Björnstorp

The Björnstorp estate has roots in the 1500s. However, it is not mentioned in documents before 1568, when the successful "Captain of the Hackbut Corps", Mikkel Pedersen Jyding, was granted the estate in gratitude for his great successes as commander of local militia groups in northern Scania. He expanded the estate with an additional four farms, beginning the estate-building that would later become Björnstorp. Little is known about the development of the estate in the late 1500s and large parts of the 1600s, but it is known that Björnstorp was owned by Lady Mette Rosenkrantz of Häckeberga for a few decades before her death in 1683. She was very successful in business, like several other noble ladies who had to take over responsibilities for estates and farms after the husband was killed in battle or captured. She built up an "estate empire", which comprised of no less than eight estates.

After the death of Mette Rosenkrantz, a daughter from the third marriage, Mette Sophie Krabbe, took over ownership of Björnstorp. She was married to a Danish government official, Johan Monrad, a marriage that would give them both a lot of worries during their lives, and lead to their heirs being forced to sell Björnstorp after their deaths. The difficulties stemmed from the regulations the Swedish state applied in the Swedicisation process after the treaty of 1658. One of the implications was that marriages between Swedish and Danish citizens were to be hindered and preferably prevented. The marriage at Björnstorp between the beautiful Mette Sophie and her Danish government official was also considered to have occurred without the family’s approval, which cast a further shadow over their lives. It has been written that many of Mette Sophie’s rejected suitors exploited the regulations in order to have their revenge on her.

In 1712, the heirs sold Björnstorp to another successful woman in Scania, Christina Piper, owner of Krageholm, Högestad and Christinehof. She built a new manor house at Björnstorp in 1750, two years before her death. After Christina Piper’s death in 1752, a daughter inherited Björnstorp, but sold it only two years later to Baron Frederick Gustav Gyllenkrok, who was married to Eva Charlotte Bielke.

This acquisition was the start of the Gyllenkrok family’s ownership of Björnstorp with the exception of the years 1754-1779, when the estate was owned for short periods by others, including the architect, Adolf Frederick Barnekow, between 1761-1765. The Gyllenkrok family has owned Björnstorp since 1779. The takeover in 1754 was also the beginning of a gradual merger with nearby Svenstorp, which Frederick Gustav Gyllenkrok owned when he acquired Björnstorp.

An extensive restoration of the castle was carried out in John Frederick Gyllenkrok’s time, from 1865, with designs by Helgo Zettervall. Björnstorp is located at the foot of the northern slope of the beautiful and prominent ridge, Romeleåsen, six kilometres west of Veberöd.

The present owner is Baron Thure Gabriel Gyllenkrok.

Scania’s landscape gardener

During the second half of the 1700s, the chamberlain, Baron Frederick Gustav Gyllenkrok, and his wife, Eva Charlotta Bielke, owned Björnstorp at several different times. For short periods it was owned by others, and of these the most captivating personality was the landscape gardener, Adolf Frederick Barnekow, who owned Björnstorp between 1761-1767.

He was born in 1744 in Lövestad, north-east of Sjöbo, the son of the governor of Kristianstad county, Lieutenant General Christian Barnekow, and his wife, Eva Charlotta Stenbock. At the age of 18, he began his academic training, studying drawing and architecture at two universities, Lund and Uppsala. The year before, when he was 17, he bought Björnstorp and began to develop bold plans...
for revamping the castle and grounds. He built new wings for the castle, new barns and new accommodation for the servants. He redesigned interiors in the castle, created a magnificent terraced garden with flowerbeds and ponds, built a new drive, and even made an eight-sided square to create the optimum aesthetic setting for the building.

The cost for the whole project far exceeded his assets and the yield from farming, which is why he was forced to sell back the estate to Frederick Gustav Gyllenkrok in 1767, at a considerable loss. His short, but splendid, life as Lord of the Manor at Björnstorp impoverished him for the rest of his life. In the few years after the estate was sold, he lived with his generous siblings.

It was his habit to spend the winters in Stockholm. This enabled him to gain such standing in court circles that he was appointed as chamberlain to Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, and Gustav III personally appointed him as director for royal theatrical events. He had great qualities as a socialite at court, but gradually lost the confidence of Gustav III as a theatre man. He was relieved of the theatre directorship and given a retirement post in the Customs Society. His duties in Stockholm carried good status, but the financial rewards were not in proportion to the pompous titles.

During his 44 years, Adolf Frederick Barnekow managed to make his mark on several of the most important castle parks in Scania. In addition to Björnstorp he drew up designs for Skabersjö, Roslätt, Övedskloster, Hviderup, Widtsköfle, Ekeside, Strö, Sörbytorp, Örtofta, Sinclairsholm and probably Maltesholm. In addition to parks, he was also responsible for the interior rebuilding at sites such as Widtsköfle and the county governor’s residence in Malmö.

Adolf Frederick Barnekow had a great talent as an architect, principally as a landscape gardener and park planner, but his financial and administrative gifts were insufficient as the squire of Björnstorp. He died at Widtsköfle in the summer of 1887, after contracting a serious abscess condition.