

Central Bohemia Tourist Board



# Romantic Tales of Central Bohemia



Central Bohemia Region



Dear visitors,

We have selected for you ten of the most interesting love stories, spanning times ancient and modern, featuring castles and other locations in Central Bohemia. Through these tales retold you can visit bygone times and engaging places in Central Bohemia and explore true love stories that brim with emotions, setbacks and struggles against prejudice.

Discover the happy and less-than-happy tales of ladies and gentlemen, their affairs marital and extramarital. You can read about composer Antonín Dvořák and his Muse; about the love affair between two intellectuals – the Czech writer Karel Čapek and the actress Olga Scheinpflugová; and follow the loves of notable Czech monarchs.

We trust this tourist guide will inspire you to visit the historical settings of these romantic tales.

Follow the trail of true romance and let it work its charm, as you explore the Central Bohemian region.

I wish you the most pleasant of romantic experiences.

*Nora Dolanská,*

Director of the Central Bohemia Tourist Office



*Photos opposite::*

*The Emperor Charles I with his wife and children at the Austro-Hungarian officers' parade in Italy*

*Karel Čapek and Olga at the beginning of their acquaintance*

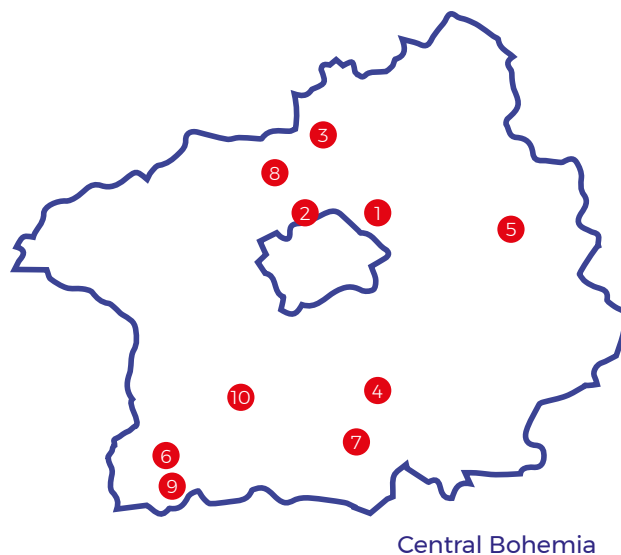
*Portrait of Sophie Chotek*

*Antonín Dvořák with his family and friends at Vysoká u Příbrami*

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## MORE FOR YOUR SAKE THAN MINE

***Charles I of Austria (1887-1922) met the love of his life, Zita of Bourbon-Parma (1892-1989) on a visit to Františkovy lázně (Franzensbad). The couple came through the unexpected; becoming Emperor and facing the First World War.***

The Hapsburg Archduke Karl Franz Josef was called-up after his studies at the University of Prague in 1908 to be a Lieutenant of the Dragoons Regiment in Brandýs nad Labem. He moved to the wonderful local Renaissance chateau, where all the sovereigns of the Hapsburg dynasty had resided in their turn, over the centuries.

A few years later, he met the attractive Zita, in Franzensbad. This lissom young woman with her hair in a bun was often likened to the Empress Elizabeth for her good looks. Charles, the second in line to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was being urged into marriage and Zita had the proper regal lineage. But her feelings took a full two years to develop, before Charles proposed. On her engagement photo, Zita added her catchphrase: 'More for your sake than mine.' It came to be the motto of her life, full of ups and downs.



*The Emperor Charles I with Zita and their son Otto after the Hungarian coronation in 1916*

Their wedding took place in 1911 – the wedding ceremony was even recorded on film, by the founder of the Austrian film industry, count Alexander Kolowrat-Krakowsky. The newly-weds returned from their honeymoon to the Château at Brandýs, where they were welcomed by a multitude in the tens-of-thousands. Here, they passed an all-too-short marital idyll, as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand d'Este on 28 June 1914 completely changed the lifestyle of the archduke and duchess.

Charles unexpectedly stepped up to being the Heir to the throne, and took over after the death of Emperor Franz Joseph I in November 1916. Charles I was enthroned at a very difficult time, and after the outbreak of WWI spent time on the Russian and the Italian front. He was one of the few monarchs to take part in the fighting personally. His wife fearlessly accompanied him and made the rounds of hospitals to cheer up wounded soldiers.

