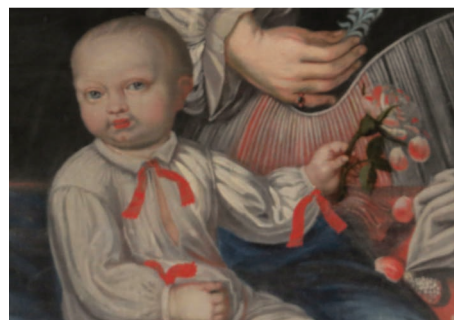
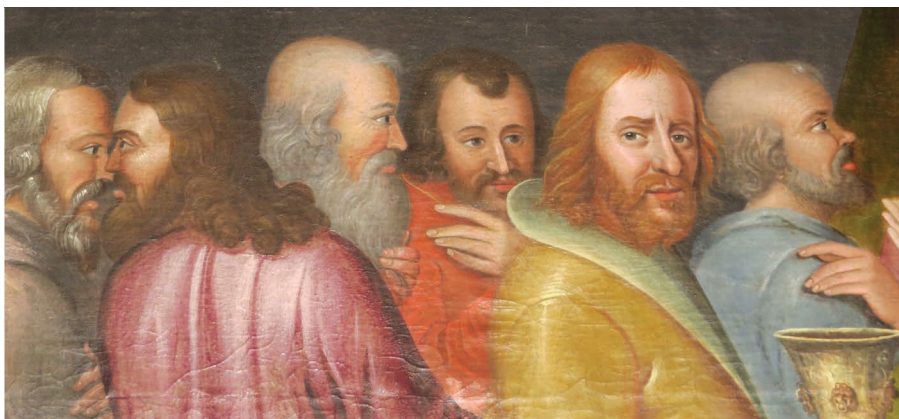




**The Church of the Holy Cross**  
in Ronneby





## WELCOME TO THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS

Ronneby's town church, Holy Cross, welcomes many visitors, from near and far, every year. The residents of Ronneby, and in particular we who work here in the Church of Sweden, are honoured by your visit. We hope that this booklet gives you joy and inspiration, as well as information

The mighty white church that towers over the 13th-century town is its only surviving medieval building. A call at the church is a must for any visitor to Ronneby. Here one can wander among memorials and monuments, reflect on the Christian symbols and their meaning, or simply rest in silence. We

who live here are likewise drawn to the cool tranquillity under this vaulted ceiling. We, too, feel the presence of times past, and the solemnity and beauty that linger even when no formal service is under way.

