



Lihme Kirke.
ca. 1880

The Church of Lihme.

Before the great church building began in the middle of 12th century there were made only a few stone churches built shortly before or around 1100 A.D. One of those is the church in Lihme which is considered to be one of the oldest stone churches in Jutland. A walk round the church shows clearly, that method of building differs from that of later churches. The artisans were not yet skilled in the technique of ashlar. The ashlar differ of size, they are rough-hewed, and the craftsmen have chosen sorts of stones: basalt and quartz, which later artisans would not have chosen. Further it seems that the artisans mistrust the way of just putting ashlar on one another as if they were toy-

bricks relying on that the wall will last. At several places like apse and tower you can see examples of ashlar interacting, same method which is used when the material is wood.

In the walls of the nave, however, where the material is rough field-stones put approximately in courses, you can see the genuine workmanship of the artisans which shows by the way that the method of building is influenced from England. The same influence appears between the windows of the southern side of the nave where small flat stones are placed in herringbone (pattern). It is impressive to look at the northern wall seeing it standing as vertical as when it was raised 900 years ago and the mortar is still the same into which the field-stones were put so long time ago and it still keeps the wall together.

Another English touch at the church is the placement of the portals, far back towards the tower and opposite what is normal, it is the northern portal, which has got the most brilliant workmanship. The (rounding) consists of a heavy hewn round stick and a top? course of (roll-billets), a style element of English Norman origin like also the vicar door on the southern side of the choir.

Of more domestic origin, at least as to the placement, are the two stone figures, which are placed at the eastern end of the choir. It reminds of the houses from the Viking period, where the "hammer band" ended up with a carved dragonhead. On the northern side you see a quiet slumbering lion while the lion on the southern side is a cruel wild beast swallowing a human being. Another human being on the back of the animal is trying to wring up its mouth. The whole figure may be considered as a symbol of the church being the helping power saving man from the Evil One.

The entrance into the church is now through the porch on the southern side. In the late 1600 years the porch was used as a mortuary for the owners of the manor Kaas, who also owned the church. There was only entry through the northern portal, where a smaller porch was built. It must be a later destruction of this porch that has molested the round sticks at the sides of the northern portal too. In the 1780es new entry was made through the western side of the tower. This entrance was used until about 1865 when the coffins in the original porch were removed and buried in the cemetery. A window framed with new ashlar replaced the western door. The church room is longer and more narrow than in the most Danish churches - also an English touch. From the first time the room had the right scales between length, breadth and height as to fulfill the conditions of the architectural desirable "golden Section". During the years there has been a filling of earth in and outside the church, but during restorations it has been demonstrated that the original floor cobblestones lie approximately 80 cm under the present level. That explains several present peculiarities: e.g. the entrance portal is very low, a marked entry of a winding staircase in the tower room is even lower, and on the outside the plinth of the nave is nearly disappeared.

As long as architecture has been studied in Denmark there has been one great question concerning the church of Lihme: was the tower built at the same time as the rest of the church? Most people have meant that the tower was built some decades later especial because of the corbels which are formed like men's heads and therefore pointing to a later time. It has always been visible that the tower-room has been separated from the nave by two arches which met on a column in the middle of the nave. Because of the two small windows one may imagine that there has been a master gallery above the arches which has got its light from the windows.

An internal restoration of the tower room in 1983-84 gave the final answer to the question of the age of the tower. After the old plaster had been taken away, balk holes appeared in the sides of the tower and the nave; they were intended for the carrying crossbeams of a board ceiling. The balks reached to the inner side of the outer wall. Also the construction of anchor-balks lying lengthwise in the middle of the thick walls proved that tower and nave was built at the same time. During the restoration was also found the staircase to the gallery in the south-western corner of the tower which is now marked on the wall just as the places where the cross-beams are led into the walls.

The church was built by and belonged to a local lord and was dedicated to St. Vincentius. Luckily enough we now know a little about the conditions in Lihme in the 12th century thanks to a document from 1176 which has fortunately been preserved. It was Bishop Niels in Viborg, who issued the document. During many years the church belonged directly to the bishop, but from this very year he granted the church to the clergy of the Viborg Cathedral that owned our church until the reformation. The bishop wrote about the church "St Vincentii Church has because of glaring sins fallen into ruins and is an object of derision for anyone passing by!" Possibly a superstructure of the tower has been in a state of decay. If the new owners have started a restoration of the church it may be the explanation of the frieze of men's heads on the tower. It may be created by artisans having been working at the Viborg Cathedral. The present height the tower became in the 15th century with a superstructure and with peculiar decorations on the northern side.

