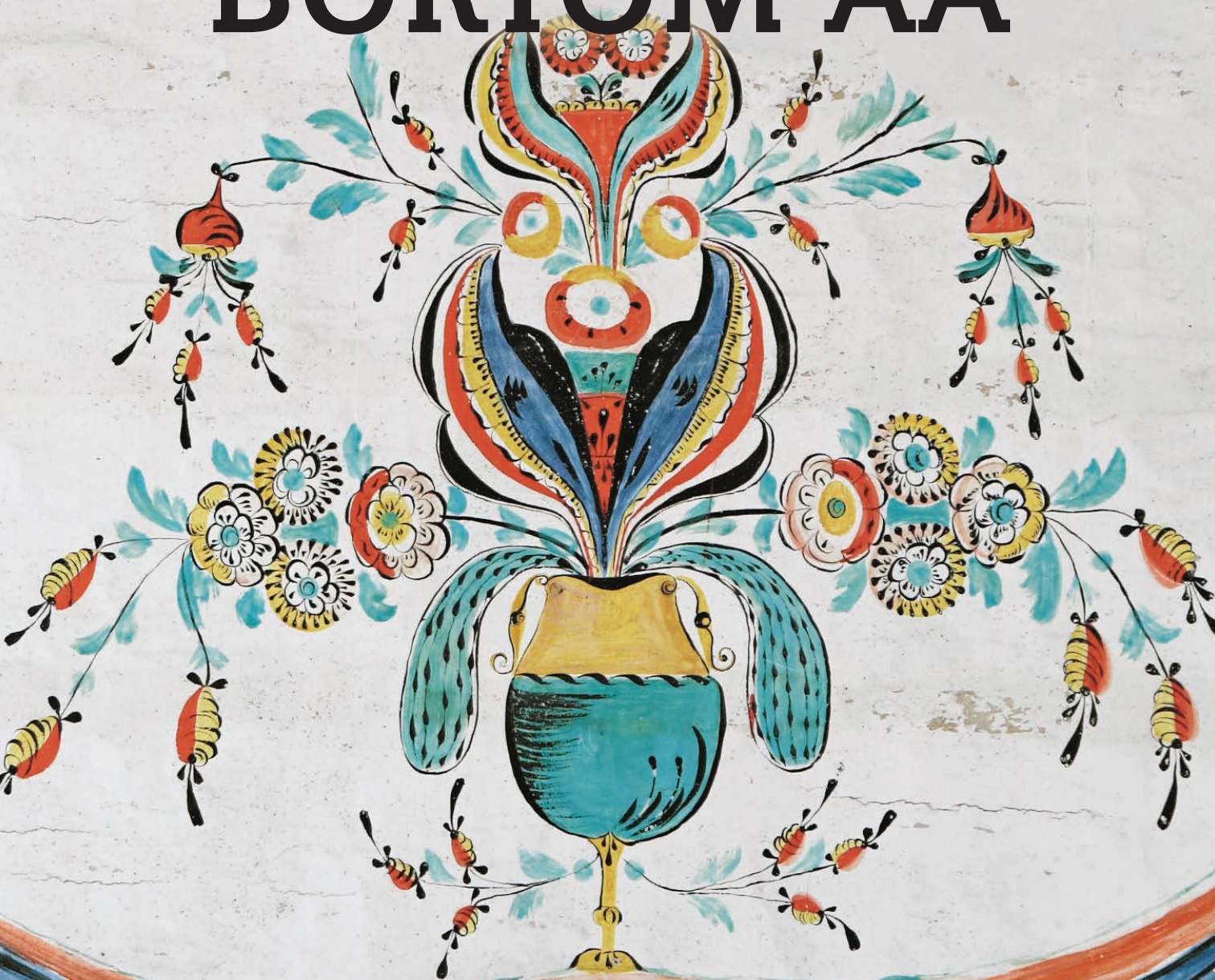


*Decorated Farmhouses  
of Hälsingland World Heritage*

# BORTOM ÅA





»» *Its history is unusually well documented, and shows that through the centuries its owning family has been among the most affluent.*



**Copyright:** Gävleborg County Administrative Board  
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**Photography:** Jakob Dahlström, Hälsingbilder, Hälsinglands museum  
**Translation:** Semantix Språkcentrum





**BORTOM ÅA**, part of the Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland World Heritage, has a secluded location in Fågelsjö, a forest village in the borderlands between Dalarna and Hälsingland. The farm, one of the oldest in the village, was built when the Finns colonised the area in the 1600s. It is separated from the other houses in the village by a river, inspiring its name Bortom Åa, meaning beyond the river. It is also called Fågelsjö gammelgård. Its history is unusually well documented, thanks in particular to the farmer Jonas Olsson, who documented most of what happened on the farm during the 1800s.

