

Silesian Ostrava Castle

History

The castle was built in the second half of the 13th century as a royal stronghold on the border between the Teschen principality in the hands of the Piasts, and Moravia, represented in this area by the Olomouc diocese as a nobility. The reason for the construction of such an expensive stronghold was the protection of the „medieval trade route“ leading to the administrative and commercial centers. from Opava through Hlučín and Těšín to Kraków and especially the border of the Polish state, which, at that time, was formed by the river Ostravice. The importance, which was then presented by the builders of the castle, is also manifested by the massive walls, 4 meters high and 2.4 meters thick.

The first written record of the castle comes from August 2, 1297, when the Bishop of Olomouc Dětřich from Hradec concluded an agreement about the Polish-Moravian border with Duke Měšek of Těšín in the presence of Duke Boleslav of Opole. It was agreed that both sides would build border stones on their banks of the river Ostravice, which would determine the border for the future, in case that the flow of the river had changed. The meeting was also attended by Herman Speher, who held the position of the castellan at the time.

Another important written report comes from February 23, 1327. Duke Kazimír of Těšín confirmed that he had received Těšín along with Silesian Ostrava and the castle as the fief from the Czech King John of Bohemia. By this legal act, Těšín was permanently annexed by the Czech state and the castle thus lost its function of a border castle. The Ostravice River has also ceased to be a state border since then and has become the border between the estates of the Bishop of Olomouc and the Duke of Těšín – which consists border between Moravia and Silesia. The dukes of Těšín then ceased to be interested in the castle and in 1380 Duke Přemysl sold the castle along with today's Kunčičky to the Tvorkovský family.

Shortly after 1440, the owner of the castle became the Hussite governor Jan Čapek of Sány, who appointed a Hussite (Reformist) priest in the parish of Silesian Ostrava. Three-storey or taller living core of the castle was built at the end of the 15th century. According to the paintings in the church of St. Wenceslas in Moravian Ostrava the castle could also have up to a five-storey circular tower with a gallery. However, its existence has not been confirmed by research yet.

The castle and the whole local estate were acquired by Jan Sedlnický of Choltice in 1508, who bought it from Václav Hřivnáč for 5,330 Hungarian goldgulden. In addition, he also expanded his property including the villages of Heřmanice, Vrbice and Záblatí by an advantageous marriage. Members of this significant Silesian family lineage belonged to the prominent provincial officials. That is why the castle soon became the center of political life in the Těšín region.

The castle was rebuilt into a Renaissance Chateau by Jan Sedlnický during third and fourth decade of the 16th century. The reconstruction was carried out with the participation of Italian masons and artists. The old walls were supplemented by a cannon bastion – embrasures have been preserved in the northern part of the enclosure wall to this day.

In 1534, Sedlnický began the construction of the ditch, which stretched from Vratimov through Kunčice and Kunčičky to today's mine Zárubek and there it led to the river Lučina. The ditch powered the local mills, sawmills and fed with water local ponds, while also served as additional castle defence. Jiří Sedlnický also stands behind the construction of the church of St. George near the Chateau in 1555.

Another of the Sedlnický's dynasty member - Bedřich - unfortunately strongly indebted the estate. Signs of the economic decline began at the end of the 16th century and the individual villages of the estate were sold off. Bohuslav Sedlnický was able to buy the chateau in 1630 thanks to his marriage to Anna Maria, née Wilczková.

The castle was still an important stronghold during the Thirty Years' War and it served as a base for various warring parties which were staying in Silesian Ostrava during time of war. Napolitan army called by the Roman Emperor Ferdinand II. to guard the Jablunkov Pass instead of guarding the pass plundered the entire Silesian Ostrava including the castle chapel and the church. The region was ransacked again by Mansfeld's Danish army in 1626, yet the worst damages were caused by the Swedish army which occupied Silesian Ostrava during period of 1642–1649.

Ottoman expansion during 1760s lead military officials to ask Silesian authorities to *restore old stone castle destroyed during the Thirty Years' War*. However the plans to modernize the fortifications were abandoned.

The Silesian Ostrava estate with a chateau passed into the long-term property of the Germanized Wilczek family from Dobrá Zemice (today „Dobrá“ near Frýdek-Místek) in 1714. It was bought by the Austrian diplomat and military leader distinguished in Ottoman Wars Jindřich Vilém, Count Wilczek of Dobrá Zemice. By a favorable marriage to Countess Maria Charlotte Saint-Hilaire, he acquired the Kreuzenstein estate near Vienna, where the Wilczek family lives until nowadays. The Wilczeks were very wealthy and they expanded the estate, but did not live in the chateau. They preferred the chateaus in Klimkovice and Kreuzenstein and only the estate's administration was based in Silesian Ostrava.

