

PER FAXNELD



SECRET STOCKHOLM



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

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BLACK FRIARS' CELLAR

⑥

A hidden, atmospheric cellar

Södra Benickebrinken 4

Guided tours for groups can be booked through the Stockholm Medieval Museum: medeltidsmuseet.stockholm/besok/historiska-rum/svartbrodraklostrets-kallare
Metro: Gamla stan



Behind a small, anonymous black iron door on Södra Benickebrinken 4 is the entrance to the preserved cellar of the Black Friars' monastery (the name Black Friars comes from the black cloaks the brothers of the Dominican order wore over their white habits). As you enter down a narrow flight of stairs to the dimly lit medieval brick arches, the cool cellar air grasps you with its ghostly fingers. The remnants of the past include a fireplace and the beautiful floor made in the 13th century from Gotland chalkstone.

The cellar probably functioned as a hostel for pilgrims that came to Stockholm because of a miraculous altarpiece (see below). Visiting today, it is easy to imagine how they huddled together among the subterranean archways, often ill or beset by life's troubles – and hoping desperately their journey to this city would set things right.

The atmospheric space now constitutes the only visible remains of a once extensive structure and very prominent monastic order. The monastery was the last of three to be founded in Stockholm, when King Magnus Eriksson donated land to the order in 1336.

A miraculous silver image

The Black Friars had a steady income due to a special artefact in their possession: an altarpiece of gilded silver which attracted visitors from near and far and made the monastery and its church a pilgrimage site. Depicting Christ being taken down from the cross, the silver image was said to hold miraculous powers that those who gave donations could benefit from. Many such stories are recorded in a legendarium from the early 15th century. For example, a paralysed woman was cured, and a boy who drowned (and lay under the ice for several hours) was resurrected by it, as was a soldier shot through the neck with an arrow. When King Gustav Vasa of Sweden converted to Protestantism, he banished all Catholic holy orders from the land. The Dominican monastery was dissolved in 1528 and its buildings torn down. This took place over several years, with some structures left standing until 1547. The building material was carted away and used for the Royal Castle. King Gustav also took the altarpiece and melted it down – or had his chancellor pawn it in Bremen, Germany, according to one version. Its exact fate remains unknown and there has been speculation about it having been buried beneath the foundations of the order's property when they were banished. Extensive archaeological digs in modern times have failed to turn anything up, but some remain convinced it is concealed beneath the cellar vaults.

KATARINA FIRE STATION LANTERN

③

The world's (probably) oldest operational fire station

Tjärhovsgatan 9–11

The lantern and garage can be viewed all day



It seems likely that Katarina fire station is the oldest one that remains operational in its original location – the closest competitor being an American station running since 1889. A process to get this acknowledged in *Guinness World Records* has started. Yet, most of the interior that can be seen through the garage doors looks more functionally modern than quaintly archaic, a prioritisation which is only to be expected.

The oldest parts of the building date back to the 1870s. After having served as a brewery, city watch quarters, and an extra hospital during the 1834 cholera epidemic, it became a fire station in 1876. In 1895, major reconstructions were made, with several smaller buildings that were part of the complex being torn down and new ones replacing them. Nine horses pulled the fire carts at that time but were eventually replaced by cars. In 1914, the stables were turned into a garage. The last horses, Max and Dux, were sold off in 1916.

The final major makeover of the station was in the 1980s. Today, around 45 firemen work there, protecting a district of 120,000 people from the ravages of fire.



NEARBY

Firefighting museum

The museum is only shown to groups of five to twenty visitors and must be pre-booked (via Christer Lundell: 209ludde@gmail.com)

Entrance fee

At the back of Katarina fire station (in another stable building) is a firefighting museum run by firemen volunteers since 1993. It features historical photographs, folk art with firefighting-related motifs, banners, old fire trucks and carriages, uniforms, hoses, gas masks and other equipment.

