

The Old Church of Högsby through the Centuries

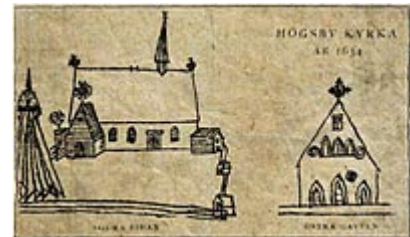
A gothic church that lost its style about 150 years ago

In the annals there is no information of when the church was built, but a good assumption is sometime during the 13th century.

The first mentioned restoration of the old church was 1639, when the old organ, which had belonged to the church since old times and now had declined, was repaired and tidied up by the mayor of Skänninge, Per Johansson, for a sum of 130 "daler" copper coin. At that time the organ was placed in choir but in 1637 it was moved to the back of the church. Then new organ voices also were added.

There are some old stories about the church in flourishing in the village. One says: when the Danish army was ravaging the county of Småland they used the church as a stable. The history annals can't confirm the story but it is established that the Danes stole the church silver and among other things destroyed the parish register.

In the year of 1634, in the 20-22 of September, Högsby was visited by the antiquary Jonas Haquini Rhezelius. In his traveller's manuals he made a couple of drawings of the church, probably the oldest existing pictures. The originals are kept in the Royal Library and they weren't reproduced until 1920.



The church of Högsby 1634, six years after Carl Sabelskjöld's first wife Magdalena Strang was buried there.

In the year of 1686, the parish of Högsby had the church, which was in a terrible state, plastered. At the same time the old monk house by the western gable was pulled down. The cost was 700 "daler" copper coins. At the same time there also were put in *"tvenne vackra fönster på norra sidan, till vilka högaktade herr assessorn i Svea hovrätt, Sylvester Phrygius, förärade glas och bly samt arbetslönen"*

(two beautiful windows on the north side, to which the honorable Herr member of Svea lower court, Sylvester Phrygius, procured the glass and lead and paid the worker's salary).

In the year of 1750, in the 20th of August, the church was drawn by, at the time being, lecturer and after that rural dean and vicar in Madesjö, Peter Frigilius, who left a large collection of history to the diocese of Kalmar. Before 1774 there had been no changes or restorations of the church, except epitaphs at the walls and oil paintings representing prominent persons, especially priests.

Löfgren tells in his Clerus (biography of priests) about Johan Åhman, dean in Högsby 1766-1782: *"Utom den verksamhet, drift, nit och ordning, varmed han vårdade sina församlingar, har han även lämnat efter sig hedrande åminnelser i de anseliga, förbättringar, som både ut- och invändigt skett på moderkyrkan, vilken i hans tid, med bibehållande av den yttre uråldriga formen, undergick en total omändring, i det att en mängd stenpelare och valv, som förut uppfyllt hela kyrkan, alldeles bortröjdes, ett anseeligt brädvalv uppsträcktes istället, nytt torn uppfördes vid västra gaveln, altartavla och andra kyrkoprydnader anskaffades. Hans konterfej väl målat är upphängt i kyrkan"*

(Beside his activity, energy, zealotry and order, and his caring for the parishes, he also have left behind honorable memories in the huge, improvements, both in and outside of the mother church, which in his time, with preservation of the ancient shape, had a complete change,



meaning that a great number of colons and vaults, which had filled the whole church, were taken down, and a big vault of wood was built instead, a new church tower was built at the west gable, an altar piece and other church decorations was procured. His portrait was well painted and hung in the church). This is a short but detailed description of the changes the church processed 1774.

The educated and the experts haven't been able to give the dean Åhman such a flattering judgment for rebuilding the church.

Just as above mentioned, professor Wernstedt from Gothenburg, when visiting Högsby in 1925 making drawings of the church of Högsby, found out that the church originally had been a gothic church with lines of hewed colons. The professor said something like this: It surprises me that the citizens of Högsby so thoughtlessly have given up such invaluable vaults and hewed colons and don't have cared for them more and like common stoneware thrown them into the new church tower. But, he said, "Det beror väl på den här" (It probably depends on this) and pointed with his hand at Åhman's oil painting hanging on the main wall of the church. There is no doubt that the preservation of this solemn gothic style would have been of great value, since there probably aren't any gothic churches preserved in the old diocese of Kalmar, probably not even in the whole county of Kalmar.

