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# From church to museum and back again

The de-sacralization and re-sacralization of Kinnarumma's old wooden church

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In the small village of Kinnarumma in western Sweden an old wooden church was replaced by a new church building in the early twentieth century. The old church was de-sacralized by being moved to an open-air museum in Borås and used there for exhibitions and the storage of museum objects. The need for more church premises in the city led to the re-sacralization of the old church in 1930. The transition of Kinnarumma's old wooden church to museum object, its museumification, was an expression of change in religious heritage, and its re-sacralization expressed an unchanged part of the same heritage.

## Introduction

When an object's original use and context cease and it is included in a museum's collections, its identity changes. This also applies when buildings are moved to open-air museums. The change in identity can be seen as a loss, as when Philip Fisher writes about the process of *silencing* or *deconsecration* of an object (Fisher 1991: 19). Religious objects undergo the same change when they are included in a museum collection. Fisher describes the change and the loss, writing: 'When the crucifix is taken out of the cathedral, the cathedral is taken out of the crucifix' (p. 19, also cited in Paine 2013: 14).

This article focuses on the move of Kinnarumma's old wooden church from its

original location to an open-air museum in nearby Borås, and how the church's identity and use changed in connection with the move and integration into the museum's collections. Questions to be answered are:

1. How can the transition of Kinnarumma's wooden church be seen as an expression of change related to religious heritage in western Sweden in the early twentieth century?
2. What happened to the religious identity of the old church building after its inclusion in the open-air museum? Did the crucifix leave the cathedral, as suggested by Fisher?

The materials that have been used are primarily descriptions from the local newspaper *Borås Tidning* and from local literature, such as the village history *Kinnarumma sockens historia* (Bergstrand 1963).

## Concepts of sacralization

Different terminology is used regarding commissioning and decommissioning of a church building, and some of the terms are also used in a secular way. Fisher's use of de-consecration above is an example. The term *consecration* is most often used

in a Christian religious context. It is used specifically for the consecration of bread and wine in the Eucharist, but also for the ordination of priests and bishops, as well as the commissioning of churches and ecclesiastical objects. In the case of buildings and objects, the reverse process can be described as *deconsecration* (or *deseccration*), and a renewed religious use as *reconsecration*. Sometimes the ceremony of commissioning is called consecration, but it can also be called *dedication*.

*Sacralization* (de-sacralization, re-sacralization) can be used synonymously with consecration, but also in a religious context wider than Christianity. In academic literature, the concepts of consecration and sacralization are used overlappingly.<sup>1</sup>

Jakob Dahlbacka uses the terms sacralization and re-sacralization (Sw. *sakralisering* and *resakralisering*) in his study of the reopening of the Luther Church in Helsinki, and he also discusses a duality within Lutheran Christianity; on one hand, it is the use that sanctifies buildings and objects while, on the other hand, there is a strong tradition of church sacralizations or dedications (Dahlbacka 2021). In this article, the term *sacralization* (de-sacralization, re-sacralization) will be used in relation to the change in religious status of Kinnarumma's old wooden church, and the term *dedication* only to refer to a ceremony of sacralization.

## Background

Swedish society underwent major changes in the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Many of the changes can be linked to industrialization, urbanization and democratization. At the same time, Romantic nation-

alism was at its height and expressed in art, literature and architecture. There was also an increasing interest in folk traditions, folklore and local history. This later development can be traced in large projects of national interest such as the Nordic Museum and Skansen in Stockholm.

There were also many local expressions of Romantic nationalism. In smaller towns and rural areas, people gathered to preserve traditions, objects and buildings. In December 1903 in the Borås city hall, an association was founded by people with a special interest in local history. The name of the new association was De Sju Häradernas Kulturhistoriska Förening (The Seven Hundreds' Cultural History Association).<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the new association was to create a good relationship with home and motherland, as well as to work towards an ethnographic relic and industrial museum for Borås (Johansson 2005: 343–4). The pattern of the association is a parallel to the more famous work of Artur Hazelius (1833–1901) in Stockholm and the creation of the open-air museum Skansen, opened in 1891, although in Borås the focus was not only on old peasant life and traditions but, right from the start, also on early industrial history.