TEATER DUR OCH MOLL

⑦

Stockholm's smallest theatre

Fjällgatan 16–18
 durochmoll.se
 info@durochmoll.se
 Metro: Slussen



In a tiny cottage on Stigberget, a mountain on Södermalm, Teater dur och moll is Stockholm's smallest theatre.

Since opening in 1998 it has offered plays created especially to suit the premises, usually tales of women in historical times – for example dealing with the Swedish witchcraft trials in the 17th century. The actress Gen Hedberg runs most of the theatre's business, with help from a pool of professionals and enthusiasts. Especially impressive are the grotesque masks used.

There are only 20 seats, so watching a play here is a very intimate affair. No spectator will be more than 4 metres from the actors, meaning eye contact can be maintained in a unique way. Leaflets proudly proclaim it is 'the smallest theatre in the world!', which may or may not be true – but it is definitely the smallest of its kind in Stockholm, and probably also in Sweden.

The name of the street is Fjällgatan, with 'fjäll' indicating a type of great mountain – in reference to its high altitude (to find an actual fjäll, though, you have to go to the north of Sweden). Stigberget was once the gallows hill, a grim place of execution. When the gallows were moved to Skanstull in the late 17th century, people started building houses here. No fancy houses, of course – as no one with money would want to live somewhere with a history like this – but wooden shacks. They were not long-lived, however, as the great fire of 1723 devoured them all, along with most other buildings in the parish.

After the fire, the present-day theatre was one of the first new buildings built on the ashes. A carpenter named Andersson bought the plot of land from a butcher and built himself a two-room cottage with a thatched roof facing the street. In the courtyard, he built a bakery. Andersson, his wife, three children and three maids all lived in the cottage itself. His wife ran a 'sylteri', a sort of unpretentious eatery serving cold cuts.

By 1756, the family had moved out, and the cottage toward the street became a rowdy tavern, Aline on the Mountain. For more than 50 years it remained a place of toasting, boasting and drunken feasting. Today, this is the building where the theatre is housed. It looks fairly similar to the way it did in 1805, when it was converted into a weight shop run by a man named Blåberg.

JUGENDSTIL DOORS OF GASVERKET

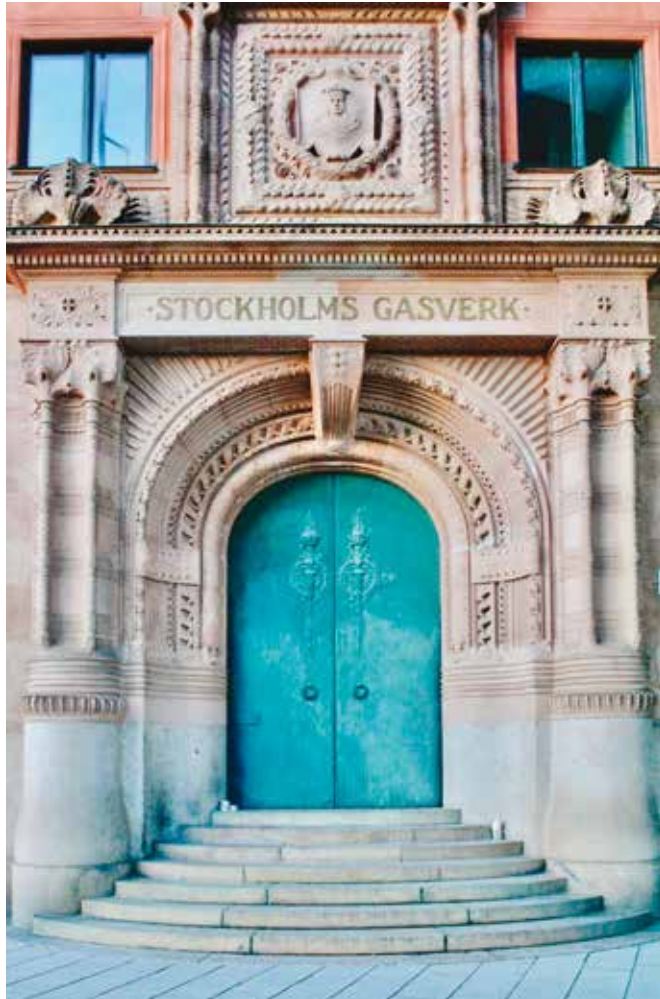
⑩

Tolkienesque turn-of-the-century copper doors

Torsgatan 22–28

The interior is closed to the public, but one of the most interesting rooms can be seen through a window

