

DIARY FOR EXCHANGE 9229

FF CORNWALL TO FF TALLINN, 29th MAY – 6th JUNE 2009

Friday 29 May 2009

The majority of our party left Cornwall after lunch in beautiful sunshine and drove to our accommodation near Bristol Airport. This was Fawltly Towers revisited! It provided a memorable and hilarious start to our exchange. Apart from the fact that the pub had no wine, no ice and no cheese, we had a good meal with lots of laughs. The following morning, full English breakfast was served after the tea/coffee arrived, one item at a time! We then left and parked our cars at a farm. All went smoothly with the flights (4 countries in one day) and when we arrived at Tallinn we were met by our charming hosts and their 10-month old daughter. Being hosted by a family with a baby was the icing on the cake. This was Ullar and Kerli's first hosting for Friendship Force and we hope they enjoyed the experience.

Saturday 30 May

A bright sunny day welcomed us on our first full day in Tallinn and our visit to the extensive Estonian Open Air Museum at Rocca Al Mare.



This also included a colourful folk dancing display in which some of our more adventurous members participated. Following lunch at the Kolu Inn within the museum grounds we left with our hosts for Keila-Joa Manor House, formerly a seat of the Volkonsky family who Tolstoy introduces to us as the Bolkonskys in his great

novel "War and Peace". The house and grounds appear unoccupied and somewhat neglected and were last used as a Soviet Army Cultural Centre. Whilst at this location we also visited the nearby Keila Joa waterfall and the bridge of locks.

Next on our itinerary was a visit to a beautiful baroque manor house- definitely National Trust material- which was being totally restored by its new owner a Russian oligarch. Fortunately we were permitted to walk around the exterior of the house and grounds. Our hosts' country retreat was but a short distance away, and suitably refreshed we left in due course for the splendid evening welcome party at the Huuru Mill.



This was a very busy, eventful and interesting day which was a wonderful introduction to Estonia.

Sunday 31 May

Our day started with an authentic Estonia breakfast consisting of sliced meat, cheese, black bread and coffee plus a drink called KAMA. Kama flour is made from wheat, barley, rye and peas which when mixed with keefir (plain yoghurt) and a little sugar becomes a “healthy and natural” drink. It even tasted quite nice.



The sights of Tallinn Old Town were next. A local guide provided a good historical background and she then took us around the upper and lower parts of the old town. Many of the churches, palaces, houses and shops had been renovated in recent years and others were still on the list. The guide seemed very thorough with her explanations and we

learned much. Lunch was provided at St Patrick’s Pub and was served with 2 for 1 Estonian beer.

After a short tram journey we arrived at Kadriorg Park. This is a lovely park with an old palace (now a museum), a modern art gallery, fountains and a lake where children (and big children) fed the ducks.

The nearby open-air song contest grounds were huge and could normally hold 150,000 people. It would certainly have been an impressive sight when full.

In the evening we were hosted by another family at a barbeque with smoked chicken and salads and the opportunity to experience a very hot sauna!



Finally, home to bed, a little tired, but pleased by a very enjoyable day.

Monday 1st June

We left Tallinn in warm sunshine making for Tartu, a university town two hours to the south. We spotted storks nesting on convenient posts along the road, many feeding their young.



Our first visit of the day was to the Estonian Agricultural museum where we were shown a fascinating array of ancient farming implements and given a demonstration of techniques by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide.

After butter-churning & bread-making lessons, we earned our first lunch of rye bread, fresh butter and barley porridge.

The Estonian bread oven bore a marked resemblance to our own Cornish cloam oven which probably explains the FF skill on display when asked to load it!





On to Tartu itself and our immaculate, erudite guide who looked like an Oscar Wilde character himself as he showed us Wilde's statue.



In the sweltering heat of Children's day, the children of Tartu played in the fountain (no Health and Safety here) and cornered us for a spontaneous group hug.

Afterwards, St John's church provided a cool oasis, a soaring gothic wonder with over a thousand terracotta figures. For our second lunch

of the day we were treated to a leisurely meal in the university refectory. Then we clambered up 'heart-attack' steps to the verdant university green punctuated by numerous statues and the occasional student.

On we travelled through the forests and meadows to the lakeside town of Viljandi and yet another welcome meal at the motel. Then it was the bowling alley for some and bed for others.



Tuesday 2nd June

We woke fairly early this morning after a comfortable night in our little motel in Viljandi. The room was well equipped, fairly spacious and with an excellent walk-in wet-room type of shower. Just about everyone was down by 08.00 hrs for an excellent, buffet breakfast, - cereal, porridge, continental meats, eggs, salad vegetables etc. The pretty blonde at the bar/reception spoke English well and she told Michael Cole and I that the hotel had been an old factory, which explained its intriguing decor of painted girders and stainless steel wire mesh.

The weather was due to change in the course of the day and already it was cooler when we got up. It was still very pleasant and sunny, however.

Viljandi is said to be the prettiest small town in Estonia. It is very spacious and in atmosphere more like a large village, but compares to Truro in population. It has a long history. The German Order of Teutonic Knights occupied Estonia in the 12th and 13th centuries and they built vast defensive earthworks here in Viljandi on a hill overlooking the lake and river. These were subsequently surmounted by an extensive stone and brick castle and monastery giving three stages of defence to the original settlement. The Teutonic Order of Knights was an Order licensed to crusade against any non-believers anywhere in the known world which gives some indication of the nature of the civilisation in the region at that time. It was very interesting walking through the dramatic ruins with Lea and our guide explaining the layout of the place and its significance.