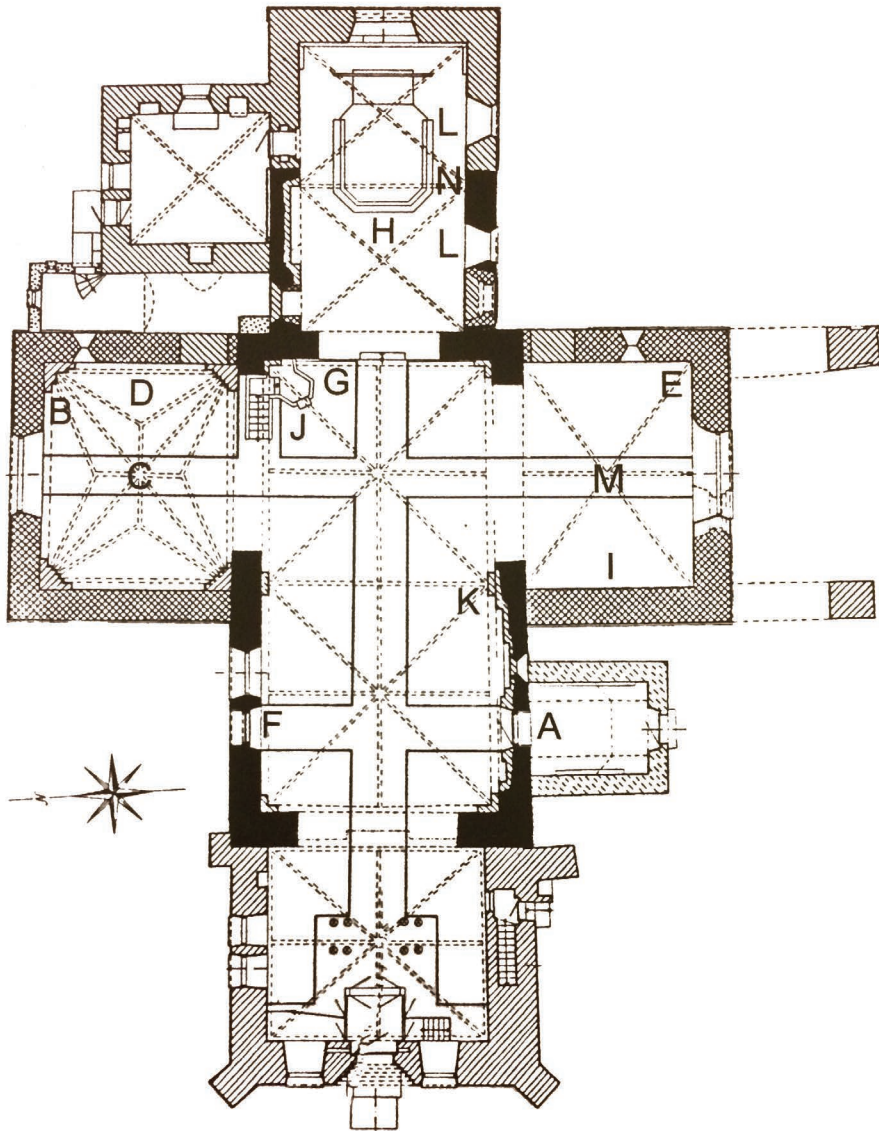
The Church of the Holy Cross is the finest medieval structure in the province of Blekinge. Its oldest section dates from the latter part of the 12th century, and it was completed in the 15th century. The church houses Blekinge's largest collection of Renaissance art. The ornate frescos, the wealth of high-quality art objects, and especially the many splendid family memorial tablets,

tell the dramatic story of a cherished church in a rich Danish merchant town.

We hope that the church and its history will so fascinate you that you tell of it to your friends, and return here often yourself.

WELCOME!

TEXT: Björn O Svensson  
PHOTO: Helena Johnsson  
TRANSLATION: Ann Laurel Lofsvold,  
Ann-Margret Olofsson



## CONTENTS PAGE

The Structure: A Brief History	4
A The Oldest Portal	4
B St Peter the Pope	4
C The Riddle of the Star Vault	5
D Christ Crucified	8
E King Magnus or Queen Margareta?	8
F Traces of the King's men	9
G The Sponsor's Logo	9
H A Painted Sermon	9
I Schlüter's Memorial Tablet	10
J The Proclaimed Word	10
K Renaissance Magnificence	10
L Stained Glass Windows	12
M Jöns the Farmer	13
N The Dance of Death	13
The Building and its Contents: A Chronological Overview	14



# THE STRUCTURE: A BRIEF HISTORY

*The central section of the church - the nave and half the chancel - was built toward the end of the 12th century, of hewn granite. The large north and south transepts were added about fifty years later, when Ronneby was developing into a proper city. The transepts, too, are built of granite, but with brickwork framing the openings. Gothic elements were added in the first part of the 14th century. An advanced ribbed ceiling was built throughout the church, the chancel was lengthened and squared off, and the sacristy was added at this time. The last period of construction came in the second half of the 15th century, when the broad brick tower was built, the sacristy was given its beautiful stair-step gable, and a pair of sturdy, unusual flying buttresses were built to support the south transept's gabled wall.*



## THE OLDEST PORTAL

Only a few parts of the oldest church remain in their original condition. At this portal, however, at the small Romanesque window in the north side of the chancel, and the closed-off, narrow, granite-framed window above the south porch, one stands face-to-face with details that have been in place for nearly nine hundred years. What the artisans then created still functions as before. The portal is constructed entirely of granite. The unknown master mason decorated the transom with a cross and two heraldic lilies, formed into half circles.



