Marsvinsholm

Marsvinsholm Castle, in its present form, originates from the mid-1600s, when Otte Marsvin owned the estate and built an elegant Renaissance castle in the Christian IV style. It has subsequently been changed by two extensive restorations, in the 1780s during Count Erik Ruuth’s time, and in the years 1856-1857 when the two wings by the entrance were built. With the changes in the 1800s, Marsvinsholm got the unified character that the building has today – very different from the original. In the later restoration, a grand church, also designed by Ch. F. Zwingmann, was built 1 km south of the castle.

The first mention of the Marsvinsholm estate is in 1371, when it belonged to the Hvide family, but it was sold to King Valdemar Atterdag at the end of the 1300s. After that, Marsvinsholm was owned by the Danish Crown and the families Ulfstand, Ulfelt and Marsvin. At the time of the Swedish takeover and thus of the castle’s confiscation, it was owned by the Urne family through Christian Urne. However, he got the estate back when he swore an oath of allegiance to the Swedish Crown and died at the castle in 1667. After his death, Marsvinsholm was sold to Holger Ottesen Thott, who sided with his countrymen in the Scanian War and fled to Denmark. The estate passed back into the hands of the Crown, but after a short period it was granted to von Buchwald. It later went back to the Thott family, and in 1683 to the well-known field marshal, Otto Wilhelm von Köningsmarck. After his death and several changes in ownership within the family, the Ruuth family came, through marriage, to own Marsvinsholm for the whole of the 1700s until 1819, when Erik Ruuth transferred ownership to his son-in-law, Erik Piper. During the rest of the 1800s, the estate was owned by the families Tornérhjelm, Wachtmeister, Stiernblad, Bennet and Hamilton. In the early 1900s, the estate returned to Danish ownership with the families Johannesen and later Wendelboe-Larsen, and from 1978 the Iacobaéus family, who through the son, Thomas Iacobaéus, currently own Marsvinsholm.

Due to its long history, and not least its extensive line of ownership, Marsvinsholm has been associated with many historical events. For example, von Köningsmarck was serving in the Venetian army when he took Athens and bombed the city so intensively that Turkish gunpowder stores in the Parthenon blew up and large parts of the ancient temple collapsed. Gustav IV Adolf made his declaration of war against Napoleon at Marsvinsholm, and in the final stages of World War II the English, Danes and Swedes used the castle for negotiations on their continued cooperation after the war.

The surroundings
Marsvinsholm is 7 km west of Ystad, surrounded by rolling farmland interspersed with deciduous woods. It is centrally located in southern Scania and close to the coast. A grand church from the 1800s, previously part of the estate, is 1 km south of the castle.

Herrgårdsosten
One of Sweden’s best-selling cheeses is “Herrgårdsosten”, which has Swedish origins from the late 1700s. The “herrgård” or country house that gave the cheese its name has shown a degree of modesty, as it is refers to Marsvinsholm Castle.
At that time, Marsvinsholm was owned by the successful Count Erik Ruuth. He had diverse talents and was involved in farming, food production and industry, in the form of pit coal extraction in Höganäs, as well as economics at a national level as Gustav III’s finance minister. He was consequently well aware of the conditions in the 1700s when the population increase was the most important factor. In Scania, the trend had been slower than in other parts of the country, as the many wars of the 1600s had caused crop failures and diseases that held back growth during the
first decades of the 1700s. However, in the period 1750-80 the population of Scania increased by 30%. This had major consequences for farming, which was then in a period of transition due to land reforms based on Rutger Macklean’s model. New crops, new cultivation methods and new tools were introduced. England was the pioneering country, and here and there English specialists were engaged in agriculture and plant cultivation.

Mercantilism was the predominant model for economic policy. It was based on promoting domestic production, thereby making the country less dependent on imports. The general attitude was “what can be done as well or better in Sweden shall be done here”. A special fund, the manufacturing fund, was established to support domestic companies.

In many cases, it was the forward-thinking large estate owners who took the initiative in the new spirit of the time. Count Ruuth fitted in well with his broad expertise and his contacts with Sweden’s powerful elite. However, his contribution to domestic production did not come from England, but from Switzerland. He had at some point tasted an Emmental cheese that “he found so well to his taste” that he decided to produce it on his own estate, Marsvinsholm.

To make his bold idea a reality he brought a Swiss “cheese presser”, Pierre Nicolas Dubas, to Marsvinsholm in 1786 and gave him an assignment to produce a Swedish Emmental. He set up a cheese plant and could, after a suitable maturing period, present the Scanian Emmental to his client, who soon started selling the cheese on a broad front. Thus, “Ruuth’s cheeses” became known far beyond Scania’s borders and as the 1800s proceeded, manufacturing started up in other places, mainly in Västergötland.

The cheese had a certain success, but never achieved the qualities of the Swiss original. At the time it was said to be “leather-like in consistency” and that “it needs an exceptionally long maturing period”. Such details did not prevent continued production and development, which gradually led to the high qualities that “Herrgårdsosten” has today.