



IN THE WAKE OF EBBE SKAMMELSON



*Oh, how much do I love you, my home land,
In all your poor but colourful beauty
You are the reality of my fantasy country
My reality in the dream's illusion*

*My country, my dear beautiful Småland-country
The wild-strawberry decorated Eden
I love each pine needle, each blade of grass
That grows wild around lakes and moors.*

Translation of Autumn Evening, a poem by Pelle Näver, a poet from Småland.

Odensjö Parish



An Iron Age cemetery

A small forest road leads northwards from the local folk museum. The road is a part of the long distance trail "Bolmenmarschen". An Iron Age cemetery is located along the trail just a few hundred metres from the folk museum. It contains about 40 grave monuments. Items from the latter part of the Iron Age have been found there. A fishing hook was among the items found. It is now kept at the National Museum of History in Stockholm. During the Iron Age, the dead were cremated. The ashes and remaining burnt bones were placed in an urn which was buried in the



Iron Age cemetery.

ground. A heap of stones was placed on and around the grave. Sometimes the stones were also covered with soil. Usually the grave monuments were placed in a clearly visible place near a lake.

The Nordic Seven-Year War affected Odensjö

Parishes that were badly affected by the Nordic 'Seven-Year War' (1563–1570) were not only those located along the routes used for main military operations, but even more the ones located in

what was then the border areas. Several minor and medium-sized routes had, since time immemorial, been used by farmers from, for example, Odensjö, for peaceful trade between the forest region and the coastal region. Some of the main items traded were salted herring, butter, textiles and forest produce. During the war, the small trade routes were converted to entry routes for Danish aggressors. Most of the time, it was the farmers alone that had to arrange surveillance and defence on the Swedish side. There were usually very few cavalymen or other soldiers on the Swedish side of the border. The farmers had to use all their shrewdness and foresight to protect their lives and property to the best of their ability. Still it often ended up in despair. The Danes burnt the vicarage in 1565 and the following year



There are different theories about the origin of the name Odensjö. The name probably dates back to pre-Christian times and relates to worship of the ancient Æsir god Odin. The Parish consists of several small villages located around the southern part of Lake Unnen and the western shore of Lake Bolmen. The population of the Parish reached a peak of some 1,000 people around 1900. Currently about 300 people reside in Odensjö.

they chased the clergyman to the extent that he "ran himself to death" near Håsthult farm. The Danes were back again several times. They again ravaged the vicarage in 1613.

The church

The church was built in 1818 on the site of a burnt medieval church. It was altered and extended with a new sanctuary in 1926. A basement was excavated under the sanctuary for the installation of a furnace for heating the church. The heat was conveyed to the church through holes in the floor. Earlier, the church had been heated with a large oven but the result of that practice was that the church was sooty and smoky. An old vicarage was replaced by the current building in 1918.

Extra-ordinary men!

Several clergymen named Wieslander served in Odensjö between 1770 and 1838. One of them, Nils Wieslander, had studied in Germany and was regarded as very intelligent. Nils' father was also a clergyman in Odensjö. The son had become the father's superior in terms of knowledge. Tradition says that, while he visited his parent's home he often used his knowledge to arrange a situation to enhance his image as a talented man. Further, according to legend, "although he had bypassed his father in knowledge, he still at times had to have a sad acquaintance with father's clenched fists. But when he was in trouble with the father he usually initiated some magic tricks to show his talents. In such



The vicarage.

case he managed to avoid the physical punishment". Nils became the clergyman in Odensjö in 1834. His talents had been inherited. His predecessor in Odensjö, Petrus Nicolaus Wieslander (1774–1833), was remembered as "a cheerful man who new more than ordinary human beings". There are several stories about him too. Once he brought a device for generation of friction electricity from Germany to the remote Odensjö. The magic powers this device



Göte's shop in Odensjö.

could release were used by Wieslander to surprise the locals. These tricks awarded him a reputation of being a "secretive magic maker".

The postman

In 1906, Odensjö got its own post office. The organist, Mr. Ahlgren, was the man in charge. He dealt with postal duties at his house.

From there, people could collect the mail at any convenient time provided that someone was at home. Often the school children collected the post on their way home from school. From the late 1930s to 1957 Erik Westberg used a motorbike to distribute the mail in the area between Åsen and Önne.