In 1911, the association got the city's permission to rebuild buildings collected in an area called Idrottsparken (the sports park) – later called Ramnaparken (named after Ramnasjön, a lake in the area) – close to central Borås. Several buildings were erected and in 1914 the open-air museum

1 An example is Andrew Spicer's use of both desacralization and desecration in the same article (Spicer 2005: 87, 92).

2 The old Älvsborg county was divided into eighteen smaller districts known as hundreds (Sw. *härader*). The seven hundreds in the south of the county collaborated, and still do, as an informal network in various ways. Borås is the major city in the seven hundreds.



Kinnarumma old wooden church, Ramnakyrkan, in the open-air museum in Borås.

was inaugurated by Governor Karl Sigfrid Husberg and Minister of Finance Axel Vennersten (Johansson 2005: 344). Among the rebuilt buildings was an old wooden church from the parish of Kinnarumma, 15 kilometres south of Borås.<sup>3</sup>

### The value of an old church

During the first years of the twentieth century, Kinnarumma parish (1907), and nearby Seglora parish (1903), built new brick churches in neo-Gothic style (Markving and Markving 1981: 161–2, 166–9). Both churches replaced older wooden churches from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Kinnarumma's old wooden church was erected in 1690–1. Over time, it underwent

several modifications. For example, it had a bell tower from 1725 to 1869, and in 1870 the windows were made wider (Markving and Markving 1981: 161; Hill and Hallgren 2012: 3). The church was representative of the area, where similar wooden churches had replaced older medieval stave churches.<sup>4</sup>

Jakob Lindblad notes that there was a change in how old churches were viewed when new ones were built in the early 1900s. In the past, materials from the old church were often used in the construction of a new edifice. Now it became more common to abandon the old church. Lindblad states:

4 When Kinnarumma's wooden church was moved from its site, several parts from an older stave church were found (Bergstrand 1963: 32). The only medieval stave church preserved in Sweden is Hedared stave church north of Borås.

3 In Sweden numerous churches have been moved to – or built in – open air-museums. For examples, see Andersson 2022: 17–19.

In several cases, the church was apparently left to its fate in the condition it was in after the last service, something that was completely unthinkable during periods when the materials of the old church were an important asset in the construction of the new one.

However, this way of abandoning the old church has saved several older churches by allowing them to be taken care of by cultural history associations or other interested groups. (Lindblad 2004: 145, my translation)

The pattern described fits into the context of both Kinnarumma and Seglora. The old buildings were not seen as assets but as burdens, as problems to be solved. In Seglora, the parish planned to use material from the old church to build stables next to the new church, but the plans were not realized. Since the old church stood in the middle of the graveyard, the congregation did not want it to fall into disrepair. The façade was washed in 1908 and the roof was repaired in 1913 (Bergstrand 1966: 187). So, what to do with an old church building?

Among the founders of De Sju Häradernas Kulturhistoriska Förening in Borås city was Johannes Eriksson, director of textile factories within the Kinnarumma and Seglora parishes. The association was looking for an old church building that could be moved to Borås, and which could house the association's collection of museum objects. Eriksson was an important link between the association and the parishes of Kinnarumma and Seglora (*Borås Tidning* 25.6.1914). The association was offered the choice between the old churches in Seglora and Kinnarumma. The latter was chosen.<sup>5</sup>

5 Seglora's wooden church was sold to a manufacturer in nearby Viskafors to be re-

The church council in Kinnarumma decided on 24 May 1911 to donate the old wooden church to the association. That no greater value was seen in the old objects was underlined by the fact that in 1913 the council also deposited more objects from the old church than was originally agreed upon (Bergstrand 1963: 52–3).

De Sju Häradernas Kulturhistoriska Förening also wanted a belfry to place close to the church in the open-air museum. One option was a belfry from Ornunga, located 30 kilometres north of Borås. The parish of Ornunga built a new church in 1903–5. They planned to demolish the old stone church and sell its wooden belfry. The association in Borås was offered the chance to buy the belfry for 100 Swedish crowns (Brunnegård 1975: 21–2).

