The first mention of Hovdala was in the 1130s. The present castle was built in the early 1500s and replaced an older building from the 1300s, which was located on higher ground, south-east of the new site. Here, as in so many places, the stronghold was built on low-lying marshy ground in order to defend against siege and make moat-building easier. The north wing is the oldest, built in 1511 when the Laxmand family were the estate owners. The remarkable “impregnable” gate tower was also built in the early 1500s. At that time, the tower was lower, but under Sievert Grubbe’s time as owner another storey was added in 1600 and the tower reached its peak height of 13 metres. During the 1800s, the level of the nearby lake, Finjasjön, was lowered, draining the moat and area around the castle.

The line of ownership can be followed almost unbroken since the first half of the 1300s, and with certainty after the Laxmand family took over. In the late 1500s, the Grubbe family gained ownership of the estate through marriage. The second generation’s Sievert Grubbe went down in history for his advanced education after university studies and extensive travels in Europe. He is also associated with the defence of Hovdala in connection with the Swedish king Gustav II Adolf’s ravages in Scania during the Kalmar War in 1612. Despite repeated storming, the Swedes failed to take the gate tower. They were forced to flee and the rumour spread that ”the devil himself had defended Hovdala”.

In the mid-1600s, 1666 to be exact, Hovdala came into the ownership of Jens Mikkelsen and remarkably enough the estate remained in this family until 1944, when it was taken over by the Swedish state. Jens Mikkelsen got into trouble with his former countrymen when he let a Swedish garrison be stationed at Hovdala during the Scanian War of 1675-1679. This led to an attack on Hovdala by local militiamen and most of the castle was burned down. The castle was rebuilt in the 1680s, and Jens Mikkelsen was ennobled with the name Ehrenborg.

In the 1730s, the then owner, Casper Ehrenborg, made Hovdala an entailed estate. Hovdala continued as such until Casimir Ehrenborg’s death in 1981, when the entailed estate was dissolved. After the state’s takeover, the open land around Hovdala became an area for military exercises by the tank regiment in Hässleholm, but has been owned since 2003 by Hässleholm Municipality. The Swedish Property Board administers the castle and other buildings. Hässleholm Municipality is responsible for operation and activities. The castle is beautifully situated south of the lake, Finjasjön.

**Around the world with ”Posta-Nilla”**

Nilla Jönsdotter was born in Matteröd in 1820. She is representative of the thousands of people on the Scanian estates who faithfully served the gentry, year after year, in fair weather and foul, often in monotonous jobs for low wages.

She came to Hovdala in 1839 and lived in a cottage in Broslätt, a craftsmen’s village that has now almost disappeared. Four years after the move, her daughter Pernilla was born, and was followed four years later by another daughter, Johanna. In the church records it states that the father was unknown, probably for everyone except ”Nilla”, as she was now generally known.

In 1850, she began the long years of service that would gain her the enduring epithet ”Posta-Nilla”. Her job, on the Ehrenborg family’s behalf, was to collect the mail twice a week on the 40-kilometre stretch between Hovdala and Kristianstad (Hässleholm was too insignificant to have a station post office). She went via the rectory in Brönnestad, so she could also collect their mail, to Nösdala, Påbro, Ignaberga, Lommarp, Vinslöv and Vanneberga and on to Kristianstad, probably a route roughly equivalent to today’s main road 21, to the post office at Lilla Torg.

The choice of route was probably determined by where most of the rides went to, so she could get lifts part of the way. She also had friends along the route, who offered her cups of chicory, a forerunner to coffee used by the local people.

In the 1800s, there was an official travelling speed for the transport of people and mail. On normal
roads the speed was 7 kilometres/hour, in other words, one needed 90 minutes to travel 10 km. On good roads and with lighter wagons, speeds could reach a dizzying 10 kilometres/hour. Those who carried the mail had another factor to take into consideration, the risk of being robbed when one had valuable registered letters in the mailbag, which was often the case. With this in mind, the mail carrier added a random element to the route. Robbing a mail carrier or mail wagon was considered a serious crime, which actually carried the death penalty during the 1700s. The Royal Postal Service’s rural postmen were equipped with pistols until the late 1800s. Even Posta-Nilla was probably armed with something from her employers, the Ehrenborg family. She carried the pistol under her skirt, but there is nothing in her obituary to suggest she ever used it.

The railway came to Hässleholm in 1860, and three years later a station post office opened there. This altered her route to the road past Tormestorp, and from two to three trips a week.

She continued her laborious trudging with the mailbags until 1899, when she was 80. During her last years, she lived in Ignaberga with her daughter Johanna and her husband. She died in 1916, at the age of 96. Posta-Nilla is buried in the family grave at Ignaberga’s churchyard, by the side of her daughter and her husband. The oldest daughter, Pernilla, emigrated to the USA in 1869.

After she died, someone worked out that over a period of almost 50 years she has carried her mail about 4.5 times round the world or 178,560 km.