

St. Andrew's Church, Gothenburg
The First 150 Years
1857 - 2007



St Andrew's Church, Hvattfeldtsplatsen 2, 411 20 Göteborg

WELCOME TO ST ANDREW'S CHURCH, generally known as **ENGELSKA KYRKAN**. It was designed by the architect Adolf Edelsvärd and built in 1857 for the English Congregation in Gothenburg. The church is part of the Church of England's Diocese in Europe.

A SHORT HISTORY

From the very earliest days of Gothenburg, in the seventeenth century, the Scottish community played an important part; indeed, the earliest rules for the membership of the town council specified that it should consist of four Swedes, three Germans, three Dutch and two Scots. So it is not surprising that our church is named after St Andrew.

Andrew, one of Jesus' first disciples, became the patron saint of Scotland because of the tradition that a ship containing some of his bones came to land on the east coast of Scotland.

You can see two pictures of St Andrew in the church, one on the reredos behind the altar, and one in the top window over the altar. He can be recognized by his diagonal cross; according to legend, he said that he was not worthy to die on the same cross as his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

By the end of the seventeenth century, Gothenburg was a busy port, with a population of 6000, a large British community, and many ships trading from Britain. A group of British merchants came together to found the British Factory, and among their first responsibilities was the administration of the Poor Box to help stranded sailors and other British subjects in need. The British Factory must be one of the oldest organizations in continuing existence in Sweden, with records for every year since 1699.

The original Poor Box stands in the church, behind the prayer desk on the north side of the sanctuary, though it no longer contains any money! At one time it was used to keep the church's silver communion vessels

Another link to the naval history of Gothenburg is the plaque on the prayer desk itself, dedicated to "the Sailors' Mother, Elizabeth Cundale", given by her sailor friends on her death in 1911.

Our first place of worship, after the king of Sweden had given permission for members of the Church of England to worship freely, was a rented room in the Customs House at Smedjegatan 7. The first English priest arrived in 1747, bringing a pile of English prayer books. These, however, fell foul of Swedish censorship laws, the Bishop of Gothenburg having declared that he had found “thirteen paragraphs containing grave errors against the tenets of our pure teachings.”

The Book of Common Prayer, a 1662 revision of the first prayer books of the Church of England after the Reformation over 100 years earlier, is still used when Evensong is sung in this church, although most of our services are in modern English.

From 1764 to 1857, the home of the English Congregation was a room in the house of the merchant John Hall.

Two boards showing the names and dates of priests (called “chaplains” following the convention in the Diocese in Europe) serving in Smedjegatan, Sillgatan and St Andrew’s hang in the southwest corner of the church.

The congregation remained closely linked with the British Factory, and it was members of the Factory who took the lead in commissioning the building of St Andrew’s. The town council sold the land at a favourable price “evincing the friendly feeling existing ... towards the British Community and residents here”. Members of the Factory and others in the Congregation subscribed towards the building, and the subscribers wrote to Queen Victoria asking for a donation, as a result of which the British Government promised to match the funds raised.

In 1855, the foundation stone was laid by Robert Dickson, the senior member of the British Factory, and one of our many benefactors from the Dickson family.

“A SMALL, BUT BEAUTIFUL, TEMPLE”

The architect, A. W. Edelsvärd, contributed many other well-known buildings to the city, including St Birgitta’s Chapel, built by David Carnegie for his workers and also completed in 1857; Haga Church, our Church of Sweden neighbours who have been

generous with the hospitality of their parish rooms; and the best-known, Central Station.

Edelsvärd designed the church in the Victorian Gothic style common in England and Scotland, in spite of doubts from the city authorities. The stone used for the door and window surrounds was specially imported from Britain. It comes from Chollerton in Northumberland, and was used in the construction of Hadrian's Wall and in the restoration of Durham Cathedral. What a history! As Jesus declared on his entry into Jerusalem, "These very stones would cry out."

St Andrew's was described as "the small, but beautiful temple" in the Gothenburg Yearbook for 1857, which referred to the portico of fine hewn sandstone. Edelsvärd corrected his own copy to read "portal" instead of "portico."

The opening service, on St Andrew's Day, attracted a large congregation – the capacity was then 170, and we still manage to fit that number in for Christmas carol services although a few of the original pews have been removed – and a mixed choir: not just men and women, but British and Swedish! At the opening service, the preacher said that the doors would be opened "to all worshippers of whatever creed and whatever nation". Today we are an international congregation, representing more than 20 nationalities of Gothenburg residents, as well as visitors from all over the world.

LOOKING AROUND THE CHURCH

The **CEILING** of the church has been repainted in its original light blue colour, so it looks much as it would have looked in Edelsvärd's day.

The **BOX PEWS** are perhaps more in Swedish than in English style, although box pews are found in medieval churches in England. Edelsvärd invited his clients to try out two pews for comfort before the others were manufactured.

The **STAINED GLASS WINDOWS** at the east end of the church are the original windows, given by Robert and James Dickson, John and Alexander Barclay, David Carnegie, Benjamin Hichens and

George Seaton, and made in Scotland for the church. They have been repaired several times. They are typical of English church windows of the time.

The central window shows St Peter (with the keys of the kingdom) and St Paul. On either side are two of the gospel-writers. Apart from their names, they can be identified by their traditional symbols on the books they carry: Matthew – the man; Mark – the lion; Luke – the ox (remember the Christmas story of the baby in the manger); and John – the eagle.

The balance between **PULPIT** and **ALTAR** reflects a church in which God's word and God's sacraments are of equal importance. The preacher stands not "ten feet above contradiction" as in some Swedish churches, but just high enough to be in clear view of the congregation.

