

2 – ROSKILDE, NYBORG, SVENDBORG AND FÅBORG



Wednesday, 7 July

This morning I woke at about 7.30 feeling refreshed and got up shortly before eight. When ready, I left the apartment block and found a baker's shop that the lady had told me about. For just 15 kroner I had a breakfast of tea, a roll with butter and cheese, and a boiled egg. The shop was exceptionally clean – hardly what one would have expected in such a rundown area.

Afterwards I walked to a nearby bus stop and jumped on a bus to the train station. I arrived in good time to catch a train to Roskilde, a town to the west of Copenhagen. Following instructions, I made my way to platform 7, but shortly afterwards passengers were informed that the train would set off from platform 6. I could understand just enough of the announcement in Danish to get the general meaning, but checked with a girl standing beside me, who confirmed the information. I then followed her to the other platform.

We boarded the train and, after an unremarkable journey lasting half an hour, arrived in Roskilde at about ten o'clock. In the station I washed my teeth in the men's room, reorganized my luggage and left my big rucksack in a locker. I telephoned the local youth hostel to book accommodation, procured a brochure about the town and set off on foot to explore the place. The town centre was neat and had plenty of smart shops, but was otherwise relatively unremarkable. I found my way to the Bishop's Palace in order to see its collection of paintings and furniture, but discovered that it would open a little later, at 11 o'clock.

From here I went to the Lutheran Domkirke next door, where I showed my card for free admission. True to the description in my guide book, the cathedral was quite

magnificent. It was full of tourists, and somebody was practising on the large organ, which had a fine sound. The music stopped at eleven so that visitors could watch and listen to a sixteenth-century clock with moving figures chime the hour. I wandered around, admiring the main body of the church and the various side chapels where various kings and members of the nobility had been buried; there seemed to be no end of tombs and tombstones. The altarpiece was quite old and splendid.



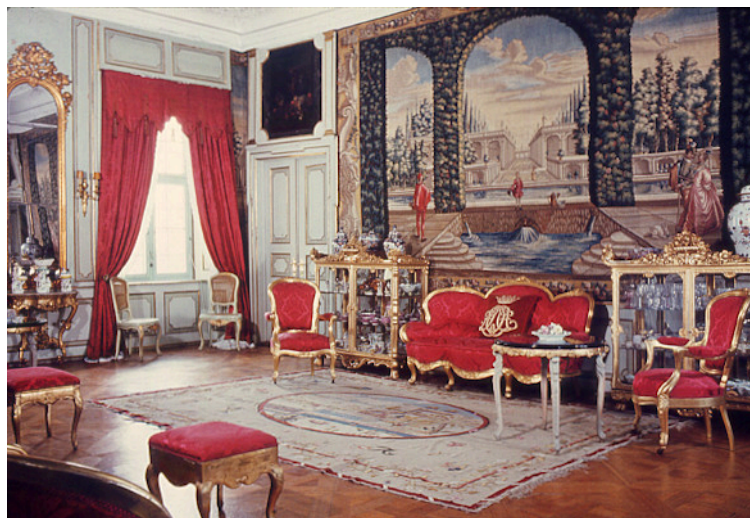
Domkirke, Roskilde

When I had seen everything of interest, I returned to the Bishop's Palace and had a look at the collection. It was contained in four small rooms and was not particularly impressive. In another part of the building I walked through an uninspiring exhibition of modern art: splashes of paint on canvasses. I did not bother with some other rooms that contained yet more modern art, but left and walked down a couple of streets to the Roskilde Museum, where I looked at an interesting collection of artefacts from Novgorod that illustrated the links between Russia and Scandinavia. In another part of the museum were artefacts associated with Roskilde, which at one time had been the capital of Denmark. On display were children's toys, photographs taken by the satirist Gustav Wied, and reconstructions of the rooms in which Wied had lived. The top storey was given over to geological displays, which I skipped.

As it was 12.30 by now, I decided to eat and then make use of my Copenhagen card by travelling to the village of Lejre in order to see Ledreborg Slot. I found a restaurant offering meals at a reasonable price and sat down to my first balanced meal: beef cooked in some type of sauce, with chips and salad. Afterwards I ordered a banana split, which contained far too much cream and ice cream for my liking.

