

BYENS VARTEGN

THE LANDMARK OF THE TOWN

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Byens vartegn

Landsbyen Sønder Kongerslev ligger i Østhimmerland i kanten af Lille Vildmose. Oppe over byen knejser den hvidkalkede kirke. Den er landsbyens vartegn, og det har den været i århundreder. Denne kirke har et særligt kendetegn: Kirketårnet er ottekantet!

Lad os kigge nærmere på kirkens og især tårnets lange historie.

Herremanden Axel Juul

Kirken er bygget i Middelalderen. Dengang var bygherrerne ofte de lokale herremænd, der også havde både rettigheder og pligter over for den lokale kirke, præst og menighed.

Vi skal tilbage til perioden omkring reformationen lige i slutningen af Middelalderen. Her levede der en mand ved navn Axel Juul (år 1503-1577). Axel Juul havde arbejdet sig op fra lav-adel til at blive en betydelig person, der arbejdede for kongen og også for kancelliet. Axel Juul valgte den sejrende side, da Danmark blev ramt af en reel borgerkrig – Grevens Fejde. Det gav ham også stor indflydelse og en god personlig økonomi.

Denne loyalitet med kong Christian den Tredje gav ham mulighed for at skaffe sig en lang række privilegier og ejendomme rundt omkring i landet. Axel Juul fungerede under kongen som landsdommer og lensmand på Aalborghus.

Herregården Villestrup & Astrup Kirke

Axel Juuls hovedsæde blev herregården Villestrup, som han byggede op fra at have været en større fæstegård til en yderst præsentabel herregård med betydelige jordtilliggende. I indretningen af denne herregård fik han bygget et tårn – et ottekantet tårn.

Axel Juul genetablerede også Astrup Kirke omkring år 1542. Den eksisterende kirke blev nedrevet. Den nye kirke var større, med hvælvinger og, ja, selvfølgelig, et ottekantet tårn.

I dag eksisterer der her i landet fortsat næsten to tusinde kirker, der blev bygget i Middelalderen. Men Astrup Kirke og senere Sønder Kongerslev er Danmarks eneste to kirker fra Middelalderen med ottekantede tårne!

Hvorfor ottekantede tårne?

Men hvor fik Axel Juul sin ottekantede idé fra? Det er fortsat et mysterium. Vi ved, at han var en højt uddannet person, sandsynligvis uddannet et sted uden for Danmark. Måske var det hans egen idé ansporet af symbolisme knyttet til hans religiøse ståsted?

Eller var det hans bygmester, der realiserede sin egne tilsvarende idéer? Identifikationen af bygmesteren til herregården Villestrup og til Astrup Kirke fortæller sig i historien.

Af eksperter vurderes det, at han var en bygmester fra Aalborg, men de kan ikke identificere ham nærmere. Han er blevet givet betegnelsen Villestrup-mesteren. Sporet af denne bygmester kan, ifølge forfatteren og kunsthistorikeren Vilhelm Lorenzen, følges i arkitekturen i andre jyske herregårde.

Et af disse spor er hans placering af et patriarkalkors på bygningerne, bl.a. på tårnet på Astrup Kirke. Villestrup-mesteren formodes at tilhøre den sidste generation af sengotikkens danskfødte bygmestre.

Sønnen Niels

Nu har vi fortalt om Axel Juul og hans bygmester og deres idé med at bygge ottekantede tårne. Men det ottekantede kirketårn i Sønder Kongerslev nåede Axel Juul ikke at bygge – selv om han også var tilknyttet Kongerslev-egnen ved sit medejerskab af herregården Kongstedlund. Bønderne i Sønder Kongerslev var fæstebønder under Juul-familien på Kongstedlund, og kirken hørte under denne herregård.

Tårnet på Sønder Kongerslev Kirke blev opført af Axels søn Niels Juul. Niels Juul overtog et arvelod af Kongstedlund efter sin far i år 1577. Niels Juul blev en omstridt herremand på den lokale herregård.

