

Walkabout along Mäster Mikael's Gata in the South Hills of Stockholm

This walkabout will cover the length of the Master Michael's Street (Mäster Mikael's Gata) and some adjacent topics of interests in the area.

The Master Michael's Street is a street in the eastern part of South Hills (Södermalm) in Stockholm. It stretches from St. Catherine's Church (Katarina Kyrka) to Renstiernasgatan, via Cornelius Park at Glassworks Cliff (Glasbruks klippan).

The origin of the neighborhood's name "Mäster Mikael" has got its name from Michael Reissuer, the city executioner: "*mäster*" was a common Swedish title for the executioner. Master Michael was - Masterman, executioner and supervises executioner helpers and rascals during the period 1635 - 1650. They served as assistants to the executions on Galgberget (Stigberget), they also caught stray pigs and dogs, they flayed horses - they were social pariahs. They were pushed away to the outer edge of mountain ridges, as they were often criminals and outcasts.

Master Michael entered the service February 3, 1635 and his office lasted almost exactly 15 years. He served during that time, together with his family, so much that he was able to acquire a house near an area by Renstiernas Street.

One day in January 1650 became an unlucky day for Michael. He had previously been convicted for having harbored a man banished from the city's "repeat criminals and vagrants" Paul Andersson in his house. But Andersson, came back once more and was let in by Mikael. They drank vodka and got into fights. Michael retrieved a sword. During the melee, Paul Andersson impaled himself on the blade, states Michael. But the Court did not believe him and on the 20th of March, his head fell for the blade and his life was history.

Now, armed with background information we start our walkabout from the Locks (Slussen) by taking the bus up to Renstiernas Street and enter the stairs up to Cornelius Park. From here you have the most stunning view of the Old Town and other parts of Stockholm's attractive skyline.



Mäster Mikael's Gata

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Kv. Sankta Katarina Större



Cornelius Park



The end of Master Michaels Street



View west, Old Town

The author Ludvig Nordström (1882-1942) - perhaps best known for his social reporting on "Lort-Sverige" (Dirt-Sweden) settled in the South Hills between his wanderings around the country. He fell in love with the areas around Catherine's Church, above all the green areas adjacent to Master Michael street. But he also saw something else among the shanty houses in the area (kåkbebyggelsen), formerly inhabited by fishermen and craftsmen. We are so lucky that the old houses remain today for our pleasures. Facing east we see the first set of old houses that could tell us a fascinating story about how people lived in the area.

In the early 17th to 18th centuries, the area had sweeping poverty. It was plagued by icy and penetrating fog from the ocean below the south hills. The houses did not have proper stone bases. We could see stones, where you could insert a stick between the wall and window. These spaces were clogged with newspaper and rags. This is a house opposite one of the finest and richest here in the South Hills. This is in a large contrast to what we see among dwellers of today with completely renovated and attractive family cottages.



Master Michael's Street No 6-10 east, 1962
Photo: Nils-Olof Engström



Master Michael's Street No 6-10 east, 2014

I get goose bumps when I'm wandering among these old houses thinking about their history and the people who lived in them over many generations. Stockholm South Hills is blessed by having significant and protected inventory of these old houses.



Master Michael's Street 9-11, 1959.
Photo: Nils-Olof Engström



Master Michael's Street, 9-11, 2014.

Walking east on Master Michael's street we see Catherine's Church (Katarina Kyrka) in front of us. The church building is situated at Högbergsgatan 15 in eastern South Hills in Stockholm. It is the parish church of Katarina parish in the Diocese of Stockholm. It was completed the first time in 1695, but has since suffered two fires. After the last fire in 1990 the church reopened in 1995. The Church is named after Princess Catherine, Charles X's mother. The beautiful Catherine's Church is visible all along from downtown and is thus an important feature of Stockholm's skyline. Catherine's Church is one of 43 churches in the City, which are protected under the Heritage Act. It is worth while to pay a visit to the church as it is one of the most beautiful churches in Stockholm.



Catherine's Church, Mid 1950s
Photo: Nils-Olof Engström



Catherine's Church, May 17, 1990
Photo: Nils-Olof Engström



Catherine's Church, 2014



Master Michael's street east

After a short visit to the church I decide to walk back along Master Michael's street and inhale the very spirit that lives in this area in Stockholm. I will also make some shorter visits to the neighboring streets to interesting buildings, like the small house tagged on to a larger one at Nytorrgsgatan. I wonder who was in charge of city planning and building codes at the time.



Nytorrgsgatan

I continue my walk towards Renstierna street and arrive at Cornelius Park, and I look over the water again with the amusement park Gröna Lund in front of me.

Then I will take to bus to the Old Town to have dinner.



Written by Leif Rosqvist, editor of the Newsletters of New Sweden Cultural Heritage Society and SRIO in Portland, Oregon.

I will also thank my wife's uncle Nils-Olof Engström for the old photos that enriched the view of the area as well as the story.

More information for the interested:

- Go to Google and type in Master Michael's Street, Stockholm and more information is available
- Go to Stockholmskällan and type in Master Michael's street for more information
- Go to Google and type in author Ludvig Nordström ("Lort-Sverige") name