

About Toreby Church

Svend Aage Nielsen



The current edition of "About Toreby Church" is published by Toreby Parish Council, 1992

ISBN 87-984147-0-4

Text and illustration: Parish Priest Svend Aage Nielsen. English translation by Hilary Lewis Karlson.

Printed by: Central-Trykkeriet, Nykøbing F.
Photographer: Erik Hvidt-Christensen, Anders Knudsen and M. Mackeprang.

Introduction

Toreby church's rich ornamentation is described on the following pages. Follow the ground plan references from 1-25:

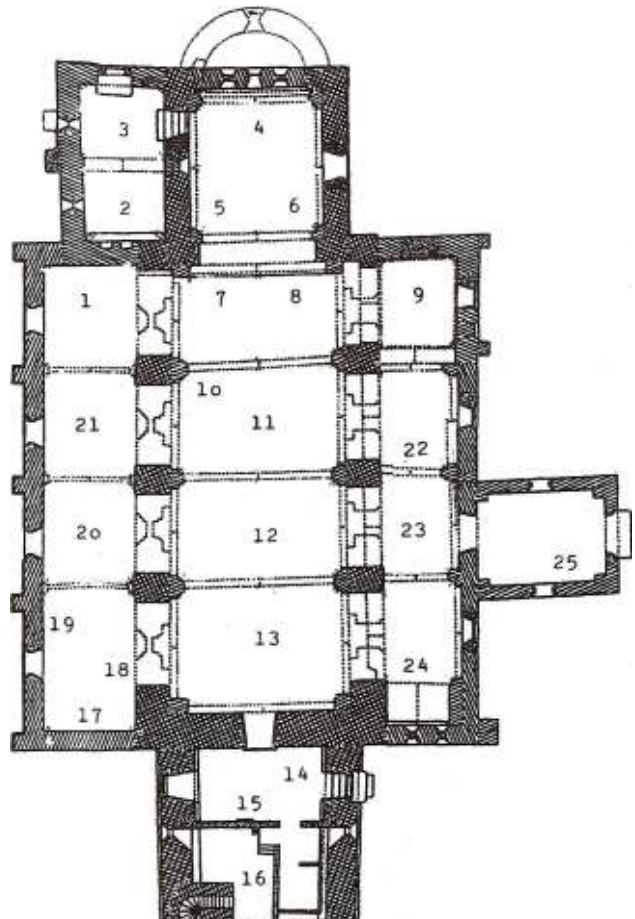
1) The Crucifixion Group.

This is the church's oldest preserved ornament. Mary and St. John date from approximately 1250. The original crucifix has disappeared; the present crucifix dates from ca. 1325. A realistic figure of Jesus, tortured and dead, hangs from the Cross. A halo surrounds his head. The addition of the sun happened around the year 1700, together with the words at his hands which read: "I have engraved them on the palms of my hands" from Isaiah 49,16. The sun symbol belongs to the year 1700 and can be seen clearly for example over the high altar in Saint Peter's in Rome. Under Jesus' feet a latin inscription dating from the same time reads

: AMOR DEUS CRUCIFIXUS =
THE GOD OF LOVE CRUCIFIED!

In the "Sjælland Chronicle" there stands amongst ten announcements from the year 1346; "The Earls of Holstein raided Lolland with a large troop. Note here the Cross in Thoreby."

It suggests that people may have prayed for help from the cross - the crucifix - against the evils of war and may also have experienced miraculous help when in need. This



Ground plan of the church with the original apse shown behind the chancel.

could be the reason why the church has been expanded again and again with side chapels, aisles, a vestry and a door in the west tower.

2 and 3 The Vestry

The age of the chalk fresco is estimated by those in the profession to be early gothic up to the 1300 to 1400's.

On the west wall we see Adam and Eve at the fall of man. Eve is reaching for the forbidden fruit with her right hand, and with the left hand she is passing a fruit to Adam behind her.

Above pointing southwards Abraham on Mount Moriah (the sacrificial mountain of the later Jerusalem) can be seen at that moment when an angel restrains Abraham's sacrificial knife. See Genesis 22. Both Abraham and Isaac are seen – understandably enough – to have closed eyes.

Beneath this is Moses' vocation, Exodus 3. The face in the burning bush is a young face. It signifies that God will later reveal himself in his son, Christ.

In the middle, the two tablets with the ten commandments, that Moses receives with an open face and extended hands in the Sinai desert can be seen, Exodus 20.