## ST PETER THE POPE

While most of the church's frescos date from the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century - the Renaissance, in other words - an older generation of frescos, depicting various human figures, has been uncovered in the north transept. Of these, the portrait of St Peter as Pope is the best preserved. He sits on a throne of sorts, holding a book in one hand and a gigantic key in the other. A Three-tiered crown sits on his head. This painting is from the late 15th century, as is the depiction of St George and the Dragon, located under the window on the same wall. Several painting fragments and a pair of consecration crosses can be seen as well.



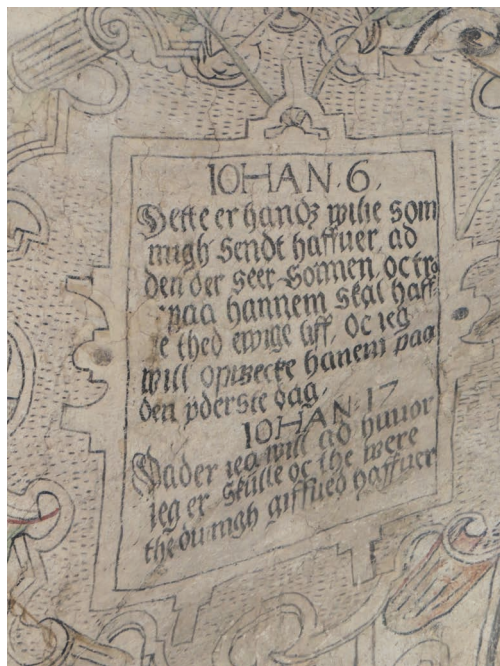


## THE RIDDLE OF THE STAR VAULT

In the early 14th century, brick-ribbed ceilings were constructed throughout the church. This may be evidence of the young town's growing commercial success. The work was costly, and so technically advanced that it can only have been done by foreign master masons. Seven of the eight ceiling sections are cross-vaulted, with an elegant cloverleaf design cut into the ribs. The north transept, on the other hand, has a bafflingly different design, 150 years younger and considerably more complicated: the star vault. What happened here? Perhaps Ronneby's political and economic difficulties in the 14th century prevented the completion of the ceiling at that time. In the comparative calm of the 15th century, the work could be resumed and finished.



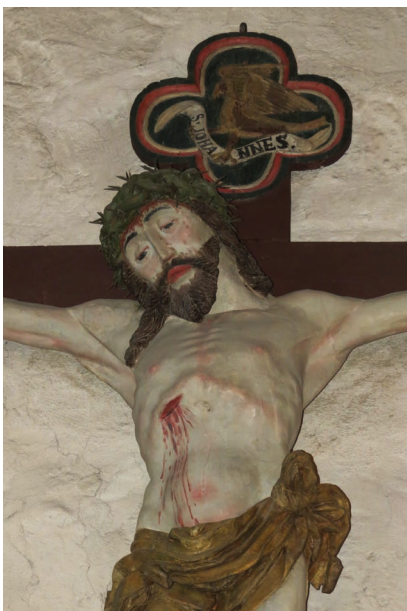












## CHRIST CRUCIFIED

The large crucifix, a naturalistic, painted wooden sculpture from the late 15th century, hung in the triumphal arch until 1842. The church was plundered during the Ronneby Bloodbath in 1564, during the Seven Years War of the North, and the crucifix is this old building's only surviving medieval furnishing. The crucifix was not always highly valued in the past. An inventory of the "antiquities and memorial tablets of Ronneby church" from 1830 states, without prevarication or, apparently, reverence: "it should be taken down because of its dreadful appearance". The crucifix was removed in the mid-19th century, and it was not displayed again until 1911, when it was placed in its present position.

