

# SWEDEN

## Church Village of Gammelstad, Luleå

### Brief description

Gammelstad, at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, is the best-preserved example of a 'church village', a unique kind of village formerly found throughout northern Scandinavia. The 424 wooden houses, huddled round the early 15th-century stone church, were used only on Sundays and at religious festivals to house worshippers from the surrounding countryside who could not return home the same day because of the distance and difficult travelling conditions.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription** 1996

#### Agency responsible for site management

- The Church Village management committee  
Kulturförvaltningen  
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### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C (ii), (iv), (v)

#### Justification provided by the State Party

Luleå Gammelstad is of international importance as the foremost representative of Scandinavia's church towns, a type of town-like milieu that has been shaped by people's religious and social needs and that is only intended for use during weekends and church festivals.

The church town of Gammelstad represents a type of Nordic settlement that has nearly disappeared. It has been shaped more by human needs than by economic and geographical forces and combines urban and rural life in a remarkable way. In Gammelstad the custom of remaining by the church for the entire weekend has created a way of life and style of building whose main features have been preserved unchanged for 400 years.

Church cottages have on occasion been built near parish churches in Norway, Finland and Sweden. About ten church towns have existed in Finland, but only a few cottages remain today

Sweden has had 71 church towns and Lapp towns (church towns for the Sàmi population); 20 have been preserved relatively unchanged. [...]

While attempting to choose a church town for nomination to the World Heritage List, the four largest towns - Öjebyn, Löfvågner, Skellefteå and Gammelstad - were the main candidates. They all have several hundred cottages and are in a good state of repair; however in Löfvågner the custom of using the church town has died out and the town has been turned into a hotel for conferences.

In Skellefteå the custom of using the church town is still strong, but its church town burned down in 1828 and was rebuilt on a new site, 500 m from the church. Thus the town's original relationship to the church and the church village has been lost. Because of this, as well as the relative newness of the buildings, Skellefteå has been considered a less attractive candidate than Öjebyn and Gammelstad.

The church town in Öjebyn is grouped around the church, but fires and demolition have reduced the number of permanent dwellings in the church village to a handful, which is not enough to illustrate the complex relations that originally shaped the church town. The entire church town in Öjebyn was burnt down by Russian troops in 1721, and thus it also is younger than Gammelstad, in which only some few houses have burnt down during 300 years. The custom of using the church town is still alive in Gammelstad, where the cottages lay close to the church and where the church town and the church village are still intertwined with one another. In addition Gammelstad has the largest number of church cottages grouped around the largest medieval church.

Gammelstad is the best-preserved example of the church towns presented above and has therefore been chosen to represent this type of settlement.

Because of the way it combines urban and rural features in building and social life, because of its great authenticity, its vital traditions and its broad historical significance with links far beyond its own region and nation, Gammelstad is considered to fulfil UNESCO's criteria iii, iv and v, as set out in paragraph 24 (a), for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

That Gammelstad developed into a church town rather than a merchant town is a direct result of the fact that land uplift made the harbour unusable during the 17th century, thus forcing the commercial centre of the district to move. Its authenticity as the medieval centre of the parish, 17th century town and 400 year-old church town

has therefore been preserved in a remarkable fashion.

During the 11th century the place where Gammelstad is now located was an unimportant island in the mouth of the Lule River. There are few signs of human activity from this period. The flat landscape makes it possible to imagine still that the area is an archipelago.

From the 12th century we find habitation strata as well as signs of wharves and simple buildings.

Further habitation strata can be dated from the 13th century. People then seem to have begun to utilize the strategic site of the interior, at the meeting-place between three waterways - the river from the interior, the coastal route from Stockholm and the coastal route from Finland and Russia. The Popes' decrees regarding new fast-days and the resulting export of fish to Central Europe would make it seem possible that markets were held at Kyrkberget as early as the end of the 13th century.

During the 14th century the area around the Bay of Bothnia was divided into parishes. Luleå became the centre of a parish that included three complete river valleys from the coast to the mountains. The location and appearance of the first church is unknown, but the vicarage - first mentioned in 1374 - can still be found in its original location among the pastures slowly formed out of old sea bed by land uplift.

At the beginning of the 15th century the stone church was built to serve the large original parish, which then had the same area as the Benelux countries of today; however it was divided up as early as the 1470s. The broad navigable channels towards Stockholm and Finland, which are clearly evident on contour maps, are now overgrown sounds bordered by surviving medieval villages.

During the 16th century the market stalls around the church developed into a church town.

During the first half of the 17th century Gammelstad was a town, but land uplift - or as one said then, the lowering of the surface of the sea - made the harbour unusable for merchant ships, and the merchant town had to move in 1649. The old channels were reduced to being waterways used by parishioners to travel to church. However the land uplift was advantageous for agriculture because new meadows were constantly being lifted from out of the sea, and the moving of the town opened up space for new church cottages near the church.

During the 18th century the church town grew rapidly, primarily because of the increase in population.

The 19th century was a time of great change. The parish was sub-divided in 1832 and some church cottages were moved. New ones were built instead, however, and the permanent population in the church village increased at the same time.

The 20th century was initially a period of decline and for a long time both the church village and the church town seemed to be in the backwater of social change.

It was not until the 1960s that things began to change. The church village's old meadows beside the Lule River were built up and the Church Town became a tourist attraction. When keeping the church cottages in a good state of repair became difficult for older cottage owners, the government took over repairs in Gammelstad and seven other church towns. This increased the owners' interest for their cottages and broke the negative trend. Today there is more interest in owning a church cottage in Gammelstad than there has been for decades, prices are rising and the owners of cottages have taken on a growing responsibility for keeping them in repair.

