Rosendal Castle is one of Scania’s best-preserved Renaissance castles, only marginally altered since it was built in the early 1600s. Even today one can see an inscribed plaque that the then owner, Anders Bille, built into the wall by the door of the east wing to let succeeding generations know that construction work started on 1 May 1615. The castle consisted of two buildings at right angles with a central stairwell turret decorated with a Renaissance spire. On the same islet as the castle was an L-shaped farm building, and the whole castle complex was surrounded by a wide moat.

The builder, Anders Bille, called his castle after his betrothed, Anne Rosencrantz, who it is said died a few days before their planned wedding. The building’s well-preserved exterior also shows that Rosendal was one of the few castles in the province that was not devastated and burned during the Scanian War of 1676-1679. Bille belonged to one of Denmark’s oldest noble families, with branches in several Scanian estates such as Råbelöv, Wanås, Herrevadskloster, Knutstorp and Näsholm. Anders Bille became both an entrusted administrator and a brave military man. In 1610, he became the county sheriff of Helsingborg Castle, which was one of Denmark’s most important castles of the realm. When the Kalmar War broke out in 1611, he took part successfully under “the Danish colours”, including the battle that could have changed both Sweden’s and Europe’s development in the 1600s and beyond. The army of Sweden’s king, Gustav II Adolf, had left a trail of devastation in north-east Scania in 1611 and was heading back north in February 1612. He made camp in Vittsjö with his force of about 3,000 men. Then the Danish forces under Anders Bille attacked the Swedes and inflicted heavy losses. The survivors fled over the thin ice of the lake, Vittsjön. During the retreat, the king fell through the ice, but was rescued by a knight from Uppland. Anders Bille was rewarded for his efforts in battle with a position as privy councillor, which was one of the highest titles in the country at that time. He died in 1633.

As Bille had no children with the right of inheritance, Rosendal went to his brother, Claus Steensen Bille of Wanås. The estate would stay in the Bille family for just over 30 years. In 1666, Rosendal was inherited by Kjell Christopher Barnekow, a minor and son of Hans Barnekow of Widtsköfle. The last owner from the Barnekow family, Magdalena Eleonora, took over in 1753. Through her marriage to Baron Wilhelm Bennet, the Bennet family became the owners of Rosendal. Before the takeover, Wilhelm Bennet had been an officer in the army of Charles XII and had taken part in campaigns up until the king’s death at Fredrikshald in 1718. He then became, among other things, governor of Halland and Malmöhus counties. The Bennet family have retained ownership of Rosendal until the present day. The current owner is Baron Gerard Bennet and children.

Rosendal is situated 10 km north-east of central Helsingborg.

The Bille House

Just north of the castle at Rosendal is a mysterious two-storey stone building. Previously, there was a Renaissance garden with a pond and an octagonal pavilion adjacent to the house. The building in question has always been known as “The Bille House”, as it is believed to be the building that Anders Steensen Bille built as the main block in 1615.

The origins of the house are unclear, but one source says that Rosendal Castle could have been preceded by a farmstead called Rosendal from the early 1400s. After Anders Steensen Bille took over the estate and built the castle, the sources become more reliable about Rosendal.

Anders Steensen Bille was born in 1580. When he was 30, he became sheriff of Helsingborg Castle and county, a position he held for almost 20 years. From 1612 until 1633, he also administered Herrevadskloster county. His capacity in official positions was rewarded in 1616, when he became a knight and privy councillor.

The county sheriff of Helsingborg lived from 1620 in what would later be called “Billegården”, east of St Mary’s Church. The house was of late-medieval character with connected buildings for both
living quarters and defence, and even a garden with fountains and a pavilion.

Bille’s acquisition of the estate and planned castle construction at Rosendal was financed through the sale of his family farm, Råbelöv, as well as Odersberga to Christopher Knudsen Ulfeldt. The bill of sale from 1616 still exists. He also bought farms and land within the Kropp parish to expand his estate.

During this course of events he had met, and got engaged to, Anne Ottersdatter Rosencrantz, who died before the new castle was completed. According to historians, the castle was named after her. Reliable sources state that he never married, but lived with the commoner, Karen Henriksdatter, and had two children with her. Both were later ennobled.

According to certain sources, the old Bille House’s function was linked to his busy love life. It would therefore have been used as a general love nest or as permanent or temporary accommodation for his partner, Karen Henriksdatter. Some sources assert that she would have lived at Billegården in Helsingborg, which seems confirmed from the time just before Bille’s death, when she received the house as a gift.

Anders Bille was a generous and committed person who donated money to schools, health care and the church. The Latin School in Helsingborg, and later Helsingborg education authority, have benefited from “Bille money” even in modern times. He is probably the donor of the pulpit that is still preserved in St Mary’s Church in Helsingborg. He was also involved in legal matters and intervened in several cases on the side of defendants, who often had little money for their defence.

Anders Bille had the trust of Christian IV, who therefore gave him many difficult assignments, mainly of a military nature. This demanding life gradually broke his health, and he died at the age of 53 in 1633. He is buried in the Bille family sepulchre in St Mary’s Church in Helsingborg.