Chateau played a role in the War of the Austrian Succession during 1740s. General of Prussian army and confidant of the Prussian King Frederick II, baron de la Motte Fouquet with his regiment spent there the winter of 1741. Silesian Ostrava and local villages – Hrušov, Vrbice and Pudlov were devastated due to military operations in the area.

Coal was discovered in Silesian Ostrava in 1763 and František Josef Hrabě Wilczek began permanent mining in 1787. Mining activities soon caused damage of the castles buildings. According to report from 1804, the castle was almost deserted at the time.

Fire of the castles farmyard in 1840, allegedly damaged also the castle, which was already described as a ruin with offices and apartments. The location of the former hall was used to expand the castle brewery. A cellar with a stone table and benches, iron arrows, swords and the like was allegedly discovered during the demolition of the knight's hall. Another fire erupted in 1872, due to which the brewery probably ceased to exist.

The Wilczek dynasty lent a mining field under the chateau to the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway company, which began to use coal mine Zárubek. The consequences of the undermining became apparent very soon. The district court in Bohumín had to carry out a commission inspection of the Chateau in January 1895, during which were discovered the causes of cracks in chateaus walls. It should be noted that the owner Jan Nepomuk; Count Wilczek, is also to blame for the destruction of the chateau. He was celebrated as a patron, supporter of science and arts in Austria. Extensive land property and mines have made him the wealthiest nobleman of the old Austria. At his Austrian residence, the Kreuzenstein castle, Wilczek gathered a huge collection of antiques and took here even the rarest items and collections of the Silesian Ostrava Castle, including the family archive.

Some of the castles residential quarters were expanded during period of 1895–1896 despite their dilapidated condition. These extensions allowed to relocate the administration of agriculture and forestry administration offices from the Poruba Castle.

Map from 1919 shows that the castle's first floor consisted of 14 rooms, 7 kitchens, 2 laundry rooms and a mangle room, 7 pantries, 5 storage rooms with ice cellar, a garage, blacksmith and locksmith workshop, 3 cellars and several sheds and coops. There were another 20 rooms, 4 kitchens, 7 offices and 3 large granaries in the first floor.

Despite this the castle was further dilapidating. The old living quarters in southwest corner were already abandoned by 1927 and there was a risk of their collapse. Deep cracks in the walls and boarded up windows indicated the castle's conditions. Net of phone and electric wires entangled every corner.

City council of Silesian Ostrava denied the request to demolish the oldest part of the castle in 1929. Inspection conducted by the historic preservation office uncovered the sorry state of the premises. Walls were cracked, uneven and crooked. The roof was also damaged and water leaked beneath. Only the still inhabited southwest corner was in better shape and the historic preservation office decided to preserve it as the most important part of the castle.

Some 5 meters wide part of the wall collapsed in 1930. Without the building permit the owners removed part of the southwest quarters roof frame three years later. This accelerated the collapse of the building. The remnants of the brewery cellar uncovered around the same time had to be filled with dirt due to its condition. The castle was further dilapidating and its inhabitants were continually moving out. By 1934 the last three tenements were still inhabited and the unoccupied rooms served as shelter for local vagrants.

The castle and its surroundings were flooded in 1940. The castle took another hit during bombing of Ostrava in 1944. Bombs fell in close proximity and damaged remaining parts. Wilczek family was disposed of the castle after 1945 and it became state-owned. Castle ruins belonged to mining company Trojice until 1958 when it changed ownership again to city of Ostrava. Coal mining under the castle continued until the 1960s which caused the castle to sink 16 meters. The castle was registered as a national cultural heritage in 1963.

Architectural design competition for the castle restoration was opened in 1967. However the winning proposition by architect Ivo Klimeš was never carried out. New restoration project started in 1979 as a part of „Initiative Z“ – voluntary work project. Despite the preservationists' objections the castle was rebuilt anew. Due to major changes caused by the new project the castle was removed from the list of national cultural heritage in 1989. This led to suspension of works and the castle was re-listed once again.

