THE FUNEN VILLAGE

A VILLAGE FROM THE TIME OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN
Hans Christian Andersen was Denmark’s great author of the 19th century. In a way, he could be said to be the Dane of the 19th century. He made use of Danish surroundings when writing his tales and, in his comprehensive memoirs, he has described a Denmark and a world in a process of colossal change.

If you look at the history of the 19th century in a little more detail, you soon discover that it was one characterised by incredible technical, political, social and economic progress. In a sense, it was a precursor of the 20th century, which it thought of by most people as being the century of development.

In many ways, Hans Christian Andersen’s age was just as interesting as the 20th century. For he experienced both an old form of society that pointed back to the Renaissance and the Middle Ages as well as a new democratic, technically advanced one that pointed forwards. In his work we find traces of all of this, including his illuminating remarks on both Funen village life and the world of the 19th century.
Hans Christian Andersen’s Funen countryside

When Hans Christian came into the world in 1805, the Funen (and Danish) forestland had been ruined by grazing animals and excessive felling. The communal system of agriculture with open fields had long since disappeared, and the farmers were busy trying to gain a better yield from the new fields which they now cultivated separately. Hedges were put up, the fields were drained and enriched with marl. Most of the farmers were copyholders under the estates and all citizens were subject to an absolute monarch. Norway and Schleswig-Holstein were still integrated parts of the kingdom. In addition, voyages at sea were by sailing ship, journeys on land in horsedrawn carriages along terrible roads, and messages were sent as letters borne by men on horseback or on foot.

When Andersen died in 1875, the forests had become conservation areas and been enlarged and the heath-land in Jutland was in the process of being planted. Norway and Schleswig-Holstein had also been lost in war. The countryside was now adorned with stone walls and hedges of hawthorn. Most of the waterholes in the fields had been drained and grain yields had trebled. In 1849, the absolute monarchy was done away with and democracy introduced at both local and national levels. Steamships and steam engines transported people between the various parts of the country. The two-thousand-year reign of the sailing ship was coming to an end. Electricity had been invented, while the petrol engine and telephone were only just round the corner. New cobbled roads stretched northwards and southwards on Funen – and telegraphy ensured that news was flashed at lightning speed from place to place.

Last but not least, ‘the small (thatched, half-timbered) cottage at the bend in the road’ was demolished and replaced by a levelled brick house with slate roof.

- Yes, Funen is a splendid land!
  none could deny this view.
  Where wood, field, shore go hand in hand,
  and where the heart is true!

The very name itself means fine,
  and that would seem a hallmark
  that Funen is a garden fine
  for all the realm of Denmark! -

‘Funen’ (1831)
It was lovely summer weather in the country, and the golden corn, the green oats, and the haystacks piled up in the meadows looked beautiful. The stork walking about on his long red legs chattered in the Egyptian language, which he had learnt from his mother. The corn-fields and meadows were surrounded by large forests, in the midst of which were deep pools. It was, indeed, delightful to walk about in the country.

‘The Ugly Duckling’ (1843)

From Hans Christian Andersen’s childhood home in Munkemøllestræde, Odense, it only took the boy a couple of minutes to be in the countryside – down across Odense river at Munke Mølle mill, continuing southwards for almost a kilometre to the neighbouring village of Hunderup, which today is only a couple of stone’s throws away from The Funen Village (Den fynske Landsby).

Hans Christian Andersen probably gained inspiration for *The Ugly Duckling* while staying at Gisselfeldt on Zealand, but the countryside of wood-fringed meadows and deep lakes in the heart of the woods was something he recalled from the countryside round Odense of his childhood. This memory, however, was of a Funen landscape that in 1843 was already undergoing rapid change: the communal system of agriculture with open fields had long since disappeared, and the farmers were busy trying to gain a better yield from the new fields which they now cultivated separately. Hedges were put up, the fields were drained and enriched with marl. By the time he was an old man, Andersen would hardly have recognised ‘his’ Funen countryside – it was still lovely out in the country, but distinctly different!