In the above mentioned document the bishop also condemned a man in Lihme for having stolen some property from the church. The man's name is Bo Ketilsen, who had kept back some money from the bishop: a royal house Carl should as penalty pay an amount to Bo Ketilsen, of which the bishop was entitled to a third. Perhaps Bo Ketilsen belonged to the distinguished family, which built the church?

The arches of the chorus have fresco paintings from 1507 or 1512 (the exact dating couldn't be made when the fresco paintings were restored). They have been covered by a younger coat, but as Eigil Rothe from the National Museum inspected the arches in 1920, he soon found out that below the outer gothic paintings showing scenes from Eden and the life after the loss of Paradise, other motives appeared of which he wrote in his report: "Inside the caps the most strange painting is found, unprecedented until today in any Danish church." It concerns a broiled cross, broiling systems and trumpet spirals reminding together with the shapes of letters in the word ANNO" of an ornamentation leading back to Irish-Merovingian art of the 9th century. The only possible explanation seems to be that the painter as source had an illustrated MS from the early Middle Age. Not all the Latin inscriptions are legible. Towards west is seen: "DIVINA PRECEPTA DATA" = the divine predetermination. Towards north: "CRUX MILIT JUSTITIE" = the cross is justice. At casual places are painted two coat of-arms for respectively the third and second last catholic bishops in Viborg.

In the eastern cap above the altar there is a hole for the bell-rope with a wooden tube in which marks of wear can be seen. Round the hole a roughly painted man's head has been painted. The bell-rope was used for the catholic Mass bell. The fresco paintings are recently restored by conservator Olav Hellweg in 1976.

In 1983 during the restoration of the tower-room, St. Peter emerged on the northern side of the tower-arch. Unfortunately he is not complete but the Key of Heaven, and the inscription make sure that it is him. Probably St. Paul has been painted on the southern wall, as these two often are rendered together, but no clue of this was found. The three upper rows of seats were for the master and mistress of the manor Kaas and are dated 1646. At that time Kaas was owned by High Court judge Niels Krag who's ancestral and maternal coats of arms (of the families Krag and Juel) are painted on the southern side. Corresponding his wife's family coats of arms are painted on the northern side: Høg (Banner) and Ulfstand. On the doors are Latin inscriptions: FIDES = faith, SPES = hope, CARITAS = love and JUSTITIA = justice.

The beautiful baptismal font is considered to be from the same time as the church. Round the whole font are relief's with figures, five motives in all, the interpretation of which is doubtful. It may be five different motives, which have nothing with each other to do: Deer hunting in a forest (St. Hubertus or St. Uustachius) Two goats nibbling the tree of life. Fight against a lion. The weapon is a three pronged fork. Dragon-fight the fighting man has a crown on his head (St. George?). Two

men in a house (it may be Adam and his son Seth, since an old legend tells that Adam when he was about to die sent his son to fetch a twig from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden). Thus all five motives may symbolize man's fight against the Evil.

Another interpretation is possible too, however: all motives form together an entire story. It begins in the house where a man is presented with something perhaps a sacred weapon. He then goes into fight using this weapon, then the man is a throughout figure during the whole frieze. But the symbolism found in this, must be the same as mentioned above.

The christening dish made of brass is dated 1593 and given by Enevold Kruse and his wife Else Marsvin, both weapons are engraved in the dish. Kruse owned the manors Aasted in Zealand and Hjermslevgaard in Vendsyssel. He was endowed with the deanery in Viborg in 1585, and that must be the reason why he has given the christening dish to the church.

Altar-piece and pulpit have both coats of arms for Christoffer Bartholin and his wife Mariane Grove. Bartholin was high court judge in Viborg, he owned Kaas and lived there. The pulpit is dated 1709. The altar-piece is older but has later got two coats of arms as wings. It supplied with a painting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the end of the 19th century. The chalice made of silver is nearly 400 years old. It has weapons engraved for Jens Hvas and his wife Ingeborg Kruse. Jens Hvas was an owner of Kaas and died in 1602. On the churchyard you find two tombstones from 18 century. On the right side of the tile-path there is a tombstone for Jens de Hofman, master of Kaas, and his wife, Ingeborg Biering. Near the northern side of the nave is a gravestone for Mogens Wendelboe Brasen who died as a vicar in Lihme in 1743. In the porch hang two tablets with epitaph over judge Wandborg owner of Kaas, and his wife Johanne born de Hofmann. Both died in 1796.