

# Stockholm – Reval time at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century

## Facts

Stockholm and Reval were both rapidly growing Baltic cities during 15<sup>th</sup> century, astride the trade route between Denmark and Russia. The end of the century was a time of increasing trade and better economic climate. Many other cities were also blooming. Riga, Åbo, Copenhagen and Kalmar for example. There were however obvious signs of unrest and war from several directions, and a constant fear that the plague would return. The social differences were considerable, not least in the state of Livonia, with its serfdom.

## Stockholm

Stockholm was an important city during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The population of 6,000 lived tightly packed inside the walls. There were also a few pockets of housing outside the city, mainly for poorer people who had casual employment in the city itself. These hovels were something that the city authorities would have liked to clear away.



Feverish building activity went on in Stockholm, both new building and rebuilding; the final work on the new city walls and not least the rebuilding of the great St. Nikolai church. There were a number of religious establishments in Stockholm: the Dominicans Convent, the Almshouse, the House of the Holy Spirit and the house of the Knights of St. John. Outside the walls were the Dominican sisters of St. Clara and the Franciscan Convent.

There was widespread trade, an important part of which came from Bergslagen and from the coastal tracts of both Finland and northern Sweden. Many ships sailed regularly between Reval, Riga, Visby, Kalmar and the ports of northern Germany, Lubeck, Rostock and Danzig. The German merchants brought in expensive spices, wines, beer and fine fabrics from the south, and fur garments, wax and flax from the east. A friendship pact with the Hansa League was signed in 1486.

Sten Sture was king in 1483. Sweden had not been part of a union with Denmark or Norway for several years. There had been widespread conflicts for and against the union, and the bloody battle at Brunkeberg in 1471 was still fresh in the memory. There was however a clear opposition to Sten Sture's hard political line. There were union friends even in Stockholm.



Sten Sture tried to emphasise his greatness by urging the rebuilding of the great church and by ordering the sculpture group of St. Göran and the dragon. The king was often in residence at the palace. At that time his bayliff was Peter Michelsson. There were disturbances along Sweden's eastern boundary, far away in Finland, at



Viborg. The town was under siege by the Russians and fighting occurred from time to time. Sten Sture sent troops there on several occasions, 1475 and 1479. There were similar troubles with the Russians in Riga.

Plague rumours were heard again in 1483. People wondered whether the Black Death would return with the same force as on several earlier occasions.

The great Nikolai church in Stockholm was rebuilt and extended, and work on the building was intensive throughout 1483. The vaults were raised, a new chapel was added, the tower and the west front were rebuilt, the roof was altered, many new paintings were added in the vaults, and a new sculpture of St. Göran and the dragon had been ordered by the king himself. Among many taking part in this work were Albert the painter, Tord the master bricklayer, and Bernt Notke.

Bengt Smälänning was mayor of Stockholm in 1483. He was the city's strong man, and he looked after all political and legal matters. He was responsible for church renovation and work in the city. He was a friend of the Kalmar union, and worked – at first in secret and later openly – to put the Danish King Hans on the throne of Sweden too. He was therefore in direct opposition to Sten Sture and his bayliff Peder Michelsson.



The Dominican priory in the centre of the city and out in the countryside. The monastery had close contacts with other establishments in Reval, Åbo and Kalmar. One of the monks there in 1483 was brother Andreas.

## **Reval**

Reval was an important city of 6 – 7,000 inhabitants at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was part of Livonia, ruled by the Livonian Order, a branch of the Teutonic Order. The head of the Teutonic Order ruled from Malbork, Prussia, while the leader of the Livonian branch lived in the castle in Reval.

Livonia was a feudal state with wide class differences. Many Estonians were in effect serfs under German nobles. The social differences widened at this time and serfdom was officially introduced about the end of the century.

