



Patrons

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NEWSLETTER

The Friends of Czech Heritage

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Architect Kamil Roškot and the Royal Tombs of Bohemia

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Chairman's Report

At times of political and social stress, such as we seem to be entering, there is a perceived need to cling to certainties, which might help us to survive the events that are fracturing the stability we have become accustomed to.

Our response can take many forms. But trying to reach out to others in a way that promotes reconciliation is one of them. Without wishing to put too much moral weight on it, the voluntary giving of time and resources can have a transformative influence, which can bring people together and have a lasting impact. I myself have worked on many conservation projects, among them being abandoned canals, moribund narrow gauge railways and historic buildings. Many of these projects have had a transformative effect on the communities they serve and those who come into contact with them.

The Friends have also contributed to the process I have described and there is no doubt that over the past nineteen years or more we have been able to promote mutual good will by way of our activities.

Volunteering can be a glue that helps to bind communities, which has been borne out through long experience in the UK. It was this experience that prompted us to try out the same model in the Czech Republic and in 2011 to hold our first working party at Červený Dvůr. It was a leap of faith for Jiří Dvořáček, the Director of the hospital, and a learning experience for us all. There was some incredulity that we would want to pay to come from the UK and work for free. Why not just

The birth house of artist Jan Zrzavý



The Friends' working party at Teplice nad Metují in 2022

give us the money, some said? But it worked and many years later in 2024 the watchman's cottage, or 'Mauricovna', has been transformed from a ruin to a residence for patients' visitors. It now has a future, *see page 4*.

We have applied this model to good effect over the succeeding years and by the end of 2026 will have organised forty-five working parties totalling some eleven thousand man hours. There is also a financial gain, for the volunteers who are often highly motivated carry out tasks, some quite skilled, which would otherwise need a contractor.

This year we have three working parties. For the fourth year running we have been assisting at the Schindler factory at Brněnec and will return in August to the Church of the Virgin Mary at Teplice nad Metují. But perhaps more important is our first working party at Rataje nad Sázavou where we will be helping to restore the historic brewery for communal use. The small town, like others in the Czech Republic, is in decline with a dwindling population and services. We will join local volunteers and tradesmen on the first phase of the restoration, which we hope will contribute to a revival in the town's fortunes.

There are other ways of giving assistance, one being advocacy of projects where our support might help to nudge a positive outcome. Recently we have heard that the project to turn the birth house of artist Jan Zrzavý into a museum devoted to his work, which we gave a grant to, is now under the auspices of the Sheriff of the Vysočina Region, and the National Gallery in Prague will support the production of a book of his work in stage design.



Villa Král at Prachatice

The 'Night of Churches' at the end of May has become a spectacular annual event in the Czech calendar when churches are opened and can be accessed in the dark hours, often lit in a magical way. In 2018 we gave a grant towards repairing the roof of the near derelict Botschen Chapel at Libouchec in northern Bohemia. Now restored 'with the heart of the locals', as described by the leader of the project, it participates annually and this year offered a very rich musical programme on the night.

In a similar way we have been following the plight of the Modernist Villa Král at Prachatic, dating from 1931. This is used by a local community group whose presence has helped prevent its being demolished for a bypass, which will in any case probably never be constructed. We recently gave our support to the group's successful application for a renewal of their lease. Their determination is community action facing up to long term planning blight caused by administrative inertia. We hope they succeed in their quest.

I have previously mentioned our involvement in the restoration of the murals in the cloister at the

The Château of Šilheřovice



monastery at Bílá Hora outside Prague. The first phase of the work, which we have given a grant for, is now complete and the final touches are in progress. We therefore hope that shortly we will be able to add the dedication to the art historian Alastair Laing, former Head of Painting at the National Trust, whose family have helped to finance the project in his memory.

Work has also started on the restoration of the Bohumín Gate in the Château Park at Šilheřovice, once owned by the Rothschilds, which I mentioned in the previous *Newsletter*.

Another recent addition to our programme of grant aided projects is the Chapel of St Mary at Sonov in northern Bohemia. It dates from 1877 and is an attractive Neo-Gothic design unlike many of the ecclesiastical projects we have supported, which are generally from the Baroque period.



Chapel of St Mary at Sonov

We continue our programme of events with various outings and walks.

In April we had a very enjoyable but somewhat exhausting walk around London visiting buildings designed by Czech émigrés. These included the exquisite Bollinger jewellery gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum, designed by our patron Eva Jiříčná. This was followed by a tour of Lord's cricket ground to see Future Systems Media Centre, designed in 1999 by Jan Kaplický. We also took in the famous Long Room and the real tennis court followed by lunch in Lord's Tavern. Ironically the giant TV screen in the bar was loudly projecting football rather than cricket!

Suitably fortified we visited Eugene Rosenberg's tiled St Thomas' Hospital, which was probably



Kaplický's West India Quay Bridge in Canary Wharf

influenced by his early experience working on the General Pensions Institute building in Prague in the early 1930s. This was also tile-clad externally. From St Thomas' Hospital we went to Canary Wharf to view Kaplický's floating bridge from 1994. This is of particular importance as following its completion he went to Norman Foster's office where he worked on a competition for Tate Modern, which included a bridge over the Thames. Kaplický's structural solution was later adopted by Foster in 1996 for his own footbridge design.

Finally, we visited Rosenberg's office buildings in the City. It was a valiant outing ably led by Ivan Margolius.

Our summer outing to historic houses in Sussex in July will be followed by a guided walk in the City of London in the autumn on Thursday 17th September. Details are on our website.

In the autumn we look forward to another fascinating talk by one of our regular contributors, Prof. Mark Cornwall. This will take place in the Czech Embassy on Tuesday 20th October on the subject of Czech traitors and the meaning of Czech treason, *see page 17*.

So, another year is now well advanced.

We have recently heard of the death of Richard Phillips MBE, a classical music impresario, who was the founder of the Leamington Spa Music Festival championing Czech music. The Friends attended the Festival on a number of occasions with our campaign and always received a warm welcome from him. His presence will be sorely

missed and we extend our sympathies to Veronica, his wife.

We have also received news of the death of Peter Cannon-Brookes, who together with his wife Caroline, have been staunch supporters of The Friends from its inception. This is a great loss both for his family and The Friends and marks the end of an era. We extend our sympathy to Caroline and the family.

Peter Jamieson

Obituary **Peter Cannon-Brookes**



Peter was a large figure in many ways and had an illustrious career in the world of fine art. He held numerous posts including at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and at the National Museum of Wales, and was a member of the International Committee for Conservation and a Fellow of the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. He also founded the journal *Museum Management and Curatorship*.

Peter, an expert on Czech sculpture, published numerous books, lectured widely and collaborated with his wife Caroline on many occasions. Together they developed a wide-ranging interest in Czech art and architecture, particularly sculpture.

They have both written for The Friends' *Newsletter* and given us many scholarly lectures. They contributed to the catalogue of the exhibition *Czech Routes to Britain* and in 2021 Peter received an Honorary Silver Medal of Jan Masaryk presented to him by the Czech Ambassador in London.