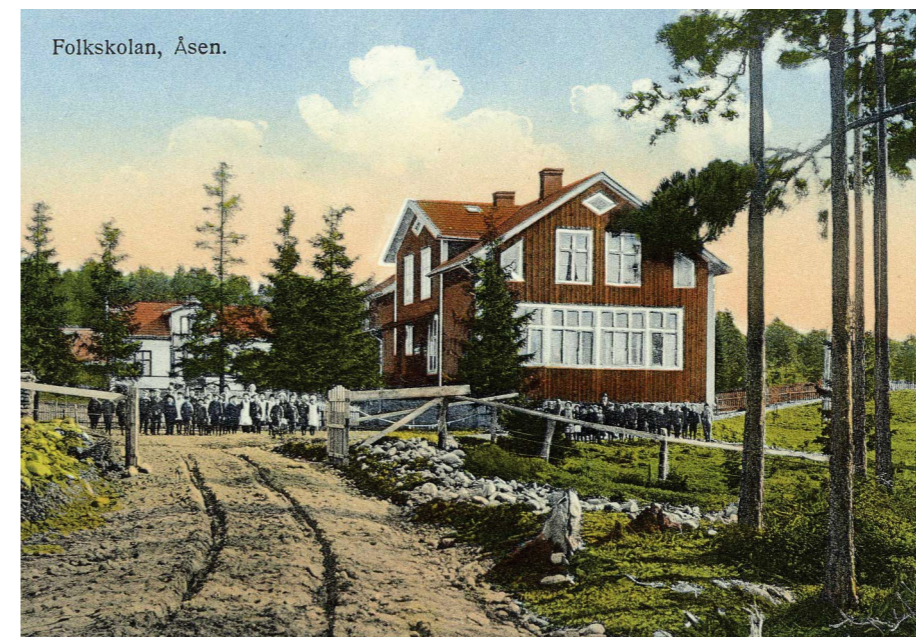
Several shops

Local people organised their "Konsum" shop in the early 1920s. Initially it was located in Esaias Svensson's house. Later a special building for the shop was constructed in the middle of the village. The shop failed to produce profit and in the 1930s it was replaced by another shop which was



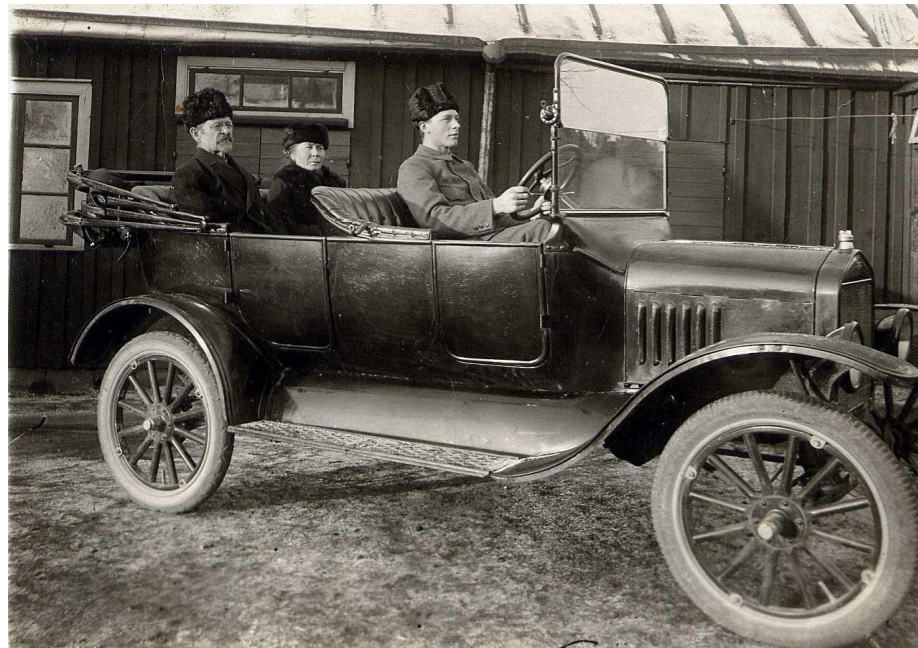
Frans Björk's shop in Skogshyddan 1908.

Coop in Åsen 1917.



later converted to a small self-service supermarket. When the local trade and business reached its peak in the 1930s, seven shops operated in the parish. Since 1996 the local residents have to travel outside the parish for shopping.

The primary school in Åsen.



Mr Arndt Johansson's taxi in 1923 with registration number G 500.

The Arndt's veranda

A railway between Bolmen and Halmstad, opened in 1889, became immensely important for local development. The road between Åsen and Odensjö, built in 1924, further strengthened business and other contacts with other areas.

The first taxis entered the scene around 1920. One of the early taxi owners was Arndt Johansson. His first car was rebuilt and converted several times. For a period it was called "Arndt's veranda" as it had curtains in the windows. Eventually it served as a small lorry carrying cargo.