Metro: T-Centralen or St Eriksplan



On a stretch of street between T-Centralen and St Eriksplan that fairly few pedestrians walk, an architectural masterpiece stands half forgotten.

Built between 1904 and 1906, it originally housed the Stockholm gasworks and water company. Most impressive are the massive double copper doors on Torsgatan 22, with Jugendstil/art nouveau torches in relief, looking like the gates to a Tolkienesque elven or dwarven kingdom.

Sadly, they will remain locked no matter how many times you say the magic word ‘Mellon’ (the password to the gates of Moria in *Lord of the Rings*). Above the door, the patron saint of Stockholm, St Erik, looks down on passers-by like a melancholy elf king framed by oak leaves and acorns. The doors are a very tactile experience if you run your hands over the beautifully cast decorations. The burning torch motif recurs on the copper roof above.

Initially, the building also contained apartments, but these were turned into offices in the 1970s. It was designed by the super-productive architect Ferdinand Boberg (1860–1946), who had at that point in his career gained the exclusive right to do all ‘technical buildings’ for the city. In the same year, 1906, Boberg created similarly-inspired decorations for the Brunkeberg power station (today moved to Tulegatan 13), where a sort of goddess of electricity with a halo of lightbulbs and cables adorns the portal.

Internally, the building has undergone extensive renovations by the property company Castellum that owns it today. Most of it has been quite ruthlessly modernised into anonymous office spaces, with few original details preserved, aside from in the spaces where cultural heritage law has demanded otherwise. The latter include the office of the head engineer (where a heist scene in the legendary Swedish crime comedy *Jönssonligan* was shot in 1981, serving as the office of the nefarious millionaire Wall-Enberg) and the boardroom, neither of which are open to the public.

You can get a good look at the former gas token hall, where Stockholmers used to buy the tokens for their gas meters, through the ground-floor windows to the right of the copper doors. It has artfully decorated wooden panelling and a stucco ceiling.

THE GHOST CASTLE'S COLLECTION

④

A secret art collection

Drottninggatan 116

The park is open to the public

To visit the 'castle' by guided tour only (in Swedish or English) go to:

su.se/om-universitetet/kultur-och-historia/konst-vid-stockholms-universitet/visningar

Metro: Odenplan



The so-called 'ghost castle', built around the year 1700, is one of the least-known top-level collections of older art in Sweden, and a supposedly haunted place (see below). Its actual name is the Scheffler Palace, as it was commissioned by the merchant Hans Petter Scheffler.

After passing through several hands, it was donated to Stockholm University in 1924 (back then, the whole neighbourhood was part of its campus, and referred to as Stockholm's Quartier Latin). Today it houses the university's art collection and is used primarily for representation dinners and internal events.

The art includes valuable carpets and furniture along with around 380 works by masters like Pieter Bruegel the younger, Jan Both and Giambattista Tiepolo. There is also a collection of glass products by artists like Simon Gate and Edward Hald, from the Orrefors glassworks. The items on display are mainly used for education and research but are also shown to pre-booked groups.

The iron gates of the ghost castle are original, and feature Scheffler's monogram.

The devil, treasures, and ghosts

At the end of the 18th century, a merchant called Jacob von Balthasar Knigge owned the palace. Knigge was an accomplished violinist and a member of the Royal Academy of Music. He was also a severe man, whose cruelty was, according to rumour, so considerable that when he died the Devil collected his soul in a flaming carriage – resulting in a local saying: 'One day the Devil took Knigge'. In and around the palace, strange phenomena started: mirrors and windows broke, mysterious noises, music and song were heard.

