Dybeck

Dybeck Castle is a well-preserved display of three periods and architectural styles – Gothic, Renaissance and baroque – integrated into one unit, as the original house from the 1400s was extended with new buildings in the 1500s and 1600s. The oldest building, from the 1490s, now the east wing, was consciously placed in an area of marshy ground to make it easier to build a moat and thereby defend against hostile sieges. There are also signs of the original, diagonally positioned defence tower, built to make the castle even more difficult to take. The other two wings, the connected north and west sections, were built in the mid-1600s. Certain granite farm buildings date from the 1600s.

The ownership history of Dybeck covers several of Denmark’s oldest noble families. The owner in 1374 was one Johannes Sastersen. In the 1400s, the Bing family owned the estate for several generations, and this has left traces even today, for instance in the area called Bingsmarken, south of the castle.

In 1487, Dybeck was sold by the last of the Bing descendants, to Tage Henriksen Hollunger, who, among other things, built the surviving east wing of the castle. The next owner was Hollunger’s son-in-law, Peder Marsvin. He was descended from one of Denmark’s oldest noble families, which for many generations would have a strong influence on estate-building in Scania. The Marsvin family owned Dybeck until the 1630s, when one of the daughters in the family married the district judge for Lolland and Falster, Lave Bille. He owned Dybeck until his death in 1679, which was just over 20 years after Sweden had taken over Scania.

In 1684, Dybeck was divided between the sons, Christian and Jörgen Bille, who decided to split both the manor house and the rest of the estate into two equal parts. This division led to 175 years of discord at Dybeck.

Both parts of the original property have been owned by descendants of the Bille family, as well as families that have married in. Jörgen Bille’s eastern half was owned by members of the Hammarberg, Ihre, von Löwen, Gyllenkrok and Wallis families, whereas Christian Bille’s western half was owned by families such as Silrnecker, Klerck, Ingelotz, Ehrensparre and Ljungfelt.

It was not until 1857 that Dybeck’s two parts were reunited in one property, when the estate owner, Albrecht Baltzar Wallis, acquired the western half, known as the “Sparre part”. The Wallis family held Dybeck for two generations until 1921, when the present owning family, through the landowner, Albin Alwén, acquired the estate. The present owners, the brothers Claes-Ebbe, Carl-Otto and Mats Alwén are the third generation of the Alwén family at Dybeck.

Dybeck is Sweden’s southernmost castle, just over 10 km east of Smygehuk. It is beautifully located in fertile farmland close to the coast and surrounded by a thickly wooded park. The castle and several of the farm buildings are considered to have great importance in terms of architectural history.

The checked cloth

In 1907, the book Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Voyage was published in Sweden and went on to become one of Swedish literature’s most famous works. The author, Selma Lagerlöf, wrote the book at the suggestion of the elementary school authority, which wanted to give Swedish schoolchildren a new reading-book with a content that also conveyed knowledge about the country’s geography, history and culture.

As the intention was to describe the whole country, she chose to start right down in the south. She was familiar with conditions in Scania, as she had lived and worked in Landskrona as a teacher between 1885-1895. When she was given the commission in 1906, she thought about several ideas before she finally went for the story of a mischievous boy who was turned into a pixie and rode on the back of a gander following the wild geese on their flight across the country.
All stories begin with “Once upon a time”, and Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Voyage is no exception. When the story begins, the boy is home alone at the farm on a Sunday morning in March, as his parents had gone to church. No-one knows for sure where the farm was or which church was visited.

Early in the story, when the long flight on the gander’s back has just begun, the boy cries out in surprise, “What is that big checked cloth I can see down there?” and the wild geese call back, “fields and meadows, fields and meadows”.

He flies on over the rich farmland of Söderslätt, the southern plain, and imagines how ”the large and affluent farms were given clever names by the roosters, such as Lyckås, Äggeberga and Penningby”, but that the manors’ roosters ”were too conceited to make up something funny.” One of the roosters cried out loudly, as if he wanted to be heard all the way to the sun: ”This is Dybeck Manor. This year, like last year. This year, like last year,” and a little further inland another cried: ”This is Svaneholm – the whole world must get to know this!”.

As the story was translated into more than 30 languages, “the whole world” did indeed find out how Nils Holgersson’s native district looked from the air, the estates and farms on the fertile plains where the fields looked like a checked cloth.

Selma Lagerlöf was already a well-established writer when the Nils Holgersson story was published in 1907. During her time in Landskrona, she had become widely known for another story, Gösta Berling, the drunkard priest from Värmland. It was followed by many literary stories including perhaps her most beloved work, Jerusalem I and II, in which she described how a group of farmers from Nåsbygden in Dalarna went to Jerusalem to live a life close to God.

In 1907, she received an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala. Two years later, she won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and in 1914 she was inducted into the Swedish Academy. Selma Lagerlöf died in 1940, at the age of 82, at the farm where she was born, Mårbacka in Värmland.