

Pre-history of Skagen Church

When you talk about Skagen Church it is relevant to ask: "Which one of them?" Historically there are three churches: Saint Lawrence church, the church built by C. F. Hansen and the present church built by Ulrik Plesner.

Saint Lawrence Church – the church buried in sand.

The first church in Skagen was erected in the end of the 13 hundred's. Precisely when is a not known, but a written source from 1387 mentions the church. It was a long gothic building made by red bricks. With its 45 meters length and with a 22 meter high tower it was the biggest church in Vendsyssel at the time. The size is amazing, but it should be noticed that Skagen at the time was a comparably large and still growing town with fishing and fish trade as the main occupation. There were also some large farms in the area.

The church was inaugurated to Saint Lawrence, who according to the legend was burnt on a grid-iron as a punishment for distributing the riches of the church among the poor.

As a result of i.a. soil exhaustion of the dunes drifting sand became a growing problem for the area. Farmland became useless and buildings were destroyed by the enormous wandering dunes. Access to the church became more and more difficult and Prayer Day (Danish spring holiday) 1775 the drifting sand covered the entrance to the church and it was not possible to reach the door. The next twenty years an unequal struggle was fought with the sand. Nature won the battle!

In 1795 it was decided by royal decree to close and demolish the church.

Altarpiece and other inventory was sold and scattered all over. Building material was reused.

The only leftovers in Skagen church today are the chalice, paten, wafer box and two magnificent chandeliers.

Deep down under 5-6 meters of sand the church floor, altar table and also the limestone baptismal font are probably hidden. However no excavation has proven this so far!

The cemetery at Saint Lawrence church was used until 1810.

In 1816 the tower was taken over by the Lighthouse Authorities. It was whitewashed and used as a navigation mark.

The tower was listed as a scheduled monument in 1903 and is nowadays managed by the National Forest and Nature Agency.

The C.F. Hansen Church

From 1795 the congregation in Skagen had no church. During a long and difficult period means were collected for a new church, and meanwhile the inhabitants of Højen (Old Skagen) had to use an old and rundown chapel – although they had paid for assigned pews at the gallery of the Saint Lawrence church. The congregation in Skagen used a chapel called Østerby Chapel just east of the present church.

Not until 1841 was the new church inaugurated, designed by the architect C. F. Hansen. This church was the last building designed by the almost 85 year old famous architect. It was neo-classicistic with a strict symmetric design and large windows giving much light to the church.

The building itself was not ostentatious – placed in the dunes with its grey plastered walls. Since the architect was not fond of towers, the church only had a small ridge turret. The locals were not happy with its appearance and jokingly called it "The Sparrow"

The Ulrik Plesner Church

In the end of the 1800 century the parish experienced a revival movement. Especially a wave of revival in 1896 resulted in so many church-goers that it was impossible to get a seat in the pews if you did not show up very early and long before the start of the service. Something had to be done. Many architects thought that an entirely new church should be erected. But the parishioners of Skagen held close to their money and stood by their wish for an extension only.

The architects Ulrik Plesner and Thorvald Bindsbøll were therefore asked to draw an extension of the C.F. Hansen church with room for 800 people, which indicates the spiritual commitment in a period with app. 2.500 inhabitants in the parish.

Ulrik Plesner extended the church in eastward direction while he with great respect for the former architect C.F. Hansen kept the symmetric ground plan. The floor was lowered by removing the dune upon which the church was built. To let more light flow through the windows the window sills were lowered as well. In the west end the parishioners had their wished for tower. From the outside you can still feel the characteristics of the old church while Plesner has left his own marks by e.g. the high pink footing, the yellow washed walls and the white cornices under the roof.

The light-filled church of Skagen was inaugurated in 1910.

The Parish Community Centre

Across the street opposite the church Emaus was built in the end of the 1800 hundreds - a "bethel" where a great deal of the children of Skagen town have attended Sunday School over the years. After more than a hundred years of activity The Home Mission Society wanted to sell the house and Skagen church had the opportunity to buy it and thereby centralize church activities spread in different parts of town.

In 2008 the renovated "bethel" was opened as a parish community centre, and many activities takes place in the house, such as confirmation classes, hymns for babies, parents café, talks and lectures, films, study groups, concerts, church council meetings etc. Also church administration is situated in the house.

In the hall a small historic organ has been preserved and renovated, originally owned by Queen Caroline Amalie. She donated the organ to Skagen church in 1841. When the church was extended in 1910 Sunday services took place in the "bethel", the organ was transferred over there and it was given to the Home Mission Society as a thank you for lending out the facilities.

Cemeteries

After the demolition of Saint Lawrence's church two cemeteries were established, one in Højen and one on Markvej in Skagen. The latter soon became too small and in 1884 the larger Assistance Cemetery was inaugurated. In 1925 a chapel was erected here, drawn by the architect Ulrik Plesner.

