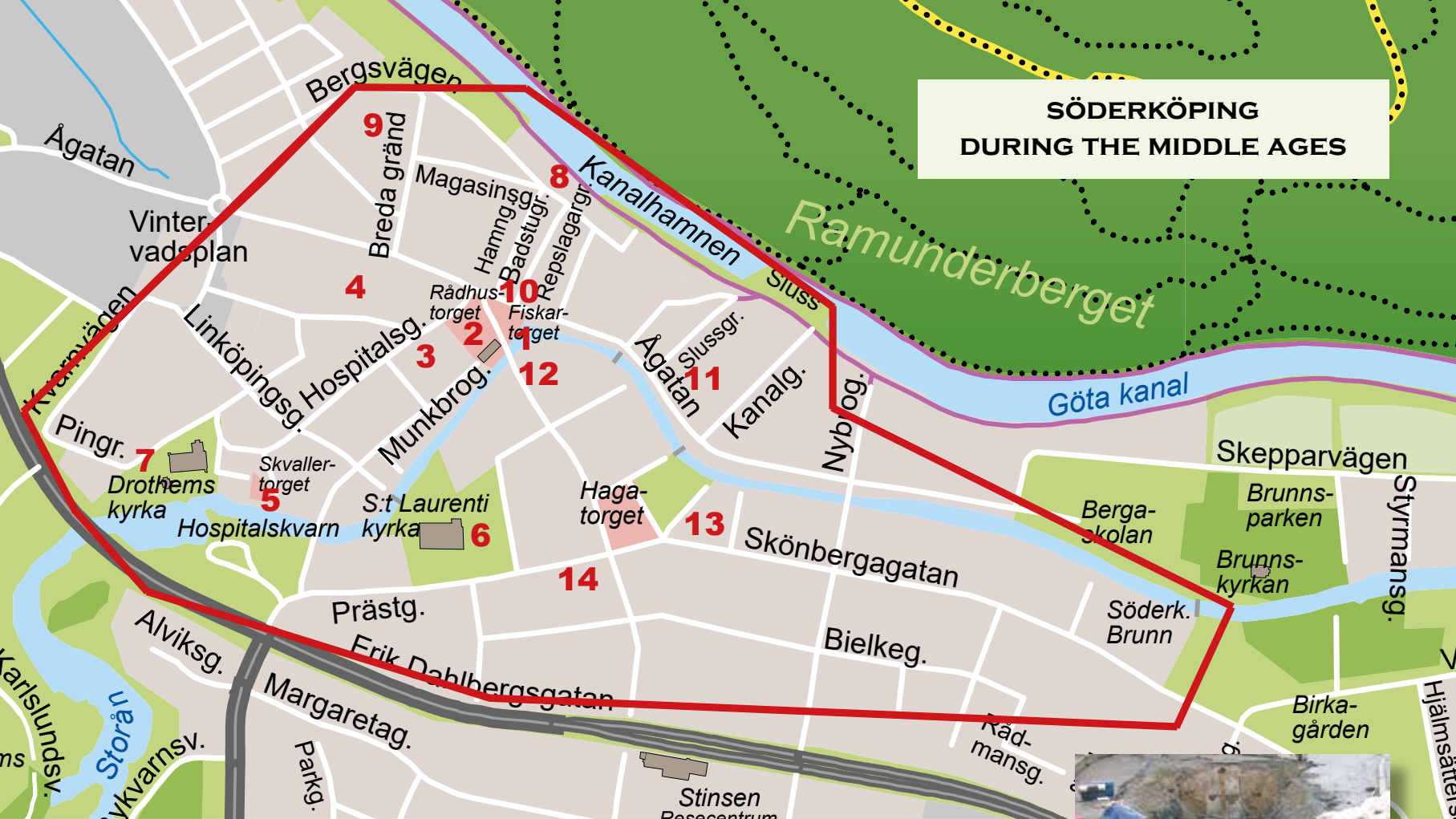


SÖDERKÖPING BENEATH OUR FEET

THE MEDIEVAL TOWN UNDERNEATH THE TOWN



SÖDERKÖPING DURING THE MIDDLE AGES



The medieval Söderköping is literally situated beneath our feet. We walk on top of some 800–900 years' worth of deposits in four metres of cultural layers. They consist of different layers of remains from buildings, waste products and lost things. There is a town beneath the town. Today's streets are mainly the same as those of the Middle Ages, only 2–3 metres higher up.

