



### Traces of Arn Magnusson

At first all I needed was a 'Swedish' knight whose eyes could serve me in telling about Christianity's holy war against Islam during the Crusades. I discovered rather quickly that were he to be found, he would have to come from Västra Götaland and have been born around 1150.

Seeking him turned into a long journey – from Skara to Varnhem, Gudhem to the Aranäs fort, and the Forshem Church to the battlefields at Lena and Gestilren. Soon it was as if the search and the fantasy became bewitched, as if Arn Magnusson, as I had named him after his imagined childhood home at Aranäs, actually had existed. Or at least someone like him.



For see, parts of Aranäs castle reflect foreign influences and the Forshem Church is built by the same hands that shaped the castle. Moreover, the church is not dedicated to the Virgin Mary as almost all churches were at this time, but to the Holy

Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which in turn was guarded by the Knights Templar. And in a stone relief carved by the Forshem Master we see a knight depicted as the donor of the edifice and above him the cross of the same temple order! And it is inescapable that the person or persons who led the *Folkunga* and *Erikian* families in the victories at Lena and Gestilren against the powerful Danes knew how battles were fought in the Holy Land – longbows and mounted knights appear here for the first time in our history.

Whoever built the Forshem Church, this returned Temple Knight is the same man who shaped the miraculous victories at Lena and Gestilren. They are why we speak Swedish today and not Danish. Those battlefields midwifed the birth of Sweden.

Arn Magnusson really existed. And he is the father of our country!

Jan Guillou

### In Arn's footsteps – a journey to the wellsprings of the Svea Kingdom.

"The Road to Jerusalem", the first book in Jan Guillou's trilogy, starts in Skara. It is here that squire Arn Magnusson launches his adventure into the realm of monks and temple knights.

The first of these popular history novels is set entirely in medieval Västergötland, specifically in the land between lakes Vänern and Vättern. It is a time of change and renewal, a time when Sweden is formed, when Christianity advances in heathen Scandia bringing with it the basis for a new society, a new civilisation and a new knowledge. The next two books, "The Temple Knight" and "The Kingdom at Road's End" continue the Arn Magnusson saga. Arn is a fictional personage, but the

places and events in the novel are based on a historical reality whose farmers and kings, priests and noblemen can no longer speak for themselves. But the traces of that time remain in the landscape, as well as in the archives and collections of the museums. Scripts and artefacts, churches and monastery ruins remain to aid our imagination's journey in time.

Come with us on a journey in Arn's footsteps. We have chosen 13 places with great historical significance to the formation of the Swedish kingdom, at the same time as they were the most important sites in Arn's story.

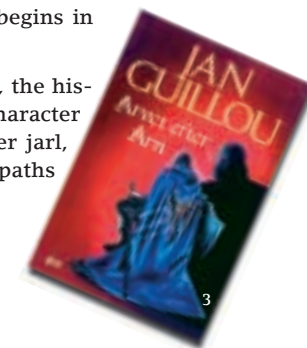
Anja Praesto  
Västergötland Museum



Arn Magnusson was born in the year of our Lord 1150.

Having spent his youngest years at Aranäs, his childhood home, Arn is taken to the Varnhem monastery at the base of the Billingen plateau. The monks bring him up to be a warrior for Christ and he becomes a temple knight in the Holy Land. Jan Guillou's trilogy follows Arn through life. You too can walk in his footsteps by journeying through the Västra Götaland where he walked. Your road to Jerusalem begins in Skara.

In the sequel novel, *Arn's Legacy*, the history continues. The central character here is the national regent Birger jarl, "Arn's grandson". And again the paths lead to Västra Götaland, Sweden.





In the early Middle Ages, Skara was a centre for both church and state. It was a 'metropolis' by the standards of the day boasting some 700 inhabitants in a city surrounded by a high fence made up of posts, wooden poles and earthen walls. The low slung residences pushed up against workshops, cowstalls and food storage sheds. People lived on top of each other, awash in the stench of dung and waste. The difference between city and country was small – everyone had animals and raised vegetables on small plots.

Commerce and trades flourished alongside this cultivation. Skara was both a meeting and a market place. On market days a motley mix of merchants, farmers and craftsmen peopled the square, along with monks, nuns, ecclesiastics, children, jesters and animals. Foreign songs and

new instruments penetrated the murmur of the madding crowd providing proof of the international trade and contact with the continent via the port of Lödöse on the Götaälv river.