## KING MAGNUS OR QUEEN MARGARETA?

In each of the south transept's four corners, the ceiling ribs rest on carved corbels that date from the 14th century, when the vault was built. The two inner corners are animal sculptures, one a lion and the other some indeterminate mythical beast. The corbels in the two outer corners are decorated with human faces. The portrait in the south-east corner is the most interesting, probably it is a complimentary picture, and it shows a crowned head of

a woman or a beardless man. Is this the Swedish King Magnus Eriksson who is honoured after having taken the power over the provinces of Scania, Blekinge and Halland in 1332? Later research supports another theory, that the tribute is meant for the renewed charter of Ronneby as a town in 1387 and that the picture is that of queen Margareta, who later was to become queen of the Union of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.







## TRACES OF THE KING'S MEN

In the lower part of the nave, near the closed-off north portal, an old door is on display. The door has been scarred by fire and gouged by axes. Erik XIV's men broke through this door on that terrible Monday, the 4th of September 1564, when the king staged his assault on the town and its people. The Ronneby Bloodbath was the late Gustav Vasa's revenge, through his son Erik, for the city's support of the Dacke Uprising twenty years before. Two thousand people - including women and children - were murdered in the Bloodbath, some of them in the church itself. An enormous fine was levied against the town, and then it was burned to the ground. The church, defiled and plundered, remained standing. Swedish history books are curiously silent about this extraordinary event.



## THE SPONSOR'S LOGO

While only fragments remain of the medieval frescos, the Renaissance wall paintings comprise the richest collection in southern Scandinavia. At one time they covered the entire sanctuary; today one can see and enjoy them best in the chancel and south transept. The extravagance of leaves and vines intertwines with bands of writing - biblical quotations in Latin and Danish - and interesting drawings. In two royal decrees, from 1575 and 1582, Fredrik II assumed economic responsibility for the restoration of the church following the Ronneby Bloodbath. The crown's customs duty, excise, and grain tithes were transferred to the mayor and city council for this purpose. And, just as sponsors in our day place their logos on their products, Fredrik had his Danish royal seal painted between the ribs in the central ceiling - the most conspicuous place in the church.



## THE PAINTED SERMON

A nearly-naked man lies in a net. His arms, legs, and trunk are bound with ropes, and representatives of good and evil powers are pulling on him with all their might, trying to win him to their purposes. He is Humanity, and the picture aims to show how we all are torn between good and evil. The Devil stands in the fires of Hell, death calls out from an open grave. Caro - the flesh and its desires - is personified as a naked woman who draws him one way. Mundus - the world or worldliness - is represented as a richly-dressed woman with both a solid stone house and a stately ship behind her, and she pulls him in another. The man, however, stretches out his right hand toward salvation, toward Christ and the cross, and there he finds the strength to resist evil. The fresco, from the 1580s, is located on the west chancel ceiling.



SCHLÜTER'S MEMORIAL TABLET

Lavish epitaphs, or memorial tablets, are characteristic of this church. They are donated by Ronneby's leading burghers, beginning in the 1580s. Many of them also relate fascinating personal histories. The four-meter-high memorial to mayor Herman Schlüter (1572-1635) and his family is one of the most magnificent. It was placed in the church after the death of the mayor's widow, Catharina, in 1636. The lower part of the image shows the couple with their sons Herman, Henrik, Johan and Elias, and their daughter Margaretha. She, her brother Herman, and their parents all hold small red crosses in their hands, indicating that they were deceased when the memorial was painted. The other images depict the entombment of Christ and the resurrection. The bronze chandelier that hangs neat the memorial tablet also was donated by the Schlüter family.



THE PROCLAIMED WORD ...

