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REGISTERED CHARITY
NUMBER 1127919

ISSN 2515-8716

NEWSLETTER

The Friends *of* Czech Heritage

ISSUE 34, Winter/Spring 2026

MEMBER OF EUROPA NOSTRA

The Schwarzenberg Palace in Prague

www.czechfriends.net

Published with financial assistance from The Office of Foreign Affairs of The Czech Republic

Chairman's Report

Regime change is a major preoccupation of our time. Increasingly we see the emergence of rulers who assume dictatorial powers and who cannot be removed peaceably. The democratic process at least allows for one set of failures to be replaced by another, but it is under threat from increasing polarisation.

There have been times when strict rules have governed an accession but those destined to assume power never take to the stage resulting in a fatal loss of continuity. For instance, in the last years of the Habsburg Empire the execution of Maximilian in Mexico in 1867, the suicide of Crown Prince Rudolf at Mayerling in 1889, and assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo in 1914, could be said to have fatally weakened the Hapsburg dynasty. Though perhaps it was also that the Emperor Franz Joseph, who reigned from 1848 to 1915 just stayed on too long and should have passed the hopeless task of governing a set of recalcitrant ethnic groups to a younger royal. You should always know when to quit.

Which all goes to show that if you can't put a system in place to take care of this type of attrition and one that is nimble enough to take account of changing circumstances, you may have a problem. Fortunately, the Czech Republic in its various guises has weathered these storms successfully. Small organisations like the Friends of Czech Heritage must also find ways of adapting to changing circumstances. The Friends was founded by Barbara Peacock and Ian Kennaway, as a result of their longstanding involvement in the newly emerged Czech Republic and held its first event at the Czech Embassy in the autumn of 2007. At that time the back wash of the communist state was still in evidence all around and it was against this background that The Friends emerged. It was a strange phenomenon, a UK-based charity devoted to safeguarding another state's cultural inheritance.

We have since spent eighteen years successfully doing what we set out to do, though the world has changed markedly in that time. The Czech Republic has made great strides and has got a grip on its past with many buildings receiving the attention that they were denied under the previous regime. The task will continue into the foreseeable future and The Friends are proud to have contributed to this resurgence.

However, like the Emperor, we need to find ways of 'refreshing' our organisation by involving more people to advance the work of The Friends into a new era. We have an 'asset' that has grown and been refined over many years. It should continue to make a valuable contribution towards securing the future of Czech historic buildings and associated heritage. We hope, dear reader, that you might be able to contribute by offering advice and services. We should be pleased to hear from you.

Meanwhile our work goes on. In the previous *Newsletter* I mentioned the conservation of the murals at the Bílá Hora Monastery in Prague, which we are supporting. The first phase for which we have given a grant is now complete and the final enhancement will take place in the spring of 2026. This will be a very fitting memorial to Alastair Laing, the art historian whose family have contributed generously to the cost of the restoration.

The Baroque Church of St Cajetan on Nerudova Street leading up from the Malostranské Náměstí towards Prague Castle has a façade that you pass with hardly a glance as you toil up the cobbled street. But it has a set of entrance doors, which has recently been restored and it now catches your eye in a way that draws you in. We are pleased to have been able to support the painstaking work.

Another modest project we have assisted is the Gothic chapel of St Bonifác at Kutná Hora. Like

The restored doors of the Church of St Cajetan

The Gothic chapel of St Bonifác at Kutná Hora

many buildings of this type it suffers from rising damp that has been very difficult to eradicate. The work continues and our grant has gone towards the resolution of this problem, which should allow the internal conservation work to make headway. As with many of our projects, it is being run by a team of dedicated volunteers.

The Château of Stekník, administered by the National Heritage Institute (NPÚ), has a commanding position looking out over formal terraced gardens with a series of hop fields beyond. It is part of the World Heritage Site, which surrounds Žatec with its brewing industry. The lower gardens have lost their formal layout but retain one fountain. The centrepiece to the fountain has eroded badly and has now been replaced with the help of a grant from The Friends. We hope this will act as the catalyst for the full restoration of the surrounding gardens.

One recent project that I should mention is the park at Šilheřovice in the Moravian-Silesian Region, which was once owned by the Rothschild family. It is an important example of the English Landscape tradition with many features. The surrounding walls and numerous gates are in the process of being restored and we hope to offer a grant towards the restoration of one of the sets of gates.

We are also looking ahead to our programme of working parties in 2026 when we will be revisiting Schindler's Ark at Brněnec and the Hermitage at Teplice nad Metují. Details will be released in the new year. Our summer outings are at the planning stage. These include a tour of country houses in Sussex. Details will be available shortly. I should also mention the two excellent talks that we have had recently.

In October Richard Bassett entertained us with the extraordinary life of Maria Theresa and how against all odds, including her sex, she managed to plant her personality and determination upon the often hostile forces that surrounded her.

More recently Antony Griffiths, the former Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, spoke to us about his personal experiences dealing with cultural exchanges with the National Gallery in Prague in the 1980s. Needless to say, there were some Kafkaesque moments.

We have heard of the death of Peter Ratzer, a long-standing supporter and we extend our condolences to his family.

You will have heard of the recent death of Tom Stoppard who might have appeared to be an archetypal Englishman though he clearly wasn't. But he seemed to share with the British that sense of irony and understatement that links us to the Czech nation.

Peter Jamieson

Thirteen Sites Added to the National Cultural Monuments

The Czech government has approved the highest status for a group of nine monuments, Prague Palace Architecture, consisting of nine Baroque palaces at Prague Castle, Malá Strana and Staré Město (Old Town): Archbishop's Palace, Czernín Palace, Tuscany Palace, Schwarzenberg Palace, Salm Palace, Sternberg Palace, Nostic Palace, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace and Clam-Gallas Palace. Built in 17th and 18th centuries they are a witness to the importance of the Czech metropolis as a political and cultural centre of the Habsburg monarchy. They stand out for their monumental architecture and decorations by the top Baroque masters, and were inhabited by the foremost aristocratic families casting their influence on the cultural and political life of Europe.

Outside Prague the status was awarded to the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist, and the cemetery Chapel of All Souls with ossuaries, both in Sedlec near Kutná Hora (Central Bohemia Region); the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and St Ignatius, with catacombs and the building of the Latin School in Klatovy (Plzeň/Pilsen Region); and the Château of Moravská Třebová (Pardubice Region). The new status will be legally valid from 1st July 2026.
Source: Ministry of Culture

Eva Jiřičná Chosen to Design the Crown Jewels Exhibition 2025

The Bohemian Crown Jewels, rarely exhibited in the past, will now be shown every year. The Friends' patron Eva Jiřičná, as one of the most famous Czech architects, designed last year's exhibition. This exhibition also highlighted the jewels' fate during WW2 and coincided with the 80th anniversary of the end of the war. Entry to the exhibition was free of charge.

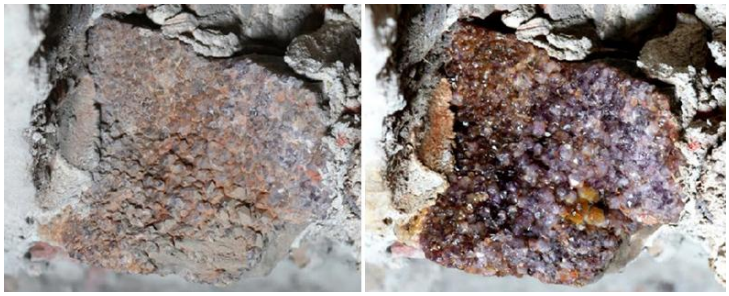
The exhibition in the Vladislav Hall

Dreamlike Quantities of Amethyst and Semi-precious Gems Uncovered at Kroměříž Palace

For decades the Baroque grottoes of the UNESCO listed Archbishop's Palace have been hiding a dazzling secret. Hidden under a layer of mortar and deposits, researches from Palacký University Olomouc have discovered walls covered with sparkling amethyst and minerals representing a fairytale treasure of immeasurable value. The find is truly significant because decorations with precious stones in both Palace's grottoes are unique and have no equivalent around the world. Amethysts, along with other minerals and shells, are not only part of the walls and vaults, but are also set into the floor of the Mining Grotto.

