

Kinnakyrkja The Kinn church

The year 1024 is a pivotal year for Kinn as a sanctuary
and for the church there.



This might be the oldest Christian place of worship in Norway that has been in continuous use ever since the early Viking times and till today. Both Christian Celtic slaves and holy monks might have lived here, and that is probably the reason why Kinn is mentioned in the first Norwegian Church Law passed by the Moster synod in 1024, and later in the old provincial laws of the country. The new Church Law regulated Christian behavior and practice, for instance the holy days to be celebrated. Among these days was the *Seljumannamesse* observed on 8 July in celebration of “the Holy Men that sleep in caves on the islands of Kinn and Selja”. Old legends from Middle Ages also mention “holy men” associated with these islands, and later they also refer to The Holy Sunniva who escaped from a heathen Viking in Ireland and was shipwrecked on Selja where she died. A monastery was built there, and Norway’s first bishops resided there from 1068 till 1170 when the bishop moved to Bergen bringing the shrine of St. Sunniva with him. The monastery was abandoned in the 15th century.

Kinn

had no registered church building in the 11th century, but monks there surely would have had a place for worship. The fragment of the Celtic cross in the altar-recess in the nave might originate from a chapel of these monks. 100 years later the chancel and the eastern part of the nave was built with rather coarse stones, and about 50 years later the nave was completed with excellent sandstones from an area north-east of Kinn. This sandstone is hard, but also easy to work with because it splits into building material with a smooth and beautiful surface. The joints from this period are of very good quality, made from warm mortar with calk and shell-sand from the island. Warm mortar has not been used on any other stone constructions in Norway, but is used in many Scottish castles. This shows that craftsmen from Britain who helped build the cathedral of Trondheim also worked on the church of Kinn.

Several restorations

and repairs have altered the church over the last 800 years. In the early 1900s the nave had a wooden ceiling as high as the stone walls with a loft above, and the choir had an arched ceiling. The gallery, the pulpitum or lektorium, on the eastern wall of the nave had been removed, but fortunately the beautifully carved front had been placed directly on this wall and thus saved. The pulpit was very close to the eastern wall. In 1866 the windows were enlarged and a gallery constructed on the west wall of the nave to provide more seats in the church that had become too small for the growing population. On both walls in the nave two large stoves were installed with iron pipes up to a chimney from the loft. The two church-bells hung from the ridge of the roof in the loft. In 1911 and 12 the church was restored and given a Romanesque style believed to be authentic, with original windows. The stoves and the gallery on the west wall were removed as were the ceilings both in the nave and in the choir. The ridge of the roof had been lowered, and now the angle of the roof was corrected. The architect Carl Berner found enough remains of the original rafter-system to reconstruct the ceiling you see today. The choir that originally had had another ceiling, was now given a copy of the one in the nave. The floors of the church were so damaged that they had to be reconstructed, and all the graves underneath it were removed and laid in a common grave on the north side of the church. The architect designed new pews and the three chandeliers of wrought iron.

The pulpitum or lektorium-gallery

is a true treasure and the only one of its kind left in churches in Scandinavia. Such galleries, often called *rood-lofts* if they had a crucifix, were normally found in large churches and cathedrals and crafting one at Kinn shows the great importance of this church. The gallery separated the priest, who was the only person allowed to enter the choir, from the laity in the nave. In Catholic times, there were no pulpits in the naves, and the gallery was used for sermons (as the congregation could more easily hear the priest from there than from inside the choir), for reading the Gospel, and performing music. On both sides under this gallery there were chapels with altars in the recesses where people could pray. The gallery is from about 1250, and all parts in black colour are original. The white parts are copies by Erik Fridstrøm from 1974. The reliefs are carved in Bergen according to drawings by Matthew Paris, an English monk from St Albans. The craftsmanship is exquisite and bear resemblance to carvings found in stave-churches. The reliefs represent Christ in Majesty with his twelve apostles enthroned. To the right a triumphant angel invites the redeemed to follow him to Paradise. The others are deemed to follow the strangely distorted angle to a place of horror. We see Judas to the very left without halo, Christ in the middle and Peter with a key and Paul with a sword on both sides. Fortunately there were enough remains and drawings to reconstruct the pulpitum in 1912.



