Össjö

Like most Scanian castles, Össjö has its origins in the mid-1500s, when the manor gained its own status after previously belonging to both the Vegeholm and Skillinge estates. The Krabbe family, through Mogens Krabbe, was the first documented owner of the estate in the years 1560-1564. He took part in several conflicts to protect Denmark against the Swedish forces that constantly threatened northern Scania. This loyalty cost him his life, as he drowned at Tofta bridge in Småland in 1564 during a campaign against the Swedes. He had, partly through marriage to Karen Geed of Jordberga, built up a considerable estate complex that in addition to Jordberga included Rössjöholm and Gedsholm. The Krabbe family owned Össjö for a further three generations until 1663 when the last Krabbe at Össjö, Niels Krabbe, died childless.

During the Krabbe’s last period, the estate had become Swedish and was then bought by the governor general, Baron John Banér. However, his financial situation necessitated a transfer of the estate to his creditor. After his death in 1682, the estate of the deceased was insolvent and the heirs were forced to sell Össjö. The buyer was a professor at the University of Lund, Niklas Andersson Hyltén, who was shortly afterwards ennobled as Silfverskiöld. This was the start of the Silfverskiöld family’s ownership of Össjö, which during the first owner’s time gained the status of an independent manor farm. He built a new manor house consisting of two single-story half-timbered buildings.

The Silfverskiöld family owned Össjö for three generations during a relatively long period, 1682-1811. The last owner from the family, Christina Eleonora, born in 1737, was married to Major Abraham Tornérhielm. He died in 1777, but the widow ran the estate until her death in 1811. Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Frederick Tornérhielm then inherited the estate. Some years after he took over, the building from the 1700s burned to the ground. He replaced it in 1814 with a building in the contemporary Empire style. This building still exists in its original form.

The Tornérhielm family kept Össjö for a further two generations, after which the estate was part of the purchase sum when Rudolf Viktor Tornérhielm acquired the Vrams Gunnarstorp estate in 1839. This was how the Berch family, former owners of Vrams Gunnarstorp, came to own, and live at, Össjö.

The present owner is Hugo Berch.

From garden boy to vicar

Few clergymen in Sweden have been as popular as Father Gunnar of Osby. He had acquired his deep experience of life and life’s conditions through hard work and a belief that never deserted him in his clerical calling. He was born in Grevie parish in 1897 and came from humble origins, which among other things meant that he started school later than the other children. Through his talent and innate diligence he soon progressed. After completing his studies, he was ordained in Lund Cathedral in 1922. During his study years he worked as a garden boy at Össjö manor to earn a little money. It is recounted that he came in the autumns and helped with all types of work in the park and kitchen gardens. Root vegetables and other vegetables were harvested, fruit and berries were picked, leaves were raked up and paths were cleared, tree branches were lopped off and bushes were clipped, in fact it was the whole spectrum of work that must be done before the frost and winter.

After his ordination, he continued his studies in Lund with great energy in addition to his clerical duties. Before he was 30 he had completed his doctorate, and according to his friends he never took a day off from his work as a vicar. His brilliant intellect gave him a deep insight into theology and he saw the Lutheran orthodoxy as the main foundation of his belief. He had a high liturgical awareness with a suitable dose of piety. He became a pioneer for Ecclesiastical Renewal, the movement that characterised the Swedish Church in later decades, with an emphasis on colour and
life in church services, more frequent Holy Communions and churches that were open for prayer. He became the vicar of Osby in 1933 and would stay for 29 years until 1962. During that time, he became famous throughout the country as "Father Gunnar of Osby". In the church there is still a chapel that he set up in the medieval chancel behind the high altar. Daily prayers are held there, just as in Father Gunnar’s time.

What made him great was that he had the ability to translate theology’s theories into living piety. Regarding sermons, he had an insight matched by very few. He often made his sermons into meditations and he could summon up images of biblical scenes that were so real the congregation felt transported to the place. He had a number of people who disagreed with him, but no-one could deny the personal gentleness that shone through all his work.

He was also a brave man, in contrast to many theologians, and he dared to get involved in visions he believed in, and implement them. Even as a new vicar in Osby he wrote that the church was too grey and that: "it lacks an expression of courage and enthusiasm and is marked rather by resignation and caution". Within two years he made Holy Communion a service for every Sunday, which was then unique in the Swedish church. As he felt strong sympathies for the Catholic rituals, he soon introduced vestments, processions, incense and after some time ordained the Swedish Church’s first nun. Some people opposed him, but he had the courage to progress in his ideas and in his actions.

He had an exuberant heartiness and humour was part of his charm. Despite his serious ideas he had "a glint in his eye" and a refreshing perspective, which he also applied to himself. Even those who opposed part of his visions liked him as a person.

Father Gunnar died in 1988.