Nevertheless, both church and belfry in Ornunga were saved and preserved in their original places. This was not through intervention by church authorities, but because of two brothers' interest in cultural history. The two men took the initiative to form a local cultural-historical association to save the buildings. At the sight of the old church, one of the brothers, the landscape painter Birger Sandzén (1871–1954), exclaimed: 'It is a crime against Swedish culture and Swedish history to demolish such an old, strange building' (Brunnegård 1975: 24). The old church in Ornunga became a museum; the local association in charge was supported by local donors but also by Svenska Turistföreningen (the Swedish Tourist Association) as well as Swedish emigrants in the United States (p. 26).

built as a chapel next to the factory there, but when Skansen in Stockholm showed interest in the church, the purchase was reversed, and the church was moved to the capital (Bergstrand 1966: 187–8).



## The urbanization of a church

As early as the founding of De Sju Hărădernas Kulturhistoriska Förening in 1903, hopes were expressed of establishing a museum, possibly an open air-museum. For several years the association was allowed to collect and exhibit its objects in a school in the city, but when it got Kinnarumma's wooden church, the plans for a museum of its own could be realized (Lagerström 2010: 84–8).

The church building was not acquired to provide religious activities in the museum. The building was to be used as a warehouse and exhibition space for the museum collections. The church was deliberately taken out of ecclesiastical use, though no evidence has been found of a ritual de-sacralization of the church at its original site.

Nevertheless, some changes were made to make the exterior of the church look more original when the building was erected in its new location. The total length of the church was reduced and the windows to the north, which were not original, were closed when the church was re-assembled in Borås (Lagerström 2010: 89). Such changes are often seen in the process of *museumification*, when an object is moved from its original context and into a museum, not with the aim of being used but in order to be seen.

Crispin Paine compares the process of museumification to *sacralization* and finds striking parallels:

Both are processes that remove the object from the mundane world, and most notably remove the object's exchange value. In theory at least (and the principle, though often violated, is still normally held), neither museum objects, once they have been accessioned or consecrated, can be ex-

changed. Thereafter, they share a unique character; they are outside the normal world of commodities. (Paine 2013: 2)

In the case of Kinnarumma's old wooden church, the museumification meant *de-sacralization*, but also that the church was protected from destruction. The church was still serving the public, as stated at the inauguration of the museum at mid-summer 1914: 'It is always of the utmost importance to our [museum's] collection to serve the public ... The Association's goal should be to keep this society's past in touch with life as it is now lived' (*Borås Tidning* 25.6.1914, my translation).

Sometimes secular use, for example as a restaurant, of a de-sacralized church has provoked negative reactions; it has been perceived as sacrilege (cf. Dahlbacka 2020: 18, 39).<sup>6</sup> However, the change from ecclesiastical use to museum use did not seem to arouse such negative reactions.

Hedvig Andersson has investigated the interface between church and museum. She has described five different categories for the interaction between museum and church: 1. churches that are visited and used as tourist destinations, 2. museums adjacent to or within defined parts of churches, 3. museums in churches that have been de-sacralized and are no longer owned or used by congregations, 4. churches in museum

6 In Halmstad, on the west coast of Sweden, where I lived for two years, I heard stories about one conservative Lutheran prayer house which was turned into a Roman Catholic chapel, a Baptist church transformed into a jazz club, and another former Baptist church used as a mosque. All three examples were perceived as sacrilege by the former users, even though all the church buildings had been taken out of use and sold before their transformations.



The interior of the church when used as an exhibition space for the museum collections.

buildings, and 5. churches that are placed and used in open-air museums (Andersson 2022: 7).