In the cemetery a monument called "They stayed out there" can be seen. It has engraved on it the names of all the fishermen who has drowned since 1862 and who's bodies never were found. Many of the well-known artists from the art colony are buried in this cemetery, such as P.S. Krøyer, Anna Ancher, Michael Ancher, Degn Brøndum and Ulrik Plesner.

The cemeteries in Højen and the two cemeteries in Skagen are still used.

Into the Skagen Church

The inventory and ornamentation reflect different eras of artistic manners without disturbing the harmony and the symmetry of the interior of the church. The general character of the architect and designer Thorvald Bindsbøll has joined together these different styles.

As soon as you enter the church door from the porch in west your attention is drawn towards the altarpiece in east. When moving up the nave you pass twenty pews on each side decorated with Bindsbøll's organic and softly curved carvings. The gallery on each side sitting a hundred people each does not give shadow worth mentioning for the day light so abundantly pouring in - due to the brilliant light wells under the gallery around the large windows. At the end of the galleries the room opens up and the floor is visible, made by shimmering Ôland tiles with fossils as a greeting from millions of years of life forms. The chairs made of massive oak are designed by Bindsbøll as well.

Baptismal Font, Chancel and Altar

Right in the middle the baptismal font is placed, a piece of carving dominated by mussel patterns and painted in white and gold carrying a brass baptismal dish. The baptismal font can easily be removed when the space is needed e.g. for a concert. In the centre of the semicircle altar rail is the big and pot-bellied pulpit made of brown wood with bronze ornamentation made by Bindsbøll. This unusual situation for a pulpit is desirable for the congregation sitting in the galleries and it underlines the axial symmetry of the church room.

The area within the altar rail is covered by a carpet embroidered in organic patterns also designed by Bindsbøll.

Flanked by two marble columns with golden Corinthian capitals five broad stairs lead to the choir with the altar in the centre. Greatest attention is claimed by the altarpiece painted by Joakim Skovgaard illustrating the nativity scene in the stable in Bethlehem – with the holy family and the manger surrounded by good-natured ruminating cattle. The enormous wooden frame is decorated with golden ornamentation and forms a suitable counterbalance to the pulpit. The oil painting of Joakim Skovgaard's nativity scene recurs in the fresco paintings in the vaults and arches in Viborg Cathedral.

On the altar table are the two heavy chandeliers dating back to the Saint Lawrence Church. The brass sculpture in the middle is rather new and it depicts the crucifixion scene with Jesus surrounded by Mary and John the disciple. They are surrounded by a circle with three stylized doves symbolizing The Holy Spirit. The sculpture is made by the local artist Niels Helledie. In the front of the altar table are three squares painted in strong and deep colours by Arne L. Hansen portraying the events of Easter: Via Dolorosa, Calvary and The Resurrection. Less visible are two squares on the sides of the table, to the south The Day and to the north The Night.

The still living artist Niels Helledie is furthermore represented by the tall blue and white crucifix hanging on the north wall over the broad sliding door to the vestry. Its colours and its shape correspond obviously to elements from the choir, especially the marble columns: Christ is the principal "column" of the church.

Votive Ship Models and Organ

Standing between the baptismal font and the rail facing the entrance you see the light and gentle nave with the flickering and refracted light. From the ceiling in the middle are two elegant bronze chandeliers in the style of Bindesbøll and not less than three votive ship models among which the middle one is the training ship Copenhagen, a mighty five-masts bark that tragically vanished without trace in the South Atlantic December 1928 with a local Skagen boy on board.

The west end is dominated by the eye-catching organ from 1962 built by Marcussen and Son. The organ façade with the many metal organ pipes is divided into sections in accordance with the symmetry of the room. The façade and the organ cases are designed by the architect Christen Justesen senior and are made by natural oak in strict modernistic style typical of the period and in bold contrast the flickering myriads of white painted balustrades and banisters with golden ornamentation. In 2010 the organ was renovated with a new bellow and it was extended with 4 new stops so that the organ now has 31 stops divided upon three manuals and pedal.

Tower and Bells

In the south western stairwell a small stair leads to the slim 36 meter high church tower. (No admittance) At the same level as the roof ridge the substantial suspension for the three church bells is found. The ringing of bells is now automatic. The largest of the bells is donated by the most affluent of the old Skagen painters, Professor Laurits Tuxen. The smallest bell derives from the 14. Century. Steep ladders lead further up to the mechanical clockwork of the tower clock, and at the very top just under the spire the carillon of the church is found, directly exposed to all weathers from all four corners of the world. The carillon consists of 25 bells operated electronically from a console in the room behind the organ. If you open up the hatch and climb out to the many bells you have a unique and windy view over the red tiles with the white ornamentation, the harbour, a great deal of the Skagen tongue of land and the mighty blue neighbour, The Sea, in almost all directions. But then we have left the Interior of the Church!!

