Bäckaskog

Bäckaskog Castle is situated on land where a monastery was built and ready for its holy purpose in 1270. Certain parts of the present castle, mainly features of the church, are from the original monastery. Access to good farmland and the fish-rich waters of the lakes influenced the monastery’s location. At the Reformation, the estate and monastery were taken by the Danish state in 1537, to be soon granted to Gert Jensen Ulfstand, who in the agreement took on responsibility to provide for the monks. In 1584, Bäckaskog was given to the Pomeranian nobleman, Henrik Ramel, when he entered the service of the Danes. This was the beginning of the Ramel family’s involvement in Scanian estates, including around 100 years at Bäckaskog. The construction of the current castle was completed during the time of his son, Henrik Ramel, who took over in 1611.

After the Scanian War, Bäckaskog stood empty, and was acquired by Field Marshal Rutger von Ascheberg. With the compulsory restitution of alienated lands during Charles XI’s time, Bäckaskog became the Crown’s property and was used as colonels’ living quarters until 1819, when the estate was leased to Crown Prince Oscar I, and later his son, Charles XV. Bäckaskog became a beloved summer residence for Charles XV, who arranged parties and practical jokes that sometimes left their mark in the district. He paid for the building of the orangery, and made great efforts to beautify the castle and park.

In 1956, the castle was separated from the farm, and a private tenant took over the complex and developed the park for tourism. Since 1996, Bäckaskog has been administered by the Swedish Property Board, which rents out the castle to a private company for tourist and business activities. Bäckaskog Castle is beautifully situated on the narrow isthmus between the lakes, Oppmannasjön and Ivösjön, 15 km north-east of Kristianstad. An extensive park that includes a herb garden, flower garden and unique trees is west of the castle, towards the shore of Oppmannasjön.

The Duke of Scania

On 3 May 1826, 168 years after the Treaty of Roskilde, Scania was honoured with its own duke, the newly born Prince Charles, who was the oldest son of Oscar I and his consort, Josephina of Leuchtenberg.

His birth caused widespread jubilation at a time when the country was experiencing a national reawakening. The Gothicismus cultural movement had been established in the early 1800s, with the poet Erik Gustaf Geijer as the prominent figure. He cultivated the myth of the Geats’ free spirit and courage. The Nordic hero stories, like the pre-Nordic myths and Viking exploits were highlighted. Frithiof’s Saga by Esaias Tegnér became the most important source of inspiration in schools and the home.

The shared Nordic values were also strengthened by the union between Sweden and Norway, and that the old arch enemies, Denmark and Sweden, were finally brought together through the initiation of the Scandinavian ideal in a ceremony at Lund Cathedral in 1829.

That spirit also influenced the young prince’s upbringing, as well as his later life as crown prince and regent. He expressed his aesthetic gifts in several art forms during long journeys in the country, where he was a sharp observer of nature and farming life. Rapid note-taking and on-the-spot sketches were later transformed into poetry and paintings.

He became crown prince in 1844, viceroy of Norway in 1856 and was crowned king of Sweden and Norway in 1860. Ten years later, he was married to Princess Lovisa of the Netherlands, after having met her in 1869 during a visit to the court at The Hague.

Charles XV became known for his way with the people, and was therefore very popular both in Sweden and Norway. A contemporary writer gave a credible description of the king which reads: "With a rapid understanding of things, he combined a lively temperament with a low rather than a high opinion of himself, a character trait that created not only his engaging, open nature, but also
the carelessness with which he often treated important matters. It also led to a lack of moral seriousness, which sometimes was ill-fated, both for himself and the objectives he set out to achieve.”

During his time as crown prince, he had developed a close relationship with the popular Danish king, Frederick VII. This later developed into what one nowadays would call a meeting of minds, which the following episode shows.

When the first telegraph line networks were built out in the mid-1800s, the first priority was developing links between Stockholm and Gothenburg, and later with Malmö. Nobody objected to this prioritisation, except his majesty, who wanted to be connected at his Bäckaskog estate. One day during the summer, the king got the idea to use the new technology to invite his relative, the Danish king, for a week-long stay at Bäckaskog. The invitation was sent to Copenhagen, and a few days later there was a polite, affirmative reply, with an anxious PS about whether the king accepted that he also brought his wife. At the time, he was living in a morganatic marriage with his lover, the ballet dancer Louise Rasmussen. King Charles quickly sent a telegram to the Danish king with the reply: “My dear brother, you can bring as many wives as you like.”