... became the centerpiece of worship after the Reformation in 1536. Two new church furnishings now were needed: a raised pulpit for the preacher and pews for the congregation. The pulpit, from the 1640s, is a splendid piece of work of German or Scanian origin. It is modelled after the pulpit in the Church of St Mary in Helsingborg, which in turn comes from the workshop of Staius Otto of Lüneburg. The framed, richly-carved sides show the four Evangelists and at the six corners stand the symbolic representatives of an equal number of virtues. From the north corner these are Chastity, Love, Justice, Temperance, Strength and Wisdom. Justitia - Justice - is shown in the photograph, holding her sword and scales. To the left stands Love, Caritas.



RENAISSANCE MAGNIFICENCE

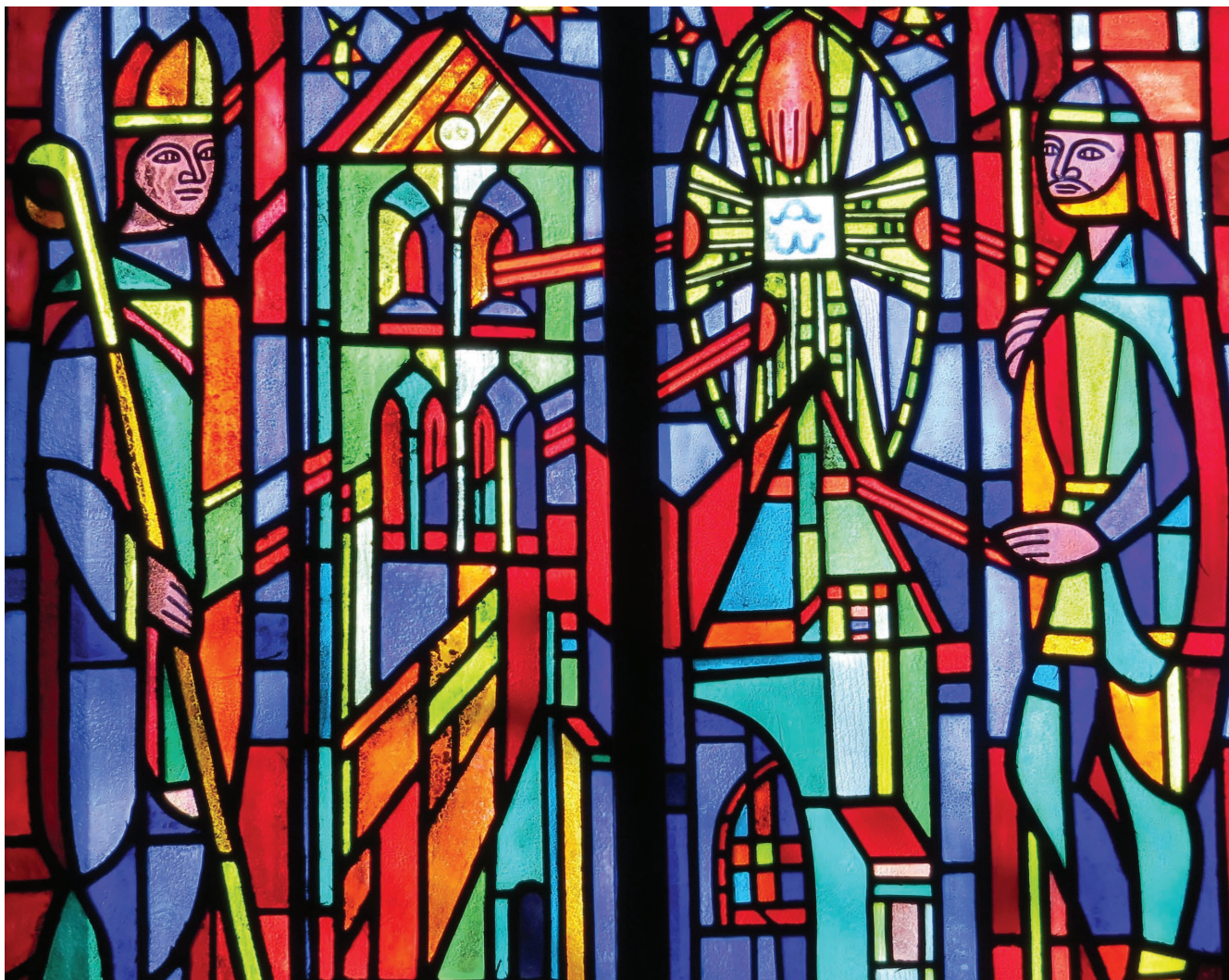
This photo of the chancel, as seen from the south wall of the nave, provides a sample-card of the various high-quality expressions of Renaissance aesthetics that can be found in the church. The altarpiece, donated to the church in 1652 by "the mayor, council, and ordinary citizens of Ronneby", is carved in the fluid, almost translucent style of the early Baroque. It is one of the finest works of its kind in southern Sweden. To the left in the chancel hangs the memorial tablet of merchant Knud Pedersen, dating from 1637, and to the right is the epitaph his brother-in-law, Jesper Schov, placed in memory of his wife, Cahtarina, in 1646. The chancel chandelier was given to the church in 1672 by Johan and Maria Kerhasen of Lübeck, and is evidence of the close ties between Ronneby and the great Baltic trading cities. A bronze candelabrum from 1610 is visible in the foreground. The chancel ceiling frescos float above it all.