There was a period during the Christian time of the reformation in our country when one couldn't stand pieces of art and other beautiful objects from the catholic time, instead they were demolished and destroyed and valuable paintings were daubed over. But one couldn't believe, as late as 1774, this old miserable desire of extermination dead things from the catholic time still existed. Huge general values just as art values were lost to our country by this lust of demolish.

During the time of Johan Peter von Sydow, dean in Högsby 1782-1827, the church got a new organ and church bells. In the 1860s the church tower with its heavy bells had become in a miserable state and the dean Löfgren feared that it would collapse. Therefore he took the step holding the services in the school house, and the candidates of confirmation were confirmed in subsidiary parish Långemåla. But after careful investigations by professional men the ringing in the church tower could continue without accidental risk.

Before we go on to the next rebuilding of the church we will have a quick look at the interior of the church. It was quite dark because of the small highly positioned windows only letting stripes of light in. All the painting was in a blue dark tone. Towards the big corridor the benches had doors.

In the year of 1885, the church was rebuilt and had the present appearance. Although it seems there were some mistakes in this rebuilding which was discovered 1925, 40 years later, and some interior changes were necessary. The three high windows which 1885 were put in at the choir gable, one in the middle with colored glass and one on each side, were filled with bricks. Also the exit at the north side of the nave was filled. The big figure of Christ which was standing in the gable window at the choir was moved to a niche in the former exit of the north nave. In the former place of the figure of Christ the beautiful and aged altar cabinet was put up, and above this an old carved crucifix that used to hang at the one of the long sides. The colored glass of the remaining windows was removed. But one wasn't fully satisfied with the beauty of the church and there were a couple of things that was necessary for making the church more pure in style.

År 1885 ombyggdes kyrkan till det nuvarande utseendet. Emellertid vill det synas som om vid 1885 års ombyggnad vissa misstag blivit begångna, vilka senare uppdagats, och 1925, eller 40 år senare, ansågos en del invändiga ändringar nödiga. De tre höga fönstren, som 1885 upptogs på korgaveln, ett i mitten och försett med kulört glas samt ett på vardera sidan därom, igenmurades. Likaledes igenmurades utgången på långskeppets norra sida. Den stora

Kristusbilden, som stod i gavelfönstren i koret, nedtogs och flyttades i en murad nisch, där norra ingången varit. I Kristusbildens ställe uppsattes det vackra och åldriga altarskåpet, och där ovanför upphängdes en gammal snidad Kristusbild på det kors, som förut hängt på ena långsidan. Allt kulört glas i kyrkans övriga fönster borttogs. Men ännu var man icke tillfreds med kyrkans skönhet och ännu fanns ett och annat man ville ändra för att göra kyrkan mera stilren.

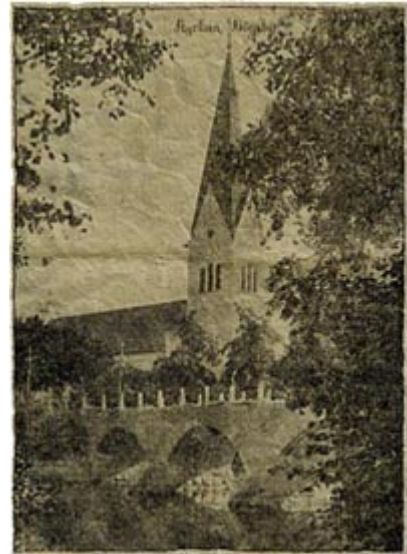
Professor Wernstedt from Gothenburg, who 1925 worked out the plans and the propositions for the made changes also have made the plans for the interior changes of the church that had been done or now are being carried out, for example new altar rails and in the choir, a bow around the altar and the crucifix above. But the most extensive change of the church is the rebuilding of the benches. In 1855 the benches were made open with very bent back support, the new ones will continue to be open but have gables and upright back support. The brown oak color has been replaced by more suitable color. Furthermore there is going to be a new floor under the bench rows.

New to the church is the two screens, in front of the choir benches, with four candelabrum on each and a door to the choir in one of them and a door to the sacristy in the other. New hymn boards are also put up.

The exterior of the church haven't been changed since the big rebuilding in 1855.

Since 1855 has the spire of the church tower, which was covered with copper plate, had several repairs.

In 1855 the church roof was covered with roofing felt, but after its duration of life and with minor repairs the roof instead was covered with roofing plates.



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