

# VILLSTAD CHURCH VILLAGE

Along the old route Nissastigen you find the church village Villstad, a well-preserved parish centre dating back to the Iron Age. You have the impression that the village with the church site, rectory and parish clerk's residence (Klockaregården) has emerged from a Viking magnate's farm. Today's landscape and settlement, however, mainly reflect the development of society in the 19th and 20th centuries. Behind the rectory is an Iron Age grave field called "Tempelbacken" with 52 burial mounds and ancient oaks. The field got its name because the vicar Daniel Nordin had a temple-like gazebo here in the 19th century. Next to the rectory is "Gröthögen", one of the largest burial mounds along Nissastigen. Down by the river is yet another grave field. A ridge in the centre of the church village is known as "Altarbacken" and bears traces of past cultivation. South-east of there are preserved prehistoric fields.

The existing Gustavian style church was built during the period 1788 to 1793 on the site where there had previously been a Romanesque stone church. The church was restored in 1910, following a fire. The graveyard contains beautiful funerary art from several centuries. The open area in front of the church was used as a popular market place until the late 19th century. The clergy were critical to this, especially since there was a high consumption of alcohol. The fact was that the parish clerk had his own distillery and dispensary; the so called aquavit shed is still there next to Klockaregården.

Five 19th century church stables are preserved and remind us of times before motoring, when you needed horse and cart to get to church. Most church stables in the county have disappeared. The church environment also includes a schoolhouse and teacher's residence from 1925, the rectory from 1858 and an older wing. The vicar Daniel Nordin, known as the "bishop of Västbo" lived and worked here in the 19th century. He was a prominent clergyman in the spirit of enlightenment.

The church village Villstad is an area of national interest for the purpose of conservation of the cultural environment and a nature reserve.



"Tempelbacken", a grave field from the Iron Age, located behind the rectory. Photo: Jönköping County Museum.



## HIDDEN GEM 9



### HOW TO GET HERE

The church village Villstad is located just to the east of Nissastigen (Road 26), between Gislaved and Smålandsstenar. Follow the sign for "Villstad".

Coordinates:  
N 6340786 / E 406072  
(SWEREF 99 TM) // N 57°  
12' 2.13", E 13° 26' 43.26"  
(WGS84)



The church village Villstad along the river Nissa comprises Iron Age grave fields, pre-historic fields, rectory and parish clerk's residence, church stables and a school building. Photo: Leif Gustavsson/L.G.foto.

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## HIDDEN GEMS

There are so many things to discover in the countryside! Here, Jönköping County Museum presents some of the cultural environment and heritage attractions in the county.

They include well-known cultural monuments such as Habo Church and the Smålandsstenar Stone Circles, but also lesser known gems such as log-driving remains in the river Valån and Stengårdshult Church. Around the county you can find evidence of how people lived and worked in the past, everything from castles and manors to abandoned embankments and clearance cairns in forest areas.

The idea with Hidden Gems is to tempt you to make excursions in the cultural landscape – here you find our history, revealed in different ways in the physical environment. This heritage is worth experiencing and protecting. Bit by bit, we will be adding more sights under the heading Hidden Gems, both for people living in the county and visitors from further away. The more people who discover these gems, the better chance that they will be preserved for the future.

### FACTS

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In Jönköping County there are more than 4 000 registered ancient remains, 87 cultural environments of national interest, close to 130 listed buildings, around 150 churches, some 100 rural community centres with old settlements, a large number of industrial heritage sites, and two cultural reserves. There are also a large number of cultural environments with buildings worthy of conservation. More information about the sites can be found on the websites of the County Administrative Board, the municipalities and the local heritage societies.

### GOOD TO KNOW

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Access to the Hidden Gems varies. Some sites are well signposted, with easy access and proper parking facilities, etc. Others are more challenging to reach. Visitors may have to walk some distance, sometimes through scrubby forest, only to be met by a broken sign (if there ever was one) when they reach the site. All the sites, however, have an exciting and interesting history.

Please note that many of the cultural heritage buildings are privately owned and can only be viewed from the outside. Also, please respect private land. Many churches are open in the summer. During other times of the year, the churchwarden may be able to open the church for you.