The Archbishop's Palace in Kroměříž with its famous gardens was built and decorated at the end of 17th century by Karl of Lichtenstein-Castelcorn, Bishop of Olomouc. Like many European châteaux and palaces of the period, it contains artificial caves (grottoes) on the ground level, *salae terrenae*, very popular at the time. Grottoes were designed to imitate nature with water features and low temperatures to serve as a place of entertainment and escape from the hot summer. Their imaginative artistic decoration usually concealed some allegorical message.

At the Archbishop's Palace it was the grotto dominated by the statue of Apollo that unexpectedly revealed the secret. Early last year when Jana Zapletalová, art historian, was collecting stucco samples for analysis and climbed behind the statue, she noticed that her torch produced sparkling reflections. "At that moment I realised that amethysts were almost everywhere under the layers of deposits" says Zapletalová. Amethysts were the most decorative part of the Grotto of Apollo, immediately surrounding the statue of the sun god, who allegorically personified Bishop Karl himself. "In various prints the Bishop was associated with a shining stone or sun, bringing spiritual and economic renewal to Moravia with the rays of his faith and knowledge. The reference to light symbolism came from Bishop's family name – Lichtenstein meaning light or shining stone, which was also featured in family coat of arms. That is why there is a dazzling glow of amethysts around the statue of the sun god, who threw an arrow – a ray of light and faith – into the dark part of the grotto with a dragon, full of fauns, wild animals



Above, a visualisation of the grotto's original appearance
Left, the same piece of amethyst before and after cleaning

and oak trees," added Zapletalová. Unfortunately, Karl of Lichtenstein, Bishop of Olomouc, never enjoyed his creation in full splendour as he died shortly after the completion of the Palace in 1695.

The amethysts discovered in the Archbishop's Palace are of domestic origin. According to Radek Hanus, a geologist and specialist researcher in precious stones, they come from Květnice Hill near Tišnov. Historical sources reveal that they were transported to the site in beer barrels.

Most of the amethysts were lost from palace in the past, especially the amethyst wall behind the statue of Apollo. "Whether this was the reason why the rest of the stones were covered with a layer of mortar and thus hidden from the public and experts alike is still unclear, as is the time when the concealment took place. In the 1950s the walls were further covered with layers of paint by students from the School of Applied Arts in Uherské Hradiště," says Zapletalová.

The grottoes, currently in a state of disrepair, remain partially accessible to the public with the help of protective floor coverings and grotto viewpoints. According to the head of the Heritage Conservation department of Archbishopric of Olomouc restoration work will be complex and will last for a number of years. It will require co-operation of foreign experts as well as efforts to obtain necessary funding.

Jana Sommerlad

Jana Zapletalová, Associate Professor, is the head of the Department of Art History, Palacký University Olomouc.

The Archbishopric in Kroměříž recently announced a public fundraising appeal to save the grottoes

Jan Kaplický's Building Saved and Relocated to the Czech Republic

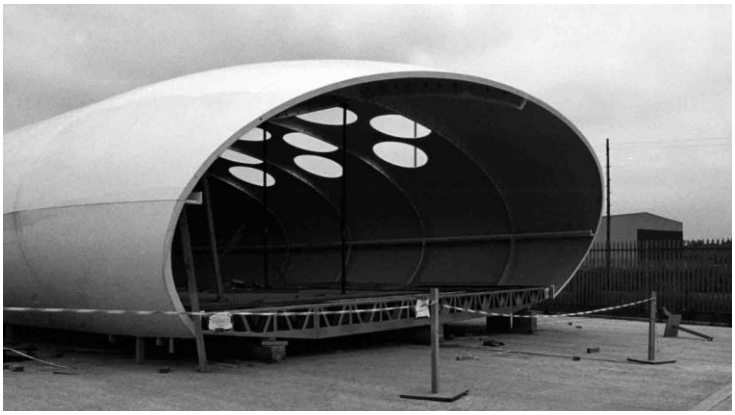
by Ivan Margolius

Described as Britain's unique and most futuristic school classroom has been saved from demolition following a Twentieth Century Society appeal, and has been relocated to the Czech Republic by the Kaplický Foundation.

Future Systems' client Gill Marshall-Andrews, who with her husband Bob commissioned the practice to design a holiday house in Pembrokeshire, the Malator House (1994-98), after its successful completion also approached Future Systems to design free-standing additional classrooms for the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, called *World Classrooms of the Future*.

There were two *Ingenium Classrooms* designed and built at Meadlands Primary and Grey Court Secondary Schools, Ham, Richmond between 2001 and 2004. Gill was based in the education department in the borough. It was a project funded by the local authority and also partly by the Department of Education. It was a pioneering project built for two local schools, primary and secondary. The local authority was the client, but Gill drove the project. It was designed to be a different sort of classroom, high-tech and encouraging a different way of teaching. Designed to push the boundaries, it showed what could be done. It was proposed as an experiment in teaching and learning where pupils could see the sky. When she was at school, Gill always wanted to see the sky; she couldn't be in a normal classroom.

Future Systems' 100-square-metre, freestanding

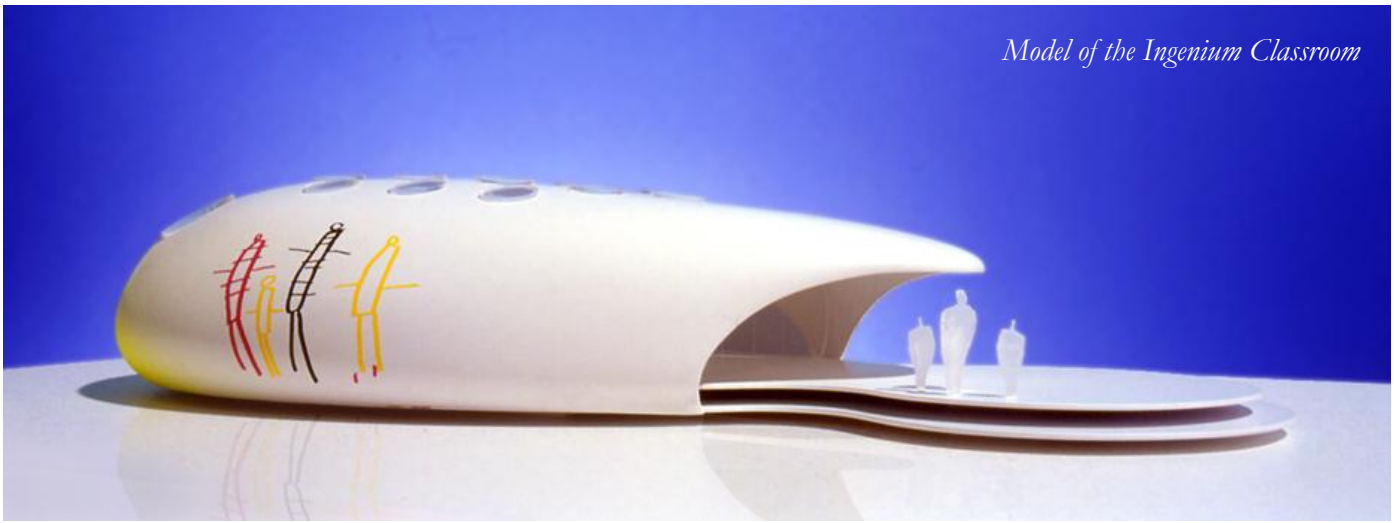


The Ingenium Classroom *under construction*

Ingenium Classroom was prefabricated from modular components, using semi-monocoque boat-building technology. Kaplický took inspiration from the practice's NatWest Media Centre (1994-99) at Lord's Cricket Ground, winner of the Stirling Prize in 1999, but this time used smaller version shell components instead of aluminium, with porthole skylights and fully glazed frontage. The built-in seating and digital white-boards internally left a large open space for up to 30 pupils. The use of suspended circular acoustic discs, integrated with the high-level natural light openings, ensured appropriate acoustic environment. The unit was equipped with a self-contained toilet, cloakroom and services pod.

