

‘There and back again’

through a White Landscape.

No Kerosene
Journey One Chapter 4



Fleeting Revelations
Finland: Myth & Modernity

Helsinki, Tampere & home.

Summary: Journey One

Whom do you seek?

What was discovered?



Our journey, to Tampere - using rail transport.

Discoveries through observation,
curiosity & 'happy accident'.

Fantasy Stories provide metaphors for our intentions:

*....like Alice, following a 'White Rabbit' of an idea, on a curious
course, a constant 'wonderland' in which occur unexpected &
varied encounters of people and of place.*

There are many 'rabbit holes'

The No Kerosene journey has a common cause:
To visit friends & partners known in the years since 1990.

Borderlands: Our EU partnerships were with those living in
'outer regions' - often deprived areas of a nation.

Our encounter in Oslo, with Sámi people demonstrating
about a human & environmental injustice, marked an
appropriate start & we travelled north with a group.

Then to Finland... & at Kemi railway station, a simple
monument, introducing to the modern history of the
country.



Thus a journey to a Finnish city (Tampere), gains an element
of 'quest', the exploring of social history and culture.

Efficient modernity: Finland.... yet containing a sense of
ancient mythic struggle, lived out since the C18th.

12th March continued

To Helsinki: Intro

Our journey: an exploration with New Encounters - social, cultural & historical realities of the places through which we travel.

The realisation grew slowly - beginning immediately after arrival in Norway as we walked passed the architecturally distinctive old telegraph office in Oslo....



... then continuing with the Sami demonstration.
On entering Finland we find a monument marking an aspect of Finnish history.



Finland - part of the Swedish and then Russian Empires.
A distinctive 'voice' developing through the Fennoman movement in C19th

The rise of 'nationalism' in the C19th created movements for independence - from Ireland & across the Continent. All forms of artistic endeavour encouraged a 'national mood'

Regions with their distinctive languages, had a sense of 'difference' from the empires into which they were placed ('Great' Britain, Austro-Hungary, Russia)

The Old Empires suffer regret - sometimes the consequences are dangerous & disruptive, sometimes, disastrous.

A sense of loss, fed by nostalgia for an imagined past. Manipulated by self-serving politicians.

Present in those who support Putin's military invasion of Ukraine.

"Svenskar äro vi icke, ryssar vilja vi icke bli, låt oss alltså vara finnar."

*"We are not Swedes,
We do not want to be Russians,
So let's be Finns."*

Expressed in various cultural forms with the compositions of Jean Sibelius marking the complexities that existed in the region.

Sibelius's interest in Russian music is to tell a... complicated story of a small nation's engagement with its bigger imperial neighbor not through the well-worn narrative of resistance and rebellion but through that of a creative and often ambiguous stimulus.

<http://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/s9592.pdf>

Helsinki

Public architecture provides the easiest visual examples. The style is termed 'Nationalist Romantic'.

There is a relationship with other 'Nordic' styles & all are sometimes regarded as being part of the Arts & Crafts movement & 'Art Nouveau family'.



**A rabbit hole of curiosity
The Joys & Puzzles of uninformed random exploration.**

The journey within a journey

A Diversion



What was this place – with its bears, pillars (that are trees) & jovially frightening images?



It seems to be a clothes shop – but was that its first use?

There are two named images on either side of the entrance door.



The sculptures of the building relate to the Kalevala & become an introduction to the Finnish National Epic - a collection of ancient stories, originally sung.

The Kalevala

...compiled by Elias Lönnrot from Karelian and Finnish oral folklore and mythology, was intentionally shaped & with 'political' purpose (in the broadest sense) & became the Finnish National Epic

"The Kalevala was instrumental in the development of the Finnish national identity and the intensification of Finland's language

strife that ultimately led to Finland's independence from Russia in 1917" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalevala>)

They are of origins, of creation, Gods & heroes, magicians & malevolent beings. They are both particular (to a northern land and people) & 'universal' providing hope and error, effort, attainment & glory and examples of horrifically dark & terrifying aspects of human cruelty & its consequent impact.

Darkness is as a major element.

Pohjola

described in an C18th description as

*Yttersta Norden, beskrives såsom en mörk och förfärlig ort.
Tartarus & ultima Thule.*

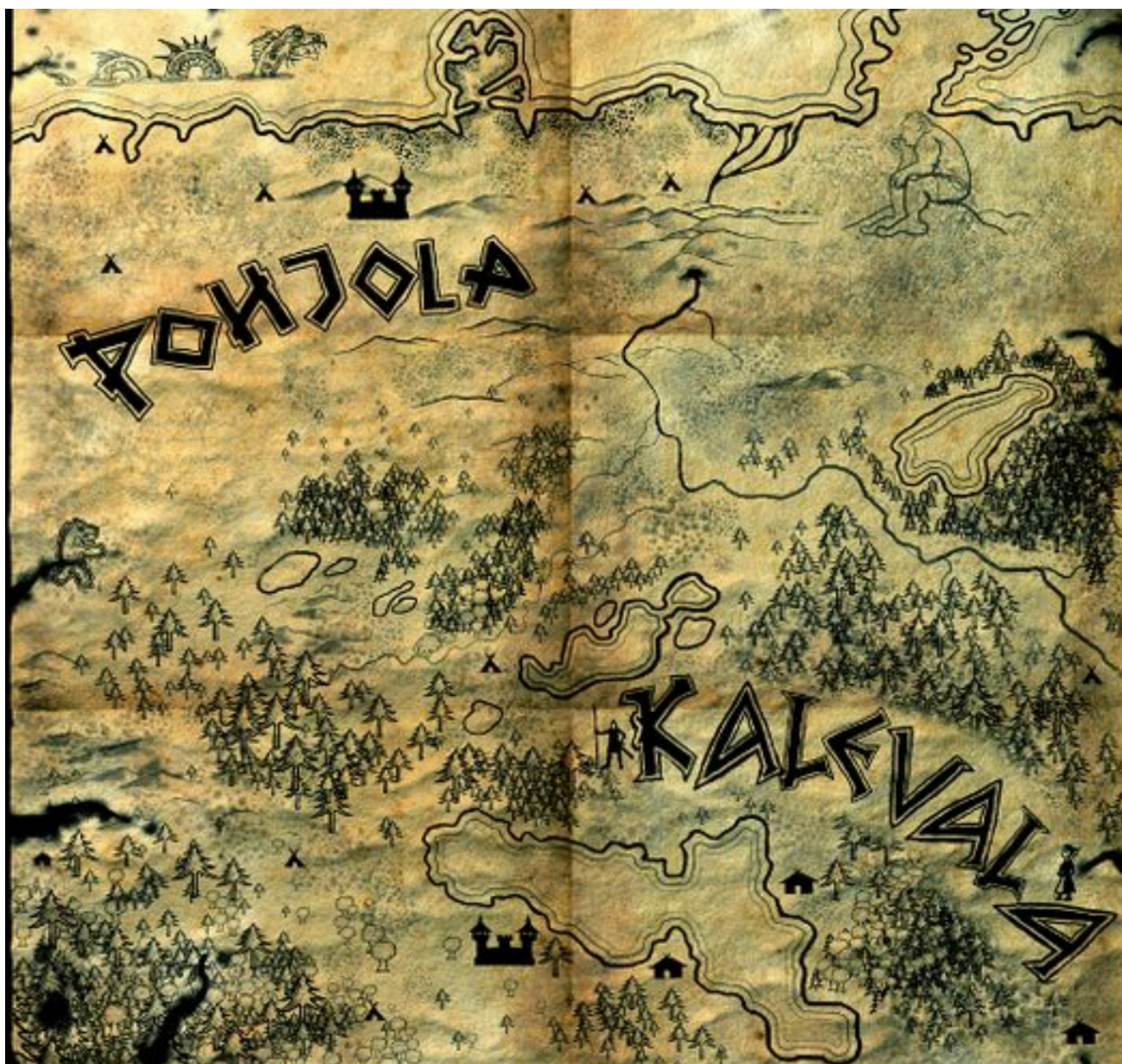
**'the most extreme North ... a dark and terrible place.
Tartarus and Ultima Thule'.**

In The Kalevala "Pohjola mainly appears as the home of women whom the male heroes, from the land of Kalevala, seek as wives."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pohjola#cite_note-Ganander-1789-2

Pohjola: also the place where major elements of the Epic are literally 'forged'.

The decorative sculptures refer to this action





Ilmarinen, “ the only skilful blacksmith” is persuaded to travel north &

“Forge ... the magic Sampo,
Forge the lid in many colors,”

The sculptures concern an incident on his journey



“Ilmarinen hastens forward
That he may behold the wonder,
Spies the Bear within the fir-top,
Sitting on its emerald branches,
Spies the gleam of golden moonlight....