Peter Jamieson

The Mauricovna Has a New Lease of Life

Jiří Dvořáček

The ruinous cottage in the grounds of the Château of Červený Dvůr, the Schwarzenbergs' former summer residence, was The Friends' first and continuous volunteering project. Fifteen years on, now fully restored, the Mauricovna has found a new purpose

Since the fall of communism in the Czech Republic we have grown used to a landscape dotted with the crumbling remains of previous settlements. This has been especially true in the borderlands and across the countryside at former aristocratic estates - places full of ruined walls that nature, often quite successfully, was claiming back. In the borderlands this was as a result of the post-war expulsion of the German population. Everywhere else across the republic, it was due to 'new aesthetics' where aristocratic and religious buildings simply didn't reflect the vision of a proper socialist landscape (and also because they were nationalised, but the state had no interest in maintaining them). Over time, we just became blind to it.

A similar fate was meant for Mauricovna, a ruin overgrown with brush at the far end of the Červený Dvůr château park. (To be more precise, the same future was awaiting the Château of Červený Dvůr itself, but that's another story). The Mauricovna, originally the park keeper's house, is now along with the entire park a protected cultural monument. While we always wanted, and have been trying for years, to restore the park to its former glory, we had essentially given up on saving the disappearing remnants of this once-charming cottage. "It's not worth it," we thought. We expected time to eventually make it disappear.

I haven't mentioned who 'we' are. We are a psychiatric hospital for treating addiction. We are a facility where people struggling with various types of addiction can stop their downward spiral, take a breath, and start building an independent, healthy, and meaningful life. Our 'non-institutional' setting - a heritage site surrounded by precious nature - is a powerful ally in that process.

Then, the people from The Friends appeared. Energetic, proactive, and incredibly inquisitive. We were collaborating on some projects inside the château at the time, and even though they had almost no free time (I swear we never forced them



The Mauricovna emerges from the initial cleaning in 2011

to work from dawn till dusk, but they did it anyway, and for no pay), they scouted out the ruins of Mauricovna. I don't know how long they spent visualising a possible future for the ruin during their walks in the park, but one day they began relentlessly 'planting the seed' of the Mauricovna in our heads. That was The Friends' first major intervention in its fate.

The second intervention - the one that committed us to taking action - was their hard work during their working holidays. Since they had already poured so much time and energy into it, we simply had to keep going. Some of the work was done together with The Friends, while other major structural phases were handed over to professional



The Mauricovna was reroofed and internally reconfigured



Above, volunteers working on the Mauricovna in 2015; below, a local Czech contractor (centre) with British volunteers in 2016



construction companies. Every summer The Friends continued with their voluntary labour, but by then we had long shared a common vision: we weren't reconstructing just a historic building, but a living home.

We wanted the resurrected house to be a place for family therapy - a place to house the families of our patients when they come to join the treatment process. Addiction affects the entire family system, and at the right moment it is vital to invite partners or parents into the therapy. You have to imagine that they are often talking together about the problem for the first time since the patient has left the 'drug or addiction career'. These relationships are full of tension, resentment and often guilt. Such therapy is incredibly demanding and fragile. A pleasant environment and the privacy of an intimate space are crucial. Additionally, the Mauricovna was to serve former patients who are successfully abstaining and return for a short stay

to reconnect with the programme. We also considered offering accommodation to the public should the Mauricovna failed to be used full-time, but it has not been necessary.

As soon as the construction was finished (The Friends, fittingly, handled the symbolic final strokes of the paintbrush), the Mauricovna immediately took on a life of its own. It was instantly filled with people attending our therapeutic programme, and for several years now, it has been almost constantly occupied. It is a completely new element of our treatment programme. Staying at Červený Dvůr suddenly has an extra dimension. People are in a beautiful, dignified environment and certainly don't feel like 'patients' in a psychiatric institution. This setting has significantly raised the level of respect our clients feel they are receiving. Their daytime programme is inevitably demanding, but in the evening and at night they are just people in an agreeable apartment in the grounds of an old château. It's like being on holiday; deep in the woods and the morning sun shines brighter and kinder than in the main part of the hospital. An environment like this definitely makes the desire to harmonise one's life much easier to find.

I have been part of the collaboration with The Friends from the very beginning. I know for a fact that without their sheer persistence, the Mauricovna wouldn't be standing. And without it, we wouldn't have this environment that contributes and helps so many people to change their lives. The Friends' legacy is hard to quantify, but it will certainly endure. For all of that, we thank them.

Dr Jiří Dvořáček *is the director of the Červený Dvůr Psychiatric Hospital*

The Mauricovna upon completion in November 2023



Newly Published Database of RIBA Archive Fund in London – Refugee Committee Papers 1939-1941

Dr Irena Žantovská Murray HonFRIBA

In recent years, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has been conducting research into one of the many unprocessed archives in its collections, which together number almost five million books, journals, archival holdings, photographs, plans, historical models of buildings, works of art and curiosities. As Director of RIBA Library and Collections from 2004 to 2014, I had the unique opportunity to learn about and work with at least a fraction of this vast treasury of materials that serve many different purposes. As a RIBA Research Fellow, I later had the opportunity to participate in a project processing the holdings of architects from Central Europe who sought refuge in Great Britain after the outbreak of the Second World War.

The RIBA Refugee Commission Archive was established in 1939–1941 as a documentary fund generated by the activities of a committee whose secretary was a young left-wing architect and RIBA librarian, Edward “Bobby” Carter. The Commission was established on 1st January 1939 and had a dual purpose. On the one hand, to register and help endangered architects from Central Europe to obtain residence permits in the form of work visas and on the other hand, to ensure that this was not done at the expense of RIBA members, i.e. British architects. Between 1939 and 1941, the Commission received requests for assistance from approximately 200 Central European architects, mostly directly, or through organizations that were involved in helping refugees, mainly from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The committee worked closely with, for example, the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (later the Czechoslovak Refugee Trust Fund), and in cases of positive processing of the application, prepared all the necessary documentation for the approval process of the Home Office (British Ministry of the Interior). Unfortunately, the period of systematic work on rescuing endangered architects was relatively short, only eight months. From 3rd September 1939, when the British government declared war on Nazi Germany, the committee met irregularly, although, also with the

help of the Architectural Association committee, it tried to continue to record the applications and needs of architects until its demise in 1941.

During the initial search, I was surprised by how large the group I was working on was, which declared its affiliation with the First Republic of Czechoslovakia – 70 people*, more than a third of the applicants. Later research revealed that this was the case for a variety of reasons, but out of respect for the original documentation, we have preserved this information in the resulting database. The research, led by architect and historian Valeria Carullo, curator of photographic collections at the RIBA, lasted over five years. In the final phase, technical experts participated, who created an interactive research database and helped to insert most of the original materials into it. These are digitized documents – copies of individual applications, photographs or building plans or other visuals sent as illustrations of the architect's work – publications, war correspondence, records of RRC (Refugee Committee) meetings and information from research on individual architects, which was summarised in a brief introductory profile. Unfortunately, a number of documents were not preserved due to the forwarding of files between collaborating organisations and government institutions, but despite this, it was finally possible to identify all 200 names on the RIBA list.