Reval had expanded during the whole of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the latter part. New houses were built, others were rebuilt or decorated. Wooden houses were changed for houses of stone. Building work was intensive and much labour was needed. The city belonged to the Hanseatic League. One important reason for its rise was increased business contacts and trade along the trading route. More goods were brought into the city: fur garments, wax and flax from the east, iron, spices, salt and



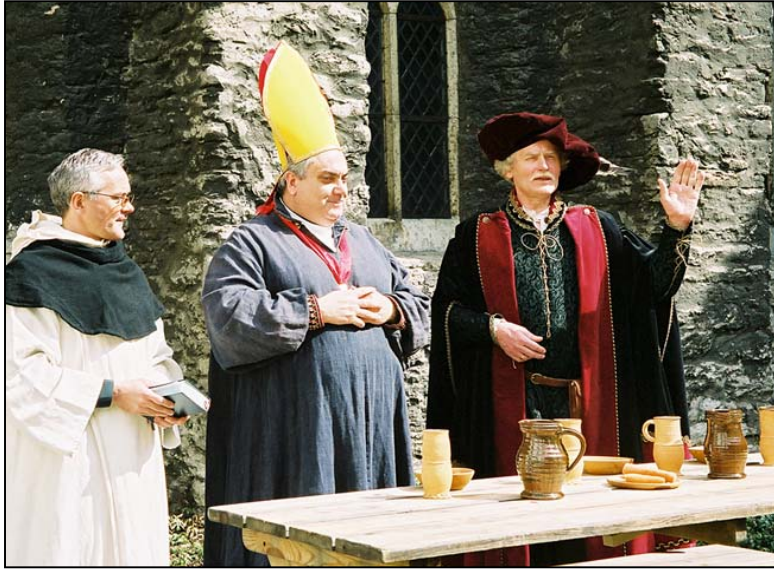
cloth from the west and southwest, which made the leading citizens and the German merchants ever more wealthy. AT the same time, the social gaps continued to widen.

Reval was heavily fortified during the century, with high walls and towers. This was done following an Estonian uprising against German rule in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. The city also needed to be.

Defended against the Russians, who advanced their positions around he end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The city was divided into the Upper town on the Lower town, each surrounded by a wall. The two parts were joined by only one gate. The Upper town on the Dome hill held the castle, the fortified seat of the knights of the order, and the cathedral. The German nobles live there, nobles who owned big estates in the country, and many subordinate Estonians who worked for them.

The Lower town belonged to the merchants and craftsmen. It was controlled by the town council, the mayor/ bürgermeister and the councillors. Most of the merchants were German, but there were also Swedes and Finns who had moved to the city, most of them craftsmen, but with a few merchants among them. About one third of the people who lived in there Estonians; they worked mostly as servants, grooms and maids, and as building labourers. Only a few of them were officially citizens of Reval.





There was a certain tension between the Upper and the Lower town, regarding decisions that had to be made but also caused by the shortage of labour in an expanding city. The official name of the city was Reval, but the Estonians had long called it Tallinn – the Danish city.

The church was well established in the city and there were many churches and convents. The Livonian Order was a religious order,

and up on the Dome hill stood the cathedral. The St. Olof church was the most noticeable one in the lower town, and with its 159 meter high spire was the highest building in the world at that time. The Nikolai church was also an important church. There were a Dominican and a Cistercian priory, plus a House of the Holy Spirit with church and hostel. A Birgittine priory stood just outside the city, which housed both nuns and monks.

The city's wealth is noticeable not least in the comprehensive paintings and decorations which the churches and monasteries and acquired during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Religious art was of the highest European class. New paintings, sculptures and altarpieces were created in Reval, mainly during the second half of the century. Bernhard Notke, the famous artist, who was born in Reval but had his main workshop in Lübeck, carried out several large commissions for both the Nikolai church and the church of the Holy Spirit. The latter's enormously expensive altarpiece was completed in 1483, and the comprehensive series of paintings called The Dance of Death was being finished in the Nikolai church. Notke was also at work on the St. George and the dragon sculpture in Stockholm.







The Dominican convent was an open establishment with a hostel for travellers. The monks were often out on journeys around the country and even to priories in other lands. They were popular and friendly and their services were often needed for writing letters, wills etc. Newcomers to the city often took lodgings with the brothers. The priory was rebuilt the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A new church dedicated to St.

