

## VIRTAANKOSKI - CULTURAL HISTORY IN BRIEF



Photo: Mika Viitanen, @KalastusKanava

Sysmä and Hartola are the oldest manor areas in Eastern Häme. The oldest manors in the area date back to the late 16th century. At the end of the 19th century, there were 26 manors in the area, 16 of which still remain. Some of the manors were horse farms owned by noble families, while others were created in connection with the division of land during inheritance. There were two manors along the Virtaankoski rapids: Vanha-Kartano Manor and Virtaan Manor.

At the end of the 19th century, during a period of rapid economic growth, Virtaan Manor began to develop small-scale industry. In 1878, Magnus Tandefelt, the lord of the manor at the time, started producing spirits at the Virtaa Manor, establishing a distillery and, four years later, a spirits purification plant. By the turn of the 19th century, Tandefelt's distillery had become the largest industrial enterprise in the municipality.

Tandefelt utilized the power of the rapids located on the estate's land and started the Virta sawmill. The sawmill only operated for a few years before it burned down. Tandefelt also started manufacturing barges at two small shipyards in the late 19th century and owned two steamboats, Lainetar and Aallotar, as well as three small tugboats, Aino, Matilda, and Pikku.

Fishing has always been an important source of food and livelihood for the people of the region. Salted fish was served every day at the manor, and fresh fish was eaten in the summer. This meant that large quantities of fish had to be preserved for the winter. In the autumn, fishing took place six days a week. The Virta estate's catch came from Lake Nuoramoisjärvi,

where it was mostly smelt, roach, pike, and zander. (Source: Stjernvall-Järvi. B. 2009. Manor Life in Eastern Häme.)



The control room of the Virtaankoski power plant in June 2022. Photo: Vapaa Virtaankoski -project

Finland's first hydroelectric power plant was completed in Tampere, Tammerkoski, in 1891. Water mills have existed in Finland since the 14th century. The Virtaankoski power plant's license dates back to 1863. Tainionvirta has been dammed since the 1910s, and a hydroelectric power plant has been in operation there since the 1950s. The history of hydroelectric power generation along the river has been eventful. The current power plant has been closed since 2012, when the fishing authorities required the owners to build a fish ladder past the dam before electricity production could continue. At the end of 2021, Hiitolanvoima Oy acquired Virtaankosken Voima Oy and submitted an amendment to the articles of association to the Finnish Patent and Registration Office, with the aim of transforming the company into a public utility company and changing its name to Sysmän Tainionvirta Oy.

### **From the hydroelectric power plant to Sysmän Tainionvirta Oy**

On November 18, 1863, the governor of Mikkeli County granted Lieutenant Johan Fredrik Stormbom permission to build a watermill next to an old customs flour mill called Tainio in 1863. According to the decision, the mill referred to in the permit application must not, like the previously built mills, block the boat route, prevent fish from swimming upstream, or prevent any future rapids clearing and lake lowering, or divert water away from the waterworks previously located there.

Magnus Tandefelt (1830-1902) established a private dairy on his land by the river in 1890. The Virtaan Manor power plant began operating in this log-framed dairy building in 1913. From 1913 to 1939, the Virtaan Manor (Ylä-Tainionkoski) Power Plant supplied electricity from



The Virtaan manor power plant began operating in 1913 in this log-framed dairy building, which was constructed in 1890. Photo: Sari-Anna Vilander

Sysmä's first power plant not only for its own needs but also to the surrounding area, including the village of Sysmä. The power plant was built in 1913 on the site of the old mill, which had been destroyed by fire in 1909.

Between 1944 and 1956, Sysmän Mylly ja Sähkölaitos Oy operated the plant and applied for and obtained a permit to raise and repair the power plant dam in 1949. The new power plant was built in the early 1950s on the west bank of the rapids, on the site of the old Pyöriäisen mill. The power plant was expanded with a second turbine room in 1956; the red-brick building as it stands today dates from this period.

1957–1966 Sysmän Voima Oy merged with Etelä-Suomen Voima Oy in 1966. Etelä-Suomen Voima Oy was founded on November 10/28, 1916, to purchase A. Ahlström Oy's rapids shares in the Kymijoki River. In 1996, Etelä-Suomen Voima Oy was dissolved. Its business operations had been merged with Pohjolan Voima Oy the previous year.

Pohjolan Voima Oy was founded in 1943 as an energy company for forest industry companies. The PVO Group initially owned hydroelectric power plants, and later also nuclear power and thermal power plants. Still in operation. However, immediately after the merger (1995), they

sold Etelä-Suomen Voima Oy's distribution networks and small power plants. Between 1995 and 1999, the power plant was owned by Heinolan Energia Oy, and between 1999 and 2002 by Vattenfall Oy.

From 2002 to 2021, the owner was Virtaankosken Voima Oy. The power plant complex included the Voimatalo, Sähkölaitos, and Sillankorva properties. The regional administrative authority suspended the power plant's operations in 2012 because it did not have a permit in accordance with the Water Act.

The company's shares were transferred to Hiitolanjoen Voima Oy in January 2022. Following the change of ownership in spring 2022, Virtaankosken Voima Oy was converted into a public utility company called Sysmän Tainionvirta Oy. Its mission is to restore Virtaankoski and develop the area as a recreational and tourist destination. (Source: Teija Ahola: Virtaankoski shore area plan, building inventory 13 January 2023)