

A Visit to Bor: a blow by blow account



The Parish Church in Bor

Tuesday 19 August

A very early start for all of us, leaving Witney by 5.45am on the Witney Shuttle. The flight was uneventful, and we were met by Ulf, who had driven the three hours from Bor to Copenhagen airport.

We sped across the famous Öresund Bridge which links Denmark with Sweden, and arrived for a great welcome meal in Bor at around 5.00pm. Meeting some of our new friends for the first time, Magnus (the Parish Priest) and Ulrika (Assistant Priest) invited everyone to introduce ourselves over a wonderful meal of baked pork, ratatouille and pineapple pie. The room was beautifully decorated, with flowers and candles on each table, and we learnt much of each other's involvement with church life and their relationship with the village of Bor.

After such an early start, and with so many miles on land and air chalked up, we separated to our host houses for a well-earned sleep.



Öresund Bridge, viewed from Ulf's van, and between Elpie and Kate!



The Altar in Bor Church - the reredos tapestry provoked much discussion...

Wednesday 20 August

Today we had a glimpse of one of the great parish disciplines of the parish of Bor. So far into the forest, and so surrounded by lakes, there is a great sense of connection with the natural environment, and Magnus encouraged us to tune into the rhythms and sounds around us as we made the pilgrimage from Tännö (one of the villages in the parish) back towards Bor. Starting with Morning Prayer in Tännö church, we walked in a companionable but reflective silence for the first part of the journey. The silence carried us from the fertile arable landscape of Tännö, with crops awaiting harvest, beneath the muster (or phalanx) of storks, and back into the embrace of the forest.

We paused by lake Flåren for the coffee and cakes we had brought with us, and watched as the rain clouds approached across the water, beginning the second leg as we were drenched for the second time that morning.

Finding ourselves on the outskirts of Bor, we visited the church of Voxtorp, after which the parish takes its official name. Built in 1849 (and therefore contemporary with our own Holy Trinity Church), it was at one time in the centre of the community. With the arrival of the railway for the benefit of local industry, the centre of the community moved 1 mile south, leaving the church isolated. It is strikingly similar to the church in Tännö in shape, design and architecture, with only the detail proportions and colouring to distinguish it at first glance. Here we shared prayer together, before heading to a sandwich lunch at the parish hall.

After a freshening-up, we gathered at the farm of Ulf and his wife Lisa. This was a delight, for Ulf's family have owned the farm for over 100 years, and it is arranged around a spectacularly well preserved 1848 manor house with a listed ball room on the first floor! Ulf and Lisa generously allowed us to explore the full spread of their home. This was followed by another shared meal in the farm buildings, where conversation and the local Småland beer flowed!



Voxtorp Church - the end of our pilgrimage



No, not belonging to the Swedish National Trust, but the home of Lisa and Ulf! The trampoline, needless to say, is the property of a grandchild...

Note to readers – what follows is something of a retrospective; not having the required combination of internet access nor time to update, this has been written after our return!

Thursday 21 August

Another walk today, from the parish centre, known as Ansgarsgården (Ans-gars-gor-den), in Bor, along tracks and through the woods towards the church in the village of Gällaryd (*Yell-a-ruud*). As yesterday, we were pursued by a parishioner bearing coffee and cake (“Fika”), gamely yet incongruously driving her small car along the woodland tracks to ensure we were never more than an hour from something sweet to eat! This walk gave a somewhat different perspective. We were accompanied by Per Pettersson, a parishioner who works as a Forestry Ecologist, who explained the nature of farming trees. The trees are mainly spruce, pine and birch trees, and take around 60 years to reach full maturity. This means forestry as agriculture is a very long term engagement, and those who engage in it now do so knowing that they are unlikely to even see the trees felled, let alone reap the rewards for doing so.

Arriving in Gällaryd, we were treated to another lunch in another parish hall, before being shown into the village church. In many ways very similar to Tännö and Voxtorp, this church was older, and has in its care one of the earliest Lutheran bibles in the country, which Magnus showed us with great care.

We then travelled by car to the north of the parish, to Oss (or Ohs, depending on which map you are using), meaning ‘mouth’, being at the point of a very large lake as it becomes a river again. This is a small community with a history of paper manufacturing. The church was built in the 1930s in a design which reflected nationalist ideals, and gave space for a family mausoleum which is still in use.