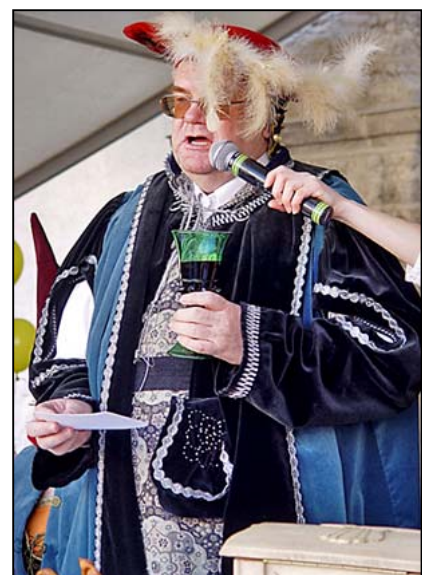
Catherine of Alexandria was built on its south side, and was completed in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Several parts of the monastery were rebuilt after this, including the cloisters, the refectory and the kitchen. In the latter part of the century the church was decorated with several altarpieces. While the rebuilding was in progress, the monastery underwent a spiritual reformation and the internal contents were changed. One part of the armoury of the city was stored in the cellars of the new church. The priory housed two schools, one for those who going to be priests or monks and a secular school for ordinary citizens who wished to learn to read and write. The monks were skilled in the use of medicines, which they often administered in their dealings with the ordinary people. The Brotherhood of Blackheads, an international brotherhood in Tallinn, supported the Dominican convent. The patron saint of the brotherhood was an Egypt martyr, Saint Mauritius. The Blackheads gave an expensive altarpiece to the convent in the 1480-/1490-ties. The Town Council also gave support to the convent.

During the later part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Russians started to move westwards. There were often disturbances along the frontier with Russian, in eastern Sweden and Viborg and in the eastern part of Livonia and Novgorod. Sweden sent troops to Viborg on several occasions, sometimes via Riga and Reval. The Livonian Order also sent troops eastwards and southwards.

### **Contacts between Stockholm and Reval**

There was regular contact between the two. Ships sailed in shuttle traffic with goods along the trade route. A number of merchants and craftsmen from Stockholm and Sweden (including Finland) went to live in Reval.

There were frequent contacts between the Dominican monasteries around the Baltic – in Reval, Stockholm, Åbo and Kalmar, and political contacts also took place. The Russians in the east were a common problem.



## Scenario – Reval 1483

Stockholm and Reval are both wealthy, rapidly-expanding cities. Many houses are being rebuilt and improved. Riches are being used for rebuilding churches and convents, and for ordering expensive sculptures, altarpieces and painting from masters such as Bernhard Notke, Herman Rode and Albertus Pictor. The great



Nikolai church in Stockholm is in rebuilt in 1483, and new vault paintings are completed. Bernhard Notke and his workers are at work on a large sculpture of St. Göran and the dragon. In Reval, Notke finishes a magnificent altarpiece in the church of the Holy Spirit while his workshop is occupied with a large painting in the Nicolai church.

The comprehensive rebuilding of the Dominican priory is coming to an end. The new church, dedicated to the St. Catherine, is ready and inaugurated, but some decorative work still remains. Expensive altarpieces have been ordered from the Netherlands and Brussels. Another altarpiece is about to finished at the priory. There is still some woodwork, stonework and painting on that altarpiece before it is completed. There is



also work on some of the convent houses – the refectory, kitchen and cloister. The work on the priory is intensive, with painters, sculptors, apprentices and assistants working hard every day.

The Dominican Priory in Reval has close contacts with its related convents and monasteries in Stockholm. The prior in Reval, Christians Bernhardi, has invited Brother Andreas and a number of citizens of Stockholm to Reval, in order to show them the completed building. The visitors will take part in the final stages of the work, and will be present at the inauguration of the new altarpiece. Ships ply regularly between the two cities so it is not difficult for a party of people to travel across. The priory has accommodation for the visitors. Several of them have been there before and know it well. Many are afraid that there will be another of the plague, but feel secure in knowing that the monks are skilled with herbs and medicines.



