

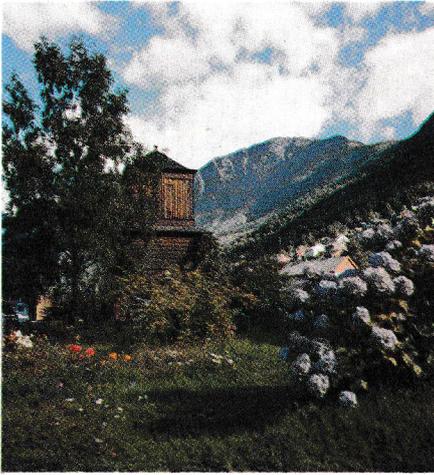
# *Aurland kyrkje*

Grunnsteinen lagd 1202.

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## Our Church in Past and Present.



The name Aurlandsvangen indicates ancient cult of heathen gods whose place of worship was situated here. The first church we hear of in Vangen parish was built on the moraine behind the stone-church 200 ft. above sea level and is in documents from the Middle Ages named as the church at Rygg. According to an issue, signed by the king in 1544, this church was pulled down in the second half of the 16th century.

Judged by the architecture this stone church must have been built in the 13th century, and an old parchment that appeared when the church was being restored in the 1860's, revealed that the cornerstone had been laid in the year 1202. We have reason to believe that the church was erected by the prominent and mighty family that once lived in Aurland. Parts of the architecture reveal English influence. A document written in 1714 is a further indication: It informs us that English merchants used to stay at Aurland during long periods to buy different articles and they are supposed to have taken part in the building of the church. Most likely they have been the master builders. At all events it is a fact that the connection between Aurland and England was good in the Viking Period. We know that the local chieftains Brynjulf, Bjørn, and Tor often sailed to England, Ireland, and Iceland, and judged by the above-mentioned document, the intercourse must have been pretty good also in the 13th century.

### Architecture.

The church is built in the early Gothic style, the arches being slightly pointed except for the big window in the nave which was enlarged and then cut in the Romanesque style about a hundred years ago. The height from the floor to the top of the gable is 57 ft. and the chancel is rather spacious compared to the nave. The walls are so-called chest-walls, 5 ft. broad, filled with pebbles bound together with clay and mortar. All the arches and corners are built from soap-stone. The master builders must have been unusually skilled as we can find very heavy stones high up in the gables. Almost at the top of the eastern gable of the nave we can

see two small square holes. We do not know for certain whether these are made to let in the light or whether they must be understood to have had any connection with religious belief and way of thinking. In the western gable the wall has been on the point of cracking, and therefore two supporting pillars were erected (one of them has now been pulled down). A porch was built at the foot of this wall, on the outside, but this was also pulled down in 1926. The church has never had any tower and the vestry is in the chancel itself. In this way the church has been preserved in its old style. In spite of many changes, the main lines of the architecture have never been broken. In its pure, though simple, beauty, it testifies to the economic, cultural, and religious power of the epoch.

### The Interior.

At the entrance we find the old basin for holy water dating from Roman-Catholic times, made from soapstone and partly laid into the wall itself. The soldiers' doorway in the southern wall had during a former restoration been covered up and built in, but in 1926 it was opened again and restored. In the 18th century there was in Aurland a military training camp and the soldiers always used this entrance. The church has been restored several times and in this way it has lost much of its former appearance. Thus a ceiling was laid, possibly to get it warmer. Originally the whole space, from floor to roof, had been open and had been so for centuries. The restoration in the 1860's brought radical changes. Then the old altar-piece, carrying King Christian the Fourth's initials, and the decorated wainscot, were taken down and beautiful decorations were covered with white painting. The old baptismal font, made from soapstone, was thrown out and was taken care of by Bergen Museum. On the altar is a soapstone slate perhaps as old as the church itself.

The big picture on the northern chancel wall is a copy after Rubens: «Jesus is taken down from the Cross.» It was painted in 1863 and up to 1926 it was placed on the altar. It is flanked by the pictures of the vicar Ole Aabel and the dean E. P. Juul. The two candlesticks on the altar date from 1637.

The slender arch between the nave and the chancel is 30 ft. high. In front of this, raised ten feet from the floor, there was in former days a gallery with a reading-desk and seats for prominent families of the village. Leading up to this gallery, in the interior of the wall, there was once a staircase.

