Svenstorp

Among Scanian castles, Svenstorp is the most representative of the Danish architectural style known as Christian IV’s Renaissance. Denmark was the cultural leader of the Nordic countries for about 80 years starting from the mid-1500s. With Gustav II Adolf’s military victory, Sweden took over the role. King Christian IV was heavily involved in both town planning and the planning and construction of particular buildings. During his long reign, architectural style became more flexible, as the castles were gradually being released from their military functions. Thus, a lord of the manor could now focus instead on aesthetic design that promoted his personal status.

Svenstorp’s main building consists of a two-storey rectangular house. The central sandstone Renaissance doorway is the entrance to an arched passage that extends through the entire ground floor. On the gables are elegant volutes, spiral-shaped shell ornamentation that is a mark of the Renaissance and later baroque idioms. The building was designed by the Dutch architect and master builder, Hans von Steenwinckel, and was built in the years 1596-1599.

At the time of the construction, Svenstorp was owned by Beate Huitfeldt, the widow of the former knight and privy councillor, Knut Ulfeldt, who died in 1586. She was familiar with the cultural trends of the times after several years’ service for Queen Anna Catherine at the Danish court. After the queen’s death, she retained her role at the court of Christian IV, who was involved in the planning of Svenstorp Castle through recommending Steenwinckel as the architect.

The Svenstorp estate had been in existence for at least a couple of hundred years before the castle was built and had certainly been a manor farm. In the 1400s and part of the 1500s, the manor belonged to individuals from the Glob and Ulfstand families, but at the end of the 1500s it was owned by the Ulfeldt family, who kept it until 1669, when Scania had been Swedish for 10 years. The last of the family, Christopher Ulfeldt, had difficulty reconciling himself with the Swedish rulers and left Scania to live on one of his estates in Denmark. Before the move, he sold Svenstorp to Lady Mette Rosenkrantz, the landowner in Scania who could benefit most from the business climate during the Swedicisation period. After her death, she was succeeded at Svenstorp by her equally, if not more, well-known daughter, Mette Sophie Krabbe.

On her death in 1694, Svenstorp was bought by the city court judge in Malmö, Peter Hegardt. The next Hegardt generation, the daughter Maria, was the third prominent woman owner of the Svenstorp estate. She lived a long and active life and took great care of both her estate and her private life. She was married three times and survived the third husband, general Axel Gyllenkrok, by over 20 years. The Svenstorp estate became the property of the present owning family through Maria Hegardt’s last marriage.

In 1743 she made her two estates, Svenstorp and Stora Markie, entailed estates for a son from the first marriage (Stora Markie) and a son from the third, Baron Frederick Gustav Gyllenkrok. He owned several estates including Björnstor up in Scania and Hässelbyholm outside Stockholm. With the Crown’s consent, he moved the entailed estate rights from Hässelbyholm to Björnstor up, which laid the foundations for today’s cooperation between the Gyllenkrok entailed estates, Svenstorp and Björnstor up.

The present owner is Baron Thure Gabriel Gyllenkrok. The castle is the home of Nils Gyllenkrok and family.

The surroundings
Svenstorp is located 6 km north-east of Lund. The castle is surrounded by a beautiful, terraced garden that Linné described as: “sloping a lot to the east and levelled with 4 to 5-cubit- high deposits, decorated with hornbeam bushes, and, in the middle of the garden, a most beautiful fountain, which formerly sprayed water 24 cubits high, water that was led here from far away on the plains between Lund and Svenstorp, where the land was higher.”
The victory feast at Svenstorp

Svenstorp Castle was the scene of an almost tragicomic sequence of events connected with the bloody Battle of Lund on 4 December 1676. Before the battle north of Lund, the Swedish army had been pushed further and further south in Scania and made camp in the area between Stora Harrie and Örtofta. The Danish army had made camp south of Örtofta, mostly on the Svenstorp estate. The high-commander, King Christian V, had accommodated himself and members of his staff in the castle. It seems that he devoted a lot of attention to the coming victory rather than preparing for tactical eventualities, which he should have done, especially in view of the weather conditions. The king stayed in a ground-floor room in the square tower-like extension at the front of the castle. Everyone in the Danish command thought it would be an easy victory, so Christian V had the kitchen staff at Svenstorp prepare a victory feast that could be enjoyed when the Swedish forces had been beaten.

The Swedish command was fully occupied with tactical considerations, namely that a further advance would be made to the south over the river, Löddeå. The winter of 1676 had come early to Scania and by the end of November even running water had begun to freeze. The Swedish advance was planned for 30 November, but was delayed until 4 December, so that the continuing cold spell would make the ice strong enough to take horses, heavy wagons and cannons. After reconnaissance, an order was given on 3 December that the army would go over the frozen Löddeå east of Kävlinge the same night to attack the Danish forces on the flank.

This manoeuvre surprised the Danes, but they still managed to seize the initiative and forced the Swedes south towards Lund. North of the city the armies grouped for a battle that was to be one of the bloodiest ever fought on Swedish soil. Both sides had successes and setbacks among particular units, but later in the day the Swedes gradually got the upper hand and managed to surround such large parts of the Danish forces that the fighting ceased. By the end, around 8,400 were dead in the trampled mess of blood and earth. They were buried in mass graves, one of which was relocated as recently as 1995.

The defeat of the Danes meant that King Christian had to hastily leave his camp at Svenstorp, as well as the ordered triumphal meal. The tragicomic conclusion of the bloody Battle of Lund was that the Swedish king, Charles XI, installed himself in the castle and not only took Christian V’s bedroom, but also his victory feast.