Beneath this again is a serpent like creature with a coiled neck – a motif that can be traced as far back as to Ancient Babylon. It can also be seen on many of the Roman Baptismal Fonts in Denmark.

In the east arch Solomon's renowned judgement can be seen, 1st Book of Kings 3. His head is crowned and has a sword in his hand, whilst one of the two women, with downcast eyes, extends the disputed child towards him.

In the next south arch the bible story continues with the prophets Jeremiah (with a Phrygian cap), and Zechariah. They both look towards John the Baptist. He stands above and points towards a lamb (now-eroded), with his left hand, whilst a faintly visible victory banner is held in his right hand.

In the east arch the crowned Christ with the crossed halo between Alfa and Omega (see Rev of St. John 21,6). He is surrounded by stars and angels, who swing thuribles. It equals the description of their service in heaven before God and the Lamb's throne (ref. Rev of St. John 7 and 8)

Christ blesses with his right hand with the original, undivided church's blessing, where the ring finger closes to the thumb finger and forms an "a" = first letter in the greek *agapao* = I love you! This greek-orthodox gesture of blessing has its origin in the ancient gesticulations – even though the widespread latin form, where the ring and little finger just bend in towards the palm was later adopted in the western church.

In his left hand Christ holds the clod of earth / the apple. It is crowned with a cross – the sign of his redeeming act and accomplished work.



In the Omega alphabet a solitary cross can be seen. It is thought to be primitive church / Byzantine in its form, but is latin in its measurement.

Above this one can see the letters: TOR. The greek word *PANTOKRATOR* and the latin word *SALVATOR* both end with these letters. They mean *THE ALMIGHTY* and *OUR SAVIOUR*. The figures of the chalk fresco indicate that the eroded word was *PANTOKRATOR*.

The records of the parish meeting of 17th June 1914 show that it was decided that

the room should be renovated as a “vestry and waiting room for children whilst waiting for baptism, as well as being a confessional”. For the latter function kneelers and prayer desks with faith, hope and love symbols were later provided. A table and chair with part of the Lord's Prayer engraved in the backrest in latin “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

A bowl and jug – for bread and wine – are placed in one of the room's two ambries.

In addition to this, there is the base, which was used for the present altarpiece from 1919 to 1952 in the room. The same two inscriptions that are used under the altarpiece today can be seen on the base in gothic script.

On the base stands a seven-armed candleholder, donated to the church in 1952 by the superintendents Ingeborg and Hans Melchior Jensen from the Sønderskov Home.

From the same time there is a little crucifix, which was carved by picture-carver, Poul Larsen of Nagelsti. The figure of Jesus is stretching out his nailed right hand in blessing, in accordance to the words of his sermon on the mount, Matthew 5,44!



4) *Altarpiece and Ornaments*

The piece portrays Jesus lowered from the cross, mourned and prepared for burial. Jesus' body rests as if on an altar block. This indicates his sacrifice for us.

Crying, Mary holds onto her son's arm. Her head cloth is surely that, which was born by the nuns of the Santa Clara Closter in Florence, which in 1495 paid Perugino for the original picture that can now be seen in the Pitti Palae in Florence.

Mary of Magdala cries whilst supporting Jesus' head with her right hand combing his hair. She holds gently the head from which the Crown of Thorns has just been removed. It lies by Jesus' right hand and the marks made by it can still be seen on his forehead.

Joseph of Arimathaea in expensive councillor's clothing supports Jesus' back with both hands. Close to his right hand lies the tip of the spear in Jesus' side. Behind him stands the Apostle that Jesus loved – as if turned to stone / mortified. He has at his side his mother, Salome, crying and with folded hands.

Mary, wife of Clopas, stands with open arms in an expression of sorrow and prayer. Nicodemus in expensive / fine councillor's clothes, displays the nails that were used in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Before him kneels apparently the Mary who is named as John Mark's mother in The Acts of the Apostles 12 – with the house in Jerusalem, where communion was established, and the Holy Ghost came down.

It has been suggested that the older man near Nicodemus is the Apostle Peter. The downcast eyes and folded hands suits well Peter's situation after his denials of Jesus in the early hours of Good Friday. Could it possibly be a self-portrait of the artist himself? He had the Apostle Peter for his namesake. It is traditional to show St. Peter wearing a short beard. The young man on the far right could be St. Mark. His expensive clothing does not suggest that he is one of the disciples from Galilee.