“Ilmarinen, full consenting,
Straightway climbed the golden fir-tree,

High upon the bow of heaven,
Thence to bring the golden moonbeams,
Thence to bring the Bear of heaven,
From the fir-tree's topmost branches."

Eventually the "Sampo" is forged. It was intended for the 'Daughter of the Northland, honoured by land and water' but was stolen by her mother "Louhi, hostess of the Northland".



"the artist, Ilmarinen,
Hither comes from Kalevala,
Here to forge for us the Sampo,
Hammer us the lid in colors."

The Sampo seems to have been regarded as having magical properties related (in ancient terms) to present day 'health, wealth & happiness' aspirations.

Kullervo

‘an ill-fated character’



“Of a mother, trouble-laden,
Him the mother named Kullervo,”

Of the many magical characters in the Kalevala, Kullervo has, maybe because of his personal ‘complexities’, become an almost obsessively fascinating character.

Kullervo gains considerable magical powers. He was severely harmed as a child, (including attempted crucifixion), commits incest (causing suicide of his sister) & ultimately takes vengeance before committing suicide.

‘Fatherless, the magic infant,
In the cradle of attention,
To be rocked, and fed, and guarded;
But he rocked himself at pleasure,...

...

Kicks in miracles of power,
Bursts with might his swaddling garments;

...

Knocks his cradle into fragments,
Tears to tatters all his raiment,...

...

“When my form is full of stature,
When these arms grow strong and hardy,
Then will I avenge the murder
Of Kalervo and his people!” ‘

Kalevala: Rune XXX1. Kullerwoinen Son of Evil



Kullervo's Curse by the Finnish painter **Akseli Gallen-Kallela** 1899.

Kullervo cursing beasts from the woods to attack his tormenter, the Maiden of the North.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kullervo>

Kullervo creates his end as intentionally as he created other acts of destruction.

Though clearly an 'Epically Presented Life,' there is an underlying sense of harsh reality to the story



Accompanied by his (appropriately black) 'watch-dog' he chooses the ground where his sister died

“Finds the turf itself is weeping,
Finds the glen-wood filled with sorrow,
Finds the heather shedding tear-drops,
Weeping are the meadow-flowers,
O'er the ruin of his sister.”



Kullervo

“Asks the blade this simple question:
“Tell me, O my blade of honor,
Dost thou wish to drink my life-blood,

...

Thus his trusty sword makes answer,
Well divining his intentions:
“Why should I not drink thy life-blood,
Blood of guilty Kullerwoinen,

...

Thereupon the youth, Kullervo,
Wicked wizard of the Northland,
Lifts the mighty sword of Ukko,
Bids adieu to earth and heaven;
Firmly thrusts the hilt in heather,
To his heart he points the weapon,
Throws his weight upon his broadsword,
Pouring out his wicked life-blood,

...

Thus the wizard finds destruction,
This the end of Kullerwoinen,
Born in sin, and nursed in folly."



<https://www.kansallisgalleria.fi/en/object/467449>

The Kalevala

Archaic mythology providing an underlying drive to social & political action.

Politicians, desiring a Finnish nation built their actions on the creative work of Lönnrot - whose efforts in collecting, compiling & publishing became the basis for other inspirational art work - particularly by Akseli Gallen-Kallela, music & other epics that have inspired the growth of a vast range of 'Fantasy'.

"To survive you must tell stories" (Umberto Eco: Island of the Day Before).

It is unavoidable - and is primarily 'oral'.

We all do it - in gossip, family gatherings, with friends. Then through in Facebook, with Twitter, WhatsApp & all other forms of 'Social Media' (including the photos & details of the 'No Kerosene Journey').

We receive accounts that are incorrect or have malignant intent (purposefully or by accident), or are simply misunderstandings. Accounts need to be tested (informally or otherwise) by personal 'critical faculty'.



All knowledge, 'fact or fiction' of any kind (including rigorously produced through 'scientific method' - a mark of our Age) is but an 'account' - a 'story'. Always 'of its time'.

The Kalevala, composed from oral singing traditions ('runes/runos/chants'), is shaped in C19th & thus, for C21st creates some classic 'issues' (gender roles particularly).



‘Truth’ is not simply ‘literal or physical reality’ but exists, in ‘layers’, through ‘its telling’ story.

The original material collected by Elias Lönnrot was largely from the Karelia region (in Russia - part of the region is still in Russia).

Despite the apparent (and ‘encouraged’) readings of the Kalevala as being somehow ‘otherworldly’, their general

purpose seems (as with other ancient, pre-Industrial Age story) as expressive of prosaic realities common to any Age. Present, apparently rational, pragmatic story-telling has the same intent - attempting to make sense of and maintain 'balance', regardless of whatever may be occurring.

The apparently mysterious 'Sampo' is an example of such 'prosaic reality'

On one side the flour is grinding,
On another salt is making,
On a third is money forging,

repeated:

Grinds a measure fit for eating,
Grinds a second for the market,
Grinds a third one for the store-house.

having the same purpose as English Wassailers encouraging, through an annual practical ritual in January, an apple tree to produce fruit

Apples enow,
hatfuls, capfuls, three-bushel bagfuls,
tollants ol full, barn's floor full,
little heap under the stairs.

Hip, hip, hip, hooroo!

Sound worlds & Silent ecstasy

This 'Rabbit Hole' has music.....

The stories in the Kalevala were sung - slowly, sometimes for hours.

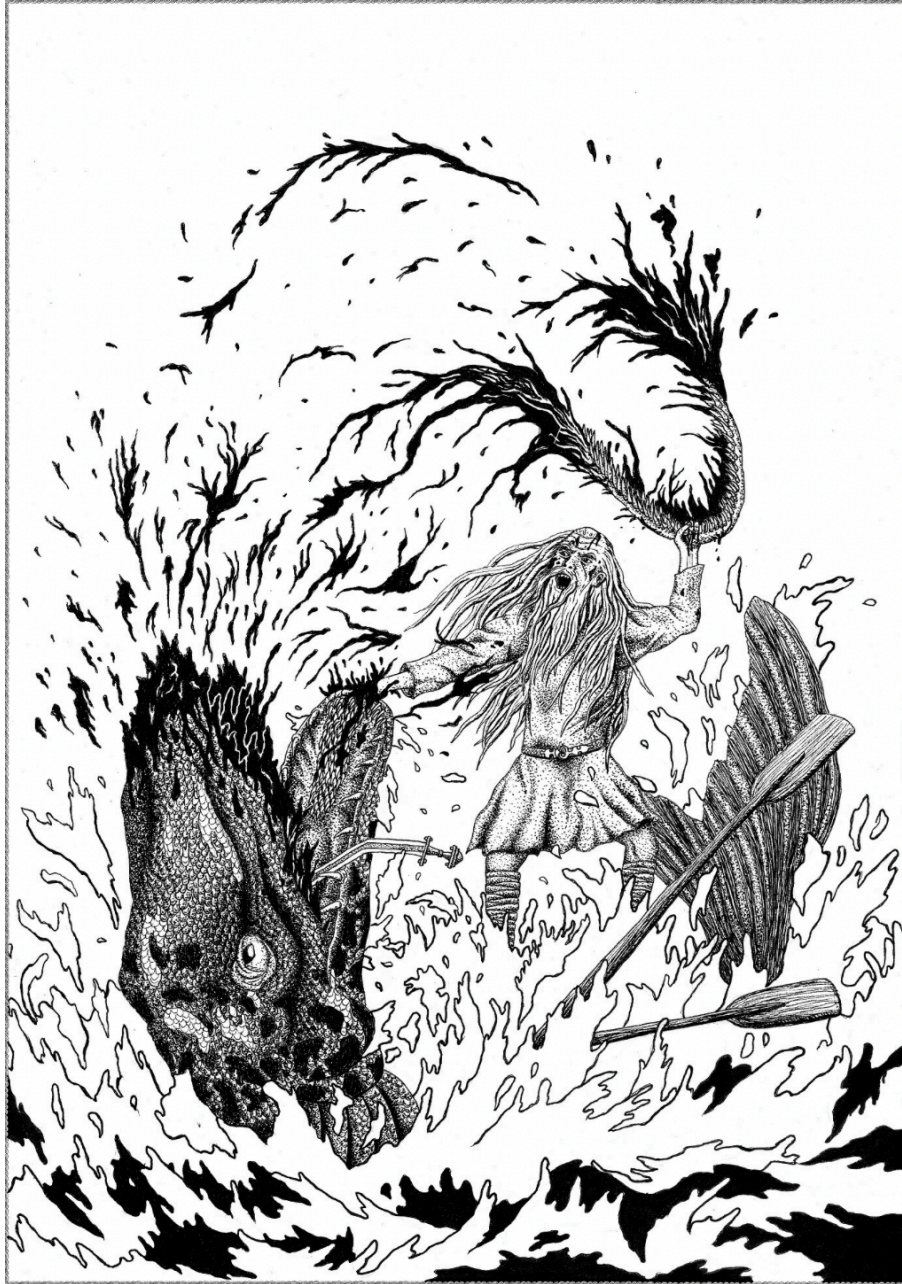
The Sámi (in the far north of Scandi-Nordic countries) had their drum, the Finns have the kantele which accompanied their singing.

