

Tomas Johansson

Tomas Johansson died suddenly at the age of 52. One of Sweden's leading authorities in archaeology by experiment and pedagogy left us in deep sorrow.

Tomas was born and grew up in Vilhelmina, Lapland. He went to "gymnasiet" (secondary school) in Umeå and studied archaeology at the university in Uppsala. After his studies he worked at the Jämtland County Museum in the 1970s as a "museum antikvarie" and for a period as County "antikvarie" at the county board in Östersund. At the County Museum, Tomas constant flow of ideas and exciting knowledge enriched and stimulated the staff to set up and develop pedagogic activities at the museum.

His deep interest for experimental archaeology dates back to his young days. When he localised and inventoried Stone Age settlements along the rivers in his neighborhood, he realized archaeology could best be explained by practising it. At the County Museum he started activities with experimental archaeology which made him famous in wide circles, both national and international. However, he soon found out that institutions were too tight for the activities he wished to create, so he left the County Museum.

Instead Tomas Johansson started the Society for Prehistoric Technology (FFT) in 1980. The Society was transformed into the foundation "Institute of Ancient Technology" (IFT) in 1991 (www.forn tidateknik.z.se). Already in the first year, both television, radio, local and national press followed the results of the experimenting activities of the Society. After having given many shorter courses for school children, teachers and university students, in 1982 he started the course "Human – Nature – Technique through 8000 years" (MNT) at the Bäckedal Folk High School.

Over the years, together with the staff of the Society and the teachers at Bäckedal, Tomas practically investigated and documented a wide range of prehistoric techniques. His ability to find interesting issues and questions provided new knowledge within certain areas of technique.

His unbending drive and his curiosity to accomplish more has influenced and inspired many colleagues and pupils. Many have received Tomas' support and encouragement to develop in own areas of interest and specialities while he simultaneously gave them responsibility to share knowledge.

Already in his early days, he set up international contacts. He published both in Swedish and international publications as well as in the own series "Forn tida Teknik" ("Ancient Technology"). The latter magazine was published until 1995, after which it continued with new contributions on the Internet. Tomas wrote a handbook for blacksmithing in 1984 and in 1985 – 1986 he was coordinating the reconstruction of the Viking ship Arnljot in Gällö. A documentary movie about the project was broadcasted in the Swedish national television show "Vetenskapens Värld" ("Scientific World"). Tomas and colleagues made study tours as far away as the Taiga area in Siberia in the east, Greenland and Alaska in the west, but as well as far as Mali and Burkina Faso in Western Africa in the latter case in order to study traditional bronze casting. For a long time he dreamt to do a large project of making documentary films about vanishing techniques. In 1992, with the people of the TV series "Vetenskapens Värld", Tomas made a documentary of every day techniques among the Evenker and Nener people in northern Siberia which was shown in Swedish, Russian and Polish networks. Tomas worked also as a consultant in similar productions for the BBC.

Archaeology by experiment had a low status within the Swedish university world when Tomas started in the early 1970s with his activities. In 1986 he arranged the first Scandinavian symposium to collect the experts within this field. During the 1980s and 1990s many (re)constructed "ancient villages" were established in

Sweden showing the ordinary – daily – life. Many of the driving forces behind these villages have their background in the education Tomas launched. In 1999 The Swedish Network for Ancient (Re)constructed Villages (NSLF) was founded, a national network of cooperation between the archaeological open air museums. Tomas was their chairman and administrated a presentation of the members' activities through his Institute's website.

By the end of the 1990s Tomas got more internationally engaged, among others in a project with the famous open air museum in Kizhi and at excavations in the Viking Age site Staraja Ladoga in Russia. In 2001, Tomas was one of the initiators behind the founding of EXARC. This is a European network for archaeology by experiment, ancient technology and education, with cooperation between archaeological open air museums as its main aim. As late as March this year Tomas Johansson was elected to its first chairman.

Tomas was an entrepreneur and a do-it-yourself-man. He was a visionary man who did not follow old footsteps but cleared new ways. He was burning for the cause without any thoughts for personal gain or prestige. With a drastic and swift sense of humor he could illuminate a certain present day phenomenon with historical comparisons and with own experiences from different cultures. His constant lack of resources forced him to be innovative. When he realized that he never would be able to obtain the large library he wished, he used data technology as aid, creating a fantastic digital library on his subjects. When he later realized that the search systems available on the market did not live up to the requirements he posed, he of course constructed a free text search system by himself, with many possibilities of combination.

Tomas' wide interest in techniques spanned from prehistory to the future. His knowledge about computers was large and over the later years, he started to work as a consultant within this field. He helped to recruit qualified young Russian computer experts for Swedish companies.

Last year, Tomas resumed his interest of his younger years for flying and he bought an ultra light plane. He talked with enthusiasm about the experience when he could fly across villages and the landscape. Faithful to his personality he made plans to create a developing centre for this kind of flying.

Many might have experienced Tomas as a lone wolf, off-centre and restless. But none was as entertaining as he. His deep and wide ranged knowledge combined with the ability to paint his ideas and visions for the future with broad brush strokes or his biting mean and interesting reflections between people, society and science, made him the middle point of every group. We are grateful for having learnt to know Tomas and remember all years of nightly conversations when time stopped and Tomas gave dreams wings.

Closest to him are his daughters Lovisa and Nina, their mother Cajsa Lindström and his parents Bo and Katarina Johansson.

Göran Andersson, Stone Gauffin and Ulla Oscarsson, friends and colleagues.