



# The Old Navy Yard



## The HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Following the Peace of Roskilde in 1658, it was resolved that the main base for the Swedish Navy should be relocated from Stockholm to the south coast of the country. The principal reasons for this decision were that in winter ice prevented the Fleet from leaving its Stockholm base, and spring was well advanced before the warships were able to put to sea. Furthermore, the new base would be nearer to the Swedish provinces on the other side of the Baltic and it was considered important that the population of the former Danish provinces in the south should be assimilated into Sweden as quickly as possible. In 1679 Johan Gyllenstierna, King Karl XI's counsellor extraordinary, travelled to Blekinge in order to conduct a further study as to the feasibility of this project, and he was advised that the island of Trossö and the surrounding islands might provide a suitable location for the naval base. Gyllenstierna concurred, and reported his findings to the King, after which responsibility for the matter was entrusted to General Admiral Hans Wachtmeister. However, these plans soon ran into an obstacle in the person of Trossö's owner, the farmer Wittus Andersson who most definitely was not prepared to sell his island. This impediment was resolved when the authorities indicted Andersson for piracy after which he spent the following twelve months incarcerated

in the Karlshamn fortress. After his release, he was granted the sum of 1,000 dalers as compensatory payment for his land, but nonetheless trice cursed the town, which was now beginning to spread over the island. It would, he swore, burn to the ground, be ravaged by pestilence, and finally sink to the bottom of the sea. Karlskrona grew rapidly, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the third largest town in Sweden.



## THE PLANS AND SHIPS MODELS BUILDING

In 1752, King Adolf Fredrik decreed that the Admiralty in Karlskrona should establish a room in which "all the appropriated models attendant to the vessels, galleys and several machines together with plans and drawings thereof" should be deposited. The oldest inventory of the Models Hall is from 1761, and bears witness that the Royal Command had been obeyed. In the years 1783-85 the Navy Yard saw the construction of the building where the naval architect F.H. of Chapman was to keep the models of his ships, a large number of which he had brought to Karlskrona from Stockholm. These models were generally considered the private property of their builder, and it was not before 1801 that one of the models made by the naval architect Sheldon was actually purchased for the collection. The building is almost 80 metres in length and 10 metres wide. It is two storeys high, the east part excepted on which there is an additional third floor. The walls are half-timbered, filled with brick and then coarse plastered. The extension on the south side resembles the facade of a Greek temple supported by Doric columns and the decorative elements are the work of F.H. of Chapman, who was probably influenced by C.A. Ehrensvärd's neo-classical ideals. The Plans Hall is on the ground floor and it was here that the recruits for the Navy's warships were enrolled. Prisoners could also attend divine services here as their presence in church was considered to be far too disquieting for the ordinary members of the congregation. The Collection was kept in the Models Hall for almost 150 years before being transferred to the

Artillery Court where it remained until 1954 when it was moved to the former Boy Seamen's barracks. Since 1997 the collection has been in the care of the new Naval Museum on Stumholmen, while the Plans and Ships' Models building is now used to house the Administrative Department of the Naval Command's Southern Region.

## THE SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

This rather plain wooden building was erected in about 1760, but it is probable that the neo-classical frontage on the east wing was a later addition. The masque crowning the workshop was made by the Sculptor to the Admiralty Johan Törnström, and is presumably meant to represent the classical Greek goddess of drama. In the beginning, the workshop had been built with a steep saddle-back roof, but this was later lowered so as harmonise with the classical front of the building for, as C.A. Ehrensvärd remarked, "a low roof was most pleasing to the eye". Johan Törnström began to work at the Navy yard at about the same time as af Chapman, and he produced a large number of inspired sculptures, ships' figureheads, decorative elements and paintings for the Navy, the Church and civilian buyers.

## THE ROPE-WALK

The Rope-Walk from 1692-93 is both the oldest building in the Navy Yard and the longest building made of wood in Sweden. The original plans called for the building to be wholly of stone but owing to lack of money, stone was only used in the construction of the heads of the Rope-Walk. The finished long Rope-Walk building is constructed of heavy timbers, with exterior walls of wood panelling. Until 1960, all the mooring ropes and cordage needed to equip the Navy's warships were made here and in the years immediately before 1960, the Rope-Yard also sold to the civilian market. The Rope-walk is once again full of life and the art of rope-making is shown to the public.

## THE WASA SHED

The Shed was constructed in 1756-63 on top of what had previously been a slipway, and was named after the 60-gun ship of the line "Wasa" which had been built there in 1778. Originally there were no walls between the load-bearing pillars and the roof which was to shelter the ships on the slipway from the elements. This particular Shed with its protective construction is probably the oldest building of its kind in Scandinavia, and a considerable number of warships were built here. Nowadays it is only used to house smaller vessels.

## THE LINDHOLM AND POLHEMS DOCKS

After several hundred years Lindholmen, the first dry dock to be built in Karlskrona, is still in use. In southern Europe the ebb and flow of the tides were used to fill and empty their dry docks while in Sweden when repairs and maintenance were necessary, the ships had to be keelhaled. It became clear that it was necessary to construct a dry dock in Sweden. The inventor and engineer Christoffer Polhem (1661-1751) was engaged for this project. In 1716 blasting work commenced and eight years later, in 1724, the first vessel could be taken into the dock. The ship was first floated into the dock after which the dock had to be emptied. As pumps were not employed, it took a workforce of 270 men labouring in three shifts and using to more than leather sacks, 3 days to empty the dock. This was considered by many to be an unnecessary waste of manpower which finally resulted in the construction of a building to house a steam-powered pump. Modern pumping equipment is now used, and ships can be seen in the dock.

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