

Pioneer



**Pioneers of Time Travels
Finland**

Thomas Nordström

Thomas Nordström has been the principal for the Free Christian Folk High school, FKF, in Vaasa, Finland for more than twenty years. As a fairly new principal he experienced a Time Travel event to the Middle Ages, at Kronobäck medieval monastery, Kalmar county, Sweden. He was so excited that immediately after the event he asked: Is it possible to bring the Time Travel program to Finland and to Vaasa? The following year, in September 1999, after long preparations, the very first Time Travel events in Finland were organized by Kalmar county museum and FKF for the students of the school, at Korsholm's castle 1395. This was the start of regular Time Travel programs every year for and, a few years later, by students of the Folk High School. And Thomas Nordström is still the principal and the driving force.



The Incredible Device

The very first Time Travel program in Finland

The Incredible Device is the name of a song written by Michael B Tretow. The song became a big hit in Sweden and tells the story of an incredible device, a perpetuum mobile, that just goes on and on. An extraordinary machine that always works. Ebbe Westergren created an incredible device, a perpetuum mobile, when he started the historical Time Travels. This is a remarkable tool that the Free Christian Folk High School (FKF) in Vaasa, Ostrobothnia, Finland was able to borrow twenty years ago. With that device, thousands of schoolchildren under the guidance of students and staff and from FKF have travelled to the local Middle Ages in Ostrobothnia, more precisely to 1395.

A historical Time Travel for high school students at Kronobäck medieval monastery in Mönsterås, Kalmar county, Sweden, on a Wednesday, 23 September 1998 was the starting point for an incredible journey. Staff from FKF in Vaasa visited Mönsterås high school and had the opportunity to take part in a Time Travel to the Middle Ages, organized by Kalmar County Museum and Ebbe Westergren. Our experience was very strong and led to the Time Travels in Finland and Ostrobothnia a year later.

Korsholm Castle 1395

Kalmar county museum was invited to Vaasa to introduce the Time Travel program. They researched and wrote a scenario for a local medieval fortress, close to Vaasa, 1395 at Korsholm castle. At that time Korsholm castle was in the middle of the fight for power in the Nordic countries. Kalmar county museum filled up a bus with props and costumes in Kalmar, arrived in Vaasa with three persons in **September 1999** and prepared our students and teachers. Finally, two Time Travel events to the year 1395 were organized at Korsholm castle, **the very first Time Travels in Finland.**



Two Dominican sisters prepare for medical herbs

Students and teachers dressed up in medieval dresses, got medieval names, became medieval characters and had a chance to experience life in 1395 for a full day. The students made medieval food, prepared medical herbs and tried shooting with a bow and arrow. The Time Travels were an immediate success!

In the years that followed it became a tradition to invite Kalmar county museum every year for these Time Travels. The students became better prepared, wrote their own medieval characters and there was a follow-up in school after the event. Key questions on power, conflict, diseases (Black Death) and religion were added. Also, a local Iron Age Site and the former military regiment at the school (1880s) were used for Time Travels.

Organize our own Time Travels

After the first successful visits, it was time for us to take the next step, to try to organize our own Time Travels for primary and secondary school pupils in the region of Ostrobothnia, with students and a couple of teachers from FKF as leaders. This was a big challenge, but we got support and guidance from Kalmar county museum. Ebbe Westergren adjusted the medieval scenario to fit various places in the region.

In 2003, FKF organized its first medieval Time Travels in Ostrobothnia for 10-12 years old pupils. At first, the steps were a bit unsteady, but with support and encouragement from Kalmar, the activities were soon established. Since 2003, FKF has organized these medieval Time Travels at 8-10 primary and secondary schools in the region every year, to the benefit of many, many pupils.

It continues...