As Emperor, Charles led numerous reform- and peace negotiations. He consulted with his wife on all important decisions and much appreciated her presence at the meetings. His political services and statesmanship ended with the fall of the monarchy. Following the confiscation of all Hapsburg property, the former Emperor was sent into exile (in 1919). He died three years later, aged not quite 35, on the island of Madeira, where he is also buried.

His 30-year old widow never again dressed in anything but black and her new mission in life was to bring up her eight children, the oldest of whom, Otto, was being groomed for Imperial office. Zita returned to Austrian soil only in 1982, but never again saw her beloved Brandýs. She witnessed almost a century of history, and was interred in the Imperial Hapsburg crypt in Vienna upon her death in 1989.



Brandýs nad Labem Castle  
Plantáž 402  
250 01 Brandýs nad Labem  
[www.brandyszamek.cz](http://www.brandyszamek.cz)

## A FREE-SPIRITED MISS

***She was the first woman of the 19th century to reject the role of women as good mothers and housewives, and instead embarked on an artistic career. Although she charmed many notable men and had several love affairs, she never found Mister Right.***



*The Zdenka Braunerová Studio, Roztoky u Prahy*

Zdenka Braunerová (1858-1934) grew up in a family of the renowned Prague patriot, the lawyer František Brauner. She was a forceful character, and altogether far too self-sufficient and independent for a woman of her time, raising eyebrows with her lifestyle. She completely failed to live up to the traditional idea of womanhood, and was the first Czech woman to make her living through art.

Zdenka showed all-round talent already as a child, but preferred to paint, and at twenty went with her mother to Paris. This magical and unrestrained city was to become her lifelong love. And just imagine, the Académie Colarossi admitted women students, too! Zdenka's professional painting career led to her first exhibition and first successes.

The young woman also had the first in a series of love-affairs in Paris, with the Czech painter Antonín Chittussim, who opened her eyes to landscape painting. Another relationship, with the poet Julius Zeyer, never got beyond platonic friendship.

Her partnership with playwright Vilém Mrštík, whom she supported and worked on illustrations of his works, ended just short of marriage. The painter also had a stormy relationship during the short visit to Bohemia of Auguste Rodin, which went beyond her being a guide and interpreter for the famous sculptor. To round off the tally of interesting men in her life, there was the affair with the much younger translator, Miloš Marten.

All the men in her life had something in common – they were complicated intellectuals. A number of the affairs blossomed in the painter's Studio in Roztoky u Prahy

In the latter half of her life, Zdenka ceased to split her calendar year between Paris and Prague and settled down in the grounds of a mill, bought by the Brauner family. Here she built a Studio in the style of an English country house, an architectural project of her own design.

She devoted herself to oil paintings, illustrations and graphics, also designing and painting on glass, and decorating furniture. This Czech painter, graphic artist and book designer stood out in many fields, but her free spirit was in many respects ahead of her time. This modern European, her life awash with the breaking of wild waves, charmed many men of several generations, but never found true love. She departed, resigned to the fate of an unattached maid.

You can enjoy an impressive Zdenka Braunerová exhibition to this day, just a few dozen yards from the castle in Roztoky u Prahy (the seat of the Central Bohemian Museum) in the renovated Studio, with numerous original pieces, paintings and antique furniture.



Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky  
Zámek 1  
252 63 Roztoky  
[www.muzeum-roztoky.cz](http://www.muzeum-roztoky.cz)



## AN OVER-EMANCIPATED LADY

***One of the less harmonious marital relationships was that between Barbara of Cilli, Holy Roman Empress, Hungarian and Czech Queen, and Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg.***

Barbara of Cilli (1390/95-1451), daughter of Herman of Celje, became the second wife of Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368-1437), a major European monarch, in 1408. The marriage was advantageous to Sigismund, who got a very beautiful, brave and passionate woman, as chroniclers agreed. Their marital relationship was not too harmonious, however. A year after they wed, their only daughter, Elizabeth, was born.

