

The Park at Krásný Dvůr

by Pavel Vlček

Away from the main roads and favourite sights for visitors in Northern Bohemia lies one of the most beautiful and one of the oldest parks laid out in an English style.

It was founded by Count Jan Nepomuk Rudolf Černín in Krásný Dvůr and by the end of the 18th century had already acquired such fame that its detailed description appeared three times in contemporary publications. The oldest record (1791) comes from the pen of a German poet, Franz Alexander von Kleist (1769-1797), the second was published five years later in a popular German gardeners' yearbook, *Taschenbuch für Garten Freunde* and the third, in 1797, by a Prague painter Johann Quirin Jahn (1739-1802) appeared in the Prague journal *Apollo*.

All these descriptions, several contemporary painted views, plans of individual buildings and the original plan dating back to the end of the 18th century provide very precise information on the park's first appearance and its later changes, not least because some of the garden buildings survive.

Choose your way wisely, pilgrim! So runs a French inscription on a tree at the entrance warning educated visitors to the park. In those days the tree was surrounded by a circular bench. From there one could set off in various directions and eventually visit all the characteristic features which had to be present in an 'English park'.

The English, or rather the Chinese division of a garden into three sections – *pleasing, terrible* or *horrid*, and *surprising, enchanted* – as in Chinese-style gardens, was championed by the real spiritual father of the romantic park in Central Europe, Christian C. L. Hirschfeld. Another view was represented by the painter Jahn, who was certainly not familiar with Hirschfeld's work. He, in turn, looked on these divisions of the park as an allegory of youth, manhood and old age while the other parts served as a reminder of the nations of the world and even of antique mythology. Theoreticians of 'English gardens' on the Continent were of the opinion that "the scenery of the garden should be different from the natural landscape, just as a heroic poem differs from a prose narrative." No doubt, the architect of the park in Krásný Dvůr followed this rule.



Krásný Dvůr *The principal façade of the chateau*

Closest to the chateau was the *pleasing* part of the park, little of which remains today.

The open section with its "English lawn", low shrubs and large "flower baskets", as well as solitary, ancient oaks still famous today, has not survived. The lawns today also look different. Then it was "hard to see a lawn better mowed than here" and J.Q. Jahn even compared it to velvet. Twenty people worked in the garden then and "in the winter even more", as we can read in a contemporary guide; the annual maintenance budget, including white sand to cover the pathways was more than 300 Gulden. The artificially natural look proved very expensive.

Today a small bird house remains, minus the colourful birds whose singing added to the cheerful – *pleasing* – atmosphere. On the other side of the stream, on a low hill, there stood a small *Lusthaus*, pleasure pavilion (1784-86). It was simply furnished and "especially suitable for conversation." The poet Von Kleist mentions that it was dedicated to music and the muses (for example the small temple of Apollo) while Jahn, the well-educated painter, impresses with his knowledge when describing the house as built in "La Fosse style" (Charles de la Fosse, 1636-1716, a French painter), with Doric columns, the correct proportion of which he had no time to examine. It is possible that he was simply alluding politely to the fact that the only feature the building had in genuine Doric style were the triglyphs and even these were heavily modified.

With this pavilion, dedicated since 1969 to Johann Wolfgang Goethe who regarded the park as one of the most beautiful on the Continent, the *pleasing* part of the garden came to an end giving way to the *horrid, terrible* and melancholic section formed by a dark, cool valley, no doubt very pleasant in the hot summer months.

Here the pilgrim came across a hermitage (1784-1786) with a thatched roof. Only the surrounding wall remains today. At the time of its first appearance the stone walls of the building confused Jahn into believing it was a grotto. The interior of the cabin was simply furnished with straw matting and farmhouse-style furniture. From the window to the right of the door, a visitor could see a tiny chapel with a miniature bell tower (after 1785). Jahn thought the chapel (no longer in existence) was intended to show the visitor how the Greek column emerged from wooden architecture. Two wooden columns at the front had formed a "Vitruvian peristyle" but Jahn intensely disliked its proportions, insisting that Prof. Jan Ferdinand Schor (1686-1767) of the Prague Polytechnic or the Frenchman, Marc-Antoine Laugier, would have designed it differently. Jahn also objected to the double gable, the appearance of which is difficult to imagine today. The chapel disappeared completely just after 1953 and only the entrance to a long, dark and partly ruined underground passage remains, connecting the hermitage to the chapel.