The solid clay of Söderköping has preserved organic materials such as wood and leather well, which makes the finds in the town unique. The archaeologists can, when excavating in town 800 years later, still smell manure and fresh wood.

The results from hundreds of excavations, put together with the earliest written sources, make the picture of the medieval town more complete. Objects from different layers are compared with each other as well as those from other ex-

cavations. Wood can be dated by the annual rings. Most of the medieval buildings are lost except two churches and a few cellars.

This brochure will help you see and feel the town beneath your feet – see the narrow alleys and the low turf-roofed dwellings of the Middle Ages and imagine the smells and sounds of man and beast!





What Did the Town Look Like?

During the 11th and 12th centuries Söderköping was just a local market place, with buildings in a couple of places by the river. The town itself was constructed from a city plan in ca 1200 and the plan was almost finished by 1250. The rivers separated the town into three parts, each with its own main street and church. The Town Hall square and the harbour were central places. The city plan still remains today with a few changes. There are fewer alleys, the river Storån is much narrower, the small river Lillån now runs in a culvert under Ågatan and Göta Kanal and Hagatorget have been added.

The medieval buildings were built close together. The alleys were 16 metres apart with two yards, each 8 metres wide, between them. The narrow yards held dwellings, market stalls, workshops, stables, sheds and barns, and had kitchen gardens. In the perimeter of the town were fields and meadows. The buildings were mostly loghouses with turfed roofs. Fires were frequent as the fireplaces inside the houses were open and lacked chimneys.

There was a brickyard in town at the end of the 13th century, but only a few of the buildings were made of brick. In comparison the four churches and the town hall must have seemed impressive.



The population was fairly large, perhaps a couple of thousands. Trade and craft were the main occupations. They had animals; a cow, pig, sheep, goats and fowl. The refuse from both man and beast was dumped in the alleys and in the river. The town reeked. The sounds of the town were those of work and animals; the blacksmith's hammer against iron, the seller's cries, the rattle from carriages and the whinnying from horses. When dusk fell work ceased and the town fell silent.





Medieval charter from 1253 where Master Svantepolk Knutsson (married to Benedikta, who inherited Söderköping) announces that he has traded a plot for a mill with the burgher Götulf Ryss of Söderköping. The seals belong to Söderköping and Svantepolk Knutsson.

Left: Seal with the current city arms is from 1430.



Söderköping in the Written Sources

The Middle Ages is the first period of time that has left written documents. Söderköping is mentioned in ca 750 written charters and 450 of these are actually written here.

The first time Söderköping is referred to is in a will from 1250, when the widow of King Erik Eriksson, Queen Katarina, bequeaths Söderköping to her sister Benedikta. She then got the right to the taxes from the town.

Söderköping had its own law, the Law of Söderköping, probably instituted about 1300, known through fragments of copies. It was replaced later by King Magnus Erikssons City Law by the middle of the century. The oldest preserved manuscript of the town's law is "Sutherkopings lagboch" (book of law) from 1387.

Many important political meetings were held in Söderköping such as the coronations in 1281 and 1302, the first parliament in 1359 when Magnus Eriksson's position as king was secured, the election of the Danish queen Margareta as sovereign in 1389 and the synod in 1441, when the decision to found the University of Uppsala was taken.

1. The Harbour

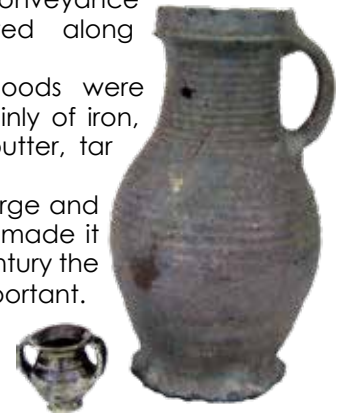
Söderköping's position by the wide river Storån, which runs to the bay Slätbaken, made the town one of the most important harbours in the country. It was, together with the towns Visby and Kalmar, the centre of the Swedish Baltic Sea trade. Therefore there are many medieval finds in Söderköping.

There are no references to the harbour, nor has any remains been found. It was probably situated where the two rivers meet and create a large basin. An inner harbour with a pier and a conveyance street might have been situated along Munkbrogatan.

Salt, cloth, wine and luxury goods were imported. The export consisted mainly of iron, copper, furs and leather goods, butter, tar and even horses.

