



# Ösmo Church

A BRIEF  
HISTORY  
AND  
DESCRIPTION  
OF THE  
MURALS AND  
TREASURES

## A BRIEF HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF ÖSMO CHURCH

The text is mainly based on an earlier text by Sven Fornarve, edited in 2005 by Arne Tillbom. A supplementary text about the latest renovations has been added in this edition.

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Further information about Ösmo-Torö parish is available on the website [www.osmotoro.se](http://www.osmotoro.se)

### LITERATURE:

Robert Bennet: Ösmo kyrka (Volym 152 i serien Sveriges kyrkor).

Axel Quist: Ösmoboken.

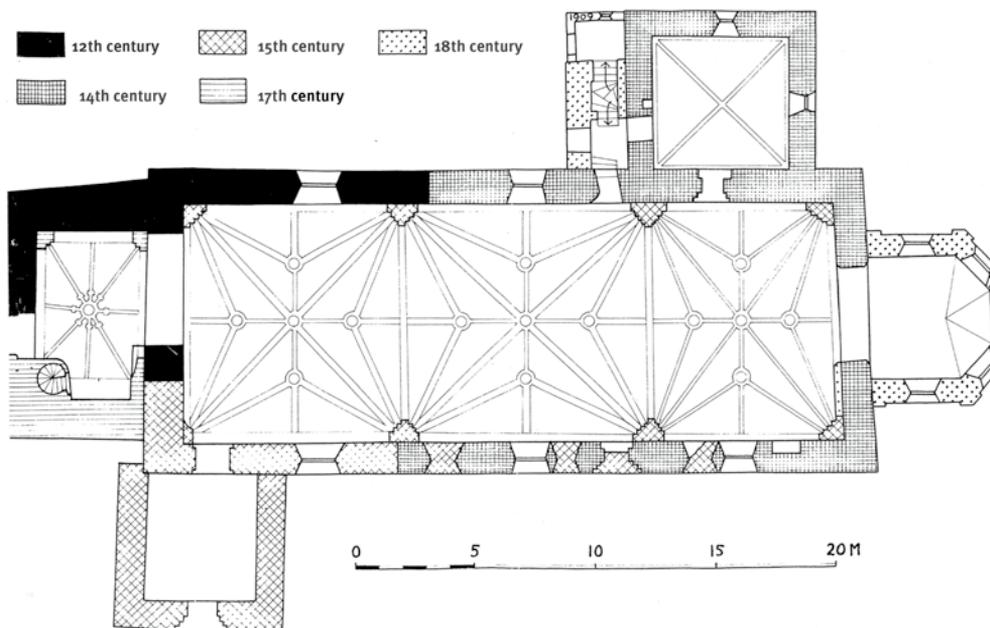
## HISTORY OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

IT IS THOUGHT that the people of Ösmo gathered here on the site of this church long before the Middle-Ages. The immediate area around the church is full of ancient remains of various kinds: evidence of Stone Age dwellings as well as a Viking Long house have been found.

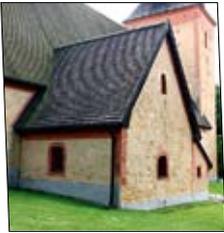
The most likely reason for this is the fact that it was possible to sail here from both north and south. At that time Nynäsvik extended right up the stone cliff south of the church and from the other direction an inlet of the sea from Hammersta to Ösmo Fors. When the first Christians chose this place for their church it was because it was already an established meeting place.

CHRISTIANITY CAME to this area about the middle of the 11th Century. One can be fairly certain of this because some of the rune-stones in the parish have signs of the Cross on them where as others do not. It must have been a difficult time of change when this new teaching came to the area, causing conflict between the new believers and those who held fast to the old faith. Christianity came to stay and in due course the Asa following gave way under the pressure.