The valley of the stream (which has no name) still ends in an artificial grotto, a characteristic *memento*

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mori, where as a symbolic source of new life, fresh water springs from behind a gently carved 'Roman' sarcophagus. An obvious reminder of the beginning and the end, it made one pilgrim think of the Roman catacombs, Jahn saw an Egyptian sarcophagus, while a third visitor wrote about a grave "dedicated to honour" that will "always lead all sensitive souls to contemplation." Alas, sensitive souls are suffering a reduction in numbers.

Next to the melancholic section of the garden, full of reminiscences and reminders, there used to be a romantic part, which was also the largest. It was not until about 1796 that a gothic temple was added and used as a prospect tower. According to the painter Jahn, it had a circular staircase, "something courageous and adventurous, characteristic of the gothic style." However, he disliked the fact that the staircase wound in one direction only, making him dizzy as he climbed up. At this point the "Dutch farm", an example of a smallholding with "Swiss livestock" and a dairy, had not been finished. In line with contemporary fashion, the farm and the dairy were a necessity as

Krásný Dvůr, The Park *The Gothic Temple*
Left, a section showing the staircase arrangement,
taken from the original plan of 1792.
Below, an exterior view today



they provided refreshing cold milk for passing visitors. Today the farm is the clubhouse of a local golf club.

On the way back to the park a path led around a new orchard on the edge of which stood a relatively small garden lodge for the gardener. It was a low timber-frame building altered and enlarged into its current appearance at the beginning of the 19th century. From there it was just a short distance to the main “highway”, the only track that must also have served as a racing venue – the hippodrome. The point where a visitor turned round, the “*point de vue*”, was marked by an obelisk whose foundation stone was laid by the Duchess Maria Kristina Sachsen-Teschen on 11 August 1797. The inscription commemorated the victorious battle of the Archduke Karl at Schwarzenfeld in the Upper Palatine, 22 August 1796.

On the left side of the highway there is a stone wall, presumably evoking an image of a rock, which in reality served as the dam of a large water reservoir feeding a waterfall or cataract. Today the lake is dry but once its water surface reflected a Chinese pavilion whose blue and white exterior evoked the cobalt hues of “Japanese porcelain.” The interior was furnished and decorated in white and yellow, with real china and “Turkish rugs” on the floor. The bells on the roof of the pavilion gently sounded in the wind adding to the colourful visual effect.

Unfortunately, the appearance of the pavilion today, painted pink for no reason, was damaged by inappropriate renovation in recent years. Even a hurricane will not sound the bells again. Below the pavilion there was an artificial grotto offering, particularly in summer, an unexpected and cool retreat with a spring of fresh, drinking water flowing into the reservoir.

A visible sign that the château’s old park was being replaced by an English garden arrived in the form of a miniature enclosure with an animal feeder and a pavilion that, according to a contemporary source, was populated by the “existing game and two deer.” Immediately below the game park, above a small fishpond, there was another characteristic garden building, a rotunda ringed by single Doric columns (1784). It is thought that a marble bust of the Countess Černín was to be placed there, presumably in the middle. She must have been ‘the sun’ to the owner: the small temple



Krásný Dvůr, The Park *The Obelisk*

was later dedicated to the Sun. It provided a magical backdrop to the fishpond fed by a tiny waterfall reminiscent of a cascade. The inevitable small island in the middle of the pond, today no longer in existence, housed a swan and duck house for the “birds living on the pond.” A ferry, or rather a “gondola” tied to a rope, afforded a closer look. The idyllic atmosphere was completed by a “fisherman’s hut” on the banks of the pond. Its walls were made out of reeds and “festoons of fishing nets” were hung from the roof. Only Jahn mentions that there was a new vineyard at this end of the park (planted with the famous Lobkowicz vines from Mělník), as well as a spa pavilion. This would point to the fact that the spa was one of the last buildings to be built, only around 1796. Jahn paid the spa considerable attention and consequently we know that it was a simple building with plain walls and that half of it was sunk into the ground. He praised the simplicity and the absence of fantasy or even frivolity in the building created to aid “health and cleanliness rather than pleasure.” For him it was also an allegory of the purification of man.

Today there is a second pond, just below the upper, original one, occupying what was previously the site of a small farmer’s hut with a garden - later described as a hermitage.