Briefly about

- what the church holds from the church buried in sand, Saint Lawrence's church

Altar Chandeliers

Two heavy bronze chandeliers donated 1598 by Poul Nielsen Goldsmith, vicar in Skagen 1585-1601.

Altar Silver

Chalice and paten, originally from the Medieval period, recast and restored several times – latest in 1732.

Baptismal dish

Brass baptismal dish hanging on the wall in the vestry is probably from the baptismal font from the church buried in sand.

Briefly about

- C.F. Hansen's church inaugurated in 1841 and inventory from this church

Architect

C.F. Hansen, royal chief building architect, professor at the Royal Academy of Arts in Copenhagen, known as the architect of the Cathedral and the Courthouse in Copenhagen.

Baptismal Font

Wooden white-painted font with gold ornaments from 1841. Brass dish from 1894.

Crucifix

The alter crucifix from 1841 is on the wall in the vestry.

Brass Chandeliers

Two pendants with candles in the choir section

Organ

Built by P.U.F. Demant for Sorgenfri Castle c.1837, donated by Queen Caroline Amalie, 1841.

Moved to the "bethel" house – now Parish Community Centre – in 1909.

Two chairs for the vicar

Two white chairs at the south wall

Relief

Bronze memorial tablet for lost rescue men by the salvage of the wreck of "Daphne" in 1862. Originally placed on the south wall, now at the tower.

Artist: Professor and sculptor Andreas Paulsen.

Briefly about

- Skagen church after the renovation by Plesner, inaugurated in 1910 and inventory

Architects

Building: Ulrik Plesner, known from many other buildings in Skagen, e.g. The Museum, The Harbour Master Building (Tourist Office).

Inventory: Thorvald Bindsbøll, known from the red fish ware houses at the harbour in Skagen.

Choir

Altarpiece painted by Joakim Skovgaard, known from Viborg Cathedral. Donated by landowner Ida M. Suhr, Petersgaard, South Sealand, holiday visitor to Skagen.

Frame: Th. Bindsbøll.

Altar rail, altar carpet and pulpit: Th. Bindsbøll.

Pendant Chandeliers

Two bronze chandeliers in Bindsbøll style donated 1910 by Manager L. P. Wrenfeldt Christensen, Hellerup, born in Skagen og Merchant Chr. Rosenberg, Skagen.

Wafer box in silver

Donated 1916 by King Christian the 10th and Queen Alexandrine, summer residence at Klitgården in Skagen.

Organ

Built 1962 af Marcussen & Søn, originally 27 stops. Renovated 2010 with new bellow and extended to 31 stops

Tower clock

Donated 1942 af consul Th. Andersen and wife, Odense, summer house in Skagen.

Briefly about

- newer acquisitions and alterations

Altar table

Front decoration with Passover theme from 1989.

Artist: Arne L. Hansen, Espergærde, summer house in Skagen.

Altar sculpture

Brass Crucifixion group 1994.

Artist: Niels Helledie, Skagen.

Carillon

Installed in the very top of the tower in 1985, extended 1998 till 25 bells, all donated by clubs, firms and private donors and have the donors's names engraved on them.

Crucifix

Over the door to the vestry, donated 1994 by Orla Dam Hansen, Skagen.

Artist: Niels Helledie, Skagen.

Stone floor

Ôland tiles laid down at the renovation in 1989.

Architect: Christen Justesen.

Briefly about

the votive ship models

Front:

The full rigged "Queen Louise", built 1880 by shipbuilder J. Chr. Ovesen, Østerby.

Middle:

The training ship "Copenhagen", built 1930, donated 1944 by clog maker J. P. Petersen, Skagen.

Restored 1980 by sailor and seine maker Jens M. Diget, Vesterby.

Back:

The full rigged "Fremad", built 1934, donated by Jens M. Diget, Vesterby.

Briefly about

- the 3 church bells

The smallest bell with a relief of a bishop is medieval and has hung in the bell house by Østerby Chapel

The medium bell is from c.1500 and has also hung at Østerby chapel. Served possibly as a town bell in Vesterby in the 1700. Recast in 1886 and 1974.

The largest bell was donated in 1910 by painter Laurits R. Tuxen, professor at the Royal Academy of Arts, summer house in Skagen.

Briefly about

- Skagen parish 2011

Belongs to: Frederikshavn deanery, Aalborg diocese

Inhabitants: 8.530, 7.776 members of the State Church.

Church Council: 13 members.

Parish: Fellowship with Hulsig parish, 159 inhabitants, 140 members of the State Church.

Vicars: 3 pastors.

Cemeteries:

Skagen cemetery, Markvej. Established 1809.

Højen cemetery, G. Skagen. Established 1809.

Skagen Assistance cemetery, Chr. X's Vej. Established: 1884.

Offices and meeting rooms: Sognehuset, Kirkevej 7A, from 2008.