A brief history of Södertälje

The name Tälje has a complex background. Some place name researchers contend the name comes from the Old Swedish noun talgh, which means ‘indentation’ or ‘bay’. Others believe it is related to the verb tälja, which means ‘to cut a notch’. A third interpretation is that Tälje derives from an Old Sami word for ‘isthmus or spit of land between two bodies of water’. In Södertälje's case, there is a spit between the two lakes, Mälaren and Saltsjön. We can see how Mälaren cuts in from the north and Saltsjön (the Baltic) from the south. Tälje was spelled several different ways at first. The Latinised version, Tælging, or Tælghia, is found in several old documents dating from the Middle Ages.

The Swedish name Telge, with several variant spellings, became common in the 1500s and for a couple of centuries thereafter. Another town named Tälje was founded in 1622 in the Roslagen area where the Baltic cuts into a bay. In order to differentiate the two Täljes, the older town was given the prefix ‘south’ and became Södertelge, while the newly established place in the northeast became Norrtelge.

The Södertelge spelling, with a g, was the most common in the 19th century, but Södertelje with a j was also used. When the reformed Swedish spelling was instituted in the 1910s, it became the official name of our city of Södertälje. The abbreviated variants of Telje and Tälje are still seen today, in for instance the Telge Group, the borough of Tälje and the university satellite, Campus Telge.
Tälje was mentioned for the first time in a written text in 1070, a description of the History of the Archdiocese of Hamburg or Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum in Latin. The book describes Ansgar’s route from Skara to Birka, where he passed Tälje.

The central parts of what would later become Tälje were populated during the latter part of the 8th century. The ongoing land elevation made it difficult for boats to pass the narrow strait between two lakes, Mälaren and Saltsjön. Another factor was that Birka had sprung up on the island of Björkö in Mälaren. Birka is usually called Sweden’s first city. It became a commercial centre and the goods for sale often came from the south, past Tälje.

In the early 9th century, the merchants of Birka established an outpost at Tälje. It was meant to aid and protect seafarers when they towed their vessels across the spit. The people who lived here became the first residents of Tälje. The land route from what would later become Stockholm passed by the same site. This became a simple converging point at what was to become Tälje.

An archaeological investigation has proven that Tälje has been a settlement, while we know from a written source that Ansgar, the Apostle of the North, passed Tälje on the way to Birka in 829. Ansgar’s efforts to convert our ancestors to Christianity had very little effect. It would take another couple of hundred years before they abandoned their Asa faith for Christianity.

At that time, the inhabitants of Tälje and the surrounding areas lived by hunting and fishing, basic farming and livestock keeping and by trading with and assisting passing ships. When the spit between Mälaren and Saltsjön became even shallower, people were forced to carry goods from one harbour at Maren to another on the shores of Mälaren. The transports were done by haulers or transporters who grew in number as the quantity of goods increased.

A fortress was built in the late 14th century just north of Tälje to protect the city and make tax collection more effective. The fortress was called Täljehus. Telgehus County was governed from here between 1318 and 1527. Archaeological excavations show that the fortress was surrounded by a moat and a palisade. In 1435, the regent, Engelbrekt, attempted to build a canal between Mälaren and Saltsjön. This set off a conflict and the Täljehus fortress was burnt down. The following year, Engelbrekt was murdered on Göksholm outside Örebro and the canal project was abandoned. Telgehus was rebuilt in the 1470s but was abandoned in the 1520s and was later ruined. The ruin was excavated in 1937 and is one of the few medieval traces left in Södertälje.

Church and parliamentary meetings began to be held in little Tälje in the 13th century, since the town was conveniently situated for travellers. It was easy to reach by boat or by sledge in winter. There is evidence of a number of meetings in official mediaeval documents – charters – preserved in the national archives in Stockholm. Documents in the archives show that Tälje was granted its first city charter in the mid 14th century. The original letters patent have been lost, but they were renewed in 1584 by Charles, Duke of Södermanland.
During the reign of King Gustav Vasa, a number of **crown farms** were established around the country, including one in Tälje in the 1540s. Under the rule of Duke Charles, Gustav Vasa’s youngest son, Tälje experienced its first great flowering. The Duke looked after little Tälje, which he called “our merchant city of Tälje.” In the 1580s, he had a **loading quay** built at Igelstaviken, south of the city, on the same spot as our modern-day Uthamnen in Södertälje. Duke Charles made sure iron goods from the iron mining district of Bergslagen were shipped out from the quay in Tälje. There were large quantities and for some years in the late 16th century, one quarter of Sweden’s total exports of iron goods went through Tälje. The Duke granted tax relief to foreign merchants who settled in Tälje. Commerce flourished and the town grew prosperous. This is confirmed by preserved tax rolls and customs records, along with archaeological finds. These **“glory days” came to an end** sometime after the death of King Charles IX in 1611.

