



Daisy's Garden

By Matt Mykityszyn

With their spectacular setting and rich history, Princess Daisy of Pless's terraced gardens are amongst the most beautiful in Europe.

The gardens at Książ Castle in Wałbrzych are amongst the finest in Poland, but are little known outside that country. Książ itself (also called Schloss Fürstenstein) has a colourful history and the gardens owe much to the castle's most celebrated occupant, Princess Daisy of Pless.

The situation of the gardens is spectacular, extending as they do over an area of two hectares – nearly five acres – on 12 different levels. The site of the gardens had originally served as fortifications and each terrace affords sweeping views of the castle's beautiful surroundings, overlooking the gorge of the Pełcznica river. Their transformation began when Duke Christoph II von Hochberg became master of Książ in the first half of the 17th century. Still, it was only after the demolition of the old walls and ramparts in 1646, and the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, that it became possible to extend and add to them. Soon, these terraces no longer had a practical function: they served as a venue for walks in decorative, æsthetic surroundings. Flower gardens,

maintained in a Renaissance style, began to appear around the castle. The last phase of creation took place between 1913 and 1927, when they took on the form and appearance that most areas still retain. To this day there are reminders of Princess Daisy.

Daisy was born Mary Theresa Olivia Cornwallis-West in Wales in 1873 to an impoverished but aristocratic and well-connected family. In 1893 she married Hans Heinrich XV, Prince of Pless and Count of Hochberg (1861-1938). Her husband was one of the richest men in Europe and she was a famous society beauty (pictured in *Country Life*) so their wedding in London was a public event with crowds shouting "God Bless you!" as their carriage drove through the streets.

A friend of both Edward VII and Kaiser Wilhelm II, she worked to promote peace and served as a nurse during the First World War. Gradually, the marriage foundered and the couple divorced in 1922. Daisy later obtained notoriety with a series of indiscreet (and much quoted) memoirs, published in 1931.



Opposite page: Książ Castle Gardens benefit from a spectacular location.

Above: The Goddess Flora Terrace in 1914.

Right: Princess Daisy of Pless was a famous beauty in her day.

Far right: The south side of Książ Castle with the Goddess Flora Terrace beneath.



Princess Daisy was a brilliant gardener, who sought among her flowers a remedy for her sadness. Known as Europe's most beautiful woman, she was also among its richest, and yet – apart from gardening and presiding over the castle's salons, she had no real say in the fortunes of her own home. Her divorce forced her to leave her re-creation of the gardens unfinished, though her husband continued the work. Daisy remained in Poland during the Second World War and died in relative poverty in 1943.

The gardens are best understood by taking the terraces one by one. Let us begin our virtual tour with the Terrace of the Goddess Flora, which is connected to the Powder Tower in the southwest corner. The upper floor of this many-sided stone tower was built on the medieval foundations of the tower of the same name. In the older part, the original crenellations and the gothic portal have been preserved. The stone stairs, located by the tower walls, lead down to the Terrace of the Goddess Flora.

Going in the opposite (eastern) direction, one reaches a dry moat and then – to the left – a stone path to the entrance gate of the main courtyard. On the terrace are lawns, flowers and shrubs – and it provides a magnificent view of the Pełcznica Gorge and the surrounding hills.

Guidebooks published before the last war referred to this

area as the 'Terrace of the Garden of Delights'. The present name refers to the statue of the goddess Flora, which may be seen in an ivy-covered rock niche. The terrace's main decorative feature is the richly sculpted Triton Fountain, located in the centre. The tritons emerge from the round pool to support a large, fancifully shaped basin, in which little figures stand to support a smaller bowl. The most striking floral feature consists of the shaped box hedges. From the terrace one can take the stairs (which may be seen to the left of Flora's statue) leading to the higher Walnut Terrace, named after the walnut trees that once grew there.

The Middle Terrace is embellished by two figural fountains, on the east and west side of the terrace – the works of the Silesian sculptor Blichmann. The sides of the balustrades are richly decorated with bas-reliefs with geometrical and plant motifs. A column with a Corinthian head emerges from the centre of each fountain and the heads are decorated with masks from which water spouts. The statues of figures with jugs, which once stood on the tops of these columns and from which water also splashed, have not survived. The charm of the terrace lies in the beauty and richness of the vegetation growing on the escarpment. From here, the south part of the castle may be admired, with its diversity of architectural styles.



Above: The Donatello Fountain on the Chestnut Terrace in 1914.

