

Skarhult

The village of Skarhult has origins from medieval times. The oldest known building is the existing medieval church, in Romanesque style, located close to the castle.

Nothing is known about the original medieval building at Skarhult, but it was probably located where the oldest parts of the present castle started to be built in the late 1400s. The place was a strategic choice by the bank of the stream, Bråån, to serve as both living quarters for the king's representative and a centre for protection against internal and external enemies.

Before the present castle was built, the Skarhult estate had existed since the mid-1300s when a district judge, Johannes Nielsen, was the owner. His successors, and subsequently the owners for many generations until 1624, were members of the Rosensparre or Skarholt families.

The oldest, partly-surviving castle was given an east wing and a round corner tower during the 1560s, and a west wing in the 1590s. The extensions were done during the time of Steen Skarholt Rosensparre and his son, Oluf Steensen Rosensparre. In the late 1500s the castle was given its characteristic, and partly preserved, façade decoration, which was typical for the Renaissance. The castle's military function is clear from the loopholes under the roof projection and the gun ports for cannons in the round tower. The castle was surrounded by a moat, which is now dry. Skarhult Castle has kept its character as a brick building from the 1500s to the present day, despite a restoration in the 1840s when Charles XIV John was the owner and Professor C.G. Brunius was engaged as architect.

When the Rosensparre ownership came to an end in 1624, Skarhult went to a son-in-law, Corfitz Eriksen Rud, whose descendants kept the estate for a further two generations until 1661. By then, Scania had become Swedish and powerful Swedish noble families were soon attracted to buy up potential estates. And that is how Skarhult came into the possession of Count Pontus De la Gardie. He died in 1692, after which his widow, Beate Elisabeth von Köningsmarck, lived and ruled at Skarhult until her death in 1723.

After her death, Skarhult was owned through marriage by the Brahe family. They had major interests elsewhere; their own estates in central Sweden, commissions of trust at court and, in Magnus Brahe's case, a position as chancellor at the University of Uppsala. Under their ownership, Skarhult was empty for around 100 years, but was reawakened through a restoration in the 1820s. When Magnus Frederick Brahe died in 1826, Skarhult was taken over by King Charles XIV John. He owned Skarhult until his death in 1844. During his time, he engaged Professor C.G. Brunius to start an extensive restoration of the castle.

After the king's death, Skarhult was sold to Baron Carl John von Schwerin, who continued the restoration work on the buildings as well as the park and garden areas. Subsequent generations of the von Schwerin family continued in the same spirit, including the creation of a beautiful English park and the development of agriculture and other activities on the estate.

The present owner of the estate is Baron Carl John Frees von Schwerin.

A Bernadotte in Scania

In the early 1800s, Denmark planned yet another campaign aiming to capture Scania. This time they allied with France, which then was the dominant power in Europe. The overall plan also included Russia, which was to conquer the northern half of Sweden, while the Danish-French forces would take the southern half.

Denmark's declaration of war was handed over by the Danish minister in Stockholm on 14 March 1808.

The Danes did not trust the French and wanted to place the French forces under Danish command. This was unreservedly opposed by Napoleon, who instead appointed marshal of France and the then governor of the Hanseatic cities, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, as commander of the allied forces. As governor of the Hanseatic cities he resided in Hamburg, which was convenient for the commission. Bernadotte got to work with just over 40,000 men, officers and soldiers from France, Spain,

Belgium, Holland and Denmark. Problems quickly started to arise when the powerful British fleet appeared on the horizon and threatened to intervene against any allied invasion of Scania. This, combined with signs of mutiny among the Spanish forces, led to increasing doubts about the war. In fact, it came no closer to Sweden than that the commander-in-chief, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, stood with his staff on the quay in the Danish town of Helsingör and looked over at Scania's west coast. He had no idea that two years later he would be Sweden's crown prince and that his hesitation had stopped Denmark's final attempt to recapture Scania.

Two and a half years later, on 20 October 1810, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte again stood on the quay at Helsingör, ready to get on a boat and be taken over the strait to Helsingborg as Sweden's crown prince.

He quickly took on his new crown prince role and worked to regain Sweden's honour, primarily in the international arena. In this he had more expertise than anyone else, gained from all his military and political commissions for France.

To the surprise of contemporaries, he soon gave Swedish foreign policy a new direction when he got closer to Russia by refraining from taking back Finland, and at the same time pressured Denmark to give up Norway in order to create a Swedish-Norwegian union. These resolute policies reclaimed Sweden's honour, even though sometimes the price was high (see Klågerup, page 114).

Crown Prince Charles John became Sweden's king in 1818.

He did not show the same interest in domestic policy as he had shown in the first few years of bold foreign policy. Many issues were decided at the castle in the presence of his few, but loyal, friends. Posterity has referred to "rule from the bedroom" as the king's habit was to stay in bed until late in the day. From there, undisturbed by special interest groups, he could discuss issues with the nobles he trusted, including the owner of Skarhult, Count Magnus Frederick Brahe.

The close trust between the king and Skarhult's owner meant that the monarch was offered the estate after Magnus Frederick Brahe's death in 1826. With this, Bernadotte came back to Scania, now as the owner of the Skarhult estate and Renaissance castle. He owned the castle until his death in 1844.