Swedish became a great power in the 17th century, with several nationalities within its borders. Foreign merchants and artisans came to Södertälje, mainly Germans, bringing new customs and ideas. They often ran small farms inside the city as a sideline. The city also had several fishermen, but most important were the haulers, who transported goods between the city’s ports to the north and south.

**1600**

The era of adversity began in the 1630s for the merchant city of Tälje. The first misfortune was a city fire in 1630, the extent of which we know little about. The next blow was the **Bothian trade embargo of 1636**, which forbade all exports from Tälje. Foreign trade had been the main source of the city’s prosperity. To help the cities, a **city customs duty** was imposed in 1622 that was meant to prevent rural trade and commerce. Södertälje was granted three customs gates along the exit roads: Järnatullen towards the south, Turingetullen towards the west and Stockholmsullen towards the east. The **city customs duty ended in 1810**. In the 1640s, the government imposed an obligation to provide transport to passing travellers and issued an inn ordinance for the convenience of travellers. An inn was opened at Stora Torget.

The next major setback was another devastating **city fire in 1650**, when much of that built up after the last disastrous fire in 20 years before was destroyed. Most of the urban area was ravaged by the fire. City engineer Anders Torstensson was commissioned to design a new city plan. It replaced the earlier mediaeval plan, with its irregularly shaped streets and districts. Instead, the city was rebuilt according to a grid pattern with straight streets and rectangular blocks. The plan remained in force essentially unchanged for more than three hundred years, until 1963.

**1700**

**The Great Northern Wars of the late 17th and early 18th centuries** hit Södertälje hard. Conscriptsions to the army took many men to the field of battle, most of them never to return. The **plague** hit the city in 1709 and killed many. One year later, only a hundred or so residents were left in the city. In 1719, the city was **raided by the Russians** and much of the city was burnt to the ground. The church survived and a persistent story claims that the Russian commander said that if a marksman could hit the rooster on the weathervane atop the church tower with a single shot, the church would be spared. An unknown marksman stepped forward, aimed at the rooster and pulled the trigger. The shot hit the rooster, which spun round on its axis, and the church was saved. There was probably no time for such an event during the brief period the Russians were inside the city. But nevertheless, there is in fact a repaired bullet hole in the rooster to this day.

During the prosperous years of the early 17th century, a **school was established** in Tälje at the northeast corner of the churchyard. The schoolmaster, Jacob Rondeletius, wrote a play called Judas redivivus – The Risen Judas. The school was closed after the first city fire in 1630. The church was destroyed in the second **city fire of 1650**, but it could be rebuilt with a great deal of effort and financial assistance from landowners surrounding the city.
The city hall was burnt down when the Russians ravaged the city in 1719. The rebuilding was delayed due to poverty, but in 1735 the people of Södertälje could finally open the new city hall on the west side of Skoltorget. Although it has been added to and changed over the years, it still exists, although on the east side of Stora Torget since the 1980s.

After the end of the war in 1721 and the severe peace terms, Sweden wanted to concentrate on peaceful activity and stimulate domestic business. Several companies were started in Södertälje with the government’s assistance. A rather large number of them manufactured cloth for various purposes. Tobacco was grown on the outskirts of the city so that it would not have to be purchased from abroad. This business was run from the 1740s all the way to the 1830s, and tobacco barns for drying the leaves were a common sight in Tälje.

The 18th century was essentially the century of recovery. Once the greatest needs had been ameliorated, Södertälje could begin thinking about arranging a better school. During the lean years, the town had allowed the parish clerk to teach the children to read and write. By the early 1780s, the city had scraped together the funds to build a new school, which was built on the north side of Gamla Torget, just north of the church. Skolhuset – the School Building – was finished in 1782 and the name of the square was changed to Skoltorget.

Several other pre-industrial companies were established. They became an early equivalent to the employment projects of the 1960s and when the state funds were exhausted, the new companies usually had to shut their doors. One of the smaller companies was a stoneware factory that manufactured pots. The little “factory” thrived and was in operation from 1752 till 1797.

One government project that was less successful was King Gustav III’s idea of setting up crown distilleries. The king figured that the people drank vodka and if it was made under government management, there would be good money to be made. But he had not counted on the people’s resistance to stripping them of their time-honoured rights to distill their own intoxicating liquors. The crown distilleries were a failure and were shut down after a couple of decades. There was one in Södertälje at Målarhamnen, near Kronstrandsgatan. It started in 1776 and was in operation until 1787. When the distillery was closed down, the population declined.

Nationwide investments were made in better healthcare starting in the late 1760s. The Order of the Seraphim was allocated government funds and given responsibility for all hospitals in the country. In Stockholm County, they determined that a hospital was needed in Norrtälje, while the southern areas got their hospital in Södertälje. A hospital was built here on lot 75 east of Storgatan on a hill later called Orion Hill after the new district name of Orion. The hospital was finished in 1778. Oddly enough, the hospital was closed in 1823 when medical care was centralised to Daniken in Stockholm. Thereafter, Södertälje was without a hospital until 1869.