ANNA LAWESDOTTER SKOUG





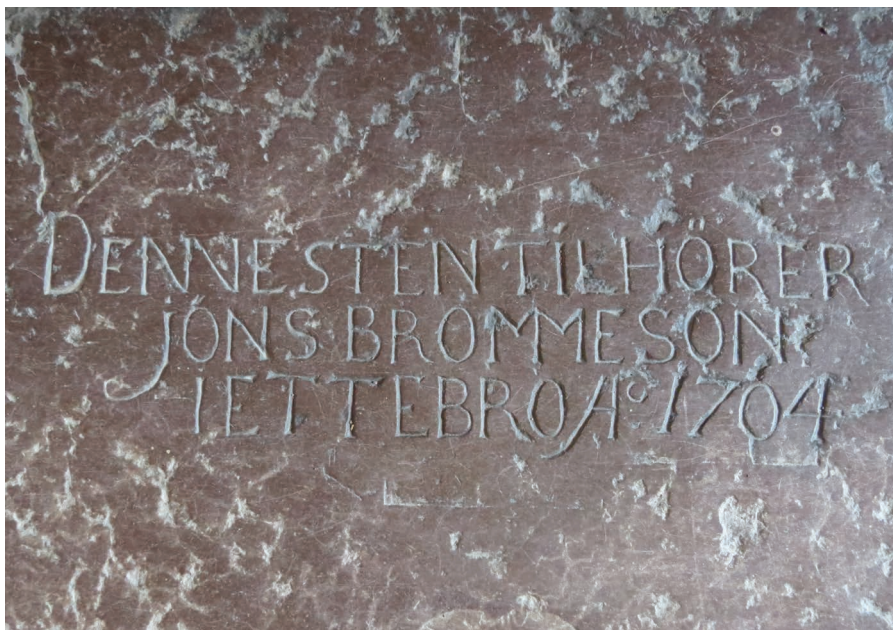
## STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The two stained glass windows in the south wall of the chancel are recent, from 1955, and are by Erik Olsson of the Halmstad Group. They show various events in the life of Christ, including his death and resurrection.

The Church of the Holy Cross itself is depicted here as well, and people of importance in local church history, including Bishop Eginno of Dalby, who brought Christianity to Blekinge, and St Knut, the martyr king of Denmark.

The St Knut Guild still meets in Ronneby, just as it did in the Middle Ages. The west window depicts St Erik and Ronneby's famous son, Archbishop Haquin Spegel.