In Church Tradition the young man who fled when Jesus was taken prisoner in the garden of Gethsemane was St. Mark. When The Gospel according to St. Mark was recorded, however, he is named as St. Peter's secretary.

Bottom right is supposedly the Roman Centurion who supervised the crucifixion at the place of the skull (Golgotha). At the death of Christ and the signs that followed it, he came to believe in him as “a just man and the Son of God”.

His turban does not stimulate thoughts of Roman Leaders of the year 30 A.D. Perhaps this could be due to the artist's own impressions, when there was no Roman Empire, but more the (Ottoman) Islamic / Turkish occupation, that influenced the Middle East and parts of Europe.

The red cape that hangs from the man's shoulders is the most convincing sign that he is the Roman Centurion from Golgotha. That very same cape for which the Roman Soldiers cast lots at Golgotha! The characters of the picture are given the faintest halos over their heads, only visible when close to the picture, save two, those of St. Peter and the Roman Centurion. Can this be the artist's own identification with the Golgotha drama, where the Centurion's conversion after the crucifixion did not make him immediately worthy of the halo? And could it be that the artist would not want to dress his self-portrait with a halo? Above left one can see the place of the skull with the empty cross. Behind lies Jerusalem as “the land beyond the sea”.

1981 the church acquired the green chasuble with twelve ears of wheat and a sunshine-gold cross-stem of unbleached poplin printed with tree-rings/grains from a piece of driftwood. Called "Growth" by its creator, Edel Lind, of Odense bishop's palace.

1991/92 a new altarcloth was sewn by members of the congregation with a simple star and cross symbol, so that the cloth refers to the messages of Christmas and Easter.

5) The Baptismal Font

The baptismal font is from the year 1200. The base is possibly from a font of Gotland chalkstone. In 1848 the font's ornamentation was hacked off. The basin is of Dutch origin from 1625. On the bottom of the basin the fall of man at the tree of knowledge is shown. Around its edges two dogs hunt on each of their respective halves a hare and a hind, which have in turn a unicorn before them.

Representing the beginning and the end and / or as a sign of the two natures of Christ, the unicorns which are the symbol of Christ stand with their horns facing the tree of life, that stands on the hill of Paradise. From this flow the four rivers.

The four dogs symbolise charity and truth, justice and peace. The hare, the speed with which we shall receive the gifts of God, and the hind, the need for the life giving water, Psalm 42,2!

From approx. 1650 there is a beautifully worked towel rail. Two christening jugs stand near the font. One is of tin from 1834 and a new one from 1977 given by Sønderskov Home's superintendent Johs. Andersen.

On the wall at the font are the candleholders. The oldest dates from approx. 1650 have a beautiful heart symbol. The other is from 1782.

6) The Candleholders

From approx. 1650 with the heartform, and from 1782. The two large ones are decorated with various flowers, daffodils being one of these and were given by P. H. Pommer and M. Madsdatter.

7) Sanctuary Chair

From 1567 worked in relief with the Hardenberg and Lykke coats of arms. In Latin there reads “Gentleness is useful in all things”.

8) Sanctuary Chair

Worked in relief with the Rud and Bølle coats of arms.

In Latin there reads: “God's Word is Truth”. On the back of the stool there is a head in profile. The names of nobles, which have been in charge of the church, are given.

9) *Epitaph in the Southern Aisle*

Under the picture of the epitaph one can read “Year 1643, the 24th January, has Hans Brems, the bailiff of Kierstrup paid for and mounted this plaque over his parents named Hans Knudsen and his dear wife Anne Nielsdatter, who lived and died in Grænge and who now lie buried beneath it. God give them a joyous resurrection.”

The picture portrays the great vision of resurrection, which the prophet Ezekiel received (Ezekiel 37) to calm the people of Israel during their imprisonment by the Babylonians, where they died – and as the Prophet believed – were reborn. In the clouds the angels breathe life into the dead from the four corners of the world, whilst the prophet indicates to the resurrection of the dead with his hand. Above is a mussel shell, the symbol of purity and virginity! The vision has played an indescribable role in the Jewish people's history!

- Note also the rib bone with the human facemask to the left!

10) *The Pulpit*

The work was carried out by Nakskov Master Jørgen Ringnis (for 100 rigsdaler) in 1645 including the stairwell and sounding board. On the sounding board angels hold forth the objects of suffering: the crown of thorns, nails, pillar, cross and ladder. Beneath soars the dove of the Holy Ghost, beneath the sun, which can be seen in the arch of the sounding board. There are also words from Psalm 22.

