

Patrons

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NEWSLETTER

The Friends of Czech Heritage

Shortlisted for the Europa Nostra ILUCIDARE Awards 2020

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Chairman's Report

We seem to be in the thick of it. First came Brexit and how it might affect our dealings with the Czech Republic. This has been an issue of little consequence or largely out of mind as the latest preoccupation has gripped us. Covid-19 has meant that all our activities have been put on hold. Our programme of events has been postponed along with all the working parties that were planned for this summer. If conditions improve, we hope to hold our first event in the autumn and the working parties, which were largely fully booked, will take place at the same time next year with our loyal participants holding on till then.

We will confirm dates and details of our events when this is possible. Details of the working parties in 2021 can be found on our website.

But in the meantime we have not been idle and others have seen fit to honour us. Many of you will know that we have been shortlisted for the Europa Nostra ILUCIDARE Awards 2020. This is a new initiative and we are recognised as contributing to 'cultural heritage-led innovation and diplomacy'. This is a very pleasing result after many years of building up our network of contacts and exchanges with a wide variety of organisations in the Czech Republic. Our strength lies in being a UK charity set up specifically to concern itself with another country's business. British history shows how as a nation we tend to take over, but in our case we hope our interested concern has been for the good.

With our shortlisting come many helpful initiatives from Europa Nostra ILUCIDARE, which will be extremely useful in increasing The Friends' visibility and expanding our work. The winners will be announced at an award ceremony in the autumn.

So this brings lots of very useful exposure and contacts for the future.

Projects that encourage and inspire

Not everything has ground to a halt. Our projects continue to edge forward either to commencement or completion. The restoration of the Baroque mortuary associated with St. Andrew's Church in Starý Kolín is the initiative of a valiant group of volunteers. We have given a grant to help stabilise the walls while funds are raised to replace the roof. This is a successful example of our policy of

offering a grant at the inception of a project to help it on its way. Despite the pandemic, the first stage of work to protect the walls from further damage was completed before the end of April. Mrs. Marie Smutná who leads the project says:

"Thank you very much for your wonderful and kind support. I would like to emphasise that without the help of The Friends of Czech Heritage the mortuary would have been left in its sorry state. We believe that now it will be easier to raise more funds even though the times are not favourable. However, we have definitely stopped further degradation of this valuable building."

And more good news - the Botschen Chapel in North Bohemia that received The Friends' grant for a new roof last year went from a forgotten ruin to featuring in *The Night of the Churches 2020* in May. Mrs. Jiřina Bischoffiová, in charge of the project writes:

"Dear Friends, I would like you to know that we welcomed 130 visitors on the night. We gave them all information on the history of the chapel, on our plans for the chapel's future and on your support without which we could not have achieved so much. Thank you very much indeed."



Above, the Botschen Chapel during the 'Night of the Churches' in May 2020



The Mortuary at Starý Kolín as it appeared in the last century when still roofed

In our last *Newsletter* Barbara Peacock described the restoration of an important item of furniture from the Château of Uherčice: this is now completed. We have had a long-standing association with the château and, as previously reported, it is now being restored with the help of a large EU grant. However, the château lacks its contents, which were dispersed or 'lost', and our grant is intended to help start the process of refurnishing the rooms. We hope to bring you further news of progress in our next *Newsletter*.

I should also mention the city of Brno. Here the Low-Beer family were very active in the business community before World War II and have recently taken a proactive interest in re-establishing their links and promoting their past connections. This has been in part trying to establish a museum in one of their former textile factories, which was taken over during the War by Rudolf Schindler of *Schindler's List* fame.

The Arnold Villa in Brno was once the home of the Low-Beer family and is being restored after lying empty for many years. It has important historic connections with that branch of the family, which built the famous Tugendhat Villa on an adjacent plot (see the *Newsletter* cover story in *Issue 18, Winter 2018*, on 'The Friends' website: www.czechfriends.net/newsletter). We gave a grant in 2017 to help start the clearance of the surrounding grounds and now the City of Brno has opened a gate to connect the two properties. We hope to bring you further news of these developments.

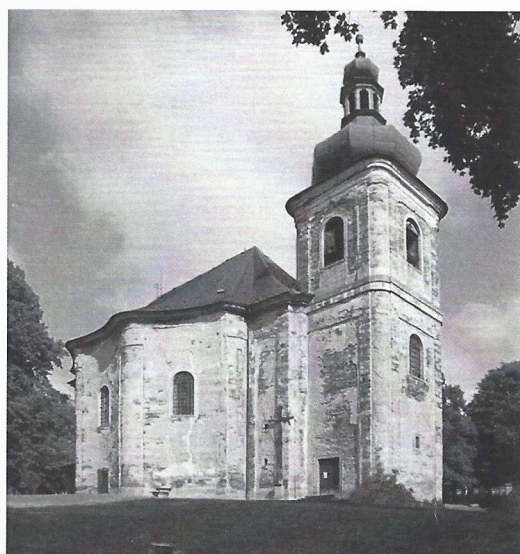
The condition of the Villa Benies, a Cubist masterpiece by Emil Králíček near Prague, has been a concern of ours for some time. We are

The Friends' working party in Brno working in the garden of the Villa Arnold



Above, the synagogue at Pacov.

Below, the Church of All Saints at Heřmánkovice near Broumov



meeting with the owners about contributing to its restoration and hope to bring you news in the next *Newsletter*.

Places of worship are perhaps the most vulnerable of buildings and nowhere more so than in the Czech Republic where for historic reasons they have suffered neglect or abandonment: be they Catholic, Hussite or Jewish, they have all seen their congregations dwindle or annihilated. They are also some of the buildings that are the most difficult to give a new life to. We have been involved with such projects in the past and now have three more.

The synagogue at Pacov (Vysočina Region) is an almost unique survivor and requires a new roof to secure it. At Heřmánkovice near Broumov the Church of All Saints is one of a very important group of Baroque pilgrimage churches, all in rural settings, designed by the renowned Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer, and in need of a great deal of work. Likewise, the small Gothic church of St. Boniface