

The album *Kopice. A Story of Beauty Lost* is the most comprehensively developed monograph on the history of the unique palace and park complex in Kopice, one of the most renowned representatives of Neo-Gothic architecture in Silesia.

Kopice. A Story of Beauty Lost is a publication focusing on a small village in Silesia, near the town of Grodków, in Opole Voivodeship (60 km from Wrocław and 30 km from Opole). It is a compilation of materials which provides an overview of both the growth and the decline of Kopice (German: Koppitz). At one point in its history, the village was one of the major beekeeping centres both in the region and nationwide, a development in which the leading figure was Father Jan Dzierżon, Ph.D. – the Silesian “lord of the bees”. Over the ensuing decade, Koppitz became the seat of Upper Silesia’s industrial moguls, and the home of an extraordinary woman, Johanna Gryczik von Schomberg-Godulla, subsequently Countess von Schaffgotsch (and also referred to as the “Silesian Cinderella” in local anecdote).

Silesia is more than just industrial landscapes: it can also boast picturesque villages with beautiful churches and magnificent aristocratic residences. Some of its noble and merchant families owed the rise of their landed estates, such as Moschen (now: Moszna), Neudeck (Świerklaniec), Plawniowitz (Pławniowice), and Pless (Pszczyna), to their bold embracing of new technologies offered by the 19th century, i.e. the construction of foundries and coal mines, which improved the standard of living not only for their owners but also for the ordinary residents of the area (through the development of housing and road infrastructure). In the 19th century, Silesia was a promised land, where nature had granted access to its resources – its “treasures” – and thus contributed to the dawn of a new era in the region.

My work includes an ample collection of iconographic mementoes of Kopice’s former splendence, supported with previously unknown source materials. It tells the story of the ongoing extension of one of Silesia’s most interesting aristocratic residences, which received visitors from nearly all over the world. When viewing with admiration the Schaffgotsch family’s château and their popular 63-hectare park with its 1,342 sculptures, some of those visitors described the mansion as something out of a fairytale, and were quite right in this observation, as it was home to Countess Johanna, who had been born the daughter of an ordinary peasant family. Through a conjunction of extraordinary events, at the age of six she inherited an estate comparable to the wealth of the Queen of England. At that time, such stories were possible only in Silesia, where anyone could become rich, which is what happened to Karl Godulla. This and more is the stuff of my book.

Every story has its positive and negative facets; in Kopice, the negative ones begin after 1945, when the Polish communists arrive. Courtesy of their efficient management of the Schaffgotsch estate, the property was completely looted and in 1958 it burnt down, also due to the looters’ activities. Today we can enjoy the view of the beautiful majestic ruins of the château reflected in the park pond. Even the deceased owners of Schloss Koppitz were not spared: their bodies were profaned, which was standard conduct in the totalitarian era, as the communist policies left no room for kulaks and class enemies.

Now, decades later, the unique Silesian line of the House of Schaffgotsch, which is related by blood to the Piasts, Poland's oldest dynastic family, is regaining its splendour. Today, increasing numbers of people are taking an interest in the former lords of Koppitz and the village itself. The joint efforts of Kopice's parish priest, Father Jarosław Szelaąg, and myself to save the Schaffgotsch family mauzoleum have contributed to restoring a calm, positive atmosphere in the area. Even descendants of the Schaffgotsches have begun to visit, and no one fears the unknown and the alien anymore. At this point I would like to thank Count Hans Ulrich von Schaffgotsch for his and his family's cooperation and their assistance in gathering material for this book.

Kopice continues to grow more and more beautiful, which can be observed near the mausoleum, but also around the mansion, whose majestic ruins attract tourists. The arrival of a new owner allows us to hope with optimism that the ruins of the Schaffgotsch residence will be secured and saved. What he has done at the mansion in Żyrowa to date is a credit to him and gives us hope that similar results can be expected at Kopice in a decade or so. I feel privileged that I can tell my story of Kopice, a place that I have been attached to emotionally and involved with as an activist for over thirty years.