After I had spruced myself up, I walked to the station at the end of the road and immediately boarded a train bound for Lejre. Ten minutes later, after a journey through pleasant countryside, it stopped at the little village. I was somewhat puzzled, for I had read that the castle was a forty-minute journey from Roskilde. Any

confusion was dispelled when I discovered that a bus, bound for the castle, was waiting at the station. I got on board with some people and it set off immediately. We drove along quiet country roads at first and then up a very long straight road lined with trees, which led to the *slot* (castle). I was dropped off at the gates and told where to go. I discovered afterwards that the straight road had been specially built by way of an approach to the *slot*.



Ledreborg Slot, Lejre

A short walk along the avenue brought me to the attractive building with wings on either side, outhouses and an ornamental clock tower; the predominant colours of the walls were orange and red. The buildings were situated in peaceful parkland and there were few people about.

Just inside the magnificent entrance, the lady in charge was chatting animatedly to an American couple. It transpired that the husband originally came from Scotland, and that one of the daughters of present owner of the *slot* (the Holstein family) had married into the Munro family, who lived in a Scottish town that the man knew. When the Americans left, the lady turned her attention to me. She was very interested to learn that I came from Ireland. I put on a pair of overshoes, took a

printed guide in English and set about viewing the rooms, starting upstairs. The interior was very elegant and charming, especially the central banqueting hall and the fine chapel. I lingered in the rooms, drinking in the refined atmosphere, and was somewhat reluctant to leave.



Ledreborg Slot, Lejre

Eventually I returned to the entrance, where the lady gave me instructions on how to get to the kitchen. A young Dutch couple followed me; I spoke to the man, who had been in Ireland on holidays. The kitchen, which was situated in the basement, was quaint. Back in the main hall, the lady spoke with me again and told me a little more about the place. What was special about it was that it was more than just a museum: it was being lived in, and part of it could be hired for weddings. It was certainly placed in an idyllic setting. The lady then wondered if there were similar big houses in Ireland, and I told her that there were. She had seen a poster that depicted various Georgian doorways in Dublin and had been quite impressed by them.

I eventually left and took a quick walk around the beautiful gardens, many of which were terraced down a steep slope at the back of the *slot* and led to an ornamental lake. Here I was able to breathe the fresh air and listen to the birds singing. I then slowly made my way back to the gate, where I bought a packet of slides of the house for only 15 kroner and a postcard of the chapel. The girl in the shop was very friendly and chatty; she told me that the Holstein daughter who had married the Scotsman would be coming to live here soon.

A bus stopped at the gates at 15.31 precisely (I had asked about the times earlier) and I travelled on it back to the train station. In no time at all I was back in Roskilde. I now got on a bus that should have taken me to the Viking Ship Museum on the banks of a fjord, but the silly driver never told me when I had to get off, and so I missed the stop. Annoyed by this, I had to wait for a considerable time in the cold at a bus stop near the fjord, with a strong stench of seaweed assailing my nostrils. At last a bus arrived and the driver promised to tell me when to get off. He was true to his word, and I discovered the museum was just a short walk away from the bus stop. By now I had wasted precious time, since I was obliged to check into the local

youth hostel before six o'clock. I was beginning to find these hostels and their strict regulations a nuisance.



Viking Ship Museum, Roskilde

I looked at the fine old Viking ships and reconstructed models quickly, though without rushing, and found them quite interesting. One of the long ships was believed to have been made in Dublin. On the walls were descriptions and diagrams of the Vikings' journeys and lifestyles. I could have spent longer here, but I left when I seen everything to my satisfaction. As there was no bus likely to come for a while, I walked briskly back to the train station.

