Often in History as in detective work, the evidence is incomplete and the Historian can never be quite sure that he has drawn the right conclusion. He or she must look at all the evidence that is available and weigh it carefully before deciding about what happened. Now work as a historian and investigate the,

“Mystery of Tollund Man”

An early Spring day – 8th May 1950. Evening was gathering over Tollund Fen in Bjaeldskor Dale in Denmark. The evening stillness was broken now and again by the call of the snipe. Two men were cutting peat for the tile stove and the kitchen range.

As they worked they suddenly saw in the peat layer a face so fresh that they could only suppose that they had stumbled on a recent murder.

They notified the police at Silkeborg, who came at once to the site. Bit by bit they began to remove the peat from the man’s body till more of him became visible.

The man lay on his right side just as if he were asleep. He Lay 50 metres out from firm ground and had been covered by about 2 metres of peat, now dug away.

On his head he wore a pointed skin cap fastened securely under the chin by a hide thong. Round his waist there was a smooth hide belt. Otherwise he was naked. His hair was cropped so short as to be almost entirely hidden by his cap. He was clean-shaven but there was very short stubble on the chin and upper lip.

The air of gentle peace about the man was shattered when a small lump of peat was removed from beside his head. Underneath was a rope, made of two leather thongs twisted together.
This was a noose. It was drawn tight around his neck and throat and then coiled like a snake over his shoulder and down across his back.

Who was this man?

How long had he lain there beneath the earth?

What was the cause of his death?

Above: His body uncovered.

Above right: A full view of his face and neck.

Right: A full view of his face and neck.
The body was removed from the bog and examined by doctors and scientists. They came to the following conclusions:

**Date of Burial.** Underneath the body was a thin layer of moss. Scientists know that this was formed in Danish peat bogs in the early Iron Age, about the time when Christ was born. The body must, therefore, have been put in a hole in the peat roughly 2000 years ago in the Early Iron Age. The acid in the peat had prevented the body decaying – it looked as if it had been recently buried.

**Cause of Death.** Examinations and X-rays showed that the man’s head was undamaged, and his heart, lungs and liver were also well preserved. He was not an old man though he must have been over 20 years old because his wisdom teeth had grown. He had therefore probably been killed by the rope round his neck. This noose had left clear marks on the skin under his chin and at the sides of his neck where the knot was. It was impossible to tell if his neck had been broken because the bones were very crumbly.

**His last meal.** The stomach and intestines were examined and tests were carried out on their contents. The scientists discovered that the man’s last meal had been a kind of soup made from vegetables and seeds, some cultivated and some wild, such as barley, linseed, “gold of pleasure”, knotweed, bristle grass and camomile. There were no traces of meat and from the stage of digestion it was obvious that the man had lived for 12 – 24 hours after this meal.

In other words he had not eaten for a day before his death. Although such a vegetable soup was not unusual for people of this time, two interesting things were noted:

a) The soup contained many different kinds of wild and cultivated seeds and some of them must have been gathered deliberately, because they were not always easy to find. The soup was, therefore, probably for a special occasion.

b) The soup was made up from seeds which were connected only with the spring.
Some clues about the life and customs of the Iron Age people.

These people were living in Denmark and Germany at the same time as Tollund Man (about 50 B.C. – 100 A.D.).

First let’s see what the Library can tell us, then we’ll see what clues the Museum provides.

**The Library**

**Clue 1: The religious customs of the North German Tribes.**

Here is a description of the religious customs of seven north German tribes – the Reudigni, the Aviones, the Varini, the Eudoses, Suarini and the Nuitones. These tribes worshipped Mother Earth, the Goddess of Spring and growing crops. Each spring they celebrate the birth of new life and crops.

“There is nothing unusual about these tribes except their worship of Mother Earth, the Goddess of Spring. They believe that each spring she rides through the tribes. In the middle of a lake is an island with a small wood on it and in the wood is a holy chariot covered with cloth. Only one priest may touch it. This priest follows the Goddess as she rides away each spring in her chariot drawn by cows. This is followed by days of fun and merrymaking wherever she goes to stay. All is peaceful and quiet until the Goddess grows tired of the company of ordinary men and women and returns to her holy wood. After this the chariot, the robes, and the Goddess herself are washed clean in a hidden lake. This task is done by slaves who are then drowned in the lake.”

(Written in 97-98 A.D. by Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman, in his book about the German tribes.)

Above: Statue of the Earth Goddess, found in a bog.
Clue 2: The laws of the German tribes.

“The German tribes hold trials of accused men before their tribal council. The punishment varies according to the crime. Traitors and deserters are hung from trees. Cowards, poor fighters and evil men are drowned in swamps under a cover of sticks.”

(Written 97-98 A.D. by Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman, in his book about the German tribes.)

The Museum

Clue 3

This noose was around the neck of an Iron Age man who was found buried in Borre Fen in Denmark. His last meal had been a soup made from Spring seeds. Across his body was a birch 1m long and 4.5 cm thick. Next to the noose in the picture is a neck ring. The Iron Age people used to bury these in the bogs as offerings to the Spring Goddess.

Clue 4

This man was found buried in a bog at Grauballe in Denmark. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. Scientists discovered that he had been buried 1650 years ago. His last meal, eaten shortly before his death, had been a vegetable soup made from Spring seeds.
Things to find out

1. Who found the body?

2. Where was the body found?

3. What clothing or possessions were found on or near the body?

4. What was the age of the man?

5. How long had he been dead?

6. Which of the following was the most likely cause of death?
   
   Old age: Yes / No
   Explanation:

   Disease: Yes / No
   Explanation:

   Suicide: Yes / No
   Explanation:

   Murder: Yes / No
   Explanation:

7. Reasons for death (why did he die in this way?)

   Your theory:

   Supporting evidence:

8. Conclusion and comments:

Signed ............................