The freely accessible database, which can be found at www.ribacollectionsrrc.com, was preliminarily presented at the Villa Tugendhat on 12th December 2025 and officially published on 10th January 2026 at the Wiener Holocaust Library in London. The database is currently being gradually supplemented with newly acquired information and bibliographic data and includes a contact page where users can send corrections or additions. We are continuing the research for the purpose of a future publication and exhibition. For more information regarding specifically Czechoslovak architects, you can also contact me personally.

Dr Irena Žantovská Murray HonFRIBA
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** Ernst Wiesner was one of the Czech architects who found asylum in the UK. He returned to Brno after the war but with the arrival of communism he returned to Liverpool where he died in 1971. His grave was recently discovered in Allerton Cemetery, Liverpool, by the manager of the Villa*



Stiassni. Following renovation paid for by the Region of South Moravia and by public collection, it includes stones from his most famous buildings in Brno, seen to the right of the main stone, above, including the Villa Stiassni, where The Friends held a working party in 2017.

‘I Served the King of England’

Bohumil Hrabal’s summer cottage in Kersko added to the list of national cultural monuments

Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997) is one of the most recognised Czech writers whose books have been translated into thirty languages and adapted for more than a dozen films. A large part of Hrabal’s work is directly connected with his small summer house in Kersko and its surroundings by the River Elbe/Labe 30 km/18.6 miles north-east of Prague. He bought the summer house in 1965 as a summer retreat where he then spent decades

Bohumil Hrabal’s summer cottage viewed from the garden



writing and escaping the city as well as entertaining his friends and feeding stray cats. His neighbours in the summer houses community of Kersko, and the local landscape, often feature in his stories and some of the films are based on them.

Hrabal died in 1997 and his cottage ended in the hands of one of his neighbours. In 2021 it was put up for sale at 12 million Czech Crowns and was relatively quickly bought for the nation by the Ministry of Culture. It is now owned by the Central Bohemian Region and managed by the Polabí (‘along the Labe/Elbe’) Museum. The building was renovated and opened to the public in 2024 as a small museum devoted to the life and work of Bohumil Hrabal, with many original features, personal possessions and artefacts.

Hrabal’s writing inspired some of the most famous films in the Czech cinema and the Czechoslovak New Wave. *Closely Observed Trains*, directed by one of his friends, Jiří Menzel, received an Academy Award in 1968. Jiří Menzel adapted for film a number of other stories by Hrabal, some set in Kersko, including *Larks on a String* (1969) and *The Snowdrop Festival* filmed in Kersko, all very popular at the time.

Milan Kundera, another well known Czech writer, described Hrabal as ‘the incarnation of magic Prague, a union of earthly humour and Baroque imagination’.

Jana Sommerlad

Villa Rothmayer Garden

Now Open to the Public

Situated in Prague 6-Břevnov, this relatively modest house of 1928-29 was always intended to be a creative space where the architect Otto Rothmayer and his wife, the textile designer Božena Rothmayerová, could live and work.

Rothmayer was a pupil of Josip Plečnik (1872-1957), and the Slovene architect's own villa in Ljubljana is imprinted on this building: the principal feature of the garden elevation is the substantial cylindrical staircase that rises from the basement through the two main floors and terminates as part of the access to a roof terrace. Rothmayer makes two chimneys, either side of the door onto the roof, into a ‘portal’.



The Villa Rothmayer from the garden side, showing the dominant cylindrical staircase and the dark-painted pergola

Both men had worked on the redevelopment of Prague Castle for decades (Plečnik from 1920) and shared an approach to making buildings function better, while using historical forms and motifs. After 1951 Rothmayer withdrew from teaching and from his work at Prague Castle: he was unable to reconcile his outlook with the new communist regime. Rothmayer lived until 1966, Božena Rothmayerová until 1984.

The garden, developed from plain ground after 1929, is not large but has a striking atmosphere as a result of objects and features that interact with the house, its attached pergola, and the vegetation. The garden became famous through photographs taken by Josef Sudek, one of the Rothmayers' circle of friends and collaborators.

Thanks to the descendants of Rothmayer the house and contents have been preserved *in situ* as a time capsule, and are available for small groups to visit (online booking and payment); the garden is free to visit during house opening hours.

www.muzeumprahy.cz

Tuesday, Saturday, Sunday 10am - 4pm

Thursday 12pm - 6pm (April to October)

Tours every 2 hours

Stephen Conlin

Tom Karen, the Forgotten Czech Design Hero

Ivan Margolius

To my shame, when we were compiling with Jan Kaplický our book *Czech Inspiration* (Fraktály, 2005), which celebrated the Czech design achievements throughout the world, we missed including Tom Karen. Perhaps it was because his name was hiding behind that of his practice, being synonymous with Ogle Design. It was only in the last five years that his design contributions were publicly revealed, helped by his autobiography, *Toymaker: My Journey from War to Wonder* (535, 2020).

Tom Karen OBE (1926-2022) was one of the talented Czechoslovak generation born between the wars, escaping Nazism, which came to Britain and made a real contribution in their adopted country joining such personalities as Alf Dubs, Eugene Rosenberg, Karel Reisz, Herbert Lom, Ernest Gellner, Franta Bělský, Tom Stoppard, John Tusa and others.

He was born in Vienna in 1926 as Tom Kohn, but his home was in Brno. Tom's father was businessman Pavel Kohn (1889-1961). In 1881, in Brno-Bohunice, Pavel's grandfather, Gottlieb Kohn, registered a brick manufacturing factory called Gottlieb Kohn & Sohn, which in the 1930s had over 500 employees and so the Kohn family was well provided for.

Tom's mother was Margarethe Szabo-Ferraris (1903-1986), a pioneer of women's flying, one of the most successful pilots at the time, the holder of the Czech first-ever women's aviation record, and the owner, together with her husband Pavel, of several aeroplanes. Her father was Arthur von Ferraris, a well-regarded Viennese society portrait painter.

With the Third Reich's final invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the family drove to Prague in their big Hispano Suiza car. However, Pavel was arrested by the Gestapo and after his release, he escaped to Poland and came to the UK via Sweden. Tom, with his siblings, was sent to Belgium first, with Margarethe following later.

Then they had to flee again, this time to the south of France. In June 1942 they travelled through Spain to Lisbon, from where they managed to fly out to safety in a DC-2 to touch down at



Left, the Aston Martin DBS V8 Sotheby Special promotion car, 1971



Right, Bond Bug three-wheeler, 1970

Whitchurch Airport in Bristol. They travelled to London to reunite with Pavel. Tom was sixteen years old.