In the pulpits main area stand first John the Baptist who points towards the Lamb that rests on the Holy Scriptures. “See the Lamb of God, that bears the sins of the world”, is written below.

After this follow the four evangelists with their particular symbols. Holy father Irenæus was responsible for the portrayal of the four headed life forms to the prophet Ezekiel as symbols for the evangelists – with the principal that there is but one Gospel, in four versions! See Ez. 1,5f. and Rev. of St. John 4,6f.

St. Matthew's symbol became the child of man (often shown with wings), because his Gospel begins with the human Jesus' genealogy.

St. Mark's was the lion, because the Gospel according to St. Mark begins with John the Baptist's praise “a voice crying aloud in the wilderness”, where the lion's roar can be heard.

St. Luke received the ox, because it is a sacrificial beast, and his Gospel begins with Zechariah's offering.

St. John has the eagle, because his Gospel is introduced by the uplifted version of the Word. Compare with the eagle that soars towards the heavenly light.

In between the Saints stands Jesus with the ball of earth in his left hand. On it is an erected cross. According to the word of the Holy Bruno “The Cross stands, whilst the Earth revolves.” With his right hand Jesus blesses in the manner of the western church. The three upright fingers symbolise the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost and the two bent fingers the two natures of Christ. Under Jesus stands St. Peter's proclamation to the Jewish council: “There is no salvation in anyone else at all” (Acts of the Apost. 4,12!)

First to be seen under the edge of the pulpit are the three virtues: Faith = the cross; Hope = the anchor; and Love = the burning heart. Beneath these are the four following Cardinal virtues: justice = the sword; Wisdom = mirror and snake (in other words show self-knowledge and be as clever as snakes...); Courage = the broken pillar (referring to Samson's courage); and Moderation = the water jug and the goblet (drink water for thirst and wine with modesty).

The first three virtues are described by St. Paul, the next four by Platon. Holy father Ambrosius stood for their merging. He connected these main virtues together. Platon's four virtues have herewith received religious support.

Behind the characters in the pulpit the mussel shell can be seen once more = Purity, the symbol of virginity. Below and between them the green lilies of mercy can be seen.

In the door to the stairwell is a keyhole – referring to the key-power of the Word, which is also referred to in the scriptures above the stairwell. At the bottom of the pulpit there is a bunch of grapes referring to the wine and therewith to Jesus' institution of communion and to his redeeming death for us – for the forgiveness of sinners. In addition the stool is furnished with appropriate scriptures, faces of angels and baroque partial portraits.

11) Consecration Cross – Chandeliers

On the pillar behind the pulpit and on the pillar opposite the consecration cross can be seen. It is a greek cross = equal arm length cross in a circle, blessed by the bishop with holy water at the church's consecration and later filled in with chalk fresco colours!

The church chandeliers were donated by Bodil and Rolf Viggo Neergaard in 1917.

12) The Organ Loft

It was built in 1705. In 1910 Bodil and Rolf Viggo Neergaard donated a Stamp Organ to the church. Its facade is preserved behind the present P.G. Andersen Organ. This was begun in 1970 and completed in 1990.

It has about 1500 pipes and 20 stops that are divided between the main and the middle manuals and the pedals. The organ cannot be described here as much as it deserves.

13) The Texts on the ends of the Pews.

One can see here how the texts on the ends of the pews begin with the Bible's first sentence and continue throughout the complete Bible Story. The five-pointed stars which have been used by the artist, Jens Steffensen, as punctuation between the individual texts, symbolise the five parts of the world = the Gospel to the whole world.

14) and 15/) The Family Room

The earlier Wallmoden burial chamber Cenotaph. There hangs here a grave edging on the wall from around 1600 A.D. On it there is written in Latin: "Pastor Peter Mikkelsen has set this monument above his splendid wife Anne Ottesdatter." The grave edging was found under the altar chair at the font ("the priest's wife's chair") in 1952. On the wall hang also those two memorial plaques that were on the coffins of Catharina and Christopher von Wallmoden from 1788 and 1791.

Christoffer von Wallmoden's fine memorial of his wife was done by Johs. Wiedewelt.

16) Tower room and tower. (See page 14)

17) Gravestone and earlier altar piece

Standing against the wall is a partially preserved gravestone from approx. 1600-1650 of red chalkstone with the Evangelists and their symbols in the corners.

