

## FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE TOWN HALL

The neo-Renaissance town hall building has been the dominant feature of the town since 1888-1893, at which time it was constructed in line with the designs of Viennese architect Franz Neumann. The construction dates can be seen above the entrance portal, but the dates shown here feature the date on which the construction of the building was originally to have been completed, i.e. the year 1892. This finishing date was never quite achieved. A **magnificent relief** that **depicts the foundation of the old and new town halls** sits above the dates of construction. The relief was created by Theodor Friedl. On the left-hand side, which is dedicated to the original town hall, we can see the builder Marcus Spazio (holding a model of the building in his hand), Catherine of Redern (owner of the demesne, holding the deed of foundation), a burgher in typical attire, and the mayor of the time Mr. Hentschel. The centre of the relief features a female figure that represents the city of Liberec, whilst the right-hand side is dedicated to the current town hall and features Mayor Schücker, architect Neumann (holding the designs in his hand), and councillor Felgenhauer. A **balustrade balcony** stands over the relief, a balcony from which a number of prominent personalities have spoken, including Emperor Franz Joseph I, President Edvard Beneš, and President Václav Havel. **Two heralds** can be seen holding the town emblem further higher still, as can the **clock**, the corners of which are decorated with motifs of the moon and sun.

At one time a copper knight adorned the summit of **the main town hall tower** (65-metres in height) as a symbol of the protection of the rights and privileges of the town. This knight was removed in 1952 and is now found at the Museum of North Bohemia. A red star replaced the knight, but this was removed in 1989 and the summit became home to a lion, the symbol of the Czech Republic, from 1990 onwards. However, you won't even see this lion today since it was removed from the summit. It seems likely that the tower will once again take on its original appearance of old and that a copy of the sculpture of the original knight will again sit at its peak. A **stylised, bronze tank track** has been fixed to the town hall beneath the windows to the right of the entranceway. This has been placed here to commemorate the invasion of Warsaw Pact forces in 1968 and the individual tracks are inscribed with the names of the 9 people killed in Liberec as a result. **The rear of the building is also adorned with reliefs**, three of them in fact, again sculpted according to the designs of T. Friedl. The relief on the left-hand side symbolises textile production in the town, the one in the middle features the burghers giving thanks to the town of Liberec, and the right-hand side symbolises trade relations between Liberec and the rest of the world.

## BEHIND THE BEAUTY OF THE INTERIORS

The exterior of the town hall makes an extremely imposing impression indeed. The interiors of the town hall, meanwhile, are characterised by romanticising historicism and the **outstanding quality of artistic craftwork**. The first landing is reached by climbing the marble staircase and once here, we are faced with a beautifully painted window that depicts **a woman with a bundle of grain. This window was a gift from the guild of bakers**. The first floor is also adorned with painted windows. The one in the middle was a gift from factory owner Baron Liebieg and depicts the **personification of Liberec** (a woman holding the town emblem on a shield). Images of farming and a knighthood can be seen to the sides. The ceiling above the staircase is decorated with a picture by the Viennese designer and painter of the frescos in the basilica in Hejnice Andreas Groll. The painting is an allegory to **symbolise Liberec and the development of its trade in fabrics**. Groups of little angels can be seen on the side pictures – on the right they are carrying the emblem of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and on the left the emblem of the town of Liberec. There are **busts** in the niches by the staircase, one of actor Vlasta Burian and one of Karel Vacek, a well-known composer and native of the town.

There are four stained-glass windows in the corridor on the second floor. The first of these depicts the **mayors and town clerks of Liberec** together with the dates in which they held office. The second stained-glass window is dedicated to the **original town hall** that was built in 1603. This structure enhanced the square until 1893, when it was demolished following the completion of the new town hall. **Three designs for the construction of the new building** are depicted in the third stained-glass window, along with the design that actually won. The final stained-glass window is adorned with **images from the ceremonial hall and its adjacent rooms**.

