

THE STAVECHURCH AT EIDSBORG

How old the stave church at Eidsborg is, is uncertain. When restoring the church in 1927-29, they found marks of some fire-places beneath the floor. These fireplaces give a hint that the building at its origin may have been an ancient sacrificial temple (Norwegian: *Gudehov*). It is told that some pillars or posts bear the years 768 and 1127, but these years are not to be relied on. Most probably the church dates from the year 1200.

When they were to build the church, they could not agree where to place it. Some wanted it built in a valley called the church valley, others wanted it built at Lofthus. One day, however, they set to work in the church valley. But when they the next morning found the tools moved to the place where the church now stands, they believed that the question where to build the church had been decided in a miraculous way. Myths like this are told about many old churches.

The old church was at first only half its present size. The nave was 20 feet long, 16 feet broad and 22 feet high. The north wall is made from 15 erected slabboards, the south wall from 12, apart from the round pillars in the corners. Some of the staves or slabboards are two feet broad. Churches of this kind are called stave churches most likely because the planks of the walls stand erect. All the wood in the old church is pitch pine which has been well preserved and the maintenance has been better than in most old stave churches. There used to be galleries around the church. Both the galleries and the roof have probably always been roofed with shingles as they still are.

Twice the church has been enlarged toward the east, in 1826 and 1845. The last time the old decorated walls were boarded and a flat ceiling was made. At the same time the present choir was added to the east, and the entrance moved to the west wall.

In former days the entrance was on the south wall. The door was 8 feet high and $2\frac{2}{3}$ feet broad and made of one single piece of wood. Close to this door are carved out some crosses, and there still are some traces of runic inscription, but they are too vague to be interpreted. The carvings, which formerly were round, the door, are now in the gallery. They are, however, so vague that they can hardly be distinguished.

High up under the roof on the south wall are some round apertures about $\frac{1}{2}$ foot in diameter, through which in olden days the only light came into the church. One of them is yet visible. The sills and the lowest rafters connecting the slabboards were formed like waves, an art which few managed. The steep roof rests on 3 rafters, and there is a nail through them where they meet at the top. Apart from this, there are no marks of iron anywhere except where the hinges of the door have been.

The stave church was painted with watercolors. The north wall was painted in the year 1604, the south wall in 1649. Nobody knows who painted the church. But competent persons have declared that the paintings on the south wall do not seem to be quite so good as the those on the north wall. The decoration is here

divided in three parts along the wall. The uppermost part is a large, mighty renaissance frieze, well formed and painted. On the middle part are painted arcades. In three of the arcades from the left are painted the wise men going to Bethlehem to worship Christ, and in the following arcades the virgin Mary and infant saviour, and further the marriage in Cana. Although the pictures are rather worn, and the colours thus are dim, the strong black contours make the drawings distinct. Lowest on the wall are painted some great square rosettes of leaves. On the south wall too the decoration is divided in three parts. In the arcades are here pictured the clergymen, the five wise and the five bad virgins. The old wall paintings were spoiled when the church was restored in 1826 and 1845, especially those on the south wall.

The steeple was at first very short. It was renewed in 1693. The present steeple dates from 1727. It was then made higher and got a vane at the top. The owner of the church at that time, Christian von Koss, restored it. The initials of his name, C. v. K., and the year mentioned above, are now to be seen on the vane.

