

SKEEL CASTLE HISTORY

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<http://www.gammelestrup.dk/english/info/info.html>



The history of Gammel Estrup

Driving along the main road from Grenaa to Randers you pass Gammel Estrup on your right-hand side shortly after leaving Auning. On the left-hand side of the road is Helligbjerget (Holy Hill), which down the ages has served as a landmark and viewing point. The manor is a renaissance building in red brick with a courtyard surrounded by a moat. For over 600 years Gammel Estrup was passed down by inheritance – until it was finally sold in 1926. As you pass the manor you can also see the extensive farm buildings.

The early days

It is not known when the first Gammel Estrup was built. Archaeological excavations around the moat have discovered remains from the 14th century, and in the Middle Ages there is further evidence of the periods when the manor was part of a land dispute or was destroyed by warfare. The same family owned the manor for 600 years. The oldest part of the present building dates from c. 1490, when the owner Lave Brock (c. 1504) erected a “stone house” at the spot. A stone house is another word for a fortress, Lave Brock being a temperamental who doubtless needed a secure retreat. In 1468 he killed Niels Paaske, a Randers merchant, with his own hands.



The renaissance courtyard

The manor's present appearance came about largely in the 17th century, when Eske Brock (1560-1625), a member of Christian IV's Royal Council, rebuilt and modernised the house. Until his death in 1625 Eske Brock was one of Denmark's richest men. He is the best-known of the manor owners at Gammel Estrup – not for his deeds but for his diary, which gives a unique insight into everyday life for a rich nobleman in the time of Christian IV.



The manor estates

It is important to note that Gammel Estrup was not the only estate owned by the Brock family. It formed part of a large estate complex with several other manors. Eske Brock left no male issue, so his daughter, Jytte Brock (1595-1640) and her husband, Jørgen Skeel (1578-1631), inherited the estate on Eske Brock's death in 1625. Jørgen Skeel was also a Member

of the Royal Council and a man of such power that he could challenge King Christian IV himself.

The rich Skeel family

The Skeels are the family most often linked with Gammel Estrup. Right up until 1926 there was a Skeel at the manor. In the 17th and 18th centuries the family was one of the wealthiest in Denmark. It was said of Jørgen Skeel's son Chresten (1623-1688) (known as "the Rich") that he could ride from Grenaa to Viborg on his own land. This was not quite true, but the family's wealth was indeed immense. In 1725 the Skeels had a large area, including the estate at Sostrup, turned into a county under the name of Scheel. However, Gammel Estrup was not part of this county, since beforehand it had been made an entailed estate for the Skeel family. This meant that it was exempt from tax, and that it had to be handed down to the eldest son in its entirety; in return it could not be sold.

The welfare of the country

Never again did the family acquire such influence as under Jørgen Skeel (1578-1631), but both Jørgen Scheel (1718-1786, Chief Equerry), who for a time ran the court of the dowager queen, Juliane Marie, and that of Prince Frederik, as well as his son Christen Scheel (1743-1771), an ambassador in Russia from 1765-1771, played an important part in the history of Denmark.

The squandering count

Gammel Estrup's role at the centre of one of Denmark's largest estates came to an end with Jørgen Scheel (1768-1825), who lived a life of extravagance at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Together with his wife, Christiane Mette Bille-Brahe, he managed to squander the enormous Skeel fortune, resulting in one of the most remarkable financial scandals in the history of Denmark. In 1815 Jørgen Skeel went bankrupt and only due to Gammel Estrup's status as an entailed estate did the family manage to save the manor.

The barring of entailment reform

Life at the manor then calmed down, until 1926 - a total of 600 years in the same family. True the family name changed from Brock to Scheel, but throughout the period the manor was only ever passed on by inheritance. However, in 1920 parliament enacted the barring of entailment law abolishing the entailment system, with the result that when Christen Scheel (1853-1926) died, there were no fewer than 11 heirs to the estate.



The manor sale

The family then chose to sell the manor. Thus from 1928 the main building was owned by Christen Scheel's son-in-law, Valdemar Uttental, who collaborated with interested parties, public and private, to set up the private institution, Gammel Estrup, the Jutland Manor House Museum. The farm buildings and the land continued to be farmed until 1969, when the state-owned Danish Agricultural Museum purchased the farm buildings and converted them into a museum. Today the two institutions share ticket sales but are otherwise independent museums with different owners, staff and activities.

Bibliography:

Gammel Estrup, FRITS NICOLAISEN (red.), Randers Amts Historiske Samfund, Auning 1993

Gammel Estrup, EJLER HAUGSTED & OTTO ANDRUP, i Danske Slotte og Herregårde bind 14, AAGE ROUSSELL (red.), København 1967, s. 107-132

Exhibitions

Permanent exhibition

The manor presents an interior exhibition showing examples of manor life down the centuries. As well as porcelain, china, exhibition comprises the original rooms of the manor, including the Renaissance Hall, the chapel, the kitchen and the orangeries. The museum also houses an extensive art collection.

Events

Winter holiday activities for children

Paint your own old style portrait

Gardens and landscape

A manor is far more than just its imposing main building. In former times the courtyard was the pulsating centre for a wide range of activities. The most obvious of these were linked to the agricultural buildings at these large manor houses, but the gardens and carp ponds, the wetlands and woods, the paths and watercourses are also part of the manor world.

The orangeries and the garden

At Gammel Estrup large areas of the original gardens have been preserved. Their natural focus is the two white orangeries that have served as wintering houses for the delicate southern plants so popular with the upper class in the 18th century. The orangeries were renovated in 2003, and today are used for concerts and other cultural activities in the summer. During the winter they continue to protect the more sensitive plants.

Today the garden is divided into two areas by the orangeries. The foremost part is symmetrical, with a fountain in the centre, giving an impression of a civilised garden whose prime purpose was to allow the owner of the manor to promenade! The many flowers and the well-trimmed lawn add to the atmosphere of a verdant and ordered enterprise.

Further back the garden originally consisted of a system of avenues and a bosquet (woodland) garden. Today this may lack the grandeur of the past, but its main lines are preserved, and Gammel Estrup, the Jutland Manor House Museum, has plans to renovate the area in the course of time in order to create the complete garden.

The buildings

The farm buildings at Gammel Estrup are owned by the state and serve as the home of the Danish Agricultural Museum. The facilities consist of a series of buildings from olden times – primarily the 17th and 18th centuries – combined with areas for new exhibitions and storage. Gammel Estrup also has a forge, run nowadays by a smithy guild.

Cultural environment

Thanks to the power and greatness of the nobility down the years the manor of Gammel Estrup has exerted considerable influence on the landscape and the general development of the surrounding area. The many testaments to the influence of the manor have together created a rich and unique cultural environment. Among the more immediate of these are the farm buildings, the orangeries and garden, the family graveyard, the forge, the labourers' cottages, the avenues and the fish ponds. Further away the manor has influenced the local church, the mill farm, the high-ridge fields, the meadows, the coppice wood, the old roadways, the smallholders' plots and much more besides.

This cultural environment is mediated to the public by our nature guide at Gammel Estrup through a range of experience tours and activity tours.

Address

Gammel Estrup, Jutland Manor House Museum
Randersvej 2

8963 Auning
Denmark
tel. 0045-8648-3001
fax. 0045-8648-3181
email: post@gammelestrup.dk

This web page can be found on Patti Simpson's Personal Web Page
<http://psdesigns13.com/skeels.html>