Barbara had plenty of talent – from political ambitions, through working precious metals, to magic rites and efforts to gain the elixir of life. Sigismund initially turned a blind eye to her passion for other men. He too often spent time away on long campaigns, surrounded by women. Later on, he resorted to reining-in his prodigal wife's allowance, and, for a time, banished her from the Royal Court to Hungary, together with her daughter, due to defamation. The couple grew apart, even after her husband's wrath had passed.

Barbara also had talent for sensing the right time to stand by the King's side. One of such key moments came in 1436, when she accompanied Sigismund to Prague, where he was to be enthroned as the Czech King, while his wife was crowned Czech Queen in St. Vitus Cathedral by Bishop Filibert on 11 February 1437. On this occasion, Sigismund gave Barbara the Charter to the city of Mělník, together with other bequeathed cities, and other estates.

Later, Barbara secretly made pacts with leading Czech Lords against her father-in-law, Albrecht of Hapsburg, to whom Sigismund wanted to entrust governance. He found out about this plot, however, and had his wife seized. In December 1437, after

the death of Sigismund of Luxembourg, Albrecht was elected King. Barbara was released, by the decision of the Joint Congress of the opposing nobility and the cities, in Mělník.

Two years later, the widowed Queen had all entitlements duly restored to her. She settled at Mělník in the summer of 1441. Thanks to her being resident, the city revived and came to prominence, prospering economically. Important gatherings took place here, Barbara remained active on the political scene and assisted with the election of her grandson, called Ladislaus Posthumus, as Czech King.

Barbara of Cilli died at her seat in Mělník during a plague epidemic in 1451. This Empress, Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, lies buried in Prague's St. Vitus Cathedral.



Barbara of Cilli as Venus, from Konrad Kyeser's Bellifortis



Mělník Castle  
Svatováclavská 19/16  
276 01 Mělník  
[www.lobkowicz-melnik.cz](http://www.lobkowicz-melnik.cz)

## THE COMPOSER'S MUSE

***The world-famous composer Antonín Dvořák, a native of Nelahozeves, had two loves of his life that inspired him and gave him lifelong support. He never quite won the love of charming Josephine, his muse. Over time, however, he fell in love with her younger sister, Anna.***

The up-and-coming composer Antonín Dvořák (1841-1901) made a living any way he could, just as long as he had time for composition. Among other things, he taught piano, which brought him to the well-situated family of Prague burgher Jiří Čermák, to educate his daughters, the lovely Josephine (1849-1895), and the younger Anna (1854-1931).

He knew the elder sister, Josephine, from the Provisional Theatre, where he played the viola. Josephine showed much talent - her acting debut was followed by dozens of roles in quick succession over the next decade, not just in the Provisional, but also in the Weimar Court Theatre. The infatuated Dvořák hoped that their classes might lead to a relationship. Josephine never felt the same, however, and later married a notable politician, count Václav Robert Kaunitz. Instead of grieving, Dvořák set his feelings to music, and composed his 'Cypress' cycle, named after a romantic poetry collection.

The composer continued to teach the musically more talented Anna, who had less lofty ambitions than her sister. Anna was happy to promote Dvořák's creative talent, which she admired unreservedly. It did not take long for their relationship to develop into something more. They got married in 1873. In April the following year, Dvořák's eldest son Otakar was born, the first of their nine children.

After several years of courtship, Josephine Čermáková and Václav Robert Kaunitz exchanged vows in 1877 at a low-key ceremony. Antonín Dvořák was there as a witness. For the next twenty years, the Kaunitz couple enjoyed life in their chateau at Vysoká - albeit without offspring. The lovely



Josephine Čermák and her sister Anna at the piano

château setting was soon teeming with numerous summer visits, also affording access to the wider family. Dvořák reposed here in the summer, composed his music and felt very happy.

The Kounitz couple keenly followed his rapidly ascending creative career. The family letters chart Dvořák's growing achievements, at home and in America. The letters did, however, increasingly often mention Josephine's health issues. In May 1895, aged less than 50, Countess Kaunitz succumbed to heart failure. Dvořák, at the time working on his Cello Concerto in B minor, incorporated a memento within it, Josephine's favourite song, 'Let my spirit'.



