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The Ghost of Västra Ed Church

A weird experience – but what was it?

BY RICH HELBERG

I was on vacation in Sweden during the summer of 1999. I called the minister of Västra Ed church and made an appointment to meet her in the next couple of days. I was in search of the death records of my great-grandmother Lovisa Maria Mellberg.

I went to Västra Ed Church a couple of days later and met the female minister. She told me that the records were inside a walk-in vault in the office. We went into the vault and I started searching the books for the correct one. The minister asked me for the name that I was searching, and I told her. I then told her that she was the wife of Gustaf Ludvig Hellberg. Her eyes got wide, and she asked, "Gustaf Ludvig Hellberg?" I told her yes, and she got excited and told me to stay where I was and she would be back. She went out of the vault and telephoned somebody. She was speaking Swedish, so I did not understand what she was saying. She returned to the vault, and told me that someone was coming down and I should not leave. I didn't know why she asked me to stay in the vault, but figured she had her reasons.

A local historian comes

About ten minutes passed, and then a gentleman walked in and introduced himself as Lennart Larson. He asked me if I was any relation to Gustaf Ludvig Hellberg. I told him that he was my great-grandfather. He told me that he was a local historian of the area, and wanted me to stay until he went back home and got a newspaper article about Gustaf that he wanted me to see.

He returned in about 10 minutes, and showed me an article that was

printed in the Västra Ed newspaper from a son of an eighty-three year old woman. She remembers my great-grandfather when she was a little girl of five years old.

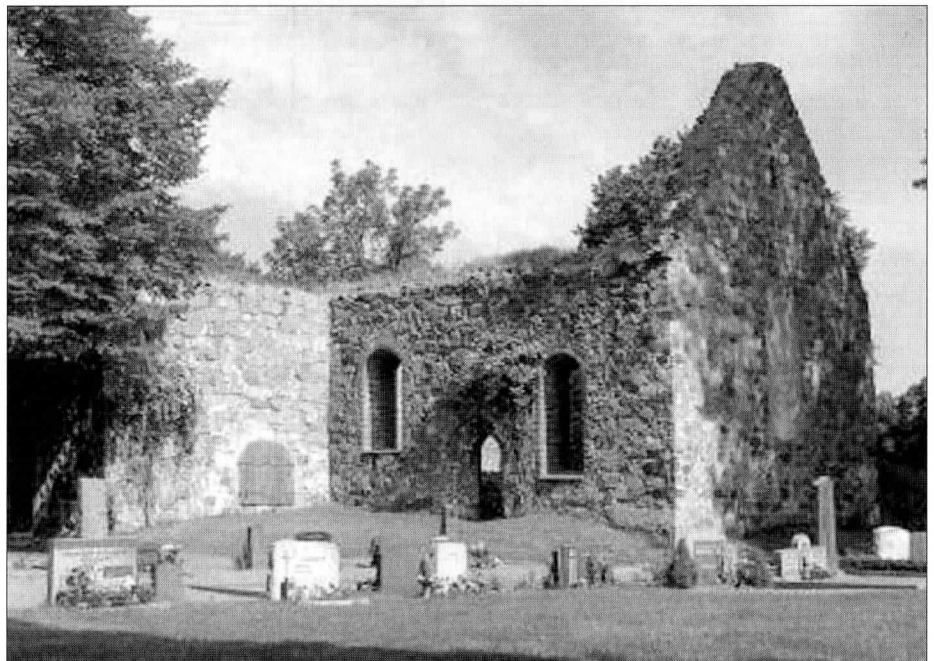
The article told about her and her grandfather meeting Gustaf in the old ruin church. He was coming up the stairs from the underground burial crypt when she and her grandfather were starting to go down. She talked about the strange meeting they had where they stared into each other's eyes. They stared down each other's but nothing ever came of it. Gustaf proceeded to climb up the stairs and they proceeded down the stairs. She said that Gustaf walked around with an axe over his shoulder all the time, and that he used to sleep down in the crypt.

Gustaf's strange behaviour

He would take the bodies out of their caskets and put them on the floor, and then put rags inside the casket so he could sleep. She related that she never forgot that story, and told her son about it, which he published in 1967.

Lennart Larson then assisted me in trying to locate the records of my great-grandmother, but we found that she was not listed in either Västra Ed or Ukna parishes. Lennart said that each one thought that the other one was keeping records on her.

Lennart and I then went over to the ruined church from the 1200s, and he showed me around. We entered the rear room of the ruin,



The Västra Ed church ruin. Oldest part is from the 1100s, and was added to during the 1200s and 1400s, when vaults were added. It was replaced in 1863 by a new large church, and left as a ruin, but was conserved in the 1920s. (Info from Wikipedia.)

which was modernized for funerals in the winter. It is an enclosed round room at the rear of the church. Lennart and I entered the room, which had a new floor. Lennart explained to me about the floor. He said that before they modernized it, there was a stairway going down to the crypts below. He said they filled the crypts with sand and then installed the new floor over the stairwell.