The pulpit, which dates from the 17th century, is in the Renaissance style, and was also painted white along with the rest.

At the last restoration, the original colours and designs were uncovered.

From ancient times the custom had been to put the bodies of deceased parishioners of high rank under the floor of both the nave and the chancel. When the floor, therefore, was opened in 1926, many coffins were found. They were brought out and buried in the churchyard.

In 1725 the Danish-Norwegian King sold the church, and thus it came into private possession. It remained private property up to about 1900, when it was taken over by the local administration.

Sir Henry Clarke Jervoise, Bart., who used to stay in this village in summertime to fish trout and salmon in the river, presented to the parishioners a certain amount of money to buy the church, and to encourage a restoration. He is only one of the many Englishmen that showed great interest in the old church and facilitated its recovery and preservation. When William Gladstone visited Aurland in the 1880's, he wondered how a small village, particularly in the Middle Ages, could have managed to erect such a fine building.

#### Restoration.

The last restoration was performed in 1926. Then the ceiling was taken away and the baldachin over the pulpit was brought back again. A new low altarpiece was made, so as not to screen the three windows in the chancel. Mr. Anton Lang, the famous artist from the Passion Plays in Oberammergau, has carved Agnus Dei and the two cherubs on the altarpiece. The crucifix in the arch between the nave and chancel, is also his work. The Norwegian artist Emanuel Vigeland has made the stained-glass windows (two of the windows in the chancel illustrate the story of the Prodigal Son, the one in the middle the Saviour).



The Church, being central point of Vangen, dominates the small village and gives character to it. The inhabitants also appreciate the fact that they possess such a dignified monument from the 13th century.

#### Organization of the Norwegian Church.

The Church of Norway is a state church, dependent on the state for its maintenance. It is Lutheran and episcopalian («The Norwegian Lutheran State Church») and has nine bishops but no archbishop. The bishop who is the supervisor of Aurland parish lives in Bergen. He pays a formal visit to Aurland once every six years.

The present church (also called Vangen Church) has a service every three weeks. There are three more churches in the parish: Flåm, Underdal, and Bakka (at Gudvangen). The parson, who lives at Vangen, ambulates therefore, preaching one Sunday in each and covering all of them in one month.

There are no sects or non-Lutheran denominations in Aurland. All the population belong to the Norwegian Lutheran State Church.

## Aurlands-kyrkja som ho var og er.

Etter namnet å døma, er Aurlandsvangen ein gamal kultusstad, d.v.s. at i heidensk tid har dei dyrka gudane sine der. Den eldste kyrkja i Vangen sokn stod på haugen bakanfor steinkyrkja, om lag 60 m. o. h. og er i mellomalderdokument nemnd som Kyrkja på Rygg. Ho hadde største tiende-innkoma av alle kyrkjene i Sogn. Denne Ryggja-kyrkja vart, etter eit brev, underteikna av den dansk-norske kongen i 1544, nedriven i den andre helvti av det 16. hundreåret. Kringom på gardane finst nokre få stokkar som seiast å vera frå denne kyrkja, og ymse småting som dei fann i tufti vart i 1846 sende til Bergen Museum.

Når ein ser på byggjestilen, må kyrkja vera bygd i det 13de h.året. Eit gammalt pergamentbrev, som kom for dagen då kyrkja vart restaurert i 1860-åri, fortalde at grunnsteinen var lagd i 1202. Det er grunn til å tru at kyrkja er reist av ei gamal stormannsætt som hadde hovudsættet sitt i Aurland i Vikingtida og Mellomalderen. Summe drag i stilen og byggjemåten vitnar om engelsk påverknad. Eit dokument frå 1714 peikar i same lei. Det fortel at engelskmenn låg i Aurland om vintrane og kjøpte opp varer og at dei skulle ha vore med og bygt kyrkja. Ein lyt vel helst tru at engelske har skaffa byggmeistrar. Visst er det, i alle høve, at herseætti, som budde her, hadde godt samband med England i Vikingtida. Hersane Brynjulf, Bjørn og Tor siglde mykje på England, Irland og Island, og etter det nemnde dokument ser det ut til at sambandet har vore godt også i det 13de året.

Byggjestilen er tidleg gotikk, alle bogar er kvasse, bortsett frå det store vindauga i skipet, som i seinare tid er gjort større og vart då, diverre, hogge i rundbogestil. Skipet er 18 m. langt og 12½ m.