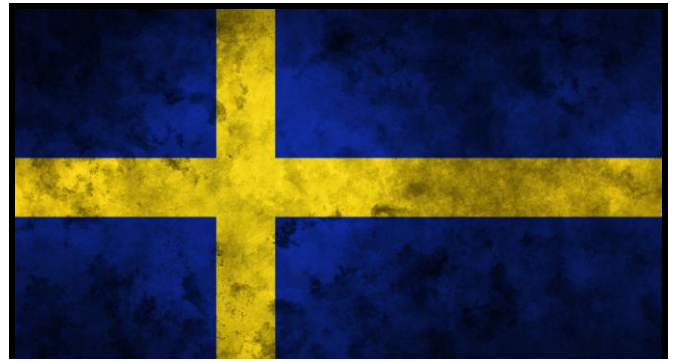


SWEDEN REVISITED

BY CRAIG AND SUE WALKER



Craig and Sue Walker live in Athens, Greece but spend a lot of their free time exploring mainland Europe in their camper van. Craig has volunteered to conduct some revisits in Greece over the last couple of years but a long journey to Sweden opened up another opportunity to help TWGPP. Like many of us on holiday these outings can often take us to areas we would never normally think of visiting but open up a whole new vista on particular countries. Enjoy the report.

Steve Rogers

There are eleven CWGC sites in Sweden, all on or near the west (Skaggerak) coast. Some had not been visited for the Project, so since my wife and I were spending the summer touring the area, Steve asked me to revisit the two main sites and get to as many of the smaller ones as we could. We managed to get to them all, and to our delight only a couple were visited in torrential rain – Sweden had a simply glorious summer this year.

Sweden was of course neutral in both World Wars, and the graves reflect this. The casualties (150 named in total, plus several unidentified) are mostly of two kinds: casualties from the battle of Jutland, washed ashore in the aftermath, and aircrew from WWII whose planes crashed in Sweden after being damaged over Germany, Norway or Denmark.



The cemetery at Hano

The graves were mostly brought together after the war into CWGC plots in two large cemeteries at Kviberg (outside Gothenburg) and at Helsingborg. Smaller groups are at Falkenberg, Varberg and Malmö. The remainder can be found in small church cemeteries at Riseberga, and on the island of Ockerö, and there are single graves in the churchyards of Fjellie and Varöbacka – and a single unidentified casualty in Bodenäs Old Church cemetery.

The larger CWGC plots are of course very well looked-after, but I must say we were very impressed by how very well-tended the small churchyard graves were as well.

Before we got to the west coast, though, we had an altogether different site to visit. **Hano** is a small island off the southeast coast of Sweden, which in 1810-12 acted as an advanced base for the Royal Navy squadron in the Baltic, which was protecting British trade despite Napoleon's Continental System designed to isolate Britain. At one point Sweden was officially at war with Britain, but welcomed the RN presence on Hano as a counterweight to French pressure. The British squadron was under the command of Admiral Sir James Saumarez, aboard HMS Victory.

The small graveyard is high up on the rocky hill behind the small port, and obviously it's much decayed. It contains the graves of at least fifteen sailors, but only two are known by name, Richard Davis and Clifford Williams. A large wooden cross - made from the mast of a British ship - was erected by the men of HMS Plymouth in 1973, and the island and graveyard are still a regular stop for British warships in the Baltic. I've visited several nineteenth-century British cemeteries in Greece for the Project, and those in Piraeus and on Cephalonia have that distinctly Victorian feel to them. This was an altogether bleaker place, a simple plot to bury sailors who died, not in battle but still far from home.

THE WEST COAST

When Sue and I reached the west coast, our first call was at Bokenas Old Church. This is a jewel in itself, dating in part from the middle ages, with very old pews and galleries - and the traditional sailing ship hanging from the ceiling.



**Bokenas old church and
Jutland headstone**



It's been replaced by a new church, but is well cared-for as a national monument, as is the old graveyard. In a corner of this is a stone erected by the parishioners over the body of an unknown British casualty from Jutland. It had fresh flowers on it - something that we were to find was usual throughout the country.



My wife and I were travelling in our campervan, which is great for visiting isolated spots, but for my next visit, to the large Kviberg Cemetery outside Gothenburg, cycling across town from the campsite seemed better. The CWGC plot holds 73 named graves from both wars. Included is that of Commander Loftus William Jones, Captain of HMS Shark, which was fought to the last in a desperate destroyer melee at Jutland. He was awarded a posthumous VC.



Other members of the crew lie near him, as do sailors from HMS Ardent, Fortune and Black Prince, the armoured cruiser lost with all hands after running into the High Seas Fleet on the night of the battle.

Also in a group are the graves of all fourteen members of the crew of the RN Drifter Catspaw, which foundered in 1919 while returning from the intervention on the other side of the Baltic, which helped establish the (short-lived) independence of the three Baltic States.

Kviberg cemetery

Nearby, there is a German plot, not nearly as well maintained. Unfortunately my pictures from this cemetery failed to satisfy a certain Mr Rogers. He suggested that my camera settings were adrift; I disputed this, but was chastened to find that he was correct. So I cycled across to Kviberg again, in the rain, and revisited the revisit! Lesson number 1: check your settings!

(By Steve – We have all done it. I did the whole of Tower Hill memorial once and after 2 hours realised I did not have a card in the camera!)

We next took the ferry to the small island of Ockero, where several casualties from both World Wars share a monument in the old churchyard with a similar number of German dead. Again, nicely looked after.

Ockero Churchyard

SOUTHWARDS

Southwards along the coast from Gothenburg, a single British airman lies in Varobacka churchyard, whilst four more casualties, two British and two Canadian, lie in Varberg cemetery.



The latter had rather leafier-than-normal new plants in front of the gravestones, and since it seemed to me that the engraved messages would be important to any living relatives, I took pictures with the plants, and then, with the help of a prone wife holding the plants out of camera-shot, also without. Lesson number 2: an assistant can be useful!



The small plot at Falkenberg Forest Cemetery is particularly peaceful. The graves are of British and Canadian airmen, who were shot down over Denmark on the way to bomb Stettin, and whose bodies were washed ashore.

Falkenberg Forest cemetery

The next churchyard is at Riseberga, which we reached in torrential rain. I'm sure Western Front photographers know how to cope, but I'm more used to facing the problems of bright sunlight in cemeteries in Greece!

The churchyard didn't appear too large, so I hopped out of the van, expecting to spot the distinctive CWGC stones quickly.

Twenty minutes later, and soaked to the skin, I was saved by two young ladies who took me to the office, found the locations on their computer, and escorted me to the plot. The four graves are grouped round an impressive monument, and are, of course, nothing like the standard gravestones. The men died in the influenza epidemic of 1919, "whilst enjoying Swedish hospitality awaiting repatriation to the dear Homeland after lengthy internment in Germany in the Great War". Lesson number 3: remember to take the plot numbers with you, even to a small churchyard, and especially in the rain!