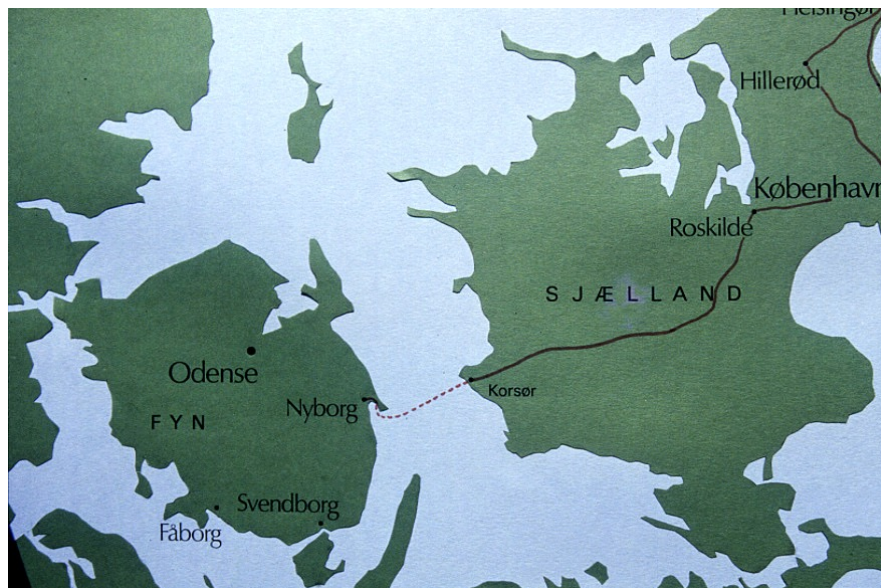
At the station, I found the bus that would take me to the youth hostel. I hopped on board and off it drove at a leisurely pace through the outskirts of the town along narrow roads lined with neat houses. One of the roads had large plant boxes on both sides, which meant that the bus had to drive in a zigzag manner in order to avoid them. As we left the suburbs behind, the driver suddenly indicated that I should get off near a junction. I had been studying a map and it seemed as though I was still some distance from the hostel. Following the signs, I walked a little over a kilometre; en route I passed some unusual but pretty cottages with strangely-shaped dark thatched roofs. At last I found the hostel, situated in rustic surroundings and beside a golf course. Exhausted by now, I arrived just before six o'clock. The hostel looked quite nice and the members of the staff were good humoured. As I discovered that they had no suitable food on offer, I would have to travel back into the town for an evening meal. I paid for one night and breakfast the following morning, then found my way to an eight-bed dormitory, where I found a couple of surly Germans. They were *very* serious cyclists. I had a refreshing shower and washed my hair, then sat down to relax and write some of my diary. It was blissfully peaceful here; outside I could hear the wind in the trees and little else, save for an occasional passing car.

After a while I dragged myself out of the hostel and walked along a rugged path over the fields back on my way to the main road. Although I was tired by now and took my time, I enjoyed the walk. When I reached the end of the path, I did not know where I was. After a lot of dithering, I walked up a rough laneway and emerged at the main road. I found a bus stop and read the timetable; after waiting some time

I concluded that I had missed a bus and would have to wait even longer. I was inclined to return to the hostel, but decided to stay and wait. Eventually a bus came at about half past eight; I was back at the train station just before nine. Now I was faced with the choice of returning to the hostel at either 9.14 or 10.14 p.m. I went into the comfortless fast food joint in the station, hoping to demolish something by 9.14 but, because my dinner of steak, chips and salad took some time to prepare, I was unable to eat my food in such a short space of time. In the end I had to hang around until 10.14. I filled in some of the time eating a large orange in the station waiting area and writing some postcards.

I travelled back to the hostel on the bus and got off at the spot where I had started my journey. I walked along the path in the growing darkness, but somehow I lost my way and ended up going too far. By now I had no idea of where I was. As I was beside a house, I knocked on the door. A man reluctantly opened it and directed me back to the hostel. I finally arrived at it by five past eleven; although the door was still open, the place was almost in darkness. I had to creep into the dormitory, fetch my washing gear and pyjamas and go down to the washroom. Having cleaned my teeth and changed into my night attire, I crept back up to the dormitory and quietly slipped into bed.

Something told me that I would not enjoy the silence of the place for long and I was right, for an elderly man began to snore very loudly. All attempts to stop him proved to be fruitless; shouting and banging failed to rouse him. I lay awake for a while, resigned to the fact that I would probably get no sleep at all but, because I was so exhausted, I soon drifted off into the land of nod.



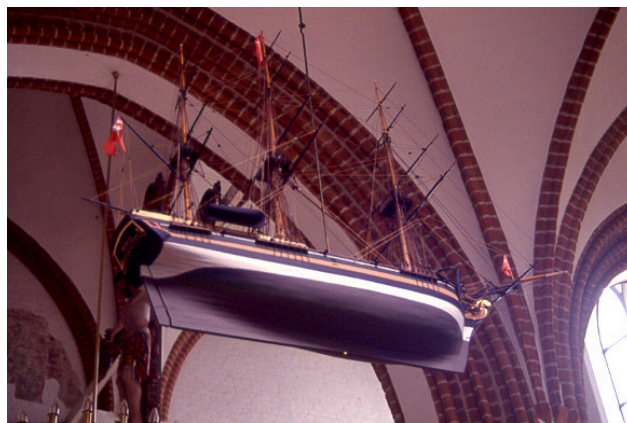
Thursday, 8 July

I was woken early this morning by my companions moving around, though they did not make much noise. I had the washroom to myself; when ready, I went to the dining room and ate a hearty breakfast. At first I sat at a table on my own but, as this had been reserved for a family, I was moved to another one and joined my unsmiling dormitory companions. Like most of the people in the hostels here, they made no attempt to communicate or be friendly. As I found the hostels too clinical for my

liking, I vowed to keep away from them and look for guesthouses whenever possible. The only advantage of staying in the hostels was the excellent food served at breakfast.