Antonín Dvořák Memorial  
Vysoká u Příbrami 69  
262 42 Rožmitál pod Třemšínem  
[www.antonindvorak.cz](http://www.antonindvorak.cz)

## ANYTHING GOES, EXCEPT MARRIAGE!

***At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, getting married, as of right, was only for the chosen few. That is why the sojourn of Czech aristocrat Sophie Chotek (1868-1914) with the successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand d'Este (1863-1914) broke all sorts of taboos at the time.***



*Franz Ferdinand d'Este with his wife Sophie Chotek and their children*

Courtly etiquette and ceremony of the House of Hapsburg had been honed and refined over the centuries, down to the smallest detail. The respected rules of legitimacy were overriding, when it came to the advisability of matrimonial ties. When it came to romance, the tacit rule was 'anything goes' and every affair had its explanation, and if needed, compensatory hush-money, but marriage outside the highest circles was unthinkable. Such was the broader context of the great love between the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand d'Este and the Czech noble princess Sophie Chotek.

The status of Franz unexpectedly changed following the suicide of crown prince Rudolf in 1889 making him second in line to the throne, after his father, Karl Ludwig; upon whose death in 1896 Franz Ferdinand was confirmed as Heir to the throne. At around that

time he met Sophie Chotek, at that time a lady-in-waiting to Archduchess Isabella of Croy. The young couple fell in love and began exchanging letters.

Sophie Chotek, without a drop of Royal blood, was not a suitable bride for the Viennese Court. To make the marriage happen, Franz had to overcome the ire of the aged emperor and the stipulated year-long waiting period, for reconsideration. The Emperor's consent came at quite a price: Ferdinand had to sign a document forsaking any claims to the throne for his future descendants. Franz signed, and after many years of secret love, separation, and struggle, the wedding could at last take place.

On her big day, 1 July 1900, the bride wore a white satin dress with a double cord of pearls. The Heir to the throne married 'beneath himself' to the fanfares of the Imperial anthem. The Feast opened with a freshly delivered telegram: the Emperor had elevated the bride to being Princess of Hohenberg (later still, the Emperor lifted her status further, by granting the title of Duchess).

The couple drove to Konopiště Castle, where they spent their honeymoon, finally officially allowed to be together. This expensively rebuilt Czech castle became their most beloved residence. The marriage was blessed with three beautiful children, in swift succession. Sophie liked to take photos and her pictures tell of happy family years.

On 28 June 1914 the couple attended a military parade in Sarajevo, and met with their assassination. After an earlier failed bombing attack on the convoy, they were shot at another place by the Serbian separatist Gavrilo Princip. The couple both succumbed to injury and the incident became one of the triggers of the First World War.



Konopiště Castle  
Konopiště 1  
256 01 Benešov  
[www.zamek-konopiste.cz](http://www.zamek-konopiste.cz)



## A CZECH NOBLE QUEEN

***The story of Queen Joanna of Rožmitál, who became Czech Queen as the second wife of George of Poděbrady, is a poignant tale of a strong emotional bond all through their 15-year marriage.***

On Christmas Day in 1466, Joanna gave her husband George of Poděbrady a slim book of prayer. Her dedication verse makes for touching testimony of the strongly felt bonds of their marriage. And yet, the relationship between the then Czech ruler, George of Kunštát and Poděbrady (1420-1471) and Joanna from Rožmitál (1430-1475), started as quite pragmatic.

George's first wife, Kunhuta, died in childbirth, and so the 20-year old Joanna, at the behest of her brother, Leo of Rožmitál, the primate of the Catholic Church, became the second wife of a widowed father of six. George was a Protestant, but the Lords of Rožmitál sided with Catholicism. In times of strife between the Catholics and Utraquists, this was a clear message from George – let us now put an end to our post-Hussite troubles.