(fortsættes)

Hvis vi skal karakterisere Niels Juul som person, så kan vi måske bedst få det fortalt fra den ligprædiken, som biskoppen fra Viborg holdt, da han blev begravet i Kongerslev:

”... Han haver og hos disse og andre Gaver og Dyder haft sin Brak og Lyde, saavel som alle Mennesker ogsaa have. Thi her findes ingen paa Jorden, som er engleren og uden Brøst og Fejl... Saa haver fordi denne gode Mand og som et andet Menneske haft sine Brøst, Fejl og Skrøbelighed, iblandt hvilke somme ere komne af menneskelig Svaghed og et meget hastigt Sind, som lettelig kunde lade sig fortørne, og somme af Menneskens Brug, Sædvane og Sæder i denne sidste Verdens Tid, hvilke ere vel i sig selv onde, men føre dog Folk hen med sig, ligervis som en Strøm bortdriver, hvad som der udi kastes...”

Med andre ord: Niels Juul var en omstridt og hidsig herre. Det havde givet ham mange uvenner og fjender. Det kostede ham også til sidst livet. Skaberen af det ottekantede kirketårn i Sønder Kongerslev blev dræbt i et personligt opgør med en anden herremand under pinsemarkedet i Aalborg den 13. maj år 1600. Det anvendte våben var en daggert. En daggert er et stikvåben til nærkamp – et våben, som ikke ville være tilladt at bære til et pinsemarked i nutidens Danmark!

Den fromme Niels

Men måske fik Niels Juul som mange andre herremænd vasket tavlen ren ved at være ivrig kirkegænger og støtte op om kirkens arbejde. Niels Juul gennemførte ved egen bekostning en udbygning og udsmykning af sin lokale

kirke i Sønder Kongerslev. I ligprædiken fortalte biskoppen om dette velgørende arbejde:

”Han haver haft Vilje til at zire og pryde Guds Hus og sin Sognekirke, som vi kunne se her for vore Øjne. Thi endog han havde intet af samme Kirkes Indkomst eller Rente, vidste og, at hun kunde det ikke formaa, haver han dog paa sin egen Bekostning med et saare smukt Taarn, Hvælving, Tavle paa Alteret, Prædikestol og hvis andet dertil Behov gjordes, ladet hende pryde og opfærde, hvilket var i Sandhed en lovlig og berømmelig Gerning.”

Det ottekantede tårn i Kongerslev

Lokalhistorikeren Poul Erik Kristensen regner sig i en artikel fra 1991 frem til, at tårnet i Sønder Kongerslev må være etableret omkring 1597, få år før Niels Juuls dramatiske død.

Bygmesteren eller Niels Juul må formodes at være inspireret af Niels' fars ottekantede kirketårn i Astrup. De er ikke helt identiske. Astrups ottekantede tårn er mere slank, hvor Kongerslev-tårnet virker mere buttet. Men de har formodentligt oprindeligt lignet hinanden mere.

Niels Juuls ottekantede tårn bar også oprindeligt et spir. Måske af samme udseende som spiret på Astrup Kirke. Tårnet i Kongerslev var også tidligere højere. Herom beretter Erik Pontoppidan i sit atlas fra 1700-tallet:

”Kirken skal fordm være kaldet Vor Frue Kirke, er en liden og sirlig Kirke med Hvælvinger, som før havde et ganske høit Taarn, men samme blev af Storm nedslaget, og et lavere i steden opført - Altertavle og Prædike stool

ere 1591- bekostede af Niels Axelsen Juul til Kongstedlund og Frue Anne Stygge.”

Pontoppidans Atlas blev udgivet i 1769. Tårnet med spir må altså være styrtet ned i perioden fra cirka år 1597 til slutningen af 1760'erne.

Det skal lige bemærkes, at Niels Juul også bekostede hvælvingerne i kirken. Hvælvingerne har – ja, vi tør jo næsten sige selvfølgelig, en ottekantet struktur!

Det eksisterende kirketårn

I 1870'erne blev tårnet restaureret. Dengang blev tårnets ”smukke slanke spir” fjernet og erstattet af den nuværende kalot.

