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LILY MEETS THE VIKINGS

By Alison Alderton



Lily on Roskilde Fjord

Arriving at a destination by boat is always special; it gives a totally different perspective on an area even if it has been visited previously by another means of transportation. Our nearest home waters in Denmark have played a major part in our lives since we arrived. Roger and I have taken our RIB out on its calm waters, visited the towns along its shores, walked our dog on its beaches, attended the Garfish and Herring festivals and crossed the northern entrance by car ferry. Yet it wasn't until we entered its waters in *Lily* that we came to realise what a special place it is.

Roskilde Fjord is an arm of the larger Isefjord which flows into the Kattegat Sea on the northern coast of Denmark's largest island, Zealand. A long narrow inlet stretching inland for almost 40kms, it is shallow with a depth of less than 6 metres in most places and is littered with 30 or so islands. The southern end forms part of a National Park, a haven for wildlife and a main roosting site for Greylag geese, golden plover, dunlin and lapwing. Because it is such an important area there are rules and regulations which boaters need to adhere to; during the bird breeding season (1st April to 15th July) landing or coming within 50m of the islands is strictly forbidden. There are also some 8 knot speed restrictions in places, not that it affects us as *Lily's* top speed is a mere 6 knots.

The largest and most important island is Eskilso. On its highest point stand the remains of a church which once belonged to the Augustinian monastery. The monks inhabited Eskilso for a short period of time during the first half of the twelfth century and introduced a number of plants known for their medicinal properties such as mullein, hounds tongue, black horehound and greater burdock. Today these still thrive on the island.



Lily in Roskilde Marina

but are found no where else on or around the fjord.

The surrounding landscape is diverse, a mixture of woodland and farmland, whilst lining the shore there are salt meadows and mud flats which attract great numbers of wading birds. There are also eskers, towering grassy mounds which protrude out of the briny water on top of which the round towers of Clonmacnoise wouldn't look out of place.



Rowing out of harbour

As well as providing a special habitat and safe haven for wildlife, the fjord is also known for its Viking ships with the town of Roskilde being home to the impressive Viking Ship Museum. On entering the system of fjords we had spotted one of their ships on the horizon, its bright orange and yellow striped square sail billowing in the breeze. It was easy to see how threatening such ships would have appeared to our ancestors attempting to protect their homelands from the invading hordes.

It was a tight fit squeezing into the marina at Roskilde which rarely caters for craft of our length (15m) or over. With the assistance of the Harbour Master we were soon settled, moored against a sturdy quay wall beneath a crane which we were reliably told would not be needed during our stay. As it is a rarity to see a barge in these waters *Lily* immediately drew in the crowds and the quayside was soon bustling with people. Late in the day we were approached by a young man who was extremely curious about our barge. Roger explained at length our trip and the design specification of *Lily* in which he seemed particularly interested, enquiring about the shape and build of her hull and how she handled sea conditions. The inquisitive fresh-faced Scandinavian turned out to be Ture Mollor, one of Roskilde Museum's chief boat builders and restorers and in no time at all he had commandeered Roger into a days work on their latest project.

The Gislinge Boat Project was established to reconstruct, using 180 year old oak and traditional methods, a small working boat dating from the 12th century. The original boat, after which the project is named, measured 7.7 metres long and was discovered during an excavation near Gislinge in 1993 in a reclaimed section of the Isefjord. Roger was lucky enough to spend a day both watching



Sea Stallion

and working with Ture and his team on the handmade project. Each piece of oak used in the clinker-style hull is painstakingly measured, cut or cleaved then fitted by hand using nails produced on site to form the body of the boat. It is then caulked with sheep's wool and tar to make it waterproof. Roger was able to assist with the marking and placing of the third side plank and was an 'extra pair of hands' when it came to offering up and fixing into place with clamps. Being able to watch the boat take shape and play a very small part in its creation was something he later described as "a pure privilege".

The ground surrounding the work area soon became ankle deep in fine oak shreds and off cuts from the boat's planking and the air filled with the pungent scent of aged oak. At the end of the day Roger and I were given permission to collect all the off cuts we could carry for use as fuel in the small wood burner on board *Lily*. Throughout the winter this precious fuel has warmed us, our boat and frequent batches of Glogg, a Danish version of mulled wine with plump vodka-soaked raisins and fine slivers of crunchy almonds, bringing back fond memories of Roskilde.

In late September we returned to the museum, work had been slow but Ture remained confident the boat would be finished and in the water before the end of the autumn. True to his word the boat, which has been named *Gisle*, was launched on the last day of October 2015 and then underwent a series of successful sea trials much to the delight of the museum's skilled craftsmen and women.