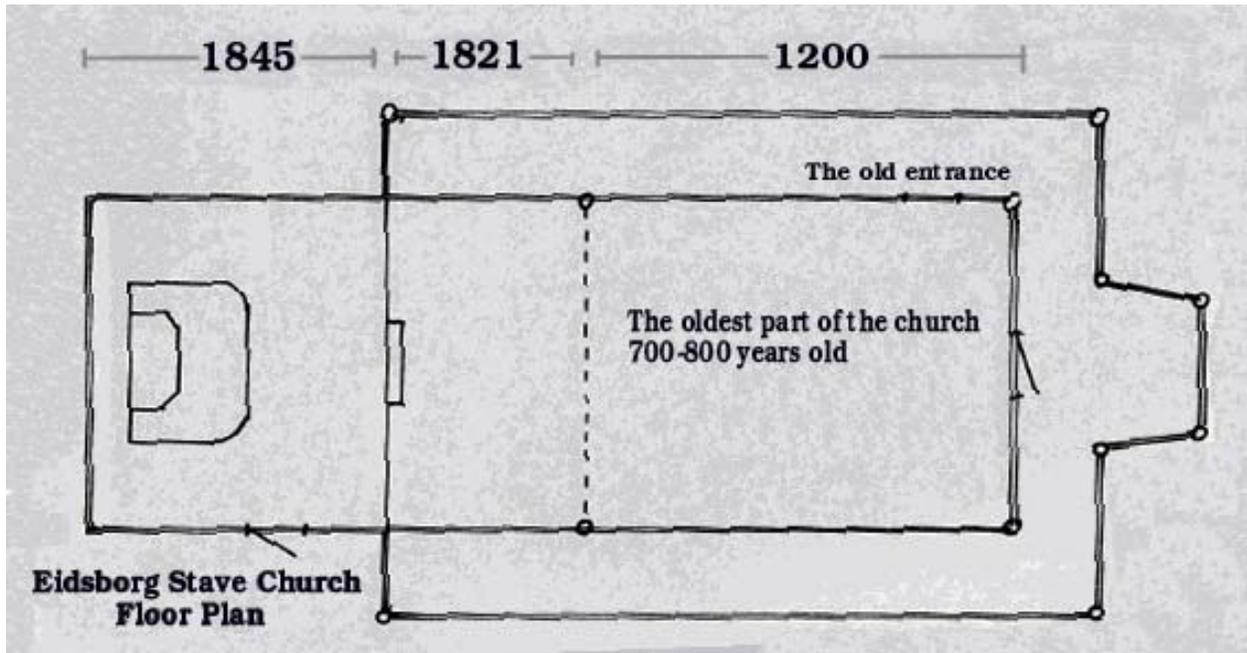
The church at Eidsborg is probably consecrated to St Nicolaus of Bari (Nicolas). Until the middle of the 19th Century, a wooden image about the size of a small boy at 12 years (about 4 feet 7 inches) was placed near the choir door. It was "Sante Nikuls." The image is now kept at the Oslo University Collection of Antiquities. In the year 1965 was formed a copy of the mentioned image. This copy of "St Nikuls" has now got its place in the church. It is a good image. The face is painted, the beard gilded, with the mitre and Episcopal garb. It is told that a piece of gold is placed in his chest as a heart.