Over the centuries, the owning family has been among the most affluent, due mainly to their many trips trading goods such as the firearms they had made in the farm's gunsmithy. A new dwelling house was built in 1910, after which the old one was left untouched, making it one of the best-preserved farmhouses from the 1800s in Sweden. The last owner Kristina, known as an eccentric who hoarded everything, bequeathed Bortom Åa to the municipality, and today tours are available throughout the year.







# FARMHOUSE PRESERVED INTACT

**THE OLDER** residential dwelling of Bortom Åa is an elongated and spacious two-storey double house. The entire house is preserved complete with its interior effects in the form of furniture and household items. Bortom Åa thus represents an intact farmhouse from the 1800s, with status objects as well as the simpler items for day-to-day use preserved.

## ROOM FOR DAY-TO-DAY LIVING IS UNIQUE

On the walls of the room for day-to-day living, the "dagligstuga", shelves and racks for plates and spoons remain in their original places by the table. Next to them also hangs a set of guns made in the farm's gunsmithy. Guns were made at Bortom Åa not only for the farm's own use, but also to sell. The traces of wear show clearly how much one of the best-preserved rooms for daily use in a Swedish farm environment from the 1800s has been used.

»» *The house's oldest and, originally, only festivities room is on the ground floor. Its walls have been decorated with a floral motif on a grey-blue ground, and landscapes and figures have been painted above the doors.*



## GROUND-FLOOR FESTIVITIES ROOM PAINTED IN 1825 BY AN UNKNOWN PAINTER FROM DALARNA

The house's oldest and, originally, only festivities room is on the ground floor. Its walls have been decorated with a floral motif on a grey-blue ground, and landscapes and figures have been

painted above the doors. There is also a large picture of Sweden's then Crown Prince, Karl Johan, in a covered wagon flanked by soldiers in uniform. The wall painting is like none other in Dalarna or Hälsingland, perhaps because its creator probably normally painted furniture.

## THE HISTORY OF THE FARMHOUSES OF HÄLSINGLAND

### MANY ROOMS FOR FESTIVITIES

A Hälsingland farmhouse could have up to fifteen decorated rooms, but only a couple of them were in day-to-day use. The others were used only for really important occasions, such as weddings. These festivities rooms are often richly decorated, and the painting technique indicates the room's use and status.



### LINEN, THE FOREST AND TRADE

The farmers' healthy finances were based on agriculture and animal husbandry. Many Hälsingland farmers were also able to supplement their income with activities such as linen production, trade and the sale of forest land and timber rights.







### FIRST-FLOOR FESTIVITIES ROOM PAINTED BY BÄCK ANDERS HANSSON

The first-floor festivities room, the "herrstuga", was decorated in 1856 by the painter Bäck Anders Hansson from Dalarna. The walls here are divided into simple framed panels, with the typical stylised floral designs of Dalarna in orange-red, yellow and green

on a white ground. The woodwork is a contrasting intense blue.

### SOME SMALLER CHAMBERS

On the first floor, the other large room was divided into three smaller chambers and furnished in 1863. Replacing a large room in this way, with several small guest bedrooms, represented an innovation among the farmers in the region

at the time. Prior to that, guests usually slept communally in the spacious guest rooms. At Bortom Åa, they could now sleep separately in small rooms with more privacy. These rooms were often used by important guests such as inspectors from the forestry company and clergymen. The walls were decorated with printed wallpaper sent to the village from a general store in Voxnadalen.







## MANY BUILDINGS FOR DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS

The grassed farmyard was completely enclosed until the early 1800s, but the layout subsequently became more dispersed as buildings were moved. Today, thirteen buildings remain, two of which are dwelling houses. However, they have never been occupied simultaneously.

Today, many of the buildings still have shingle roofs. This was an innovation introduced for the first time in this area in 1855, during Jonas Olsson's time. In 1910, the newer dwelling house on the south side of the farmyard was built in the detached house style considered modern at the time.

## COWSHED COMPLEX, TWO-STOREY STOREHOUSE, BAKEHOUSE AND SMITHY

There is still a fully equipped gunsmithy to the east. Built in 1785, it has played an important role in the finances and history of Bortom Åa. In the west of the farmyard there is a large cowshed complex, built around 1900. It contains a cowshed, stables and housing for small animals. The farm also has a building range comprising storage sheds, a two-storey storehouse and three threshing barns of different sizes and ages, the oldest of which was built in 1741.