Having studied the times of the buses and trains, I left at my leisure and strolled along the path towards the bus stop. From here I travelled to the station, where I boarded a train bound for Nyborg on the island of Fyn (or Funen) – the first part of my journey today. So far I had not decided if I would stay in Nyborg overnight or not. The train journey was uneventful; I gazed out at some pleasant though bland scenery and wrote my diary, which had got somewhat behind after the previous evening's comings and goings.

By midday the train had arrived at the rather unexciting port of Korsør. From the station it was a short and well-signposted walk to the large and impressive ferry, in which I found a relatively quiet place to sit. The ferry started for Nyborg at 12.30 p.m. The fare for the complete journey from Roskilde was 78 kroner (about £8), which was not too expensive. During the crossing I had a cheap and basic meal in the cafeteria, then wrote more of my diary.



Church in Nyborg, Fyn

The ferry docked at Nyborg at 1.30. When I walked off the boat, I passed the local youth hostel, which I did not like the look of, and headed for the town centre and the tourist information centre. I was not particularly impressed by the place in general, but when I reached the old town centre, I realized that it had lots of charm. There were some beautiful old streets with most unusual buildings and houses, all painted in bright colours. The girl in the tourist centre gave me a map and a bus timetable, and offered to mind my rucksack for a while. I then went wandering around the streets in earnest, map in hand. First of all I walked to the *slot*, which was nearby, but discovered it to be a very ugly building constructed with dull red bricks. I poked my head around the door and saw a huge, long hall with wooden beams

above and no furniture, and noticed that it was full of people being lectured in Danish by a guide. This was a guided tour that had just started. I left and went walking around the narrow streets admiring the houses, which I found much more interesting. I ambled to the main church; it had a tall steeple and looked rather unremarkable outside, but it was quite impressive, though plain, inside. There were rather Dutch-looking chandeliers and model ships hanging from the high ceiling. The pulpit was made of black wood, which was elaborately carved, and there was a modern pipe organ at the back of the church. There were tombs along one side and also a large steam engine, which looked quite out of place. I lingered here for some



Nyborg, Fyn

time, almost alone, then went outside once again. Wandering around the streets, I gradually made my way back to the tourist information centre. I now collected my rucksack and walked at a leisurely pace towards the main road in order to catch a bus to Svendborg, a town located in the south-east of the island. By now I had realized that there was no necessity for me to stay in Nyborg any longer.

A bus arrived at the stop a little after 3.30 p.m. and I jumped on board for the journey to my next destination. Once we had left the town, we approached some pleasant countryside: the type that I had read about and seen pictures of. Driving

through land that rose and fell in a series of round hillocks, we passed large fields, pretty thatched cottages of an unusual design and colour, neat little villages full of quaint houses, gardens bursting with colourful flowers, and the unusual whitewashed tall churches peculiar to this region.



The bus took nearly an hour to reach the port town of Svendborg. Beside the bus and train station was a small tourist information centre in a kiosk. A girl served me but, as she did not understand everything I said, a young man with a broad London accent helped. It turned out that he was Danish, but had been talking to an English friend of his for a while and had picked up the accent. The girl made several phone calls and booked a private room for this evening's accommodation. She also gave me other pieces of information that I needed, and I left with a pile of tourist literature.



Guesthouse, Svendborg, Fyn

I now began what I thought would be a short walk to the guesthouse, but it turned out to be long and arduous. The house was farther away than I had expected and the journey was uphill most of the way. My rucksack, which now had everything

in it, began to feel heavier and heavier as I trudged along. At first I walked along busy and noisy streets, but managed to leave them when I approached a neat and tidy suburban area in which there were many attractive houses. At last I reached my destination: one of two semi-detached houses with the date 1918 displayed on both of them. The lady of 'my' house, Tove, was in her garden chatting to friends; when I appeared, she came over to me and brought me into her house which, although a model of neatness and perfection, was pleasantly homely. My bedroom was neat, tidy and rather feminine. I was delighted with everything. I left my luggage in my room and looked around the house and also the garden, which was very impressive. In it were lots of flowers and also a pond; Tove drew my attention to the goldfish in the pond, which I had not noticed. Afterwards I returned to my room and began taking things out of my rucksack.