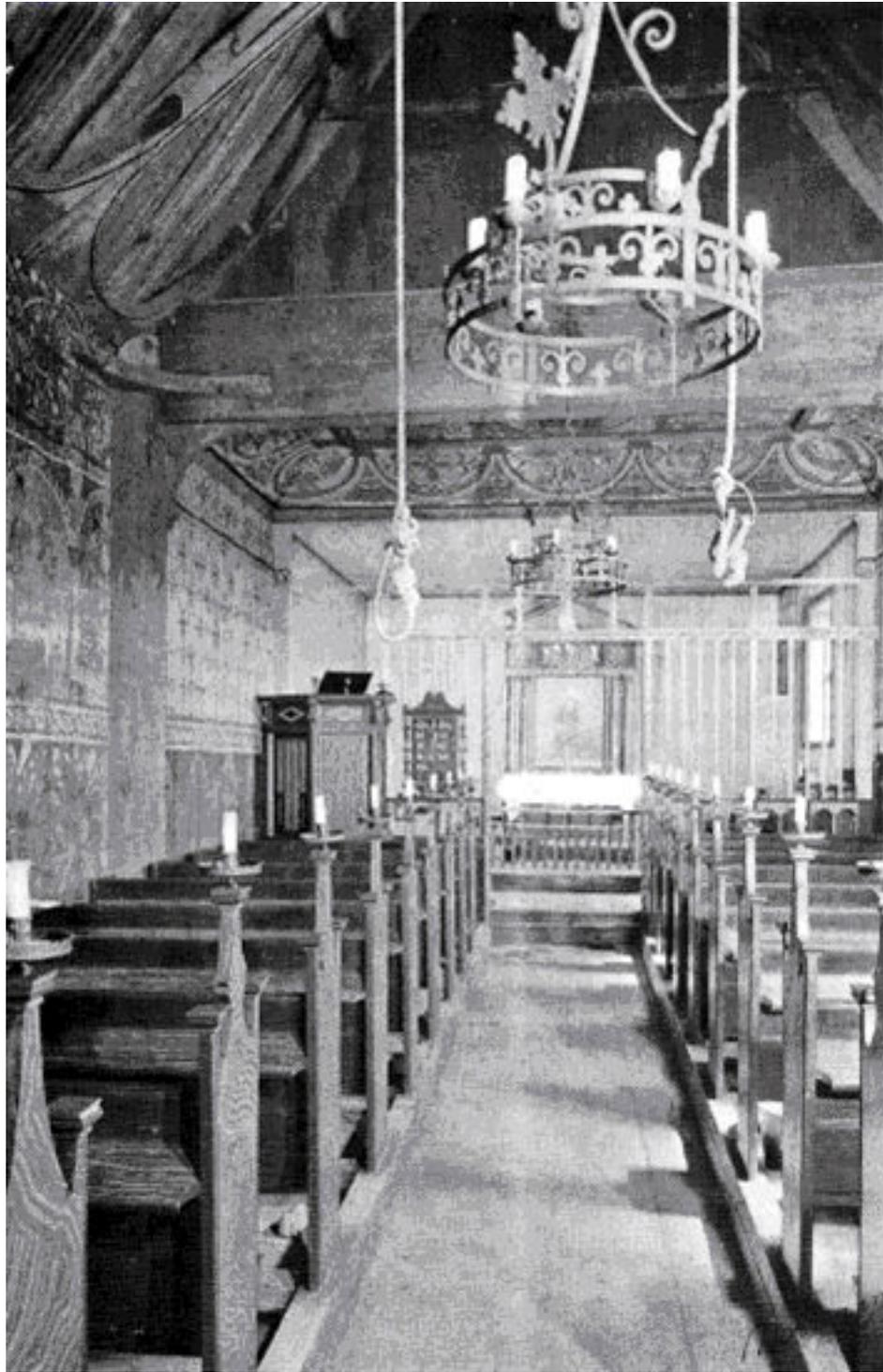
Every St John's day people gathered at the church, took out Nikuls, carried him around the Eidsborgtjorn, washed and bathed him there, that he should free them of their sins, or as others tell, that he should give them a rich crop. That evening they carried him, with much ado, three times round the lake. Afterwards he was placed in the church again. It is uncertain how long the people of Eidsborg kept on like this. J. Lund tells in 1785 that they used to do this in olden days. But when the mayor Peter Mandt, who took the image to Oslo about 1850, was taken ill shortly afterwards, people meant he was punished for taking away St Nikuls.

