

Nature trail "Oborou Hvězda", information board No.5 - The Pleasure House

([Letohrádek](#) - informace v českém jazyce)

Ferdinand of Tirol, the second-born son of Ferdinand I and Anne of Bohemia, became a governor in the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1547. In 1548, he acquired further land in the valley of the Litovický Stream from the Liboc ecclesiae. He added this land to the existing game-preserve, establishing a meadow and a pond there. The foundation stone to the building of the pleasure house was laid down on the 28 th June 1555. Back then, the twenty-six-year-old archduke and Bohemian governor Ferdinand of Tirol (1529-1595) not only laid down the foundation stone, but he actually designed the construction himself, to be built by Italian architects, and later completed by the royal builders. His drawing of the pleasure house ground floor plan has been preserved in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. The following inscriptions (in Italian) have been preserved on the document depicting the ground plan of the pleasure house:



"The house for the new park, built upon the order of Ferdinand, my most kind prince and lord, with many medals of different kinds and modern coins of different types being laid to the foundations, all in gold and silver, with great value. His Majesty had them laid down in his own hands under the first foundation stone. And I myself was present there on the day of the 28 th June 1555, writing the epitaph".

(Translation of another text from Latin):

"Witnessing the time of three hundred and eleven ages following the birth of Jesus our saviour, Ferdinand the Archduke in his own hand founded (with contribution of) by the hand of Minerva the Goddess. As you can see, I was fixed and founded by the holy right hand of Ferdinand, son of the King of the Romans and mighty anchor of education, F.F.F. Ferdinand, son of Ferdinand, in 1555."

Ferdinand of Tirol was probably inspired by similar buildings in Italy. Simultaneously with the construction of the pleasure house, a decorative garden was being established in the slope below in the years 1555-1556, which was never completed. There was a ball game hall established in the garden, designed as a *salla terena* with open arcades, and a well was situated down in the south-western corner. There was an aviary situated nearby the pleasure house, and a kitchen and houses for servants were established in the former quarry by the pleasure house. The area in front of the pleasure house was designed to host festivities, jousting tournaments, and hunting displays.

The ideological design of Ferdinand of Tirol began to be realized by Juan Maria del Pambio at first, who was a master mason, and as such he contributed to the construction of the pleasure house, as well as of other buildings in the newly established Royal game-preserve, and also to the reconstruction of Prague Castle after the fire at Malá Strana and Hradčany on the 2 nd June 1541. The construction was completed quite quickly by Prague Castle builder Hans Tirol, with whom he cooperated after his arrival at Prague in 1554, and after his death in 1556, the construction was taken up by the newly appointed castle architect Bonifaz Wohlmut. The actual construction work was managed by Giovanni Luchese. The building was nearly finished in the autumn of 1556.

A number of further details regarding the actual construction of the pleasure house can be found in the documents of the castle archive keeper J. Morávek, who states that: "Approximately 20-30 workers dug up about 11 250 tree stumps by the end of October (1556) in places around the pleasure house, which were supposed to be ploughed and levelled before the first frost for the planting of new tree grafts".

There is no information regarding the appearance of the game-preserve at the time of building the pleasure house, and especially in the upcoming period of peak Renaissance. Apart from official correspondence, we read about the game-preserve in the reports of the contemporaries admiring the new building of the pleasure house (Vavřinec Špan of Španov, Jan Sixt of Lerchenfelz), and in the mediated or indirect reports regarding the events in the game-preserve.

Originally, the forest inside the enclosure walls was not organized and segmented as to the ground plan, as it was depicted later on. There were paths crossing the forest. The hunting castle's immediate surroundings were arranged. Its foreland was deforested, with regular plantings of new "grafts". This may have been similar to the Liboc Gate (back then the only one), where there was a corridor leading towards the pleasure house, with a comfortable path.

The next period marks the period of splendour and glory for the Hvězda game-preserve and the pleasure house. In 1562, celebrations of the coronation of Emperor Maximilian II were organized here. In 1563, the game-preserve hosts hunting events, and the pleasure house hosts banquets, festivities, as well as diplomatic negotiations, especially with representatives of numerous European countries; the enclosure walls were also completed at that time, with a single gate – Liboc Gate. The second gate, Bílá Hora Gate, was only built

later on. In 1567, Ferdinand of Tirol, the founder of the pleasure house, terminates his mission in Bohemia and moves to his Castle Ambrass near Innsbruck.

The completion of the ball game hall is nearly constantly connected with problems. The repairs date back to 1577, when the object was facing demolition.

In the period after the Battle of Bílá Hora, the ball game hall becomes a mere "langes Gewölbe" or "langer Gang", i.e. a mere arch or corridor without any specific purpose, as it is stated by a chronicler Jan Morávek. In 1565, a festivity of Prague shooters was organized here.

Rudolph II organized festivities in the Hvězda game-preserve in 1610 on the occasion of a convention of Catholic electors and German princes.

Frederick I became the King of Bohemia on the 4 th November 1619. In 1620, several weeks before the fatal battle, folk festivities were held in the game-preserve.

In the following period of the Thirty Years' War, the game preserve and the pleasure house were greatly devastated, mostly by the Swedish troops, yet there were also quieter inter-war periods, when it went through repairs.

In the 1630s, royal painter Jonas Falck created a ceiling painting on the second floor of the pleasure house, depicting the Battle of Bílá Hora.

The roof of the pleasure house was taken down and reconstructed around the year 1628, getting a new Baroque bulbous dome.