Nothing is known about the first Christian church, though most likely it was a simple wooden building, as was common in other areas of the country. A stone building was erected some centuries later. The oldest parts of the church are to be found in the north-west. The tower was almost



certainly a fortified tower for defense against enemy attack, which was fairly common at the time. The walls were constructed of sturdy grey stone with small windows placed high in the walls, for the purpose of easier defense. Only parts of the tower and north wall of the 12th century church remain. It was certainly a lot smaller than today's church with a narrow nave which was extended in the 13th Century with a rather large Choir.



The vestry.

DURING THE 14TH CENTURY the church was considered too small and a considerable enlargement commenced. The nave gained its present size and the vestry was built. The new wooden roof was of "clover-

leaf" arches. Remains of this may still be seen in the attic. That such large additions to the church took place may be a sign that this area did not suffer too much from the Plague. Otherwise such an undertaking could have hardly taken place.

The 15th Century is the next great epoch in the history of the church building. During this time brick arches replaced the old wooden ceiling and the porch was added.

During the 17th Century the tower was built and a hundred years later the present chancel with the Törnflykt's family vault was added. Similarly, to the west of and under the vestry, a wine cellar was constructed.



The porch, the nave, and the chancel.

The current bell tower dates from 1794. About 25 years earlier a lively dispute took place between the patron of the church and its congregation. The patron considered that the church bells should be hung in the tower, a new bell tower to replace the old one not being necessary. The church members claimed the church tower was not stable enough for the weight and movement of the bells. The patron had his way, but as feared the tower developed cracks and a new bell tower had to be built anyway. The yoke of the big bell is still in the tower.



## CEILING MURALS

On entering the church one's eye is immediately caught by the murals on the walls and ceiling. These, ascribed to Albertus Pictor, came into being soon after the plastering of the arches in the middle of the 15th Century and are of considerable art and historical interest. Coats-of-arms of several families hang in the church and give some idea of who financed the work.

On the north side of the east arch are two coats-of-arms directly connected to a large manor of the time, namely, Nynäs. The Ulv coat-of-arms (a wolf looking back) represents the then owner of Nynäs, Bengt Gottskalksson of the Ulv lineage. He was married to Birgitta Styke, it is thought she financed the painting of this vault. She was the daughter of a very interesting person of the time – Arendt Styke – a famous pirate and one of the leaders of a powerful organisation, the Vitalij Brotherhood, who were at the height of their power during the 14th and 15th centuries. Much of their activity may have been planned from Nynäs, which was on the coast.

The eastern vault also contains the coat-of-arms of the Bishop of Strängnäs, a shield with key and sword crossed and the national coat-of-arms with three crowns; at this time on a red background.

A DOMINANT POSITION is taken by the arms of the houses of Tott and Natt och Dag (Night and Day). They are in the eastern side of the middle vault. The commissioning of these beautiful paintings is



The Ulv coat-of-arms.



The coat-of-arms of the Bishop of Strängnäs



Coat-of-arms of the House of Tott.



Brita Olofsdotter Tott.

ascribed to these families. Above the Tott coat-of-arms is the portrait of a woman in white. She is said to be Brita Olofsdotter Tott – mistress of Hammersta and known to have been exceedingly dishonest and unreliable.

DURING THE 15TH CENTURY Sweden and Denmark were not on the best of terms, though not actually at war with each other. In Sweden Karl Knutsson Bonde was sometimes king and in Denmark Kristoffer of Bayern ruled followed by Kristian I.

Karl Knutsson was proclaimed king over northern Norway and Kristian over southern Norway. At the same time forces were at work to re-establish the old Nordic Union, thus worsening a complicated political situation.

The aristocratic families vied and strived for power and influence. Karl Knutsson did not always manage to stay on the throne but was re-called time and again to lead the country.

Various families manoeuvred for position, the Natt och Dag (Night and Day) family being the most successful. There were two branches of the family, one with their Coat of Arms divided lengthwise and the other with a horizontal divide. In order to distinguish them it was common to say "Night and Day down" and "Night and Day across". The first named family had their seat at Hammersta-Häringe, and for many generations were advisors to the King thus with great power and influence. In the 15th century the man of the moment was Erengisl Nilsson Natt and Dag. By mid-century he was a widower.