## JÖNS THE FARMER

Nearly sixty gravestones are laid out in the church aisles or placed standing along the walls of the chancel and south porch. From the Middle Ages and until 1811, only the most prominent city and parish residents were permitted burial inside the church. More than fifty graves and burial chambers lie under the floor. The oldest gravestone is now the top surface of the high altar. It commemorates Jens Holebeke, a soldier who died six days after Whitsunday in 1354. Another stone, in the south transept, reads: "This stone belongs to Jöns Brommeson in Ettebro A(nn)o 1704" - a rare example of a farmer with a grave inside the church, where burghers and priests otherwise generally predominate.

## THE DANCE OF DEATH

Dancing couples line the south wall of the chancel in a long, badly damaged fresco. Their clothes indicate their disparate social classes, but all have this in common: their dance partners are skeletons. The painting is meant to show that death makes no distinction, but dances with us all. The motif is actually medieval, but here it re-appeared in the 1580s, probably as a response to the Ronneby Bloodbath, or perhaps as a blow in the war of images being waged between Fredrik II and Swedish king Johan III. Fredrik had his own portrait painted on the wall opposite, showing him to be - unlike the enemy king - "a Christian knight". A famous Dance of Death fresco has been found in the Marienkirche in Lübeck, Germany; another can be seen in Tallin, Estonia; and yet another in Mästerby Church on the island of Gotland.





## THE BUILDING AND ITS CONTENTS: A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW



### THE MIDDLE AGES

The structure of Ronneby's town church is entirely medieval, except for the small, south porch. Nonetheless, more than three centuries separate the oldest and the newest sections. The various periods of construction are indicated by different types of shading in the diagram on page 3.

The first church was built in the latter part of the 1100s, just a century after the arrival of Christianity in Blekinge, and about the time the whole country was divided into territorial parishes. In the beginning it was a Romanesque granite church, with a nave, a shallow chancel, and an apse, with entrances in the north and south walls. In the 13th century, as Ronneby grew and deve-

loped into a chartered city, two transepts were added to the church. Here, too, the material was hewn granite and the style Romanesque, with small arched windows. Now, however, the door and window openings were framed in a new material, brick.

Two side chapels, in the corners between the chancel and the nave, were added in the 13th century as well. Two closed-off doorways in the south-east corner are all that now remain of these chapels.

A rich supply of herring and Lüneburg salt, exported to a Catholic Europe with strict Lenten rules, brought economic prosperity to Ronneby in the early 14th century. The burghers used their

resources to add to their church. The Gothic style brought with it new architectural demands. The apse was torn down, the chancel was doubled in length, its east end was squared off, and a sacristy was added on the north side. The crowning touch was the Gothic cross-vaulting of the entire ceiling. There are some indications that the ceiling work was halted because of 14th-century crises brought on by political and economic unrest and the plague. One of the church's vaults, that in the north transept, was not built until 150 yeatts after the others, whatever the reason for this may have been.

In the last century of the Middle Ages, Ronneby was again enjoying favourable economic winds. Hanseatic



merchants were an everyday sight in the city, trade and craft guilds flourished, and the first institution of higher learning in Blekinge, the Ronneby Latin School, was established. By the mid-15th century, preparations were underway for the building of the broad west tower that would complete the architecture of the church. The tower was duly built, of brick, and the church achieved the exterior appearance it still has today.

A few features were added even after the tower was finished. Around 1500 the two striking flying buttresses were built into the south transept wall, and the beautiful stair-step gable was added to the sacristy roof. The peculiar steps and niches on the south wall of the tower may have been used as an outdoor pulpit, and may even have served, in the Catholic period, as a "rendezvous for indulgence-sellers".

## THE RENAISSANCE AND BEYOND

The citizens of Ronneby could delight in their large, beautiful church throughout the first half of the 16th century. The church was dedicated to St Lawrence, and it housed a remarkable number of side altars, including one erected by the German Brotherhood on the authority of a papal brief from 1400. The Reformation in 1536 likely brought some changes to the sacred edifice, but we know that it was desecrated in the Ronneby Bloodbath in 1564. The church was then completely plundered, although it is unclear whether the building itself sustained any damage.