The river is described in 1567 as large and navigable, but the rise of the land made it less accessible and from the 17th century the harbour gradually ceased to be important.

Top: Boat frame from a smaller vessel.
Wine jug and small ointment jug.





Top: Causeway beneath Hospitalsgatan. Below: Knife sheath and boot in leather, shoelast in wood, bone comb with bone pieces.

2. Rådhusstorget – Trade and Punishment

Rådhusstorget (the Town Hall square) was central to the town during the Middle Ages. Trade was made from the small shops, the town council was held here and bodily punishments were executed, such as the flogging of thieves. The square was somewhat larger than today and by turns cobbled and paved with wood, built in steps down towards the river. There are traces from eight different fires. Great fires occurred in 1281, 1305, 1380, 1393, 1418 and 1567.

The first Town Hall was built in the 13th century of stone with a turfed roof. During the 15th century stepped gables and a tower were added. After the Danes' ravages in 1567 the Town Hall was renovated and added to, but it was demolished 200 years later. Today's Town Hall is built on top of the medieval cellars.

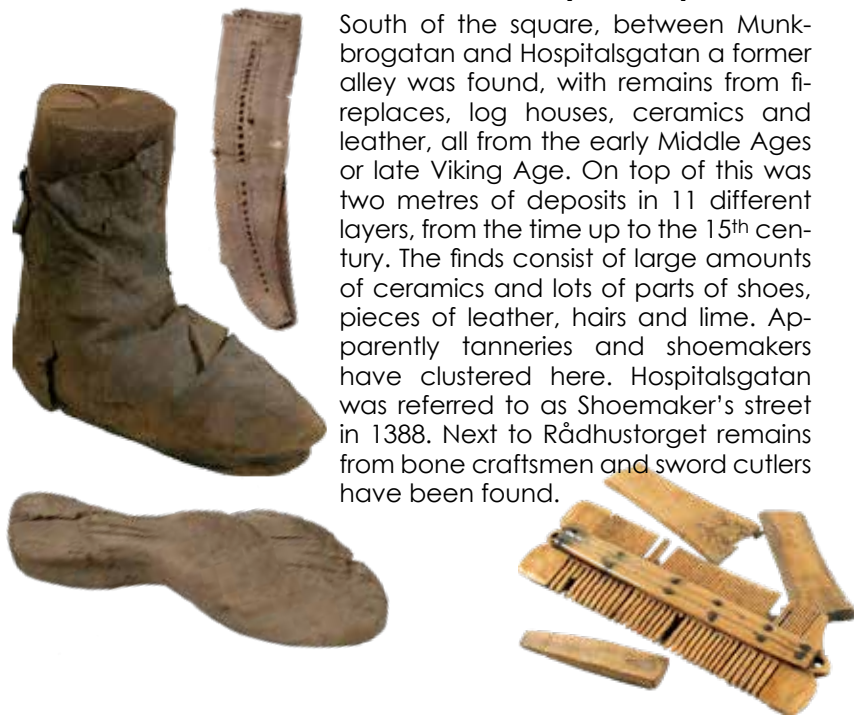
In the Town Hall the government of the town congregated, half of which were Germans and half Swedes. There were a Council Hall, wine and beer cellars and holding cells and in the tower the fire guards kept watch.



Tapping-cock for a beer barrel.

3. Craftsmen by the Square

South of the square, between Munkbrogatan and Hospitalsgatan a former alley was found, with remains from fireplaces, log houses, ceramics and leather, all from the early Middle Ages or late Viking Age. On top of this was two metres of deposits in 11 different layers, from the time up to the 15th century. The finds consist of large amounts of ceramics and lots of parts of shoes, pieces of leather, hairs and lime. Apparently tanneries and shoemakers have clustered here. Hospitalsgatan was referred to as Shoemaker's street in 1388. Next to Rådhusstorget remains from bone craftsmen and sword cutlers have been found.





The Main Street Vintervadsgatan

Vintervadsgatan still has its medieval direction and excavations have shown 17 layers of paving in stone or wood, causeways of tree trunks. When the paving was too deep in refuse a new paving was put on top. Wooden plumbing had been laid under some of the earliest causeways.