A number of sons in the Danish Tott family held similar positions in Denmark and had ambitions to gain high status in Sweden also. To this end they successfully brokered and achieved suitable marriages for the girls in the family. One of the brothers, Olof Axelsson Tott, had a 16 year old daughter, Brita. Olof managed to conclude a deal and Brita was married off to Erengisl Nilsson of Hammersta.

However, she did not come to Hammersta solely as a young bride but also with her father's instructions to find out what was going on in the Swedish corridors of power. The Danish fleet lay off the coast south of Stockholm and via a trustworthy servant she communicated information to the Danes. This continued for a long time, but by chance the king became aware of her treachery against her new homeland. The spy story created a great scandal.

Brita was brought before the High Court and sentenced to be burned at the stake, but was reprieved. The funding for murals in one of the roof vaults in her home church was a form of thanks for her reprieve. As a memorial of this act she has been portrayed in one of the sections. Perhaps it is one of the oldest portraits of a private person in a Swedish church.

Another tale says that Brita did not pay the agreed sum to the painter Albertus, he therefore painted her as a penitent forever on her knees before the image of the Trinity, thus declaring for all future generations her unreliability. The explanation for this tale may be the fact that Albertus Pictor presumably returned 20 years later to paint the west vault, the one over the organ, these murals are of a completely different character.



The Witch and her Hare.

It is without dispute that Brita contributed to the murals in the church. Apart from her own Coat-of-Arms and that of her husband, the Danish family Falk's Coat-of-Arms can also be seen. This family is from Brita's maternal lineage.

The murals include countless interesting paintings, some demonstrating the beliefs of the Middle Ages. Probably the most remarkable being the suite portraying the legend of "The Witch and her Hare". This section of paintings is still intact in its original form. When the whitewash was removed in the 18th century and revealed the images they were considered so unsuitable it was planned to immediately whitewash over them again. Other murals were "touched up" during the 1870's but not the "Witch" suite which was left as it was. During the 1930's the murals in the east and middle vaults were restored, as far as was possible, to the original condition. The 1870's restoration in the west vault was kept as it was.

For subjects and position of the murals see the following two pages.

cont. on page 10

## VAULT I, (PREVIOUS CHANCEL)

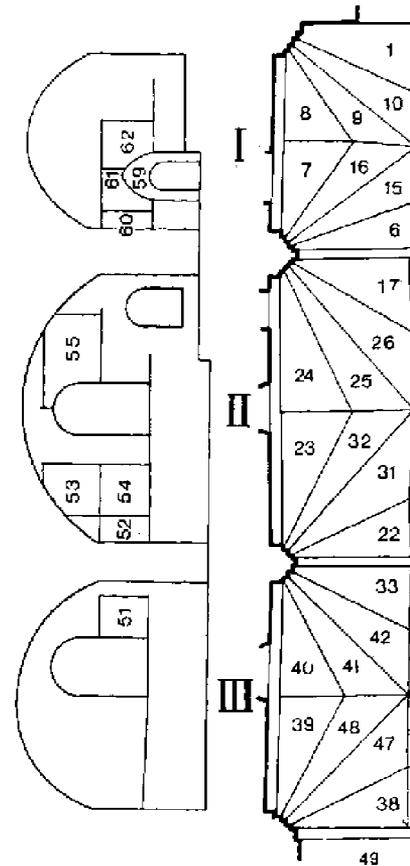
- 1 Legend of the Unicorn and the Virgin Mary, Arch angel Gabriel, God the Father, and the dove of the Holy Spirit.
- 2 Coronation of Mary.
- 3 Jesus taken to prison; pelicans with young; national Coat-of-Arms.
- 4 Ascension of Mary; Phoenix in the fire; Coat-of-Arms of the Bishop of Strängnäs.
- 5 Samson wrestling a lion.
- 6 Samson carrying the gates of Gaza.
- 7 Death and reception of Mary in heaven; Coat-of-Arms of the house of Ulv (Wolf).
- 8 Ascension of Christ and Pentecost; Coat-of-Arms of the house of Styke.
- 9 Angel.
- 10 Baptism of Jesus.
- 11 Resurrection of Lazarus.
- 12 Devil tempts Jesus to turn stones to bread.
- 13 Jesus and the Devil on the temple roof.
- 14–15 Jesus tempted by the Devil with all worldly wealth.
- 16 The Devil flees.

