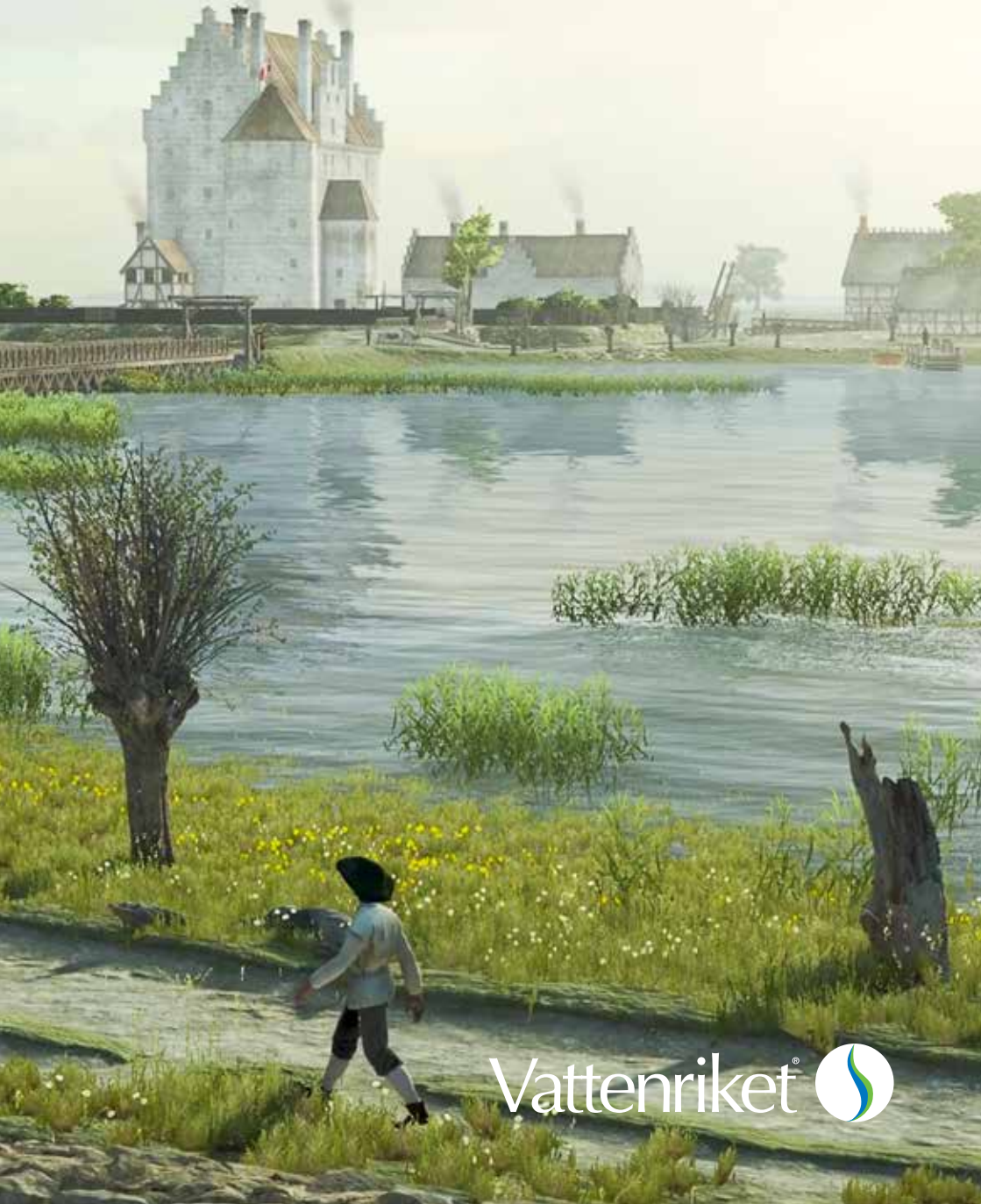




Lillö Castle Ruins





Erik Dahlberg drew this sketch of Lillö Castle in 1658.

