

A walk around Roskilde's abandoned monasteries



Roskilde Domkirke

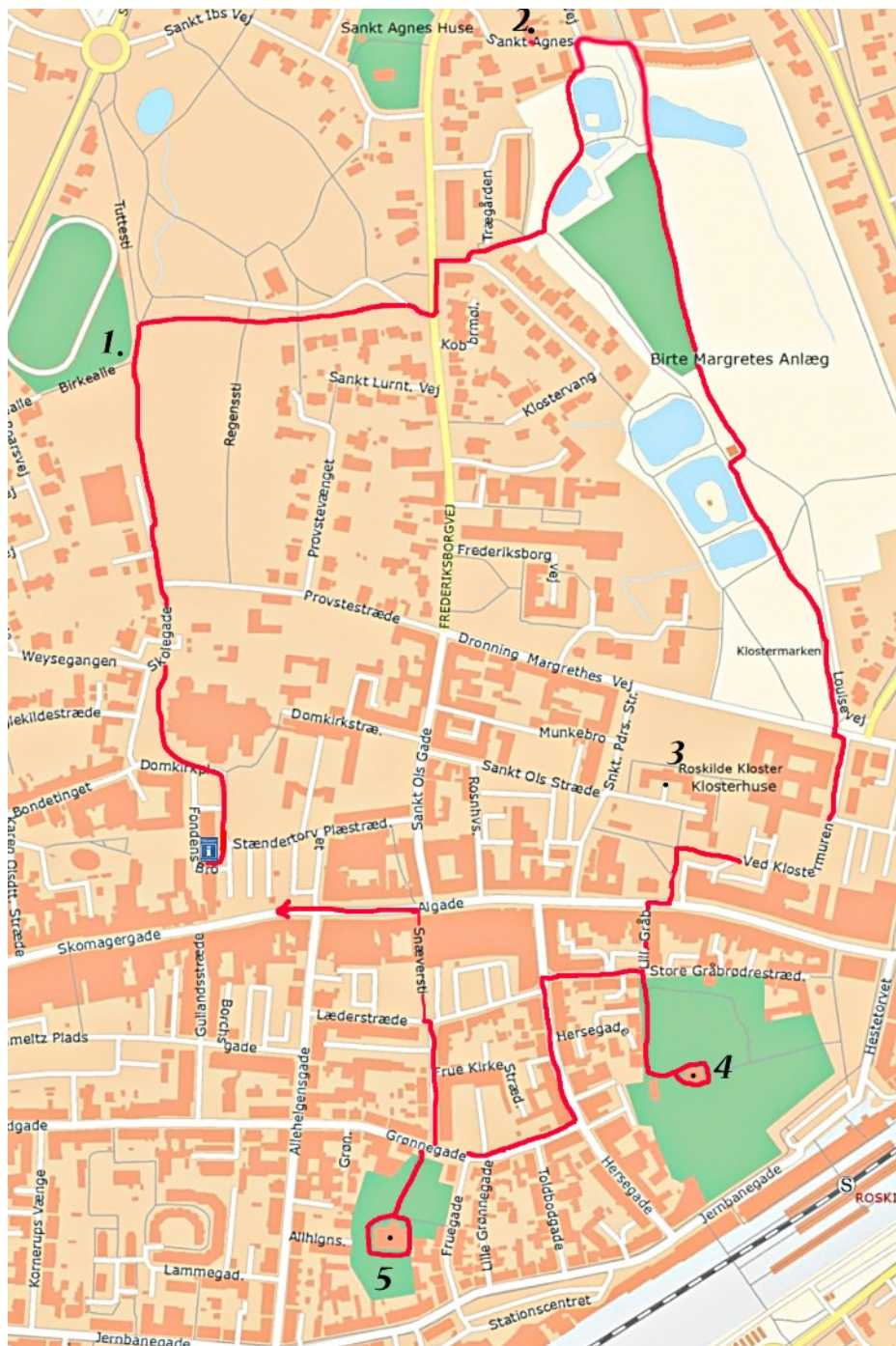


Gråbrødre kloster

Publisher af Roskilde-Egnens Turistforening - www.roskildeturist.dk

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NORDEA
FONDEN



A walk around Roskilde's abandoned monasteries.

See where the monasteries were located and read a brief account of their history. In the Middle Ages, Roskilde was one of the Catholic Church's strongholds, with 12 parish churches and five monasteries, two for monks and the other three for nuns. The monasteries were located at the edges of the town and were all disbanded after the Reformation in 1536. A walk around their locations makes for a pleasant stroll, which runs in an arc around the northern, western and southern parts of the town, including many of its scenic spots.