In the autumn he signed up to study aeronautical engineering at Loughborough College, finishing with a diploma in 1945. He found employment at Hunting Percival in Luton but soon realized that aircraft structure calculations were not his forte. At that time, in 1948, he obtained British citizenship and chose to change to the less-sounding Jewish surname Karen.

His next job was as a technical illustrator at the Air Registration Board based at Croydon Airport. While at Croydon between 1950 and 1954, he started to design in his spare time, creating a three-wheel vehicle called Vimp, which got illustrated in several magazines.

Still not satisfied with his hitherto career, he decided to become an industrial designer, a new vocation at that time but becoming popular. Tom enrolled as a mature student at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1955. Then, before completing the course, Tom got recruited into Ford Design Studio in Dagenham, where he helped to design car interiors, including a proposal for the Ford Anglia 105E bonnet badge.

In 1959 he finally found the right position, becoming an employee at the dynamic David Ogle design consultancy in Stevenage, founded in 1954, working on design proposals for a cooker, a boat, a bicycle, and a bath. Following this beginning, Tom was enticed to work for Hotpoint and then for Philips, creating award-winning designs and thus achieving wide appreciation for his abilities. In May 1962 David Ogle died in a motor accident, and Karen was recalled back to Ogle, then based in Letchworth, and invited to become chief designer and managing director of Ogle Design. This became his last tenure until Tom retired in 1999.

Karen's long design involvement at Ogle was very

fruitful and impressive. He was leading the designs which became the 70s icons such as the Reliant Scimitar GTE car, the Aston Martin Sotheby Special car, the Bond Bug three-wheeler car, the Raleigh Chopper bicycle, the Landspeeder anti-gravity craft for the *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* film, the truck cabs for Leyland, the Bush T130 radio, the Marble Run toy for Kiddicraft, the crash test dummies for MIRA, the Range Rover Popemobiles, and many more admired and treasured objects and toys.

In 2022, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation staged an exhibition of Karen's works. Karen's design drawings are lodged in the Victoria & Albert Museum archive.

Sir Jony Ive, who developed the iPhone, MacBook, iPad and iPod, was greatly inspired by Karen: "Tom was a wonderfully insightful designer who gave his time generously... showing me around his design company Ogle when I was a young boy... His practice was optimistic and conspicuously responsible. He perfectly embodied the ideals and values of a generation of designers that took the responsibility of their profession seriously".

See also: <https://tomkarendesigner.co.uk>

Ivan Margolius is an architect and writer

Tom Karen with the Raleigh Chopper bicycle, 1968



Czech Architecture Greats

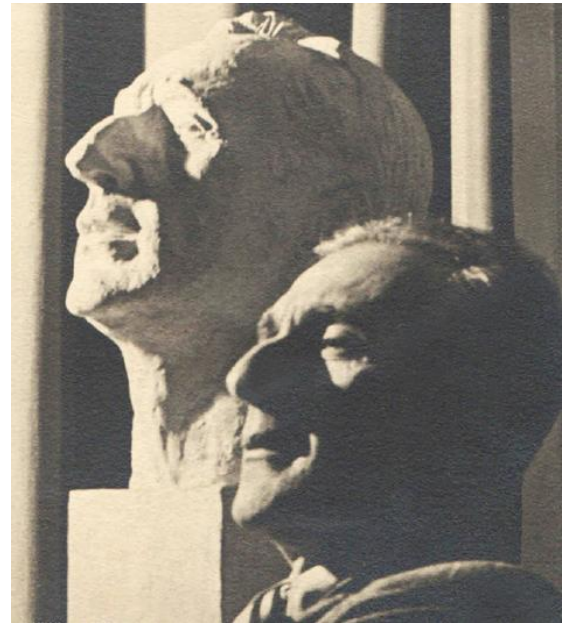
Architect Kamil Roškot (1886-1945) and the Royal Tomb in Prague's Cathedral

Vladimír Šlapeta

In 1934, shortly after the death of Kamil Hilbert, who had been in charge of the Neo-Gothic completion of St Vitus' Cathedral in Prague, work on the royal tomb in the cathedral's crypt was entrusted to the architect Kamil Roškot. He embraced the noble but difficult task with an original, modern approach, creating a miniature yet monumental space that perfectly complemented Josip Plečnik's grand renovations at Prague Castle in the cathedral's immediate vicinity.

Josip Plečnik viewed the first months in the newly established Czechoslovak Republic with a significant dose of skepticism. "Domestic developments do not promise much... If we must drink from the chalice of bitterness down to the bottom, then let us not be afraid of the last drop," he wrote to his close friend Jan Kotěra on 1st January 1920, reflecting on the secularisation of society and the radical turn away from the conditions prior to WW1, which resulted in fierce public criticism of Kotěra and his peers. The atmosphere of religiosity was now being replaced by a new spirit, an adoration of American mechanical civilisation, German New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), and the French and Soviet avant-garde. Sepulchral architecture and other monumental themes, which had previously dominated Plečnik's teaching, were diminishing in importance.

The new spirit similarly dominated Kotěra's School of Architecture, Prague Academy, which was located on the top floor of his villa in Prague-Vinohrady in the immediate vicinity of Plečnik's home. The post-war generation of students, some with bitter wartime experiences, were drawn to the idea of the house as a machine for living, to standardisation, constructivism, and the new urbanism. One student, however, differed from the others. "A philosopher has joined us," Kotěra introduced the new student, Kamil Roškot (1886–1945). He was different in almost every way: in age, outlook, and family background. Nearly a decade older than his classmates, from the respected family



Roškot poses with a bust made by Otakar Španiel for his fiftieth birthday in 1936

of the notary Antonín Roškot in Vlašim, Kamil was also an accomplished draftsman. He had a bachelor's degree in construction from the German technical school (*Technische Hochschule*), had taken courses in philosophy at Charles University, and had attended private painting lessons given by Max Švabinský. He spoke six languages, including classical Greek, and had spent nearly the entire war on the Russian front. Roškot's mother Alexandra was a cousin of the later president Emil Hácha, who under the old regime had been a member of the Royal and Imperial Supreme Administrative Court in Vienna, where he often visited his uncle before the war. He graduated from the Academy in 1922 aged 36 and just two years later was elected a member of the prominent Mánes Association of Fine Artists. In 1928 he headed the newly founded Association of Academic Architects and remained its chairman until his death. He could rightfully hold this position thanks to his body of work, in which he had managed to recast the traditional principles of architecture into a succinct, modern visual language characterised by a mastery of composition, a sense for the monumental, and a sensitive gradation of scale that produced buildings which resonated with their urban context. His designs won many awards, but the architect's grand visions often failed to win over the potential clients and remained only on paper.