The agricultural practices changed quite rapidly after the introduction of the first tractor in 1955. The two owners, both called Gunnar, hired it out with themselves as managers and labour. From that time many farmers disposed of their horses. In 1966, a combined harvester, for pulling by the tractor, also entered the scene. Some years later it was replaced by a combined harvester with an engine. This first fully-fledged combined harvester was used in the area throughout the 1970s.

Local specialists

Albin's Ida lived in Odensjö. She was skilled in treating both humans and

animals. She was at least good enough to assess whether a doctor or a veterinarian was needed. After Ida's death in 1948, her son Ture took over some of her responsibilities. Another woman, Matilda Mild, served as a local midwife. In case of toothache, assistance could be sought from the tailor who in addition to his basic trade also repaired clocks and removed aching teeth. He was equipped with a special pair of pincers with which he could grip the tooth and make the necessary twisting and pulling. The dental services of the tailor were phased out when a national subsidised system for dental care became effective in the 1950s. There were also carpenters, masons and boat makers locally. One of



The tailor, Mr Ståhle.



Boat maker Gunnar Johansson delivers a typical Bolmen boat. Photo: Rigmor Andersson.

the boat makers, Axel Mild, made the special Bolmen boats with out-rigged oars.

Odensjö Society for Cultural Heritage

Odensjö folk museum is located at Lunagårdet on the shore of Lake Bolmen some 600 metres north of the church. Over the years, old interesting buildings worthy of preservation and care have been moved to this place. A local tradition with a "café" during Sunday afternoons in the summer paved the way for the present "coffee and waffle service". Lately, the "Bolmen Day", the last Saturday in July, has become a major event around the lake, and also in Odensjö.

The entrance to the folk museum.



Life in Odensjö 1900–1950



'Sunday-best'

In church all the men sat on the right hand side of the aisle and women to the left. The pews were numbered and each village had its own designated spaces. Through this arrangement it was easy for the clergyman to check if someone was missing. In that case it was essential to have a good reason for being absent. Everyone dressed decently in church. The men wore black or at least dark suits. The women also dressed in dark colours and some wore black silk scarves. The dress code was particularly important in connection with the Holy Communion. After sharing Holy Communion, young people were expected to refrain from going out dancing until the coming Saturday. According to the clergyman, the dancing itself was not a sin but some other activities that took place in connection with the dance were sins.

The race to church on Christmas Day morning

Earlier the church had no electric lights. As the church service always started at 11 a.m. daylight was sufficient most of the year, but around Christmas the church was lit by candles. The horses were kept in the church stables during the church service. The stables were divided in five sections, each with space enough for four horses. Some farmers jointly built and managed their section. Each farmer had his own stable for one or two horses. A portion of hay was always brought for the horse to eat during the service. If the weather was cold enough sledges with bells were used in the winter. Quite often there were horse races on the way back. It was believed that the one who reached home first would also harvest his crops first.

The parish catechetical meeting

The parish catechetical meeting was held every autumn to check people's knowledge of the catechetic book. All members of the parish had to study the book to avoid the shame of failing to answer the questions. Many were frightened when that day approached. Their attendance was noted. It was no good to be one of those who did not attend.



A group of young candidates for confirmation in Odensjö.

Confirmation - a ticket to adulthood

All young people were confirmed at the age of 14 or 15. Confirmation studies were very comprehensive. It was necessary to attend the congregation hall twice a week. Many had a long way to walk, often close to 10km one way. Sometimes a kind father provided transport with a horse cart. If the youngsters were lucky, he would wait and provide transport back too! The teaching could take 3 or 4 hours so several of the youngsters brought food along. In between the lessons there was plenty of homework to be done. On Confirmation Day, the candidates had a chance to demonstrate what they had learnt. Confirmation was regarded as the entry to adulthood. It was the time when boys obtained their first pair of long trousers and possibly even a suit.

Wedding feasts

Weddings were often celebrated for several days. From the 1920s the bride was dressed in white as opposed to those marrying around 1900 who wore a black dress with a white veil. Guests were expected to bring food to the wedding party. It could be cakes, curd cake or something similar. It was essential that all such gifts were offered for the guests to taste. In the evening, young people would assemble outside the farm where the wedding took place to call out the married couple and congratulate them with a cheer.

Funerals

Food was also brought by guests at funerals. The death of a person was announced through a letter edged in black. The church bells rang at 10a.m. the day after the death. This tradition lives on. The big bell was, and is still, used if a man has died and the small bell is used for a woman. Therefore, it is possible to know from a distance if it is a man or a woman who has died. The guests would arrive at 7a.m. to the house of the deceased. Breakfast and coffee was served and some prayers were said. A specially decorated wagon pulled by a horse transported the dead person to church. In previous times it was only the wealthy who could afford to have their last transport in a wagon. Often the body was carried to the church instead. The funeral procession followed after



Road decoration to honour the deceased.

the wagon or after those who carried the body. Special crosses of spruce branches were placed in all junctions and at road gates to honour the deceased. This tradition still remains today.