#### **As provided in ICOMOS evaluation**

*Qualities:* The church towns of northern Scandinavia are a unique form of settlement, based on trade and religion. Beginning as trading Settlements, they became the foci for religious observances among the widely scattered farming Communities in this thinly populated region. The church cottages, used only at weekends and during church festivals, testify to the strength of Christian faith in Sweden from the medieval times to the present day. They are to be found juxtaposed against larger, more conventional houses for the officials and merchants who lived permanently in the settlements, both types of building to be found clustering around the church. Gammelstad is an exceptionally well preserved example of this type of settlement, and one where no effort is spared to maintain its character and authenticity.

*Recommendation:* that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii, iv, and v:*

Gammelstad is an outstanding example of the traditional Church town of northern Scandinavia, and admirably illustrates the adaptation of conventional urban design to the special geographical and climatic conditions of a hostile natural environment.

#### **Committee Decision**

Bureau (June 1996): the Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe the nominated property on

the basis of criteria (ii), (iv) and (v) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value as it is a remarkable example of the traditional church town or northern Scandinavia, and admirably illustrates the adaptation of conventional urban design to the special geographical and climatic conditions of a hostile natural environment.

Session (1996): the Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v), considering that the site is of outstanding universal value as it is a remarkable example of the traditional church town of northern Scandinavia, and admirably illustrates the adaptation of conventional urban design to the special geographical and climatic conditions of a hostile natural environment.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site

#### **Boundaries and Buffer Zone**

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: a buffer zone is defined and adequate

#### **Status of Authenticity/Integrity**

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- Increasing migration among citizens and church cottage owners may change awareness and traditions in the future

### **3. Protection**

#### **Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- The Royal Highness command in 1817; answer from the Royal Highness in 1849; permission to acquire a Church Cottage is prepared by the Parish of Nederluleå and decided by the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten; contract Form for Preservation and use of Church Cottages in the Church Village of Gammelstad signed by the church cottage owner and the Parish of Nederluleå; the aesthetic program; Fire-preservation plan; ACT Concerning Ancient Monuments and Finds; the Swedish Statute Book SFS 1988:950; the Planning and Building Act SFS 1987:10.
- The protection arrangements are considered not sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- A new fire-preservation plan
- Timeframe: yearly
- Action to be taken at local level

### **4. Management**

#### **Use of site/property**

- Urban centre, religious use, unpaid visitor attraction

#### **Management/Administrative Body**

- Steering group: in the Church Village management committee all management parties are gathered to discuss central issues and to exchange information in relation to the World Heritage area. Each member takes decisions and other actions in their own organisation
- Formally constituted
- Management by the State Party; management under protective legislation; management under traditional protective measures or customary law
- Site manager on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional; local; private owners of church cottages
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

### **5. Management Plan**

- No management plan
- New management plan completed and adopted: December 2005
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: The municipality of Luleå

### **6. Financial Resources**

#### **Financial situation**

- The municipality of Luleå; the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten; the Parish of Nederluleå
- Extra funding has been drawn from World Heritage status, through EU-funding
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: sufficient

### **7. Staffing Levels**

- Number of staff: 2

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation, management, visitor management
- Average: promotion, interpretation, education

### **8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques**

- Expertise from: the National Heritage Board; the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten; County Museum of Norrbotten; Municipality of Luleå

### **9. Visitor Management**

- Visitor statistics: 100,000 in 2003 – trend: increasing to stable
- Visitor facilities: visitor Centre that includes authorized tourist information and an exhibition including a slide show describing the site; guided tours; gift-shop; WC and RWC; one of the church cottages is open for visitors; medieval church is also open for visitors; information building in connection to the main parking facility; open-air museum; three restaurants, two cafés and two handicraft's shops
- No tourism/visitor management plan

### **10. Scientific Studies**

- Archaeological surveys; a study of the visitors in a World Heritage area
- The results from the scientific studies are concluded in folders, brochures, books and in the guided tours

### **11. Education, Information and Awareness Building**

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem are used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses; local authorities
- No need for awareness raising
- Lectures; study groups; travels advices; permanent historical exhibition; information exhibition slide show; the World Heritage day; Persmäss and other church festivals
- Web site available
- Local participation

### **12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)**

#### **Reactive monitoring reports**

- N/A

### **Conservation interventions**

- No major conservation inventories have been carried out
- Present state of conservation: good

### **Threats and Risks to site**

- Fire; Decreasing traditional use
- Specific issues if mentioned: fire will always be a serious threat, even if we install an alarm system in the future. Development of the traditions is important to maintain the values of the site

### **Actions taken**

- Fire protection plan through cooperation with the rescue service
- Preventing measures and information through awareness building activities amongst the church cottage owners

### **13. Monitoring**

- Formal monitoring programme
- Measures taken/planned: yearly control

### **14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions**

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, economic, management
- Strengths of management: the citizens and the Church Cottage owners are now well aware of the unique values of the Church village of Gammelstad; increasing numbers of visitors from all over the world; improvement of visitors facilities; the public spaces and the buildings in the world heritage area are taken care of in a more thorough way than before; the cooperation between authorities, associations and owners in the area works very well, which is essential for the future preservation and development of Gammelstad
- The management is functional
- Future actions: not provided