Now, it is more than twenty years since this Finland-based operation with Time Travels started. And it continues. The concept of Time Travels still works excellently! Our own students experience Time Travels to 1395 at Korsholm Castle every year. And then those students who take the youth leader program at FKF become leaders of Time Travels for the pupils at various schools in Ostrobothnia, as part of their studies to be youth leaders. Thousands of primary and secondary school pupils, mainly in the region of Ostrobothnia, have experienced joy in connection with the medieval Time Travels and at the same time gained knowledge about life and conditions in the past.



Preparations for the Time Travels at Korsholm Castle, early a cold September morning

The secret of success

One may wonder, how is it possible that the Free Christian Folk High School has been able to organize medieval Time Travels regularly for almost twenty years? And it still continues. When the experiences are summarized in a few points, one realizes that it is completely realistic to organize one's own Time Travels.

Initially, it can be stated that Ebbe Westergren's and Kalmar county museum's concept on Time Travels is really, really good. At the same time, it is important to remember that you have to use the basic concept in a wise and thoughtful way. When the planning for our first own Time Travels began at FKF in the early 2000s, a basic framework for Time Travels was created.

A framework that for all years has stood for continuity and confidence. The framework consisted of focusing on an interesting age, the Middle Ages. When the age was chosen, suitable equipment was purchased and fabricated, partly with the help of sponsorship. The scenario for the medieval Time Travels was written by Ebbe Westergren, as an adjustment of the 1395 Time Travels at Korsholm castle. To avoid weather problems, we decided to move the Time Travels indoors. In this way, the Time Travels can be organized in all seasons, regardless of weather and wind. We cover spaces that are used for the event with cloth and scenery to create a realistic environment.



Two students try the bow and arrow.

Will there be an attack on the castle? War or negotiations?

Another important part of the basic framework for the Time Travels in Ostrobothnia is that they form an established part of a vocational education program for youth leaders at FKF. This means that the group of students who organize the Time Travels, mainly in different primary and secondary schools, are regularly renewed and prepare and perform the Time Travels as part of their studies at the Folk High School. Last but not least, the Time Travels consist of dedicated staff.

The scenario for the medieval Time Travels is focused on the year 1395 and Korsholm castle. Sir Filpus Karlsson is the bailiff of the castle and in the story he calls for more people in a difficult situation. Ever since 2003, Anders Bengs from FKF has personified Sir Filpus. Tomas Swanljung, another teacher at FKF has had the had the main responsibility for organizing the Time Travels from 2014.

After the foundation was created, the Time Travel programs, including preparations, education for students at the folk high school, booking of the primary and secondary schools, props management and all the events have rolled on year after year.

New details

Some new details of the Time Travels have been designed by each group of students who have been responsible for implementing the events. Since the students are renewed every year, the content and implementation of the events have varied based on the student group's ideas.

For some years, the responsible group of students wanted to invest more in the musical expressions in the Time Travels. A bagpipe was acquired. The bagpipe and three jokers sounded and complained loudly to the great joy of all participants. A couple of years, they even made an activity group dedicated to medieval music.



Students write messages using the runic alphabet.

One year a love story was added in the event, in another year a traitor appeared. This last character added to the discussions on who to trust and who is not reliable. These small additions have been a popular way for student groups to make their own little mark to the Time Travel events.

Time Travels - Perpetuum mobile

For almost twenty years, the medieval Time Travels for primary and secondary schools have been organized by FKF students, and their teachers. The interest in the Time Travel programs is as great as ever among both organizers and schools. How is this possible? I believe that it is made possible by the fact that Ebbe Westergren's incredible device, the historical Time Travels, actually appears to be a "perpetuum mobile", a motion that seems to go on forever.



Sir Filpus, Anders Bengs, and his knight

Thomas Nordström Principal at the Free Christian Folk High School, Vaasa, Finland

After the first Time Travel events in Finland in 1999 by the Free Christian Folk High School, several other organizations and regions in Finland and the Åland Islands started Time Travel programs. One of them is BARK, the Culture Children Network at Region Ostrobothnia in Vaasa.



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Scott Green
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