Erik XIV may have thought that he had destroyed Ronneby forever. If so, his judgement was too hasty. Out of the ruined city, new economic activity arose within the year, and reconstruction got under way. King Fredrik II took decisive

action for the rebuilding of the church when he, in 1575 and 1582, directed that royal funds be used for a lavish restoration. The ornate frescos are the most spectacular aspect of this, with their thoughtprovoking figures, their quantity of cartouches, and their bands of writing in Danish and Latin, all entangled with vines, leaves, and flowers. The paintings are the only ones of their kind in all of southern Scandinavia (and probably beyond) and yet we do not know the artist's name.

Individual contributions to the beautification of the church are apparent from about 1580 on, particular in the form of memorial tablets. In just a decade and a half, prosperity had been restored to many merchant houses. The 17th century brought even greater gains to Ronneby and its trade. It is recorded that, at this time, Ronneby had 300 burghers and was one of the most important towns in Blekinge and Scania. The restoration and decoration begun at the king's initiative were completed by the residents themselves, both collectively and individually, with artworks of the highest quality. Chief among these are the pulpit from the 1640s, and the unsurpassed early-Baroque altarpiece, given to the church by the burghers in 1652. From the increasingly large and exclusive memorial tablets we can discern that the leaders of the town's trade and business community were Knud Pedersen, Jesper Schov, Herman Schlüter and others. Most of the chandeliers and candelabra, as well as many other furnishings, also were donated by individuals during the 17th century.

The provinces of Scania and Blekinge were ceded to Sweden in 1658 by the Treaty of Roskilde, and Ronneby's

position declined. When Karl XI decreed the creation of Karlskrona in 1680, Ronneby was sacrificed in favour of the new naval city. Ronneby's city charter and privileges were not restored until 1882. In the intervening years, Holy Cross served as an unusually exclusive parish church. Few changes were made. It may even be that the parish's two hundred years of relative obscurity saved the church from some of the "improvement's" for which the irreverent 19th century is infamous. Twenty medieval churches in Blekinge were torn down during the same period.

## BELLS AND ORGANS

The tower houses three church bells. The great bell was cast in Lübeck in 1593 specifically for the Church of St Lawrence in Ronneby (now the Church of the Holy Cross). In 1726 it was recast in Ronneby, then recast again in Stockholm in 1882. The middle bell, from 1675, has been recast three times, most recently in 1820. The little bell has remained untouched since it was first hung in the belfry, in 1667.

The earliest record of a church organ is found in the minutes of the Ronneby municipal court in 1636. That instrument stood in a loft in the north transept until 1843. A new organ, with twenty stops, built by P Jönsson in Hjortsberga, with a façade by architect C G Blom-Carlsson, was then placed in the present loft. It, in turn, was replaced in 1893 with a so-called Romantic organ, built by Åkerman & Lund in Stockholm. The frame and façade were remodelled in 1937 to make room for a new works, with 38 stops, from Mårtenssons organ factory in Lund. In 1969 the organ was expanded to 48 stops. Now the organ has been rebuilt yet again by Mårtenssons. It has been back in service, with 50 stops, from the spring of 2010.

N<sup>o</sup> 27.  
R. Bj  
J. N<sup>o</sup> 27, 56, 58, 69, 72,  
93, 125, 140, & 175,

N<sup>o</sup> 26.  
R. Bj  
J. N<sup>o</sup> 6, 10, 41, 47, 67,  
79, 138, 152, 157, & 159,

N<sup>o</sup> 25.  
R. Bj  
J. N<sup>o</sup> 21, 60, 61, 62,  
76, 86, 87,  
116, 117,

N<sup>o</sup> 24.  
R. Bj  
J. N<sup>o</sup> 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 139, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 153, 154, 155, 156, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200,