Working boat yard

Over 200 people have downloaded the working drawings for the Gislinge boat and the museum is planning to get in touch with



Roger working in the boat yard



Ture clamping planks



Woodworking tools



Alison collecting off cuts

some of them to discover how their build plans have evolved. This summer Ture and his team will begin work on *Gislinge II*; this boat will be reconstructed on the basis of the experience gained during the first project. The way forward for the museum is now centred on the working boatyard and these types of projects, building replicas for other countries both as operational boats and museum pieces as well as providing props for the television and film industry. The skills learnt are being kept alive, practiced and passed on for generations to come in the working boatyard where members of the public, schools and groups can become actively involved. The museum's harbour houses a number of these reconstructed vessels along with a selection of traditional Nordic boats in which it is possible to enrol on a day's sailing.

Away from the working boat yard and harbour, the museum's main building houses a large number of exhibits including the remains of 5 Viking ships. Collectively known as the *Skuldelev Ships*, they include a 98ft long warship, capable of carrying a crew of between 70 to 80 Vikings, a 46ft long merchant ship used on the Baltic and Danish Sounds, a deep sea trader, a long ship and a ferry. Filled with stones and intentionally sunk on the fjord in order to form a barrier should invaders approach by water they were recovered in 1962 and found to be in surprisingly good condition.

Tree-ring dating on the *Skuldelev 2* ship revealed that the keel was carved from an oak tree felled near Dublin in the summer of 1042. The Vikings had come to Ireland in the 800's where they established bases along the Irish coast which slowly developed into cities. During the time the oak was felled for this ship Dublin would have been the largest Viking settlement outside of Scandinavia.

The *Sea Stallion* is the largest reconstruction of a Viking ship to be found anywhere in the world, it is based on *Skuldelev 2* and was built at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde between 2000 and 2005. In 2007 the *Sea Stallion* made the journey from Roskilde to Dublin to revisit the birthplace of the original. A crew of 65 made the 7 week voyage of over 1000 miles travelling from Roskilde to Norway, then crossing the North Sea to the Orkney Islands before rounding the north-west coast of Scotland to Ireland, arriving in Dublin to vast crowds lining the banks of the River Liffey. I am sure many of you will recall the much publicised event or perhaps visited the ship during the winter of 2007/2008 when it was exhibited outside of Dublin's National Museum? Since that time the *Sea Stallion* has returned to Denmark and appeared in many television programmes most recently "The Last Kingdom", a BBC drama based on Bernard Cornwell's series of books, *The Saxon Tales*.

Roskilde's other main attraction is its cathedral which houses the tombs of every Danish Monarch with the exception of one, King Canute. Famed for his failed attempt to try and command the incoming tide to turn back, he was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, London as at one time England and Denmark shared him as a ruler.

About half way up the fjord stands the town of Frederickssund. Situated on a natural narrowing of the water the only bridge to cross the fjord is found here. It is also home to a replica Viking village and open air theatre where Nordic sagas and Viking battles are acted out throughout the summer months. On occasions the cast will arrive on Viking ships sailed from Roskilde and moor on the purpose built jetty at the foot of the village.

During the darkest, coldest months of winter the Viking Ship Museum is closed to the public, its wooden ships having been hauled up onto the surrounding grassy land and covered for protection against the elements long before the first sign of a freeze has dared to show its face. The boatyard is still, the



Viking ship on the fjord

coldness silencing the sounds associated with woodworking tools but behind the scenes work goes on unnoticed whilst the spring is anxiously awaited.

For a relatively small expanse of water Roskilde Fjord has provided us with some surprising finds. Over the winter the whole expanse of water froze, sparkling and twinkling in its coating of ice and snow to give us a winter wonderland quite like no other. Reminders of Ireland were flown in on the wings of the Whopper swans which arrived in large numbers, taking a respite from their migratory journey southwards. The air was filled with their haunting cries, a sound which had become a familiar part of our lives whilst based in the village of Clonown perched on the edge of the Shannon callows. The call of Ireland is never far away; we often find it in the oddest or strangest of places but never expected to stumble across it in connection with a Viking ship. When it comes it is always welcomed, memories of a moment in time never possible to recapture but always treasured and remembered fondly no matter how great the distance between us.

At the time of writing the 2016 boating season is just getting underway, boats are being uncovered, cleaned and placed back into the waters of Roskilde Fjord and in a few weeks time our winter mooring will expire. Roger and I are unsure where we will be heading as there is a new addition to the crew of Dutch Barge *Lily*, a Beagle puppy named Maksimilian. He is only beginning to find his sea legs and get used to a life afloat however we are told the Swedish Canals are the perfect place for a young puppy to explore so perhaps we will head there?

For more information on the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum visit:
www.vikingskibmuseet.dk

Photos: Alison Alderton/Roger Harrington



Viking Ship Museum and Roskilde Cathedral