A long way to school

There have been several schools in the parish: Ytra Röshult, Hästhult, Odensjö and in Åsen. In 1927, a small school was opened in Björkön to serve the farms on the western side of Lake Unnen. However, after a few years there were not enough children and the school was closed. In spite of several schools, many children had a long way to school. Still, rarely anyone stayed at home. To help families who lived in areas where it was totally impossible to reach any of the schools, the local School Board agreed to open additional schools provided that there were at least eight children in the neighbourhood. Gradually the number of children in the area declined and in 1959 the Odensjö School was also closed.



A day at Odensjö school

School started at 9a.m. and ended at 2.10p.m. In the mornings the children were organised in two lines outside the school building and then marched into the building under the supervision of the teacher. In the classroom they sat in pairs at the benches. Every school day started with a prayer and a hymn. When a question was asked and a child was selected to be the one to answer he or she had to stand up to give the answer. Breaks lasted 10 minutes except lunch-time which was about half an hour. All brought some food from home, usually sandwiches with milk or home-made cordial. The food was eaten outside the classroom. If the weather was nice it was enjoyed outdoors, but if the weather was poor, the children ate their lunch in the porch. All school material had either to be paid for by parents or, whenever possible, it was inherited from older pupils. On the day of the exam, there used to be four lessons one of which was religious studies. Parents were invited to attend together with the clergyman. Odensjö had a nice playground for the children. However, when they played with a ball, the ball often ended up in the church graveyard. The children were not allowed to climb the stone wall that surrounded the graveyard, nor was it acceptable to run while fetching the ball.

Time to shop

The items for sale in the local shops were quite different from those of today. Nothing was pre-packaged - everything was kept in drawers. Flour, sugar, coffee, dried fruit and many other commodities were weighed and packed locally. Being busy was unheard of. On the contrary, coming to the shop was a social event and an opportunity for some gossiping and getting the latest news. Salted herring was among the most important commodities. The farmers often brought butter and eggs that were sold to the shopkeeper. The local shop

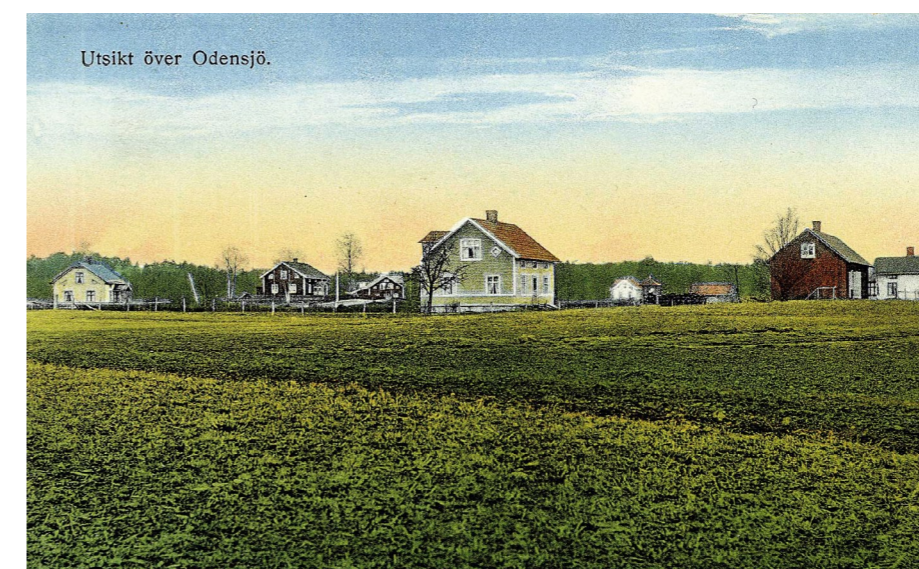
supplied virtually everything that was required locally. To a very large extent it was still a livelihood based on subsistence production and the total purchases remained very modest.

The state of the roads

Local roads were often in a very poor state. Deep rutted tracks caused by wagons were filled with water especially in autumn and spring time. Sometimes the road itself was like a swamp. Many parents had to help their children to reach school on foot. The people living along the roads were responsible for the main-



Odensjö Church around 1900.



