Røros - A Place in Europe

In the past year, we have lifted our gaze from our own newspaper house and connected with a European community that shares our concerns: We must strive to preserve not only typesetting machines and printing presses as cold and stiff symbols of a bygone era but also the craftsmanship that accompanied these machines and contributed to the dissemination of words and opinions in the spirit of democracy and freedom of expression.

Through the European Heritage Days, the European Commission and the Council of Europe have given us the opportunity to hold several gatherings with quite young enthusiasts, all interested in learning to operate equipment similar to the machines we have at the Press Museum Fjeld-Ljom. Interest in learning to use and maintain machines that no longer have any commercial value is understandably limited. But as long as we choose to see Europe as a whole, we are enough in number to carry on the legacy from the pioneers who once apprenticed for several years before they could enter regular production, in a newspaper or a printing press.

The typographic profession, as we knew it fifty years ago, has practically disappeared. The trade union has dissolved, becoming part of a larger union, and screen and keyboard have long replaced lead typesetting and composing sticks.

It has warmed us that we have been welcomed with open arms by this small but strong letterpress community in a unified Europe. Through the project, we have brought together enthusiasts from ten countries, with nearly as many different mother tongues - and our common conclusion is that this is just the beginning of something we will continue together.

In Røros, like so many other places with newspaper and printing press museums, we may not have been diligent enough in lifting our eyes from the type case and seeing that there are others like us. We just need to be willing to look a little further, dare to cross some linguistic and cultural boundaries. And then be rewarded tenfold in return.

Jan Erik Øvergård