

Thorning Church

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The area known in Christian times as Thorning Parish occurred at the intersection of Hærvejen along the Jutland Ridge and the streams to the east and west. Many people travelled through, but few stayed in the poor heath area. Thorning Parish, with 15,000 acres, was the largest parish in Lysgård District and one of the largest parishes in Viborg.



The numerous burial mounds in the parish testify to settlement already in ancient times, and near the protected Church Woods on Munk field are traces of settlement in the Viking Age. The name Thorning has its origins in the nature of the place and can be interpreted as beginning with "thorns," as the old Danish name for thorn is "thorn," or in the Jutland language, "thuen."

The inscription on the baptismal basin in Thorning Church says that it is given to Tuorning Church, and the city name is rendered in the Jutland language, Thuening. Even today there are many thorns in the region.

Another interpretation is that the place is named after the god Thor. It is likely that Thor's altar stood nearby on the hill by the river valley, where the first stave church was later built to testify that Christ triumphed over the ancient Norse religion.



Thorning's Romanesque ashlar* church was constructed in the 13th century in the Jutland style with a mitered foundation.

*finely cut masonry, often limestone

The granite font has cord and lily ornamentation and on the corners of the sandstone feet has decorations that resemble the lion heads on the Hinge Church



baptismal font, created by the same stonemason. The font may once have stood in the derelict Ungstrup (Luhn) Church, which was closed in 1558.

The baptismal basin is made of brass and was donated to the church in 1661. It is an older southern German work showing the Annunciation and the words, "He that believeth and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16) The donors were Niels Nielsøn, bailiff at Kjærsholm, and Michael Andersøn from Ungstrup.

Another treasure is the church's medieval board, which is now to be found on the north wall near the choir. It is a so-called Nottingham

board, made in England, where there was a whole cottage industry of cutting devotional panels in alabaster, which is a soft, white stone. This took place from the mid-1300's until the Reformation. In Denmark these Nottingham boards are only found in a few places, including in Thorning Church and also in Vejrum, Borbjerg and Hornslet Churches.

Nottingham boards most often illustrate legends involving Catholic saints, but the board in Thorning has a gospel theme. In the center is the Virgin Mary with the dead Christ in her arms after the dismantling of the cross. At the top is God the Father flanked by two angels holding a ribbon that goes through the whole picture. The ribbon inscriptions are now illegible as the original paint has been removed.



At the bottom we see again the dead Christ, who lies in a monstrous chained opening that is full of sharp teeth. This could be an allusion to the story of the prophet Jonah, who God sent to Nineveh to preach the judgement and repentance. Jonah was shipwrecked and swallowed by a sea creature. Three days later he was spewed out on the coast outside of Nineveh, where he could fulfill his mission.

On the blackboard it seems that Jesus himself is being Jonah in the whale's mouth. Perhaps the inscription on the ribbon may have been from Matthew 12:39-40, where it says, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and no sign shall be given it save the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."



In Thorning a late Gothic alabaster box sat in the church altarpiece until 1903. Now it hangs on the north wall, closest to the choir.

The new altar was donated by a local woman from Thorning. The altar table piece is adorned with designs from Brorson's hymn, "The Most Beautiful Roses." A painting by Christian Bang envisioning the Transfiguration which was formerly in the altarpiece now hangs in the middle of the north wall.

In 1998 the existing altar from 1903 received a new painting. It was painted by the great Nordic church painter Sven Havsteen-Mikkelsen, and was also the artist's last painting. When installed, he told the parish council that in his view it is one of the best pictures he has painted and added, "I have always kept myself from painting the Resurrection, for no one has seen it. But now that death is near, I feel like painting the Resurrection's light."



The subject is the resurrected Jesus, who meets the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is one of the themes that Sven Havsteen-Mikkelsen often returned to. On his last picture, however, there is an interpretation. There are not three, but only two people, for Jesus has

at this time become invisible to the disciples and leaves a radiant glow: "Resurrection light," the artist said. Christ reveals himself even though he is hiding - only visible to the faithful.

In this way you can in Thorning Church commune with the living, breathing Christ.

The new painting was installed in connection with a major church restoration in 1998. The altarpiece frame was simplified, number boards and kneeling benches refreshed, and the pulpit was gilded. All of this was thanks to a large bequest from a couple in Thorning.

With the Reformation in 1536 the pulpits arrived in the churches. The Word was preached - and it must be in Danish!

The Sandberg family of Kjærsholm, to which the church belonged, over the years donated many things to the church. The family had many manors, and the manor seat was Kvelstrup in Jutland. The family also distinguished themselves as officers during the Swedish wars.



The couple Henrik Sandberg and his wife Kirsten Juel, who was a widow for 38 years, have their tombstones placed on the northern wall of the choir.

It might also be mentioned that Tycho Sandberg and his wife Karen Juel, who was a sister of the naval hero from Køge Bay, Admiral Niels Juel, are laid to rest in the crypt of the cathedral, along with an unmarried sister, Lisa Sandberg.

The Sandbergs donated the church altar silver in 1620, and the altar foundation's foot shows a series of images with scenes from the Passion along with donors' names and coats of arms. The chalice was replaced in 2008 and was engraved with a lily pattern inspired by the decoration on the tombstones in the choir.

It was Tycho Sandberg, the last of the family on Kjærsholm, who arranged for the richly carved pulpit as a gift for Thorning Church before his death on the battlefield. The family fulfilled his desire and donated the church pulpit in 1662. The pulpit was painted then. The carver of the images was probably Lauritz Jensen, a student of Johan Sculptors in Viborg.