At the bottom there is also a shield with Christ's monogram and sun symbol. The following is an attempt to explain the stone's complete text: God our Father, we could well think of You in the time that we are here on Earth, so that during our lifetime we look towards thee, and thereafter pass on to eternal life. Amen.

On the stone there stands an earlier altar ornament: a beautiful renaissance frame and picture from approx. 1850: "Jesus lets the small children come unto him".

18) The Choir stalls

One of the church's two old choir stalls with original end piece dates from the year 1500 with Niels Torkildsen's coat of arms – a star, within which there is a triple rosette.

19) Memorial Plaque

On the wall over the burial place of priest Brugmann and wife – with dates and comments of their lives. Made by Johs. Wiedewelt.

20) The Nave

A three masted fullrigger – made by Johannes Månson after a real ship that was stranded by ice in Nykøbing F. harbour in the 1920's. He lived for a while in and around the Sønderskov Home and contributed it to the church. Both it and its lifeboat bear the latin name of Pax = Peace.

21) The Window of the North Wall

There was once late gothic stained glass in these windows, from approx. 1520, with amongst other things two coats of arms of noble families connected with the church. Also the arms of Niels Torkildsen with the following sentence in latin: “Niels Torkildsen, Pastor of this church”. Also a Beldenak coat of arms with the latin script: “(Jens) Andersen of Gods mercy, bishop in Odense”. NB: Until 1803 the church was under the administration of Funen, as was the whole of Lolland Falster!

In the fourth window was an old danish Coat of Arms with the Order of the Golden Knight around it and a crown above that. According to a report from 1706, the glass mosaics were removed in order to make new and larger windows.

22) The church's new pulpit.

Made in 1988 – donated by the craftsmen after the restoration of the church. The base is made in the form of a cross.

23) The ends of the Pews.

Near the entrance the church is seen as a house of prayer, for prayer for all God's blessings.

On the end piece of the pews to the left seen from the centre aisle, the words: “Prepare to meet thy God” can be seen. They were included following a personal request of Mrs. Bodil Neergaard, in that they are also engraved in the doorstep at the Sønderskov Home by the first occupant of the home.

To the left stands the alms box from 1689. Over it lays a sword, which has been dated by the textile museum to be from around 1720 - the time around the great nordic war. The story behind it is unknown.

24) The Fresco of the Pharaoh's daughter

In 1957 Mrs. Bodil Neergaard donated the fresco of the Pharaoh's daughter, who finds the child Moses in his cradle in the Nile whilst her older sister, Miriam bends over him. The picture is painted by Anne Marie Telmanyi. It was made for Mrs. Bodil Neergaard for her 90th birthday. Beneath it stand verses from Grundtvig and Dagmar Liebmann – who with their first four lines give a worthy picture of our understanding of God.

25) The Priests of the church in the time after the reformation.

In general the lion heads on the doors to and from the arms house are protective symbols, that indicate that God protects his people!

About the Tower Room

A spiral staircase with a total of 76 steps in the tower's northwest side take you up the church tower.

The large bell is from 1595. On it is written the following: “Anno 1595 Frederik Hobe was the Queen's vassal. Mr. Per Micelsen, Jørgen Lavridsen, Jens Jørgensen, Rasmus Mortensen, Hans Render Niels Hwos church guardians Torby”. These were the church's priest and guardians!

On the edge there is a translation from Low German: Of fire am I cast, Michel Westfal has made me. All the people of the parish have.....?

On the edge of the bell there stands in latin: “The Word of the Lord is eternal”: VERBUM DOMINI MANET IN AETERNUM!



On both sides of the bell there are relief's of Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms. She stands on the moon, the sun's rays surround her, she has a crown and sceptre, but appears beautiful and unadorned in her appearance as a woman – of whom Christ allowed himself to be born! See Revelation 12.

Over the choir arch in the northeast corner, original chalk frescoes have been discovered: a dancing sun that opens out into daffodils – a clear and direct referral to the resurrection.

From the church pulpit. Above left an angel stretches his head and looks towards the heavenly light. Below this the virtue of courage: The broken pillar. Above right is the virtue of moderation: A water jug and a goblet.

The face above and the two to the sides are more human in form. Should they perhaps illustrate the reaction to the words of the priest? The Ox, St. Luke's attribute, looks understandably enough, disgruntled; his ears hang low! In these life-like surroundings the Gospel is held forward by the Evangelist using the ox as a platform. The Gospel is held open at the Jesus' words:



“Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11,28).