Svanholm

Svanholm Castle was one of the grand quadrangular brick castles built in the mid-1500s within the Danish kingdom. The initial purpose of the building was to be both living quarters and a defensive stronghold against the country’s internal and external enemies. The castle was built on an islet in the lake, Svanholmssjön, so that the natural moat made it easier to defend. The house was strongly fortified with strong walls, allures, loopholes and steep roofs with stepped gables and blind windows. However, the usual round towers for "sweeping" fire along the walls were replaced by a projecting gable on each side, from where one could fight attackers in the same way. The owner at that time was the Danish knight, privy councillor, captain of Copenhagen Castle and feudal lord of Lindholmen county, Mourids Jepsen Sparre. He died in 1534 and after a tough dispute over the inheritance, Svanholm was taken over by the son, Jacob Sparre, who in turn passed on the estate in 1573 to his sister, Anne, who had married into the Gyldenstierne family. After this, several Danish noble families owned the estate.

When Scania became Swedish in 1658, Erik Hardenberg Gyllenstierna was the owner. It was a later Gyllenstierna, Axel, who in the 1690s rebuilt the east wing as a five-storey structure. In the 1700s, Svanholm was owned by the noble families Coyet and Juel, partly together, but unified in 1751 under one owner, Julius Coyet. After his death, Svanholm was inherited by the estate’s most well-known name throughout history, the general and baron, Rutger Macklean. His origins are disputed, both Scotland and Holland are mentioned, but the family came to Sweden in the 1600s. Macklean’s life’s work had a major effect on Swedish farming, which is described on the next page. As lord of the manor he obliterated traces of the 1500s by filling in the moat.

After Macklean’s death, ownership passed to his nephew, Kjell Christopher Bennet, who in 1837 sold the estate to Carl John Hallenborg. His niece, Eva, was married to Count Carl-Augustin Ehrenswärd, who became the last private owner of the Svanholm estate. In 1935, the castle and park were split off in a newly created cooperative association, which since then has owned and managed the castle. The rest of the land was sold to a private individual.

Svanholm Castle offers a multi-faceted excursion with one of the country’s leading district museums showing fine collections of textiles, costumes, tools, toys, weapons, coins, ancient finds, etc.

**The great agricultural reformer**

When Baron Rutger Macklean took over Svanholm, he found the estate in poor condition. The tenant farmers lived together in villages, which were clusters of homes and barns. They lived under the pressure of an obligation to carry out day-work on the estate. Their own strips of land were spread over a large area, which meant that the most remote were seldom, if ever, worked on. Macklean estimated that one-third of the open land belonging to the estate was never, or only rarely, used. This discovery was to spark big changes in the late 1700s.

If one looks at Rutger Macklean’s background, his commitment seems more understandable. He came from Stockholm, where for a time he had been a member of the circle around Gustav III. His objections against particulars of the king’s rule made his position impossible at court. He was much taken by the Age of Enlightenment’s opposition to the status quo and believed strongly in science and rationalism.

As he found no rational approach in the old ways of farming at Svanholm, he brought together the widespread fields into large, composite units. To further increase rationalisation he moved the farmers out of the crowded villages and built new farms and farm buildings on a central site in each new unit. He called his reform “enskifte”, or single-lot, as the land for each farm consisted of one lot.

Initially, opposition to the single-lot reform was very strong when it was realised that the community spirit of the villages would be lost. The efficient farmers left Svanholm, whereas the
indebted and therefore more compliant farmers grudgingly accepted the new order. The word began to spread about the advantages of rationalised farming, first in Scania and then throughout the country. A gradual transition to the single-lot system meant that in 1827 the Swedish parliament introduced a new land distribution law. Thus, Macklean had reformed the whole of Swedish agriculture.