The Kantele was supposedly created by Väinämöinen, the god of chants, songs and poetry



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Väinämöinen>

His original Kantele was made from the jawbone of a monstrous pike.



<https://palosaari.artstation.com/projects/e0Y5r6>

This link has examples of the sound

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kantele>

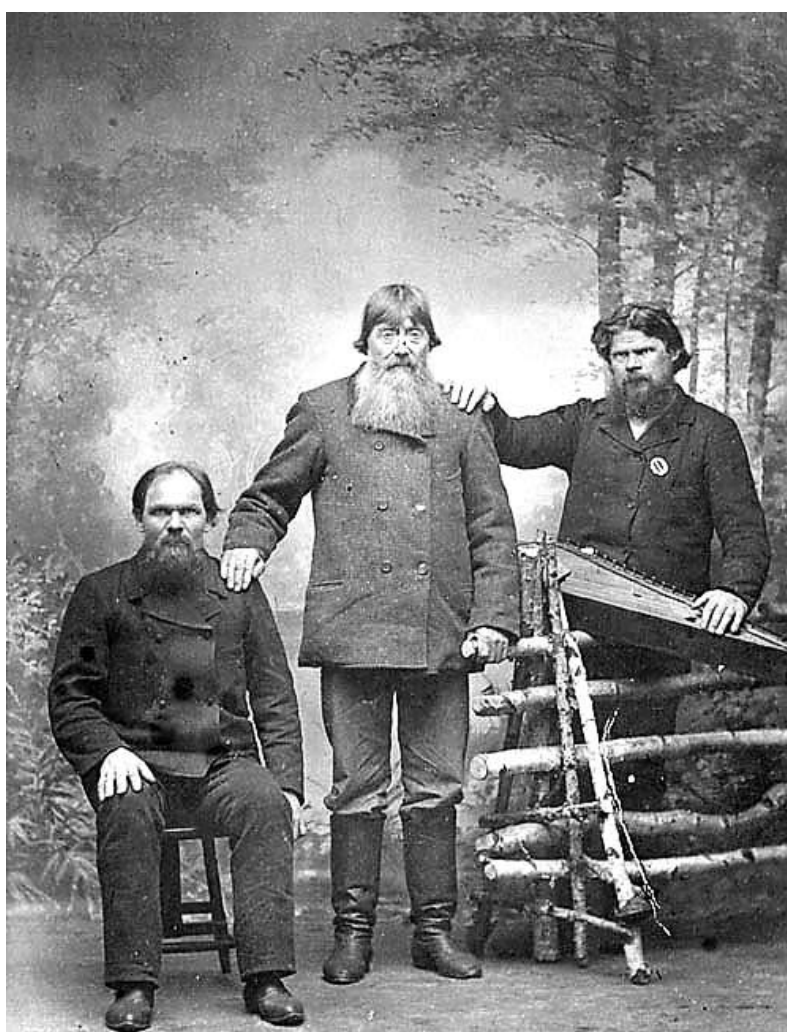
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:DIY_kantele_sample_raw.ogg

A song recorded in 1939:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vaka_vanha_Vainamoinen.ogg

Versions of the instrument are also used in other Baltic countries - and the shape and style is found in many cultures - sometimes called psaltery, & including hammered dulcimers, cimbalom

Traditional players and singers were photographed & recorded in the early C20th. The three in this photo are Iivana Misukka, Iivana Onoila and Juho Kuokka.



Present active research is exploring possibilities:
<https://www.temps.fi/en/research/kantele-of-the-runosong-culture-and-the-dialogue-of-creativity/>

The Kalevala Epic continues to have major influence on Finnish culture and sensibility

Journal of Finnish Studies, Volume 13, Number 2, Winter 2009:

The Kalevala, Popular Music, and National Culture

- provided Sibelius's first major musical success in 1892: 'Kullervo'
"the definitive breakthrough of Sibelius's nascent career" (Wikipedia).
- had major influence on the development of fantasy literature - especially Tolkien.

The Kullervo story was "the first time that J. R. R. Tolkien,...began writing prose" (Wikipedia)

"In 1955 he told the poet W.H. Auden that discovering Finnish had been like 'entering a complete wine-cellar filled with bottles of an amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before'.

'Tolkien realised with The Story of Kullervo that language, culture and mythology are inextricably linked,' ... 'He had invented a language - and so he invented a mythology.' ...

...the mood of the Finnish epic affected Tolkien's writing: 'There is a strain of deep tragedy and pessimism that runs through Tolkien's work, even The Hobbit and certainly The Lord of the Rings.

The Story of Kullervo is without a doubt the darkest story he ever wrote. It is our first experience of that darkness.'

<https://www.clarendonhousebooks.com/single-post/tolkien-and-the-kalevala>

- provided Longfellow (who had visited Finland), with the 'trochaic tetrameter' structure for his American Epic 'The Song of Hiawatha' Longfellow.

The journey within a journey:
becoming, in the process, a rather lengthy diversion



The question: 'What was this place'

Result:

A very mundane answer discovered after researching articles on the architectural style.

Originally the building was constructed for an insurance company called **Pohjola** with another insurance company called **Kullervo** included. The companies still exist as part of the 'OP' Group: <https://www.op.fi/home-page>

The main entrance, designed by [Hilda Flodin](#), a pupil of [Rodin](#), is flanked by the names of the two insurance companies, both from Kalevala, and by devils, monsters or trolls; bears, the symbol of the insurance company, top the pilasters and also appear in the interior decoration. Because the mouths of the Pohjola characters are slightly open, passers-by sometimes leave cigarette butts in their mouths as a prank.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pohjola_Insurance_building

There it is - I'm rather amazed that by accident we're viewing important elements of the Finnish National Epic on the front of a building.

Amazed & Delighted - not because they exist - but that we encounter such an attractive example of the epic as we took a brief stroll between trains.

We did not have time to make anything other than ‘a walk round the block’ (literally) but saw other examples of the National Romantic architectural style are in other buildings

– these 2 seem to have been associated with a government agency (Ministry of Transport).





Entrance with decorative lintel



A steam railway engine on one side & a sail driven 'trader' ship on the other





Probably the most significant architectural site is the Central Railway station which was not in 'Nationalist Romantic' style. It was intended as the western-most railway terminal of the Russian Empire but was not completed until 1919 by which time Finland had become an independent nation state.

It is regarded by some as one of the world's most architecturally significant railways stations.

There is a very detailed description of the history of the station in the following link:

[Click here: Helsinki Station](#)