In the early 19th century, business and industry were on the back burner in Södertälje. The population languished at about 900 souls and the city lived up to its designation as a backwater in many ways. But things were about to turn around. A project that had been dormant since the 1400s finally got started: the building of a canal between Mälaren and Saltsjön. The project had been brought out and dusted off several times over the years, only to be put back in mothballs. In 1806, King Gustav IV Adolph granted a charter to a private company to build a canal. The company had to raise the capital itself, but could count on help from the military, as long as the country was at peace. In exchange for its investments, the company was allowed to keep the fees the boats would pay to pass through the canal. The work was expected to take four years, but, delayed by war, technical problems and cost over-runs, ended up taking thirteen. This major project was very meaningful to the small, somewhat apathetic city. The workers needed food, lodging and amusements. New techniques and ideas were adopted and applied in other activities as well. At the end, the workers tidied up the area surrounding the new canal and helped make things new and attractive in other parts of the city as well. In short, the canal was a welcome shot in the arm for the city.

During the latter half of the 18th century, little Södertälje was a city people passed through on the way somewhere else, and most of the time there was at least one person, usually more, waiting for a ride at Stora Torget where the inn was situated. Even though the city had many haulers who were compelled to provide transport to travellers, there was almost always a shortage of transport. While they were waiting, the travellers could walk around the city, but there was not much to see. The houses were small and usually in poor condition. The church had no objects of significant value and was in need of repair. One can understand why travellers described Södertälje as a rural backwater.
Poet and troubadour Carl Michael Bellman was one of those who spread this hardly flattering description. He had good contacts in the city and knew how miserable things were there. He wrote the quite famous poem Vällovliga magistraten i Tälje, which translates roughly to “The laudable officials of Tälje.” It was published in 1767 but spread rapidly when it was included in his collection of poems and songs, The Epistles of Fredman, in 1790. In the poem, he described some of the city judges as pigs. It took a long time to overcome this negative publicity.

A cold water health spa was started in Södertälje in 1849. An unemployed pharmacist, Carl Petter Lidman, discovered that, according to legend, the miraculous waters of Torekälla spring could be used to help the sick. He managed to interest a couple of people in investing money. They went together to buy a couple of lots in southern Södertälje and built a treatment centre. The spa was a success from the start. Great numbers made their way to the city to get relief – and hopefully a cure – from their ailments. These patients, often with their families in tow, needed somewhere to stay and eat while in Södertälje. The spa did not have a hotel or restaurant, but could arrange lodging in private homes. This became an economic upturn for the people of the city and spa guests were highly esteemed by the townsfolk.

In the mid 1850s, the Swedish Parliament decided to bring rail to Sweden. This resulted in the building of the Western Main Line between Stockholm and Gothenburg. It was opened in 1862 and gave Södertälje a rail connection to Stockholm. This section of the line was opened on October 24th 1860 and Södertälje has had daily connections to the capital city ever since. At first, rail traffic was on a single track. This was so unfortunate in Södertälje that the main line went to a station at Saltskog. From there, a branch line went to the city centre.
Around the mid 19th century, the main road to Stockholm was considerably improved and construction of the new segment was completed in 1858. With the three modes of transport — road, rail and canal — Södertälje was advantageously positioned as a hub, which in turn resulted in the establishment of several companies in the city. Södertälje also had a diligent workforce and plenty of land for new industry. One of the oldest companies to take advantage of these conditions was Ekenbergska Vagnfabriken. The factory opened in 1838 and manufactured horse-drawn wagons at first, but converted production when the railway came to Södertälje and began to build railway carriages. Demand was strong and the company flourished. The firm was converted into a company named D J Ekenbergs Söner, which was so successful that AB Atlas, a company recently formed in Stockholm, bought it in 1873. Railway carriages and equipment were still the main products.

The first city council assembly, 1863.

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The dawn of industrialisation brought a large influx of labour — workers accompanied by many children in need of education. The old schoolhouse from 1782 was no longer adequate. The city's first primary school for girls opened its doors in 1869. Previously, girls had been offered little opportunity for education. The next primary school was completed in 1886 at Oxabacken in an area formerly used for pasture, a market and other temporary events. The population continued to grow and in 1898 it was once again time for a new schoolhouse at Oxabacken, south of the original building.

The population influx increased the need for housing, which initially could be arranged on the large farms along Storgatan. Up until the mid 19th century, the townspeople had been part-time farmers, with small fields outside the gates of the city; some even raised livestock. When they stopped farming, many of these urban farms had vacant outbuildings. These sheds and barns were converted into simple homes for Södertälje’s new residents, and were known as gardshus, or courtyard houses. This opportunity was soon exhausted and construction began outside the old urban core. Flats were built in buildings outside of a zoned area and not subject to city building regulations. These were usually rather simple structures, but they met the need for housing.