## VAULT I, WALLS

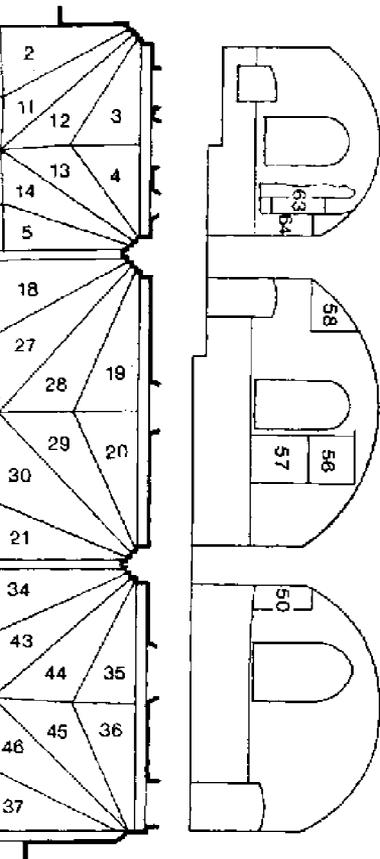
- 59 Head of Christ.
- 60–62 (fragments)
- 63 St. Birgitta.
- 64 Male figure.

## VAULT II

- 17 Throne of Grace; image of the donator, a woman with the Tott Coat-of-Arms on the hem of the dress. A larger shield can be seen lower down.
- 18 Wheel of Fortune; Natt och Dag Coat-of-Arms.
- 19 Harold racing his brother St. Olaf to Nidaros. Above Cain's sacrifice. Below Cain murders Abel.
- 20 St. Olafs voyage. Above Abel's sacrifice. Below Cain grovelling before God the Father.
- 21 The Fall.



# ÖSMO CHURCH



- 22 Adam and Eve evicted from Paradise.  
 23–24 The Judgement with Christ as King of Glory;  
 Maria, Peter and the blessed in nr 23.  
 The Lost are in the adjoining section. Next to Christ is  
 John the Baptist. The two shields belong to the  
 Danish houses of Falk and Tott respectively.
- 25 Isaac sends Esau hunting.  
 26 Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes. Jacob takes food to  
 27 blind Isaac.  
 28 Esau hunting a deer.  
 29–32 The Witch and her Hare.

## VAULT II, WALLS

- 53 The scourging of Christ.  
 55 Carrying the Cross.  
 52 St. Barbara and St. Dorothy.  
 54 The Crucifixion.  
 56 St. Ursula and the martyrdom of 11,000 virgins.  
 57 St. George and the Dragon.  
 58 Figure in red (fragment).

## VAULT III

- 33 Noah's shame. Above portrait of a prophet.  
 34 Elias mocked by the boys of Bethel Above portrait of a prophet.  
 35 Journey through the Red Sea, also the Golden Calf.  
 Above Spies return with grapes. A prophet.  
 36 Moses commands water from the rock.  
 Jonah spewed up by a large fish. A prophet.  
 37 St. Michael battles the Dragon.  
 38 St. Michael the weighing of souls.  
 39 The copper Serpent; Isaac carrying wood  
 for a sacrifice. Above a prophet.  
 40 Manna from heaven and Abrahams sacrifice.  
 Above a prophet. Below Coat-of-Arms Geet family.  
 41–48 Worshipping angels with ribbons bearing the beginning  
 of Gloria Majestatis Deo (Glory to God in the Highest).

## VAULT III, WALLS.

50. Male figure with halo.  
 51. Root of Jesse; Delilah cuts Samson's hair.

## SCULPTURES



THE TRIUMPH CRUCIFIX is said to be from about 1475 and made in Lübeck. It was kept in the church attic for many years and re-discovered in the 1920's. It was then placed on the tower wall. In 1934 it was restored and placed in the Triumph Arch, where it still hangs today.