Left: Red tulips on the Water Terrace.

Below: The imposing western facade of Książ Castle.



One of the most popular with visitors (and most photographed) is the Cascade Terrace, known before the last war as the Rose Terrace. This consists of symmetrically arranged box and rose compositions. It is particularly striking when viewed from the Chestnut (Kasztanowy) Terrace above, affording as it does a view of the shape of the greenery. On the north side, a cascade fountain is built into the rock, from which mountain vegetation grows – giving the terrace its name.

The largest and in some ways the most impressive of the terraces is the West Terrace. This is located next to the castle's huge west wing, built in the first half of the 20th century in an eclectic style. It is embellished by three fountains surrounded by topiary and complemented by bushes, flowers and a lawn. The largest and most beautiful is the middle fountain, of Italian provenance.

The castle's imposing and beautiful west wing, supported on a rock covered by mountain vegetation, is fully visible from this terrace. Two towers flank it. To the right stands the George Tower, once the home of Princess Daisy von Pless's beloved but incorrigible son, Alexander, who left Poland in the 1930s for a playboy's life in Paris but then fought bravely with the Polish Army in North Africa and Italy, and spent the rest of his life in Mallorca.

The White Tower stands to the right. In the pediment of the façade of this part of the building, between the two towers, are sculptures of lions bearing the coats of arms of the von Hochberg dynasty and the family of Earl De La Warr, to which Princess Daisy belonged.

A few stone steps down from the Middle Terrace, the Water Terrace is considered by many to be the most beautiful of the terraces, with 27 fountains on its rectangular surface, surrounded by box topiary. In its outer corners stand short, four-sided stone towers. The Water Terrace is famous as the setting for a scene in Jerzy Hoffman's celebrated 1976 film *Trędowata* (based on the 1909 novel *The Leper* by Helen Mniskówna), with the much-loved actress Elżbieta Starostecka playing Stefcia Rudecka, a governess whose love affair with a wealthy aristocrat leads to tragedy.

The Horseshoe Terrace, named for its shape, connects the Middle Terrace with the Cascade or Rose Terrace. Despite its small size, its architecture is interesting, especially the dual stairs and decorative stone balustrade (with the entrance to the terrace in the middle), with neo-Renaissance balusters. Also of interest is the small fountain with stone bowls, in the middle between the flights of stairs.

The Chestnut Terrace is accessed from the West Terrace via the George Tower with its neo-Romanesque decor on the ground floor. This includes a close replica of the Renaissance façade of the Peller House in Nuremberg – a striking building by Jakob Wolff the Elder, based on the elaborate façades of the trading houses in Northern Germany – which was destroyed in World War II.

Named for its chestnut trees, the terrace is enclosed by a carved stone balustrade. In the centre are fragments of the fountain, attributed to Donatello, that stood there before the war. In those days, the terrace's garden was considered the most beautiful in Książ. In the early 1980s, Daisy's son Alexander described it in a letter to the castle's management at the time: "A family dining room adjoined it, a small area only for family and very close relatives. On the room vault were frescoes which my father had bought in Italy. These frescoes and the Italian fountain on the Chestnut Terrace caused a great deal of trouble, as the Italians suddenly took the notion that these were important works of their national art. For this reason, they had to be smuggled."

The most striking of the garden buildings is the Wałbrzych Palm House which provides a good opportunity to examine the huge changes brought about to the Książ gardens by Princess Daisy and her husband.

The Wałbrzych Palm House arose from the initiative of Hans Heinrich XV, the last representative of the Hochberg dynasty to live in Książ Castle. The Prince had it built for his Princess Daisy, recognising her as a lover of beautiful flowers and unusual plants. To this day, this expression of love – the largest imaginable 'bouquet of flowers' – holds great charm. It is the only such palm house in Poland to be preserved in its original form. To build it, the Prince had seven train wagons full of solidified lava from Sicily's Etna volcano brought from Italy. On the site, the builders broke up large chunks of the volcanic tufa into smaller pieces; with this they created grottos, waterfalls and walls with plant niches. Built in the years 1911-13 in the modernist style, its glass and metal construction

swallowed up the astronomical sum of seven million gold marks (the 1910 currency equivalents would be £350,000 or US\$1.75m).

As well as the Palm House, a greenhouse, a garden maintained in the Japanese style, a rose garden, a fruit and vegetable garden, and an area for the cultivation of shrubs were also developed. The whole undertaking was so immense that it was referred to as a garden 'factory'. As soon as the construction work was completed on the building, some 80 species of new plants were introduced.