A few decades into the 19th century, the city court and authorities, various municipal bodies and the local inn outgrew the city hall on Stora Torget. A wing was added on to the back of the building, facing west, in the early 1840s so that the inn and its basement restaurant could accommodate both local and out-of-town guests. In 1843 the city court, magistrates and some municipal bodies moved to the former hospital premises, which the city of Södertälje had purchased. They shared the building with a teaching programme that was a form of higher education.

During the time of Duke Charles, in the late 16th century, a fire watch system of a sort was implemented, dividing the city into four sections: two on the west side of Storgatan and two on the east. A guard stood watch in the church tower around the clock to make sure no fire broke out. But if one did, he was to toll one of the church bells and everyone was required to rush to the fire and help put it out. In the mid 19th century, the organisation was improved according to military methods, with clear lines of command and more modern tools.

Södertälje has never been home to any government or church authority. The city was instead a centre of commerce and crafts that evolved in the late 19th century into an industrial city. Enterprising individuals began publishing newspapers in many Swedish cities during the 19th century. The first local newspaper in Södertälje was founded in 1861 and given the straightforward name of Södertelge Tidning (“The Södertälje Newspaper”). The publisher was a merchant, Justus Johansson. Originally, the four-page newspaper featured some local news, along with national news clipped from the newspapers Afornbladet and Post & Inrikes Tidningar. Advertisements occupied a large part of the newspaper, then as now. An uninterrupted, albeit crooked, line goes from Johansson’s local newspaper to the modern Länstidningar.
In the old days, the seat of local government in the town was the general city assembly, at which all citizens had the right to vote. A council of elders served as a form of government. The mayor was the obvious candidate for the position of chairman. Although the general city assembly was a democratic institution, it was rather clumsy and became unwieldy as the city grew. Consequently, the government issued the Royal Ordinance of Local Governance of 1862. As a result of this regulation, which came into force on New Year’s Day in 1863, the cities of Sweden—including Södertälje—were run by a city council assembly. The first chairman was customs inspector Gustaf Gyllenram.

Södertälje’s prime location at the intersection of road, rail and water-ways, attracted several businesses to establish operations in the city. In 1860 the petrochemical industry came to Södertälje when Söder- telge Oljebruk opened by the bay at Igelsväken. In 1871, a match factory was founded; over the years it grew and sold its famous brand, “The Ship and the Rose”, almost all over the world. The match factory moved to Gothenburg in 1908 and was eventually amalgamated with Svenska Tändsticks AB. In 1889, Svenska Jutevävsfabriken opened its doors. The factory manufactured burlap, a common packaging material at the time, when goods were often put in burlap sacks. In 1891, Vagnfabriksaktiebolaget i Södertelge (Vabis) started building railroad carriages. In 1896 Vabis gained a competitor in Södertelge Verkstäder, which also produced rail rolling stock. There were also a number of small businesses. Södertälje had become an industrial city.

One notable event was the major fire in the town’s church on January 25th 1881. The fire started in the buildings on the west side of Storgatan where Turringelunden Park is now. The fire brigade had great difficulty in obtaining water due to the cold weather, and the strong wind meant that the fire rapidly took hold in the shingled roof of the church. Disaster ensued. The gutted church was rebuilt quite soon afterwards to drawings by an architect named Åbom and was re-consecrated in 1883. The buildings in which the fire broke out were not rebuilt: instead the plots of land were merged and a park was created. It was called Brända tomten – the burnt lot – until the 1940s when it gained its current name Turingelunden.

Storgatan has always had a significant role. A hundred years [a century] separates these two pictures: 1862–1962

St Ragnhild’s Church after the fire in 1881. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

During the years after 1860, when the city had about 1,700 residents, the population steadily grew. In 1870 it was 2,150, 1880 3,500, 1890 4,600 and eventually in 1900, the population has reached 8,200. The increase of 6,500 people over four decades left its mark. The old city of commerce and crafts was in need of modernisation and expansion. In the 1880s, the residents of Södertälje witnessed construction of stately new stone buildings along Storgatan and several other locations. Examples of these stone buildings were Storgatan 3 and Storgatan 10, both of which were later demolished. Retail shops grew in terms of both variety and number. The telegraph opened in 1858 and a telephone society went operational in 1883.

The hospital in Oxbacksgatan, 1869. PHOTO: TORGNY DUFWA

The hospital in Oxbacksgatan became an “epidemic hospital” for patients with infectious diseases.

PHOTO: THORE BILLING

The hospital in Oxbacksgatan, 1869. PHOTO: TORGNY DUFWA

PHOTO: GÖRAN GELOTTE

The hospital in Oxbacksgatan, 1869. PHOTO: TORGNY DUFWA

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Several free-church faith communities were formed in the late 1800s. In Södertälje, Baptists, the Mission Covenant Church, Methodists, the Salvation Army and later the Pentecostals set up their own parishes and constructed Free Church buildings. Together they stimulated the spiritual side of life. The generally increasing consumption of alcohol prompted a backlash, and a life of sobriety was portrayed as an ideal. Several temperance societies were established in Södertälje in the 1890s and attracted many members.