4. The Block Gillet – for Man and Beast

A big excavation in this block showed three different medieval layers. Stonepaved alleys ran from Vintervadsgatan down to Lillån and by one of those were two yards from the 16th century. The yard closest to the alley consisted of a building, 15 x 5 metres, with one part as a workshop and the other part as the living area with wooden floors and a fireplace of bricks. The neighbouring yard was barely one metre apart, with a double fronted cottage, stable, sheds and a paved courtyard. In the stable, made for two horses, horseshoe nails and parts of stirrups and bridles have been found.

On **the town farmer's yard** from the 15th century, four buildings were squaring a courtyard with causeways of tree trunks. The buildings towards the street were completely destroyed by fire. Clumps of dross indicates a workshop. In the barn burned grains were found and in the cow shed, where a whole wall remains, a cowbell was found.

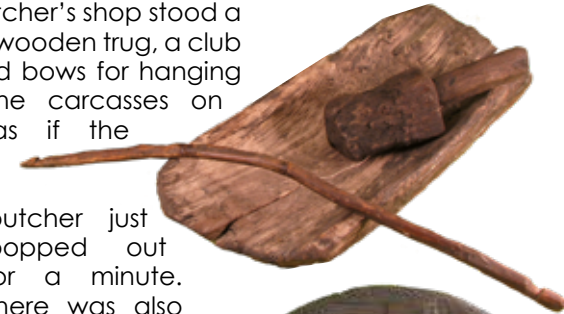
The silversmith's yard from the 13th century was situated in a small plot with five buildings. The workshop was turned towards the street and the dwellings were placed in the middle



of the buildings. The house was typical for its time with two rooms and a gallery on two sides. Among the finds there are a mould for buckles, a measurement for rings, a silver gilded iron spoon and workshop waste.

Closest to Lillån and the square was a building with a **butcher's shop** and dwelling from the 13th century. In the living area the gable of a bench in the Roman style was found, even though the rest of room had burned. In the butcher's shop stood a large wooden trug, a club and bows for hanging the carcasses on as if the

butcher just popped out for a minute. There was also a stool with a Morris game carved into it.



Below: The remaining wall where the cowbell was found.



5. The Greyfriars' Convent

The Greyfriars (Franciscan monks) founded a convent here in 1235, only 12 years after the order was founded. It was the first on the mainland and indicates that Söderköping was a big town, since the Greyfriars were a mendicant order. They were given money and property in return for prayers or a burial place in the abbey. The daughter of King Karl Knutsson, the princess Magdalena, is said to be buried in the abbey.

The area was walled and apart from the abbey, here were houses with dormitories and refectory, sheds of different kinds, gardens and jetties.