The cathedral stood on the city's highest point. Its spires towering over the city marked the city centre and served as landmark for visitors.

*It is the year of our Lord 1150. While praying in the cathedral Arn's mother Lady Sigrid has a vision directing her to donate the Varnhem estate to the Cistercian Order.*

Almost 900 years later during the advent season 1999, the cathedral will be reconsecrated following a comprehensive restoration designed to serve new generations and coming centuries.



**I**t was at Tibertius, the day thought of as the first of summer, a time when the ice broke up in Västra Götaland. Never had so many people gathered in Skara before, but then no ordinary mass was to be celebrated that day. The new cathedral was finally ready to be consecrated. FROM "THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM"

Today's cathedral is a mighty Gothic edifice built with sandstone from the mountains of Västergötland. One remnant of the eleventh century is the unique crypt that served as the last resting place for the first bishops. Fires and vandalism have necessitated several renovations of the church. The collection of seals belonging to medieval bishops and the lovely stained glass windows contribute to the church atmosphere.

However, the cathedral no longer stands on the city's highest point. Some 900 years later, the city has 'caught up', its streets and squares now resting on an almost three metre thick layer of cultural artefacts and old trash. It allows us to learn much about how our medieval predecessors lived.

Today's street grid is in much the same as then and street names like Tullportagatan and Gråbrödragatan (Tollgate and Grey Friar streets) reveal something of the city's past.



The early history of Skara is described at the Västergötland Museum exhibition named "Medieval Skara". The focus is on Skara's period of greatness when the city was a centre of power during the medieval formation of the Svea Kingdom. There is also an exhibition about Arn.



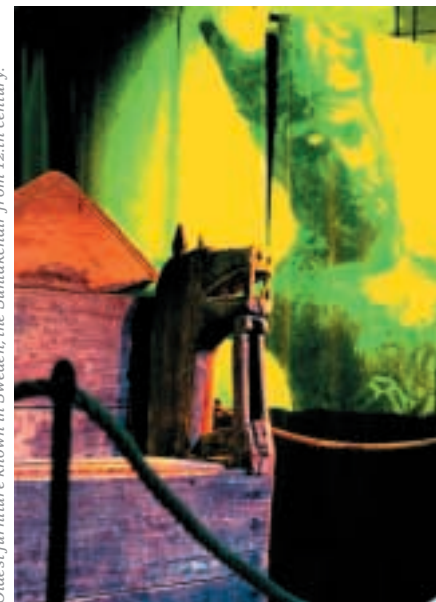
Bishop's seal.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

Västergötland Museum, +46-(0)511-260 00. Open daily May-Sep – weekdays 10-17, holidays, 12-17; Other seasons: Tues-Sun. [www.skaramus.se](http://www.skaramus.se). Cathedral summer hours: Mon-Fri, 10-19; Sat-Sun, 10-16. Other seasons: Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri, Sat, 10-16; Thu, 10-19; Sun, 9:30-13:30. For music and historical services during the summer, call +46-(0)511-201 71 or 201 79. Skara Tourist Bureau, +46-(0)511-325 80.

**MORE READING** "History of Sweden", the Swedish Institute. For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

Oldest furniture known in Sweden, the Sunkakchair from 12th century.



**H**is year there would be an early Christmas service at Husaby Church because it was a royal church. Not that there would be a king present for the western Göts had kept them out. But Judge Karle, the foremost man in the region, would. And that's why the Folkunga family would attend early service at Husaby instead of at their own church at Forshem. FROM "THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM"

Nestled at the foot of the naturally lovely Mount Kinnekulle, the triple spire of the Husaby Church can be seen from afar. Remains on site reveal Husaby as having held special importance to the future Swedish kingdom. One baptism changed history and launched an alliance between church and state that eventually led to the creation of a nation. Tradition has it that it was Olof Skötkonung who accepted baptism here, becoming the first Christian king in the land.



The possible site of the royal demesne is today covered by the ruins of the Husaby episcopal castle, built in the late 1400s. *It was here in the royal demesne that Arn was seduced by Algot Pålsson's daughter Katarina. Later when he was practising Christmas songs in the Husaby Church, he met the other daughter Cecilia and lovely music was made in more than one way...*

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

A multimedia exhibition called "The Well" was produced as part of the millennium of Sweden's Christianisation. Focusing on the baptism of Olof Skötkonung, the show started in Husaby and then toured Sweden, Germany and England. "The Well" is even available on CD-ROM.