Workers grouped themselves in trade unions. The first "worker's municipality" was a regional organisation in the Swedish Social Democratic Party, which was formed in Södertälje in 1899. Many people joined organisations and unions as a reaction to the working conditions created by industrialisation. The Free Church, temperance, workers' and sports movements were the four that propelled Sweden into an increasingly democratic 20th century.

The Helsinki company Tollander & Klärich opened a cigarette factory in the town at roughly the same time as Astra was founded. When Svenska Tobaksmonopolet (the Swedish tobacco monopoly) was established in 1917, the state monopoly acquired the cigarette factory. The business was relocated to a new factory by the harbour Östra Mälarmenn. In 1918, W Dan Bergman started making products out of aluminium in premises in the Östra Mälarmenn harbour area. The company moved to new facilities in the Ekensberg area in 1938 and changed its name to Wedawerken; during its heyday it was the town's third-largest factory and had just over 600 employees.

Several wars in Europe increased people's will to defend themselves, and in Sweden voluntary rifle corps were formed, a version of today's Home Guard. The key skills for members of these corps were to be able to march and shoot using a rifle—a form of military drill. In 1881 a rifle club was founded in Södertälje. It was based on Tältet, an area southeast of the town centre. The name stems from the time when marching troops used to pitch camp on this large open space. The arrival of the railway in the early 1860s meant that troops were transported by train and Tältet was freed up for other activities. A group broke out of the rifle club in 1887 and formed a new rifle club called Söder­tegelte Skytttegille. They had tired of military drills and simply wanted to shoot. A few years beforehand, the shooters were forced to stop using Tältet, as it was deemed as being too close to places used by the general public. Tältet thus became “vacant” again and sportsmen and women started practicing and competing in the area. After a few years, the sportsmen and women grouped themselves into clubs. The first and largest club that used Tältet was Södertälje Sportklubb (SSK), which was founded in 1902 and was for football and athletics. The next club formed was Södertälje Idrottsförening (SIF) in 1907. Both had pavilions on the Tältet area; Sportklubben's was the largest.
AB Atlas had a gasworks built for its factory in 1874. The works produced so much gas that the company was able to sell it to the city. This enabled Södertälje to install gas lamps in the city area, replacing the dim oil lamps. Södertälje was therefore one of the first cities in Sweden to obtain gas lighting. It was in use until 1928 when Södertälje, again among the first in Sweden, replaced it with electric street lighting.

As the town had a good gas supply, electricity was not connected until 1908. It came from two generators that stood in the old waterworks premises at Järnagatan. The generators were run by two diesel motors and supplied a limited amount of electricity that was only enough for lighting. It was not until 1918, when Södertälje was connected to the national grid, that enough electricity was supplied to power machinery as well. Most companies and workshops switched to electric motors fairly rapidly. In 1927/1928 the power plant Södertälje Elverk switched from direct current to alternating current, and voltage was increased from 127 to 220 volts in 1952/1953.

Before 1896, the population of Södertälje had their water needs met via private wells or public water collection sites. To provide a water supply, the city decided to develop a municipal well in the southern part of the city. The water would be pumped up from the well to a large reservoir on Torekällberget and distributed from there to properties in the city. The reservoir on Torekällberget was 64 metres above sea level, which produced adequate pressure in the pipes. This was a good solution for a while, but the well down in the city was too small to meet demand for water. When the volume of water withdrawn increased, salt water began to trickle in from Maren. Extensive studies and calculations resulted in the city taking water from a powerful spring out in Djupdal, west of the city. At the same time, the reservoir on Torekällberget was extended and received a good supply of clean, high-quality water. The system worked well until Södertälje expanded after the Second World War.

The old canal, built in 1819, with its lock, became too narrow, too shallow and too meandering over the years. Vessels increased in size and rebuilding was necessary. The private canal company was acquired by the state in 1912. This time as well, the intended construction period was four years. The First World War and a strike delayed the work and increased costs dramatically. The canal was straightened, deepened from 3.6 to 5.6 metres and widened from 12 to 25 metres. The new lock had a length of 135 metres compared with the previous 42 metres. This enlargement and deepening allowed vessels of just over 10,000 dwt to pass and the lock became the largest in the Nordic region. The rebuilt canal was opened on November 17th 1924 by King Gustaf V.

Work began to install underground water and sewage pipes along Storgatan in the early 1890s. The municipal water mains made life so much easier for households and were a major advantage for the fire brigade. For a number of years, the sewage pipes poured untreated sewage directly into Mälaren and Saltsjön. Södertälje’s first municipal sewage treatment works opened in Viksängen in 1958. This operated until 1974, when the town was connected to the regional sewage network. In the years after the mid 1890s, the networks of pipes were built further and further out from the town centre, but they did not cover most of the town’s area until the latter part of the 1930s.