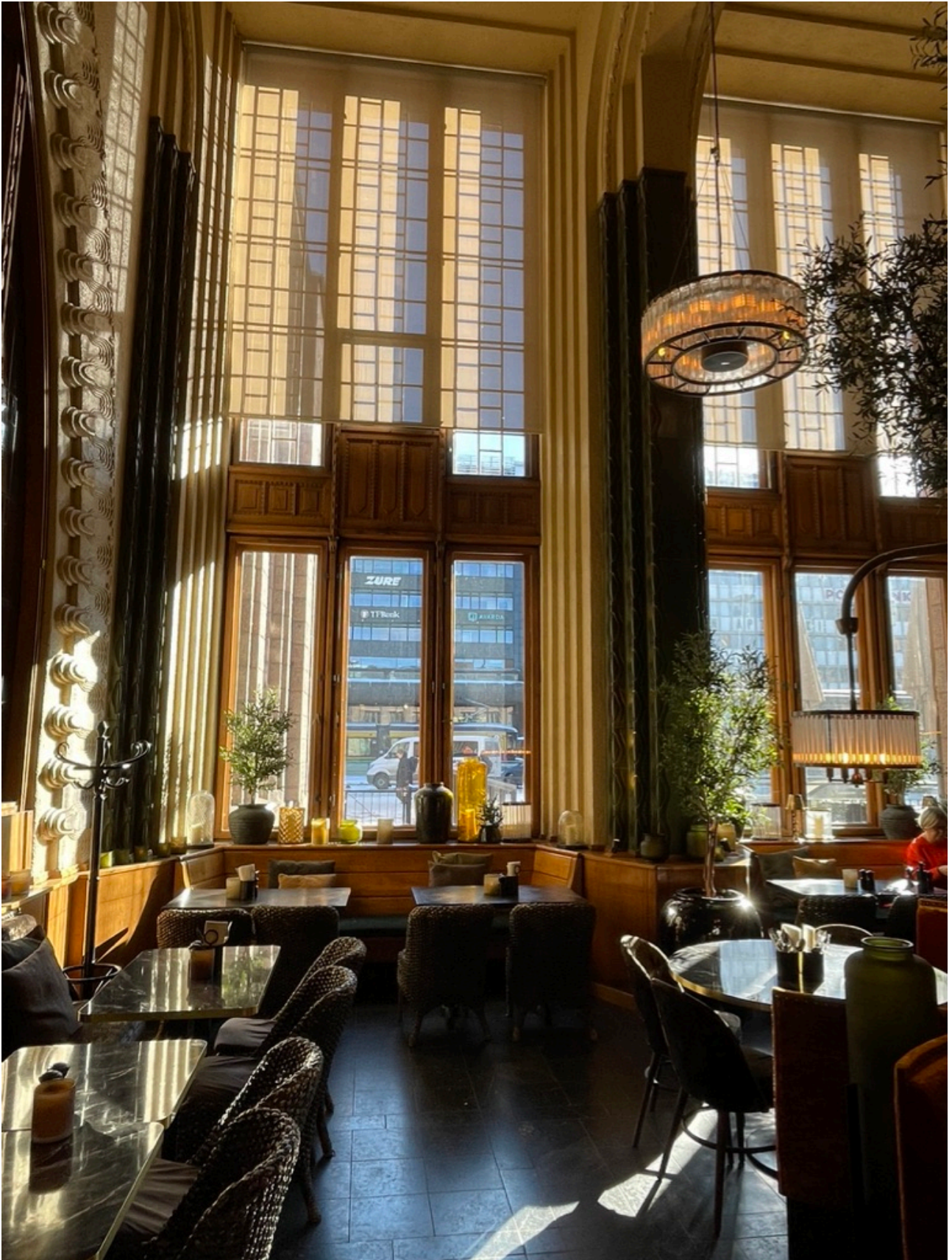














Travelling on railway systems is to travel with a degree of uncertainty as each national system is idiosyncratic & requires experience to understand.

On one occasion a group of us were left behind in Krakow due to failure to realise the terms in which Poland describes its train 'arrival/ departure positions'. I use that phrase because the term for such positions varies & sometimes systems use more than one term.

In present-day Finland the word 'track' and a number occur – but this is a more recent usage as in the Helsinki station there is evidence of an older term 'platform', as still used in UK



On to Tampere:



Such is the precision of standardised train lengths that it is possible to keep a space on the platform clear of snow for staff and crew.

Tampere

Tampere the focal point of Journey One.

We travelled there 'indirectly' on the lengthy land route through Narvik & by avoiding crossing the Baltic Sea.

Here we were to meet a project partner with whom, due to the Covid restrictions, we had only been in contact with through email & on-line systems.

Unfortunately before we arrived in Tampere we were told that they were unwell and could not meet us.

Fortunately we did not alter our plans.....

Tampere was yet another unexpected discovery
a delightful place to visit

In itself, a complete educational experience



We were told that Tampere was the ‘Manchester of Finland’.

A centre, thanks to the availability of water power, of the textile trade established by a Scottish business entrepreneur James Finlayson

1820

Scottish engineer James Finlayson establishes a cotton factory by the Tammerkoski rapids in the city of Tampere.

Over a short period in the 1800s Finlayson became the largest industrial enterprise in Scandinavia. This growth was based on

unique courage and open-mindedness. The company's weaving hall had the honour of switching on the first electric lights in the Nordic. The company had its own hospital, daycare centre, school, fire brigade, pharmacy and nursing home.

The company even its own social security system at a time when no one had yet heard of such a thing.

More significantly, Finlayson was the first company in Finland to offer women an opportunity to an independent life: an apartment and livelihood.

Women's status in Finnish society is evident in the fact that in 1906 Finland became the first country in Europe to grant women the right to vote.

<https://finlaysonshop.com/pages/our-story>





Once offices, now a brewery.







There is, now, only one working mill (paper) in the town centre. The chimneys are not functioning but were kept as reminders of the history of the town. They have impressive sculptural impact.



Monday 13th March

Our hotel was fine – but had a somewhat severe ‘penitentiary’ style. Access to breakfast was controlled by locks.





A large area near the station has been redeveloped. It was formerly an locomotive 'roundhouse' & associated railways tracks.







As is standard in many European cities, there is a 'mass-transit' system - usually, as here, using trams.



Our train to Turku was in the mid afternoon and we decided on an unplanned, drifting route around the centre.

One building 'caught our eye' due to its significant position and a seemingly slightly curious style.



After the experience of Helsinki & of visiting this place, my conclusion is that that the judgements of eye and of ear are formed during early childhood.

We did not expect to find anything particularly interesting - but the entrance we used (a side door) indicated it was rather special.





I'm 'cast back in time' by architecture:
In the case of Helsinki, to folkloric stories & here in Tampere
to a specific place that has no direct connection.

Not directly... but through the intention of architects separated physically but being of the same background, spirit and intellectual interest.

Edward Wood - working in the 1890s in Manchester and with a style called Vernacular Revival.



Long St Methodist Church, Middleton 1899 - 1903.

Leaving a profound impression on me as child aged 3 to 8 years.

<https://edgarwoodsociety.org/>

‘..he saw himself as an artisan serving the people...’

Tampere: the ‘Manchester of Finland’.

Lars Sonck 1903 - 07 & decorated by Hugo Simberg - creating a building for the area of the town that housed the

growing industrial workforce. Designed in National Romantic style, it became Tampere's Lutheran Cathedral.

On entering we were astonished - and captivated by the interior.... photographing as much detail as possible





There is a lengthy green cord, bundled & carried







Boys, apparently modelled from locals, carry the cord forwards



Their destinations (on either side) seem very bleak





Overseeing the centre of the church are angel wings surrounding a flying serpent.







The resurrection (**Magnus Enckell**) still requires women to dress 'appropriately'... curious.





The artist, **Hugo Simberg**, was criticised for placing a snake / winged serpent at the centre of the ceiling.

Simberg's approach is curious - he has a positive theme of boys (from Tampere) carrying a symbol of life – the green and fruitful cord.... but to bleak destinations.

A 'cord of life' - is this similar to the 'green force' to which the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas refers:

"The force that through the green fuse drives the flower Drives my green age"

(click on words: excellent summary & poem in English & Italian)

"the flow of time
moving to its inexorable conclusion."

Much of that poem seems to bear a similar understanding of life as may be seen in Simberg's work, which also maintains a humorous aspect:



The serpent is usually a symbol of evil. Simberg's other frescoes in the church demonstrate an approach to artistic expression that requires the observer to engage sensitively.

The symbol of evil that is placed centrally is not alone – it is surrounded by angel wings.
Angel wings also cover other parts of the church ceiling.

Is Simberg suggesting evil is a central issue for humanity – but there is the surrounding protective power of angels?

The serpent could be viewed as contained (and ‘uncomfortable’) being surrounded by angels.....

Or is ‘temptation’ & evil always present, despite the protection - snake-like, ‘forked’ or ‘double-tongued’ always untrustworthy.

...‘preserve me from the violent man;

They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison is under their lips.’ Bible: Psalm 140



.... the protective, sheltering wings of the angels are everywhere. They may be seen as a positive reassuring image







Of the image 'The Garden of Death' Simberg stated that it was a place where the dead wait prior to entering heaven.





Simberg's 'wounded angel' was a theme reproduced several times and in this case he has located it in industrial Tampere (the chimneys & footwear are different from the original version).



Everywhere the details form an important part of the whole
- and they retain a decorous simplicity of line.

































The centre of Tampere is equally fascinating – with the industrial buildings re-purposed, providing connectional & recreational spaces.