Slightly away from the dwelling house is the "härbre", a raised log storehouse for the farm's food. Built in the mid 1820s, it has a very special locking arrangement. This covers the entire inside of the door, and requires multiple keys and ten different operations to open. Jonas Olsson made it himself in 1860.









## DECORATIVE DOUBLE ENTRANCE DOOR LEADS INTO THE HOUSE

The wide front door is perhaps the most noticeable feature on the exterior of the house. The double entrance door has painted decorations in several colours, and is adorned with a carved rising sun motif. The door was painted at the time of a wedding in 1821, and records the names of the couple and the date of their marriage. The entrance is emphasised by a porch typical of the late 1800s.

## THE FORESTRY FINNS' FÅGELSJÖ

Bortom Åa (1690) is the oldest farm in the village of Fågelsjö, itself the result of colonisation by the Forest Finns in the 1600s. During the 1600s, many Finnish slash-and-burn farmers migrated from the eastern province of Savonia to areas such as the forests of central Sweden. This was to escape the Swedish-Russian conflicts that often played out on Finnish soil, and to benefit from the tax incentives offered for breaking new ground here in a still relatively undeveloped part of Sweden. Fågelsjö's first inhabitant was Sigfrid Markusson (c. 1635-1705), a third-gen-

»» *As the prosperity of successive owners grew during the late 1700s and the 1800s, so did the farm. The income came from more than just agriculture, because only a small area was under cultivation.*

eration Finnish immigrant. One of his sons, Olof Sigfridsson (c. 1659-1744), was the first farmer at Bortom Åa.

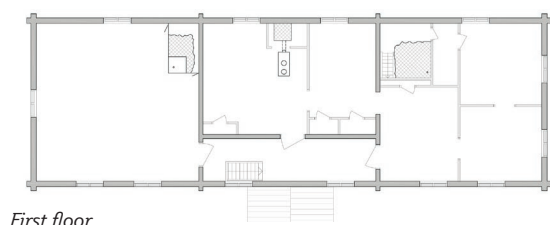
## UNUSUALLY WELL DOCUMENTED HISTORY

The entire history of the farm is unusually well documented in a wealth of letters, diaries and other documents preserved in the farm's archives. As the prosperity of successive owners

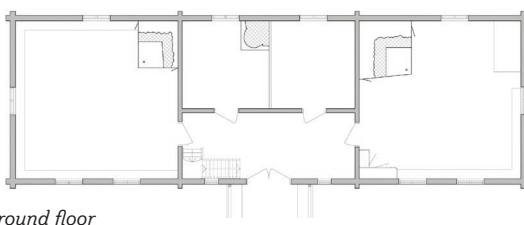
grew during the late 1700s and the 1800s, so did the farm. The income came from more than just agriculture, because only a small area was under cultivation. The forest, trading, and selling butter, poultry and hides augmented the profits from gun production. The owners soon distinguished themselves with their reading, writing and business skills, and the family had many contacts outside the village.



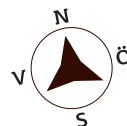
## PLAN OF BORTOM ÅA, THE OLDEST DWELLING HOUSE



First floor



Ground floor







## JONAS OLSSON DOCUMENTED MINUTELY

There was a change of generation on the farm in 1853, when the young farmer Jonas Olsson took over from his father. His betrothed Sigrd Andersdotter moved in a few years later, after which the house's interiors were extensively renovated. A great deal is known about Jonas because he kept a diary for a large part of his life, wrote many letters and recorded events on the farm in in-

scriptions in the buildings. For example, thanks to him we know exactly when the big hay barn "toppled off its posts". Jonas Olsson was not only a very enterprising farmer, but also an assured wood-carver, a skilled smith, a juryman in Västra Hälsingland's rural court district and a travelling salesman, with an obvious aptitude for expressing himself in writing. Jonas and Sigrd had five daughters, but only the youngest, Kristina, survived to adulthood.







## KRISTINA AND MÅRTEN – AN ECCENTRIC COUPLE

Kristina married Mårten Persson, who later also moved to the farm, though the farm remained Kristina's personal property. They lived on in the old farmhouse for twenty years, then in 1910 built the new, much more modern dwelling house called "the American house". When the couple moved in there, they abandoned the old farmhouse as it stood. It is evident from interviews with older villagers that the Perssons became increasingly eccentric with the years. It is said that Kristina moved out into the cowshed, while Mårten lived on inside the farmhouse on a camp bed in the office. Both Mårten and Kristina were known for a fondness for the "good old days", despite dreaming of a more modern lifestyle. Kristina is also known for hoarding everything, sometimes to



*The blue wallpaper would probably give the room a particularly high status, because according to a letter it was much more expensive than the others. A roll cost as much as an adult sheep.*

absurdity, perhaps due to a strong respect for her father and his times. Kristina had no heirs, and bequeathed the estate to the municipality as cultural heritage on her death in 1943.