You see the four Gospel evangelists, each in his own setting. In the middle field "Salvato", as there was no room for the last R. There is no doubt that the artist was thinking about the Savior.

The corners are adorned with female sculptures, the so-called "Rural Virtues," and they symbolize faith, hope, love, justice and strength. The Virtues demonstrate that Christ is all virtue's perfect mirror.

The pulpit is like the family's last will and testament, before they disappeared. War and sickness, along with poverty in the country, were done away with under the Sandberg family.

The bourgeoisie took over from a very weakened nobility. Now money and industriousness trumped inherited privilege.



In 1709 Kjærsholm - and thus Thorning Church - was taken over by Janus Friedenreich from Palstrup and his wife Anna Margrethe Linde, who was the daughter of West Jutland's largest banking magnate, knighted Christen de Linde, while Friedenreich's own father was a wealthy pharmacist who had taken over Palstrup and become over the years the area's major builder and benefactor. The couple converted to pietism.

In 1743, Friedenreich had the church's dilapidated tower dismantled and built the open stilt-tower. It is a form that originated in Jutland. In addition, the church was extended 11 yards to the west. It is likely that the beamed ceilings were added at the same time. At the west door of the tower, the old side doors were bricked in. As a result of these modifications, the church today has its own classic touch, and the new roof put it all in a nice context.

In the tower opening is a memorial, a wooden board and two coats of arms for the couple who had the honor of creating this beautiful church building. The church was restored again, but the Sandberg's colorful manor life with hunts and celebrations was replaced by pietistic gloom. These changing times are depicted in Blicher's "A Village Clerk's Diary."

The vestibule was built in an extensive restoration in 1936. The architect was Søren Vig-Nielsen. One of the old Renaissance church benches stands in the vestibule. On the wall hangs the Lysgård County seal with the words, "Christ is the light of Eternal Life."

The organ dates from 1981 and was built by Poul-Gerhard Anderson. It has 12 stops, controlled by two manuals and pedals.



Thorning Church's bell is from 1871 and was cast by JP Meilstrup of Randers. The tower clock was donated to the church and installed in 1956. It was built by R. Kjeldsen-Nielsen, Tårnurfabrikken Chr Ørnholms efft., Løkken.



The respected poet-priest St. Steensen Blicher was a pastor in Thorning-Lysgård parish from 1819 to 1825. He thus became the twelfth name on the church's pastors-roll that reaches back to 1530.

Blicher's rectory was where Blicheregnen's Museum is now housed in the old rectory. His study room faced east, and it was here that he began his great short story poetry in 1824 with "Fragments of a Village Parsonage Diary." When his flock of children grew from six to nine, debts and tax arrears also took a dramatic jump upward for Blicher. Thorning was a poor parish, so after six years Blicher moved in 1825 to the east- Jutland Spentrup-Gassum Parish. While there he also wrote the church history of Thorning, because in the first 300 years after the Reformation, pastors stayed where they were. It is telling that Thorning's pastors-roll shows the first eleven pastors with a small cross in their last year, as evidence that they died in office. The exception was No. 4, who had to flee the country after killing a nobleman in a duel. But Blicher travelled of his own volition as the first - and was later followed by several priests in the parish who thought the same way he did.

In the cemetery, you can see the Blicheresque tombs. Next to the tower lies Mads Doss from Dosshøjgård in Thorning Vestermærk. His cowpox certificate bearing Blicher's signature can be found in the museum. Like his father, Niels Blicher, and other Enlightenment pastors, Blicher vaccinated his parishioners against smallpox. Mads Doss' beloved, who is mentioned in Blicher's display as "e Stuntheustøs" Mett Kølvro, is not there. She is in fact a product of Blicher's imagination.

Other funny names seen are Walrus and Claus Vattrup, who were the first owners of the horse "Brass Jens" from Blicher's story in "E Bindstouw."



Highwayman Anders Sting Jensen (1883-1965) repaired often to this region when winter fell. In fact, he chose Kjellerup prison rather than the road, and in one of the cells he sat through the winter and cut model ships, but in the spring time set out on the road again. The bailiff promised in return to save the models that were not yet ready for next year's voluntary arrest stay!

Jensen knew ship's rigging inside and out, because as a

newly-confirmed young man, poor Anders struck out from a farm in Vinderslev, where he otherwise would have to slog away without pay. Instead he went to sea on a fully-rigged ship from Bremen, and for 18 years he sailed the seven seas. Then the era of the sailing ships was past, and he didn't want to be on steamers. He made himself a knife-grinder's wagon and went on the road. One and a half bottles of spirits plus assorted beer was his daily ration, but despite this his hands did not shake as he cut his models in wood.

He gave away most of his woodwork. The tall ship in Thorning Church, however, he put up for sale in order to help a vagabond buddy who was in debt and therefore not allowed to leave town, as his wagon was impounded. The ship was purchased by the fabric-man I.C. Wolsgård from Kjellerup for 35 kroner, and he donated it later to Thorning Church.

Anders and his companion could in return for the 35 kroner take a taxi out of town as wealthy men. Anders Sting Jensen lived out his life in enjoyable retirement as a teetotaler. Anders knew that his ships were true replicas and without technical faults, but on the Thorning model there is one detail that requires a comment. The bowsprit juts too high into the air, but this was for decorative reasons, he explained.

Source: "Thorning Church Says" with text from Jesper Langballe. Published by Thorning Parish, 2000.