Gärsnäs

The oldest known documents concerning the Gyorthsnaes estate date from the mid-1300s. The owner at the time was Gjord Jensen Drefelt of Gärsnäs, whose line of descendants kept the estate until the late 1500s. The next owning family, for about 100 years, was Sinclair, who in turn sold Gärsnäs in 1630 to the landed proprietor, Falk Lykke, owner of the Bollerup and Kronovall estates in Scania, as well as estates in Denmark. Falk Lykke is one of Danish history’s most prominent people. After multifarious studies and extensive travels in Europe, he was active for a long period in foreign war service. Later, he became feudal lord in Kristianopel, Viborgs, Lunde and in St Peter’s monastery county, and died in 1650. In 1640, major extensions were made to the existing rectangular three-storey house, probably with high stepped gables. It is considered, with good reason, that the present central building is the original from the 1500s, or even the original from the 1300s, with thick limestone walls and a cross vault in the cellar.

At the time of the Treaty of Roskilde, when Scania became part of Sweden, Gärsnäs was owned by the Rantzau family, but after the peace agreement it was transferred briefly to Gustav Banér’s ownership. However, it soon returned to the rightful heirs from the Rantzau family. The next owner, from 1702, was Jörgen Adlersten. During the 1700s and 1800s, Gärsnäs was owned by the following families: Lindenstedt, Dagström, Schönström, von Schants and Rosencrantz. The last named retained the estate in family ownership until 1931. Henry Rosencrantz carried out an extensive renovation of the castle in 1873 with designs by the renowned Danish castle architect, Ferdinand Mehldal.

Gärsnäs Castle is situated just north of Gärsnäs between Simrishamn and Tomelilla. The castle is private property.

Medieval Tumathorp

A few kilometres east of Gärsnäs Castle is the site of the medieval town of Tumathorp, now downgraded to Tommarp, one of many villages in Österlen. Tumathorp’s status as a secular and religious centre has been substantiated both through archaeological finds and a variety of documentation, mainly on the medieval Premonstratensian monastery. In the earliest period from 1050, probably before the monastery was founded, Tumathorp was thought to have been a trading centre and a town for the local king.

Archaeological excavations have uncovered graves from the 1000s situated under the two stone churches from the 1100s. It indicates that the stone churches were preceded by wooden stave churches, which were common in Scania in the early medieval period. The town’s importance as a religious centre is accentuated by the fact that two churches had been built during the 1100s, before the monastery was established. One of them, St Maria, became the parish church until 1857, when it was replaced by a new and larger building, while the other, St Petri, is considered to have been the Premonstratensian monastery church. St Petri may even have had dealings with the local state demesne that is believed to have existed on the site. The state demesne probably had a royal mint, as three coins from the period 1048-1086 have been found bearing the letters “TV”, which is interpreted as being Tumathorp.

The Premonstratensian order was already an important monastic order in Scania during the 1100s. Like the Cistercian order, it set out to reform the church and church life of the times. The founder, Norbert of Xanten, was born into a family of the German high nobility in 1080, and died in France in 1134. After several attempts to reform convention, he had a strange vision, which he understood to be a sign from God to build a mother monastery for a new monastic order. So began the Premonstratensian order in 1120, and by 1126 there was a papal confirmation for his holy mission. At its height, the order had around 2,000 monasteries in Europe.
The order’s brothers were of live in poverty as monks and emulate their Lord Jesus Christ in love of their fellow man. Each monastery consisted of an abbot and at least 12 monks, like Jesus and his disciples. They would devote themselves to a deepened spiritual life, missions in the nearby parish churches and otherwise work for the church’s independence. Their task was also to provide for the local population’s spiritual welfare. They wore white clothes, like the angel at Christ’s grave.

In the mid-1100s, Archbishop Eskil established four Premonstratensian monasteries in Scania; Tumathorp, Vä (later Bäckaskog), Öved and Lund.

Initially, the Premonstratensian order’s monasteries were open to both monks and nuns, but this was seen as too daring and was banned by papal decree in 1198.

The foundations of the monastery buildings in Tumathorp were laid around 1155. French monks from the mother monastery probably took part in the building work, as death announcements with French names are found from 1170 and around 100 years onwards.

In the early 1300s, the monastery was probably struck by a devastating fire, which seems confirmed in a letter from Archbishop Esger Juuls dated 1322, in which he relates how the monastery “through bad times and fire has been almost totally destroyed”. The monastery’s heyday was over, and 100 years later there are accounts of great poverty due to repair work. Some 40 years after that, it is written that the monastery ”has insignificant income, it is poor and destitute”. From that time on, there are only sporadic details on levies, taxes and even acts of violence.

When the Reformation arrived in Denmark in the mid-1530s, all monasteries were ”liberated ” from their buildings, functions and property. Land confiscated by the Crown was often granted to nobles, and this was also the case with Tumathorp, which went to the king’s secretary, Morthen Krabbe. The monks were allowed to stay there for a time, but in documents from 1584 it is stated that they were definitely gone.