For more info on "The Well - Die Quelle - Källan", check [www.husaby-well.com](http://www.husaby-well.com)  
 Turistbyrån Pilgrimsgården, Husaby: +46-(0)511-34 32 60.  
 Turistbyrån Lidköping, +46-(0)510-77 05 00.  
 Homestead Ass. Cafe: +46-(0)511-34 30 30.

#### MORE READING

"Husaby church", leaflet. For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.



Comb jewellery.



**H**ey had imbibed Christmas ale in the great stone hall at Aranäs, well warmed by its log fires, and life had never seemed better. At the early Christmas service down at the Forshem Church a confident and proud Arn had shown what he had commissioned, even pointing to his own figure in stone above the church portal as the one giving the church keys to the Lord. And above him was the cross of the Knights Templar. FROM "THE KINGDOM AT ROAD'S END"

Forshem is proud to have a unique medieval church with its own place in Swedish history. The oldest part of the nave is from the 1100s. Its greatest claim to fame lies in its six stone reliefs.

Christianity and the new society it created brought with the skill of building in a new material, namely stone. Stone churches were built around Kinnekulle and the area became a landscape of open quarries and workshops. Church builders from all over the Skara plain came to fetch sandstone and limestone for their edifices. Over time the churches were rebuilt, but the sculptures remain - stone is eternal.

In the 1760s the Forshem Church was given a cruciform design. The immediate church area is a valuable setting that includes the parsonage from 1790.

Three of the Forshem reliefs show the Passion story and one is thought to contain a selfportrait of the stone master himself. But who was this man with pick, chisel and mallet? We have no name for this skilful artist, so sought after in Västra

Götaland and elsewhere that he was asked to be stone master for the Skara Cathedral. We call him either the Forshem Master or the Skara Master.

*It is likely that another of the carvings is of the lord of the Aranäs castle, the one known as Arn Magnusson in the novel.*

The Forshem Church is consecrated to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

The church is open daily, Apr-Sep, 08-20. Tours by arr., +46-(0)501-402 10. There is a pilgrim's shelter at the parsonage.

Forshems Gästgiveri (restaurant), +46-(0)501-420 55.  
 Turistbyrån Pilgrimsgården, Husaby: +46-(0)511-34 32 60.  
 Turistbyrån Mariestad: +46-(0)501-100 01.

MORE READING For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.



**W**hen Knut lowered his voice and explained what was coming. Much information had been bought in Skara, the most important being that gained from a man who'd left King Karl Sverkersson's service at Näs but a short while ago. They had learned that when no danger was supposed at Näs as now when the ice neither carried nor broke, the king was wont to walk alone on the shore each morning before work began.

FROM THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM

A more central place than Visingsö Island in lake Vättern could hardly be found in Sweden during the 12th century. The island lies right between the two Götaland provinces and was the centre of power at the time. The kings and their courts often resided at the castle at Näs, our first real national castle. Probably built during the 1150s, the castle was sooner an indicator of status and a residence than a defensive facility.

The Sverker dynasty is most closely identified with Näs, but even the rival Erik dynasty kept court there at times. Four kings have reportedly died on the island, among them Magnus Ladulås.

Visingsö's central role had ended by the beginning of the 1300s, gradually replaced as a royal residence by the palace in Stockholm. The castle departs from history in 1318, even to the point of beginning to crumble into lake Vättern. Today there are only a few remnants standing.



Visingsö Island has a great number of Iron Age burials. The Medieval enthusiast should not miss the Brahe and Kumlaby churches. The open horsedrawn vehicles called Remmalagen are a popular transport means on the island.

Real drama is mirrored in the Arn novel by letting the main character witness the assassination of King Karl Sverkersson, an event that actually took place in 1167.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

Gränna-Visingsö Tourist Bureau: +46-(0)390-401 93 or 410 10.  
Jönköpings länsmuseum (county museum): +46-(0)36-30 18 00.

**MORE READING**

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.



**W**he halting place lay below the old Askeberga ting, on a sharp bend in the river Tidan. Several skiffs were already drawn up on the shore and there was great excitement among rowers and residents alike when the owner, Squire Eskil of the Folkunga family, arrived.