In his writing, Andersen often found motifs in the cultural landscape and, even though the depiction of 19th century cultural history is not his real purpose, it is possible despite this to trace large sections of it in his work. The agricultural changes of his age transformed Denmark completely, and a visit to The Funen Village gives a strong and vivid impression of this process. With Hans Christian Andersen as your ‘travelling companion’ through this part of Funen and Danish history, rural Denmark of the 19th century is documented as a still existing and important condition – not only of today’s Denmark – but equally of the Danes’ cultural and national identity.
Houses in the country often have a more prosperous appearance than on Zealand, where one often believes one is looking at a wayside heap of dung lifted up on four poles, only to find it is a family dwelling. From the road on Funen one only sees well-kept houses – the window sills painted, in front of the door some flowers; and where flowers are cultivated – as Bulwer so aptly remarked – there is always a higher level of culture in a peasant who also thinks about what is beautiful. In the ditches that line the road we see lilacs, white and mauve; nature itself has decorated here with a host of wild poppies which, when it comes to colour, could rival the most beautiful cultivated in any botanical gardens. Close to Nyborg, in particular, they grow in great profusion.

‘O.T.’ (1836)
The poplar

Pollarded poplars and willows were so characteristic of the Funen farmscape in the 19th century that we have chosen to make them the logo of The Funen Village. They stood at the boundaries between farms. Most often, of course, in areas without woodland, but also elsewhere. The straight, bristling branches were lopped off at regular intervals – every one, five or ten years, according to the size of the wood that was needed. The branches were used for making hedgerows, for fuel, building materials and, for example, implements.

‘Do you see that big tree over there?’ said the witch, pointing to a tree near by. ‘It’s quite hollow inside. Now, you must climb right up it, and then you’ll see a hole; slip through this, and you’ll come deep down into the tree. I will tie a rope round your waist, so that I can haul you up again, as soon as you give me a shout.’
‘But what am I to do down in the tree?’ asked the soldier.
‘Fetch money!’ answered the witch.
‘The Tinder-Box’ (1835)
Burdock

Extremely common plant near buildings, ditches and water. Very large heart-shaped leaves. Used, among other things, in cooking and as a medicinal plant. Andersen’s ’burdocks’ are also called ’butterburs’, or more correctly: red butterbur.

The biggest green leaf in this country, depend upon it, is a burdock leaf. Hold it in front of your tummy, and it would do for an apron; put in over your head in the rain, and it’s almost as good as an umbrella – it’s a tremendous size. A burdock never grows by itself; where there’s one growing, there are lots more. It’s a lovely sight, and all that loveliness is food for snails. The big white snails that fine folk in the old days used to have stewed into a fricassee, muttering ‘Yum, yum, how delicious!’ as they ate it – for they really did love the taste of it – these snails lived on burdock leaves, and that’s how the burdocks came to be sown.

Well, there was an old manor-house where they had given up eating snails; these had quite died out, but the burdocks hadn’t died out. They grew and grew all over the paths and flower-beds, till they were quite out of hand; there was an absolute forest of burdocks. Here and there stood an apple tree or a plum tree; otherwise you’d never have guessed it was a garden. The whole place was covered with burdocks – and in the middle of them lived the last two snails, both extremely old.

‘The Happy Family’ (1848)
3 The Water Mill

Typical of the Funen countryside, where the water mills lay closer than elsewhere in the country. Operating a water mill required special permission until c. 1850. The mills often housed illicit bars!

_Odense River, just behind Munkemølle:_ three large water wheels revolved under the weight of the rushing water and then stood suddenly still when the sluice gates were shut; all the water then ran out of the river, its bed was exposed, with fish floundering in the water wheels — I could pick them up with my hands — and out from beneath the big water wheels, from the mill, came fat water rats in order to drink; suddenly the sluice gates were lifted, the water rushed in crashing and foaming, there was not a rat now to be seen, the river bed filled up and I, standing out there, splashed my way to the bank, startled like the amber-collector on the North Sea coast when he is far out and the tide turns.

_‘The Fairy Tale of My Life’ (1855)_
The hop poles

Hops were introduced by monks. They were cultivated on poles, round which they twine clockwise. Used as a flavouring for beer. The best hops were imported from Bavaria, although hops were cultivated throughout Denmark – especially, though, in Northwest Funen.

To take the place of the two old leafless trees, a tall flagstaff was put up flying the Danish flag, and, near by, another pole round which the hops twined their sweet-smelling clusters in summer and at harvest time. But in winter according to ancient custom a sheaf of oats was hung from this pole, so that the birds of the air might have something to eat at happy Christmas time.