THE MADONNA STATUE to be found on the left side wall represents the woman of Rev. 12:1-2 standing on the moon and clothed with the sun. About 1500.

MADONNA OF MECHELEN a small sculpture from the famous workshop in Mechelen, Flanders – with town mark, five carved rods on the base. This has been discussed in an article by Rune Norberg in the publication "Fornvännen 1970/4" and is one of two genuine madonnas from Mechelen in Sweden.



THE PULPIT is a gift from an interesting lady who lived in this area during 1600's. Her name was Helena Fleming and born in 1611 at Fituna, Sorunda. She was the daughter of Vice Admiral and Lord Lieutenant Henrik Classon Fleming. Twice married, first to Colonel Wolmar Yxkull of Ogesta in Ösmo who died in 1649 when she was 38 but soon remarried to General Major and Governor Nils Bååt of Fällnäs in Sorunda. He died in 1659 and Helena lived as a widow until her death in 1688. She felt warmly for the parishes of Ösmo and



Sorunda and benefited both churches. She gave a beautiful pulpit to Sorunda and at about same the time a similar gift to Ösmo. In addition Ösmo received Nyble farm as a vicarage. The farm is still owned by the church and an old farm building from the 1600's is still standing. The main building from 1800's is now Ösmo Civic Society's HQ. Close by is a relatively new house and utility buildings for the present tenant farmer.

Helena and both her husbands are buried in the Yxkull crypt beneath the east vault of the Church

## A CONFISCATED SWORD

The sword on the south wall of the Choir is from 1620 according to the inscription on the blade and made in Solingen. One side has an image of Gustav II Adolf and on the other one of the Duke of Weimar. This sword came to the church through special circumstances, so the story goes.

In the hamlet of Björsta, Älgviken, was a military small holding. This meant that the owner of the land was freed from tax on condition that he supported a soldier in the event of war. In the 17th century this farm was owned by Jöns Pedersen Bagge and he had two farm hands. One after the other they were taken out in the Thirty Years War as soldiers; both died. When Jöns got an order to send a third man he was obliged to go himself. He survived and returned to Elfsnabben on a Swedish ship and from

there had to ride home. Jöns rode towards Ösmo and Björsta. This was a Sunday morning and at Valla Inn, which was situated north of the church, he took a break to wet a dry throat.

He heard that his wife was at the church service. He got the silly idea of collecting his wife to take her home. He rode right into the church in the middle of the service and in full uniform, including his sword, a foolish thing to do. To make matters worse when Jöns turned the horse round in the Choir it lifted its tail and relieved itself. He hoisted his wife into the saddle intending to ride out. He got no further. The crime of bringing a weapon into church was unforgivable, but when it had already happened the weapon must stay in the church. Jöns sword was taken from him and it was hung up on the wall. Later heavy fines were also imposed for his misconduct.



## FUNERAL SHIELDS



Gustaf Lilienstedt's funeral shield.

Funeral shields from various Ösmo families hang on the walls of the church. The custom of funeral shields arose in the 16th century. Initially they were simple wooden plaques with the family coat-of-arms painted on it. Nothing from this period exists in church. The oldest is of Wollmar Yxkull who died 1627. Towards the 17th century they became larger and more ornate. The largest one in the church required 5–6 men to carry it in the funeral procession. Rings are attached at the back in which poles could be inserted for the bearers.

On the north wall, closest to the Choir is the shield of Olof Olofsson Törnflyckt 1680–1737. He owned Nynäs, inherited from his father.

Next to the pulpit is the shield of Wollmar Yxkull owner of Ogesta and Djurnäs, deceased 1627.

On the south wall, to the east is the shield of Lieutenant Colonel Johan Gustaf Ulvenclou 1672–1735, owner of Vansta and Körunda. To the west of this is the shield of a junior cavalry officer who fell in Karl XII's Norwegian campaign and died the same year as the king. His name was Gustaf Lilienstedt, grandson of the Törn-

flyckts of Nynäs, born 1702 and died 1718.