After 20 years of use the *Ingenium Classroom* at Grey Court Secondary School had outgrown the classroom size needed, overall pupil numbers growing from around 500 to 1,600, and the school planned to remove the structure to make way for expanded teaching facilities.

The Twentieth Century Society launched an appeal in October 2024, looking to find an appropriate



Model of the Ingenium Classroom

new home for the shell and someone with the resources required to relocate the structure. After being deluged with nearly 100 expressions of interest, there was one party that met the full criteria: The Kaplický Foundation.

The Foundation was established in 2008 to continue the legacy of Future Systems founder Jan Kaplický, who died in 2009, and to support the development and promotion of architecture and modern art in his native Czech Republic.

After a period of negotiations and with the support of Gill Marshall-Andrews and the Grey Court School, the classroom was carefully dismantled by an expert team of contractors over the 2025 Easter holiday. The component parts were transported by road to the Czech Republic in four lorries, with reassembly and specialist restoration planned over the future months.

After intensive interest the Kaplický Foundation agreed that the *Ingenium Classroom* would take up its new position as an exhibition pavilion in the landscaped grounds of Galerie Golf Hostivař in the eastern Prague suburbs, which combines a golf course together with a display of the best work of sculptures by Czech artists.

This action then succeeded finally in bringing a Jan Kaplický-designed building to the Czech Republic, the second such, following his early design of František Dvořák's studio (1967) located in Prague Braník.

In October 2025 Jan Kaplický was awarded by the President of the Czech Republic, Petr Pavel, the Order of Merit *in memoriam* for his work in the sphere of architecture and culture.

Villa Čerych, Česká Skalice

In 2022 Eliška Kaplický Fuchsová, widow of architect Jan Kaplický, purchased Villa Čerych in Česká Skalice. The villa was designed by Otakar Novotný in 1924 in Rondo-cubist style for the textile manufacturer Ladislav Bartoň-Dobenín and given as a wedding gift to his niece Maria Bartoňová-Čerychová. The villa was used as the background of Václav Havel's film *Leaving*. The building, which has been renovated, will serve as a Kaplický Creative Centre, organising artistic workshops, professional conferences, interactive exhibitions and film shows.

Ivan Margolius *is an architect and writer*

Czech Architectural Greats

Josef Polášek *(1899-1946)* Architect with Social Awareness

by Vladimír Šlapeta

After the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the Moravian metropolis of Brno gained an important role as the second largest city of the new state. It had a convenient location in the middle of the republic and a strong economic potential of the arms, engineering and textile industries, thanks to which it had already earned the nickname the 'Austrian Manchester' during the monarchy. Moreover, President Masaryk fought against Prague centrism and, as a counterweight, located a number of important institutions in Brno - the Supreme Court, international trade fairs, and a technical college that had already existed here since the mid-19th century was supplemented by Masaryk University, colleges of agriculture and veterinary medicine, and secondary education was also significantly expanded. All of these institutions needed new buildings, which was a great challenge for young architects who were looking for professional employment in Brno in the first half of the 1920s. After Jindřich Kumpošt, Arnošt Wiesner and Bohuslav Fuchs, a strong generation arrived from Prague and Vienna schools. Among the most hardworking and agile of them was Josef Polášek. He came from a poor, large family from the wine-growing region in South Moravia and after leaving a state civil engineering college in Brno, he became a prominent student of one of the leading representatives of the Cubist movement, Professor Pavel Janák at the School of Applied Arts in Prague, who introduced him to the great

Left, from the top
Large housing estate in Královo Pole
Housing for the technocratic middle class in Košice, Slovakia, which Polášek built simultaneously with the above
Dr. Kyjovský's weekend house on the Brno dam lake

world of architecture. Janák supplemented his teaching with excursions abroad, thus opening up wider horizons to his students. This way Polášek learned from an autopsy the architecture of the Amsterdam School and the buildings of W. M. Dudok in Amsterdam. He also visited the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1925, and was then engaged, on the recommendation of his teacher, in the building design office of the city of Brno, where he worked closely with Bohuslav Fuchs until the end of the 1920s. Together with him, he was responsible for the construction of the funeral chapel of the Brno central cemetery which reflects fresh Dutch inspiration, and later for a number of school buildings in the Brno suburbs, annexed to the city after the creation of Greater Brno in 1919.

In 1928 Josef Polášek received a grant from the Ministry of Education and spent half a year in Holland studying local architecture, especially schools and residential buildings which formed the focus of his activities. He compiled the results of his trip in the book called *Holandské stavebnictví (Dutch Construction).* After his return, his collaboration with Bohuslav Fuchs culminated in the excellent construction of the VESNA vocational school for girls, which attracted international attention from architectural magazines. When Bohuslav Fuchs left the city's building design office in 1929, Josef Polášek took over the leading role in it, which he retained until the end of his life. However, he also designed and worked on projects in his own architectural office. At the same time he became one of the founders of the *Left Front* and a member of the Czechoslovak CIAM group, and in 1929 he attended the 2nd CIAM congress in Frankfurt am Main, where he grew familiar with the construction of the new Frankfurt and its satellite towns carried out by the building director, Ernst May. He also met a number of leading architects headed by Le Corbusier, Gropius and Alvar Aalto.

The social construction of Frankfurt was another important impetus for his work. The 1930 Building Act provided tax breaks that opened up new possibilities for him in this area as well, first a group of houses in Husovice and then a large housing estate in Královo Pole where, with minimal resources, he created a very cultivated living environment for the socially disadvantaged with up to 40m² of living space in the spirit of the new concept of urban planning with terraced housing in green surroundings, bordered along the street with a series of low-rise extensions with shops. In contrast, the Masaryk housing estate with more comfortable apartments designed for the technocratic middle class, which Polášek built simultaneously in Košice, Slovakia, is reminiscent of the formal vocabulary of Scharoun's estate *Siemensstadt.*

Throughout his life, Polášek also designed family houses - after the first ones in his native region in Kyjov, houses in Vyškov and Kroměříž followed, and this area of work culminated in the weekend house of the lawyer Dr Kyjovský on the Brno

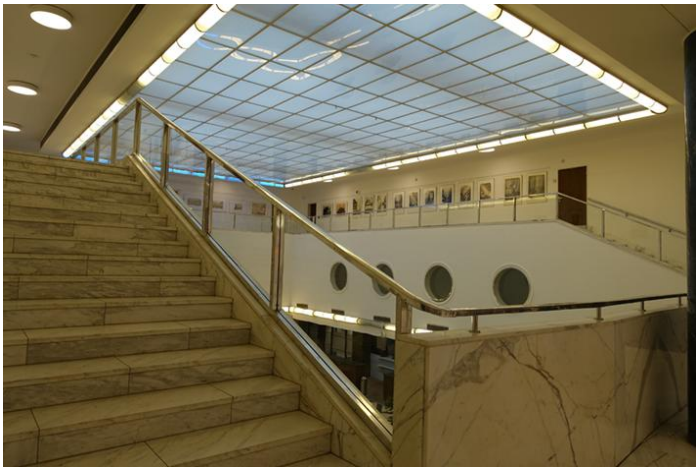


Above, from left, Polášek's own house in Barvičova Street, Brno; Dr Pur's house in Brno, in the centre; the ALFA sanatorium in the High Tatras, Slovakia. Right, the First Moravian Savings Bank in Brno on Jánská Street, 1936-39

dam lake with a dynamically shaped terrace. His own house and the house of Dr Pur are examples of the high cultural standard of the homes of the Brno intellectual class. This group also contains the building of the ALFA sanatorium in the High Tatras, Slovakia, whose cubic volume is surrounded by terraces on the southern and western sides overlooking the mountain valley.