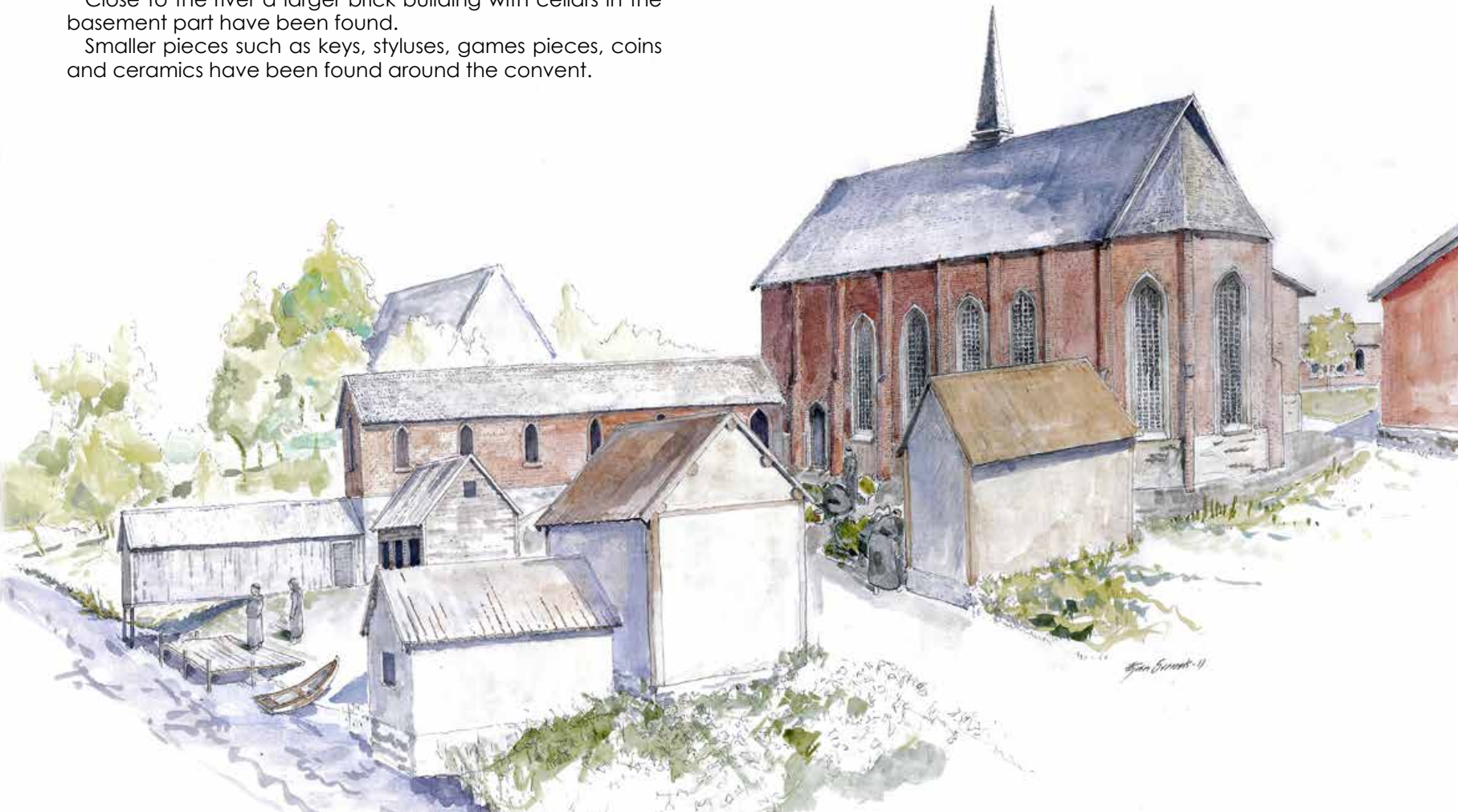
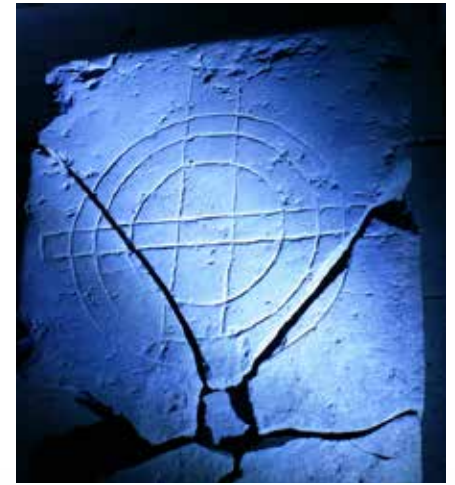
The abbey was 40 metres long, built of bricks and with a pentagonal chancel in Gothic style. The archaeologists have found remains of the abbey's foundations, chancel, walls, window glass and brick flooring. It's not known where the other buildings were situated.

Close to the river a larger brick building with cellars in the basement part have been found.

Smaller pieces such as keys, styluses, games pieces, coins and ceramics have been found around the convent.

The finds in the area also includes cross grave slab covers and pieces from early christian grave monuments. These were graves for men high up in the church hierarchy.

After the Reformation the buildings were demolished. The area was donated to the hospital across the river. The old convent area was used as burial grounds for the poor.



Church and Society

The spiritual life was very important. The Catholic church had a large part in peoples' lives and ruled all, regardless of class. The Church and the monasteries administered several social services.

The hospital St George in Söderköping is referred to in 1277, but existed before that. It was situated to the west, just outside town, since the lepers had to be isolated for life. The hospitals during the Middle Ages looked like a church hall with lots of beds. Excavations of the hospital has showed remains of two rooms with lime stone flooring and murals on the plaster.

Helgeandshuset (house of the Holy Ghost) is known from 1330 and was an almshouse for the orphans and old people. After the Reformation King Gustav Vasa ordered the merging of hospital and almshouse at the site of the almshouse, across the river from the closed convent. The hospital took care of all persons unable to care for themselves and was the largest household in town. It was closed in 1787.

A third charity institution, **Själagården**, existed during the 15th century by the church of St. Laurentius.

The church also managed several **public baths** by the river. You went there to clean yourself and to be treated with leeches and blood letting. The public baths remained well into the 18th century, despite being considered immoral.