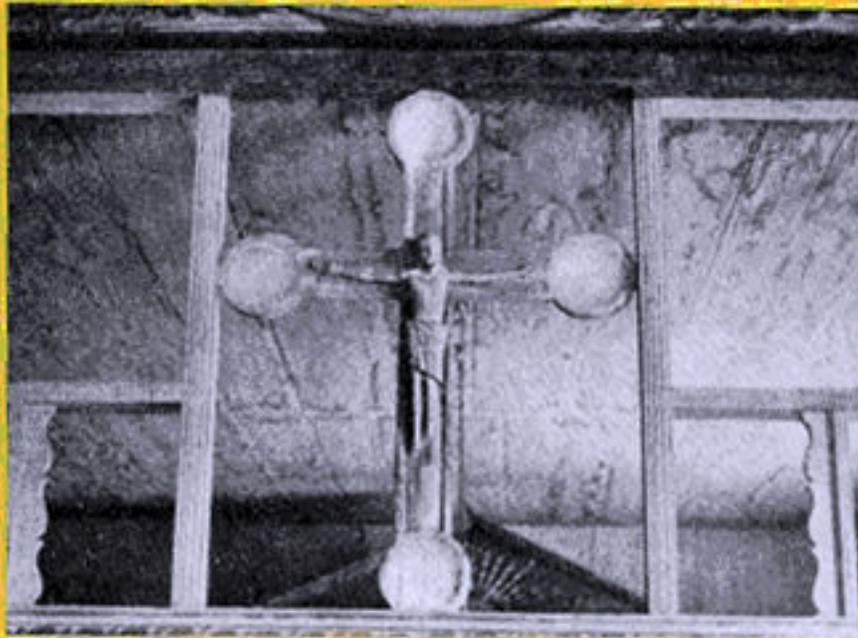
It has been difficult to make a church yard at Eidsborg, as the ground there is very mountainous. A myth tells that two young women at Vindlaus, who were sentenced to death, were promised mercy if they could carry sand to the church yard in their aprons. They toiled and arried sand until the church yard was finished, and so saved their lives. Most of the earth on the churchyard has probably been brought there, as it is different from that near by.

During the years 1927-29 the stave church at Eidsborg was restored. The boarding and ceiling from 1845 were removed from the eldest part of the church, and the old wall paintings were restored, except those on the middle parts of the walls. The part of the church that was added in 1826, and had not been painted before, was then decorated.

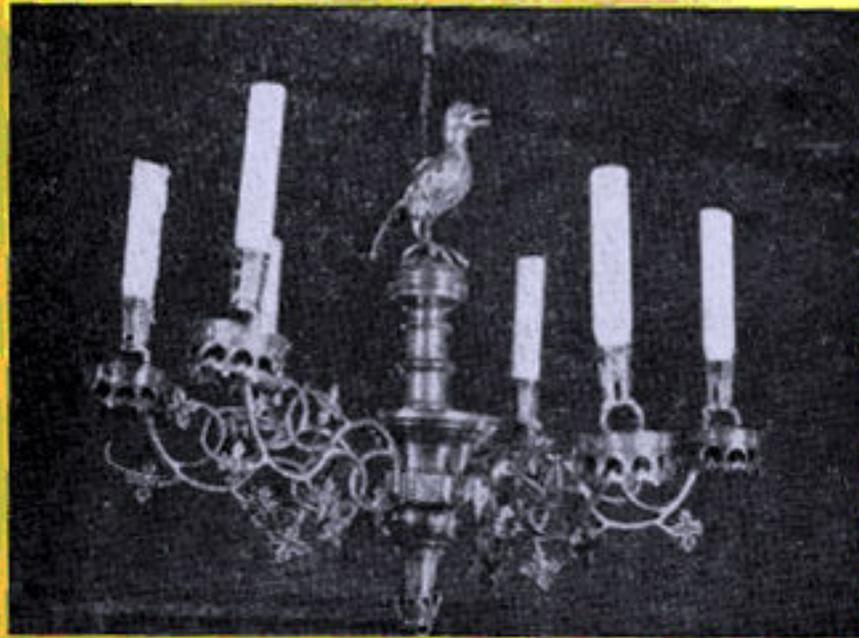
From the booklet available at the church







Crucifix from the 1300's



Chandelier



Altar portrait by Mikkel Mandt, about 1850



"St Nikuls" (Copy)
*Original is in the
University of Oslo
Collection of Antiquities*