Friday 22 August

We gathered for morning prayer at Ansgarsgården again, after which we boarded a coach to take us to Växjö. We visited the Deacons’ Centre at Skogslyckans Church first. Deacons are ordained as a specific order in the Swedish Church (unlike the UK where, except in a few cases each year, most clergy spend only a year as a deacon before being ordained priest). They have the task, as set out in Acts 6, of working with the poor and marginalised in society. This Deacons’ Centre was opened in January to provide support and food for those in need, and the demand has far exceeded any kind of supply. The issues of homelessness, poverty and immigration from other areas of the EU are at the forefront of Swedish concern at the moment, and there is seemingly, we were informed by various people we met, little governmental support in these areas. The Swedish church both here and in other places is finding a way of making hands-on support available, and we were very impressed with the energy and breadth of the work taking place here.

We then walked into the city centre and up to the Bishop’s house, where we met Bishop Jan-Olof Johansson. Discussing the nature of our friendship visit, he expressed a hope that we might tie our parishes together with the [Living Faith](#) initiative of Oxford Diocese and its cousin, the [Till Tro](#) (either ‘towards faith’ or ‘to belief’, depending on how you place the emphasis) initiative which has grown from the work in Oxford.

We then descended the hill and visited the cathedral, where we celebrated a eucharist with the Dean, and had a brief tour.

Saturday 23 August

We all had a free day today and did a variety of activities from visiting the nearby town of Värnamo, visiting some of the local sites and spending some time by the lakes, before gathering for a

splendid barbeque at the bunkhouse owned by a parishioner. This gave us an opportunity to reflect on the week so far and to consider how our friendship might be developed. We changed hosts from this night onwards, so we returned to new houses.

Sunday 24 August

After a short lie in, we gathered again at Tännö church where Ulrika and Alastair led a eucharist, with a choir made up from the friendship team. Alastair preached on not turning your back on the very important things in life, which Ulrika offered in translation, and then presided at the eucharist, attempting to use some Swedish along the way!

Following the service we gathered to enjoy some Smörgåstårta – the famous Swedish sandwich cake, made of layers of ham, pate and mayonnaise, and topped with beautifully arranged slices of ham, cheese, cucumber and tomato.

Climbing into cars again, we headed for the lake of Vidöstern, for a blustery, damp trip on a replica Viking boat. We were relieved as we stepped on that forward motion would be provided by a non-replica four-stroke engine! We paused for coffee and cake on the island of Färjansö-Långö, a nature reserve, where Per, the Forestry Ecologist, gave us a talk about the variety of trees on the island and how they relate both to each other and to us, when alive and when seemingly dead.

Returning to our homes, we had a brief time to dry off before a dinner hosted at Inga-Lill's beautiful home (currently for sale!). We had a wonderful evening, talking about Swedish culture and reflecting on our time together.

Monday 25 August

Our final full day in Sweden took us to Värnamo, the nearest town to the parish. Värnamo is almost identical in size to Witney, has a river running through it and many cafes... but the similarities end there! Modern building has replaced many of the older, wooden structures, and it was a preserved example of a timber house that we visited first. Apladalen ("Apple Valley") is an 18th century priest's house which was removed from its site and re-erected in Värnamo in the 1920s for preservation. It now houses a wide-ranging collection of decorations, clothing, tools and writings from the period and gave a fascinating insight into the traditions which aided survival in cold winters and making the most of the summer when it comes.

From there, we visited Värnamo church, which was the first we had visited, besides the cathedral, with side-chapels. Again, it had a magnificent pulpit, and was beautifully decorated and presented. The parish hall, where we had lunch, has recently started a Fair Trade cafe which sells Fair Trade goods and employs people who need help in getting back into a work environment. This was led by two deacons who explained that many of the people they work with go on to run their own businesses, having gained the experience they needed.

After some free time in town, we gathered at the Värnamo deacons' centre, which has a focus on caring for those with drug and alcohol problems and the children who are often close to such issues. This is a joint project between the Swedish church and the Pentecostal church, and has been running for ten years. The project gives those with problems a place to go, people to talk to who will help them to get 'clean' and stay so.

Finally, we returned to Bor for a dinner at Ansgarsgården, and Per the tree specialist showed some of his very fine photographs charting the pattern of the year in the area.

Tuesday 26 August

Our final day, and with a late breakfast (followed almost immediately for some people by a good lunch!) we bade farewell to Bor and our new friends. Ulf drove us the three hours back to Copenhagen airport, and we flew to the UK, knowing we have left some wonderful new friends behind and wondering what the next phase of this friendship might be, but certain that there will be an exciting next phase!

Here are some links you might find interesting:

Firstly, to translate Swedish websites, this might be helpful! [Google Translate](#)

Basic information: [The Wikipedia page on Växjö Diocese](#)