Sövdeborg

The earliest stronghold was located close to Sövde Church, a little over two km west of the present castle. The stronghold, which formed the centre of a large farm, was confiscated by the Danish Crown at the Reformation in 1537, like other church estates. At the end of the 1500s, the estate was owned by Frederick Lange, but he abandoned the medieval stronghold and between 1590-1597 built Sövdeborg Castle on the present site. The original castle had south and east wings, was surrounded by a moat and had a round tower crowned with a high Renaissance spire. In 1630, Sövdeborg was taken over by Denmark’s richest man, Tage Ottesen Thott of Näs and Ericsholm. Tage Thott was feudal lord of several city strongholds and border fortresses during the Scanian War. His son, Otte Thott, is mentioned as the owner of Sövdeborg in 1639. In his marriages he was husband to two of Denmark’s richest woman, from the Gyllenstierna and Rosencrantz families. During his time, the northern wing was built in the early 1640s and he also gave the main building a grand interior, which is still partly preserved, including the magnificent ceiling decorations in two of the halls. The white stucco ceiling of the stone hall has areas featuring a number of pictures from classical antiquity’s history and world of ideas, whereas the red reception room has a carved oak ceiling in brown, red, green and gold. Otte Thott was succeeded by his son, Holger Thott, who was the last of this family at Sövdeborg.

When Scania became Swedish in 1658, Holger Thott and his brothers swore allegiance to the Swedish king, but still managed to get into conflict with Sweden during the Scanian War and fled to Denmark. After the war, Sövdeborg was sold in 1679 to the field marshal and governor general of Scania, Rutger von Ascheberg, a member of a German-Baltic noble family who had successfully served in the Swedish army in both the Thirty Years’ War and Charles X Gustav’s campaigns. As governor general he was highly regarded, not only by Charles XI, but also his subjects, and he therefore succeeded in carrying through his Swedicisation program using fairly humane methods. Rutger von Ascheberg died in 1693 and his successors gradually divided up the estate. In 1735, the estate was reunified under the general, John August Meijerfeldt. In 1788, Sövdeborg was sold to Count Carl Gustav Piper, who was the holder of the large Piper entailed estate and Lord Chamberlain for Gustav III’s consort, Queen Sofia Magdalena. In the years 1840-1844, Carl Piper carried out an extensive restoration of the building and, under the guidance of Professor Carl George Brunius, transformed the Renaissance castle into a romantic medieval castle. Crown equerry, Count Alfred Piper, who was married to Ebba von Haffner from Egholm in Denmark, lived at Sövdeborg in the years 1850-1910.

Through marriage, Sövdeborg passed into the Stiernswärd family. The present owner is Erik Stiernswärd. Sövdeborg Castle is the northernmost of the four castles located in the lovely countryside between Sjöbo and Ystad. The country road north from Skårby to Sjöbo is one of the most beautiful in Scania. The nearby Snogeholm area for country walks consists of 800 hectares of accessible countryside with well-signposted long-distance footpaths.

Rutger von Ascheberg

Few people are as associated with the painful Swedicisation process as the field marshal, governor general of Skåneland, count and friend of the king, Rutger von Ascheberg. His military exploits were indisputable, and were freely alluded to by the otherwise reticent Charles XI when he said: ”I love him as if he was my father, I have him to thank for everything that I have learned about the nature of war.” Rutger von Ascheberg acquired Sövdeborg in 1679, when the violent and bloody Scanian War had ended. The seller, Holger Thott, could not reconcile himself with his new masters, and decided to sell the estate and leave Scania for good. Ascheberg, a member of a German-Baltic noble family, was born in Courland in 1621. He had
served in the Swedish army during the Thirty Years’ War and in Charles X Gustav’s Polish and Danish campaigns. As a Swedish officer in the years 1634-1679, he took part in 15 major battles and took nearly 40 standards and colours, which in that era was considered a major achievement. Ascheberg’s military successes meant that King Charles XI showered him with honours and positions of trust in society. He became a member of the royal council in 1681 and was made a count in 1687.

As Charles XI instigated a royal autocracy, the former noble’s privy council was dissolved. The new royal council was composed in a way that personal relations with the monarch were decisive for being selected.

Rutger von Ascheberg served as governor general of Skåneland between 1680-1693. He had a more considerate attitude to Swedicisation of the area than his tough predecessor, John Gyllenstierna and to a certain degree managed to win the confidence of the population in the former Danish province. One of the measures he took was to reinstitute the University of Lund, which was inaugurated for its second period as a seat of learning in 1668. The first period had spanned from 1438 until the Reformation, when all the Catholic institutions were closed. The new university naturally had a protestant orientation and by prioritising theological training, the church became one of the most important elements in the Swedicisation process. Danish parish priests were gradually replaced by Swedish priests educated according to the Swedish tradition at the University of Lund.

Ascheberg was also involved in defence, a subject in which he was highly qualified. He therefore took an active part in establishing the allotment system, which was carried out in the 1680s. The regulations came into force in 1682 and were based on a contract between the Crown and the provinces, in which every province committed itself to set up and maintain a regiment of 1,200 men.

Rutger von Ascheberg died in 1693.