

New life for ancient walls

Two of Smorgon District's architectural gems to undergo restoration

By Lyudmila Smirnova

Walking across a 17th century 'Northern Athens' and touching the walls behind which Vytautas, Grand Duke of Lithuania hid seven centuries ago, is possible in Smorgon District. Ogiński's estate in Zalesie and the castle in Krevo of 14th century have always been landmarks of, both this region and the whole country. These tremendous architectural gems have been attracting fans of history, mystical stories and picturesque photo sessions for many years, not only from across Belarus, but also abroad. However, centuries of historical events, wars and hard times have had their effect on the monuments, which have become dilapidated and are no longer as presentable as they once were.

However, soon both monuments will get a new life.

An estate full of pineapples?

When you arrive at Zalesie, located 15 kilometres from Smorgon, you immediately think 'Nobility', with its beautiful lime avenue, shady paths leading to the estate of notable persons, the park with its rare trees, a pond with swans and the magnificent palace... covered in scaffolding!! The well-known estate, home to Michał Kleofas Ogiński, the outstanding politician and composer, who lived and created here during the second half of 18th-early 19th centuries, is currently experiencing a rebirth.



Only fragments of a number of walls and towers of Krevo Castle have remained to the present day

"Around 15 people are currently working on the site," says Ivan Lysko, Departmental Head of the Smorgon District Executive Committee. "Gas water and electricity now supply the palace, external networks are completed and heating and ventilation systems are under repair. The workers have started on the installation of fire and security systems and decoration work is also being carried out."

For now, only the palace is being restored. However in the future they plan to restore

all aspects of the palace-park complex, including a small, snow-white chapel, a mill on the river bank and the carriage house and stables.

"Br8 billion from the national budget and Br7.4 billion from the regional budget has been allocated for this restoration work," says Mr. Lysko. "By the end of this year the restoration of the palace building will be finished. Next year it will be filled with museum exhibits. The official opening of the renovated palace/park complex will be in 2015 and dedicated to the

250th anniversary of Michał Kleofas Ogiński."

It is said that Ogiński was inspired to write his musical masterpieces by the picturesque nature of the Zalesie area. It is not without reason that Zalesie is dubbed the 'Estate of Muses', or 'Northern Athens'. In its heyday, this place was visited by many writers, poets and composers.

According to Mr. Lysko, many of the former areas will again appear in the restored palace. There will be a music hall, a hotel with eight rooms

and even a greenhouse under a glass roof. Perhaps pineapples will not be growing here, as they used to be during the time of Michał Kleofas Ogiński, but some exotic trees and bushes will certainly be appearing Zalesie.

Tower of Kęstutis

One of the oldest defensive fortifications in Belarus is Krevo Castle, located 25 kilometres from Smorgon. Constructed on the order of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas in the early 14th century, for protection

of Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the Crusaders, it has not fared as well as the estate in Zalesie. Apart from the results of Polish preservation attempts in 1929, only fragments of walls and towers remain standing today, and it is now impossible to completely restore the building. However another option was found. According to the *Castles of Belarus* programme, the main areas of the castle will be rebuilt from the fallen masonry, and the 'Big Tower', also called the Princely Tower, or the Tower of Kęstutis, will be fully reconstructed. In the vaults of this tower, by order of his uncle, Jogaila, the Lithuanian Prince, Kęstutis, was kept and murdered. Prince Vytautas was also held captive here, but escaped, disguised as a woman.

"This year survey work is being carried out in Krevo," says Mr. Lysko. "Br1.1 billion from the Republican budget, Br600 million from the regional and Br500 million from the district budget — have been allocated for this purpose. Half a billion Roubles have already been drawn on design-estimate documentation."

Next year recovery work will start, and the country's only stone fortress, which was home to Grand Dukes of Lithuania and Kings of Poland, along with Ogiński's estate in Zalesie will both get a new lease of life and continue to impress and inspire future generations.

Walking on ecological path — to medieval barrows

By Sergey Smirnov

New tourist routes to appear in Belovezhskaya Pushcha by year's end

New routes will essentially differ from those now existing, notes Dmitry Bernatsky, a senior research assistant at the Belovezhskaya Pushcha nature reserve. "The new paths will be non-asphalted, through the woodlands, aiming to give pedestrians longer walks," he explains. Each path will stretch 4-8km, designed for fit amateurs, and will be located in the northern part of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

"The reserve's north is much wilder than the south, where the tourist infrastructure is located," notes Mr. Bernatsky. Belarusian lowland marshes, found only in the northern part of the reserve, deserve to be viewed as a national treasure and the new eco-paths will allow visitors to experience nature up close. They'll see medieval bar-



Walking paths in Belovezhskaya Pushcha

rows and centuries-old giant trees of various species, including one of the greatest pines in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha. In the 18-19th century, it was used for wild-honey farming, being a living beehive.

Tourist infrastructure is being expanded in the national park, with tourist centres opening in the Svisloch and Novoselki forestries, where

the paths will originate. Some administrative buildings are also to be located there, able to accommodate guests. Mr. Bernatsky tells us, "Until now, the Belovezhskaya Pushcha has boasted only one tourist centre, in Kamenyuki, which is visited by several thousand people daily. Our new facilities will cater for those seeking more privacy."

Simple dialogue without problems

By Andrey Belov

The Academy of the Interior Ministry of the Republic of Belarus has developed a phrase book for local police to use during the World Ice Hockey Championship in 2014

"The police phrase book for the World Ice Hockey Championship is just 10 by 14.5 centimetres. This size is chosen not lightly. It will fit easily into a policeman's pocket," said Sergey Chebotarev, the Head of Press Group of the Interior Ministry of the Republic of Belarus, as he introduced the project.

The phrase book includes phrases in five languages: English, German, Polish, French and Spanish. The book contains four sections which will help the po-

lice to communicate effectively with visitors to the capital: 'Talking with Citizens', 'Orientation in the City', 'State Roadworthiness Inspection' and 'Communication in Criminal Situations'.

Mr. Chebotarev noted that since the beginning of October, 75 police from Minsk and Minsk Region from the Interior Ministry of the Republic of Belarus have started learning English, and a further 75 will start English lessons from the middle of January next year. It is thought that about 300 students of the Academy, who have good knowledge of English and German, may also participate in security details during the World Ice Hockey Championship which will be held in the capital during May.