Armed with such experience, in the mid-1930s, together with the furniture designer Jindřich Halabala, he published a charming book, *Jak si zařídim byt* (*How I'll Design My Flat*), in which he perfectly presented the high standard of housing and living style of the Czech interwar intelligentsia. As part of his employment with the Brno municipality, he developed and implemented an extremely complex project for the conversion of a former Baroque Dominican monastery into a town hall, which continues to serve the city unchanged. Although the focus of Polášek's work lies in a series of school buildings and both social housing and accommodation for the middle classes, his crowning achievement was ultimately the construction of the First Moravian Savings Bank in Brno on Jánská Street, which he designed together with Heinrich Blum and Otakar Oplatek after winning a competition in 1936.

The building, constructed at the very end of the 1930s in two stages in an elongated clearing after the demolition of an older building, combines apartments of various sizes with shops on the



ground floor, generously designed spaces of a financial institution, and an impressive roof extension - a penthouse with terraces. First, the older building in the northeastern part of the plot was demolished and the first stage was built containing shops and apartments on the ground floor. Only then was the second historic building demolished and a new building housing the savings bank was erected, above which more apartments were placed. The entrance to the savings bank, accented by a three-storey convex bay window, draws the visitor from the covered entrance niche through a narrowing glass space into the oval staircase hall illuminated by a dome. From it there is access to the cashier hall, composed in the spirit of serodynamic 'steamship' architecture. The cashier hall space is flanked by a mezzanine with round windows and galleries along the entire perimeter. It is one of the most impressive interior spaces of interwar Brno. The building was immediately widely presented to the international public in the magazine *Moderne Bauformen*.

Josef Polášek was elected a member of the

prominent Prague art association *Mánes* and in 1937 he also participated in two meetings of the East European CIAM groups - in May in Brno and Zlín, and in December in Budapest. Despite his ongoing and at that time incurable tuberculosis, he worked with great dedication and at the end of the thirties he built a number of social apartments and schools in Brno and several branches of the First Moravian Savings Bank in smaller towns. He alternated these activities with time in sanatoria in the High Tatras. In 1938 he undertook a longer trip to southern France - Toulon and Hyères, accompanied by the Czech poet Ivan Jelínek. Later, in his English exile, Jelínek wrote an enchanting memoir of this trip.

When construction work was halted during the war, he developed a number of regulatory plans for the South Moravian countryside. He also helped the resistance when, at the end of the war, he hid in his house Antonín Tenzer, a younger colleague from the Janák School, who was being hunted by the Gestapo. Despite his advancing illness, just after the war, he built residential houses in Brno-Tábor, in collaboration with Jiří Kroha and Vilém Kuba, and a school in his native Kyjov. He died on 20th December 1946 at the age of 47. His work was commemorated only in 2004 with an exhibition and monograph in the Brno Architecture Gallery. Many of his buildings have been designated national monuments.

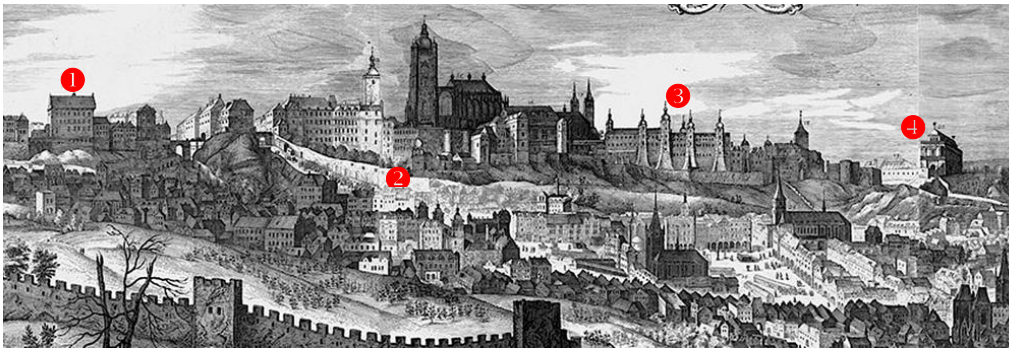
Prof. Vladimír Šlapeta *studied architecture in Prague. From 1973-1991 he was director of the architectural department of the National Museum of Technology in Prague and following the Velvet Revolution 1989 he became Dean of the Faculty of Architecture in Prague and later in Brno. He is a member of the* Akademie der Künste *in Berlin and the author of* Czech Functionalism 1918-1938 */AA London 1987. In 2023 he was awarded the UIA Jean Tschumi Prize in Copenhagen*

The Schwarzenberg (Lobkowicz) Palace in Prague

by Pavel Vlček

When looking at the panorama of Prague's Hradčany, the Royal Palace and St Vitus Cathedral stand out, but the tall building of the former Lobkowicz Palace on the left side will certainly catch your eye. One of the first aristocratic palaces, it creates a counterpoint to the monarch's summer palace, also known as Queen Anne's summer palace, which ends the panorama from the opposite eastern side. The construction of large palace buildings in Prague modelled on Italian palazzi was a Renaissance innovation, which stemmed both from the greater self-confidence of the nobility and its participation in political life, and from cultural change. This entire process was accelerated by an unfortunate event, the devastating fire of Lesser Town and Hradčany in 1541. At that time, the burned-out town houses on small medieval plots made way for large palaces in two Prague towns (the unification of the four Prague towns did not occur until 1784) around the monarch's residence. The need for extensive construction work also attracted a large number of construction teams and individual craftsmen from the Italian-speaking cantons of the Swiss Confederation (especially from the area around Lugano in the canton of Ticino) and neighbouring Lombardy (mainly from the province of Como). If in the first decades of the 16th century only isolated Italian construction craftsmen can be documented in Bohemia, then after 1538, when the construction of the royal summer palace at Hradčany began, their number increases exponentially. In the second half of the 16th century, 330 Italian stonemasons and bricklayers living in Bohemia can be safely documented. Undoubtedly, the fact that Prague became, thanks to Rudolf II, the imperial residence for the first time and also for the last time, was a contributing factor.