The central part was a 15m (49ft) building, constructed from metal and glass, in which date palms were planted. This was surrounded by single-storey conservatories. On the Palm House's roof a small lookout was created, from which one could admire the enchanting panorama of the surroundings. From the beginning, the Princess decided that the Palm House should be accessible to visitors – and so it has remained to this day.



Above right: Baroque sculptures by Johann Gottfried Schenk surround the main courtyard.

Right: The modernist Wałbrzych Palm House was built between 1911 and 1913.





Left: The rhododendrons were brought from England to Lower Silesia by Princess Daisy.

Above: Książ is home to Poland's only bonsai collection.

Below: The Rose Terrace on the south side of the castle.

Of all these splendours, it was the rose garden that was to remain the apple of the Princess's eye. The roses cultivated there included those with snow-white petals, now known as the 'Daisy' variety. So fascinated was the Princess with roses that she recommended the development of a second large rose garden on the castle terraces.

This is not all that the Princess changed in the castle gardens: to transform the appearance of the terraces and the surrounding park according to her particular vision, she brought gardeners from her native Great Britain. The gardens, maintained up to that time in a formal French manner, were refashioned according to an English style, characterised by natural and romantic qualities. There appeared a large number of rhododendrons, beloved by Daisy. The Palm House provided the seedlings of the bushes and other plants that served to change the decor of the castle surroundings. The Palm House was also the source of fresh vegetables and fruits for the princely kitchen.

At present, over 250 species of plants grow in the Wałbrzych Palm House, which represents flora from a variety of climate zones and continents. One may view bamboos, fig trees and bushes from Asia; eucalyptus, spruce and pine trees from Australia; perennials from Africa; cactus and agave plants from Central America; and Mediterranean citrus plants.

For admirers of the Far East, there is Poland's only bonsai exhibition, an exhibition of remarkable specimens of these miniature trees, which have won many awards in Poland and abroad and are a great visitor attraction. The presentation of small

trees allows visitors to see, in miniature form, the passing of the four seasons, corresponding to the weather conditions outside. The oldest bonsai in the collection is a juniper about 200 years old.

The spirit of Princess Daisy still presides over these magnificent gardens. Although, nowadays, people tend to visit Książ Castle primarily for a ghoulish tour of the Project Riese tunnels with their memories of the horrors of Nazism, visitors are coming more and more to admire the handiwork of an Edwardian beauty. 🌹

Matt Myktytyszyn is a specialist in international communication at Książ Castle. He also manages the Princess Daisy von Pless Foundation, a non-governmental organisation dealing with educational and cultural activities, as well as the historical heritage of the Wałbrzych .



From Pless to Pszczyna

Now known as Pszczyna, Pless is part of Upper Silesia and emerged from the Middle Ages as a duchy under the crown of Bohemia which, in turn became part of the Habsburg dominions. In 1548 it was sold to the von Promnitz family and eventually passed to the von Hochbergs. Following conquest by Frederick the Great of Prussia, Silesia became part of Prussia in 1742, and Pless was downgraded to a principality (in Germany Prince was a lower rank than Duke). The Princes of Press, though nominally rulers, had little power and no real independence. The Hochbergs, however, did own a large number of very lucrative coal mines in Silesia and were one of the wealthiest families in Germany. Following the First World War, a plebiscite was held in that part of Upper Silesia and the people elected to join the newly recreated state of Poland. So Pless has been Polish ever since.

The Hochberg connection with Książ goes back long before they inherited the principality of Pless. In true medieval fashion, the first castle was destroyed in 1263, as was its replacement in 1482, this time by the troops of the King of Hungary. Their commander gave the site to Frederick of Hohberg (as it was then spelled) and the family moved up the aristocratic tree before becoming imperial counts in 1683 and Princes of Pless in 1847. In the 16th century, the Hochbergs built a large Schloss in the German Renaissance style. Książ remained in the hands of the family, despite their opposition to Hitler, until 1944, when it was seized and work was begun to create a vast underground complex, known as Project Riese, for Hitler's use as a potential command centre. Much of the castle was damaged or even destroyed in the process, and subsequent occupation by the Soviet Army did it no favours. Eventually it passed into the hands of the Polish state which restored much of the remaining interior and used the building as a recreation home and cultural centre, with the Nazi tunnels being used by the Polish Academy of Sciences. It is now open to the public.

Below: The gardens at Książ Castle are interesting all year round.