FROM "THE KINGDOM AT ROAD'S END"

One of the most discussed ancient monuments in Västra Götaland is the stone ship at Askeberga. Also called *Ranes Stenar*, the ship was built during the Iron Age (app. 400-500 AD). At 55 metres, it is the second largest in Sweden after *Ales Stenar* in Skåne.

must have been a well organised, stratified society. It may be that the stone ship served for the burial or the commemoration of some local chieftain.

*Askeberga is where Arn introduces half-siblings and allies into his family.*

The monument consists of 24 gigantic megaliths weighing between 25 and 30 tons each. They must have been transported some distance since there are no blocks that size nearby. The work of transporting and raising the blocks must have called for the efforts of a large group, meaning there

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

The stone ship lies on a secondary road W of the Tidan community.  
Turistcentrum Skövde: +46-(0)500-44 66 88.

**MORE READING**

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.



Whatever Sigge and Orm may have imagined about coming to the Forsvik of their dreams looking for Squire Arn, their plans were shattered at once by what they saw. Perhaps they had expected a large house with carved dragon heads extending from the ridge and serving as a dramatic backdrop for Arn as he rode out on the square with his flashing sword, surrounded by young men and boys imitating him. What they found was a village with four streets, a crowd of people seemingly rushing at cross-purposes and a buzz of foreign languages. FROM "THE KINGDOM AT ROAD'S END"

Forsvik's history spans the centuries. The town lies on the Göta Canal about 10 km north of Karlsborg and is named after the farm located there since the Middle Ages. The water in the rapids was already used to run a mill and a saw.

During the 1400s the Forsvik estate was donated to the Vadstena Cloister on the other side of lake Vättern. As that institution was being built at the time, timber and iron was needed. The new owners built a new mill, saw and waterpowered hammer, thus founding what would become the Forsviks Bruk.

Starting in the 1600s, Forsvik was an iron mill that became a foundry, mechanical workshop and wood grinding mill during the 1800s. While the foundry was closed in the 1970s, all the older industrial buildings stand.

The industrial setting in Forsvik is one of Sweden's oldest. Here in the well preserved and renovated complex it is possible



to understand much of what the Swedish industrial history is about.

*In the novel Arn settles in Forsvik when he returns from the Holy Land. This is also where his grandson, Birger Magnusson, grows up under the tutelage of a very wise grandfather.*

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

Forsviks Bruk is open daily in the summer (+46-(0)505-413 52) for exhibitions, summer theatre and a youth hostel. Guided tours. Steamboat tours. The "When Arn Lived" exhibition opens in 2001. [www.forsvik.com](http://www.forsvik.com)  
Karlsborgs turistbyrå, +46-(0)505-173 50.

#### MORE READING

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

Medieval sword

And then it was as if a darkness fell over the Lena battlefield, a large dark cloud rose and then settled towards the attacking Danish knights and the air whistled and cried as if a thousand cranes had lifted together.

When the first volley of arrows fell into the rushing Danish army it was as if a mailed Divine fist had fallen upon it from above. FROM "THE KINGDOM AT ROAD'S END"

The battle at Lena left deep tracks in Kungslena and in our history. It may be that the battles that raged here in the early 1200s were decisive to the formation of the Kingdom of Sweden.

Kungslena comprises a historically interesting setting with church, manor and castle ruins in what was once the largest village in Skaraborg county.

Tradition has it that the Kungslena Church was built by King Erik Läspe och Halte in the mid-1200s to the memory of the battle at Lena. This is where the Houses of Erik and Sverker fought on January 31, 1208, in a battle clearly won by the former. However, King Sverker returned two years later with his Danish army. This time, the royal House of Erik finished the long running fight with the Sverker family, for at Gestilren in 1210 AD, King Sverker fell in battle. In the novel several of Arn Magnusson's nearest men fell as well, including his son Magnus Månesköld.

This battle may have been won by the new military techniques used, namely ironclad knights and bowmen. At this time a mounted knight carried a shield and wore a chain mail shirt and a helmet.



A large granite monument has been raised near the church to the memory of the Battle at Lena. A few kilometres to the south at the Varv crossroads, there is another stone, this one commemorating the Battle at Gestilren.