‘The Gardener and the Noble Family’ (1872)
The Dutch Windmill

A Dutch windmill is one where the cap turns. It came to Denmark c. 1825 and many were built. It replaced the post mill, where the entire construction was turned, or as a supplement to water mills. Common as a windmill pump down by the coast.

“I am not proud at all,” it said, “but I am very much enlightened without and within. I have sun and moon for my outward use, and for inward use too; and into the bargain I have stearine candles, train oil and lamps, and tallow candles. I may well say that I’m enlightened. I’m a thinking being, and so well constructed that it’s quite delightful. I have a good windpipe in my chest, and I have four wings that are placed outside my head, just beneath my hat. The birds have only two wings, and are obliged to carry them on their backs. I am a Dutchman by birth, that may be seen by my figure— a flying Dutchman. They are considered supernatural beings, I know, and yet I am quite natural. I have a gallery round my chest, and house-room beneath it; that’s where my thoughts dwell. My strongest thought, who rules and reigns, is called by others ‘The Windmill’ (1865)
The country-dweller had three to four gardens: the vegetable garden, the orchard, the decorative garden for flowers and the hop garden. All of them can be seen at The Funen Village.

...The village of Hunderup, whose farmers are probably the richest on Funen. All around one can see beautiful, well-kept farms with red-painted timber and decorative gardens. The hopbines twine along the fences and in the ditches grow elders and wild roses.

In the wood there is music and a tent with refreshments; this is why the townspeople come out here and normally an excursion is made to Christiandals Woods, also referred to as ‘Fruens Bøge’, which are only separated from Hunderup Woods by the river that winds its way between them.

How many a lovely summer afternoon did I not jump around here when I was young and gather wild strawberries on a long blade of grass; then the blind man played on the violin in the woods and fine folk sailed up river from Odense in a boat from which a large red flag was hanging.

‘Fragment of an Summer Excursion 1829 – Odense and the Surrounding Area.’
Flax


But one day people came and seized the flax by its top and plucked it up, root and all – it did hurt. Then it was laid in water as though it was to be drowned, and after that it was put over the fire as if it was to be cooked. It was terrible.

‘One can’t always be on velvet,’ said the flax; ‘things have to be tried out before you can know them.’

All the same things were as bad as could be. The flax was bruised and broken, scutched and hackled, and goodness knows what else besides. It was put on the spinning wheel, where it whirred and purred – it was impossible to collect your thoughts.

‘I’ve been amazingly lucky,’ thought the flax in the midst of its pain. ‘One must be thankful for the good one has enjoyed. Thankful, ay, thankful’ – and it was still saying this when it came on the loom – and then it was turned into a splendid great piece of linen.

The whole flax, every single bit that was growing on it, was turned into the one piece.

‘The Flax’ (1850)
8 Toll House

Toll houses were at 7.5 kilometre intervals on the new 19th century main roads from c. 1820 to c. 1850. Here a toll was levied from travellers. Sometimes such a house was also a ‘speakeasy’.

By this time he had arrived very near the town. The crowd on the high road had been gradually increasing, and there was quite a rush of men and cattle. The cattle walked on the path and by the palings, and at the turnpike-gate they even walked into the toll-keeper’s potato-field, where one fowl was strutting about with a string tied to its leg, for fear it should take fright at the crowd, and run away and get lost. The tail-feathers of the fowl were very short, and it winked with both its eyes, and looked very cunning, as it said “Cluck, cluck.” What were the thoughts of the fowl as it said this I cannot tell you; but directly our good man saw it, he thought, “Why that’s the finest fowl I ever saw in my life; it’s finer than our parson’s brood hen, upon my word. I should like to have that fowl. Fowls can always pick up a few grains that lie about, and almost keep themselves. I think it would be a good exchange if I could get it for my goose. Shall we exchange?” he asked the toll-keeper.

“Exchange,” repeated the man; “well, it would not be a bad thing.”

And so they made an exchange,—the toll-keeper at the turnpike-gate kept the goose, and the peasant carried off the fowl.