From the Tourist Office, turn left onto Fondens Bro and across Domkirkepladsen (Cathedral Square), heading north. On your right is the burial site of King Frederik IX. Continue straight along Skolegade, and soon Skt. Hans Kilde (St. John's Spring) will appear on your right. This was one of Roskilde's three sacred springs. The tour then continues along the medieval Tuttesti; on your left you will see a sports ground, which is the site of Skt. Clara Kloster (St. Clare's Convent).



Skt. Clara Kloster/St Clare's Convent (no.1) The sisters of St. Clare, or '*Clarisserne*', were the female counterparts of the greyfriars. The convent's rules were very strict. The nuns had taken a vow of silence, consorting with people outside of the convent was forbidden and strangers were not permitted to enter the grounds. The nuns lived a very spartan and simple life, dressed in a cloak and cape of black wool with a rope around the waist tied in three knots, which symbolised chastity, obedience and poverty, as along with a black veil. The sisters did not have their own cells, but slept in shared quarters on the top floor. Everyone slept here, including the abbess herself. Only one entrance to the sleeping quarters was permitted; a ladder, which was drawn up at night, was the only connection to the outside world.



The first record of the convent was in 1255. It burnt down in 1302, but was rebuilt. It housed 40 nuns and became wealthy after the Reformation, thanks to the ample bequests and dowries from noblemen, who wished their daughters to enter the convent. In 1561, the convent and part of its estate was given to the University of Copenhagen.

The buildings were torn down and half a million stones were used to build the manor house, Selsø Slot. What was left of the convent was removed in 1843, including most of its foundations. This was done so effectively, that despite the efforts of two major excavations, very few remains of the convent have been found aside from some masonry. The convent lay outside of Roskilde's fortifications.

Continue to the right along Bellevuesti, which is a footpath from the 1830s. The town park, Byparken is on your left, while on the right is Provstevænget, which is all that is left of Skt. Hans Parish, which burnt down in 1443. This is where most of the cathedral's clerics lived. Just inside the area is what is left of Roskilde's fortifications from the 1150s (see drawing). Continue until the junction of Frederiksborgvej



and Klostervang, keeping to the left inside the park area, where there are three lakes; these were the fishing lakes of St. Agnes Monastery. Keep to the left and walk alongside the lakes and out of the park. The area to the left is *Skt.*



Agnes Husene, (St. Agnes houses, now accommodation for the elderly); under them are the remains of Skt. Agnes Kloster (St. Agnes' Priory).



Skt. Agnes Kloster/ St. Agnes' Priory (2) The

Black Friars, or the Order of the Dominicans, also had their female counterparts. The priory was founded in 1263 by King Eric Ploughpenny's 14-year-old daughter Agnes, was became the priory's first abbess. The priory was located north of the town and outside its fortifications. In 1266, Agnes' 21-year-old sister, Jutta, also became a nun in the priory, and as the eldest, she became abbess in her sister's place. The sisters did not take well to priory life, however, and four years later they escaped, which caused a great scandal. Agnes settled in the nearby town of Sorø and spent the rest of her days living peacefully and uneventfully. Jutta, on the other hand, wanted to experi-



ence the world and went to visit another sister in Sweden who was married to the Swedish king. The king welcomed his sister-in-law warmly, so warmly in fact that they had a child together. At the time of the Reformation, St. Agnes' Priory owned property in 70 villages across Zealand. In 1508, the number of sisters in the priory was estimated to be around 30. Of these, 23 were to "serve the almighty God and St. Agnes and pray for their souls", while the remaining sisters were able to work in the kitchen, the cellar and "any other of the priory's work or occupations". The order always wore white. Compared to the monks, the nuns focused less on their studies and more on religious contemplation. After the Reformation, the priory was dissolved and its property given to a group of noblemen. In 1579, the King granted permission for the buildings to be demolished. First 4,000 bricks, and then a further 80,000 stones were removed from the buildings. The latter were used to construct Kronborg Castle. In 1672, the area where the priory stood, along with the rest of the ruins, was sold to the owner of Sortebrødregård (Black Friars' Farm), which later became *Roskilde adelige Jomfrukloster* ('Roskilde Convent for Noble Maidens'. Around 1825, what little remained of the priory also disappeared.



Walk back through the whole park past the other three lakes, which were used by Black Friars' Monastery for fishing, or alternatively walk through the open area around the amphitheatre onto Dronning



Margrethes Vej. Cross the street and head to the left around Roskilde Library. Continue straight and then take a right on Klosterstien past Roskilde Convent for Noble Maidens, now Roskilde Abbey. The building on the right is Sortebrødregård (Black Friars' Farm), which was built using reused materials from Sortebrødre Kloster (Blackfriars Monastery).