Kamil Roškot did not subscribe to the communist tendencies of the Left Front and its leading theorist Karel Teige, who simply ignored him. On the other hand, he acted as a link between the two

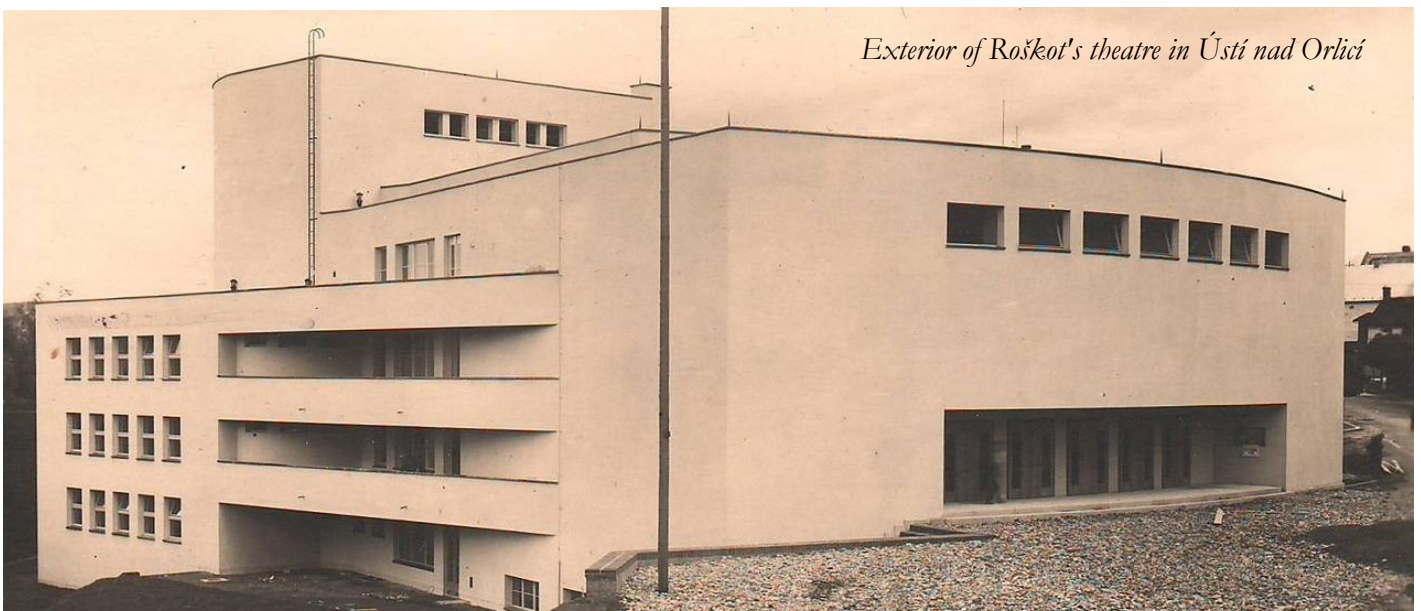
generations of Kotěra's students – the pre-war generation of Cubists led by Josef Gočár and Pavel Janák, and the post-war Functionalist generation headed by his younger classmates Jaromír Krejcar and Bohuslav Fuchs. However, he continued to admire and respect his teacher Jan Kotěra and his friend Josip Plečnik.

Roškot's two most beautiful projects were realized with the support and goodwill of Plečnik's friend Josef Cibulka, a priest and professor of liturgical art at the Theological Faculty of Charles University. Cibulka first recommended Roškot as architect in 1930 for the design of a theatre in his hometown of Ústí nad Orlicí, opened in 1936. Here, into a steep slope below the local church, Roškot placed the conical segment of the vestibule and auditorium, extended by the rounded tambour of the stage tower. This sculptural building is then lined by elegant horizontal galleries on both main sides. With this theatre, Roškot built his first masterpiece.

Professor Josef Cibulka was also an influential member of the Union for the Completion of St Vitus' Cathedral, which oversaw the task of completing the church in time for the St Wenceslaus millennium in 1929. The work under the guidance of architect Kamil Hilbert involved extensive archeological research that led to the opening of the royal tomb which had been established beneath the Colin mausoleum in the late 16th century. It was found to be in a sorry state. In February 1929, Kamil Hilbert designed a provisional renovation of the tomb and its main entry wall using red Nučice sandstone and a bronze grille decorated with the Czech state emblem.

Toward the end of Hilbert's life, he also had paving stones laid in the tomb and a pedestal built for the royal sarcophagi. Following his death in the summer of 1933, the Union decided in early 1934, thanks mainly to Prof. Josef Cibulka, to entrust the task of renovating the tomb's interior and its sarcophagi directly to Kamil Roškot. Roškot kept Hilbert's renovation of the western entry wall, although he did replace the floor tiles with an original geometric *pavimento* and gave the entire space a uniform, modern, refined and stately appearance.

The single-chambered, barrel-vaulted tomb measures 9.29 × 5.2 meters. Into this space, Roškot placed three rows of sarcophagi containing the remains of several Kings of Bohemia. Holding a central position, slightly set back, is the sarcophagus of the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia Charles IV. Seen from the front, the sarcophagus to his left contains the remains of King Ladislaus the Posthumous, with King George of Poděbrady to Charles's right. Behind them, the four wives of Charles IV (Blanche of Valois, Anne of Bavaria, Anna von Schweidnitz, and Elizabeth of Pomerania) lie in one sarcophagus on the left, and King Wenceslaus IV and his first wife Joanna of Bavaria rest in a sarcophagus on the right. At the rear of the tomb, we find Charles IV's son John of Görlitz on the left, the Baroque sarcophagus of Emperor Rudolph II in the middle behind Charles IV, and the Neoclassical pewter coffin of Maria Amalia, Duchess of Parma (a daughter of Maria Theresa) on the right. Two smaller grave markers are located off the main axes: a low rectangular slab between John of Görlitz and Rudolph II marks the



Exterior of Roškot's theatre in Ústí nad Orlicí



The Bohemian royal tombs in the crypt of St Vitus' Cathedral, Prague. Emperor Rudolf II's sarcophagus is against the rear wall on the left

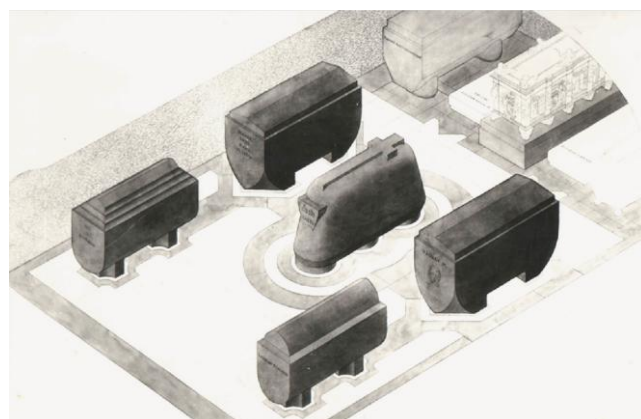
grave of Charles IV's first-born son Wenceslaus (who died in infancy) and the remains of several of his other non-adult children, and between Rudolph II and Maria Amalia is a low slab marking the remains of three other Habsburgs – Rudolph of Habsburg (King Rudolph I of Bohemia), Rudolph II Duke of Austria, and the sister of Emperor Rudolph II, Eleanor.