Further to the west on the south wall is the shield of bank commissioner Hans Stålhandske 1645–1649. He was son-in-law to Yxkull of Ogesta. The next shield on this wall belongs to Erik Biörnclou who died at a very early age.

The tower's south wall holds the shield of Erik's father, Mattias Biörnclou 1607–1671, Advisor and Chancellor. He was a poor miller's son who through the generosity of others got the opportunity to study and became a learned and well respected man. He became a skilled diplomat and for his services he received several farms in different parts of Sweden, amongst them Vansta which at his hands became an estate.



Erik Biörnclou's funeral shield.

## 17TH CENTURY SILVER CANDLESTICKS

The above mentioned Mattias Biörnclou died 1671 and was buried in the church 1672. He was married to Margareta Wallenstedt, daughter of a professor from Uppsala. At her husband's funeral she presented a pair of candlesticks to the church. Stolen in 1975 they have since been returned.



## PORTRAIT IN THE VESTRY

In the vestry is an oval portrait of the priest, Laurentius Weldt, who died 1731. His father was rector before him and his grandfather came as a refugee from a turbulent Germany. Laurentius grew up in Ösmo rectory and towards the end of the 1660's a lad of the same age came to the manor of Vansta as clerk. He was later to become the renowned Christoffer Polhem.

His schooling had been neglected after his parents died when he was very young. Laurentius and Christoffer became good friends and Laurentius soon realized Christoffer was talented. Christoffer was poor, but Laurentius helped his friend with latin; the most basic subject for further studies.

When Laurentius was appointed vicar to the manor of Fällnäs in the neighbouring parish, Christoffer followed, taking employment there. Later on Laurentius returned to Ösmo after his father's death, becoming rector. Polhem remained at Fällnäs and continued his studies with the vicar of Sorunda.

Laurentius Weldt served in Ösmo during the Russian raids of 1719. One cannot see his right hand in the portrait and this may be the source of the legend of how he saved Nynäs chapel from the Russians. Laurentius, as the story goes, stood in front of the chapel door and begged for the chapel to be spared. The Russian commander replied in that case it would cost him his right hand. He stretched out his right hand which was duly chopped off and the chapel was saved. There is probably no truth in this. If so the good man was left-handed because his handwriting was still the same afterwards.

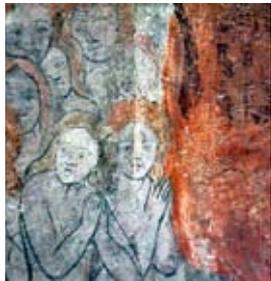
## OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

The church owns a number of silver objects and several well preserved textiles. Space does not allow for detailed descriptions.





Cleaning the paintings is a painstaking and delicate work.



Only half of the face in center has been cleaned.

## RECENT RESTORATION

At the turn of this century a long process of restoration began. It was done in several stages. The renovation of the altarpiece was the first step followed by the front of the balcony and gradually included the epitaphs and funeral coats-of-arms.

In 2008 the vestry underwent a thorough restoration, amongst other things a heated tiled floor replaced the old wooden floor. The walls and ceiling were cleaned and new furniture, light fittings and cupboards were installed. These were designed by Mona Lantzourakis.

The major restoration of the church took place in 2012. All the wall and ceiling paintings were cleaned, as well as the pulpit. Underfloor heating (from a collector loop heating pump) was installed, which required the removal of a large part of the church floor; limestone slabs replaced the previous wooden one. In connection with this work some interesting observations and finds were made. A burial crypt was

discovered under part of the Choir and it is almost certain that the large stone slabs in the aisle mark graves.

New furniture, consisting of an ambo, portable altar, also drawers for textiles, a literature stand, hymnal trolleys and a platform for the choir were acquired. An air filter is now situated on the balcony, hopefully contributing to cleaner air in the church.