Unlike Kunhuta, energetic Joanna did not settle for merely being a supportive wife, she also made her mark in public life. She was quick to chart the goings-on behind the scenes of courtly politics. She became her husband's counsel and assistant. George of Poděbrady, a born politician, had already been put in charge of the Bohemian Kingdom at the age of 25, by King Ladislav. A man of many talents and a master of compromise, after the sudden demise of the King in 1458 the Czech nobles elected him as King. He became the only Czech ruler not from a royal dynasty, but a nobleman by birth. For George and Joanna, the coronation was itself a great triumph

George lived out his great vision until the last years of his life. He counted on founding a great 'Poděbrady dynasty' and establishing it firmly among the Bohemian Estates. To do so, he needed a son born while he was still on the throne. George had many children



Czech Queen Joanna of Rožmitál

– six from his first marriage, to which he added five more. The couple vested great hopes in their first-born son Hynek (1452-1492), born to Joanna in the hub of the Lords of Kunštát dominion, the then strategically important Poděbrady. Lore has it he was born in the castle there on St. George's day, just as his father had been in 1420. The boy was very precocious, and while yet a seven-year-old became engaged to princess Catherine of Saxony. A year after his father's death (in 1472) Hynek made Poděbrady a town, granting it numerous privileges and a coat of arms. Yet this Czech diplomat and prominent poet, never did quite come out of the shadow of his father, 'the bold son of the fatherland', who is deservedly ranked among the greatest figures of our history.



Poděbrady Castle  
II. courtyard  
Jiřího nám. 1/8  
290 01 Poděbrady I.  
[www.polabskemuzeum.cz](http://www.polabskemuzeum.cz)

## THE MUSE OF POETS, WRITERS AND PAINTERS

***The last aristocratic owner of the Vrchotovy Janovice Château was a woman ahead of her time. Sidonia Nádherná of Borutín (1885-1950) was neither ready to give up love for freedom, nor freedom for love.***



Baroness Sidonia Nádherná of Borutín, painted by Max Švabinský in 1908

She was an inspiration to others all her life. Her name is found encoded in many verses by the Austrian writer Karl Kraus, but also hidden in the voluminous correspondence and journals of poets, writers and painters.

Sidonia's life story could have made quite a remarkable biographical novel, before she was laid to rest in the Castle Park in Vrchotovy Janovice. This was indeed where this cosmopolitan woman always headed after her travels, and where she received many prominent guests.

Sidonia was drawn to all things new and modern: she was one of the first ladies to drive, and was an avid smoker, and sportswoman. She was inclined to wear plunging necklines, not least to show off her long elegant neck. She took much interest in literature, drama and the arts. Her particular talent lay in landscape gardening.

Yet, what in particular attracted three major figures of the arts, Rilke, Švabinský and Kraus to the unconventional Baroness? Was it her learning, her passion or her disdain? This progressive, restless soul, dubbed "Sidi" was not after promises, but freedom. She made no vows of fidelity.

For Rainer Maria Rilke, a leading German-language poet, she was a Muse and patroness – she even financed his treatment against leukaemia, which overpowered him in 1926. Their deep relationship, with hundreds of letters exchanged, never quite got beyond friendship. The painter Max Švabinský fell for Sidonia after he was commissioned to paint her portrait. Although she did not reciprocate his love, his portrait of Sidonia is one of his best, depicting a woman both tender and confident.

Another fateful relationship with Sidonia involved the noted Austrian literary critic and writer, Karl Kraus. She was not only his great love and inspiration, but also enchanted him with her spirited, keen intellect. The clandestine love-affair endured several breakups and complications. For example, after an argument with Kraus, Sidonia married the sporty Prince Thun-Hohenstein. But, after six months, she broke up with him and came back to Kraus. Soon after their last meeting in 1936, Kraus breathed his last, in Vienna. No other man of destiny showed up in Sidonia's life, so she remained single and childless.

She was to face the historical vicissitudes that altered her life's course on her own. During World War II the Vrchotovy Janovice Château was commandeered by the Nazis as a base and barracks, whilst in 1948 the Château was confiscated by the Communist State. Her unsustainable situation eventually forced Sidonia to emigrate to England, in 1949, where she succumbed to lung cancer, in 1950.