After I had spruced myself up and relaxed for a while, I ambled off in search of food. Fortunately I did not have to go far, for there was a Chinese restaurant a short distance away. The waiter who greeted me spoke excellent English. As I was quite tired and hungry by now, I felt that I needed to eat well, and so ordered a three-course meal. The service was rather slow, but this did not bother me. While waiting for the courses, I sipped some water from a glass, watched some people tackling a large meal with numerous dishes, and listened to the piped music, which included songs crooned by the famous Chinese lady pop singer Deng Lijun. At last my starter appeared: a huge spring roll containing a not very authentic filling, served with salad. The main course consisted of a generous helping of rice, slivers of chicken in batter, and a dish of sweet and sour sauce. I was surprised that no stir-fried vegetables were included. Perhaps the menu had been adapted to Danish taste; I had noticed that vegetables rarely appeared with main courses here. I made a pig of myself and ended up with hardly any space for the dessert: a banana split (cooked in more batter!) with ice cream and cream. At this stage a very shy young waitress with hardly any English took over; she did and said everything with a great deal of nervous giggling and smiles. She had to ask for assistance from the other waiter when I asked for a pot of jasmine tea. This took a long time to appear, but I did not mind as I was enjoying the relaxation.

When the young lady finally gave me the bill, she went away laughing with her hand up to her mouth, which led me to believe that she might have been Japanese. Inside the bill she had written 'Thank you!' The meal had cost 97 kroner, with an extra 12 kroner for the tea, and so I left a 100 kroner note on the plate, wrote '*tak*' (thank you) on the outside of the bill and left.

Back at the house I met two Englishmen who owned two huge motorbikes that had been parked outside. They explained that they were taking part in a motorbike rally, which was an annual event, and told me about their experiences with great enthusiasm. They invited me to have a cup of tea with them but, as I had had my fill of liquid, I politely refused. Downstairs, the lady of the house invited me to drink some coffee but again I refused her kind offer. Instead I had a welcome shower in the bathroom downstairs, then went up to my room in order to write my diary. Eventually I became quite tired and went to bed at midnight. I soon fell into a deep sleep.

Friday, 9 July

This morning I was woken by the two motorcyclists moving about noisily; although I had slept well, I could have slept longer and therefore felt rather tired. By eight o'clock I was in the dining room with the two English lads, taking photographs of the magnificent spread on the table. We even had lit candles! Tove laughed a good deal and fussed over us, serving us with lots of tasty bread, various types of cold meat and cheese. She ate with us and chatted to us about various topics, such as her job; she worked in an old folks' home, looking after senile people. She worked night shifts and was only just back from her place of employment. She seemed to be a very nice person. Her English was not particularly good as she tended to drift into German or Danish, but we managed to understand her. She seemed to understand us without too much bother.



Breakfast in the guesthouse, Svendborg, Fyn

We had an excellent breakfast and then prepared to leave. I asked if I could stay again tonight, but she regretted that I could not. I made several telephone calls, using her smart phone, but had no luck. I finally rang the youth hostel in Fåborg; when the man said that he had no bed for me and I told him that I had not managed to find anywhere to stay, he relented and said that he could take me. He asked me to telephone him if I could not arrive between four and five o'clock. My impression was that he was a very decent person. A weight now off my mind, I set off for the harbour and the *Helge* steamer, which would take me to Valdemars Slot. As I had spent a considerable amount of time on the telephone, I had to hurry.

As no bus was forthcoming, I walked briskly through the old town centre, which was quite pretty, got lost a couple of times as the streets were a little difficult to find, and finally arrived at the train station. I quickly threw my rucksack into a locker and dashed across the road to the harbour where I caught the 11 o'clock steamer in the nick of time. It was quite a small boat and one had to sit outside in the cold open air. Unfortunately it looked as if it would be a dull, overcast day.

We now set off for the islands off the coast, passing scores of yachts and other types of boats. Our first port of call was Vindebyøre, which did not look up to much. We then crossed over to another unremarkable landing place, then approached the

village of Troense. According to my book, this was a fine village of thatched cottages, but it did not look very enticing from the harbour, which was full of pleasure boats. I decided that if I had the time, I might walk to it from Valdemars Slot.