At the fork is an unusual wooden, richly painted road sign called Granne Påle or Splendid Post. The 1902 original stands on Turbinhusön island in Tidaholm.

The ruins of Lena Castle lie on the mountain slope above Kungslena. Built by Regent Birger jarl, the castle foundations



Model of Lena Castle.

are mostly hidden under the earth. Investigations suggest that the castle wasn't a fortification, but rather an upper class brickbuilt residence from the late 1200s.

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

Kungslena Herrgård. +46-(0)502-440 42; tours can be arranged for groups of at least ten.  
Model from Falbygden's Museum: +46-(0)515-850 50.  
Cafe Drabanten and B&B: +46-(0)502-441 47.  
Turistbyrån Tidaholm, +46-(0)502-162 08.

#### MORE READING

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

**P**erhaps the loveliest of all cloister names had been given to one in the southern part of Västra Götaland. Gudhem was its name and this God's Home was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The cloister was built on a ridge with a view over the distant blue Billingen mountain and, with a little effort, the double spire on the Skara cathedral. North of Gudhem lay the glittering lake Hornborgasjön where the cranes came each spring before the pike began to spawn. The cloister was surrounded by farms and fields and small oak copses. Truly an exceedingly peaceful and handsome countryside with no intimations of darkness and barbarity whatsoever.

FROM "THE TEMPLE KNIGHT"



Life at the Gudhem Cloister seems both harsh and peaceful. Living inside the cloister walls was strictly parcelled by song and prayer. It was cold and draughty – especially the harsh winters were hard to bear. But the cloister was a wellspring of knowledge and ideas where the nuns learned new languages and some crafts.

The cloister was founded in the mid-1100s at the initiative of King Karl Sverkersson. The next century saw it at its greatest supported as it was by King Erik Eriksson, known in history as *Läspe och Halte* or the lispng, limping king. In 1250 his widow, Queen Katarina, donated estates and gold that enabled the construction of the cloister facility and church whose ruins we see today. The queen spent her final years at the cloister and died there, being buried in brick mausoleum.

*Gudhem is where Arn's fiancée was forced to spend 20 harsh years under the iron tutelage of Mother Rikissa. The cause was Bishop Bengt's excommunication of Cecilia Algotsdotter and Arn Magnusson declared in the Skara Cathedral. "In the future, no man of the cloth in Västra Götaland may have anything to do with these two in matters concerning the Christian communion. The only refuge they may seek is to enter a monastery."*

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

There is a museum at the cloister with artefacts from the excavations there. Hours: April–Sep, Mon–Fri, 11–17; Sat–Sun, 9–17. Hostel Cecilia: +46-(0)515-72 03 77. Guided tours by arr. +46-(0)515-72 02 23, 72 00 11 or +46-(0)73-762 16 70. More sights at the Falköping turistbyrå, +46-(0)515-77 70 50.

#### MORE READING

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

When a woman named Sigrid, born into the high nobility, deeded the immense estate called Varnhem to the Cistercians, the monks were given the opportunity to build what would be the largest monastery in medieval Sweden. Built between 1150 and 1260 and modelled on German and French monasteries, the location was ideal. It was private yet in the midst of superb cultivation and grazing lands. It was blessed with forests providing timber and game, while the proximity to mount Billingen ensured the brothers of stone for buildings, as well as clean water and waterpower.

The monastic community was divided in two – ordained monks and lay brothers. Their motto was *Ora et labora* or pray and work, a phrase that well described life at Varnhem.

*This is where Arn was sent to learn. He was placed in the monastery as an oblat, that is as a child serving God. The gesture was an offering by Arn's parents Sigrid and Magnus as thanks to the Lord for his miraculous return from the dead. The monks teach Arn*



*language, philosophy and theology, but also practical skills such as forging, cultivation and building techniques.*

**A**rn saw Varnhem's spire rise in the distance just before Bartolomeus in August, in the midst of the busiest harvest time and when the hegoats should be slaughtered in Västra Götaland. At first seen indistinctly, through some oddly scraggy or dried out or lightning damaged tree top in the middle of the luxurious oak copse and then finally clearly. Since he did not know the spire from his childhood it was not that which moved him. But he knew that his mother lay buried therein, the same he spoke with each night in his prayers... And so he rode through the monastery gate filled with solemnity.