Vrchotovy Janovice Castle  
257 53 Vrchotovy Janovice  
[www.nm.cz/Hlavni-strana/Navstivte-nas/  
Zamek-Vrchotovy-Janovice.html](http://www.nm.cz/Hlavni-strana/Navstivte-nas/Zamek-Vrchotovy-Janovice.html)

## A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE AND DEVOTION

***Beautiful, intelligent and successful Polyxena was a faithful Catholic, whose charm, but also political engagement gained her the epithet 'First Lady of the Kingdom'. Although it seemed her second marriage stemmed from the head, rather than the heart, years of partnership brought mutual deep feeling.***

Polyxena of Pernstein (1566-1642) was arguably the most talented of eight daughters in this most powerful aristocratic family. Polyxena was beautiful and smart after her mother, a Spanish aristocrat. Polyxena had good fortune on her side in all her endeavours. She did everything right. It was perhaps only in private life that she violated the established matrimonial practices of the 16th century. She first married aged 21 years, almost an old maid by the standards of her time. Her spouse was her father's friend, William of Rosenberg (1587).

Despite the 30-year age difference between the spouses, William was hoping for an heir, to keep the Family lineage, but failed. Before his death, William of Rosenberg bequeathed his wife the estate of Roudnice nad Labem, and she was vigorous in making the best of her inherited assets.

The widowed Polyxena became one of the mainstays of the Catholic Church, just as the dispute between Protestants and Catholics in Bohemia at the turn of 16th and 17th centuries was at its height. The influential widow rose steeply in the social hierarchy – and for her wealth, charm and beauty, but also political activity, she was dubbed the 'First Lady of the Kingdom'. After ten years, it seemed this most well-known of widowed noblewoman, in all likelihood past childbearing age, would never wed again.

Yet eleven years after her late husband's death, Polyxena of Rosenberg did remarry, this time to the Supreme Chancellor of the Bohemian Kingdom, an esteemed politician and primate of the Catholic



Polyxena of Lobkowitz

Church. Zdeněk Vojtěch Popel of Lobkowitz (1568-1628) acquired by way of this marriage, the Czech hereditary title of 'Prince of the Lobkowitz lineage'.

Polyxena and Vojtěch appear on their display portraits as a very fine couple, attired in Spanish fashion.

It seemed that pragmatic judgement and powerful influence (the bride brought a very sizeable dowry) were the decisive factors in the marriage, but after several years of partnership, the initial sober match had become an affair of the heart. The fact that they had a son, Václav Eusebius, was widely considered a miracle, since Polyxena was by then forty-three!

After the tough defeat of the gentry's uprising and the subsequent recatholization of the country, Polyxena showed herself an uncompromising and loyal Catholic, while financially assisting the wives of those engaged in the resistance or banished abroad. After 1621 she bought up confiscated estates on the cheap, including, as one of the significant additions to their Family assets, Nelahozeves Castle, a first-class example of Renaissance architecture. In the extensive exhibit there you'll find among other things a sizeable portion of the Lobkowitz collection of fine paintings.



Nelahozeves Castle  
277 51 Nelahozeves 1  
[www.zameknelahozeves.cz](http://www.zameknelahozeves.cz)

## A GODSEND OF A WOMAN

***It was one of the most beautiful love stories between two intellectuals - the brilliant world-famous writer Karel Čapek (1890-1938) and the accomplished actress Olga Scheinpflugová (1902-1968), born in Slaně.***

Aged thirty, Karel Čapek would wait by the theatre for the young actress to emerge after her performance. Although he'd only just started to make it as a writer, he took to Olga and her 'songbird voice' to play Mimi, in an as-yet unfinished comedy. The actress was eventually to play a purpose written role in Čapek's 'Outlaw' drama.

At the time they met, Karel Čapek was torn between the sultry Věra Hružová and the more petite, bright-eyed Olga. They both tugged at his heartstrings, but



Karel Čapek with Olga Scheinpflugová at Strž

Čapek settled for Olga from 1923 onward. Their relationship lasted fifteen years (with just three years in wedlock).

The Čapek family was dead-set against Karel spending his future with this vivacious actress. His doctors advised against marriage, in view of Karel's spondylitis, an inflammatory malady of the spine. So, the couple lived together as free agents: the genius writer of renown and the distinctive actress. She portrayed over a hundred roles on the first stage of the National Theatre alone. She was not overshadowed by the great writer, they were equal partners.

