



# The Godnatt and Kurrholmen Forts



## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1680 it was decided that Sweden's principal naval base outside Stockholm should be relocated to the Blekinge archipelago, and that a new town be established there. This particular site was chosen in part because of its nearness to the Swedish provinces on the other side of the Baltic, but also as winters were shorter in Blekinge, it gave the Fleet earlier access to waters free from ice. Work on the fortifications for the new town of Karlskrona began immediately, and the two forts on the islets of Godnatt and Kurrholmen would prove to be the two final representatives of an older type of Swedish military fortification, which would be overtaken by modern developments in artillery. Even before they were completed the two towers known as Godnatt and Kurrholmen, were obsolete, and hark back to the traditional type of keep so cherished in Sweden ever since the Middle Ages. The origins of the Godnatt and Kurrholmen towers are to be found in the deliberations held during the 1850's by a number of government commissions regarding a permanent defensive



system for Karlskrona. By this time warships were beginning to be powered by steam, and it was feared that the Drottningsskär citadel and the fortifications on Kungsholmen alone were not sufficient to protect the southern fairway. Plans were therefore made for the establishment of an inner ring of defences on six small islets including those of Godnatt and Kurrholmen, some 2 to 3 kilometres from the main naval base. In 1862, when Kurrholmen was being built and Godnatt had been completed, Major General af Kleen sent a memorandum to the General Commandant of the Royal Engineers in which he drew up proposals for the improved defence of Karlskrona. At the same time he also expressed his misgivings regarding the ongoing work on the base's fortifications, for during these years there had been considerable developments in Artillery technology and the combined effect of such innovations as rifled gun barrels and fast ironclad vessels meant that the planned defensive towers were now all too vulnerable to enemy forces. The result of the memorandum was that the Kurrholmen tower only carried a battery on one floor instead of two, and of the six towers planned only two were built.

## THE GODNATT TOWER

The tower is built in two storeys over a low underground vault. In the centre of the combined upper story and flat roof there is an observation tower on top of which there is a small beacon. The whole building rests on the bedrock of the islet. Although the tower has been planned so that the ground plan forms a pentagon, the corners are so bevelled that the alternating short and long walls of the core construction merge on reaching the roof, which acts as an observation post. The end result is thus a regular ten-cornered building. The entry to the tower faces towards the north, which is the most protected side of the building. There is room for 8 guns on each of the two floors and

for further pieces on the open upper story, which is protected by the battlements of the outer walls. Between the ground floor joists there is a wide opening that can be covered by hatches, and situated above them in the vault of the upper battery, there is a massive iron ring. This construction was used to move cannon and other heavy material. Heating was provided by cast iron stoves. On the battery floors these were placed along the interior walls with one stove sitting beside each two-gun embrasure, while smaller stoves were used in the smaller rooms. Of these stoves none still remain in the tower. The two spiral staircases inside the building are extremely unusual, placed as they are one above the other in the circular stairwell, and running parallel to each other. At the bottom of the stairwell a hole has been blasted out of the bedrock and is connected by a conduit to the sea outside. It was intended that a distilling apparatus for the desalination of seawater should be placed there, and that the water collected in the cavity used to cool the condenser. A few decades later, the tower was only in use as a lighthouse, a function that it still fulfils. The upper battery floor had previously been converted into flats for the permanent staff of keepers who were stationed there. Both the dividing walls between the living quarters and some of the lighthouse equipment still remain and date from the period when the embrasures were used as opening for the signalling lights.

## THE KURRHOLMENS TOWER

Both the basic design and construction of the Kurrholmen tower, which is built on the bedrock of the islet, is simpler than that of Godnatt. There is a circular shaft to allow light into the building in the centre of the tower, and an extension housing a stairwell faces towards the northwest. There were also plans to provide Kurrholmen with distilling equipment for the desalination of seawater. This would probably have been placed at the bottom of the light shaft and as with Godnatt a hole connected by a conduit to the sea had been blasted out of the bedrock. It has been mentioned earlier that the engineers had departed from the initial design, and the tower was built with one floor less than originally envisaged. Presumably it was the first floor that was rejected, but the combined roof and upper floor were completed according to plan. However, one floor less meant also one battery less, and the consequent reduction in the firepower of the tower from 20 to 10 guns. The ground floor was used as a storehouse, and the kitchen was probably also situated here. On the northeast part of each floor there was a magazine. This was the most protected part of the building, and the walls were constructed with ventilation channels, which ensured a constant flow of air and reduced dampness. The latrines are situated on the ground floor of the stairwell, and are drained by way of a conduit leading out into the sea. During the 19th century the tower was used for the storage of various military supplies and equipment. The wooden roofs on both the towers, which had been removed during times of war, were again put in place in 1996.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Karlskrona Tourist Office, Stortorget 2, 371 34 Karlskrona. Phone +46 455-30 34 90. Fax +46 455-30 34 94.  
E-mail [turistbyran@karlskrona.se](mailto:turistbyran@karlskrona.se). [www.karlskrona.se/tourism](http://www.karlskrona.se/tourism)