The entire composition is dominated by the central bronze sarcophagus of Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia Charles IV - shaped as a military helmet, it creates a scene resembling a ceremonial "ride of kings" led by the *Pater Patriae* (the nickname of Emperor Charles IV). The sarcophagi of George of Poděbrady and Ladislaus the Posthumous that flank him at the head of this procession are made of French bronze, while the sarcophagi of Charles IV's wives and Wenceslaus IV are made of Todice syenite and that of John of Görlitz is made of Silesian granite. The two small grave stones, in the middle axis, are made of Liberec granite. The *pavimento* floor tiles – a combination of light and reddish-brown marble – are placed in semi-circular formations around the sarcophagus of Charles IV in order to emphasise his exceptional status in the royal "equestrian

entourage," while hexagonally laid tiles outline the positions of his "fellow riders." Each sarcophagus was designed individually. The metal relief ornaments are by the sculptor Ladislav Kofránek.

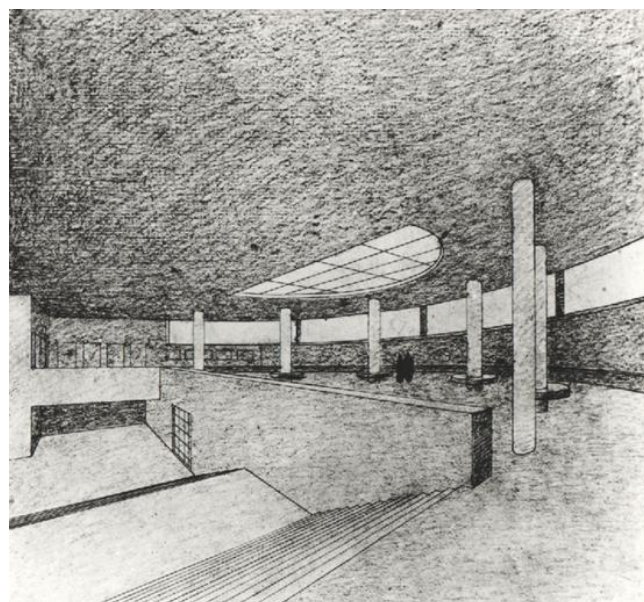
The crypt's walls and vaulted ceiling are uniformly covered in a shimmering golden glass mosaic. While it was an essentially minimalist architectural undertaking, Kamil Roškot succeeded in creating a monumental and sublime impression befitting of

Roškot's drawing of the layout of the Bohemian royal tombs in the crypt of St Vitus' Cathedral, Prague, with the sarcophagus of Emperor Charles IV in the centre



the dignity and historical significance of the Kings of Bohemia. With the Royal Tomb, he thus created a unique complement to the extensive renovations of Prague Castle begun just a short time before by Josip Plečnik, whom Roškot held in high regard. The Royal Crypt was ceremonially consecrated on 2nd November 1935 by Archbishop of Prague Karel Kašpar. Kamil Roškot continued to devote himself to sepulchral architecture with great enthusiasm. For him as for Josip Plečnik, there was no such thing as a small task in architecture.

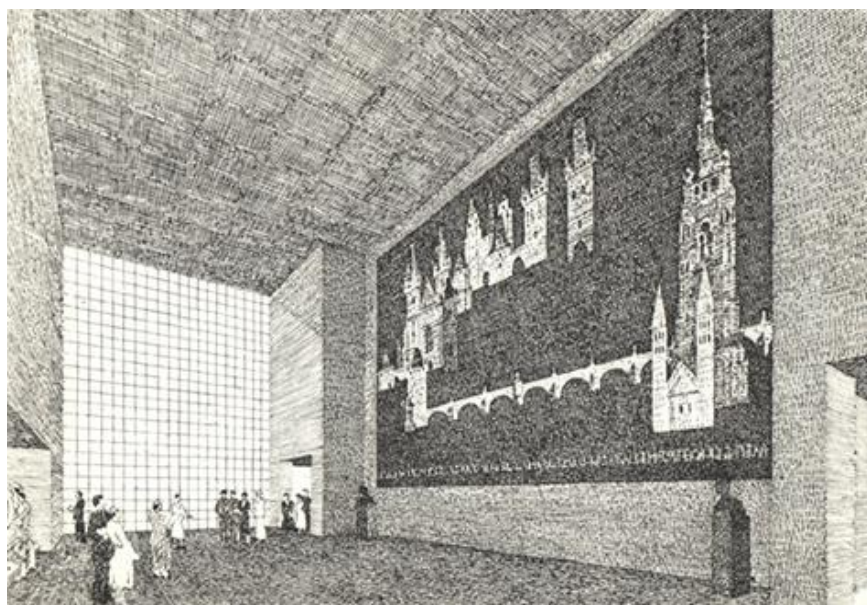
Kamil Roškot's third and final masterpiece was the Czechoslovak Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. It was not his first such commission, for he had built three other pavilions since the second half of the 1920s: the Czechoslovak pavilion for a trade fair in Milan (1927–1928), the Pavilion of the City of Prague for the Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Brno (1927–1928), and the Czechoslovak Pavilion at the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in 1933. In the spring of 1938 he won the competition for the Czechoslovak Pavilion in New York. The project was realized under very dramatic circumstances: first, following the signing of the Munich Agreement on 30th September 1938, Czechoslovakia lost large



portions of its border regions, and the construction budget and exhibition programme were greatly reduced. When the German Wehrmacht occupied the rest of the country on 15th March 1939, the pavilion was completed only thanks to support from Czechs and Slovaks living in the United

Roškot's Czechoslovak Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939: above, an interior space, below the main façade





A hall in the Czechoslovak Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939

States, and not until a month after the exhibition's opening, by which time the Czechoslovak Republic had ceased to exist. Throughout the exhibition, the Czechoslovak flag in front of the pavilion flew at half-mast. Neither the official catalogue nor any architecture magazines mentioned Roškot's pavilion, which ended up acting as a symbolic "gravestone" of the young state that Hitler had erased from the map of the world. The building nevertheless aroused a significant amount of attention.*