From fortress to visitor site

In days gone by Lillö Castle was an impressive fortress visible far and wide. Protected by a moat, the River Helge å and mile after mile of inaccessible wetlands, it occupied a strategic location, well defended against enemies – whether they were Swedish soldiers or Danish rebels.

Lillö's early history is shrouded in mystery, but its thick stone walls may first have been raised in the late 13th century, with a moat dug to add further protection.

For much of the Middle Ages, north-eastern Skåne belonged to Denmark. Here, in the borderlands with Sweden, conflicts often broke out between power-hungry men in the two countries. Castles

were important: control of a castle gave control over the local population. At Lillö, wealthy noble families with close links to the Danish kings lived and ruled for centuries.

Lillö is destroyed and rebuilt

In the mid-1400s the region was laid waste by Swedish troops led by Karl Knutsson Bonde. They burned, plundered and killed in an attempt to seize control of Skåne and Denmark. In 1468 Denmark's King Christian I ordered the partial destruction of Lillö after the castle's owner, Ivar Axelsson Thott, had switched allegiance to support Karl Knutsson Bonde's cause.

Lillö was repaired, but its stone walls and moat could not prevent the castle from being set on fire again in 1525, this time during a rebellion and civil war between supporters and opponents of King Christian II. Some years later Lillö was rebuilt once more.

The castle becomes a manor

The early 1500s saw Lillö transformed into a modern defensive stronghold with two round towers and gun slits, built to withstand the new heavy artillery and weapons of the time.

As renovations continued, Lillö evolved into a stately manor house with beautiful tiled stoves, vaulted cellar ceilings and stuccoed walls. Early in the 1600s the entire castle was painted white with dark lines to resemble the massive stone blocks of ashlar masonry.

Resistance and defeat

During Swedish King Gustav II Adolf's campaign in Skåne in 1612, Beate Huitfeldt, a Danish court official born at Lillö, managed to repel an attack from a small Swedish force attempting to seize the castle. The plaster of the ruins still bears traces of the battle.

When Skåne became Swedish in 1658 King Charles X Gustav ordered Lillö to be burned and destroyed by cannon fire to prevent the Danes from ever using it to threaten the city of Kristianstad. Fortunately, military engineer Erik Dahlberg sketched the castle before its destruction to record what Lillö looked like in its glory days.



Glimmingehus

Lillö and Glimmingehus are roughly the same size and design. The castle at Glimmingehus is still standing. At Lillö the landscape is well preserved.

When the botanist Carl Linnaeus visited Lillö on his journey through Skåne in 1749, all he saw was a shattered wall protruding from a mound of earth.

From ruin to visitor site

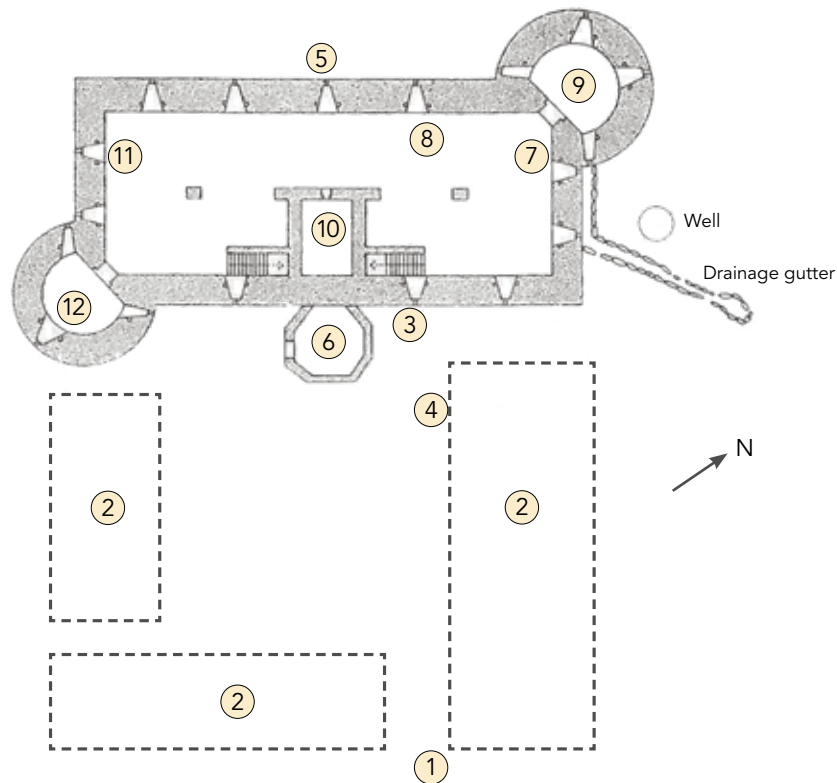
From 1938 to 1944 Thorsten Andersson led excavations of the ruin and moat, retrieving cannonballs and remnants of everyday objects from the site. The walls were rebuilt and a protective roof erected.