The game-preserve, as well as the entire country, witnessed the worst devastation during the Swedish occupation. On the 30 th May 1639, following several victorious battles, the Swedes commanded by Banner attempted the conquest of Prague unsuccessfully. The surroundings of the town were greatly devastated. The game-preserve was under fire from imperial cannons.

The most frequently used path to the conquest of Prague around Bílá Hora was also used by Königsmark in late July 1648. Malá Strana and Hradčany were plundered. Both the game-preserve and the pleasure house suffered extensive damage during the siege of the Old and the New Towns, which ended on the 24 th October 1648 by the Peace of Westphalia.

Joseph II visited Bohemia within the framework of an inspection journey shortly before the death of Maria Theresa on the 29 th November 1780.

The precipitous spirit of contemporary reorganizations and far-reaching changes of familiar facts, which accompanied the whole decade of Joseph II government, affected the pleasure house and the game-preserve too. The pleasure house was eventually transformed into a military object, and it was used as a gun powder storage. The pleasure house underwent numerous constructional changes, which influenced negatively both the interior and the exterior of the building. Most of all, the roof was lowered and provided with a lightning conductor. The Baroque truss with lanterns was taken down, and the roof was furnished into today's proportions. The Renaissance lining was removed from the windows, which were bricked in. The entire premises surrounding the pleasure house within the ground-plan trace of the former enclosure wall was closed up by a fortification bastion system with four corner bastions. The fortification reached as far as the well in the slope behind the pleasure house, and it ended right behind the stables-warehouse, where the walls on the sides were strengthened by two trapeze bastions. The corners of the walls in front of the entrance to the pleasure house were protected by two bastions projecting themselves in a diamond shape (1850). The fortified area was also connected with the former kitchen, transformed into a guard house (1833) via a walled path delimited by walls on both sides.

In 1834, there was a walled-in atrium in place of today's entrance to the pleasure house. New exterior modifications were also carried out in connection with the entrance to the basement.

The premises of the game-preserve surrounding the new gun powder storage also went through significant changes. Due to the risk of a thunder stroke and the effort to secure the gun powder storage from explosions, all growth was cleared within the distance of 60 steps from the pleasure house. Later on, as it is depicted on a plan dated 1849, this surface area of the security zone was more than doubled. In front of the entrance, to the East, the forest was cleared within 150 steps (or 60 Lower Austrian fathoms). This distance amounted to 200 steps (or 80 Lower Austrian fathoms) in the direction to the South. The entire Western hillside below the pleasure house was also deforested. There are fields and meadows in the lower part of the game-preserve, with tree nurseries situated by the forest edge.

The Prussian troops entered Prague on the 8 th July 1866, following the victorious Battle of Chlum near Hradec Králové (3 rd July 1866). At the time the Prussian army conquered Prague, the pleasure house stopped being used as a gun powder storage for some time. The period of the military determination of the pleasure house ended in 1874. The gun powder storage was removed and most

necessary repairs were carried out. The appearance of the pleasure house during the last years of its military determination as a gun powder storage is depicted in the drawing of Vincenc Morstadt from 1872. The slant path in the front was preserved up until 1937, when the terrain surrounding the pleasure house underwent significant modifications.

After World War I, the game-preserve administration was taken over by the Prague Castle Administration, which provided for the most necessary repairs, and in the years 1924 to 1931, the pleasure house was leased to the Museum of National Liberation (the Museum of Resistance of the Czechoslovak Legions) for the purposes of a permanent exhibition of paintings depicting battles and battlefields of the Czechoslovak Legions, until they were relocated to the new Museum at Vítkov Hill.

In the period 1934-1935, there were fact-finding works carried out in the pleasure house and sala terrena by the castle builder Karel Fiala (1862-1939), who found a number of graves, a wall separating the historical park from the pleasure house all the way to the stream running down, probably terminated via a pond.

The three through-views of the pleasure house were arranged, and then the actual space in front of the pleasure house was modified, according to the design of architect Josef Sokol and others. The original space with a slant path dates back to the period of the military utilization of the pleasure house, and it was extended in the years 1937 and 1938, with the terrain lowered to such an extent as to prevent water from running to the pleasure house. At this time, the premises acquired their present-day appearance.

Numerous skeletons were found in mass graves during the realization of the terrain modifications around the pleasure house; they were the killed Prussian soldiers from around mid-18 th century.

When the game-preserve and the pleasure house were occupied by a telegraph battalion in 1938, the game-preserve was taken up by the Germans, who set up a service garage for the vehicles and weapons of SS.

In 1945, Hvězda was occupied by the Russians, and by Svoboda's army after that. They stabled their horses on the ground floor of the pleasure house. When they left, cleaning and removal of damages was organized, unfortunately only in the form of volunteering.

An Alois Jirásek Museum was opened in the pleasure house after World War II in 1951; later on the historical exposition and exposition of Mikoláš Aleš were added. The pleasure house was reconstructed according to the design of castle architect Pavel Janák in the years 1938-1951. Modifications also continued in the game-preserve, with participation of gardener J. Němeček. In 1962, the game-preserve area with the Hvězda pleasure house and the surrounding Bílá Hora battlefield were declared a national cultural monument.

Since 1958, the object of the pleasure house has been administered by the Museum of Czech Literature.

Further reconstruction of the pleasure house took place in the years 1986-2000.

Nature trail "Oborou Hvězda":

1. [Bílá Hora Castle Game Reserve](#)
2. [Bílá Hora Castle Game Reserve \(formace v českém jazyce\)](#)