We also visited a very large and important brick barn, which had been built in mediaeval times as a storehouse for the town. It was very large indeed with a brick vaulted basement area of several rooms and barns and other spaces above. It had recently been refurbished and adapted to serve as a Music Centre for the region - in fact for the whole country.



There was a small and a large concert hall, both well equipped, changing rooms and showers for the artistes, practice rooms, research facilities and a music archive with recording facilities. Of particular note were the very modern external additions - all glass and steel, for a bar and small restaurant to one side, all tastefully done, and the very slim and pretty dark haired

guide who explained everything extempore with enthusiasm!

We also visited the largely rebuilt Church of St. John where the pews were painted grey and could be reversed for concerts by swinging the backs over!

The organ and choir were in a balcony above the West Door. We found it quite a moving church, very simply decorated, with white walls, gilded candelabra, pale grey woodwork and several rather dramatic plant arrangements. The overall effect of white, grey, green and gold was very peaceful.



We had a roast chicken lunch in a small cafe by the lake and were then off, by coach, to visit a little, 69 year old lady who, when her husband had been alive, created, and now maintained by herself, a garden of about 2 acres, way off the beaten track and entirely for her own satisfaction. It was very interesting with a

large pond/lake, small barns and numerous "sculptures" or cairns made by collecting stones which she then arranged in groups. After a snack of rhubarb cake and rhubarb cordial (both very popular and widespread in Estonia) we were off to visit another garden some distance away. This time it was an extensive rock garden built, together with his house, by a farmer out of virgin forest land over 20 years. All the rocks had been gathered from his land and were the remains from terminal moraines as a result of the glaciers which covered large parts of the region in the distant past. This garden was for his and his families pleasure, but well warranted inclusion in any itinerary for the gardening enthusiast.

We were met there by many of the hosts from Tallinn. Kiira was there with her red Toyota Yaris and she whisked us off back to Kentmanni Street for a late meal and bed. All in all it was a very enjoyable day with a lot to see and do - somewhat wearisome for the legs, feet and brain, but beneficial to the soul!

Wednesday 3rd June

Andres and Kai (our hosts) both went to work late and Kai dropped us off to explore the smart department store; Viru keetus. Then we had coffee in the Chocolaterie Café in the Masters' courtyard of the Old Town. We explored both inside and outside the walls of the Old Town, had lunch in a restaurant, bought some colourful china gifts, and met up with Kai again at about 5 o'clock in the Square.

Kai took us to her office at the Institute of Estonian Language where she is in charge of the personnel department. We met her boss who is also a professor

at Tartu University. Andres then joined us and we set off for a restaurant on the coast and named Paat. This is Estonian for boat and the building is designed to replicate the upturned hull of a boat.

Here we entertained our hosts for a very pleasant meal.



We left in what seemed to be a cloudburst and explored a nearby modern housing development. There we were invited in by a friend of Kai before returning to our home (pictured below) some 20km outside Tallinn.



We were greeted by Oscar the cat and Andres then gave Robin a lesson in making bread. Unfortunately, Robin failed to do it anywhere near as well after we got back to Cornwall and Kai now tells us that it took Andres six months to get it right!

Thursday 4th June: the 125th Anniversary of the Estonian Flag



Sixteen of us assembled at the Balti Railway Station car park to meet our hosts for a bus excursion to Lahemaa National Park, nicknamed 'The Land of Bays'. It was still raining (having started the previous morning!) when we left at 0840hrs. We arrived 1 hour later in the rain at a log cabin café in the middle of the Park, where we met our guide – Simaa, who was extremely entertaining, could speak 5 languages, and had a droll sense of humour.



The day consisted of standing in the rain in a graveyard, walking along a windswept peninsular, in the rain, through a forest which Simaa called “a poor man’s fur coat”, where we were encouraged to place a stone on a cairn and make a wish – presumably for it to stop raining! We then had an interesting visit to Kaismo’s, somewhat quirky Maritime Museum, which gave us the opportunity to dry off a little!



This was followed by a visit to a beautiful garden, where, once again, we stood in the rain admiring beautiful flowers.

Simaa then told us to “sharpen our teeth”, and we went for a simple local lunch in an old converted Farm Labourer’s House on the Palmse Manor Estate. After lunch, a visit to a comprehensive agricultural museum within the same building included a kitchen with a large open chimney, where we were able to see that it was still raining!



A tour of the Manor itself, the home of the German Von Pahlen Family, and its associated buildings then kept us out of the rain for an hour or so! The Manor was especially charming with a homely atmosphere.

We left the area at 16.30 to return to Tallinn for the Farewell Party and it was still raining...



The Party was held in the basement of the office in the city of one of our hosts. The fare consisted of pea soup, ham on black bread, strawberries dipped in white chocolate and curd cake, and a convivial atmosphere existed throughout the evening. ED Iain's Estonian went down particularly well, as did his comment that he had organised the weather for the first half of the week, whereas the latter 3 days of rain had been organised by his opposite number, Lea!

Friday 5th June

Another wet morning. After a leisurely breakfast, we visited Feliks and Mare's summerhouse followed by a trip to see an old manor house which has now been converted to a school for disadvantaged children.

The weather improved around lunchtime, but a frost is forecast for tonight. We arrived at the airport around 3.00pm. The plane was late and after a very bumpy flight we arrived late at Stockholm and missed our connection to Amsterdam.

This was where the fun began - luxury hotel, lovely meals, all at the expense of KLM.

On the Saturday we had a short trip to Sigtuna, a pretty village near the airport and then uneventful flights back to Bristol.