The 'sister-church', Seglora's old wooden church, which was rebuilt in Skansen, Stockholm, was adopted for museum and ecclesiastical use immediately after its reconstruction; it falls into the category of churches 'placed and used in open-air museums' (Andersson 2022: 9). Kinnarumma's church, after the move to Borås, falls within the category 'museums in churches that have been de-sacralized and are no longer owned or used by congregations' (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, it was as a church building that the church was incorporated into the museum. It was easily identified by visitors as a church building; most clearly from the outside, but also when entering the church, as shelves and displays could not hide the building's

ecclesiastical history. The building testified to a lingering sanctity (Dahlbacka 2021: 61–2; Beeker 2016).

### Urbanization demands more church facilities

Kinnarumma's old wooden church was not alone in moving from the countryside to the city. Urbanization was strong and in the city of Borås there were good opportunities for work and livelihood thanks to the growing textile industry. Within fifty years, from 1860 onwards, the population increased from 3,000 to 23,000; in 1930 the number was 38,000 (Åhman 1985: 12).

Yet the city only had one church until 1906, when a second was built; but there was a need for still more church facilities in the fast-growing city. The old wooden church, although used as a museum, was one option. In 1930, De Sju Häradernas

Kulturhistoriska Förening offered the parish of Borås the chance to put Kinnarumma's old church to use for worship, an offer the church council accepted (Åhman 1985: 77).

In the local newspaper, *Borås Tidning*, the re-sacralization was announced for Sunday, 12 October 1930. As the church had crossed the border between the dioceses of Gothenburg and Skara when it was moved to Borås, the bishops from both dioceses were to be present: Bishop Hjalmar Danell (1860–1938) from Skara would perform the sacralization of the church and the Gothenburg bishop, Carl Elis Daniel Block (1874–1948), would preach at the dedication ceremony (*Borås Tidning* 11.10.1930).<sup>7</sup> The day after the event, the paper announced in its front page: 'the temple of Kinnarumma yesterday re-opened for church activities.' The paper wrote about a 'moving event with two bishops at the altar' (*Borås Tidning* 13.10.1930, my translation).

From 1931, the church was renamed Ramnakyrkan because of its location in the park with the similar name of Ramnaparken (Hallgren 2003: 21). In the preaching programmes (Sw. *predikaturerna*) in the weeks after the re-sacralization, no services were announced in the church, but after a while regular Sunday services started. During the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, Sunday services were celebrated at 11 o'clock in Ramnakyrkan, and during some

periods there was also a Sunday school (for example *Borås Tidning* 28.9.1940, 20.9.1950; Bergstrand 1963: 53).

The city continued to grow, and more church facilities were needed. In Borås, six new district churches were built during the period 1959–77 (Berglund 2005: 262). These modern church buildings were more suited to meet the needs of the parishes, and Sunday service ceased in the old wooden church at the open-air museum.

## Discussion

The parish of Kinnarumma decided at the beginning of the twentieth century to replace its old wooden church. There were practical reasons for such a decision. Swedish society was also undergoing major changes and building a new modern church could be seen as an expression of adjusting church life to the developing society, as a change in religious heritage. In previous church constructions, materials and furnishings had been used in the new building, but this did not happen this time. This was, as Jakob Lindblad notes, typical of church building projects around 1900; the old was valued less than before. When entering the new Kinnarumma church in 1907, the visitor could not recognize any objects, such as altar cabinets or pulpits, from the old church. A larger than necessary part of the religious heritage was lost in the replacement of the old wooden church.

At the same time, there was an increasing interest in cultural history, folklore and local history. When old church buildings were valued less as expressions of religious heritage, they were appreciated as carriers of cultural heritage. De Sju Häradernas Kulturhistoriska Förening, founded in 1903, showed an interest in the old wooden church in Kinnarumma and moved it to the open-air museum in Borås to use it as an exhibition hall for the

7 Bishop C. E. D. Block was present at three sacralizations of churches from/in Kinnarumma. As assistant in 1907 at the dedication of the new church, which replaced the old wooden church; at the re-sacralization of the wooden church in 1930; and later, in 1940, he performed the dedication of a third church in Kinnarumma, replacing the decayed 1907 church (Bergstrand 1963: 59).



museum collections. Through the move and changed use, the church was de-sacralized, and the old church building was more valued as an expression of cultural than religious heritage.

