



Fårö church

a short description
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Fårö church most likely dates from 1324, or possibly earlier. On the southern wall of the church there is a consecration cross signifying that the pope at that time had given his permission for the dedication of Fårö church. Originally twelve of these crosses would have been traced with blessed oil on the walls and then later painted as proof of papal sanctification. Only one of these crosses has been preserved to this day.

Fårö church is the only church on Gotland that has been rebuilt so radically that it has completely lost its original medieval character. The most extensive reconstruction took place in 1858-59, when the large nave, "nöia körka", i.e. the new church, as the people of Fårö still call it, was added crosswise replacing the choir. The paintings on the ceiling from 1761 were lost and the rococo ornaments on the pew doors were covered with paint. Later these have been restored.

The doors were moved from the south side originally to their present location in the tower. There are visible traces showing that they have been both lengthened and widened. Inside the church you can still see outlines of the old entrances on the long southern wall of the nave. The so-called Virgin gate on the northern side had been closed in earlier.

The original lower, narrower tower was supposedly torn down around 1770. During the later part of the 1700s, when there were quite a few other changes, the tower was raised and given its present spire. Due to its similarity to a Russian church tower there is an old tale that Russian prisoners of war had been forced to build it. Perhaps without a grain of truth, but still a funny local story.

In 1761, windows were also opened up along the long northern wall of the nave; one window frame is marked with that date. The windows are perhaps what contribute most to the loss of the church's medieval appearance, the medieval gloom, the mysterious ambience, is brightened up by sunshine and candles. The door lock and hinges on the church gates also date from 1761 and were hand-forged by the bell-ringer on Fårö at the time.

A Latin inscription in the porch reports that Magnus Möller decorated the church ceiling, pulpit and pew doors with paintings in 1761. He also painted the poor-box, "Fattig (poor) Lazarus", to the left, inside the church. It shows the sick beggar, Lazarus, as related in Luke 16: 19-31. The 19th c. turned wooden chandelier in the tower room is a gift of a man named Nordsström, a wood carver from Skär.

A renovation was carried out in 1967-68. The church's general appearance was mostly retained and only the most critical improvements were made. The old black cast-iron stoves along the walls on each side of the nave were replaced by electric heating and the chandeliers that decorated them now grace the gateposts outside at the western entrance. Electric lighting was installed but not in the chandeliers. It was still possible to ring the bells by hand even after the bell ringing was electrified in 1989. We have also kept the old custom of ending every worship service with manual bell-ringing, three clangs three times, a so-called *angelus* or angel ringing.

During this renovation the number of pews was reduced and the seats were widened. The church now seats 350. Erik Olsson from Sanda restored the painting on the pew doors and backs, as well as on the altarpiece and pulpit. It was at this time that the aforementioned consecration cross was revealed.

The altar is from 1709. The sandstone altarpiece bears the insignia of Karl XI, but the picture is of Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper. John lies at his Master's knee and the others are gathered around the table with the Chalice and the Lamb. Earlier there was a pulpit and an altar screen from the 17th century. These are now found in the fisherman's chapel at Hallshuk. The icons that belonged to the altar screen are found in the Gotland County Historical Museum.

The renowned bullet hole in the old altarpiece was made in 1620 and the priest who was the object of the attempted murder was Christian Christensen Nestvediensus. He came to the Fårö congregation as vicar in 1616 at 22 years of age and married Judit Johansdotter from Lauters. That particular Sunday, the Fårö people shot at him because he had "leaked information" to the authorities about their piracy along the shore. He fled from the church, down to Lauters, where he and his wife rowed over the sound in a boat. He finally ended up in Öja, as far from Fårö as possible(!), and was the vicar there for many years until his death.

The baptismal font is from the 14th century, and made of limestone. Above it hangs the processional crucifix also from the 14th century. These are the oldest objects the church possesses, the same age as the consecration cross.

The most famous of the church's effects are the two "*kutatavloma*" (seal-hunting pictures) from 1618 and 1767.

The big *kutatavlan* describes a dangerous trip that 15 seal hunters experienced in the winter of 1603. They were out hunting seals "*kuł*", in the Fårö dialect, when the ice floe that they were standing on drifted out to sea with the hunters still on it. Three of them were able to reach land at Gotska Sandön, while the others drifted all the way to the Swedish coast, where they reached land after 14 days at sea. As thanks for their salvation, they had this painting made, which in addition to the hunters with their hunting equipment and dressed in their Sunday best also presents the oldest current image of Visborg Castle in Visby. A long text in Danish on the picture describes their adventure.