The chandeliers were cleaned, mended and given a lift system to make the lighting and snuffing of the candles easier. New lighting and an audio control panel were also installed.

In order to make the church more handicap-friendly the porch floor was lowered, which in turn required a new church door and a lift was placed for access to the Choir.

The total cost for this long process was about 20 million Crowns, of which just over half was provided from the state Church Restoration Fund.



Scaffolding for the job of cleaning the paintings.



Installation of under-floor heating.



#### DISPOSITION

**MANUAL 1**  
 Bourdon 16  
 Principal 8 B/D  
 Flûte harmonique 8  
 Gamba 8  
 Oktava 4  
 Oktava 2  
 Trumpet 8 B/D  
  
**MANUAL 2**  
 Rörflaut 8 B/D  
 Salicional 8 (bas gemensam med Rörflaut 8)  
 Flûte oktaviante 4

**PEDAL**  
 Subbas 16  
 Bourdon 8  
 Basun 16

**KOPPEL**  
 I/P, P<sub>4</sub>/P, II/I, II<sub>16</sub>/I, I<sub>4</sub>/I

**OMFÅNG**  
 Manual C–f<sub>3</sub>  
 Pedal C–c<sub>1</sub>

## ORGAN GALLERY

The organ gallery at the west end of the nave was built 1716–22. Originally smaller the additional section is easily discerned and the original consoles are still visible on the south and north walls. They are carved in wood with a floral pattern which was originally gilded. Now they are under the gallery which is supported by light grey wooden pillars.

1728 two small galleries were built to the north and south. 1778 the gallery was adapted to accommodate a new organ, presumably this was when it was extended.

1873 saw yet another new organ, the side galleries were removed and the present entrance from the tower was built. The gallery was painted white with gilded borders along the parapet. After the 1934 restoration it was painted grey-green with green marbling

## THE ORGAN

The first church organ was in use 1531–1728 and was later moved to Nynäs manor chapel. A new organ, 1728, was replaced in 1777 by one with 7 1/2 divisions built by Olof Schwan in Stockholm. 1873 it was moved to Nynäs.

The present organ was installed 1873 and was built by the Swedish organ builder E. A. Setterqvist. It has 13 divisions, 2 keyboards and pedals. It has a mechanical register and tracker system and separate manuals and pedals. The front is of triumphal arch type and painted in gray with golden ornaments. The visible pipes are blind. This organ is one of very few remaining organs from Setterqvist's "romantic" period. It is in good and original condition, although, compared with a modern organ, a bit heavy to play and also has a somewhat limited tonal range.

## THE PRIEST AND THE DEVIL



There is another story about Laurentius Wendt. He was evidently a popular prelate.

When he took the office as rector at the end of the 17th century, succeeding his father, he was very eager to get as many people as possible to attend church.

About the same time a remarkable event took place giving rise to much speculation. The stream running from the lake Muskan to Hammersta changed its course and the rector's mill in Ösmo lost its water thus becoming useless. This gave rise to the story of the Devil's revenge.

The story goes as follows:

The old rector had an agreement with the Evil One about the sharing of souls. The rector would get the sheep and the Devil the goats in the parish but neither would poach the others territory. The old rector died and his son took over. He had very different ideas to his father and began working hard to win over the ungodly to the church. With mounting anger the Devil saw what was happening and one evening he went to the rectory to discuss it with the new incumbent referring to the old agreement he had had with his father. Laurentius simply threw him out.

Infuriated the Devil decided on revenge. He visited a crofter whom he had previously helped with his harvest. One can well imagine the crofter's terror when one dark autumn evening a knock came at the door and the Devil himself stood there. The crofter had to obey for

he had promised so when he had received help previously. The Devil took the crofter to the stream and ordered him to follow into the forest. The poor man did not understand what was afoot and went along. Soon he had lost the Devil in the dark and called out to him. No reply came, instead he heard a strange noise and to his horror saw the stream coming towards him. Panic stricken he ran and stumbled away only to have the stream follow him, and so it runs to this very day. The result was the rector's mill ran dry and the Devil was revenged.