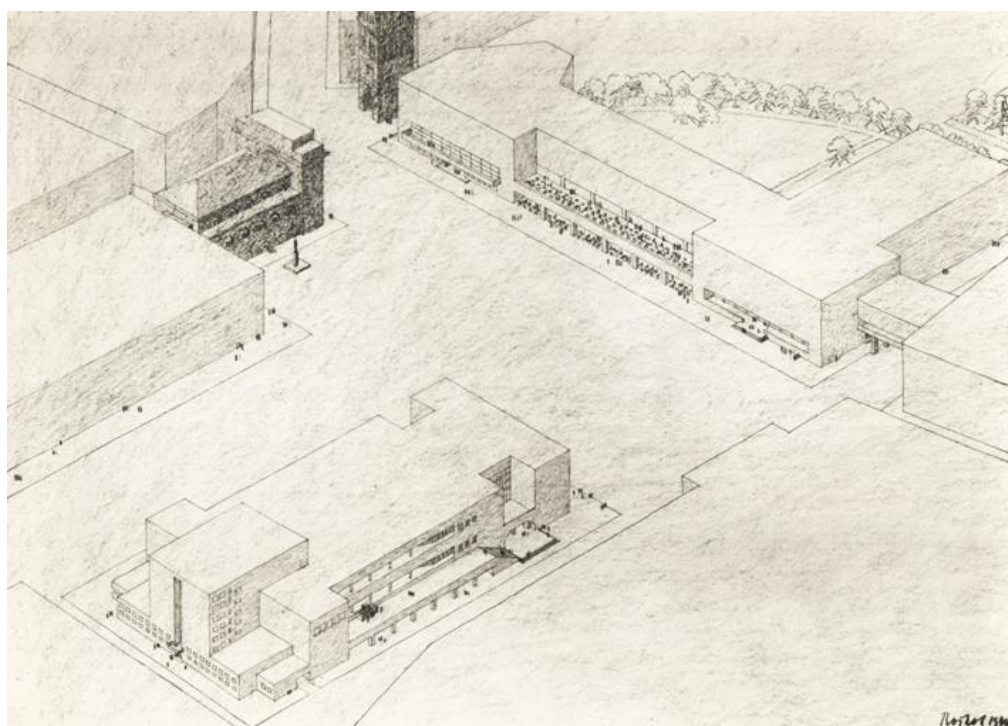
During and immediately after the WW2, Kamil Roškot fully tasted the "chalice of bitterness"

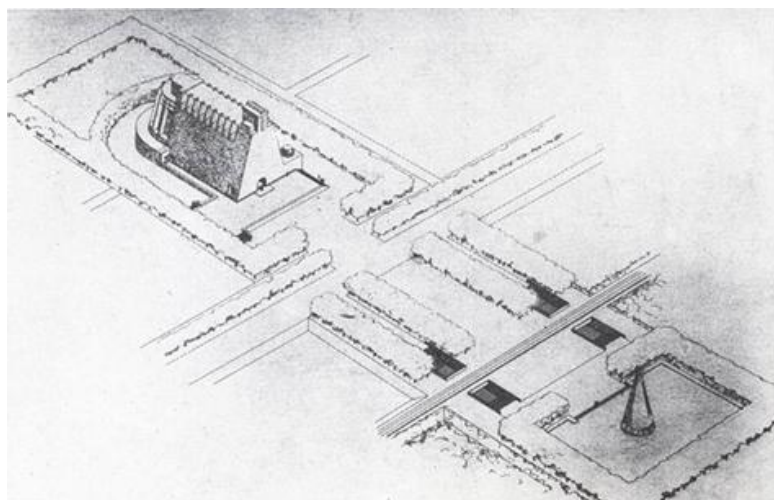
**The quote by philosopher and pedagogue Jan Amos Comenius written in English on the main elevation of the Czechoslovak Pavilion ("After the tempest of wrath has past, the rule of thy country will return to thee, O Czech people") was used by Tomáš G. Masaryk in his inaugural address upon being elected president in December 1918, and again on 1st January 1990 by Václav Havel in his presidential inaugural address*

mentioned by Josip Plečnik in his letter to Jan Kotěra. He remained faithful to his uncle Emil Hácha, who had taken on the thankless role of president of the Protectorate and, with it responsibility for preserving the nation's bare survival. Roškot frequently visited Hácha at Prague Castle and at Lány Château (which had been converted into the presidential residence by none other than Plečnik) and acted as an intermediary for secret information about the domestic resistance. He was also busy designing a church and a memorial to Tomáš Baťa in Zlín and toward the end of the war took an interest in urban projects, including a development plan for his hometown of Vlašim, and designs for

public buildings along the arterial road (today's "magistrála") then being planned in Prague. He also drafted plans for a monumental opera and concert hall on the Square of the Republic (Náměstí Republiky). Emil Hácha ultimately could not withstand the constant pressures of the German occupational authorities and suffered a mental and physical collapse. After liberation in May 1945, he was taken from Lány to Pankrác

Roškot also drafted plans for a monumental opera and concert hall on the Square of the Republic (Náměstí Republiky) in Prague. Top centre is site of the Municipal House/ Obecní dům, next to the medieval Powder Tower/ Prašná brána





Above, Roškot's design for a Roman Catholic church (top left) and Bat'a Memorial (lower right) in Zlín, first variant 1941

York's Sword of State

Stephen Conlin

Visitors to York's Mansion House have the chance to see many objects associated with the city's rich history. When a volunteer guide points to a display cabinet and says, "...and here is the sword of the King of Bohemia", it immediately draws the attention of anyone with an interest in the Czech lands. Which King, and why should such an object be here?

The role of the York's Sword of State goes back to 1389 when Richard II and his court moved to York to avoid plague conditions in London. Richard II's Queen Consort, Anne of Bohemia (1366-94), would have accompanied the King to York.

In recognition of this time as the temporary capital, the King granted the title of 'Lord Mayor' and the privilege of carrying the sword with the point uppermost, except in the presence of the Sovereign. This honour has been celebrated in civic ceremonies from then on, and it helped York's claim to be the long-term 'capital of the North'. At some stage in the first four decades of the fifteenth century the original sword was lost and a substitute had to be found.

Meanwhile an event of international significance had occurred in May 1416 when, in the aftermath of the Battle of Agincourt, Sigismund of Luxembourg and his retinue came to London to secure peace between France and England. His status at the time was King of Hungary and Croatia through his marriage to Queen Mary of Hungary; he had already been elected King of the Romans in 1410. His sister, Anne of Bohemia, Queen Consort of England, had been dead for over two decades. He was to succeed to the throne of Bohemia in 1419 upon the death of his half-brother Wenceslaus IV.

King Henry V made him welcome and lodged him in Westminster Palace, while Henry's court removed itself to Lambeth Palace. On 7th May Sigismund was installed as a Knight of the Garter in St George's Chapel in Windsor. Part of the ritual involved the placing of a ceremonial sword along with the banner, helm and crest of the Knight in his allotted stall, where a plate would be placed as a permanent reminder of election to the Order.

When Sigismund died in 1437 he was King of

Prison, where he died on 27th June. By this time, Roškot's health was also declining – he had been a heavy smoker all his life and the tragic fate of his beloved uncle weighed heavily on him. In June 1945, he was flown by special military transport to Paris for brain surgery, but did not survive the operation and died on 12th July 1945.

While described by French critic Michel Ragon as "the Czech Le Corbusier", the communist regime had little regard for Roškot's architecture. Moreover, the shadow of his uncle cast a dark shadow over his legacy. In 1978 he was remembered in an exhibition in Olomouc, which subsequently travelled to the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, the Museum of Finnish Architecture in Helsinki, the Vienna Künstlerhaus, ETH in Zürich, Budapest, Ljubljana, Belgrade and Zagreb. *Sub specie aeternitatis (in the sight of eternity)*, the message conveyed by Kamil Roškot's life and work – as reflected by his uncompromising beliefs, his solid architectural forms characterized by a remarkably forceful contrast between the monumental and the intimate, and the spiritual dimension of his work – has lost none of its relevance even in today's digital era of the third millennium.