The kings donated large properties to the monasteries and almshouses. **The royal demesne Bosgård** was situated close to the Helgeandshus by the south side of the river but there are few facts known about it. It still existed in the 16th century when King Gustav Vasa owned it.



*The altarpiece from the hospital.
Top: Pilaster from the first hospital*



6. The Church of St Laurentius - the Town Parish

The town parish church of St Laurentius is first referred to in 1253. The brick church from the late 13th century was originally built as a three-naved basilica and was rebuilt into a hall church at the end of the 15th century. A fourth nave was added in 1583 – today's appearance. The church has medieval artefacts such as triptych, crucifix, triumphal crucifix and interesting grave covers. Remains of murals exist both inside and outside of the church. The bell tower was built in 1583.

In 1281 King Magnus Ladulås' wife, Helvig, was crowned in Söderköping, the first coronation of a queen in Sweden. In 1302 their son Birger Magnusson and his wife Märta were crowned in town. The coronation was either held in the town church or in the abbey.



*The coronation of
St Olof, triptych
from St Laurentii
church, ca 1500.*



7. The Church of Drothem – the County Parish

Today's church was built ca 1300 as a three-naved hall church of stone. The vaults were made during the 14th or 15th century. The church was preceded by an older stone church, and before that there was probably a church of wood.

During excavations in the church graves from the 11th century have been found, among them a young girl's grave, where a 4 cm tall pendant crucifix in gilded silver was found. This church also has medieval artefacts, such as a triptych and the altarpiece from the hospital.

8. The Church of St Ilian (St Giles)

The Church of St Ilian in the "Merchants Quarter" is referred to in 1307 for the first time, but it is not known when it was built. In 1528 St Ilian's and St Laurentii parishes were merged and the church of St Ilian was demolished to be used as building materials. When Göta Kanal was built 300 years later some remains and finds from the church were destroyed.

Later remains from the church and graveyard have been found. The church was built of bricks and was probably situated from the ware house and out into the canal. Among the finds are pieces from grave covers, granite blocks from the foundation walls and moulded bricks, which show that the church had vaults and gateways.

Remains of another well-built stone house have been found by the canal warehouses. The finds there; candle holders, gold pins for shrouds and gilded book clasps, have ecclesiastical connections.



Top: Moulded bricks. Above: Grave from the 16th century, belonging to a grown man, 178 centimetres long, with worn teeth, suffering from a rheumatic illness. Below: candle holder of bronze, gilded book clasp, grave cover with inscription.



9. A Merchant's Treasure

By the then northwest boundary of the town is the quarter Norrtull. Only one layer of building remains from the 14th century has been found. It was a log house, 5 x 10 metres, with wooden floor in one part and a clay floor in the other. The finds; hooks-and-eyes, and lead seals from the Flandres, used to validate cloth, indicates that there was a cloth merchant here. The finds also includes a gold ring with blue stone, crossbow arrows and shards of glass.

On the floor were thousands of silver coins. They are impossible to count because they have melted together to one big lump in a fire. Most of the coins were minted during King Magnus Eriksson's reign, 1320–1340. The latest coins was an "örtug" from the reign of Albrecht of Mecklenburg, 1364–1389.

Why leave such a treasure?

Hooks-and-eyes, ring and coin treasure from Norrtull. Coin minted in Söderköping during Magnus Eriksson's reign, size ca 15 mm.



The Main Street Hamngatan (Harbour Street)

Hamngatan was the main street in the part of town between the river and the mountain of Ramunder, "the Merchant's quarter", as it was called in a document from 1458. The street was alternately wood and stone paved. When Göta Kanal was built the area was completely changed.

10. Ågatan – Water from the Mountain and the River

In 1996 a fully functional waterpipe was found in Repslaga-regränd, consisting of four split logs, and leading the water from the mountain of Ramunder to a well in Ågatan. The name Repslagaregränd (Rope-maker Alley) indicates that the alley was used for making rope, for which a long, straight place is necessary.

In the next alley, Badstugränd, a logbuilt well has been found. Close by were remains from a house from the 14th century. One of the finds there is a belt buckle with clasping hands. The name of the alley allude to the public bath of St Iljan's, situated by Lillån in the south end of the alley.

Between Hamngatan and Breda gränd were three additional alleys, four and two metres wide with logtimbered houses from 1250–1400. The findings here are from everyday life and nothing that indicates crafts.



