

The Grossedlitz Baroque Garden

In 1719 August Christoph, Count von Wackerbarth, commissioned the Saxon master builder Johann Christoph Knoeffel to build his retirement home. Only two hours away from his residence, this site would have enabled him to reach Dresden in only two hours. As General Adjutant of the Saxon Army, General Inspector of Building Works and governor of the city of Dresden, Count von Wackerbarth was the most influential person at court and close confidant of Augustus the Strong. Up to 1,000 soldiers were made available for the building of the premises, which took its form from its position in a valley, and so the palace was completed in 1720, with the Orangery also finished in 1723. The garden was beautiful, and in 1723 Augustus the Strong bought the palace and garden through a secret contract. Officially Wackerbarth carried on building, but from then on according to the plans of Augustus the Strong.

While Moritzburg was for hunting and Pillnitz was for pure enjoyment, Grossedlitz was to be the place where the festival of the Polish White Eagle Order could be celebrated. The court society would arrive from Dresden at about midday and, after the order's shooting contest had been completed, would return to the capital. About 400 horses had to be cared for in the stables nearby. The palace and gardens laid out by von Wackerbarth came nowhere near to satisfying the considerably greater demands of Augustus the Strong. Thus, the grounds were remodelled. The Palace and the Upper Orangery were to be demolished and plans were laid for a central palace complex. Alongside Knoeffel, Matthaeus Daniel Poeppele and Zacharias Longelue were commissioned with the planning and carrying out of the project. All three were noted master builders of the Baroque style, and they left their mark on Grossedlitz. Some of the more than 60 sculptures which adorn the garden were the work of court sculptor Johann Christian Kirchner. The groups of figures such as the "Four Seasons", the "Four Elements of the Earth", and the "Four Elements", which are original works in the garden, are beyond comparison. But some were the work of the court sculptor Johann Benjamin Thomae and his workshop. In 1727 the Lower Orangery was completed and the gardens reached the extent which they have today. In that year Augustus the Strong celebrated the Festival of the Polish White Eagle in Grossedlitz on the third of August, his name day.

His son celebrated this festival another 12 times on the same spot until 1756. Over the following years Augustus the Strong gradually lost interest in his Saxon palaces, and dedicated himself to Poland. In 1728 he gave up trying to build a central palace and in 1732 all building works on the grounds were stopped. By that time he was seriously ill and could not travel between Warsaw

and Dresden as often as in earlier years. A visible sign of how the work was broken off is the Forest Cascade. This was not destroyed by the Prussians, as many people assumed for a long time, but it was simply just never completed. The garden remained uncompleted and covers only about one-third of the area which was originally planned for it. War damage also left its mark on the Baroque garden. In 1745 after the defeat at the Battle of Kesselsdorf the survivors of the Saxons and Austrian armies retreated here, felling trees and damaging buildings. In 1756, only a few days after the last Festival of the Polish White Eagle Order, the victorious Prussian army set up their headquarters here and their troops remained until the end of the Seven-Year War in 1763.

In that period the gardens suffered great damage. The last destruction as a result of war was in 1813, when there were clashes between Russian and French forces in the Baroque garden. In that year the pumping station in Kottewitz was also destroyed, which before had been able to transport water from the Mueglitz river uphill to Grossedlitz. The royal family used Grosssedlitz very irregularly. The garden and palace were no longer interesting for them and so were spared being reformed due to a change in passing tastes, as happened in many other gardens. During the rule of King Johann extensive maintenance work was carried out. The Lower Orangery was rebuilt and modern warm air heating was installed. The palace, Friedrichsburg, was badly in need of repair and had to be demolished in 1871. Because of financial restrictions the new building could not be completed as originally planned, and so the visitor today finds themselves in what was supposed to be the east wing. Only the cellars can be seen of what should have become the west wing, and the central structure. With the palace complex reduced to a third, the name was changed from Friedrich Burg ("Friedrich Castle") to Friedrichschloesschen (Friedrich Little Palace). Potted plants, some of them having survived from the time of Augustus the Strong, were kept in the Orangery up until winter 1928.

The collection of bitter orange trees was especially valuable. Unfortunately in the winter of 1928/29 the entire plant collection froze during a long period of frost in which there were temperatures as low as -30 °C. From 1918 until 1990 and under different owners, there were numerous maintenance works in the garden, on the water fountains, sculptures and buildings. Between 1929 and the beginning of the 1950s it was Herrmann Schuettauf who improved the care of the coppices and the plants as well as carefully making the Baroque structures visible again through purposeful care of the undergrowth. He also changed the *broderie* patterns on the level of the upper orangery and introduced the colorful bordering plants. Since that time visitors have been able to enjoy the sight of more than 50 different flowers and herbs. After the Second World War further restoration of the garden layout took place under the management of the Monument Protection service. However, the deterioration of the grounds could

merely be slowed down. It was only after 1990 that a period of complete maintenance and reconstruction could begin.

The Grosssedlitz Baroque Garden was transferred in 1992 from the possession of Heidenau town council back to the reborn Free State of Saxony. At this point the extensive restoration and reconstruction of the gardens and buildings began. After the completion of the Lower and Upper Orangeries, 145 bitter orange trees and 300 potted plants were acquired which now, just as in bygone days, adorn the garden during the summer months and which can make the visitor feel as if they have been taken back to the time when the garden was born 300 years ago. This makes Grosssedlitz the site of the biggest collection of bitter orange trees in any German-speaking country. If you are lucky you can purchase a glass of the delicious bitter orange marmalade in the museum shop. The valuable sculptures are being carefully restored or are being replaced by copies. From Easter to October every year there are a number of events in the gardens, the highpoint being the garden festival on the first weekend in August. It recalls the Festival of the Polish White Eagle Order, which was held in Grosssedlitz under Augustus the Strong.

This order is still one of the highest decorations which can be bestowed in Poland, and former German Chancellors Helmut Kohl and Gerhard Schroeder hold this award. Only 20 kilometers away from Dresden city center, the visitor today can find an exemplary, cared-for garden complex. Wide staircases, thick, high hedgerows, water fountains, more than 60 Baroque sandstone sculptures (24 of them original), 450 potted plants and colourful borders invite you to take a stroll and enjoy the attraction of the garden complex. But the intimate and shadowy boscaiges also tempt you to relax. Whoever wishes can also play bowls or drink a coffee in Friedrichschloessen. The grounds are untypical of Baroque gardens north of the Alps. Two inclines, which are completely facing each other, were incorporated into the form of the gardens and give them a very special shape, of which this is the example in Saxony. Although it was never finished, the Grosssedlitz Baroque Garden is a totally genuine example of 300-year-old Baroque garden design, allowing the visitor to experience the spirit of those times.