Sortebrødre Kloster/Blackfriars Monastery (3) The Order of the Dominicans arrived in Roskilde in 1231, and the monastery was built over the years that followed. During an extension of the library, the stoves were found where the stones to the monastery had



been burnt. The monastery was located just inside the town's fortifications. Around here, there is an opening in the town walls called 'Munkegabet'. The Order of the Dominicans wore white robes with a black cloak worn as an outer garment, hence their name, 'blackfriars'. Emphasis was placed on study,

preaching and missionary work, which gave them their other name: the preaching friars. The monastery found itself in financial difficulties even before the Reformation and was forced to sell its farms. It must have closed very quickly after the Reformation, as the king acknowledged receipt of the monastery's chapel inventory in 1537. In the 1550s, the town bailiffs were given orders to knock down the monastery buildings and place the materials in storage. Black Friars' Farm was built from these materials around 1570, while the remainder was used to build Selsø Slot. Blackfriars Monastery lay to the west of the existing buildings in the area of Dronning Margrethes Vej and Skt. Peders Stræde.

Go through the alley to the left. Cross over Algade through Lille Gråbrødre Stræde to the entrance to the cemetery, Gråbrødre Kirkegård. Walk up to the chapel. Here is where Gråbrødre Kloster (Greyfriars Monastery) was located.

Gråbrødre Kloster/Greyfriars Monastery (4) The monastery was founded in 1237 by Franciscan monks. The monastery was located inside the town's walls, in its eastern quarter. The monks' robes were light grey, hence the name grey friars. The Franciscans wore a rope tied with three knots, which symbolised chastity, obedience and poverty. They preached like the Dominicans, but the Franciscans differed from the other order in that they left the monastery during their working day, and had great influence on the town's middle-class population. They inducted craftsmen into the order, from whose ranks originated the guilds. There was a particular association in Roskilde between the grey friars and the journey-men shoemakers. In 1286, King Erik Glipping was killed. One of those involved in the murder, Rane Jonsen sought refuge in Greyfriars Monastery. King Erik Menved was granted permission from the pope to apprehend Jonsen there. He was executed outside Roskilde and his body later broken on the wheel. In 1561, the monastery's buildings and grounds were given to a nobleman from Funen. The cemetery was not to be touched, but the monastery's chapel was to be made parish church for six of the town's parishes, whose churches were closed. In 1625 part of the church was demolished, which just left the east wing, which remained as a chapel. It was torn down in the 1700s. The existing church was built in 1855.



Walk back to the entrance to the cemetery. Turn left onto Store Gråbrødre Stræde to Hersegade. Cross the street and up Grønnegade. A little way on your left is Vor Frue Kirke.

Vor Frue Kloster/Our Lady's Abbey (5) The Church

of Our Lady was built around 1080. Around 1158, a Benedictine abbey was attached to the church for nuns. This came to be known as St. Maria Abbey or Our Lady's Abbey. Around 1176, the abbey was re-established as a Cistercian abbey. The order wore a uniform consisting of a white robe and black cape. The change of order at the abbey



can be attributed to the fact that the abbey's church came to house an extremely valuable relic, which was not only of great importance to the abbey but to all of Roskilde, which became a popular destination for pilgrimage. This relic was the bodily remains of the only Danish female saint, *Margrethe af Højelse*, although she was never officially beatified. Again in 1850 *Vor Frue Kirke* became a pilgrimage site for the sick and ailing, despite having changed radically after

the Reformation. The abbey expanded and became rich, taking up roughly half an acre of the southern part of the town, with its adjoining estate covering an area of approx. 50 ha. The church was also expanded over time, and its choir was serve as a mausoleum for *Margrethe af Højelse*. The church ended up being 29m long, of which 14m remains. The abbey was a distinguished foundation, where the daughters of noblemen and royalty either became nuns in the abbey or lived as paying guests for their entire lives. After the Reformation, when the nuns were given the choice between returning home to their families and staying, all those who chose the latter were housed together in *Vor Frue Kloster*. Even as late as 1563, a few individual nuns still lived at the abbey. It is not known exactly when the abbey was torn down. During excavations in 1933-34, various remains were found, revealing a complex arrangement clustered around a courtyard/garden, with the church located in the northern wing. In the west wing, three halls of considerable size were located, while the sleeping quarters were presumably located on the first floor. A number of different nuns' graves have been discovered in the area. One of which has been preserved and can be seen to the left of the church's entrance.

Go back to the entrance to the cemetery. Cross the street and walk up Frue Kirke Stræde, crossing Læderstræde into Snæversti to Algade. Go left towards Stændertorvet.



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*”Most people believe that
the tourists appear on their own,
but they do not”*

So wrote the chairman of Roskilde Tourist Association,
bookseller Andreas Flensborg on the 25th anniversary of the asso-
ciation in 1934.

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