In the nave

we see a man-of-war dating from 1704, a symbol of the dangerous voyage to Paradise with Christ as captain, and also of the fact that people have to fight to get there. The pulpit dates from the same time, but the paintings of the evangelists are from 1912. The pulpit canopy's purpose is to amplify the voice of the vicar. It has carved figures in the baroque style showing the tools used for the crucifixion of Jesus, and the dove symbolizes that the vicar is blessed by The Holy Ghost and thus inspired to deliver good sermons. On the south wall hangs an epitaph of Absalon Absalonsen, who died here in 1639 while residing with his daughter who was married to the vicar of Kinn. Absalonsen's father was a renowned vicar and author, and his mother a wise and courageous woman, burnt as a witch in Bergen in 1590. The frame is decorated with baroque carvings like the one on the altar-piece.



The choir

has walls of coarse stones. The windows in the north and east walls are original, but the large window in the southern wall was enlarged in 1703, probably to provide more light for the then newly painted altar-piece. The altar of soapstone has a small room for hiding relics and is probably the oldest inventory in the church. A reredos (cupboard) with three wooden female saints, St. Barbara, St. Catharina and Mary Magdalene, carved in Northern Germany in the beginning of the 16th century had their place there until 1703 in spite of the disapproval of saints after the Reformation. In 1644 a beautiful baroque frame or side panels with carved apostles was added to the reredos, and in 1700 the saints were taken out and a painting of the crucifixion replaced them. The three saints were moved to one of the recesses in the nave. Conservation-work on the reredos in 1974 showed that the saints had been on the altar, and a copy of it was made for them, now hanging on the south wall. In local tradition the saints were reinterpreted as the Irish princesses Sunniva, Borni, and Ingebjørg, who drifted across the North Sea and built churches on the Norwegian coast. The church has three old altar-cloths and two brass candelabras from 1700. The brass vessel in the font also dates back to 1700, the wooden font, however, was made in 1912. The cupboard in renaissance style on the north side of the choir-door is from about 1640. The old chair nearby is from the same time, and four copies of it is placed in the opening between the choir and the nave.



The belfry

is the gate to the churchyard and was constructed in 1912 to give room for the bells from 1653 and 1849. The gate is a copy from an old gate from before 1850.

In 2020

a new and extensive restoration costing NOK 17 mill, was completed. The slate roof was removed and rehabilitated with new nails. The hardest work, however, was to remove the cement dating from 1912 in the joints between all stones. Cement is not a good option in such joints because of its poor ability to repel moisture. The cement has been replaced by mortar of chalk.



The small house

by the church is also a treasure and probably more than 150 years old. It was first erected near Florø, then moved to an island north of Kinn and thereafter to the small island of Nærøyane close to Kinn because of the rich fishing grounds for herring found here from 1850 till 1873. On this island there were more than 40 warf-houses for salting herring in winter, but only one family lived there permanently. The family was permitted by the landowner to move the house to its present location in 1896, and the family lived here till 1970 when the parish-council bought it. The house is now renovated and is used as a vestry for vicars and other users of the church. During the last summer seasons volunteers have stayed here as host for pilgrims and other visitors to Kinn. They look after the church, which is open all day, and invite the guests to say prayers every day.



The Kinn Pageant, which has had an audience of more than 100 000 people since its start in 1985, depends on both the church and this little house.

The church on Kinn

was the principal church in Kinn parish till 1882 when the church in Florø was consecrated. It is still in use for all churchly services: baptisms, confirmations, weddings, burials in addition to concerts. In 2008 a vicar was ordained here. Having sermons here on 8 July (Seljumannamesse), 29 July (Olsok) and the Sunday on which the pageant is performed is an old tradition. Running an open church and renovation of the sanitary-house is expensive. Donations are very welcome and can be put in the collection-box in the church or by "Vipps" to 115101.



Thank you for your visit.