Threelegged pot, ceramic jug, fishing hook, wooden plate, arse sticks, cover for a cask, float, horse shoe, whetstone, knife, keys, padlock.



11. Ågatan – the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages

The period before Söderköping became a town is most visible in two areas by the river, one by Rådhusorget and one by Ågatan. Finds of a certain type of older ceramics, "blackware", show the places date from the 11th and 12th centuries.

By Ågatan, next to Slussgränd, archaeological excavations found a stone pier and remains of jetties and sheds. The waterfront was considerably higher up than today, almost up to the current houses. A collapsible balance and a buckle in silver, both from the Viking Age, are other finds from the early period.

Later buildings, such as sheds, were found further from the brink of the river, together with lots of floats made of bark, which indicates that fishing was of importance.

Slussgränd is completely excavated. Here are six layers of pavings in wood or stone from 1250–1400. The street seems to have been repaved every 15th year. Pieces of a clinker-built boat with rivets from the middle of the 13th century were also found here.

Kanalgatan was built with several yards during the 13th and 14th centuries. Finds of tools for making textile goods and cloth indicate some kind of textile industry here.



Tools for making textiles: Pins, spindle whorls, weaving comb, shears, needles. At the top a weaving sword.





The Main Street Storgatan

Storgatan originally ran more to the southwest. The bridge by the Town Hall didn't exist, since boats had to be able to pass. The street ran to Skönbergagatan, which was the main road to Småland with the same direction as today. There were buildings on the riverside of Skönbergagatan during the 13th century reaching as far as Söderköpings Brunn, but on the other side of the street there were fields and meadows until the area was built on in the 14th century.

12. The Oldest House

It is possible that the house in the corner of Storgatan and Åpromenaden was built in stone on the command of King Johan III in the 1570ies, on top of cellars from the 15th century. The building had stepped gables, but today they are only visible in the attic. The ground is one metre higher today. Then you had to climb a couple of steps to reach the ground floor.

13. Sensational Findings

Hagatorget was built on and dwellings and outhouses were closely packed together during the period between 13th and 15th centuries. At the entrance of Skönbergagatan a forge and a bakery, with remains of ovens have been found. Among the finds is a knife sheath of wood with the rune inscription "Olov the Smith". Maybe Olov was a smith, or may-



be the word was generally used for craftsmen. Other interesting finds are toys – a boat made of bark and a wooden sword. Finds of toys are usually rare.

The most sensational find from the area is a tunic. It is a frocklike garment, worn by both men and women. The men's tunics were shorter than the women's. Most of the tunic from Söderköping is preserved, only one sleeve and a piece by the neck are missing. It is full length, with a full skirt and made of two kinds of fine twill in wool, in ten gores, red and blue.

The wood, placed on top of the tunic has been dated to 1242–1243. That means that the tunic, which has been scrapped, dates from the 1230ies. It is unique – it is the only bicolored dress that have been found and it is the oldest medieval dress find in Scandinavia.



14. The Outskirts of Town – the Dump

In the block south of Prästgatan thick layers of refuse from the 14th to the 17th centuries have been found, with large amounts of animal bones and lots of finds, many of them belonging to the upper classes. There are no remains of houses here, nor any from the great town fires. Here was the town's dump, just outside the town border.

When excavating you sometimes find waste bins and lavatory barrels in the yards. Maybe a regular waste removal system was established after the occurrence of the Black Death in the middle of the 14th century.

Among the finds in the dump are many different kinds of keys and locks, ceramics, bags, shoes, mittens and gloves, and upper class things such as window glass, sometimes stained and leaded, knives with maker's stamps and beautiful handles of bronze, seal stamps, book clasps, drinking glasses, weapons and armour. A unique find is a whole longbow, 144 cm long, made of yew. It was probably broken, repaired but found lacking and scrapped. The block also show there were crafts here, such as forges, cross bow manufacturers, bone crafts, tailors and dyers.



Below: Waste bin. Above: Cover for a barrel with an owner's mark, so the right barrel was returned after waste removal.



Objects from the Dump: Whole long bow of yew and detail from it, knife with maker's stamp, enlarged detail of the stamp, belt buckle with a St. Andrew's cross, pearls, parts of armour, stirrup and spike.

At the outskirts of town were the town guards, some ten longbowmen guarding the town's boundaries. Maybe the longbow belonged to one of them?

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