



Meeting Carl Linneaus, year 1741, in Torslunda on the island of Öland.

Sweden in the mid 18th century

War, years of bad harvests and disease have taken their toll on the people and in the middle of the 18th century. Sweden was a poor country. Tradition was all-powerful and the class society ruled people's lives. Agriculture was still conducted in a hard and old-fashioned manner. The gap between the classes was large and the possibility of climbing the class ladder was very limited. The mid 18th century though was a time for change. The government and scientists started an inventory of available resources in the country. By improving knowledge of resources the economy would grow stronger. Ideas about agricultural reforms were topics for discussion, industries established in the towns and also in the countryside. Contacts with the rest of the world were established through commerce and exploration. A new direction of gentleness, the pietism, emerged and it highlighted the individual responsibility. The population grew, but as some people grew wealthier and others poorer the gaps between the classes grew even wider. Crofts became a common site in the village grounds.

Carl Linneaus may be perceived as a representative for both the old and the new societies. His appearance and spirit were rather traditional. At the same time he was a man fighting for renewal. He considered his mission to document the nation's resources and assets that were of any value to its inhabitants. The task of Linneaus' expeditions through the different counties was to investigate various parts of the country in order to make an inventory of the natural resources and also to investigate how each region could be of use. Later, the Royal Scientific Academy sent expeditions to parishes and villages in order to survey and document. Several priests started to work in their own parish as Linnés' successors. The task of documenting local regions as well as the entire world was a calling that was enormous.

At the same time the farmers carried on working on their farms. They often had many mouths to feed. People were wondering whether the new reforms would improve life at all or if it was better to stick to the old routines.

In 1741 the Government appointed Carl Linneaus to journey to Öland and Gotland. His mission was to investigate natural resources; plants and herbs for colouring textiles and that could be used for medicinal purposes, as well as to investigate various types of rocks, fossils, plants and animals. During this expedition he also described peoples lives, their, clothing, housing, fields and forests and historical remains. On this expedition, several experts in the fields of medicine, pharmacology and botany accompanied him.

Torslunda village

Torslunda village in the 1700s consisted of three farms and the vicarage - situated not far from the church. The land was divided according to soil type, and quality and the three farms had shares from each type of soil. The private land with fields and meadows was marked off and the grazing grounds were surrounded by stonewalls. The village also possessed communal land, which bordered the private land. Torslunda is situated in the middle of Öland where the soil quality is fairly good. The inhabitants of the village were farmers and their families, a priest and a county chief. Each farm had a few maids, farmhands and servants. Several crofters also lived in the village grounds.

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Linné wrote about his journey through Torslunda on the 4th of June 1741:

“Everything from Björnhovda through to Torslunda were lovely groves. We passed Torslunda meadows rather quickly... Crofters here said they spent a great deal of time in the parish, where they lived mainly from gathering nuts and acorns and bast weaving.” Because on the western part of this island there are more oaks, hazel nuts and lime than any where else in Sweden.”

Scenario, the meadows of Torslunda 1741

The farmers from Torslunda had gathered to meet the man representing the people sent from this year’s Swedish Parliament. It is said that he had been given the mission to document and investigate the natural resources such as useful herbs and describe the agriculture, but that he also was interested in traditions and culture. The man in question is Doctor Carl Linnaeus and some students and assistants will be accompanying him.

People are a bit suspicious. Who are these people? Are they spies? Do we dare to tell them what we know? Many people from the village gathered: farmers, maids, farmhands and crofters. All of them are curious. They discuss whether the agriculture and the conditions in the village needs to be changed. Some people say that science and rational reforms are the way of the future, but far from everyone is convinced.

While they wait for this important man, they prepare by tidying up the land - removing sticks and stones and leaves. The tools need fixing and new handles for the rakes are required.

One of Linné’s assistants has arrived in advance to prepare for the arrival of the doctor. The area is surveyed and documented.

It is known that Linnaeus is particularly interested in useful herbs so people find out which ones are good for colouring textiles and which ones can be used for medicinal purposes. As usual when many people are gathered tea, coffee and snacks are served.

Many people are enthusiastic about the visit whilst others are more reserved. Will life become easier just because some important men will arrive from Uppsala? The day starts as usual with hymns led by the vicar.

Issues to discuss, Key questions

Tradition – change

- Can we develop the agriculture and the living conditions in the village? Is it possible to change without ruining old traditions and the environment?
- How can we develop Sweden and the resources available in the country? What are the opportunities/disadvantages/limitations? How important is science?
- How do you picture your own future? Do you want to stay in the village and work on the farm?

Roles

The participants from the farms in the village:

The East Farm No 1: Farmer Per Persson with wife, children, servants and crofters (10)

The East Farm No 2: Farmer Sven Andersson with wife, children, servants and crofters (10)

Torslunda Farm: Farmer Per Svensson with wife, children servants and crofters (10)

The West Farm: Constable Peter Törnecrantz with wife, children, servants and crofters (10)

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Crofters: 3 households, whereof one or two single (8)

Reverend: Nils de la Roche

Samuel Wendt, Medicine and Botanice Studiosus, assistant of Linné Dr. Carl Linnaeus

Activities

- Tidy up meadows and land
- Clear stones
- Improve the stone wall
- Fix tools, fashion sticks and handles for the rakes
- Prepare textiles, knit socks
- Describe and document the environment
- Investigate and draw plants
- Make herbal medicines
- Make tea/coffee, sandwiches, churn butter, cook food

Time plan

07.30 Unpack

09.00 The group arrives, read the landscape

09.30 Change, scenario, roles, questions

10.00 Initiation, hymns

10.10 The activities commence; the reverend and Linné's assistants are leading the activities

11.00 Coffee, songs

11.30 Activities continue

12.30 Linné arrives

12.45 Food

13.30 Dance

13.45 Final ritual

14.00 Reflection

14.20 Change

14.30 Finish

Pack up, dishes

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