Other tales told of subterranean vaults where people had been bricked up together with gold treasures. The notion of secret subterranean spaces may be related to the collapse of a grave in the north end of the palace park in the 1840s, likely the dilapidated final resting place of the original owner, which resulted in the coffin becoming exposed.

The grave was dug up in 1907 and the unidentified remains ended up in the Adolf Fredrik cemetery. The palace park is officially referred to as the 'Ghost Park' and once contained an orangery, a gazebo and other small buildings. Today only the gazebo remains, with its former second floor and luxurious interior removed.



SABBATSBERGS KYRKA

⑨

A peculiar altar in a former inn

Eastmansvägen 36

svenskakyrkan.se/gustav-vasa-forsamling/sabbatsbergs-kyrka

Open for service Tuesdays 11am–noon and for occasional concerts, retreats and other events

Metro: St Eriksplan



The Sabbatsberg hill is unknown territory for most today, and its well-preserved buildings offer an interesting glimpse into Stockholm history. Located on the top of the hill, the Sabbatsberg Church is said to be the city's oldest preserved wooden church. It also has a most peculiar altar area: the pulpit stands right above the altar instead of to its side, as it does in other churches.

It is constructed in this strange manner because the church was originally an inn from 1717, run by a certain Valentin Sabbath (hence the name), and the original architecture required this unconventional solution when remodelling it into a house of God. Why was it then not torn down and replaced with a proper church, you might ask? Well, because it was not a place of worship intended for any ordinary congregation, but for the poorest of the poor. Between 1760 and 1761, all the poorhouses belonging to the city's congregations were relocated here – the idea being to remove them from the central part of the city, so the poor wouldn't cause trouble by begging. Reflecting this, the church has two 18th-century bells mounted on the adjacent Nicolai house. One of them bears an inscription: 'Då detta fattighus åt arma skänker föda, så skänker nåden ljus åt andligt döda' ('When this poorhouse to the destitute gives bread, grace brings light to the spiritually dead').

Connected to the church is a red wooden loft house that may have been used as a dormitory for the inn's guests, which now serves as the sacristy (and on the top floor, with a separate entrance via an outdoor wooden stair, is the studio of an icon painter).

There also used to be a cemetery, with a funeral chapel which was torn down in the 1880s when the Klara gasworks expanded into the neighbourhood. It was replaced with a new chapel and morgue that is today used as office spaces for various creative companies.

Back in the poorhouse days, the presence of a spring with curative properties on the hill meant both the posh and the poor moved about in the area. The rich could buy luxurious pastries and sweets from a bakery, or play nine-pin bowling, while the poor were often severely malnourished. But at least they were given limited access to the health-bringing water itself.

Created in 1734 by the apothecary Johan Julius Salberg, the spring remained in operation until 1968, though most of it had dried up as early as the 1880s.

THE KARLBERG RUNESTONE

13

A serpent-adorned Viking-age remnant

Behind Karlberg Castle

Can be visited during the park's opening hours (6am–10pm)

Metro: St Eriksplan, then a 15-minute walk



In Stockholm's inner (well, more or less) city there is only one free-standing runestone, but it was very nearly turned into rubble or buried permanently in the 1920s.

Back in those days, a pastoral area close to today's Karlberg Park was popular with local kids playing football. A group of boys were hanging out there in the summer of 1922. As it was quite warm, they put their sandwiches under a large, flat stone that had ended up there during roadworks. The stone would also be good to get some shade from the sun, one of them figured. When he stuck his head into the cavity under it, he spotted carved runes. One of the boys had an elder brother who helped copy the runes. He then showed them to his teacher at school, who was able to read them. The Swedish National Heritage Board was informed, and the stone was transported (on a wheelbarrow!) to the grounds of the nearby Karlberg Castle, where it was put in its present location.

Today, the carving has been filled in with red paint, but this was not the case back when it was made.

The runes are quite sparse, simply saying, 'Anund and Torgils had the stone raised in remembrance of Åsgöt'.