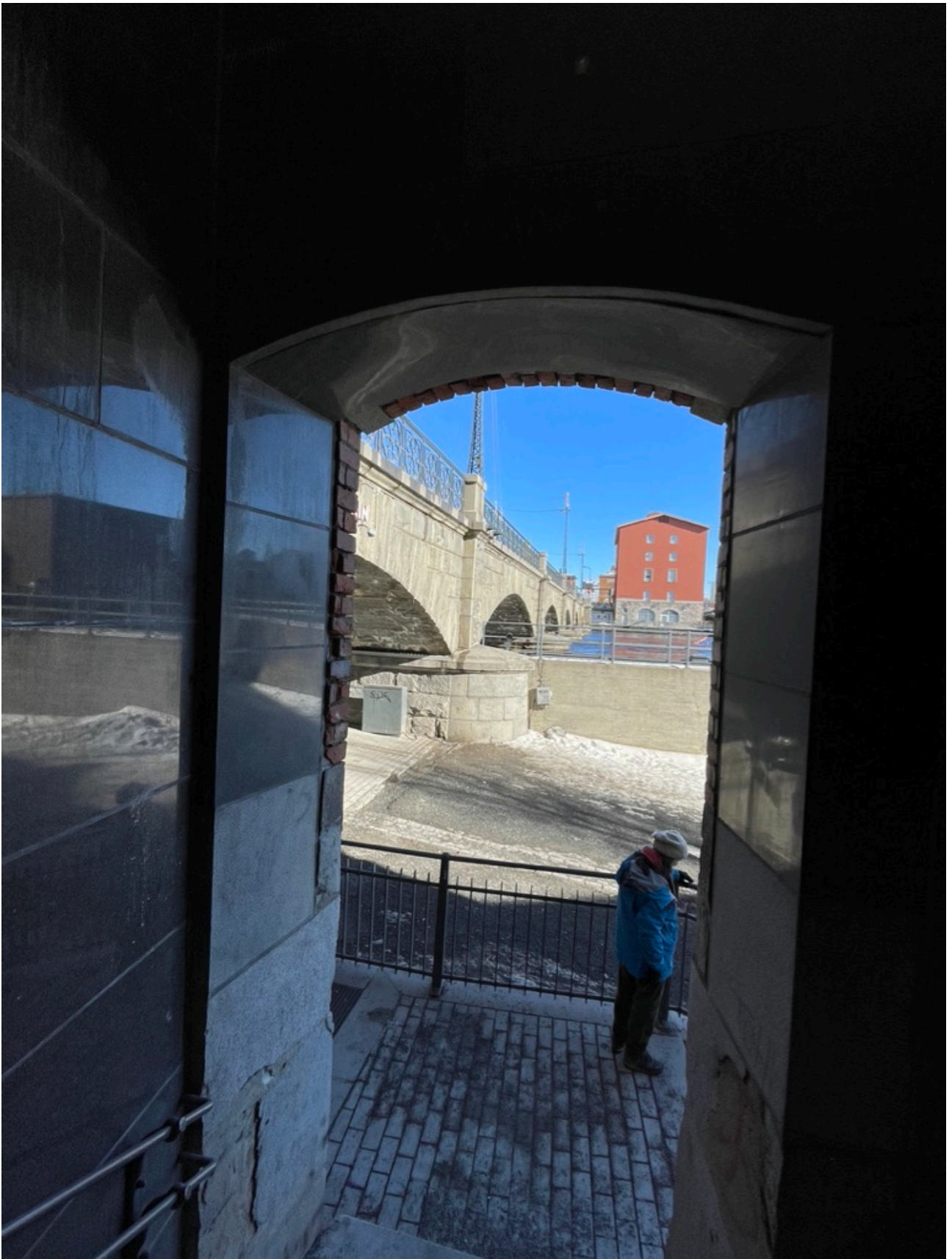


























Tampere was a traditional industrial town & the preservation of the buildings makes a 'clear statement' as the picture above one demonstrates. Having lived in similar environments in UK, it feels very familiar.

Its importance as an industrial base resulted in its significance for Russian Bolsheviks. Here, in 1905, Lenin first met Joseph Stalin & Lenin's journey from exile to Petrograd included a stop in Tampere.



As Tampere was the most important industrial city in Finland its (considerable) workforce supported the red faction during the Finnish Civil war ('War of Independence') of 1918 (27 January – 15 May 1918)

It was site of a major battle after being besieged by 'the Whites'. As ever with civil wars, there were the usual horrors and unjustified murderous aftermaths (the longer lasting war, across Russia, was horrifically vicious).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Tampere

Finland was born through such strife & for most of its history in C20th has had to manage an uneasy political context - between 'west' & 'east'

The Lenin Museum in Tampere, created after WW2, represents something of that compromise. Fortunately the (originally promotional) Museum has survived.

Welcome to the Birthplace of the Soviet Union!

Everyone from President Brezhnev to cosmonaut legend Gagarin has paid a visit to this place. You should come too!

The only Lenin Museum in the Western world is located in Tampere Workers' Hall, where Lenin and Stalin met each other for the first time in 1905.

The museum has become a cult destination, attracting visitors from around the world.

A visit to the Lenin Museum is a real experience.

The Lenin Museum tells you about the multi-generational history of Finnish-Soviet relations.

Visit the legendary Lenin Museum and discover our museum shop!

Since February 2022, Lenin Museum has unequivocally opposed the war and supported Ukraine.

Museum donates to UNICEF one euro of every ticket sold to help Ukrainian children and families.

<https://www.lenin.fi/en/a-visit-to-the-lenin-museum/>

Unfortunately, we could not visit, on Mondays in winter the museum is closed.

A disappointment

Having spent the past 33 years working with partners in post-communist societies (and because of present political circumstances) it would have made a rather special visit (& *with odd personal links... I once had a specially arranged visit to a wine cellar in which Yuri Gagarin was incarcerated accidentally, having fallen asleep, heavily intoxicated - and failing to leave with other guests. Mr Putin and friends had also partied there - with, as usual with Putin, doors locked to console his exaggerated concern for personal protection - an inevitable projection of his own behaviour*)

Being the only one of its type in 'The West', it was a very popular destination for tourists from the Soviet Union!

The presence of the museum is a reminder that Finland, since its creation, had survived through a series of compromises with greater powers - especially Russia & the Soviet Union.

The necessity of such compromises is a matter for debate - but the English language Moscow Times made the comment

"And while the museum in Tampere might be a reminder of just how deep its historical wounds still are, it's also a monument to how Finland has evolved."

Lenin and the October Revolution may have altered its fate forever 100 years ago, but now more than ever, that fate may finally be in Finland's own hands."

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/11/07/finnish-town-where-lenin-met-stalin-still-lives-in-russias-shadow-a59495>

(based in Amsterdam since 1922 after being branded in Russia as a 'foreign agent' for its open approach to news)

The comment was written in 2017 - and proved to be a correct prophecy as Finland is now in NATO

We regretted not having more time to explore more of what we felt to be a particularly delightful city.

On to Turku

We had a ferry- boat to catch.



The departure screen gives a count-down in minutes - the train manager stands ready to hold the train for any late arrivals - and she calmed people as they hurried to the train.

Even though there was a slight thaw & a sense of an impending Spring, we simply faced more snow



and the trade in timber





Turku:

more station reconstruction

(this description is being composed in Turkey on Journey 2 – throughout all of our travels railways are being remodelled)



We leave the train (which continues to the port) and immediately it starts snowing – but its light snow so we decide to continue walking to the ferry (for Stockholm)



We drag our bags and walk for 3kms - the snow increases - so we shelter in a smart but very friendly restaurant.

No-one notices our heavily clad presence - except a manager who compliments us on being correctly dressed.

Its the expected normal. Inside - informal, short sleeves - shorts sometimes... but not outside.

Dressing and undressing can take time - but is simply part of what is required.

As we live in a rural, farming, environment, where practicality of dress is a major consideration, this attitude in Nordic pubs and restaurants feels normal & 'homely'.



They have a delicacy called a Stromboli. So, as our 3rd Journey will take us in sight of that volcano, we buy 2.

And explained to our hosts the reason..... leaving them with increased knowledge of Calabria & Spilinga - and Nduja - than they had before we arrived.



The final 2 kms were in a worsening snow storm



Despite the worsening conditions we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves (though the bags proved reluctant at times as they snared on blocks of snow and ice)





Though the snow was driving into our faces from the west it was powdery dry & had little impact - we were dry.



It was also good to see that the road crossing was gender neutral - and we were quite pleased to arrive at the terminal building.



Our ferry to Stockholm was with Viking Line.
Aptly named.

I've always assumed that Viking boats did not provide much individual 'accommodation space' for their warriors.

This tradition seems to have been continued by the present company, who managed to squeeze two of us into a space that only allowed one person to stand inside the cabin.