Many plans were presented in later periods. Castle was to be redeveloped into a hotel or to be used for other commercial purposes. Its restaurant was redeveloped into a discotheque. Rest of the castle was supposed to serve as a gallery, exhibition, wine bar and a hotel with capacity of 150 beds. Construction of a supermarket next to the castle was also planned, however neither of these plans reached fruition.

City of Ostrava purchased castle in 1998 and city-owned company „Ostravské výstavy“ have been tasked with castle's administration. In 2004, the castle was open to the public after the necessary renovation. Out of the original complex only ruin of the living quarters, small part of the castle walls and Renaissance gate with tower survived until these days. No part of the Renaissance Chateau survived until today.

Company Černá louka s.r.o. (former Ostravské výstavy) administers Silesian Ostrava Castle since 2018.

Tower and Gate

Renaissance tower from the 16th century is the most preserved part of the castle. Castle gate allowing both walkers and wagons to enter the castle was marked above its entrance by desk consisting of Sedlnický family coat of arms and year 1548. This represents the oldest text written in Arabic numerals in Ostrava. Copy of the desk is displayed by the tower entrance. Pivots used for the drawbridge are still visible on the sides of the tower. Remnants of the original passage for the walkers with 17th century embrasure and old cobblestone road are still visible at the gate entrance. Stone chiselled ornaments from the late Renaissance are still visible at the attached corridor. Torso of the stone front facade is one of many examples of late Renaissance architecture preserved until these days. Rounded guard stones at the gate corners prevented passing wagons from getting stuck inside the gate.

New extensions during modern history period added new buildings and covered original Renaissance gate at the gates base. The tower consists of three floors and currently serves as an exhibition for Museum of the Amber Road and the Silk Road. The tower was completely refurbished before the public opening in 2004.

Extension with gallery and lesser hall

This extension is located at the place of original east wing which was damaged during the first half of the 20th century. Most of the perimeter walls are original build in middle age and early modern age with exemption of part destroyed in 1930s. Original walls include late Medieval and Renaissance stone chiselled ornaments. South side of castle walls is supported by four props installed in 1970s during reconstruction. Ruins of east wing were later removed and replaced by new-build part. Extension was finished in 2004 when the lower part of the construction was covered by saddleback roof. Extensions attic serves as a castle gallery. Its spaciousness allows it to be used for many kinds of cultural and public events – exhibitions, concerts, lectures, meetings but also banquets or parties. The gallery includes bar and lounge area. The lesser hall in ground floor bellow the castle gallery offers lounge area with fireplace. Many photos and paintings (mostly dated to 20th century) of the castle ruin are visible at this place. Lesser hall serves for weddings and banquets as well as many other public and private events.

Palace

The oldest part of the castle is the palace e.g. living quarters. In some source this part is described also as a bastion. It was constructed on the promontory probably during the 13th century as a stronghold enclosed with a moat. It was refurbished into a Renaissance Chateau during 16th century. New living, administrative and outhouse buildings, knight hall and chapel were built as well. Knight hall collapsed in 19th century and further degradation continued later on. Photos in the lesser hall show the magnitude of damages in the course of time. Only parts of perimeter walls survived until today. Today, although not in its original rooms, the palace contains ceremonial hall, chapel, coat of arms hall and blacksmith shop. The armoury and torture chamber are to be seen in the cellar. Chamber which today exhibits the torture chamber is still overall well-preserved and shows probably medieval stone arch.

The visitors might overlook the castle and its surrounding from the palace terraces and outlooks. Today's castle look is a result of 2004 renovation.

New extension

Construction of the so called new extension was carried out in 2009 during short period of 72 days. The great hall in the ground floor serves as a multi-purpose space for conferences, festivals, weddings and other public events. Wood carving depicting history of the castle is displayed a tone of the walls. Hatches at windows display coats of arms of some of the previous castle owners. Terrace with shingle roof was constructed above the hall. Beneath the terrace is hanged wooden chain carved out of single 105 centimetres wide and 5.8 meters long tree trunk. The chains length of 25,15 metres is a Czech record.

Courtyard

The castle well was first mentioned during 2nd half of the 20th century. The wells construction was however never finished and water was reportedly to be alway transported to the castle. Some historical photos however show that the well was equiped with pump witch would suggest otherwise. Profile of two round late mediaval bastions are visible in the northwestern and southwestern courtayrds corners. Both have been demolished during 20th century and later restored or newly erected within their former contours. Amphiteatre is located in the lower, western edge of the areal. It is used for cultural events, mostly concerts or theater shows. Its capacity is 1 000 seats or 1200 standing viewers.