The second floor is also home to some magnificent rooms that have been preserved in all their glory to this day, perhaps the most exceptional of which is the so-called **ceremonial hall**. The hall is used to hold ceremonial events, to welcome new babies as citizens of the town, to present a variety of awards, medals, and honours, and so on. Organ recitals and chamber concerts are also held here thanks to the outstanding acoustics of the room, and last but not least wedding ceremonies. The entire hall is richly decorated. The walls are covered in wooden facing that was made in Vienna by the Carl Rogenhofer Company, whilst an awe-inspiring, massive brass chandelier that weighs 450 kg and that was imported from Berlin is another major feature. On the ceiling above this we can

see a picture by Viennese painter Andreas Groll which depicts the **Victory of Truth over the Forces of Darkness**. There are 6 stained-glass windows on the left-hand side of the hall. These were made in the small town of Česká Skalice u Nového Boru at the glassworks of Karel Melzer. **The stained-glass windows symbolise Science, Art, the Mercantile Estate, Industry, Trade, and Municipal Administration**. A **wooden allegoric statuery** that was made in a specialized school in Groden in Tyrol under the supervision of sculptor Ferdinand Demetz stands above the portal at the front. The largest figure in the middle again depicts the town of Liberec, whilst the left-hand side represents care for the poor and sick and the right-hand side features industry, trade, and wealth. The organ is found up on the **balcony** across from the stained-glass windows. This organ is used to provide the musical accompaniment to ceremonial occasions of all kinds.

There are another **two rooms** that belong to the ceremonial hall. These are mainly used by wedding parties before wedding ceremonies and also serve as meeting rooms for official visits. The large glass window in the middle depicts the old Liberec town hall. This window was also created in the town of Česká Skalice. The figure that is holding the original town hall in her hands again represents the town of Liberec.

There are other interesting **painted windows** to be seen on the second floor, gifts from local associations. One of these windows depicts a bust of Emperor Joseph II and the other features a medieval bard.

A number of visitors are also drawn here by the possibility of experiencing the **view from the town hall tower**. The tower is accessible as part of tours during the summer months and offers an attractive view of the centre of the town. Not only that, but visitors who climb the stairs to the tower have the opportunity of studying in detail the mechanisms of the town hall clock and enjoying the certain magic of passing through the attic of the town hall, something of a contrast to the richly-decorated interiors.

Even though the Liberec town hall celebrated 120 years of existence in the year 2013, it remains **one of the most valuable jewels in the architectural crown of the city at the foot of Ještěd Mountain**.

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## MEMORIES OF THE “OLD TOWN HALL”

Building work on the original town hall began in the year 1603 according to the designs of Italian maestro **Marcus Antonio Spazio**. This was only the second stone building in the town, the first being the Church of St. Anthony (kostel sv. Antonína). The town hall was a single-storied building with a shingle roof and a prominent octagonal tower that was finished with a gilded cupola and vane. It is interesting that the tower had no foundations of its own, instead relying on the vaulting of the ground floor. This is also considered the main reason as to why the tower needed to be repaired on a number of occasions or indeed rebuilt, as was the case for the upper part of the tower after lightning strike on 22. 5. 1801, when the tower was set alight.

A **tap room** was found on the ground floor along with the small **butcher and baker shops** of local merchants. Beautifully forged scales were also added in the year 1704, but were unfortunately the subject of many a complaint. This comes as no great surprise given the fact that, for example, the sandstone weight was lighter during sunny weather than during rain, when it became wet and therefore heavier. The underground areas were used to **store beer and wine**, whilst the deepest part of all was used as the **torture chamber**. The **town council** was housed on the first floor of the town hall, which was home to the great hall, the council chambers, and a smaller room in which the rights and privileges of the town were kept. As is clear, the town hall was not merely the workplace of officials: major social celebrations were staged here, two rooms were rented out to the guilds of cloth makers and linen weavers, hay was stored in the attic, and so on.

The original town hall served the town for almost three hundred years and found a special place in the hearts of the people of Liberec. So it came as no surprise that the same people wanted something to remember the old town hall by even after its successor had been built. For this reason there are **a number of reminders of the beauty of the old town hall** to this day. A copy of the tower of the old town hall has been incorporated into the Museum of North Bohemia. It is also here that portraits of the Redern and Gallas families which originally hung on the walls of the old town hall can be found. The permanent exhibits at the museum also include the scales mentioned before. Meanwhile, the old town hall is commemorated on the square with a stone featuring the date of 1603 inscribed in bronze and dark paving stones that mark out the original ground plan. On top of that, the new town hall is adorned with a bell that was taken from the original town hall tower and a beautiful stained glass window that features an image of the old town hall.

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**WE ENJOY TO YOUR VISIT!**

## THE TOWN HALL



**This magnificent neo-Renaissance building that was constructed between 1888 and 1893 in line with the designs of Viennese architect F. Neumann is today the head office of the municipal authority. The building boasts richly adorned facades and highly-valued stained-glass windows. The tower atop the town hall is some 65 metres in height. Tours of the interiors, the ceremonial hall, and the tower are available.**

**www.liberec.cz**