Reval is a strong-fortified city. It should be able to withstand both Estonian uprising and attacks from the Russians. All who live in the city are bound to take part in its defence. One of the armouries of the city is kept in the cellars of the new Dominican church. The arms are sometimes taken out for training purposes. There is talk of foot soldiers being



sent eastwards and southwards. There are disturbances in the eastern parts of both Sweden and Livonia, and soldiers are transported by sea from Stockholm to assist in the defence of Viborg, and the Livonian Order have knights and soldiers both in Riga and Novgorod.

But on a day like this, when the priory is shown to visitors and the new church decorations are being put ready, there will of course be music and dancing, good food, games and competitions. It is rumoured that the mayor (bürgermeister) of the city and perhaps also someone from the Brotherhood of Blackheads will honour the inauguration of the church altarpiece with their presence. And that the inauguration will be led by the bishop of Tallinn, Simon von der Borch.



Our greeting on this day is Salve (How do you do), and when we say Vale (Good bye). There are big social differences in this city; something to remember when meeting persons of higher social standing.

2003-02-13  
 Ebbe Westergren  
 Kalmar County  
 Museum, Sweden

## Activities

- Altarpiece, painting (Anna the painter and ..... painter)
- Stone foundation (Tallinn)
- Wooden ornament (Tallinn)
- Herbs and medicines (Brother Andreas and sister.....)
- Calligraphy / songs
- Cooking (.....innkeeper)
- Try the city's armour, archery (Thomas the watchman....., a soldier from Stockholm?)



We divide the pupils into three main groups, which will later be further subdivided.

## Roles

All the persons taking part will write a role for themselves. Nameplate.

## Pupils

The pupils from Stockholm are the sons and daughters of citizens of Stockholm in 1483, merchants and craftsmen. Some of them have contacts with Reval; have been several times; know the city and its people; even have relatives there perhaps. Others are there for the first time and have only heard others talk about the city. All have been invited there Brother Andreas to see the rebuilt monastery, to help complete the last of the work and to be there when the new altarpiece is carried into the church. The pupils write a role card about themselves, their names, their parents' work, contacts with Livonia and Reval, thoughts the future of Stockholm and Reval, etc.

The pupils from Tallinn are Estonians living in Reval in 1483. They are assistants, apprentices, helpers, workers and maids who are taking part in the rebuilding of the monastery. They will now do the last work on the church decorations and attend the inauguration of the altarpiece. The pupils write a role card stating their name, where they live in the city, the jobs they did earlier (perhaps other rebuilding), thoughts about Livonia's and Reval's future and about their own future etc.

## Adult roles

From Stockholm:

Brother Andreas, Sister .....

Anna the painter

Olof joker or Olof soldier

Citizens, merchants, craftsman



*From Reval:*

Prior Christianus Bernhardi, other Dominican brothers (incl. Real brothers!)

Painters

Woodworkers

Stoneworkers

Watchmen, soldiers

Cook/innkeeper

Musicians/ jesters

Possibly German merchants/ craftsmen

Possibly someone from the Brotherhoods of Blackheads (Johann Grest, Borchardt Heerde, Jürgen Menth, Peter Gampp)

Servants/ workers

The mayor (bürgermeister) (Evert Schmidt 1476-1511, Diedrich Hagenbecke 1479-1486, Heinrich Schelvent 1481-1489, Johann Rotert 1483-1500)

The bishop of Tallinn, Simon von der Borch



**Timetable, day 1**

12.00 Gathering, change clothes  
12.20 Run-through of the scenario  
12.40 Laudes (praise)  
12.50 Reception by the Prior  
13.00 Start of the activities  
15.00 The Mayor arrives  
Meal. Show, song, dancing  
15.45 Procession into the church  
Prayer, music and song  
16.10 Change clothes, reflection?  
16.30 End

**Day 2**

09.00 Gathering, change clothes  
09.20 Run-through of the scenario  
09.40 Laudes  
09.50 Reception by the Prior  
10.00 Start the activities  
12.20 The Mayor arrives  
Meal. Show, song, dancing  
13.00 Procession into the church  
Prayer, music and song  
13.30 Change, reflection?  
13.50 End

*2003-02-13*

*Ebbe Westergren*

*Kalmar County Museum*

*Sweden*