Malmöhus

Malmöhus is one of the oldest preserved Renaissance-style castles in the Nordic countries. It is built on the spot where Erik of Pomerania in the 1430s started construction of the citadel, Malmöhus. On the site was also a foundry yard that was at times used for minting coins. The first castle was built in the 1520s, but the building was badly damaged by fire in 1529. However, this did not put off King Christian III from building a new castle by using surviving parts of the old one and building anew where the fire had caused most damage. This happened in the years 1537-1542, in part with building stones from churches demolished after the Reformation. The newly built castle was in a transitional style between Gothic and Renaissance and was given the status of castle of the realm. It was protected by a deep moat and strategically placed round cannon towers.

The castle’s early status as a castle of the realm and its strategic location in Malmö city have contributed to an eventful history with a great many violent episodes. Crown Prince Frederik, later King Frederick II, spent a large part of his time as crown prince between 1554-1569 at Malmöhus. The period is considered as the castle’s heyday, with huge parties for royalty and other high-ranking guests.

Even the great builder, Christian IV, enriched Malmöhus with a two-storey warehouse building, which unfortunately has gone. In its history, the castle has had many different purposes: defensive facility, living quarters for the Danish king when he visited Malmö, prison, premises for university lectures, party venue for the nobility of the time, grain warehouse and, nowadays, a museum. The main purpose, to defend the province, was put to the test on several occasions. One such was when Sweden attacked Scania in 1643. The war was fought to a great degree as a pillaging campaign and left in its wake devastated villages and towns. Many attempts were made to besiege Malmöhus, but without success. This was repeated in 1677, but this time it was the Swedes who held out against the Danish attackers. After Sweden took over Scania, the fortress was expanded and the surrounding area was cleared to provide a clear field of fire.

Malmöhus gradually lost its military significance in the 1700s. It became a prison instead and was used for this purpose until 1914. The stone-clad bastions were largely demolished. In 1870, Malmöhus was ablaze again and parts of the old castle were destroyed. The complex was restored in the 1930s and 1950s, and in 1937 a new building was constructed to house the Malmö Museum.

Malmöhus Castle is now part of Malmö Museums and a popular tourist attraction, located in a beautiful park area in central Malmö. The building is owned by the Swedish Property Board.

Jörgen Kock, mint-master

Hardly any other native of Malmö has become as well-known as the powerful mint-master, mayor and political strategist, Jörgen Kock. Even though he lived in the mid-1500s, his name has been kept alive through the Kockska House, which he built in 1522. Jörgen Kock was born in Westphalia in 1487 and went to Copenhagen in the early 1500s to learn the craft of minting coins. He soon became known at court and was brought into the circle around Christian II, who appointed him mint-master for Malmö in 1518. His versatile talents were rewarded with the title of mayor in 1523 and he thus achieved a position as the city’s most powerful man.

The same year he was named mayor, the Danes revolted against Christian II, Jörgen Kock’s protector and friend. The king was forced from the throne and went to Holland to obtain support for his restoration. Christian II’s uncle, Frederick I, was named as regent. Jörgen Kock was at this stage fully occupied with his duties and business deals. The mint-master role was very lucrative and made him so wealthy that he bought several properties and developed
extensive private building activities and business operations.
The struggle for the throne escalated into a domestic political conflict, and ultimately an
international conflict and civil war. Copenhagen and Malmö kept officially neutral initially, which
was a misjudgement for those who were trying to reinstate Christian II. Jörgen Kock was seen in
that situation as a traitor, but in fact his political intuition led him to "back the right horse" and he
was soon ennobled by Frederick I for his loyalty.
King Frederick I died in 1533 and the natural successor was his son, Duke Christian of Holstein.
The majority of the nobility and bishops were against a Lutheran duke being selected, and most of
the merchant class and farmers also supported the reinstatement of the Catholic, Christian II. This
situation looked as if it would make the crowning of the duke impossible, if the issue had not
become an international affair between Sweden and the Hanseatic League.
Jörgen Kock again responded according to his political intuition, this time to support the restoration
of Christian II with a view to making, with the king’s help, Copenhagen and Malmö into "refuge
cities". The forces of Lübeck reacted and attacked Scania under the command of Count Christopher
of Oldenburg. Then the Swedish nobility swapped sides and in 1536 chose the duke as King
Christian III, while the Swedish army went on the attack from the north to support the newly chosen
king. This degree of strength meant that Christian III’s forces soon conquered the entire country.
Jörgen Kock, who this time had backed the wrong horse, had to apologise, genuflecting, in the main
square of Malmö. He was restored to his position of mayor, but "released" from his duties as mint-
master. He died in 1555 or early 1556.