Industrial expansion continued in the early 20th century. This resulted in an increase in both the population and living standards. These positive factors triggered a construction boom. Several imposing, large stone buildings were erected along Storgatan and Järnagatan. The architect and builder Nils Ludvig Lundberg was the man behind buildings such as Järnagatan 10 and Storgatan 1. These buildings still make a strong impression today. Wooden blocks of flats were built in several parts of the city, thus alleviating the shortage of housing. Such rows of rented properties were built primarily in the northwestern parts of the city, principally with the assistance of Svenska Centrifug AB. At the time, this company was the biggest employer in the city and many of its employees lived in these properties.

Expansion and new routes were the objectives of the rail industry. This led to Södertälje getting a new central station three kilometres away from the city centre. The station was named Södertälje Södra. A branch line from this station served Södertälje Central. Rail service was rerouted in October 1921 and the arrangement continued until 1995, when a new station for long-distance rail service was opened, Södertälje Syd. Södertälje Södra was renamed Södertälje hamn and has since been served only by SL, Stockholm Public Transport, local trains and limited freight traffic. At the same time, the commuter station in the city centre changed its name to Södertälje centrum.
The Shopping Centre had its official opening in 1936. Today’s equivalent can be found in Luna.

The labour movement in Södertälje needed its own building for meetings and courses. The local branch of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the trade unions collected money for a fund to erect a building on a suitable site. Several sites were inspected before Folkets husförening – the Community Centre Association – opted for a site on Oxbacksgatan. It was not ideal but it was in a good location in the city. Architect Tore Lindhberg was commissioned to design the building. He succeeded in creating a monumental classicist building on the irregular site. The first Folkets Hus community centre in Södertälje was finished in December 1923.

The architect Tore Lindhberg was very productive and designed many buildings in Södertälje. He left his mark on the urban landscape from the 1920s to the 1940s. Apart from Folkets Hus, his creations include Centrumpalatset at Järnagatan 5–7, Castorhuset at Storgatan 2 and Gamla församlingshemmet at Torekällgatan 16, as well as a number of residential homes.

Industry enjoyed a golden era up to 1917, when the First World War resulted in a serious shortage of raw materials. Svenska Jutevävsfabriken was closed and several of the other factories experienced problems. Vabis, which merged with Scania in Malmö to become Scania-Vabis in 1911, went into liquidation, as did Södertelge Verkstäd. However, they were rapidly reorganised. Fortunes fluctuated for the business community in the 1920s. The 1930s were a trying time for many, both companies and individuals, and a period of depression and unemployment.

The planned community and sports centre on Tältet did not progress beyond the planning stage but the city did get a new sports park on the eastern side of the canal in 1923 and a new community park in the same area in 1927. The sports park was built in the old Fågelkärret and became an important athletics centre. It is still used a great deal today. The community park, Folkparken, was developed in the Kamphagen area a hundred metres south of the sports park. For many years it was an important social focal point in the summer. Folkparken also offered a rich variety of theatre, variety shows, performances and dancing over the years. As people took on new leisure habits, demand for Folkparken declined and the city was forced to close this cultural institution in the early 1990s. Homes were built in the Folkparken area.

Industry enjoyed a golden era up to 1917, when the First World War resulted in a serious shortage of raw materials. Svenska Jutevävsfabriken was closed and several of the other factories experienced problems. Vabis, which merged with Scania in Malmö to become Scania-Vabis in 1911, went into liquidation, as did Södertelge Verkstäd. However, they were rapidly reorganised. Fortunes fluctuated for the business community in the 1920s. The 1930s were a trying time for many, both companies and individuals, and a period of depression and unemployment.

The baker’s pretzel has become a symbol for Södertälje. The city is sometimes affectionately called Pretzel Town, and one of the department stores is called Kringlan – The Pretzel. The pretzels were baked by special bakers in great secrecy and sold by professional “pretzel ladies” by the canal and at railway stations until the 1920s. Later, they were often sold by schoolchildren at Södertälje Södra. Sales there stopped at the end of the 1950s but continue to this day on Torekällberget.

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Manufacturers continued to ramp up their production and needed even more labour. At first, recruitment was limited to Sweden. The companies launched recruitment campaigns in the 1960s; a select group of skilled Greeks came to Scania-Vabis in 1960. Yugoslavians and Finns were also recruited. With the expanded workforce, the manufacturers could handle all their orders.

In the early 1930s, the housing organisation HSB began building homes in Södertälje. They also introduced a new approach to housing with savings in a building society and tenant-owner associations. The first HSB buildings were at Järnagatan 32–34 and on Oxbacken. HSB subsequently built homes in many parts of the city.

The Finnish immigrants worked hard so that they could save money and return home. Some of them went back to Finland, whereas others enjoyed living in Södertälje and settled down here.

After the end of the Second World War in 1945, a number of projects were implemented that had been mothballed during the war years. In 1948, a municipal housing corporation was set up and named Telgebostäder. It constructed several residential areas in Södertälje, including Östra Rosenlund, Viksängen and Karlfv. This alleviated some of the housing shortages that had existed since the end of the 1930s. The three large companies, Scania-Vabis, Astra and Wedaverken, built a number of residential buildings themselves, primarily for their employees.