Olga and Karel got married with a discreet ceremony in the summer of 1935. As a wedding gift, Čapek's good friend Václav Palivec gave them lifelong tenure of his Empire-style villa by the pond in Strž near Stará Huť. This romantic dwelling with its lovely plot of land gave birth to Karel Čapek's masterpieces, and hosted many of the couple's guests. It was here that Karel sought sanctuary from the looming dread of the pre-war years. During the autumn of 1938, when the pond breached its dam and the stream flooded the villa garden, Karel Čapek caught a bad chill. Influenza was followed by nephritis and pneumonia. In short order, the malaise led to his death, at Christmas. In her desperation Olga wrote: *"You taught me everything. All except, how to live without you!"*

Čapek's wife, with her impish and determined tenacity, managed to turn the 'na Strži' villa into a commemorative museum in 1963. Olga Scheinpflugová reflected on her achievements, keeping Čapek published and opening his memorial, with irony and self-deprecation. She put it like this: *"I don't know how good a wife Čapek had, but he has a pretty good widow."* Olga lived alone for another three decades, her last performance was the lead role in Čapek's drama 'Mother' (1967). She was buried alongside her husband at the Vyšehrad cemetery.



Karel Čapek Memorial  
Stará Huť 125  
262 02 Dobříš  
[www.capek-karel-pamatnik.cz](http://www.capek-karel-pamatnik.cz)



## BELLA PHILIPPINA

***The romantic tale of commoner, Philippina Welser (1527-1580) and Ferdinand II, son of the Emperor, is a poignant testament to great and sincere love that had to remain concealed for many years.***

Bella Philippina – as the educated daughter of the Welser patrician family was widely known, was in line to take over the profitable family business. Her blonde beauty was reputedly matched by her brains. She was charismatic, widely popular and later gained renown as a fine cook and herb expert.

Her first meeting with her future husband was in Březnice Château at a social gathering in 1555, where she was introduced to the Emperor's second son, Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol (1529-1595). Philippina was twenty years old and Ferdinand was Governor of Bohemia, starting out on his political career. They fell passionately in love, and two years later were married. Numerous novels portray the scene of that freezing nocturnal wedding, of a member of the ruling family to a beautiful commoner, in the Březnice Château chapel.

The love-struck newlyweds had to keep their secrets every step of the way, even when Philippina first gave birth in 1558. Once a few days old, the baby was to be 'found' on the castle steps, for Philippina to take care of the foundling. This was also how the mother got to look after her second-born, Karel.

Although the wrath of Emperor Ferdinand I on hearing the news of the marriage and these births was a certainty, his son faced the music in 1559. Unexpectedly, the Emperor was surprisingly willing to accept the situation, subject to it remaining a secret. The children of Ferdinand's marriage were, however, excluded from the Hapsburg succession.

The situation got more complicated in 1564, when the death of their father brought first-born Maximilian to the throne. Ferdinand acquired Tyrol, on the basis of his father's last will (hence his Tyrolean

epithet). His political ascent and chance to gain the Polish Crown were an option, on condition of parting from Philippina. Ferdinand made it clear his marriage was not to be traded, and gave up the prospect of the Polish throne.

The unequal marriage was recognized when the Pope consecrated it, just four years before Philippina's death. At that time, the couple lived at Schloss Ambras in Innsbruck. Ferdinand's legally recognized wife died looking at her beloved man, with the words: "I am looking at my delight!" Despite opposition, the marriage between a merchant's daughter and the son of the Emperor was one of the happiest in Hapsburg family history.



*Philippina Welser around 1557*



Březnice Castle  
262 72 Březnice 24  
[www.zamek-breznice.cz](http://www.zamek-breznice.cz)



Photos opposite:  
Portrait of Franz Ferdinand and Sophie Chotek  
Antonín Dvořák with his wife Anna  
Charles I and Zita at their wedding, with Emperor Franz Joseph I  
Karel Čapek with President T. G. Masaryk

Title: Romantic tales of Central Bohemia

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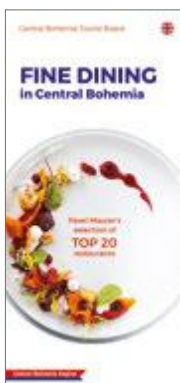
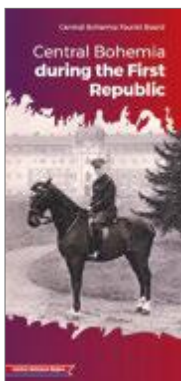
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