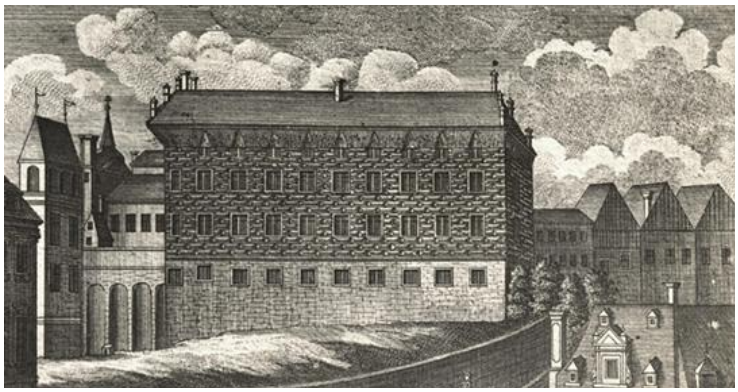
The first large palace building in Prague, however,



Detail from 'Sadeler Prospectus' of Prague, an etching from 1606, showing the striking building of the Lobkowicz Palace ❶ on the left, the Krilov Palace ❷ in the middle in front of the unfinished St Vitus Cathedral, the Rosenberg Palace ❸ to the right, and the royal summer palace ❹ at the end

was not the Lobkowicz Palace, but the Rosenberg Palace in the Prague Castle area, which was destroyed by numerous major reconstructions. Just as the Rosenberg Palace, where a purely Italian group led by Giovanni Fontana from Brusato (Lugano) had worked since 1545, the construction of the Lobkowicz Palace was also in the hands of the Italian group around Agostino Galli. Its construction was preceded by the purchase of the necessary land, which took place shortly after the fire, when Jan Popel Jr. of Lobkowicz bought the first two burnt-out houses. However, before the first works could be started, the Italian group was recalled to rebuild the Lobkowicz residence in Horšovský Týn, which had also been destroyed by fire. Only after the reconstruction and expansion of the local castle was completed, after 1558, at the latest by 1563, did work begin on the Prague palace, whose façades were covered with plaster with *sgraffito* as early as 1567, as indicated by the preserved date in the *sgraffito*. However, the planned work on the Prague palace was not fully completed. The connecting wing at Hradčany Square remained unfinished, the width (and ultimately the lower height) of which is indicated by the projections on the opposite perpendicular wings. There was to be an open arcade on the ground floor, as on the other two wings, and probably a gallery on the first floor. Not all the attics and gables were built either, which would have been covered by the roofs, as was the case not only with the Rosenberg Palace, but also with other Renaissance buildings.

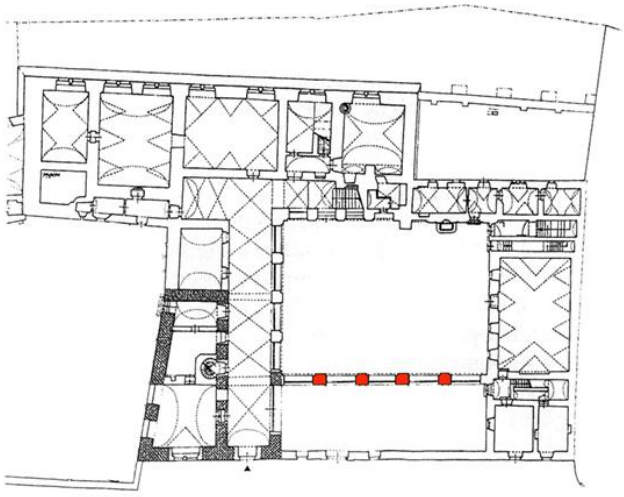
The palace has not been preserved in its original state, as it might seem at first glance. It underwent its first major renovation in 1710, when the staircase of the main wing succumbed to the Baroque feeling and sense of symmetry. The project was designed by Marcantonio Canevalle. The staircase windows, asymmetrically placed on the façade, and moreover on a different level, were replaced by new ones, but again 'Renaissance' in style, and *sgraffito* rustication added, thus resulting in its full preservation. Shortly after, when the palace came into the hands of the Schwarzenbergs, further alterations were carried out in 1723 designed by Anton Erhard Martinelli. A significantly greater intervention was caused by the collapse of the front wall (towards Hradčany Square) of the eastern wing, which was restored in 1871 in the same form with a pediment and lunette cornices. At the same time the *sgraffito* was also repaired, using a somewhat different technique and with a slightly different pattern. In 1892, *sgraffito* designed by the architect Josef Schulz (1840-1917)



Detail from a somewhat inaccurate copper engraving by Johann Georg Ringle based on a drawing by Friedrich Bernhard Werner (1690-1776), published around 1740 by Martin Engelbrecht in Augsburg. The engraving shows that even in the Baroque period the palace had preserved façades with sgraffito

was added to the provisional connecting wall (including on the inner side towards the courtyard) and pediments so perfectly, that many visitors to Prague may believe this is the original Renaissance solution. This was certainly helped by the fact that the original inscription in the cartouche *REN. 1892* was replaced by the dates '1543-1955'. The second date pointed to the restoration of the external façades, during which the *sgraffito* was returned to the original pattern.

Originally the Lobkowicz Palace, known since 1719 by its later owners as the Schwarzenberg Palace, became a model (as did the older Rosenberg Palace) for other manorial and later burgher buildings in Bohemia. Although it was created by Italian-speaking builders and all the building details are Italian, their final form does not actually



Floor plan of the palace, in which the likely medieval masonry of the former burgher's house is marked in cross-hatched lines (lower left), the masonry of the presumed but not built closing wing is marked in red. In addition to the usual barrel vaults, there are other distinctive vaulting designs

The east wing between 1871 when this façade was restored and 1892, when the connecting wall was also covered with sgraffito. The photograph may be by the author of the reconstruction, architect Josef Schulz, who had been experimenting with photography since 1861

correspond to any Italian building. The overall appearance has a specific form; practically all Renaissance buildings in the Czech environment are covered with *sgraffito* rustication which, however, has a decorative character rather than creating the illusion of embossed masonry. If the Lobkowicz builders had still correctly shaded diamond-cut *sgraffito* in Horšovský Týn, they had already abandoned this principle in the Prague building. In further development, when figural *sgraffito* also appears more often, the rustication takes on various patterns that no longer even seem to resemble embossed masonry. Another characteristic element of new palace and château buildings are projecting arched cornices, which protected the façades well from the effects of weather, but were structurally demanding, and so in many places they have not been preserved, being visible only from the hint of lunettes, cornices and mouldings in *sgraffito*. Prominent gables were also used on the buildings, but only parts of them were built on the Lobkowicz Palace. Usually, gables or attics covered the entire gable roof. Of course, there were also arcades of two types - Roman with columns and Tuscan on subtle columns. In the interior, in addition to a new type of vaults, mainly barrel vaults with cloister heads and corner lunettes, painted vaulted ceilings appear, but above all, beautifully white, smoothed multi-layer plasters are used, thanks to the limestone quarries near Prague and the 'Prague' quick lime. The Italians thus created a special building type in Bohemia, which can rightly be described as the Bohemian Renaissance.

The palace was opened to the public as early as 1909, when the Technical Museum was exhibiting here, and during WW2 the *Wehrmacht* established a military museum there, followed by the Military History Museum in the post-war years. In 2002 the National Gallery acquired the palace, and after the reconstruction from 2003-2008, architecturally designed by the studio of Tomáš Šantavý which mainly affected the interiors, the National Gallery's *Old Masters 1* exhibition was installed here. This is undoubtedly why the palace is worth a visit, not only for its original Renaissance trappings, but also because it contains paintings by such masters as Albrecht Dürer, El Greco, Adriaen de Vries, Bartholomeus Spranger and Peter Paul Rubens, among others.

Pavel Vlček *Professor Emeritus, Czech Technical University in Prague, works in the Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences, specialising in Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical architecture. He is the author of numerous books and articles.*

Left, view of the palace from the southeast, taken from the bell tower of of St Nicholas' Church. Noteworthy is the differently-placed window in the basement (second from the left), which is a remnant of the original Renaissance staircase, removed in the upper floors in 1710

Cosmas of Prague and his Legacy, the First Historian of the Czechs

by Mark Whelan

Writing in the 1120s, Cosmas of Prague, the Deacon of St Vitus' Cathedral in Prague, wrote to his friend, a certain Severus, that he had composed a 'little work' filled with 'senile musings'. Cosmas went on to warn Severus, with modesty as ostentatious as it was false, that the number of mistakes and grammatical slips within would make it impossible for anyone to get through it, and begged him not to show the work to anyone else. Cosmas sent his work to other friends, so he obviously wanted his work to circulate widely, but even he would surely have been surprised had he known that almost a millennium later his *Chronicle of the Bohemians* (*Chronica Boemorum*) had been read, studied, and pored over, across the world, regarded not just as a cornerstone of the Czech national story, but as a seminal text of its kind in medieval scholarship. It is only fitting, therefore, that to mark 900 years since Cosmas' death, the National Library of the Czech Republic in 2025 dedicated a special exhibition to Cosmas, bringing together almost all surviving manuscripts of his remarkable *Chronicle* in the process.