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 ULA Jean Tschumi Prize in Copenhagen



Left, York's Sword of State on display in the Mansion House, York. Right, the symbol of the Societas Draconica, a chivalric order founded by Sigismund and his spouse



(most likely it represents St George and the dragon). This example is described by Historic Royal Palaces as 'Probably Austrian or Hungarian 1410-1440'.

The main aim of the *Societas Draconica* was to counter the growing threat of Ottoman expansion, but it also targeted pagans, those under Orthodox rulers, and anyone designated by the Roman Church as a heretic. The Order's own ceremonial sword survives and is on view in the Neue Burg in Vienna, dated *circa* 1433, and described as 'North Italian'.

When considering other medieval Anglo-Bohemian connections, it is well known that the Reformist thinker from Oxford, John Wycliffe, strongly influenced Jan Hus' beliefs. English followers were known as Lollards, and Richard II failed to suppress them outright.

During the Council of Constance, convened by Sigismund, the hard line from Rome saw Jan Hus being imprisoned from December 1414 in a Dominican monastery on Lake Constance until June 1415 - in spite of the safe passage given by Sigismund. In July 1415 Hus was burned at the stake as a heretic. This event and the burning of Jerome of Prague the following year radicalised Hus' supporters.

The Lollards' Tower in Lambeth Palace on the Thames still bears the name of these religious dissidents, said by tradition to have been imprisoned there in the mid-15th century. Several Lollards were burnt at the stake. As in the Czech lands, the teachings of Wycliffe survived in spite of their attempted eradication, and were in the end absorbed into the English Reformation from 1530s onwards.

Stephen Conlin

- *Swords With A Story* by A. L. Laishley
 - *The City's Shield of Arms* by H. Murray in *York Historian* Volume 5 1984
 - Euan C. Roger, Royal Holloway, University of London
<https://www.stgeorges-windsor.org/charming-the-emperor/>

Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor. After his death the Knight's regalia other than the plate were removed. It is recorded that two years later Henry Hanslap, Canon of Windsor and Rector of Middleton in North Yorkshire, presented the sword to the City of York.

Today the sword bears a worn and somewhat crude inscription in which the words *SIGISMUND* and *IMPERAT* can be read, with the Royal Arms of England and those of the City of York. Since Sigismund became Holy Roman Emperor only in 1433, the title of *IMPERATOR* is clearly part of the later adaptation of the sword. The hilt has been replaced.

The sword is 132cm/ 4'4" long. The accompanying scabbard has a repeated silver dragon, the symbol of the *Societas Draconica*, a chivalric order founded by Sigismund and his spouse Queen Mary of Hungary in 1408. The form of the dragon is circular, its tail winding around its neck and a cross on its back. There are six of these on the scabbard of York's Sword of State. Sigismund may well have invested Henry V into this order during the visit to England: an elaborate inlaid saddle, displayed in the Tower of London, is by tradition a diplomatic gift from Sigismund but the dragon depicted there does not follow the circular form of the Order's emblem

Friends' Events

17.09.26 FRIENDS' WALKING TOUR: City Churches in London

There are still 40 churches in the City of London that have survived, some from before the Great Fire and others from the Blitz and they are all different! We shall explore some of them on this tour ranging from the very early period to the early eighteenth century. BUT as the churches are often tucked into streets surrounded by what we would call skyscrapers, we shall look at some of these as well

We meet in Trinity Square Gardens (near Tower Underground Station) at 10.30am on Thursday 17th September and finish near St Paul's Cathedral around 3.30pm (not forgetting, of course, a congenial lunch in between; cost not included).

Our guide: **Anne-Marie Craven** as an art historian spent many years doing picture research and running a fine art picture library specialising in art, history and archaeology with some militaria.

Price £20 to be donated to the churches on this visit.

Please email us your name/s and those of any guests to:

events@czechfriends.net

PRE-BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL/ Please book before 30th August 2026/Maximum number of persons: 15

Images clockwise from top left: window in memory of St Mary Axe © A-M. Craven; St Margaret Pattens © Images George Rex*; St Katharine Cree © Diliff*; St Mary le Bow © Julian Osley* * from Creative Commons Wikimedia



LECTURE 20.10.26: Czech Traitors and the Meaning of Czech Treason

A talk by Mark Cornwall on Tuesday 20th October 2026 at 6.30pm in the Embassy of the Czech Republic, 26-30 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QY.

'Traitors' are a very popular subject today, and the idea that 'treason' is lurking in society is an age-old concept. The talk will focus on how traitors have regularly appeared in modern Czech history since

the 19th century. The talk will focus on three notorious phases of 'Czech treason': the Omladina trial of the 1890s; the treason of Czech leaders during the First World War; and the controversial case of Emanuel Moravec during the Nazi occupation. Each of them reveals something about Czech identity during years of national crisis. Each also shows that treason itself is a slippery concept, whose meaning is usually in dispute until one side finally wins the power struggle



Mark Cornwall is Emeritus Professor of Modern European History at the University of Southampton. He has researched and taught modern Czech history for over 30 years, and lived in Czechoslovakia in the late 1980s. He is currently researching the communist secret police (StB), and also writing a book about treason, including Czech traitors, in the late Habsburg Empire. In 2022 the Czech Academy of Sciences awarded Prof. Cornwall the 'Palacký Medal for Merit in the Historical Sciences' for his work on Czech history.

Price £15 including a glass of wine. You may book via Eventbrite, or by email to **events@czechfriends.net**

EVENT ORGANISED WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE EMBASSY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC
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Financial Matters

There is not much to report on finances since our last *Newsletter*, though we are pleased to report that the funds from our closed Czech bank account were finally received on 31st January this year. This process had involved a lot of time and some expense, and had at times seemed to be leading us into the realm of Franz Kafka's bureaucratic nightmares. As the account had paid negligible interest, we are better placed holding the funds in our UK-based bank accounts, and in addition it has simplified our accounting.

We have only made one grant disbursement so far this year, which was for the mural restoration at Bílá Hora; this amounted to £4,765. This included a generous bequest from the Laing family in memory of Alastair Laing. We do recommend that, if you are in Prague, it is a very worthwhile outing to hop on the Number 22 tram and stay on it to the end of the line to visit the pretty little monastery enclave at Bílá Hora. The murals are now in a better state than previously!

Our bank balances therefore remain strong, though as usual there are a number of grant disbursements for projects in the pipeline that will need to be made in due course, as described in the Chairman's Report.

James Robertson

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Write to the Editor

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

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**Author Bohumil Hrabal's Summer Cottage in Kersko
Added to the List of National Cultural Monuments**

see page 7