What happened?

I was standing looking at Lennart while he was talking to me. It was about a minute later, I noticed something out of the right side of my eye. It was like a cloud or mist, and it went behind me and came through me in the middle of my back. It came out of me and went forward and upwards of my left front. It almost dropped me to my knees. I caught my breath and asked Lennart if he saw or felt anything, which he said he didn't. I told him that I had to get out of there, as something just went through me.

I immediately walked outside and walked about hundred feet away from that room. Lennart locked up the door and approached me and said, "what's the matter, spooky?" I told him about my experience and told him that I believe that I had some type of spirit or ghost go through me. I am not sure if it was the ghost of my great-grandfather or not, but it will always be remembered.

I returned to this room a few years later, trying to draw out this spirit. After spending about an hour video-recording the room, I just gave up as it never reappeared.

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Editor's note: The story of the life of Gustaf Ludvig Hellberg was previously told in greater detail in SAG 2003:3 under the title *Tragedy in Överum 1884*.

Maria Lovisa Mellberg Hellberg was later found to have died 2 Nov. 1928 in Överum, Lofta, (Kalm.) [Swedish Death Index].

Who was Gustaf Ludvig Hellberg?

Rich Helberg is an old and valued client of mine who I did research for in 1996. He had a question about his great-grandfather Gustaf Ludvig Hellberg who had been arrested by the local police in 1884, and now he wanted to know why? I promised to do some research for him.

It turned out to be an interesting, but tragic history.

Gustaf Ludvig was b. 2 Oct. 1842 in Målilla (Kalm.). As an adult he worked as a foundry man (*gjutare*) at the Överum ironworks (*bruk*) in Västra Ed (Kalm.). He was married in 1867 to Maria Lovisa Mellberg (b. 27 July in Nottebäck [Kron.]). They had three children, all born in Västra Ed; Carl Ludvig (b. 28 Dec. 1867); Johan Emil (b. 25 Feb. 1870); and Elin Sofia (b. 8 Dec. 1871).

In 1884 he had been arrested by the local police, and later transferred to the Insane Asylum i Vadstena (Östg.).

The asylum records showed to my surprise that he had been there before. In 1871 the manager of the Överum ironworks, with a doctor's testimony, had had him admitted to the asylum. The cause was that on Midsummer Eve that year he had tried to stop a fight, and as he was drunk, he had fallen down and hit his head on a stone floor. Among the records was found a letter from his wife that said that he had always had an excitable nature, and was aggressive when drunk. Gustaf Ludvig himself told that he had dreamt about his deceased brother in America, who had given him money that evil people had stolen from him. He did not seem to care about his wife and children, and seemed to feel he was not treated well, and did not want to work.

He was kept in the asylum until 1881, when he was sent home again. His wife did not want to live with him any more, as his temper was very uncertain. Instead he got to live with an elderly couple, Nils Magnus Lindqvist (b. 1806) and his wife Eva Andersdotter (b. 1822) who also fed

him every day. They all lived in the parish house, which was a dwelling for poor people. Every month there were two-three days, when he was very moody and difficult, and was hitting things with a stout wooden stick. He often complained about the elderly couple, as he felt that he was entitled to have their room, which was better than his. He also sometimes threatened to kill Lindqvist.

On 27 Oct. 1884 Nils Magnus went to the woodshed to fetch wood for supper cooking. Gustaf Ludvig followed him, put him down and attacked him with his axe. Then he hid the victim under a woodpile and went out, with lots of blood on his clothes. A young boy had heard the noise and gave the alarm. The shoemaker Edling and his wife hurried to the woodshed, and met Gustaf Ludvig who just glared at him and did not answer when they tried to talk to him. They had to break down the door to find Nils Magnus, whose head was crushed.

Hellberg was arrested at once and sent to the jail in Västervik.

In November 1884 there was an extraordinary court meeting (*urtimåting*). Gustaf Ludvig was asked to tell about himself, and declared that he was born in Stockholm, and that his father was Carl Johan Oscar (the King), and that he had been in England for seven million years during his childhood.

Concerning the murder he said that he had hit Nils Magnus, but that there were women there that could repair him. He said he wanted the room for himself and that he had given notice many times, as he was the sole owner of the village.

The case was remitted to The Royal Board for Health and Welfare that decided that he was totally mad, and could not be executed. He was again sent to the asylum in Vadstena where he died in 1901.

All the children immigrated to the U.S. and changed their name to Helberg.

Elisabeth Thorsell