Although the ecclesiastical identity of the building was not emphasized in its new location, it is perhaps premature to categorically say that the religious identity of Kinnarumma's old wooden church was lost. Can we, in Philip Fisher's formulation, really say that the crucifix left the cathedral (Fisher 1991: 19)?

The continued history of the church shows that we cannot. The religious identity and heritage of the building did not fall into oblivion. This became clear when the Church of Sweden in Borås, with the city's growing population, needed more places of worship and showed an interest in Kinnarumma's old church at the open-air museum. Andersson notes that a church building, through its typical architecture, influences the visitor's experience in a religious direction. Sacralized or de-sacralized, a church building is still considered a church (Andersson 2022: 12). As mentioned above, there was a lingering sanctity that did not vanish (cf. Dahlbacka 2021: 61–2; Beeker 2016).

Through the rededication of the church in 1930, its religious function became central again, but the building's religious heritage was also emphasized. The new use was connected to the previous. Anders Jarlert writes: 'The memory of a de-sacralization of a historical building that used to bear special identity – religious or secular – is not wiped out by a new "sacralization", but rather combined in a complex, selective growth of memories' (Jarlert 2018: 390). The description in the local newspaper emphasized the religious heritage when, in the headline, the building was called a 'temple', and the following article highlighted that

people from Kinnarumma, who had worshipped in the church before it was moved, were invited to participate (Borås Tidning 13.10.1930). Their participation can also be interpreted in terms of emphasizing the religious heritage.<sup>8</sup>

In the local newspaper on 11 October 1930, the day before the re-sacralization of the Kinnarumma church, there was an article about the vicar, Sven Eriksson Bohulthenius (died 1695), who oversaw the congregational work in Kinnarumma at the time of the church's original construction at the end of the seventeenth century (Borås Tidning 11.10.1930). The article's opening words read:

When these days the small, simple wooden church out in Ramnaparken is to be re-sacralized for worship after having been a museum for several years, it is only natural that many people's thoughts go back to bygone times and fondly revolve around all the many things that are hidden in the silent obscurity of the past. (Borås Tidning 11.10.1930, my translation)

The newspaper article connects the re-sacralization of the church not only to its late use in Kinnarumma, but to its original construction and early history. The writer assumes that the re-consecration made people think and wonder about the history of the church. The religious heritage in

8 A similar function can be attributed to the role of the vicar Carl Christenson (1854–1937) at the inauguration and re-sacralization of Seglora's old wooden church at Skansen, Stockholm, in 1918 (Bergstrand 1966: 188). Christenson was the local pastor of Seglora. His participation when the old church was re-opened after reconstruction in the open-air museum symbolized the church's past in person.

western Sweden was perhaps changing, but it still played a role, and the connection to the past was emphasized.

As Kinnarumma's old church was used for Sunday service over the following decades, it was given back its religious function. The de-sacralized church used as a museum evolved to be a church placed and used in an open-air museum (cf. Andersson 2022: 7 and above). The return to church identity was probably made possible because the religious identity had not been lost, even though the building was used as a museum for more than fifteen years.

In summary, it can be said that at the beginning of the twentieth century, Kinnarumma's wooden church was valued more as an expression of Swedish cultural heritage than religious heritage. The transition to an open-air museum illustrates this change. Nevertheless, the process of taking the church back into ecclesiastical use and the re-consecration in 1930 reveal that the church's religious identity never ceased; the crucifix did not leave the cathedral (see quotation from Fisher above). Two possible areas for more studies could be Ramnakyrkans function and change in identity during the last half century,<sup>9</sup> and how the memory of the old church is preserved in Kinnarumma parish today.<sup>10</sup> ■

9 Nowadays the church is used for ceremonies such as weddings and baptisms, but not regular Sunday service.

10 In my early childhood I lived near Kinnarumma and Seglora; my impression is that in both parishes today people feel a sense of pride in their churches in Borås and Stockholm respectively.

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