Bjärsjölagård

The present Bjärsjölagård Castle is located in a district known to have been a settlement for royalty as early as the 8th century. Later, the Vikings built the first stronghold on the site. The area was then partly a lake, whose islets were used for defence purposes from early times. Thus, the medieval stronghold Beritzholm developed, sited on three islets in the now drained lake, about one km north-west of the present castle.

Beritzholm was one of Denmark’s most important castles of the realm during the Middle Ages and became the forerunner of other defensive facilities, including Lindholmen (by the lake, Börringesjön).

The stronghold’s status was evident from the early line of ownership in which both King Valdemar Atterdag and later his daughter, “the union queen” Margareta, were documented owners. In the 1400s, after Queen Margareta’s death in 1412, the castle’s fate is shrouded in mystery, but in the early 1500s, Mourids Jepsen Sparre is documented as the owner, as a pledge for a loan to King Christian II. It was in this way that the Sparre family came to own Beritzholm until the 1520s when the then poorly fortified and dilapidated stronghold lost its role as a castle of the realm to Lindholmen. The old stronghold was demolished to provide building material for other castles belonging to the Sparre family, principally Svaneholm. After the stronghold was pulled down, the estate remained the property of the Danish Crown until 1658, when due to the Treaty of Roskilde, it became the property of the Swedish Crown.

During the rest of the 1600s and until 1730, the estate was classified as a material asset for the use of the Crown and later the military allotment system. The estate was managed by a commissioner, Cronacker, and in the second generation by his daughter, Susanna Barbara Cronacker, who married into the Coyet family. Her son, Peter Julius Coyet, bought the property from the Crown in 1730 and thereby became the first private owner of Bjärsjölagård. The next generation, Henrik Julius Coyet, took over the property in 1752 and built the present manor house and north wing in 1766 and 1777, respectively, according to designs by the Surveyor to the Royal Household, Jean Eric Rehn. He was one of the most renown rococo and early Gustavian period Swedish architects and designers. Bjärsjölagård stayed in Coyet family ownership until 1820.

By that time the south wing had been added and ownership had passed to the Ehrenborg family. For the rest of the 1800s and until 1958, Bjärsjölagård had many owners. Then the entire estate was acquired by the Malmöhus county’s Agricultural Society, which still owns Bjärsjölagård.

The surroundings

Bjärsjölagård Castle is located 10 km north of Sjöbo. The ruins of the medieval stronghold, Beritzholm, are still visible 1 km north-west of the castle. On the Bjärsjölagård estate, there are the ruins of two lime-kilns, the oldest dating from 1865. They are relics from the lime production previously carried out on the estate.

Färs härad, Piraten’s native district

Some kilometres south-east of Bjärsjölagård is Vollsjö, which is best known as the place where the writer Fritjof Nilsson ”Piraten” was born and spent his childhood. In the introduction to Bombi Bitt and I, he writes: ”My cradle rocked in Tosterup in the Färs härad district of Malmöhus county. My father was the stationmaster at Tosterup. My parents were good and compassionate. I was a bad son.”

Tosterup is the writer’s own name for his childhood village, or more accurately, the estate where the
overbearing and cunning squire Esping lived. Fritjof Nilsson was born in 1895, and as a child he was involved with the people and activities at the then railway station and in the small community. This gave him insights and experiences that would be used in many of his books.

Even as a youngster, he was attracted to studying and this led him to gradually break away from his childhood’s simple life and traditions. After mixed results in his studies, he eventually took his lawyer’s degree, and after some years he opened his own lawyer’s office in Tranås.

Despite a successful working life, he was driven by the thought of writing about memories from the Vollsjö of his childhood. This was realised in the late 1920s, and he debuted in 1932 with Bombi Bitt and I. The book was an instant success, selling 18,000 copies in the first year after publication. His original narration style, with a well-balanced mix of the probable and improbable, the real and the composed, quickly made him an established writer. His burlesque ”characters” from Tosterup and Färs härad became contemporary symbols for freedom and strength that no-one decided over. Even though the badly brought up rascal Bombi Bitt led the stationmaster’s cautious and strictly brought up Eli into terrifying adventures, there was no element of malice or wickedness in their tricks. The writer showed, even in his debut novel, what would become his hallmark in future works; actual and fictional characters set in a more or less probable context in order to magnify their personalities.

The following year, 1933, saw the publication of Goat in a Herb Garden, which is considered by many Piraten fans to be his best novel. In this book, he shows his unique gifts as a writer and storyteller. The opening chapter is a masterpiece, in which he captures the atmosphere, interior and people in the dining room of the Horn Hotel in Malmö, just as they come to the last round of the traditional smorgasbord. When the table is empty and the smoke haze has cleared, the central character, the squire, upstart and illiterate, Jon Esping, goes home to Tosterup and lives his life in a happy and unhappy mix of intrigue and underhand games for his own success and other people’s ruin.

Other highly rated novels by Fritjof Nilsson Piraten are The Bookseller who Stopped Bathing, (1937) and Stories from Färs (1940).

Piraten died in 1972, and an active association preserves the remaining environments from the station area in Vollsjö, including the reconstructed trackwalker’s cottage, where a museum has been established.

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