A short distance from the hut, a small temple dedicated to Pan was built between the years 1783-1786 and furnished in the oriental style. Only a mirror and a sofa are mentioned and from them a comfortably seated visitor could enjoy the “beautiful view of a waterfall falling into a small pool.” Jahn describes the waterfall in ravishing style, being reminded of a storm brewing up that we first hear in the distance, then growing stronger as “the water pushes through the pipe from the reservoir.... darkly murmuring down until it bursts out roaring and whirling like a wild stream...frothing, and ever louder, dropping straight into the deep, as if heavens have opened. The maelstrom, the roar of the waves and the murmur of the water evoke pleasantly frightening emotions...” But in the next moment everything went quiet, as if after a storm, because the reservoir had emptied. Jahn simultaneously contemplates a beginning and an ending, again seeing a reflection of virtue and transformation.

Jahn calls the building an Ionic temple with a portico of free-standing columns, but it was later known as Pan's Temple, and later still the Janus Temple. Changing the original name of the pavilion during the first half of the 19th century also indicates the growing significance given to the park. Pan, the god of woods and pastures, is exchanged for Janus, the god of beginnings and endings (transition) who brings in the New Age.

Another interesting part of the park, no longer in existence today, was to be found on the other side of the stream. By crossing a stone bridge which still survives, the visitor reached a reed fence that was accessible from one side only. Entering a space containing a well, “typical of a farm building”, and immediately opposite the entrance, there stood a structure known as Palaimon's hut. A tree grew out of the hut from which a thatched roof was suspended over the building. Smaller huts surrounding this structure were similarly thatched. The entire bizarre complex, which survived only for a short period, was accompanied by an inscription showing that even this part of the park was intended for contemplating the meaning of life and its relationship with nature. The entire description of the hut is reminiscent of a ‘Primitive Hut’ as depicted on the frontispiece of *Essai sur l'architecture* by the French theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier, published in 1753. Here too is a wooden hut depicted in the branches of mature trees; thematically this building falls into the *heroic* part of the park and illustrates the beginnings of the



Krásný Dvůr, The Park *The Temple of Janus/Pan on the left and the cascade on the right, in an engraving of 1802 (Ideenmagazin, 35/7)*

architecture of Antiquity, even though Jahn, who heard the story of the hut only in 1797, does not classify it as such. The hut served as a dwelling for a hermit whose task was to guide the visitors around the park. Apparently the hermit had died shortly before Jahn visited and a new one was installed in the hut, later known as the ‘Frater Häusel’.

We know that the founder of the park, Jan Rudolf Černín of Chudenice (1757-1845), later President of the Academy of Creative Arts in Vienna (1823), turned for advice to his brother-in-law, Heinrich Franz von Rottenhahn (1737-1809), in Červený Hrádek from where the first designs of small park buildings had been sent. However, contemporary records show that the founder of the park designed some of the buildings himself - as is clearly evident from a caption to one of the four illustrations in a popular *Ideenmagazin* featuring a remarkable park in Krásný Dvůr, Northern Bohemia, in those days famous all over the Continent.

In 1796 the magazine had already published an illustration of a railing which has long since disappeared protecting the reservoir below the Chinese pavilion. Judging by the caption, the colours of a tall flagpole and a triangular flag reflected the coat of arms of the Černín family. Many other illustrations and general views of the park were based on the drawings and artwork of Simon Peter Klotz (1776-1824). All these *vedute*, or painted views, were published in 1802, one of them complete with a very interesting caption:

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Key to the plan of Krásný Dvůr

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 The Château | 7 The Grotto |
| 2 The Bird House | 8 The Chinese Pavilion |
| 3 Temple of Pan/Janus | 9 The Gothic Temple (site) |
| 4 The Goethe Pavilion | 10 The Round Temple |
| 5 The Gardener's House | 11 The Obelisk |
| 6 The Hermitage | 12 The Farm (site) |

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Images on these two pages, clockwise from above left: a map dating from 1791 or 1792; an early 19th century engraving showing the Round Temple (monopeteros) in an engraving from 1802); the Round Temple today; the likely design of the bridge from the end of 18th century; the Chinese Pavilion and the reservoir; a contemporary (1796) design for flagpoles around the reservoir (Ideenmagazin, 8/6)



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