Vi ved fra en annonce om reparationsarbejdet, at det nye skifertag blev etableret i foråret 1872. I en annonce i Aalborg Stiftstidende hedder det:

”Kirkearbejde. Endeel Muurarbeide og Skifertækning ved Sønder-kongerslev Kirke, der paavises af Undertegnede fra den 25de M., til den 27de M., begge Dage indbefattede, ønskes bortaccorderet ved skriftlige Tilbud, som indsendes inden den 30te d. M., paa hvilken Dags Eftermiddag Kl. 2 Tilbudene blive aabnede i Overværelse af de tilstedeværende Liebhavere. Kjellingbjerggaard og Solbjerggaard, den 14de Marts 1872. Liisberg. Færch.”

I 1969-70 blev kirken igen gennemrestaureret. Dengang blev hele kirkebygning, inklusive tårnets tag forsynet med et blytag.

The landmark of the town

The village of Sønder Kongerslev is located in East Himmerland on the edge of the bog, Lille Vildmose. The whitewashed church rises above the village. It has been the village's landmark for centuries. This church has a unique feature: its tower is octagonal!

Let's take a closer look at the church's and especially the tower's long history.

The squire Axel Juul

The church was built in the Middle Ages. At that time, the builders often were local squires who also had both rights and duties towards the local church, the priest, and the parishioners.

We must return to the period around the Reformation, at the very end of the Middle Ages. Here lived a man named Axel Juul (1503-1577). Axel Juul had risen from lesser nobility to become a significant person who worked for the king and for the chancellery. Axel Juul chose the winning side when Denmark was hit by a real civil war 1534-36. This also gave him great influence and a good personal economy.

This loyalty to King Christian III allowed him to acquire several privileges and properties around the country. Axel Juul served under the king as a High Court judge and held the estate in fief to the king at Aalborg.

The Manor Villestrup & Astrup Church

Axel Juul's main residence became the manor Villestrup, which he developed from being a large copyhold farm into a very presentable manor with significant land holdings. In the construction of this manor, he built a tower – an octagonal tower.

Axel Juul also reestablished Astrup Church around 1542. The existing church was demolished. The new church was larger, with vaults and, yes, of course, an octagonal tower.

Today, there still exists almost two thousand churches in the country that were built in the Middle Ages. But Astrup Church and later Sønder Kongerslev Church are the only two medieval churches with octagonal towers in Denmark!

Why Octagonal Towers?

But where did Axel Juul get his octagonal idea from? It remains a mystery. We know he was a highly educated person, likely educated somewhere outside of Denmark. Maybe it was his own idea inspired by symbolism tied to his religious beliefs?

Or was it his master builder who realized his own similar ideas? The identification of the master builder for the manor Villestrup and Astrup Church is lost to history.

Experts believe he was a master builder from Aalborg, but they cannot identify him further. He has been given the designation "The Villestrup Master." According to author and art historian Vilhelm Lorenzen, traces of this master builder can be followed in the architecture of other Jutland manors.

One of these traces is his placement of a patriarchal cross on buildings, including at the tower on Astrup Church. The Villestrup master is presumed to belong to the last generation of late Gothic Danish-born master builders.

The Son Niels

Now, we have told the story of Axel Juul and his master builder and their idea of building octagonal towers. But Axel Juul missed to build the octagonal church tower in Sønder Kongerslev – even though he also was associated with the Kongerslev area through his co-ownership of the manor Kongstedlund. The peasants in Sønder Kongerslev were copyholder farmers under the Juul family at Kongstedlund, and the church belonged to this manor.

The tower at Sønder Kongerslev Church was built by Axel's son Niels Juul. Niels Juul inherited a share of Kongstedlund after his father's death in 1577. Niels Juul became a controversial squire at the local manor.

(Continued on next page)

If we are to characterize Niels Juul as a person, we might best do so from the funeral sermon given by the bishop of Viborg when he was buried in Kongerslev:

“... He has had, along with these and other Gifts and Virtues, his Flaws and Failings, as all Men also have. For there is no one on Earth who is an angel and without Faults and Failures... Therefore, this good Man also, like any other human being, had his Faults, Errors, and Frailties, among which some came from human Weakness and a very hasty Temper, which could easily become angry, and some from the Customs, Habits, and Morals of this late World, which are indeed evil in themselves, but nevertheless lead people astray, much like a current drives away anything thrown into it...”