## FÅGELSJÖ LOCAL HERITAGE SOCIETY MANAGES CULTURAL HERITAGE TODAY

The farm is now owned by Ljusdal Municipality. It is managed by Fågelsjö local heritage society as a study centre and tour destination. It is the only one of the seven World Heritage Decorated Farmhouses that is not privately owned. It has a shop, cafe, bakery and overnight accommodation all year round.

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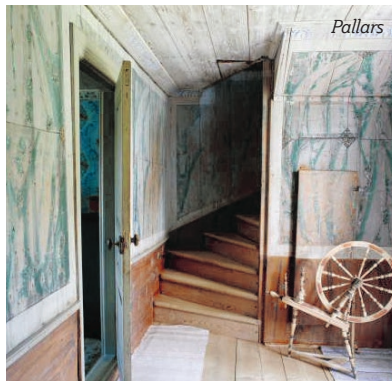
## A LITTLE ABOUT WORLD HERITAGE SITES

A World Heritage site is an environment considered globally unique and therefore important to all of humanity. The criteria that must be met to warrant designation as a World Heritage Site are governed by a 1972 convention adopted by the UN agency UNESCO. Once something is entered on the World Heritage List, the country where it is located is obliged to ensure that it is preserved for posterity.

## THE DECORATED FARMHOUSES OF HÄLSINGLAND ARE ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

There are over 1 000 sites on the World Heritage List, with about thirty being added each year. Italy accounts for most, while Sweden has fifteen. Since summer 2012, seven farmhouses in Hälsingland have become a World Heritage site, Bortom Åa being one of them.

The Hälsingland farmhouses were inscribed on the World Heritage List under the name “Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland”. The focus is on what is truly unique about the farmhouses, the vernacular architecture and the interiors. It is unusual for ordinary farmers to have built such large houses with so many large rooms exclusively for festivities. There are also more decorated domestic interiors preserved in Hälsingland than anywhere else in the world. Most of these farmhouses were built in the 1800s when construction reached its peak.



Jonas Olsson, owner of Bortom Åa 1853–95

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THE SEVEN WORLD HERITAGE  
DECORATED FARMHOUSES

- Gästgivars** in Vallsta, Arbrå
- Kristofers** in Stene, Järvsö
- Jon-Lars** in Långhed, Alfta
- Bortom Åa** in Fågelsjö, Loos
- Bommars** in Letsbo, Ljusdal
- Erik-Anders** in Asta, Söderala
- Pallars** in Långhed, Alfta



TOURS, VISITOR CENTER AND OPENING HOURS

The farm is now owned by Ljusdal Municipality. It is managed by Fågelsjö local heritage society as a study centre and tour destination. It has a shop, cafe, bakery and overnight accommodation all year round. Please contact Bortom Åa ([www.fagelsjo.nu](http://www.fagelsjo.nu)) (in Swedish) or The Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland World Heritage Visitor Center in Ljusdal Municipality ([www.stenegard.se](http://www.stenegard.se)) for more information on opening times, etc.

GET TO KNOW YOUR HERITAGE – BUT NOT WITH YOUR HANDS!

It is important to remember that our common heritage must continue to be protected. Do not smoke in the area, and do not touch the painted surfaces, wood and fabrics.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

The farm's website:

**[www.fagelsjo.nu](http://www.fagelsjo.nu)** (in Swedish)

**[www.varldsarvethalsingegardar.se](http://www.varldsarvethalsingegardar.se)**

Gävleborg County Administrative Board

**[www.lansstyrelsen.se/gavleborg](http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/gavleborg)**

*We reserve the right to make changes.*

## VISITOR CENTER

Stene Gård, Järvsö

[www.stenegard.com](http://www.stenegard.com)

Gästgivars, Vallsta

[www.varldsarvetgastgivars.se](http://www.varldsarvetgastgivars.se)

Hälsingegård Ol Anders, Alfta

[www.ol-anders.se](http://www.ol-anders.se)

Erik-Anders, Asta

[www.erik-anders.se](http://www.erik-anders.se)

Please respect the private nature of the site,  
and do not visit when it is not open.