FROM "THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM"

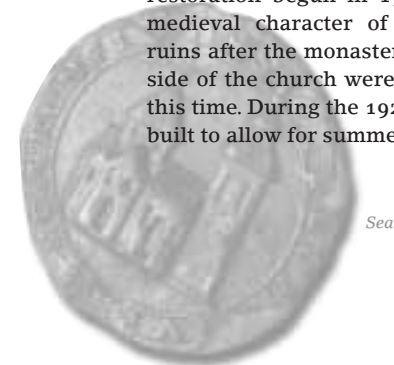
Varnhem is the burial site for the House of Erik, including such dignitaries as Regent Birger jarl, his wife, and Count Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie. A thorough five-year restoration begun in 1918 recreated the medieval character of the church. The ruins after the monastery along the south side of the church were also excavated at this time. During the 1920s a museum was built to allow for summertime visits.

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

The monastery church is open: in April, daily 10–16; May–Aug, daily 9–18; Sept, daily 12–16. Closed holiday evenings. Group tours by arr. on +46-(0)511-603 70 or 605 11. Monastery garden cafe, +46-(0)511-801 96 or 604 20. Skara turistbyrå, +46-(0)511-325 80.

#### MORE READING

"The abbey of Varnhem" leaflet. "Birger jarl" Medieval museum of Stockholm. For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.



Seal



**T**he thing for all Göt's was to be held outside the Axevalla royal demesne. Surrounded by his nearest men, King Karl Sverkersson stood on top of the wall and watched the Folkunga and Erikian families ride towards the thing field together. It was as if a great blue ocean approached for the colours of the former were blue and silver, while those of the latter were blue and gold. FROM "THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM"

From the early 1700s through the mid-1900s the barren Axevalla heath served as drillfield for both Skaraborg's and Västergötland's regiments. Kept open through grazing, the heath flora is dominated by heather, wild thyme and juniper bushes. The open nature creates unhindered views of mount Billingen and the Valle area and is perfect for hiking and riding. Nearby lie the ruins of Axevalla Hus. Built in the 1200s, Axevalla was the strongest fortress in medieval Västergötland.

Medieval axe.

*Here at the Three Road Crossing, Arn wins a single combat with Emund Ulvbane fought to save his father's life and the honour of his own family. Arn gains fame by cutting off his opponent's hand, but sparing his life.*

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

The Pansarmuseet in Axvall is the starting point for hiking trails into the area. Guided tours, +46-(0)511-621 09. Get more tips about the area at Turistbyrån Skara, +46-(0)511-325 80.

#### MORE READING

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

**T**he king had made detour in his royal progress departing from the time-honoured path. After having passed Jönköping he and his retinue had turned towards Eriksberg, the king's birthplace and also his father's, the man now frequently talked of as Saint Erik. Here the royal family had built their church and decorated it with the loveliest frescos in all of Västra Götaland. FROM "THE TEMPLE KNIGHT"

Through the centuries, the Eriksberg parish and its medieval church have of tradition been connected to the royal house of Erik. It is thought that the family stems from here and that one of its most legendary representatives, namely Erik the Holy (Erik Jedvardsson) built the old church on his hereditary estate. This he did for love of his native district and to create a family shrine.

This 12th century church has at times been used as a magazine and has been threatened with demolition. Now it is lovingly renovated and holds a number of interesting furnishings, including a medieval reliquary (a replica) and an altar that probably stood here from the very beginning. The frescos from the 11 and 1200s can still be seen and are among the oldest in Sweden. In the forefront are two royal figures crowned by double glorias. There is a place for hiding relics in the middle of

the church and an unusual stairway to heaven in the sanctuary. Outside the edifice a stone to the memory of King Knut Eriksson, raised some 800 years after his death in 1196. *It is here in Eriksberg that Knut Eriksson, king and Arn's good friend, chooses to live out his days far from the protection of stone walls and armed men.*

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

The church is open daily, 08-20. You can arrange to have Bertil Helgesson (+46-(0)515-430 24) or Arnold Gustavsson (+46-(0)515-430 77) guide you round the church and its surrounds. Coffee, homebaked and various exhibitions are offered at the Prästgården parsonage. For bookings, call the Eriksberg Culture and Friends Association, Birgitta Larsson (+46-(0)515-430 49). Turistinformation Kommunhuset Herrljunga: (+46-(0)513-170 00).

#### MORE READING

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

