

Deddington Choir's Visit to Jönköping

A report from Sibford

There were two Sibford Choir members among the party of 21 for a four day visit to Jönköping (pronounced Yernsherping). We were 18 choristers in number and three supporters and we were lead by Rev Dr Hugh White, the Vicar of Deddington supported by his Curate Rev Dr Dan Innman who sang amongst the tenors and basses respectively.

During our stay, we put in a great deal of practice and sang two traditional Anglican evensongs, one in our host church of Sofiakyrkan in Jonkoping and one in the magnificent Cathedral in Växjö (pronounced Vexsher), the Diocesan centre which has a link with the Diocese of Oxford following on the Porvoo Agreement of 1992 which provided a communion of 12 mainly northern European Anglican and Lutheran churches.

On our last morning, we joined with the Swedish choir for a Högmässa, word for word with an Anglican Communion but of course in Swedish, the language in which our leader Hugh White preached.

Throughout our visit we were royally entertained both by our individual hosts with accommodation and breakfast in their homes and for many meals in the Sofiagården Church Hall, a spacious house owned by the church mainly for offices and meetings/entertainment where provision was by the Bring and Share system we have here – but they brought and we shared. We also had much time for mini-pilgrimage walks in their beautiful countryside, in lovely sunny weather and with specific instructions on one-to-one conversations to get to know our fellow travellers and hosts, all interspersed with prayer and suitable refreshment. We also were taken, or walked, to see some beautiful old churches, mostly wooden built and some on 12th century Christian sites.

For those interested in music, the Evensongs included an Introit 'Come My Way' by Donald Lane, a resident of Deddington; the Ferial responses followed by Psalm 114, Purcell's Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G Minor, the Lord's Prayer in a version by Andrew Campling whose father Rev Michael was singing in the choir. We ended with 'This Joyful Eastertide' in a rousing version by William Harris. The Mass was a mixture of some of the above, some sung in English and then in Swedish such as 'O Taste and See' by Vaughan Williams, 'Rejoice in the Lord' by Purcell (with English and Swedish soloists), 'Not unto Us' by Walmisley, some Taize chants and some Swedish hymns (sung sitting down) two being very familiar to us, one of them being included in the recent Royal Wedding.

We were particularly fortunate with our choral mentors, Rosemary Wilson, an assistant organist in Deddington who introduced us to the music and beat us into shape with care, fun and ready wit and also Annica Sjöstrand, the organist and choir master at Sofiakyrkan, with her musical flair, a beautiful voice and the usual Swedish way of speaking fluent English.

This visit was a deeply spiritual and Christian experience as well as a wonderful opportunity to meet our fellow choristers and our new overseas friends. To be in a new environment is always uplifting and a reminder that we do no favours for our own religion by looking inwards at our own methods, customs and problems.

Norman Nash