We know more about Cosmas himself than we do other contemporary chroniclers because he filled his historical work—three books of history in all, chronicling the foundation of the duchy (and, later, kingdom) of Bohemia from its mythical beginnings to his present day—with numerous biographical anecdotes. Cosmas was born around 1045 and was schooled in the cathedral, recalling in his *Chronicle* how he used to practice singing the psalms as a young boy in the crypt. He went onto study at the prestigious cathedral school of Liège, then a pre-eminent centre of learning in Latin Christendom, before he returned to Prague to serve St Vitus' again. Cosmas recorded in his *Chronicle* how he travelled as part of the retinues of the bishops of Prague to negotiations and councils in Italy, Germany, and Hungary, before old age appeared to keep him closer to home, allowing him to focus the last years of his life on composing, as he phrased it, 'the deeds of the Bohemians', from the legendary founding of Prague by Duke Bohemus to his present day.

Cosmas' *Chronicle* is significant, for both he and his work personify much broader trends shaping both the Czech land and wider Christendom at the time.

Image of Cosmas from the Leipzig Manuscript

He was the first historian of the Czech peoples and, perhaps more importantly, the first cleric of Slavic heritage to produce a major work in medieval Europe. *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles* (*Gesta principum Polonorum*), composed in the 1110s, written in a similar vein to Cosmas' Chronicle, but with a focus on the Piast dynasty that ruled Poland, predates Cosmas' work slightly, but was almost certainly written by a cleric from France. It is a fact often forgotten that western, Latin Christendom, easily doubled in size between the 9th and early 11th centuries, with swathes of Scandinavia and Central Europe experiencing complex and not necessarily linear processes of Christianisation that saw the emergence of political units - duchies, principalities, and kingdoms - along lines that were familiar to contemporary rulers in France, England, and the Holy Roman Empire. Cosmas, therefore, represented a new phase of maturity in the Christianisation of the region, with a native cleric setting down the history of a Slavic people in ink, and doing so in Latin, rather than Old Slavonic, confirming how the duchy (and later kingdom) of Bohemia and its rulers and elites would look westwards, and eventually not just become a vital part of the Holy Roman Empire, but even produce some of its most famous emperors.

Cosmas' *Chronicle* defies easy categorisation, but always rewards close reading. The first book of his *Chronicle* repeats biblical and then largely legendary material, taking its readers swiftly from the great flood and the Tower of Babel via Duke Bohemus' founding of Prague upon the banks of the Vltava through the foundation and then consolidation of the Přemyslid dynasty to around 1038. Cosmas was unsure about a great deal of the content in the first

Image of Čech and Lech from the Bautzen Manuscript of the Cosmas Chronicle

book, lamenting that he could not even add dates to most of the events until he got to the first Catholic duke of Bohemia around 870. The remaining two books cover less than a century, taking events right up to 1125, the year of Cosmas' death. The narrative in these two books is compelling, thoughtful, and illuminating, for Cosmas was an eyewitness or at least a contemporary to most of what he described. His description of the crusaders passing through Prague in 1096, forcibly and violently converting the Jews of the city despite the protestations of the bishop, run alongside a dense political narrative focused on the high stakes infighting of the Přemyslid ducal house, with stabbings, castrations, blindings, and countless palace coups.

Cosmas has been lauded by perhaps over-enthusiastic scholars as a mouthpiece and centralising force of the emerging Přemyslid dynasty and their nascent ducal state, but more recent scholarship has brought the focus back to Cosmas' narrative and the critique he offered of contemporary events. Cosmas never shied away from the realities of the power play he witnessed, either directly or indirectly, whether for the dukes and their shifting networks of relations and kin or the people that served them, and nor was he afraid to criticise when he saw matters taken too far. When the nobleman Mutina failed in his plot to overthrow Duke Svatopluk around 1107, the latter had Mutina's children seized and taken to the market square, kicking and screaming for their mother in fear. There Cosmas witnessed them being slaughtered at the command of 'the butcher … like piglets'. When another duke believed one of his officials favoured a rival in his family, he had the poor man beaten, tied to a huge dog, and dragged around the market squares of Prague for several hours. Covered in dog mess, he was then exiled to Poland.

Cosmas dressed his narrative in deep learning. He was, of course, deeply familiar with the content of the Bible, but he was also well versed in classical Latin literature, reflecting an interesting light upon the state of learning and in eleventh and twelfth-century Bohemia. Whether quoting Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius' *Achilleid,* or paraphrasing from Sallust's *War with Jugurtha* and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Cosmas could never be accused of hiding his learning, and even verged on showing off at times. His habit, for example, of jumping from florid prose into rhyming verse of his own composition continues to vex even the best of translators. Cosmas also promised his readers at the beginning of his work that he would date the events he describes both to the year in which they occurred and also by 'indiction', the latter a moveable block of around fifteen years that emerged as a dating practice in the latter centuries of the Roman Empire and which was notoriously difficult to get correct by Cosmas' time. By the turn of the millenium, even the popes and Holy Roman emperors, rulers with the best-staffed chanceries in Latin Christendom, had largely given up on dating by indiction. It is unsurprising, therefore, that indictions are never mentioned in his *Chronicle* again. Cosmas probably just wanted his readers to know that he was the sort of person who knew what indictions were!

Cosmas' work survives in more than a dozen manuscripts. It has been translated into Czech (several times), Polish, Russian, and German, and into English in high quality scholarly editions no less than twice in recent years, in 2009 and 2020, attesting to its popularity and importance as a seminal text in medieval studies. Scholars will continue to debate just why and for whom Cosmas set quill to parchment, but it is worth remembering that when Cosmas wrote of his own motivations in one of his prefatory letters, he did not dedicate his work to the dukes (as one might expect), but instead claimed he was writing to please the good and skilled, and with echoes of Herodotus, to stop the tales he chose to record from falling into oblivion. We are fortunate that he succeeded in doing the latter and more.

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Lada Valešová

Czech-British Conductor Answers Questions from The Friends

In the context of British musical life, do you see an arc of conductors particularly inspired by Janáček?

The arc is present and clear to see for those who take interest in appreciation for Czech music in Great Britain. Sir Charles Mackerras, the centenary of whose birth we celebrated in 2025, played without any doubt a decisive role in popularising Janáček's music and bringing it to the British audiences. Through his studies in Prague with Václav Talich he became an authentic advocate for the Czech musical tradition abroad at the time when this wasn't always possible for the Czech musicians stuck behind the Iron Curtain. Maestro Jiří Bělohlávek, so beloved and appreciated, embodied this tradition and brought it into the heart of the music world in the UK. His former student, Jakub Hrůša, has started his tenure at the Royal Opera House as a new Music Director with a triumphant *Jenůfa* and *The Makropulos Case*, and is writing a new exciting chapter of Czech music in the UK at the highest level. Tomáš Hanus leading Welsh National Opera through stormy waters is another conductor Czechs can be rightly proud of. But also let's not forget the major contribution made by Libor Pešek as a Music Director and then Conductor Laureate at the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. I also include Vilém Tauský, whose name was mentioned to me with warmth and respect when I first studied at the Guildhall School of Music. He left a huge impact on his students as well as at the BBC, where he conducted many programmes, including the opera *Švanda the Bagpiper*. I would like to mention translators and language coaches, late Ilja Boháč at Glyndebourne and Karel Janovický at the Royal Opera House. For me as an artist, it's my second nature to breathe this music and I am happy to to be in a position to inspire others to love it as much as I do.