In the 1990s the ruin became a Vattenriket visitor site. Floors and lighting were installed, and information signs added. Today replicas of objects found at Lillö can be seen in the Life at Lillö exhibition in one of the ruin's towers. A key to the castle may be borrowed for free at naturum.

The ruins at Lillö were excavated between 1938 and 1944.



Your guide to the castle ruins



1. Model of Lillö

The model shows what the five-storey castle looked like before it was destroyed in 1658. Note the toilets projecting from the upper floors at the rear.

2. Buildings in the castle courtyard

In the courtyard are the foundations of buildings used at different times in the history of the castle. The kitchens, brewery, stables and maybe even a smithy, a brickworks and servants' quarters once stood on the island southeast of the moat, where there are now trees and grazing land.

3. Traces of gunshots

Many battles have been fought at Lillö. The plaster on the thick outer wall north of the stair tower still bears traces of musket fire, perhaps from King Gustav II Adolf's attack in 1612. Defenders inside the castle fired at assailants through narrow gun slits that were added in the mid-1500s.

4. Herluf Trolle's memorial stone

Born at Lillö in 1516, Herluf Trolle was a knight of Denmark, admiral and member of the Privy Council. He and his wife, Birgitte Gøye, founded Herlufsholm School in 1565, the same year he was wounded in battle and died. The school erected the memorial stone in the 1940s.

5. Toilets

On the ground at the rear of the castle ruin, large stone slabs slope down toward the moat. High above, waterless toilets ('privies') once projected from the building. Waste fell onto the slabs below, where someone had the unenviable task of sweeping it down into the moat.

6. Stair tower

Excavations revealed the foundations and stone floor of an octagonal stair tower. What we see today was rebuilt in the 1940s. Before the original tower was raised in the early 1600s, a separate entrance, traces of which can still be seen in the brickwork inside, led to the cellar.

7. Sequence of strata from the 1998–99 excavation

In the late 1990s, Vattenriket initiated a small excavation inside the castle. This part of the exhibition shows the soil layers and the archaeologists' interpretation.

8. Indoor well

Access to fresh water inside the castle was essential in the event of a siege. In the Middle Ages the well rarely or never ran dry. Today the water table is lower, so the well dries out in summer.

9. The 'Life at Lillö' exhibition

Many of the everyday artefacts discovered when the ruin and moat were excavated are preserved at Regionmuseet in Kristianstad. Replicas of some of the objects, showing how they were used in everyday life, are on display in Lillö's north tower.

10. Prison cell or storeroom?

The castle has been rebuilt several times. Thick cellar walls were needed to bear the weight of the upper floors. When the stair tower was added, extra walls were constructed to reinforce the structure. The small space these walls created was probably used for storage, not as the prison cell it resembles today.

11. A servant girl spinning thread

Textile production was hard, time-consuming work. Wool had to be sheared, washed and carded, and flax had to be harvested, dried, retted, broken, scutched and hackled, before the fibres could be hand-spun into thread using spindles.

