

TULLISAARI

If the Tullisaari Park, located to the north of Helsinki's Laajasalo island, could speak, it would have countless stories to tell of the great and the good of Finnish society who came to spend time in its grounds. Originally privately owned, the park has gone through many changes starting with its early heyday through a period of dilapidation and its current regeneration into a wonderful greenspace in the heart of Helsinki.

Covering an area of 46ha, the park is split into two distinct areas, with the manor park to the east and the national park to the west. The manor park holds significant cultural and historical value and has been afforded protected status.

The history of Tullisaari, formerly known as Tuurholma, dates back to the 16th century. In its time, the park has passed through many hands but the most interesting of its owners is arguably **Henrik Borgström**, a commercial councillor, businessman, tobacco trader and ship owner and one of the foremost figures in Helsinki society, who settled there in 1837.

Borgström's other achievements include the Kaivopuisto Park and spa in Helsinki's city centre as well as the parks in the Eläintarha area. A high-flyer, he moved in the same circles with notable Finnish cultural and political figures including writers such as **Topelius** and **Runeberg** and statesmen such as **Snellman** and **Cygnaeus**.



During his time spent working in England, Borgström had become fascinated by English landscape design and, accordingly, Tullisaari featured a dense network of paths, with the planting arranged so as to afford uninterrupted views of the nearby sea and islands. The park was also dotted with follies and scenic viewing points as well as bathing huts and even a bowling alley.

The Borgströms also added an extensive potager garden, whose hedges and arbours provided a sheltered space for the family to gather. An orangery, or greenhouse, was also often found in fashionable residences of the time. Over the years, Borgström developed the estate, adding further buildings and other features. A large number of staff were required to tend to the park and the adjacent farm.

In the 1870s and 1880s, Borgström's son-in-law, **Theodor Decker**, a renowned architect in his own right, designed villas for three of Borgström's eleven children. His daughter **Emilie** and her husband **Julius af Lindfors** were given the villa that is now better known as the home of the Finnish soprano **Aino Ackté**.

Although reflections of the Romantic style of their era, the villas are nevertheless carefully designed, unique buildings. Unfortunately, only the Decker and Aino Ackté villas survive to this day. The great granddaughter of Henrik Borgström lives in the Decker villa with her husband.

Borgström's daughter **Lina** bequeathed her estate to her niece **Selma Schulman** (née Borgström) who in turn bequeathed the land to the City of Helsinki for use as a public recreation area, with the main building to be used for charitable purposes. The main building was destroyed by fire in 1958.

Aino Ackté, one of the most celebrated opera singers of the early 20th century, and her husband **Heikki Renvall** purchased the af Lindfors villa and surrounding land as well as the Tuurholma estate and farm from **Mrs Signe (af Lindfors) Mittag-Leffrel** in 1901.

The Aino Ackté era was a glamorous one for Tullisaari. Parties were often organised with the hosts and their guests taking strolls across the park. The Ackté-Renvall family spent their summers in Tullisaari until late into the 1920s. When the couple's marriage was later dissolved, the title was transferred to their children and finally sold to the City of Helsinki in 1929 on the condition that Aino Ackté be allowed to continue residing there until her death.



By the 1920s, the Tullisaari Park and buildings were in a state of severe disrepair with the park suffering acts of vandalism. For decades, the area was used as a public recreation area, connected to the mainland by a regular boat service and, for a time in the 1960s and 70s even served as a campsite.

Villa Aino Ackté faced a long period of dereliction during which it was used as a storage space. Following a petition from the local residents, it was restored as a chamber music venue by the City of Helsinki in 1987.

In the 1990s, the interest cultural heritage conservation was re-awakened and a project to restore Tullisaari came underway in the early 2000s. The project was designed to retain and renovate the park's 19th century building stock and structures and re-instate the original path network and gardens and aimed to create a park that would serve as a recreational space but also as music and cultural venue and a local visitor attraction.



Work began in earnest in 2002 with the of clearing some of the park's overgrown trees and shrubs. The Tullisaari cove, invaded by cane-grass, was also dredged and cleared. The paths were uncovered and the benches, lighting and flowerbeds restored to their former condition. A pond at the old limestone quarry was re-established and fitted with a safety railing. The stone foundation of the fire-ravaged main building was also restored.

A new jetty was also built to replace the old. The park's many scenic viewing points now enjoy uninterrupted views all the way into the city centre. Restoration work will continue next year at the site of Villa Leonard, where there are plans to re-instate the gardens.

Although initially met with resistance by the area's residents, the project to restore the Tullisaari Park has proved a success. Today, this wonderful greenspace pays tribute to its creator, Henrik Borgström, a true patron of Helsinki's parks. Visitors to the park can choose to relax in the shade of its enormous protected oak or under the leafy linden trees, enjoy the colourful flowerbeds and wild flowers, take in the beautiful sea views or enjoy a chamber music concert at Villa Aino Ackté.

All visitors are invited to join a guided walking tour of the park on Wednesday 20 August at 6pm. Starting off at the Villa Aino Ackté car park at Henrik Borgströmintie, the walk will be conducted by Henrik Borgström himself who will offer participants a unique glimpse into life at Tullisaari. The walk also takes in this historic park's handsome old trees and gives visitors the opportunity to find out more about the restoration and maintenance work carried out.