Without Sir Charles Mackerras, do you think that the UK would have had to wait a lot longer than thirty years for the British premiere of Káťa Kabanová in 1951?

It's not an unrealistic possibility! After all, for example *Rusalka* has been premiered for the very first time only this year at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm, and although there have been many productions of *The Makropulos Case* in the UK and abroad, its Covent Garden premiere happened only in November 2025. Every masterpiece needs its advocates at the right time.

Does the global reach of Janáček's operas bring a wider awareness of Czech culture?

It's very tempting to say "yes" and to congratulate ourselves. The reality is that on the global scale the world of opera grabs a very small margin of international attention and it's nearly exclusively consigned to the countries which have some tradition of it. It's certainly true that for a small nation such as Czechs, its cultural output is punching well above its weight. We need to enable the process to continue through supporting the arts, the young artists and musicians, and to produce work which will win over and inspire new audiences.

When you were starting your career, how receptive to singing in Czech were most anglophone opera soloists in the UK? In the early 1990s ROH still used English for 'The Cunning Little Vixen'.

Since day one as a student at the Guildhall School I have been asked by singers to help them learn arias and songs in Czech. These were young students at the time, my own age. This generation matured and now in the UK we have amazing artists such as Nicky Spence and Natalya Romaniw, amongst others, who sing Czech idiomatically and as close to the native speaker level as one can wish for. There are different opinions on translations and singing in the original language, but I have hardly come across an international top-level house which would not perform the opera in its original language today. However, some composers themselves stated that their operas should be performed in the language of the audience; in an interview Shostakovich says exactly that. I think singing in the language of the audience has its important place. If I were to stage for example *The Bartered Bride* in a smaller local opera company, I can envisage using a good translation and making the production more accessible for my local

audience. There should be time and place for both offering the audience a choice.

Do you feel that any opera of Bohuslav Martinů will take its place alongside Smetana's 'The Bartered Bride', Dvořák's 'Rusalka' and Janáček's 'Jenůfa' as a truly internationally known Czech opera?
If it were to happen, Martinů operas would need to be programmed more frequently by the prominent companies and festivals. Speaking as a conductor, I was delighted to conduct a Martinů opera double bill of *The Comedy of the Bridge* and *Alexander Twice* at the Royal Academy of Music. Students took to it like ducks to water and we had a great response from our audience.

Is there a Czech opera that you feel is unjustly neglected?
I love the *Charlatan* by Pavel Haas, and would love to see it staged here in the UK. It has been done in Wexford some years ago, and I've had a tremendous joy working on it in Ostrava last year in a brilliant staging by Ondřej Havelka. It's a big piece and demanding considerable forces, but worth it.

Is teaching important to you?
Teaching is a prominent part of my output as a musician. I didn't seek it out, it found me. Results are most obvious when seeing my former students grow into artists, as well as teachers, educators, music administrators and even music agents, whom I meet in the profession not only in the UK but also when working abroad. As an artist I consider music making most artistically important to me, but on a human level the impact of mentoring leaves possibly a deeper legacy: my former students will hopefully carry a bit of what I taught them into the future.

What are you currently working on?
I was in 'seventh heaven' in a role of an Assistant and Cover Conductor for Maestro Hrůša on *The Makropulos Case* at Covent Garden (premiered in November 2025), where I also looked after the Czech language for our main and cover casts. In early spring I'll be in Dublin at the Irish National Opera on *Rusalka* once more as an Assistant/ Cover Conductor and Language specialist. I will conduct Britten's *The Rape Of Lucretia* at the Royal Academy of Music in the summer term.

What made you take up the baton?
Years spent in the opera rehearsal rooms as a coach with strong musical opinions. Instead of brooding and bringing potentially negative energy into the room, one day I asked myself: "If you are so clever, why don't you do it yourself and see how it goes?"

Does it feel a bit lonely in the world of female conductors?
I can only speak for myself. It's never lonely in the rehearsal room, or with the orchestra or in the pit. I also come from already a rich and well-established career, with human and artistic connections and very much appreciate these very same colleagues and opera companies giving me opportunities to develop as a conductor. However, it is solitary work - the preparation, the study, the responsibility for a big organism of people. That's a role of a leader who must have the strength to take that responsibility. I have been privileged to be part of some fantastic programmes for female conductors of which I'll name the Royal Philharmonic Society's WoCo (Woman Conductors) founded by Alice Farnham. RPO gave our cohorts brilliant opportunities to work with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, amongst others. But you stand alone on the podium, and the orchestras and singers know very quickly if you are up to the job.

Which is your favourite piece of music that you have conducted?
Eugene Onegin (Holland Park, 2022). So far! Also, *Jenůfa* in the rehearsals at the Royal Opera in 2024.

Do you also work in the Czech Republic?
I've mentioned earlier my work on *Charlatan* in Ostrava National Opera. I also did a wonderful project in collaboration between the Birmingham City Opera, Opera Europa and the Smetana Festival in Litomyšl called *Two Widows - New Look*. With an excellent British cast of four, Czech musicians and an Italian director and creative team it was very much to my taste. It had a great success with the audiences and I hope more of similar projects will follow.

Do you see yourself as an advocate of Czech music?
I see myself as a bridge between the cultures, someone who aims to unite and enable everyone to share their artistic vision. Similarly, I love working with opera directors from all backgrounds curious to see and help them to embody their view of Czech opera. Czech music has an international overreach and importance. We can be proud to share and enable others to tell it their own way. That's what art is all about.

Lada Valešová donated a piano recital to The Friends in the Slovak Embassy in 2010

Reviews

Maria Theresa, Queen of Bohemia

A talk by Richard Bassett on 7th October 2025

Richard Bassett introduced Maria Theresa as the outstanding personality of the 18th century with a splendid full-length painted portrait of her standing beside the archducal crown and the crown of Bohemia. He claimed that there is no public institution in Central Europe today that cannot trace its origins to her reign, not least in education and public health. He illustrated the dominant geographical position of Bohemia emphasising that it was central to her dynastic aspirations and reforming policies, and if it were to be lost, everything would be virtually lost. Within six months of succeeding her father, the Emperor Charles VI in 1740, Maria Theresa faced two major challenges. First, the invasion of Silesia by Frederick II of Prussia, and secondly the invasion and occupation of Prague by Charles of Bavaria who crowned himself King of Bohemia, prior to getting elected Holy Roman Emperor. He was to die in 1745 whereupon the Imperial rank was recovered by her husband Francis Stephan of Lorraine with whom she was happily married and had sixteen children.

Confronted by the Prussian army which had swept into Bohemia to capture Silesia and whose infantry was the most efficient in 18th century Europe, and also by French and Bavarian armies, she was hard put to resist. Richard Bassett emphasised her gift of a fantastic instinct as to whom she could turn to for help. Many were Bohemians and Prince Wenzel of Liechtenstein of Moravia, keen to protect the privileges of his Bohemian family against the Prussians and whose main artillery depot remained based in South Bohemia, financed the finest artillery weapons in continental Europe. In contrast, the Serbian merchants settled in Trieste brought money and supplied soldiers including the terrifying pandours and irregulars. Together with the Austrian Cavalry under Field Marshall Daun and the Prince de Ligne dragoons who, distinguished by their absence of moustaches, charged the Prussian infantry crying: 'we may not have moustaches but that does not mean that the points of our swords are not blunt,' won the significant victory at Kolín, (east of Prague) in 1757. This is inscribed, in French, on the monument that records the battle that saved the Empire.