In other words: Niels Juul was a controversial and hot-tempered gentleman. This earned him many enemies. At the end, it cost him his life. The creator of the octagonal church tower in Sønder Kongerslev was killed in a personal confrontation with another squire during the Pentecost fair in Aalborg on May 13, 1600. The weapon used was a dagger – a weapon not allowed at a Pentecost fair in today's Denmark!

The pious Niels

But perhaps Niels Juul, like many other squires, wiped his slate clean by being a keen churchgoer and supporting the work of the church. Niels Juul carried out an expansion and decoration of his local church in Sønder Kongerslev at his own expense. The bishop mentioned this charitable work in the funeral sermon:

“He has had the will to adorn and decorate God's House and his parish church, as we can see here before our Eyes. For even though he had none of the Church's income or rent, and knew that she could not afford it, he nevertheless, at his own expense, has had it decorated and improved with a very beautiful tower, vaults, altar Table, pulpit, and whatever else was needed, which was indeed a lawful and commendable deed.”

The octagonal tower in Kongerslev

The local historian Poul Erik Kristensen calculated in an article from 1991 that the tower at Sønder Kongerslev Church must have been established around 1597, a few years before Niels Juul's dramatic death.

The master builder or Niels Juul is presumed to have been inspired by Niels' father's octagonal church tower in Astrup. They are not identical. Astrup's octagonal tower is slenderer, while Kongerslev's tower appears plumper. But probably they originally resembled each other more.

Niels Juul's octagonal tower also originally had a spire. Perhaps it looked the same as the spire on Astrup Church. The tower in Kongerslev was also higher earlier. Erik Pontoppidan reports this in his atlas from the 1700s:

“The church was formerly called Our Lady's Church, it is a small and elegant church with vaults, which previously had a very high tower, but it was knocked down by a storm, and a lower one was built in its place – the altar and pulpit were funded in 1591 by Niels Axelsen Juul of Kongstedlund and Lady Anne Stygge.”

Pontoppidan's Atlas was published in 1769. The tower with the spire must therefore have collapsed sometime between approximately 1597 and the late 1760s.

It should be noted that Niels Juul also funded the vaults in the church. The vaults have – yes, we almost dare to say of course, an octagonal structure!

The existing church tower

In the 1870s, the tower was restored. At that time, the tower's “beautiful slender spire” was removed and replaced with the current dome.

We know from an advertisement about the repair work that a new slate roof was established in the spring of 1872. In an advertisement in the newspaper, Aalborg Stiftstidende, it says:

“Church work. Some masonry and slating at Sønder-kongerslev Church, which can be inspected by the undersigned from the 25th to the 27th of the month, both days inclusive, are desired to be contracted out by written offers, which must be submitted by the 30th of the month, on which day in the afternoon at 2 o'clock the offers will be opened in the presence of those present. Kjellingbjerggaard and Solbjerggaard, March 14, 1872. Liisberg. Færch.”

In 1969-70, the church was thoroughly restored again. At that time, the entire church building, including the tower's roof, was covered with a lead roof.



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2009

Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2009



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, maj 2021

Sønder Kongerslev Church, May 2021



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, maj 2021

Sønder Kongerslev Church, May 2021



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2020

Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2020



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, december 2006

Sønder Kongerslev Church, December 2006



Altertavle,
Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2010

Alterpiece,
Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2010



Altertavle, Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2010

Alterpiece, Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2010



Kirkeskib med hvælvinger,
Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2010

The nave with vaults,
Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2010



Hvælving,
Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2010

Vault, Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2010



Tagkonstruktionen,
Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2010

The construction of the roof,
Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2010



Kirkeklokken,
Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, juli 2010

The church bell,
Sønder Kongerslev Church, July 2010

I.G. Burman Becker (1820-1880)



after V. Dählerup.

Astrup Kirke, Hvidovre Herred.

I.G. Burman Becker?

20.

Astrup Kirke

Astrup Church



Astrup Kirke, marts 2024

Astrup Church, March 2024



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, før 1929

Sønder Kongerslev Church, before 1929



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, maj 2004

Sønder Kongerslev Church, May 2004



Sønder Kongerslev Kirke, december 2001

Sønder Kongerslev Church, December 2001

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KOLOFON

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Af Keld Jensen

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COLOPHON

Photo of the week: The landmark of the town
By Keld Jensen

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