

# STORA HÄLSINGEGÅRDARS VÄG

## Alfta: proud agricultural heritage



PHOTO AGNES ANDERSSON

A THOUSAND YEARS AGO, Alfta was already a well-established agrarian community. There are not many stories from early Medieval Hälsingland. However, according to an Icelandic saga from 1178, the Norwegian King Sverre Sigurdsson passed through the province on his way to Norway. In Alfta he encountered a band of farmers who did not want to let the King and his men pass. The saga reveals that Alfta was already Christian by that time. The oldest church can be dated back to the 13th

Alfta seen from the church tower in 1878, with Nygård farm in the foreground.



PHOTO A. LARSSON

century, and was illustrated in a major 18th-century reference work on Hälsingland, Glysisvallur, by the Hälsingland author Olof Broman.

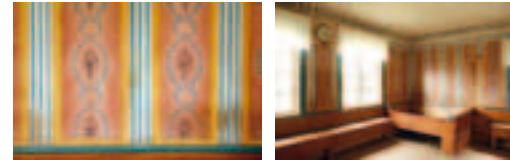
Alfta has been called the breadbasket of Hälsingland, and in the early 17th century it paid more livestock tax than any other parish in the province. The parish, which originally covered the entire fertile Voxna river valley, was divided up in 1639.

### Why build big?

Farmers were always the dominant social class in Hälsingland. The province had no nobility: the farmers owned the land themselves and ran their farms, villages and parishes. The farmers and their families stuck together. Farms were passed from father to son, and wherever possible, farmers' daughters were married off to the sons of neighbouring farmers or ones in adjacent villages. Families can often trace their ancestry back to the 16th century. The farmers used the farm buildings as a way of demonstrating their social superiority. Here in the Voxna valley, building was sometimes taken to extremes, with farmhouses with living areas 400 square metres in size, with the same amount of floor space in semi-used upper floors and whole attics.

### The Great Fire of 1793

Earlier, most of the farms lay clustered round Alfta's church; all that changed on a May day in 1793, when a huge fire broke out. In all, the fire engulfed 222 buildings, including the church, vicarage, court house, inn, officer's residence and 16 big farms in the centre of the village. 183 people were left homeless. With only a few exceptions, the biggest and most prosperous farmhouses were lost. A farmer's wife from a neighbouring village was sued in court for claiming that the fire was retribution for the farmers' 'exaggerated pride'. The fire stopped by Åsabäcken stream, by Per-Sjuls farm, where a godfearing farmer lived. This saved the farms east of the village. This is why many far-

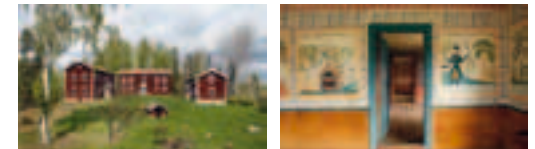


Ol-Anders was moved to a typical location.

ms in this area still show traces of 16th century architecture. Outbuildings and parts of the farmhouses at the farms Per-Ols, Hans-Ers, Jon-Knuts, Ol-Mårs and Skindra date back 200 years and more.

### The Ol-Anders farm

Ol-Anders used to be in the centre of Alfta village, but was one of those devastated by the Great Fire of 1793. Ten buildings were destroyed and nine people were left homeless, on this farm alone. Building began immediately after the fire on the



The farm was ornamented with beautifully decorated porches and paintings in vivid colours.

new farm, this time in a new, safer location, a high hill to the east of the village. This farm can be traced through agricultural records to 1575. The farm is thought to be named after the farmer Olof Andersson, born in 1640. The family remained in the same family for 400 years, after which new owners and new times arrived. The farm has developed into a visitor's centre, open all year round.

Nygårds Erik Andersson from Rättvik painted a self-portrait in the men's cottage.



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Alfta and Edsbyn Tourist Office tfn 0271-556 61

#### SIGNPOSTED HÄLSINGLAND FARMS IN OVANÅKER

OL-ANDERS	LÖKA	MÅRTE
0271-556 61	0271-556 49	0271-205 81