



that no one was able to repair it. Whoever attempted to do so either died or went mad. In fact, despite painstaking efforts the clockwork was frequently out of order. Another popular legend claims that the skeleton seen on the side of the astronomical clock is endowed with a peculiar, almost prophetic power and, moreover, should it fall into disrepair for any length of time, the Czech nation will suffer difficult times. What is perhaps the most important section of the clock remains concealed and inaccessible to visitors. This is the clockwork itself, in which a large number of original functional



holding a book in his right hand, and Saint Barnabas with a sheet of papyrus. The first to be presented in the right window is Saint Peter holding a key, followed by Saint Matthew with an axe, Saint John reproaching a serpent, Saint Andrew carrying an X-shaped cross, Saint Philip holding a cross, and Saint James with a cloth fuller's hammer. While the apostles are in motion, the mechanism brings to life other figurines on either side of the clock. A skeleton pulls on a rope attached to a bell, turns an hourglass and indicates to the Turk at its side that his time is up. The Turk turns his head in refusal. On the opposite side, the statuettes representing a vain man and a miser move in a similar manner. After the windows close, a rooster in a niche above them crows. Placed in the middle of the clock is its main element

– an astronomical dial whose pointer constantly indicates the passage of the Sun – sunrise, its highest point and sunset. The dial shows three forms of time used in the Middle Ages. At the lower part of the facade, a calendarium indicates the individual days, weeks and months of the year, as well as the signs of the zodiac. Many legends are told about Old Town Hall's astronomical clock, the best known of which is the story about the clock's creator, Master Hanuš. The councillors of the Old Town of Prague were believed to have ordered him blinded with a red-hot iron, in order to prevent him from building a similar clockwork that would outrival the Prague specimen in beauty and fame. In return, Master Hanuš had an apprentice take him to the clock, which he then damaged in such a way

parts have been preserved. Together with the astronomical dial, the clockwork represents a unique technical monument unparalleled in the world. Today, many social and cultural events take place in Prague's Old Town Hall. The councillors' assembly hall, the Brožík Room and King George's Room serve as stately rooms for the needs of the Mayor of Prague. Weddings are also held in these quarters. The ground floor Gothic ambulatory is used for exhibition purposes by the City Gallery Prague. Old Town Hall is located at the place where Melantrichova street opens onto Old Town Square. This Prague landmark is open to the public daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (except when state events are being held by the Mayor of Prague).



Old Town Hall



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Old Town Hall



Although Prague's Old Town was incorporated as a municipality as early as 1232–1234, it wasn't until 1338 that the burghers were granted approval by King John of Luxembourg to found a town hall. The prestige of this institution reflected Prague's position within the Kingdom of Bohemia. A corner house located on the town's most important marketplace was selected as the seat of the municipal authority. The significance of the town hall increased during the Hussite period, when it

became the centre of the burghers' dissent and its halls welcomed Jan Hus, Jan Žižka and Jan Želivský. Here too, in 1458, George of Poděbrady was elected King of Bohemia, and in 1621 twenty-seven leaders of the Bohemian Estates who had revolted against the Habsburgs were executed. Old Town Hall was badly damaged in the closing days of World War II and its entire neo-Gothic east wing burnt down. It has not been reconstructed. Old Town Hall has a distinctive architectural style.



The core of the structure is formed by an Early Gothic corner house dating from the late 13th century once owned by Wolflin of Kámen. In the course of the 14th and 15th centuries, three merchant houses were joined to it, thus forming the town hall's south wing. Today its imposing 66-meter-high square tower, raised from its original height in 1364, is the focal point of the square and the adjoining streets. In 1381, a chapel with a richly decorated bay window was incorporated into the tower. Noteworthy on the southeast corner of the chapel is the Gothic sculpture of the Madonna and numerous plaques and coats of arms. A clock was added in 1402, and a bell and astronomical clock were installed in 1409. Adorning the front of the town hall on the ground-floor level are the pointed arches of former arcades. The highly ornamental Gothic portal of the main entrance, embellished with the coats of arms of Prague and the Kingdom of Bohemia, was executed in the second half of the 15th century, as was the adjacent window. The lovely Renaissance window bearing the Latin inscription Praga Caput Regni (Prague, Head of the Kingdom) was fashioned after 1526. The original plan of the merchant houses has also been preserved in the interior layout of the town hall's cellars and ground floor, including the 13th- and 14th-century Gothic vaulted passages and arcades. The most valuable section of Old Town Hall is its council chamber dating from the second half of the 15th century. Here, in 1458, George of Poděbrady was elected King of Bohemia. Among the Gothic vestiges that survive today are its wooden ceiling, the statue of the Man of Sorrows affixed to a richly engraved Late Gothic console from around 1460 adorned with an angel, and the statues of Saint Wenceslas and the Madonna

crowned by two angels, both dating from the late 15th century. Among other rooms deserving notice are the historical halls situated on the second floor, which are entered through a door bearing the inscription Senatus. Displayed in the anteroom are two paintings by Václav Brožík, titled "The Founding of Charles University" and "John Amos Comenius in Amsterdam". From the anteroom one enters the councillors' assembly hall, an original Gothic space adapted during the reign of King George of Poděbrady. It is decorated with four sculptured coats of arms of Prague, each dating from a different period, and a number of statuettes of which the most valuable is the 15th-century Ecce Homo. Emblems of guilds and Old Town burghers are affixed to the Gothic-era wood-panelled walls. Of note is the Baroque stove made in 1776. In 1882–1884, significant years in the history of Prague were inscribed on the windows. This assembly hall is of particular



historical importance, as it was the meeting place of the municipal council. Here, the council decided on all matters and needs of the city and – during the Hussite Wars – even on the fate of the whole country. The assembly hall opens onto the Brožík Room, which was designed in 1879. On its longer walls are two large paintings by Václav Brožík, known as "Master Jan Hus in Constance" and "The Election of George of Poděbrady as King of Bohemia". This room, too, has witnessed many momentous events in the history of Prague. To the right of the Brožík Room is the adjoining King George's Room, which has retained a number of Gothic details

and a painted ceiling. A special attraction for visitors to the capital is Old Town Hall's Late Gothic astronomical clock adorning the projecting segment of the tower's south side. The clockwork was devised in the early 15th century by the royal clockmaker Mikuláš of Kadaň and was perfected by Master Hanuš of Růže in the late 1400s. In 1552–1560, Jan Táborský of Klokotská Hora improved the mechanism further. The fine calendar panel showing allegories of the months was created by the artist Josef Mánes in 1865. On view today is a copy of the panel, produced by Bohumil Číla in 1946. The original is housed in the Museum of



the City of Prague. In May 1945, fire destroyed all of the clock's figural sculptures made by Eduard Veselý. They were replaced with wooden statuettes of the apostles fashioned by Vojtěch Sucharda in 1948. The astronomical clock consists of three parts. Placed at the top are the mechanical figures. Every hour on the hour, with the sound of a bell, twelve apostles appear in two small roofed windows between which is a bust of an angel. Passing through the left window are Saint Paul holding a book and a sword, followed by Saint Thomas clasp ing a lance, and Saint Jude Thaddeus with a book in his hand. Also emerging in that window are Saint Simon with a saw, Saint Bartholomew