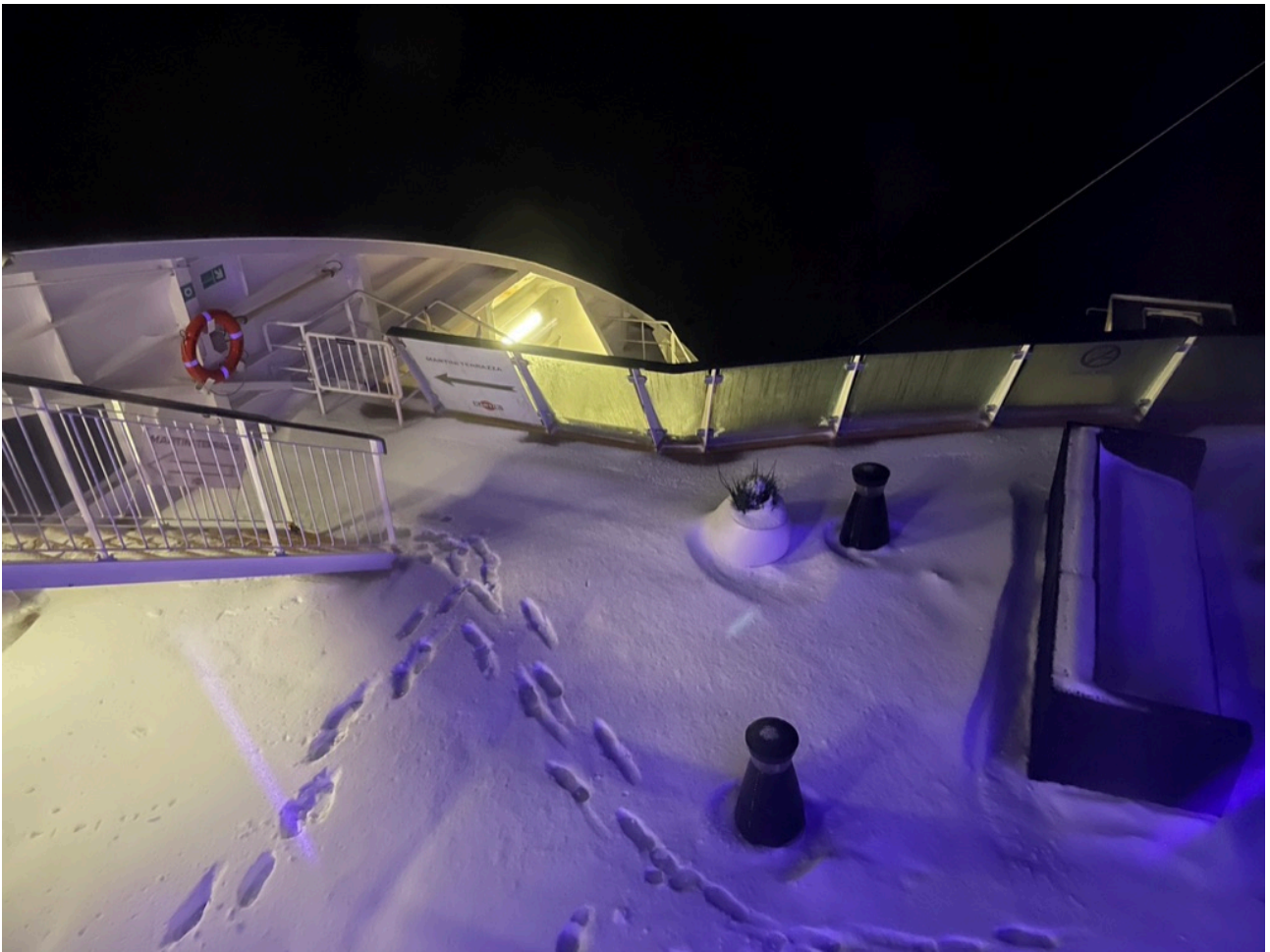
The other had to be on their bunk-bed or in the corridor..

Opening the door to the lavatory was not possible unless every other space was clear.

Not much could be seen as we ploughed, in the dark,
through the ice



..... and the decks were dangerously covered in ice and snow





We were sailing into a fierce gale which, at one point, became very turbulent when we lost the shelter of the islands that cover most of the Baltic Sea between Turku and Stockholm.

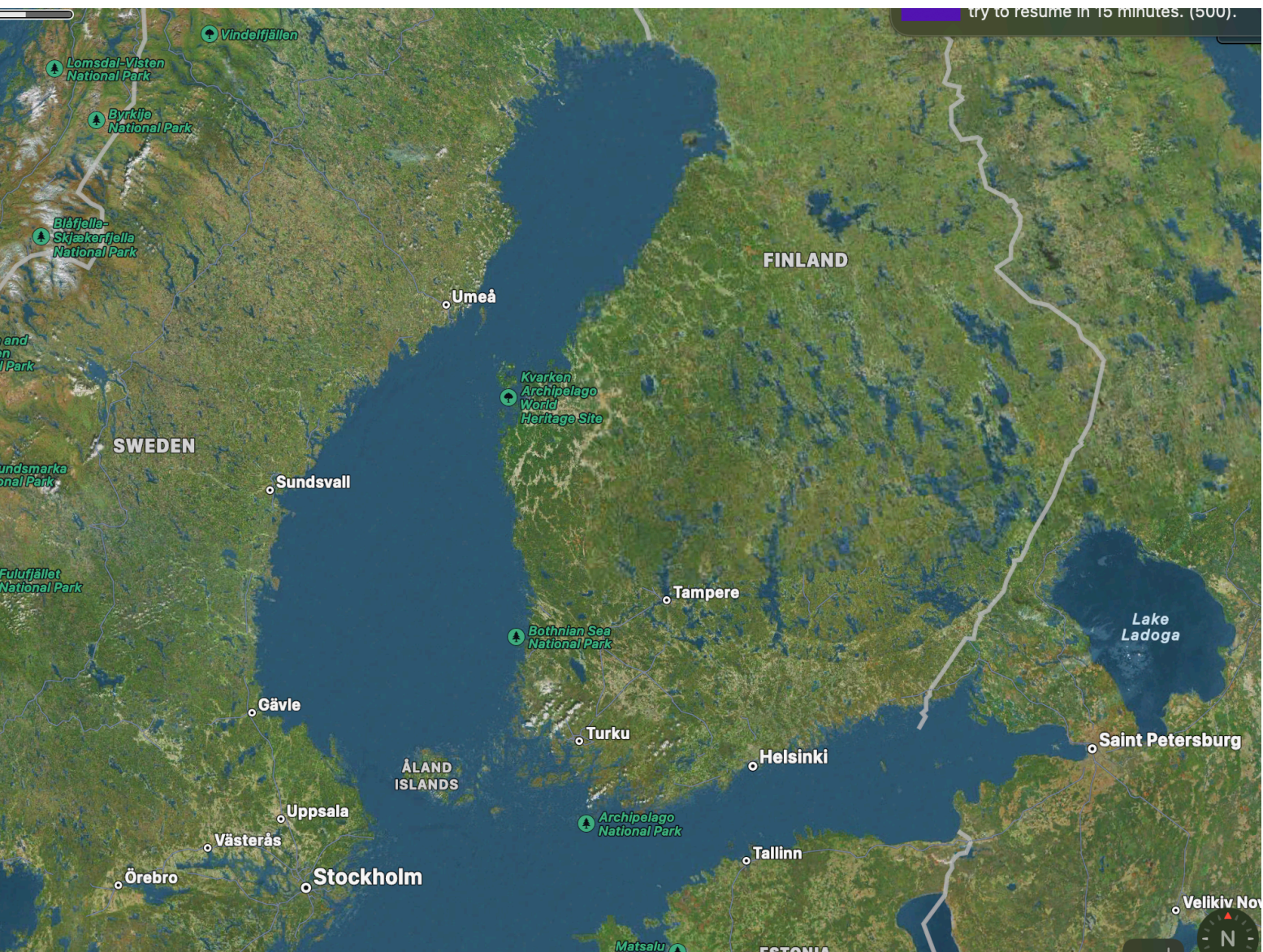
The Baltic is a shallow sea and therefore the turbulence is considerable.

Regardless of the weather, the dancing continued. I suspect that many of the people who were travelling were on a short return trip that provided 2 nights of such pleasure with a day 'sightseeing' (as occurs with many other ferry journeys such as the one we used between Newcastle and Amsterdam).



We also sail across a sea that has become potentially one of the most dangerous international seas..

Our route is through the Åland Islands:
'an autonomous and demilitarised region of Finland'.