‘What the Old Man does is always right’ (1861)
Horsedrawn Carriages

During stays at such manor houses as that of Glorup on Funen, horsedrawn excursions to spots of major diversion were the order of the day, even though Hans Christian Andersen sometimes felt that the trips were sometimes a bit too strenuous. On one occasion, he begged to be excused, because the wind set his teeth on edge, and on other occasions his pleasure was diminished because he did not like – on lengthier trips – to sit with his back to the horses. The carriages at The Funen Village include both such open carriages for excursions and semi-closed carriages such as those often used to fetch Hans Christian Andersen, e.g. as in Nyborg when he was on his way to Glorup.

Rode in a charabanc with the Count, Djørup, and Steffens past Sehestedsgaard down to his borough town complex ‘Lundeborg’, unloading place with a small, deep harbour, down to Langelang, which was a large inn and house for invalids. Then rode along a bad woodland road up to Broholm, returning home at almost five o’clock. The spittle from the horses struck me in the face.

Diary, 2 August 1867
In earlier times, ditches often marked the boundary between settlements. In the 19th century, ditches were also often dug to drain bogs, meadows, fields and roads.

Then it hopped along as quickly as it could and come out on to the road, where it had the sun of its back and was sprinkled with dust as it marched across the highway.

‘This really is dry land,’ said the toad. ‘For me, it’s almost too much of a good thing; it tickles.’

Now it reached the ditch. Here grew forget-me-not and meadow-sweet and, close by, a quickset hedge with bushes of may and alder; here, too, was convolvulus, growing as bindweed; masses of colour, and a fluttering butterfly. The toad thought this was a flower that had broken loose in order to have a better look at the world, which was of course so likely.

‘If only I could speed along like that,’ said the toad. ‘Ko-eks, ko-eks! What fun!’

It stayed on for eight nights and days in this ditch and never went short of food. ‘The Toad’ (1866)
Systematic or scientifically based forestry spread during the 18th century in Denmark. Many American and Scandinavian conifers were planted as an experiment in dry, infertile soil here in Denmark. The common spruce (Christmas Tree) is not indigenous to Denmark. Large areas of Funen were planted with the common spruce in the 1830s.

Out in the wood was a fir tree, such a pretty little fir tree. It had a good place to grow in and all the air and sunshine it wanted, while all around it were numbers of bigger comrades, both firs and pines. But the little fir tree was in such a passionate hurry to grow. It paid no heed to the warmth of the sun or the sweetness of the air, and it took no notice of the village children who went chattering along when they were out after strawberries or raspberries; sometimes they came there with a whole jugful or had got strawberries threaded on a straw, and then they sat down by the little tree and said, ‘Oh, what a dear little tree!’ That was not at all the kind of thing the tree wanted to hear.

The next year it had shot up a good deal, and the year after that its girth had grown even bigger; for, with a fir tree, you can always tell how old it is by the number of rings it has.

‘The Fir Tree’ (1845)
The Turup House

Hans Christian Andersen’s poem could apply to houses anywhere in Denmark. If he was really thinking of the Funen countryside, the house would probably have looked something like the Turup House: a typical, small Funen three-wing premises that lay outside the village ‘on the commonland’ and housed poor craftsmen or agricultural labourers.

*Where the road bends, there you see,*  
*Snugly lies a cottage wee.*  
*Somewhat crooked is each wall,*  
*All the windows are quite small.*  
*Saggnig is the door so old.*  
*How it barks, the doggy bold,*  
*In the caves the swallows twitter,*  
*There’s the setting sun – et cetera.*

‘The Mother and the Child’ (1829)  
- translation by Paula Hostrup Jessen

See map page 22-23
The Funen Village is an open-air museum that presents a Funen village milieu as it appeared in the time of Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875). The village includes some thirty buildings dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries, all of which were moved to The Funen Village from around Funen and other islands.

A visit to the museum is like travelling back to the 19th century. A village milieu has been recreated here comprising half-timbered houses, flower gardens, fences, a village pond and a village street – and all surrounded by cultivated fields. Occasionally, a grazing cow or goat comes to view, as geese strut about from pond to courtyard. Visitors can follow the farming of the common field in the views between the buildings, observe old Danish livestock breeds, and inspect examples of Funen kitchen and ornamental gardens as well as gardens of cultivated plants and old, local varieties of fruit trees.

The Funen Village · Sejerskovvej 20 · DK-5260 Odense S
Visit the place where the great writer of fairytales was born and find out about the story of his fantastic life – from the son of a poor cobbler to a world-famous writer of fairytales.