View of Odensjö.

tenance. Each village or sometimes each farmer was responsible for a certain section. The result was very uneven reflecting different levels of ambition among those responsible. A local Road Society supervised the whole system. Sometimes the Road Society meetings were quite turbulent. For most people a road of top quality for wagons was not top priority as walking was the system for transport. Horses were mainly used in farming and at special occasions. The postman used a horse and cart enabling them to bring larger goods as well as the mail. School-



A building in the folk museum.

children rarely used bicycles in those days. Quite often there was only one bike in a family. For many young people a bicycle was the first thing to buy after they started to work after their Confirmation. In the 1930s a bicycle was about 100 Crowns as compared to a month's wage that was often about 40 Crowns on top of food and accommodation.

which were ground in a potato mill and mixed with water and flour. At harvest time there was plenty of female work outdoors too. The vegetable garden and fruit orchard in the homestead were also the responsibility of the women. Here, she cultivated her carrots, cabbages, peas, berries and fruit. Jam and home-made cordials were boiled and preserved to meet the need for the year to come. Further, the farm wife was in charge of food preparation and laundry. The first innovation that helped ease the workload of women was when the houses were equipped with mainswater. Later additional investments like central heating, toilets, fridges, washing machines and deep freezers resulted in drastic changes in the daily life for both women and men.

A parish is an area where people belong to the same church.

The Nordic Seven-Year War lasted from 1563 to 1570. Sweden, supported by Poland fought a war against Denmark and Lübeck. The Swedish King Erik XIV was interested in gaining control of the Baltic Sea. The Danish King Fredrik II wanted to re-establish the union of Nordic countries which had been there earlier.

The Iron Age and the Viking Era. In the Nordic countries the Iron Age commenced about 500 B.C. and lasted to about 1050 A.D. The Viking Era coincides with the latter part of the Iron Age, 800–1050 A.D.

Women's hard work

In the 1930s–1950s the working day for women commonly lasted 12–14 hours. The most laborious periods were the summer and the time around Christmas. Women were usually responsible for milking the cows. The milk transport came to collect the milk in the mornings at around 7a.m. At that time the milk had to be cooled and taken to the milk stand. The wife was also commonly in charge of feeding the pigs and the hens. The pigs were offered a dish consisting of large amounts of boiled potatoes



GPS (RT 90 2.5 gon V)
 The Iron Age cemetery:
 1366695 E, 6306500 N
 Odin's well:
 1365250 E, 6305300 N
 The folk museum:
 1366600 E, 6306484 N

path leads to the well. The starting point for the foot path is about 100 metres before the end of the road.

Odensjö Trasmäv is a small shop with handicrafts and tourist information. Lökna Camping offers camping facilities and cottages for rent.



M/S Kavaljeren.

Places to visit

Odensjö Church definitely deserves a visit. Nearby the church is the vessel M/S Kavaljeren ready to take passengers on a Bolmen tour. But book in advance, +46371 21150 or +46702 115010.

Odensjö folk museum is another attractive place. When the summer café operates (Sundays 2–4 p.m. from midsummer to the end of August) the different buildings are also open. The buildings provide an insight into aspects of life in past times in this part of Sweden. There is a jetty at the shore and the place is suitable for a swim. The long distance trail “Bomenmarschen” leads northwards to the fascinating Iron Age cemetery.

Follow the road sign towards Ljunghagen from the main road between Odensjö and Åsen to reach the legendary “Odin’s well”. A marked

Further reading

There is plenty to read about Odensjö, but only in Swedish. Visit the Odensjö website www.odensjo.nu

How to get there?

Branch off towards Lidhult from road number 25 between Halmstad and Ljungby (48km from Halmstad and 25km from Ljungby). Then follow road signs to Odensjö at Åsen. From Unnaryd: use the road eastwards from Unnaryd and follow road signs for Odensjö. Using a boat on Lake Bolmen is, of course, another alternative.



Odin's well.

Illustration on cover: A typical Bolmen boat with out-rigged oars. **Main sources of information:** Material from Odensjö Society for Cultural heritage and from Odensjö Society for Pensioners; Ingmar and Rigmor Andersson, Björkenäs. **Research:** Karin Tengnäs and Malin Ekwall. **Text:** Karin Tengnäs. **Photo:** New colour photos where there is no other indication: Karin Tengnäs. Other photos from collections in Odensjö. **Logotype:** Lars Lidman. **Design:** Tecknaregården/Willy Lindström. **Production:** Naturbruk AB/Bo Tengnäs. **Project coordination:** Bitte Rosén Nilsson, Hylte kommun. **Copyright:** Naturbruk AB. **Year:** 2006.

The brochures “In the Wake of Ebbe Skammelson” are available on www.unnaryd.com and www.hylte.se