12. A soldier guards the castle

The soldier on guard is holding a model of the arquebus found during excavations of the moat. The hook beneath the barrel was placed against a support to absorb the strong recoil when firing.



Life at Lillö

The area's grasslands provided fodder and grazing for animals and farmland for crops. The castle's location on the island gave full control over traffic on the River Helge å, and seasonal floods supplied nutrients to the meadows while protecting Lillö's inhabitants from enemies.

In return for providing armoured cavalry for the crown's army, the nobility was exempt from taxation and could be granted estates and fiefs to govern. Lillö's owners managed and travelled between many estates, taking valuables such as textiles, important documents and other goods with them in large chests.

Hunting and great feasts

While war was a frequent presence, life was not without intervals of peace. Then the wealthy would entertain themselves with hunting and feasts, and laughter echoed through the great hall at Lillö, richly decorated for the festivities. Guests from near and far were regaled with dishes carried in one after the other on large platters, while generous quantities of beer and expensive imported wines were served in fine glasses and pewter goblets.

Food and daily tasks

Food and clothing were always needed, in war and in peace. Lillö's servants tended animals and crops and prepared the castle ahead of the master's arrival.

Barley, rye and wheat were grown for bread, grains, porridge and for malt used to brew beer. Turnips, cabbage, peas, beans and onions were also everyday

While Vermeer's painting *The Milkmaid* doesn't depict a scene from Lillö, everyday life there may well have looked very much like this.



foods. Tarragon, caraway, sage, coriander and other herbs were grown in the kitchen garden. Beehives gave wax and honey.

Cows and horses grazed in the pastures, while chickens and pigs roamed the castle yard, eating whatever they could find. Sheep provided meat and wool. Pike, carp, ide, salmon and eels were caught in the river and lakes. Meat and fish were dried and salted for long-term storage.

Textiles and clothing were valuable items, handmade and labour-intensive. Flax and wool had to be processed in several steps before being spun into thread for sewing or weaving. Clothes were washed by hand in the river.

Many larger estates had their own brickworks, producing bricks and everyday ceramics on-site. Lillö probably also had its own blacksmith who made weapons, tools and other essential equipment.



The bowl and the horse above – replicas of finds made during excavations at Lillö – can be purchased at naturum Vattenriket.

New views and the end of Lillö's Golden Age

When King Christian IV of Denmark ordered the construction of the fortress city of Kristianstad a few kilometres southeast of Lillö in 1614, the view from the castle changed. For some 40 years the two fortifications stood side by side, with the wetlands as protection. In 1658, however, the Treaty of Roskilde ceded Skåne to the Swedes, and the golden age of Lillö Castle came to an abrupt end.

Lillö's owners

Historical highlights

National Property Board ○ 2000s

Today Lillö with its Life at Lillö exhibition is a popular destination in Vattenriket. The Friends of Vattenriket keep Lillö open for visitors on Sundays during the summer. Keys can be borrowed from the naturum visitor centre all year round.

○ 1990s

Following renewed archaeological investigations, flooring, electricity and lighting are installed, and the castle ruins are opened to the public.

○ 1938-1944

Archaeologists excavate Lillö's ruins and the moat. A protective roof is erected.

○ 1749

Carl Linnaeus visits the ruins, which are barely visible above ground.

Jochum Gersdorff
(widowed husband of Ölle-
gård Huitfeldt) 1655-1658

○ 1658

Skåne is ceded to Sweden and Lillö is demolished.

Huitfeldt 1571-1655



○ 1612

Troops of King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden fail in their attempt to seize Lillö.

Trolle 1487-1571



○ 1500s

Lillö is rebuilt with towers, stairwells and gun slits and transformed into a Renaissance castle.

○ 1525

Lillö is burned to the ground once more.

Thott 1400s



○ 1468

King Christian I of Denmark has Lillö partially demolished, but it is soon rebuilt.

○ 1300s

Lillö is built, burned and rebuilt.



See what Lillö Castle looked like in its glory days in the 1650s (film).

Lillö Castle – watched over by the wetlands.
Film from UR Samtiden
(in Swedish).