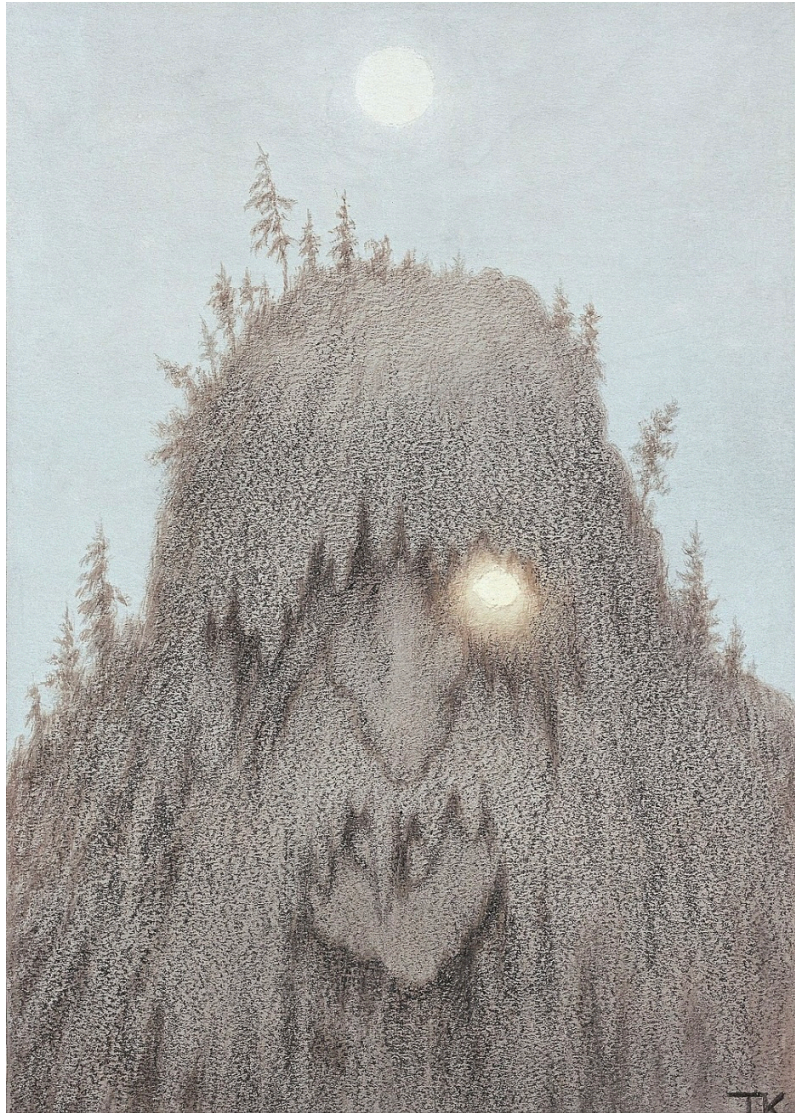


The islands have been demilitarised since 1856 after the Åland War between France, Britain & Russia (whose territory they became after war with Sweden). A 1920 decision of the League of Nations confirmed their autonomy within the Finnish State.

Russia once regarded the Baltic Sea zone as 'their sea'. Until 1989 East Germany & Poland were Warsaw Pact countries & Lithuania, Latvia & Estonia were in the USSR with Sweden and Finland neutral. Since then all 5 have become part of the EU & NATO & Putin's War has resulted in Finland joining NATO in 2023 with Sweden intending to.

The whole of the Baltic zone will be in NATO.... Russia has now lost influence & the ease of access it once had & with Finland and Estonia have oversight of all waters leading to St Petersburg

Given Putin's obsessions, fears & intentions, this major change may have increased the potential for conflict.



The Unpredictable Troll
just over the border
in the corner of the mind.

Given the manner in which Putin took control of Crimea in 2014, the danger is that he (dreaming of restoring the territories lost since 1989), uses any excuse to reclaim, as a base for further action, the Åland Islands.

“...military intelligence of Sweden and Finland have concluded that Russia has a parachute brigade stationed in the Baltic exclave of [Kaliningrad](#), surrounded by EU territory, able to attack Gotland and Åland.....

Russia has a consulate there, seen by many as a spy base.

Moreover, [it was reported](#) that Russian citizens had purchased large plots of land on the archipelago and equipped them with helipads and docks. Some of the properties are reportedly located extremely close to important shipping routes.

Russia likes to have many pretexts available – you never know which one may come in handy.”

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/the-brief-whiskey-on-the-rocks/>

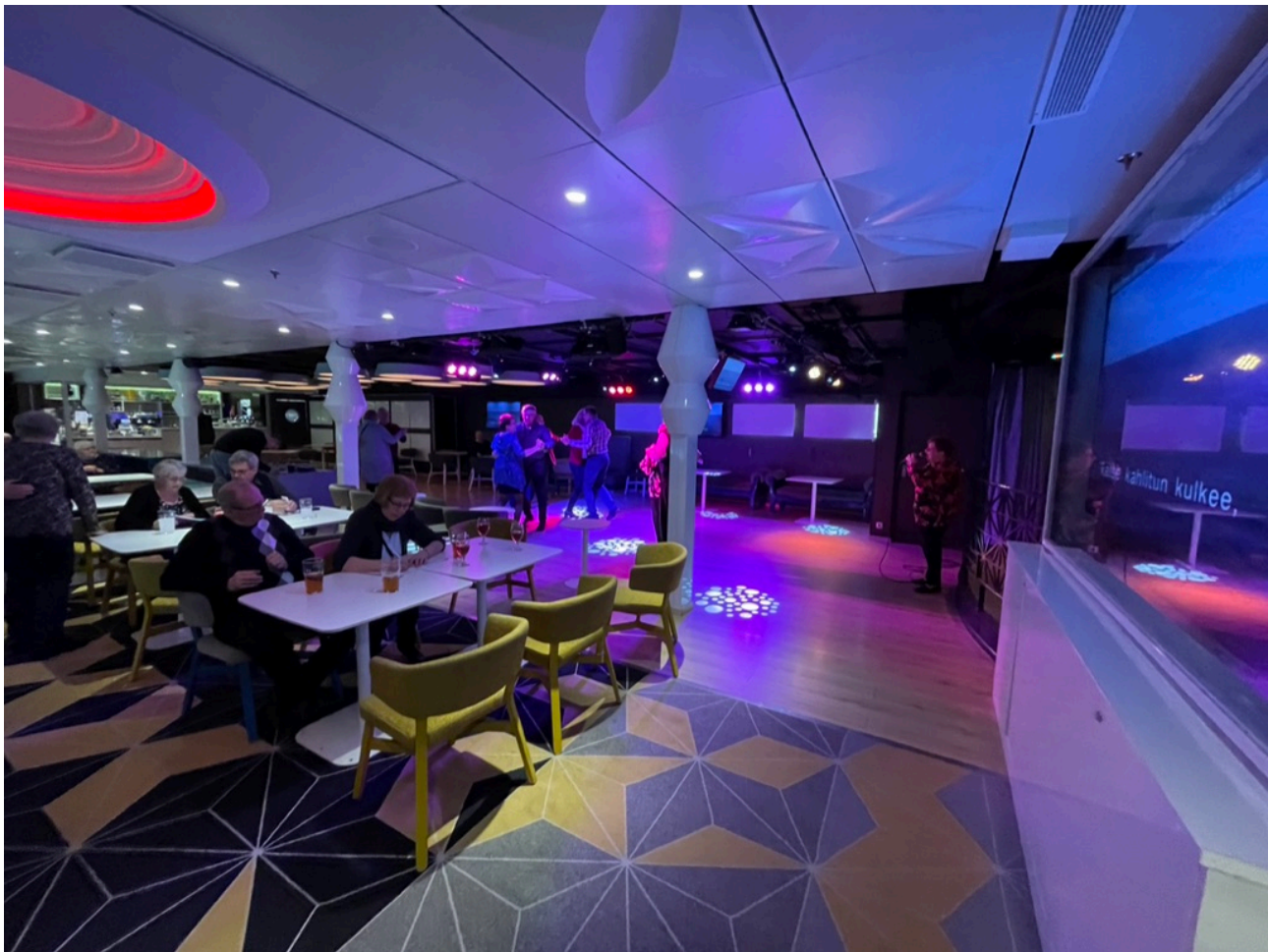
We sailed on, crossing the boundaries & through the islands

Houtskari, Southwest Finland, Finland, Baltic Sea



The band played on.....

& Karaoke also featured



For over 30 years we had partnerships in Central & Eastern Europe (post-communist countries). More recently these had included assisting Polish & Romanian colleagues with displaced Ukrainian families.

Consequently we planned a tour that was largely focused on eastern regions of the EU - and beyond.

We knew that present warfare & threats issuing from Putin's Russia would increase our interest in the recent history of the region and nation's we visit.

This journey to the north, is physically disconnected to Journeys 2 & 3 (with that criss-cross each other).

From the moment we entered Finland & puzzled about a grey monument at Kemi railway station, we realised that this First Journey is intimately connected to the others.

From 1809 - and until 1917, Finland was a Grand Duchy (self-governing) within Russia.

Finland was reluctantly 'Russian' - and was part of the history that was imposed on most of the other regions.

Yet, at the same time (as with the Baltic lands to the south), was a society whose cultural leaders were encouraging national expression & working for release from the increasing Tsarist oppression.

The monument at Kemi introduced the theme.

The architecture & art, encountered in Helsinki & Tampere, revealed the underlying and very particular Finnish culture.

On 28th April 1892 a young Sibelius established himself as an important composer. He conducted the first performance of his composition Kullervo

*'the dawn of art music that was distinctly Finnish....
by setting the Finnish-language Kalevala and evoking...the
melody and rhythm of Finnic rune singing, he had given voice to
the political struggle for Finland's independence from Imperial
Russia.'*

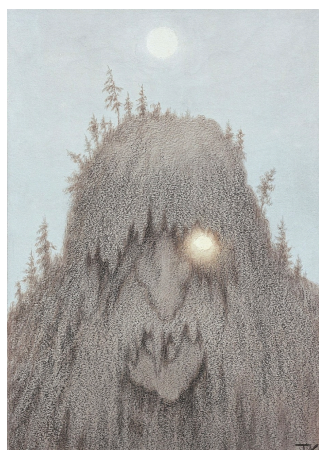
The audience applause 'erupted' in enthusiasm.... Sibelius was presented with a

'blue-and-white-ribboned laurel wreath that quoted prophetically lines 615–616 of Runo L of The Kalevala:

*"That way now will run the future
On the new course, cleared and ready".'*

Present-day, the international atmosphere is concerned that those conflicts related to 'national self-determination' may once again increase & engage many more nations.