The altar and its furnishings remind us that, at the time when St Andrew's was built, the Church of England was going through a Catholic revival. The cross and candlesticks, and even vases of flowers, on and around the altar; our colourful altar frontals; and the small table beside the altar: all of these had been fought for in English law, and some would have been illegal, though no doubt common, in 1857.

The carved and painted **REREDOS** behind the altar was donated in 1912. On the left, as mentioned above, is a picture of St Andrew; in the centre, the crucifixion; and on the right, St Sigfrid, the English missionary bishop who is said to have baptized King Olaf Skötkonung in the early 11th century. The wooden statues represent a medieval bishop and archbishop.

Our **LECTERN** is in the shape of an eagle (St John again), with the bible resting on its wings, and similar brass eagle lecterns are found in many English churches, reflecting the high esteem in which the Bible is held. It dates from 1890, and was given by the heirs of David Carnegie, who also left money for what is now the main building of Gothenburg University, completed just 50 years after St Andrew's.

We have already mentioned the **POOR BOX** and **PRAYER DESK** which stand on the north side of the sanctuary. Beside them, a **BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE** commemorates members of the

British forces who died in the two world wars and are buried in Sweden. There is an annual act of remembrance, following our own Remembrance Sunday service, at Kviberg Cemetery, with prayers by the English and German priests, where wreaths are laid at the Allied and the German war memorials.

Just south of the altar stands the **FONT**, presented by the parents of David Wemyss in gratitude for his survival of the 1914-1918 war. The font originally stood closer to the door, because baptism marks the new Christian's entry into the church. Now that baptism has a more prominent role in the worship of the whole community, its new position in the sanctuary allows the congregation to see what is going on, as water is poured into the font and blessed, and the new Christian is baptized. Beside the font stands the **PASCHAL** (Easter) **CANDLE**:

*Lord, by your cross and resurrection you have set us free:
You are the Saviour of the world.*

Behind the pulpit is our **PRAYER CORNER**, with a modern candlestand by Lorick of Vessigebro. Above this is the **AUMBRY**, where consecrated bread, wine and oil are kept so that they can be taken to sick people in hospital or in their own homes.

There are three **PLAQUES** on the walls of the nave. One, on the north, next to the old Dickson family pew, commemorates Robert Dickson, who laid the foundation stone of the church. He was the first member of the congregation to be buried from St Andrew's. Histories of the church refer to the splendid parties he gave on St Andrew's Day – our annual St Andrew's Day lunches continue the tradition.

In the southwest corner of the nave are two reminders of the early history of the church. The first is a print of St Andrew's in 1859, surrounded by snow, strolling people, and a lively dog. There were no buildings near the church, though Haga church and some houses on the other side of the canal can be seen in the background. The second is a bust of a youthful Queen Victoria, made in about 1860.

There is a tree in the church garden planted in memory of the Chilean victims of Pinochet's Government.

MUSIC AT ST ANDREW'S

The church has a strong musical tradition. We have been affiliated members of the Royal School of Church Music for the past twenty years and, to celebrate our jubilee year, a complete set of new hymnbooks (melody edition) has been ordered.

Our present **ORGAN** was built by the Danish organ builders Marcussen & Son in 1862, and has recently been visited by the Church of England Organ Club, and by the London organist Richard Townend, who performed his Organ Tour of Europe for an enthusiastic audience. CDs of this recital are on sale in the church during St Andrew's Week.

In the last two years, there have been regular Friday lunchtime concerts in church, performed by students at the Swedish National Orchestra Academy, musicians from Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, and others, playing all manner of different instruments.

THE LIFE OF ST ANDREW'S

The main activity in this building is Sunday worship. There is a service at 11 am every Sunday of the year, apart from United Nations Sunday when we join the other national congregations at the German Church for an International Ecumenical Mass. We recently admitted our first group of children to receive Holy Communion.

But St Andrew's is, first and foremost, a community, and we love to celebrate – St Andrew's Day, our Bazaar in May, Harvest vegetable picking and thanksgiving, and our African Service with brightly coloured dress and African songs have all become annual traditions in our life together. We join in local events such as the Gothenburg Book Fair and Kulturnatta, and work closely with other English-speaking organizations. We welcome our friends, neighbours and visitors to come to look round the church on Friday afternoons through the year.

The Ladies' Guild, the Ladies' Evening Group, and the Gardening Group, all these serve the church in many ways as well as having fun.

We owe more than we can ever say to our benefactors through over 250 years of the existence of the English Congregation, and to the British Factory, who administer their trust funds and arrange for the repair and maintenance of the church building. They work in collaboration with the local authority as we are now a listed building. The next major task is to provide wheelchair access to the church.

FURTHER READING

George Otter, date unknown. *St. Andrew's English Church, Gothenburg: A Short History and Guide*. (Leaflet available in church)

S. Townshend and H. J Adams, 1946. *History of the English Congregation and its Association with the British Factory Gothenburg*.

John R. Ashton, 1997. *A Short History of the English Church in Gothenburg 1747-1997*.

John R. Ashton, 2003. *Lives and livelihoods in Little London: The story of the British in Gothenburg 1621-2001*.

Gunilla Linde Bjur, 2000. *Arkitekten och Staden: Adolf Edelsvärd*.

Mark Chapman, 2006. *Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction*.

CONTACT US

We are open to visitors most Fridays between 1500 and 1700.

Programme details are on our web site

<http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/goteborg/st.andrews>

All queries should be addressed to the Priest in Charge:

Revd Barbara Moss, Norra Liden 15, 411 18 Göteborg

Tel: 031 711 1915 Email: st.andrews.got@telia.com

Text: Barbara Moss

Photos: Ling Karlsson