The entrance (above) and main building (below) of Valdemars Slot, Svendborg

Before arriving at the castle, we stopped at another village. We finally arrived at Valdemars Slot at 11.55. The approach to it was quite dramatic: a grand entrance of yellow and white outbuildings, and a pavilion beside an artificial lake. However, the house itself was very large and not at all pretty. It was rather shapeless and was faced with dull red brickwork. The interior, however, was quite different; I paid 40 kroner and spent quite some time strolling around the elegant rooms, reading an English pamphlet. Some of the rooms were quite large and most of them were painted white. The furniture was of good quality and there was not too much of it – just enough. Here and there I saw modern family portraits, photographs and modern furnishings, which suggested that the house might still be used for living in. Apart from the imposing state rooms, I also enjoyed looking at the servants' bedrooms in the attic, the huge loft with its massive beams, and the staff rooms and kitchen in the basement. The rooms in the basement had the typical smell of such rooms in country houses.



Rooms in Valdermars Slot, Svendborg, Fyn

By the end of the tour I felt rather tired and lacking in energy. I ambled over to a cheap fast food kiosk, where I bought a hot dog and a small carton of chilled apple juice. At this stage I did not feel like footing it to Troense village. Instead I availed of the gents' room in the house to spruce myself up, ambled down to the little harbour and caught the steamer back to Svendborg. I spent most of the journey sitting down, dozing. Later I watched the antics of some babies, whose parents had to keep a tight hold of them. There were two oriental children: a little boy and a girl. I had noticed quite a number of oriental or half-oriental people here in Denmark – and also many mentally and physically handicapped people. There seemed to be excellent facilities for the physically disabled here.

At Svendborg harbour I was surprised to find the key to Tove's house still in my pocket and so caught the number 208 bus and travelled to Vestergade. The bus brought me through part of the city that I had not seen before: more neat suburbs and some industrial areas. At last it reached the familiar Vestergade. I walked to the house, let myself in and, as nobody was about, left the key and a note of apology in an obvious place.

As there were no buses to be seen when I emerged, I walked briskly back to the train station, collected my rucksack and went to the bus station. I rang the hostel in

Fåborg and told the man that I was about to leave. I then jumped on the bus to Fåborg and set off just before five o'clock. Once out of the town, it travelled through countryside that looked even more pleasant than what I had seen so far. Again we passed undulating fields, charming little cottages, villages and churches. We also passed a large and fine white mansion that I had read about.

We arrived in Fåborg at about 5.30 p.m., near the harbour. In a nearby shop I asked for directions to the hostel and was told where to go. Following a sign, I walked up a narrow and picturesque alleyway lined by old buildings, passed the local museum, and suddenly found myself at the hostel. It was in a small but lovely old building that was painted yellow and white. Inside it was very modern, clean and neat. The half-Nigerian girl at the reception desk was unusually chatty and friendly, and we had quite a long conversation. Having checked in, I walked to a tiny dormitory, where I discovered that I was sharing it with a young Danish couple – this was how the man in charge had found me a bed for the night! However, when the young man greeted me, I thought that he was English because of his accent. I chatted for a while to the couple then, even though I was tired and badly needed to take a shower, I went off in search of the tourist information centre in order to arrange accommodation for the following night. My walk brought me through the town centre, which was small but full of great charm. I could now understand why my guidebook had recommended a stay here. I found the information centre, but it had closed at five o'clock.

I then wandered back to the hostel, collected my washing gear and, passing through the small kitchen, entered the clean and well-organized gents' room. I had a good hot shower, changed into a clean shirt, then went out again in search of a meal. I ended up at a fast food place in the main square, where I sat outside and ate a good meal of fish, chips, a large salad, and a delicious hot roll. I left when I had finished and some noisy young people had appeared, and I went walking around the lovely old streets of the town. I felt that this was the sort of place where one could happily linger. As the town was small and compact, I soon saw everything and, when there was a burst of weak sunshine, I stopped to take a few photographs. I was very glad that I had come here, though the one disappointment was the noise of youths driving their cars around the narrow streets at high speed.



Fåborg, Fyn



Fåborg, Fyn

Back at the hostel, I sat at a wooden table in the delightful garden, where birds were singing with great energy, and wrote my diary. When it got too dark, I went indoors and wrote in the kitchen. As I became sleepy after a while, I decided to stop and made my way to the dormitory at 10.30. The Danish couple were already asleep, and so I tiptoed in and out in order to wash my teeth. I was in bed by eleven o'clock, but was kept awake by the sound of cars and motorbikes roaring around the town centre.