The ornamentation is more interesting and evocative than the text, featuring a Christian cross with a winding, serpentine dragon curled around it – on whose body the runes are carved.

The dragon may be the fearful Nidhögg, the creature gnawing away at the roots of the world tree Yggdrasil in ancient Norse myth. The cross it is coiled around can thus also be seen as Yggdrasil, even though the stone dates from the period after Sweden became Christian. The top one of its eight arms divides into two, making for a total of nine – equivalent to the nine worlds located along the trunk of Yggdrasil. The fact that the dragon seems to be biting its own tail may also point to a possible identification with Jörmungandr, the gigantic serpent offspring of the god Loki and the giantess Angerboda that lies coiled around all of Middle-earth. It was connected to the chaos powers that the gods of order were to confront at the apocalyptic Ragnarök, where Thor slays Jörmungandr but then only manages to walk nine paces before he falls dead to the ground – poisoned by the bites of the serpent. After the spread of Christianity, Jörmungandr became connected with the biblical sea monster Leviathan, a creature subsequent magical systems would list as one of the four crown princes of hell.

HAGSTRÖMER

MEDICO-HISTORICAL LIBRARY

24

An extremely atmospheric and little-known library

Annerovägen 12

It is possible to book guided tours of the library (via hagstromerlibrary@ki.se) or to visit the reading room

Wednesday and Thursday, 9am–noon

Metro: Odenplan, then a 20-minute walk



Right next to a busy motorway lies a former courthouse, built between 1905 and 1907, adorned with Jugendstil owls. The court moved out in 1980, and it was then rented out as offices to various private companies. Today, however, it is the little-known home of the atmospheric Hagströmer Medico-Historical Library (Hagströmerbiblioteke).

Since 1997 this library has gathered collections of manuscripts and more than 100,000 rare, old books from the world-renowned research hospital Karolinska Institutet (founded in 1810), the Swedish Society of Medicine (founded in 1807) and the *Collegium Medicum* (in operation 1663–1812).

Many of the books are extremely scarce and valuable first editions. Among them are the physicist and chemist Carl Benedicks' (1875–1958) collection of books on alchemy and older chemistry. The stomach-churning Wessler collection focuses on dentistry and, alongside books and some gruesome objects, also contains a large collection of related prints. Other highlights in the library include a first edition of Linnaeus' groundbreaking biological work *Systema Naturae* (1735).

The Hagströmer Library was located on the hospital grounds where the new Aula Medica now stands before moving to its very charming new home.

At the centre of the building is the big former courtroom, which now has beautiful green bookcases along all walls and display cases in the middle. Though many of the original details were torn out in previous decades, the historical ambiance has been restored to a great extent.

The library irregularly hosts lectures and exhibitions, often striking bridges between the arts, the medical sciences and the humanities in interesting ways. It also offers a residential research fellowship for scholars wanting to work with the collections.



PER FAXNELD



SECRET

STOCKHOLM

Step off the beaten track with this fascinating Stockholm travel guidebook, filled with well-hidden treasures. Ideal for locals and curious travellers alike, the book features more than 140 secret and unusual locations.

Take a break in a parish library with a time-warp interior and a unique collection of detective novels, discover the functioning dragon fountain in the foyer of an opulent 1930s cinema turned storage facility, visit the bizarre 1921 archaeologist's grave, built in the style of stone-age megalith tombs, discover the gigantic metal eye on the back of the brutalist Swedish Film Institute that pokes fun at the Swedish military in the neighbouring building.

Find the mysterious medieval plaque hidden in an Old Town stairway, grab a bite at the French bakery on the ground floor of a socialist utopian-functional communal housing project, where a food lift sends croissants and onion soup to the apartments above. Get off the metro at a station with grotesque sculptures and a unique ecosystem featuring tiny spiders and a previously unknown fungus.

There's all this and more in an essential travel guide for those who think they know the Swedish capital well, or for those who want to discover its concealed gems.

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