The S. S. Ejder was built in Gothenburg in 1880. Södertälje became its home port in 1906. Ejder chugged along in commercial traffic in these waters until 1958 when its owners, along with Captain Rickard Fredmark, sold it to the city of Södertälje. It was a café ship for several years before it was about to sink in Landsortsdjupet, the deepest part of the Baltic Sea. Miraculously the ship didn’t end up under water. A laborious renovation effort was undertaken; since the late 1970s, Ejder has been frequenting its old waters as a museum steamship. Many hours of voluntary labour have enabled Ejder to live on after more than 130 years, making it one of the oldest coal-heated steamships in the country.

Around 1936, the economy began to recover. The business community began to return to normal and companies were able to take on staff again. Then the Second World War broke out in 1939. The three large companies in the city, Scania-Vabis, Astra and Wedaverken, were awarded good contracts by the state and had work throughout the war. Others experienced problems with raw materials and staff as a large proportion of the male workforce was conscripted.

Both construction and population influx placed heavy demands on municipal services. The shops couldn’t keep up with the pace of expansion. Existing premises were suited to the clientele during the interwar period. Something had to be done about commerce in the town centre. The authorities approved a large urban renewal project. Carried out in 1963–1965, it was one of Sweden’s biggest and most contemporary projects. Four entire neighbourhoods on the east side of Storgatan were torn down and replaced by two large complexes: Kringlan and Tellus, usually referred to as the Åhlens building. Two targeted renewal efforts were carried out at the same time in surrounding neighbourhoods: Domus in 1961 (Telge building), Metrohuset in 1964 (Stadium building) and Nya Rådhuset in 1965 (Courthouse).
The E4 arterial road went through the city centre until 1965, when a diversion/motorway was opened, considerably reducing inner city traffic. In connection with the transition to right-hand traffic in 1967, Storgatan was converted to a pedestrian street between Stora Torget and Torekällberget. The old bascule bridge over Södertälje Canal was replaced by the double Mälar Bridge in 1971. Meanwhile, Oxdackesleden, an improved through road, was built through the city. An improvement for maritime traffic was carried out in 1973–1976 when the canal was deepened, straightened out and provided with better technical equipment.

The 1960s were a hectic period during which a number of new city district areas were built. Among them were Brunnsäng, Ronna, Geneta and Fornhöjden. There was a heavy influx, including immigrants from the Mediterranean area. Södertälje became a multicultural city with many different languages and cultures. To fix the almost constant housing shortage, the city launched the large-scale Hovsjö project. An entirely new district was built on an undeveloped mountain plateau in southwest Södertälje. Unfortunately, the energy crisis of the early 1970s coincided with the project. Scania-Vabis slammed on the brakes and the labour market cooled off. The housing shortage turned into a surplus, which lead to new, albeit different, problems. The economy recovered in the mid-1970s and the municipality resumed its expansion.

The Södertälje Art Association was formed in 1945 and took up residence in the Old Town Hall. The association stayed in the building both while it was on Västra Kanalgatan for twenty years and when it moved back to Stora Torget in 1982. Eje Högestätt took over as cultural director in 1967 and injected new life into the Södertälje art scene. At his suggestion, an art gallery was built on Järnsagatan. Due to his extensive international contacts, he was able to arrange superb exhibitions of the works of Magdalena Abakanovic, Vladislav Hasiör and other well-known artists. Abakanovic’s tactile textile appliqués were exhibited at the gallery before going to the National Museum in Stockholm. These vibrant exhibitions continued after the gallery moved to the Luna Cultural Centre in 1978.

The Community Centre that opened in 1923 became overcrowded with time and was torn down in 1971. New and more suitable premises were needed. The Community Centre Association – Folkets Husföreningen and the city of Södertälje collaborated, and a new Community Centre opened in 1970. It was centrally located on Järnsagatan. The building housed Estrad, a large new stage, and Trombon, a big assembly room, as well as a number of other smaller premises, cafeterias, trade union facilities and rooms for group activities.

The new Community Centre was a popular meeting place for the people of Södertälje for several decades. The municipality expanded its facilities and modernised its organisation in the early 2000s, providing a convenient opportunity to remodel and expand the Community Centre into a contemporary City Hall. It opened on November 1st 2008.

The Ytterjärna Cultural Centre is a little oasis south of Järna with a lovely building that opened in 1992; a theatre to which many celebrities have come; schools; cafés; and Vidarkliniken, the only anthroposophic hospital in the Nordic area.
In 1965, the city took over responsibility for the library that had been run by the Association for the Södertälje City Library. The association had premises at Rådhusgatan 11. The number of visitors and books that were taken out increased with the size of the population. In 1961, the City Library moved to new and improved premises at the top of Domus on Storgatan. It stayed there until 1978, when it moved to Luna. The big advantage was that visitors could now walk in at street level.