Maria Theresa was served by the most formidable diplomat and statesman of the age, Prince Kaunitz of ancient Czech nobility from Kounice, who master-minded many of her reforms, but also implicated her in what she called the greatest theft and crime of the century, the First Partition of Poland. Illustrated with the famous allegorical print of 1773 showing the three countries that participated in tearing apart the map of Poland, Catherine II of Russia, Frederick II of Prussia in discussion with Josef II and the King of Poland in the centre about to lose his crown. After the death of Francis Stephen in 1756, Josef II was elevated to be co-regent. Often seriously at loggerheads with his mother, he was seduced by territorial expansion, hence his sharing in the First Partition of Poland. For advice she relied on another Bohemian aristocrat of Portuguese origin, Count Silva-Tarouca, with whom she corresponded and whose letters have come to light revealing much about her character. Richard Bassett described him as her 'life-boat' and her 'life coach' and of whom she said he was 'the only person I can trust to tell me the truth'.

Baron von Fries from the Netherlands, who settled in Vienna, became her most successful financial adviser. His innovations helped the Austrians to develop the most advanced economic policy. With the introduction of the 'Maria Theresa silver thaler' and freedom for it to be used beyond the borders of the Empire, Austria was able to acquire a vast amount of trade which led to Trieste becoming a most prosperous and diverse port. The coin, which became the forerunner of the U.S. dollar, continued to be in everyday use and the preferred currency in many countries in the Middle East and Africa and beyond, while continuing in name the legacy of Maria Theresa.

It is well known that Maria Theresa was not always tolerant of the Jews, of whom there were relatively few in Vienna in contrast to Prague, which had the largest long-established community. She wanted to expel them because of their collaboration with the Bavarians and Prussians, but did not succeed. They were ordered to leave Prague, but were allowed to settle beyond eight kilometres out of the city. However, after three years of lobbying she relented, allowing their return to Prague, which Richard Bassett illustrated with the coin minted by the Jews of Prague to commemorate the event with the Rabbi pledging their loyalty to her. He pointed out that although Maria Theresa's instinct was anti-semitic, she was not hostile to the Jews nor were

they persecuted under her. In 1771 a grant of privilege was made to the Jewish community in Trieste.

Richard Bassett had begun his lecture by saying it was quite a challenge to compress such a complex subject as to why Bohemia was critical to Maria Theresa into forty-five minutes. He concluded by affirming how her reforms and affection for her people has finally been recognised by the Czechs with the recent installation of the first public monument to her in Prague in Hradčany, symbolising her strength and simplicity. A variety of interesting questions followed; one was asked about road building and he pointed out that new roads were built and that she had introduced the planting of fruit trees along their sides providing fruit for the armies marching through Bohemia. This inspiring talk has greatly whetted one's appetite to know more about this remarkable woman.

Caroline Cannon-Brookes
Richard Bassett's latest book is Maria Theresa: Empress*, Yale University Press. The paperback will be available later in 2026.*
yalebooks.co.uk

Vltava Exhibition, The Riding Hall, Prague Castle

John Tusa

Sunday September 7. As we are on Castle Hill, it is easy to take in the new "Vltava Exhibition" in the grand Riding School space at the entrance to the Castle. Everyone "knows" the Vltava - of course. Smetana's music gives it recognition and an incredible musical identity. Both music and river flow irresistibly. When Annie and I drove from near its source in the south of Bohemia from the Monastery of Vyšší Brod in 1991, we agreed that the river gleamed, glinted and danced in the sun. It was joyous. The exhibition strikes a more complex note. It is as if it needs a case making for it, rehabilitation almost. Much talk of the Vltava's "flow", its purpose, its value, its importance. But it is a smallish river, often shallow, frequently obstructed by natural or man-made weirs. The Communists in particular tried to "make it useful" by building a dam. What it will never be is a significant economic highway though it has many useful purposes. It is as if the organisers feel they can help the Vltava by making it important. But the exhibition demonstrates something more precious. The Vltava is beautiful, it is a symbol, it is a representation of national identity. And the art in the exhibition shows that. (It is also temperamental and when it floods, it does so at scale). Fine panoramas of course. But some very fine paintings qua paintings. Viz: the best is Václav Špála, with some dramatic purple and deep green landscapes, not cosy; others catch the river at work or bordered by factories. The exhibition shows that the Vltava cannot be put into a single box - national symbol, channel of commerce or communication, economic hub, playground. It is all of these at times - when it chooses and when it permits. To the north the Vltava runs into the Elbe. No-one never wrote a musical masterpiece about the Elbe.
From John Tusa's diary. Sir John was in Prague for the opening of the Dvořák House in Nelahozeves.

Antony Gordon, a Friend, writes:
I just wanted to thank you for the article about the exhibition *Vltava; Famed and Flowing* (*Newsletter* Issue 33). On the strength of the piece, my wife and I booked a 3-night stay at the Charles Bridge Palace Hotel with a visit to the exhibition the main focus of our trip. It was a good decision! This was one of the best exhibitions I have seen anywhere: so carefully curated with much of interest to anyone with an interest in art, history, industrial heritage, and music. The thread of Smetana's *Má Vlast* weaved its way through the exhibition and it was abundantly clear why both the music and the river mean so much to the Czech people. There were so many superb paintings on show by artists I know already such as Schikaneder, Slavíček and Chittussi, but also many with whom I was not familiar including Mrkvička and Croll. And so many artefacts from music scores to models of dams, glassware to trade banners. The panels were so informative and well written (my only gripe is that there wasn't an English edition of the catalogue). I don't know how many visitors would have gone upstairs in the Riding School but we were very pleased we did. The display or artwork relating to the Vltava theme by young people was outstanding - clearly there are numerous talented youngsters with bright futures. Also upstairs was a fascinating film blending various performances of *Má Vlast* by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under various conductors over the past 60 odd years. It was an enriching experience.

Friends' Events

April 2026 - Czech Émigré Architects walking tour to be rescheduled for mid April. Details to be announced.

Czech Traitors and Treason - a Modern History by Prof. Mark Cornwall
13th October 2026 in the Czech Embassy.

Recordings of past Friends' talks are available on: www.czechfriends.net/friends-events/lecture-videos

Membership Information

Subscriptions will be devoted to the repair and conservation of specific projects in the Czech Republic. You may subscribe online here: **www.czechfriends.net/become-involved**

You will have advance notice of talks and events.
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Annual Rates

UK Residents: £25 single/£30 joint at same address/ £15 Students and OAPs. Non-UK Residents: £25 single, £30 joint/same address

Financial Matters

As detailed in the Chairman's report, since the last *Newsletter* we have been able to disburse the grant for the Neptune Fountain at Château of Stekník near Žatec and we have made a modest donation to the restoration of the doors of St Cajetan's Church on Nerudova in Prague. The total of these was £4,000.
As a result, our Sterling bank balance stood at just under £35,000, though as previously indicated, there will be a couple of more substantial grants to be made in 2026 which will have an impact on funds available.

Just to keep readers attuned to developments in the Czech economy, the 12-month inflation figure for October 2025 (average annual CPI) was 2.6%.

We have decided to hold membership subscriptions for 2026 at the same level as for previous years; this obviously makes no allowance for the effects of inflation, so we would ask members if they would consider topping up their subscription payments with a small donation. As they say: 'every little helps'!

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Write to the Editor

Please send your views and suggestions to the Editor by email to: **janasommerlad@hotmail.com**

Design and layout by Stephen Conlin
Published by The Friends of Czech Heritage
Corvara, Church Lane, Ripe, Lewes, East Sussex BN8 6AT
Email: **info@czechfriends.net**
© The Friends of Czech Heritage, 2026
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