Sitting alone, in distant Mid Wales, nearly 133 years later.... and listening to the dramatic music of Sibelius's Kullervo, ...it is as if I am one of those present in Helsinki - 'erupting' with relief & delight at what he has presented.... but aware of what may yet occur.....



The Unpredictable Troll:

just over the border,
in the corner of the mind.

Reflection:

Of Finland we knew little & after a 'whistle-stop' visit of 5 days we depart feeling that we have barely begun to even 'see' the country - we'd smoothly wizzed from town to town through a white landscape that was (including the human element) in hibernation.

We finish our visit ignorant of any real understanding & seizing only on aspects to which we could easily relate.

Such is the curse put upon tourists
- as a mother said to Kullervo:

"With a frog thou'lt journey homeward,
Victor, with but little honor!"

March 14th

Arrival in Stockholm was at 06.30 hrs



Disembarkation (what else!) and a walk to the Central Railway station



The weather system that had brought snow to Turku in Finland had fallen as heavy rain in Stockholm.

This made some of the walking more treacherous as it exposed the compacted ice - but we were now, for the first time since arriving in Oslo walking in temperatures above zero.



Though a rather lengthy walk it had interesting features.



The Royal Palace.....

..... and some of its neighbours



The Central Railway Station



It became the first place in which I paid for a loo visit by credit card

The venue also, rather curiously, provided a screen with fire image



Our train was supposedly to Copenhagen – but
announcements on board began to raise doubts



There were decreasing amounts of snow & lakes were thawing





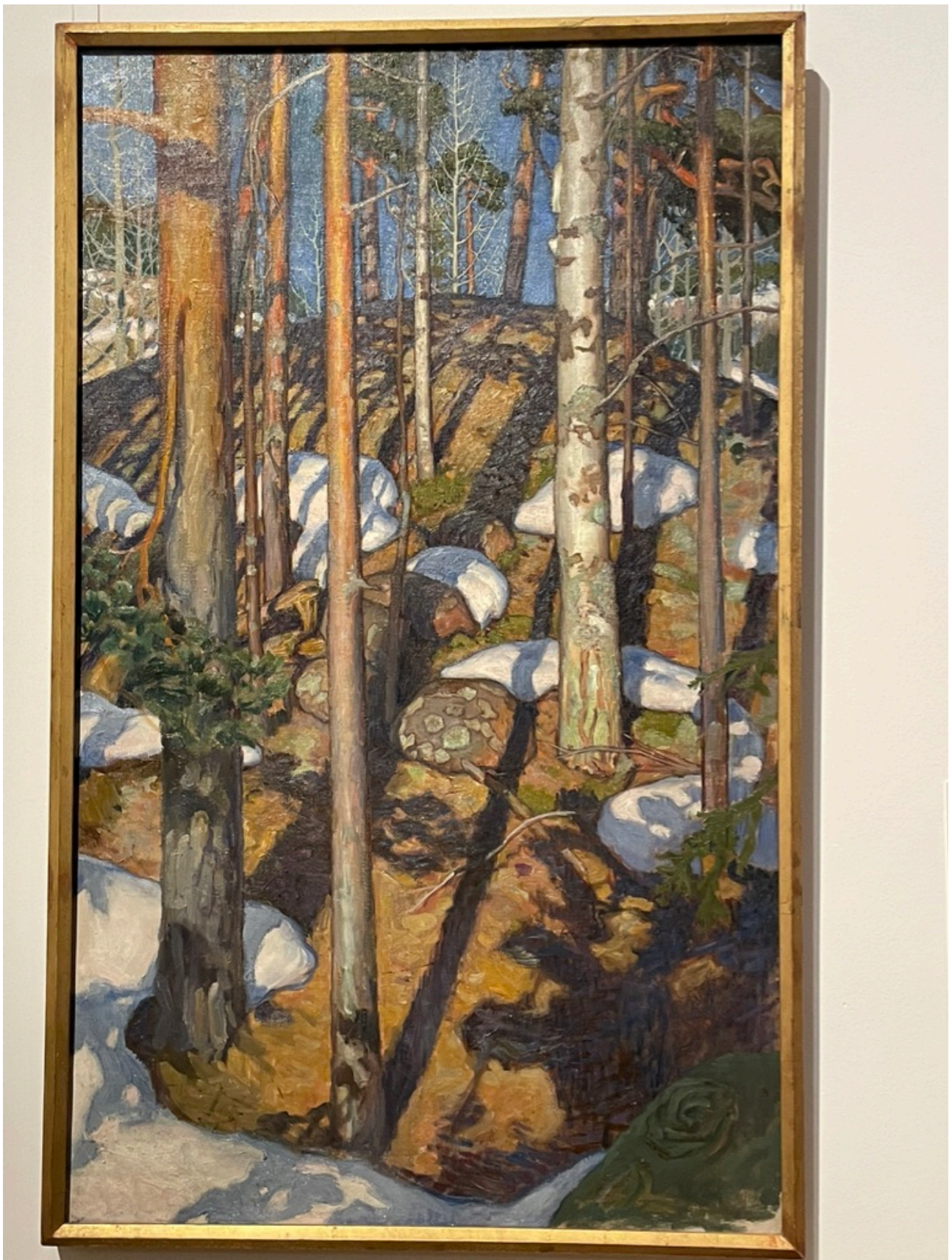
In places the ground was littered with rocks of varying sizes.



It was difficult recording the variety of rock formation due to the speed of the train.



Nearly a month later we saw a picture ('Early Spring') by the Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela that captured the landscape:



It hangs in the Belvedere in Vienna.

Just before Malmo station we had our suspicions verified when suddenly we were told the train would not continue to Copenhagen.

There was a dash from one platform to another... involving stairs to a lower level and obstructing the doors of the train to allow us – and our cases – onboard. Then a crossing of the lengthy road-rail bridge between Sweden and Denmark and we were then, once again, saying hello to (& joining) one of the Flying Lampreys that had featured early in the journey.



The Danish equivalent of a trolley service:





The person who provided this curiously limited service was also required to carry tanks of water strapped to their back. The style seemed very archaic.



Over the great Rendsburg High bridge spanning the Kiel Canal. It has a vehicle transporter underneath the railway line.



(web sourced picture)

The railway line rises and descends from the bridge in a great looping metal framed bridge, crossing over itself – trains go over and then under – we were travelling south thus went through Rendsburg station and ‘Under’ (on the long circuit), then ‘Over’.





To Hamburg, for one night.

A place of considerable personal significance, Here lived
'Uncle' Helmut Kalbitzer.

My childhood was never marked by the sense of Germans
as 'enemies'.

After the war my parents had connected with Helmut &
Emi (amongst others in Germany) who would visit on
occasions bearing gifts (Nürnberger Lebkuchen).

Both Kalbitzers were radicals, members of the resistance &
persecuted by the Nazi regime.

Their visits to us were welcomed and in 1966 I arrived at their house as darkness fell & unannounced ('interloping' with a stray Scotsman wearing a kilt).

Though surprised (shocked probably), hospitality was automatic. I then learned something of how the relationship had developed after my parents made contact (sending, through these contacts, food parcels).

Writing these notes revised powerful family emotions – as I realise an aspect of my 'upbringing' that was never properly discussed with my parents.

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellmut_Kalbitzer

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmi_Kalbitzer

At the end of my 1966 stay in Hamburg the Kalbitzers insisted that I should visit Berlin – which became an action of some significance as it gave direct experience of places such as 'Check-Point Charlie' & the Russian directed redevelopment in East Germany (I was also briefly detained by the East German authorities).

In 1998 I was again in Hamburg for a conference on pilgrimage that was led by a Lutheran Minister from Trondheim. Here I met, for the first time, Ostap Paparega - the Romanian who became our first (& continuing) link to Iasi in Romania. Hamburg & Iasi remain significant.

Arrival on this latest occasion had a certain drama as we witnessed an attempted (and failed) robbery..... and its aftermath.



We stayed at the Graf Moltke Hotel. It is a curiously faded old fashioned place but it is named after of one of those who resisted the Nazi regime – and was murdered by them.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmuth_James_von_Moltke

Our evening was completed at a restaurant opposite the station entrance





The next day we woke to discover snow & iced windows (again).... but not for long

March 15th



The journey to Amsterdam was without incident. The bus to IJmuiden and ferry to Newcastle.....



March 16th

..... sailing up the River Tyne & docking at North Shields.



Journey 1 was completed with a lengthy drive home.



There and back again