Athletics in Södertälje experienced an upswing in the 1970s and 1980s. The Södertälje Sports Club (SSK) won its seventh Swedish Championship gold medal in 1985. The Södertälje Sports Association (SIF) scored triumphs in track and field. The Södertälje Basketball Club (SBBK) played at the elite level for both women and men. The Enhörna Sports Association chalked up big victories in orienteering and found more controls faster than their opponents. Two Södertälje football teams, Assyriska FF and Syrianska FC, have also been successful. Syrianska FC plays very well and found more controls faster than their opponents. Two Södertälje football teams, Assyriska FF and Syrianska FC, have also been successful. Syrianska FC plays very well and found more controls faster than their opponents. Two Södertälje football teams, Assyriska FF and Syrianska FC, have also been successful.

Södertälje has done very well in gymnastics and sports. The Södertälje Gymnastics and Swimming Association was successful. The two branches eventually separated and each did very well in their sports. The gymnastics club benefited from the sports facilities built in various areas of the city and the swim club gained beautiful training and competition lanes at the Täljebadet swim centre, which was expanded and developed in 1989 to become Sydpoolen – an aquatic adventure centre. The centre is on the grounds of Tältet and is also a municipal swim centre used by people from all of Greater Stockholm.

In tennis, Södertälje has been moderately successful over the years, but the city gained a superstar in the 1970s in Björn Borg. His tireless training and practice, his ball sense and, perhaps more than anything else, his well-documented persistence led him to brilliant victories all over the world. His record as a five-time Wimbledon champion is perhaps his finest achievement.

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It started as an exhibition in 1985, almost a happening, in Konsthallen, the art gallery in Södertälje. An educational game with just the right amount of seriousness surrounding physical experiments. The tremendous public response led to the exhibition being made permanent. I was moved to the old industrial building Centrifugen, at the northern end of Storgatan, where it grew until it finally filled every available bit of space. The exhibition that became an experience centre was named Tom Tits Experiment and is the biggest one in Sweden.

The effort to organise the large municipal district was ongoing throughout the 1960s. The Greater Södertälje Municipality was formed as of the first of January 1971, when the city of Södertälje and the municipalities of Järna-Vårby, Hölö-Mörkö, Turinge and Taxinge were amalgamated, with Södertälje as the municipal seat. The new municipal formation contributed to coordination gains, but created greater distance between citizens and policymakers. To reduce this distance, several Municipal District Committees were implemented in 1989, which were given decision rights regarding certain social issues. This reform has largely been dismantled.

Many residents of Södertälje work in Greater Stockholm and commute between the cities by car or train. The motorway, which was finished in the 1960s, has since been expanded in phases. Rail passengers got a new and somewhat faster service in 1968 when Swedish Rail introduced commuter train service, which was taken over by SL, Stockholm Public Transport, a few years later. Long-distance service was modernized with the new high-speed train, the X2000. Increasing numbers of passengers and trains caused congestion and delays. New railway lines and a new long-distance railway station were the solution. The new section of the Western Main Line goes from Flemingsberg via a 2 km-long elevated bridge, Igelstabron, over Hallsjöfen to the new Södertälje Syd station opened in 1995. There was a major improvement for maritime traffic through Södertälje Canal through the rebuilding carried out in 1973–1976. Curves were straightened, the canal was dredged and technologies were improved in general. The project was concluded with a grand re-opening of the canal on June 8th 1976.

Enhörna, or Enhörnalandet, is a peninsula in Lake Mälaren of great natural beauty situated northwest of the built-up area of Södertälje. Enhörna is a thriving farming district with a vigorous civil society of clubs and associations. Forestry is also active in the district. Most residents of Enhörna who are employed commute to Södertälje or Stockholm.

Hölö-Mörkö is one of the southern districts of Södertälje. The population is growing apace and new housing areas are emerging. The district is made up of the town of Hölö and the islands of Mörkö and Oaxen.

The advantages of the small community and proximity to Stockholm and Södertälje meet in Järna. The countryside and the seashore are nearby, and the district offers excellent opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, as well as arts and culture.

Vårby–Mölbo, anchored by the town of Mölbo, is situated southeast of Södertälje. Vårby–Mölbo has been a separate municipal district with its own Municipal District Committee since 1989.

An administrative change occurred within the large Södertälje Municipal District when the district of Turinge-Taxinge separated and formed the Municipality of Nykvarn in 1999. This reduced the size of the municipal district by one-tenth. With its two global companies, Scania and AstraZeneca, the municipality has excellent potential for the future from many perspectives.
The formation of the large municipal district imposed greater administrative demands and the administrative departments expanded. Arranging premises for all the departments became a problem. In order to gather most units in one place, a decision was taken to build a new city hall. The choice became the former community centre – Folkets Hus at Järnagatan, which was extensively converted and adapted to modern times and new technology. The conversion and rebuilding was finished in 2008. The ceilings in the entrance hall are 36 metres high. This physical expanse and openness reflects the spirit of openness and communication in the new city hall.