The painting is a votive painting, offered in thanksgiving to God for a miraculous deliverance from the jaws of death.

The smaller painting tells about two men from Fårö, Jöns Langhammar and his father, who had a similar adventure and also want to thank God for *their* wonderful deliverance.

Both of these paintings hang on the north wall of the church.

At the very front of the church, on the wall in the southern cross-section there is a 17th century epitaph, a memorial painting of one of the vicars on Fårö and his large family. All the members of the family are there, even those who were dead at the time the painting was made. These are marked with small crosses above their heads. Four infants lie in the cradle, three dead and one alive.

Two votive ships, donated and made by a former pilot Edvin Hamstedt, were added in the 1960s. From the ceiling hangs a model of Agnes av Skillinge and in a glass case there is a model of a Danish training ship.

The organ was built in 1860 by Frans Andersson for Vaddö church in Uppland, Sweden and was purchased by the congregation on Fårö in 1875 for 800 SEK. The organ disposition is as follows: *pedal*: Subbas 16', Bombard 16', Violoncello 8', *manual*: Borduna 16', Gedackt 8', Principal 8', Gamba 8', Trompet 8', Oktava 4', Fleut 4', Quinta 3', Oktava 2' plus pedal/manual. The organ has been renovated in both 1970 and 2000-2001.

The latest complete renovation of the church was begun in September 2000 and finished in August 2001. The church exterior was re-limed white and the roof was re-tiled. The tower spire was taken down and painted gold, as was the weathercock on top watching over his flock. Inside the church the large sun over the altar was restored as well as the tower spires of heavenly Jerusalem over the new doors to the sacristy. These paintings had been removed in the 1950s.

A roof beam with a fragment of the original painting was uncovered during the renovations and documented before being enclosed in the present roof. You can see a picture of this beam near the church exit. There are also a few paintings of local interest to our church and congregation, e.g. a painting by Eric Olsson, depicting the famous pirate Gottberg from Sandön doing "obvious church duty" in Fårö church.

Enjoy your visit to our beautiful church!

Fårö Church Council

Kutatavlan (The Seal Hunter painting)

In the old days, when the men on Fårö went off on seal hunts far out on the ice around Fårö, sometimes it happened that the ice cracked and men were carried away on ice floes out to sea. There are many of these "Käutalups-adventures" recorded on the island. The most famous is the story of the 15 seal hunters who drifted off to sea in 1603 and were lost for 14 days. Twelve of the men finally made it ashore in the Swedish archipelago, while three had able to make landfall on Gotska Sandön. During their adventuresome journey they had kept themselves alive on nothing other than raw seal meat, and suffered greatly from the cold and snowstorms. In memory of their adventure they had a memorial painting hung in the church 15 years later, on which they recounted their story in rhyming Danish.

We the men of Fårö can now rightly tell
Of our destiny for rich and poor
Look at this picture, read and mark well
How GOD is mighty in dire straits
We would like to tell you
So that you can spread the word to others
When the year 1603
On St Matthew's Day in mild weather
We began to go out on the Ice
Our plan was to catch Skiäl-Fisk (seals)
But our luck took another turn
And our intention changed suddenly
There were fifteen of us altogether
Carried over the waves by the ice
Jacob Nors was the first I want to name
Christopher and Eskil and Nors Michel

Thomas Butlex and then Anders Austers
Staphen Gussemor and Hans came along
Rasmus Simunds and Hans Simunds were also there
Rasmus Ringvid and Peder Sudergård
Bottel Sudergård, Jurgen Mor, Hans Mor
Were all on the Ice from land
We were carried to Gulland (Gotland) from our Fårö
Then straight away to Gullands Sandsö
Where three of the forenamed men
Were able to get ashore on Sandö
These were Peder and Bottel Södergård,
And Jurgen Mor who was the third.

They were brought back by the grace of God
To Fårö-island again both healthy and well
We others were left on the ice
To follow it, we knew not where
With Remorse, Hunger, Cold and dire Need
Constantly faced by the threat of death
Our food was raw Skiäle (seal meat)
Which we had to eat without bread
For 14 days it kept us alive
Then GOD came and helped us when
The ice drifted all the way to Sweden
And delivered us from the agony of Death
We returned to our Fårö on Annunciation Day in Lent,
To our island of Fårö, Wife, Children, House and Home.
(a non-rhyming literal translation to English!)

*From Carl von Linné's Gotlandic Journey
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