

The Way of the Cross on Holy Hill

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The Way of the Cross on Holy Hill in Mikulov is one of the first places of pilgrimage in South Moravia and the oldest Way of the Cross in the Czech Lands. This exquisite feature of the town is now in need of extensive restoration to ensure that it is preserved for future generations. You can also participate to the project to Save the Chapels on Holy Hill. The tradition of creating ways of the cross - symbolic representations of the suffering of Jesus Christ on his journey under the cross - dates back to the beginning of the 15th century. The number of stations varied considerably when ways of the cross first started to be established (from seven to as many as thirty one stations). Ways of the cross in today's form, with fourteen stations, began in the 17th century in Spain, from where they spread to other countries. The Way of the Cross on Tanzberg Hill in Mikulov (known from that time as Holy Hill) was established by Cardinal František Dietrichstein (1570-1636), Bishop of Olomouc and owner of the Mikulov estate. The creation of the Way of the Cross was inspired by an endeavour to express gratitude to God for overcoming the plague epidemic that tormented Mikulov in 1622. The first structure was evidently the chapel consecrated to Saint Sebastian, protector against infection with the plague. Its foundation stone was consecrated on 2 July 1622 and the building as a whole was completed in 1630. A Way of the Cross with seven chapels representing the seven passion stations, the number corresponding to the customs of the time, had evidently already been built at that time. An exact reconstruction of the Way of the Cross in its original form is now extremely difficult. The chapels that have now been given serial numbers 1, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 can be assumed to have formed part of it, in addition to Saint Sebastian's Chapel, the bell tower and the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. Saint Rosalie's Chapel, which is located on the opposite end of the path leading to Holy Hill from the north, was added to this group of structures in 1692. The appearance of Holy Hill then remained unchanged until the middle of the 18th century. Seven additional chapels were built in the years 1750-1776, bringing the number of chapels up to the then definitive figure of fourteen stations. The entire Way of the Cross in its new form was ceremonially consecrated on 1 September 1776. The Way of the Cross was now complete in its final form, comprising a total of eighteen brick structures since that time. The completed group of structures on Holy Hill was, unfortunately, to serve for just ten years. Saint Sebastian's Chapel was deconsecrated during the reign of Emperor Joseph II in 1786, and the Way of the Cross also ceased serving the faithful. The entire group of buildings was destined for demolition, and was only saved from definitive destruction by the fact that it was the private property of the Dietrichstein family, which decided to save the buildings and use them for private purposes. The buildings did, however, begin to fall into disrepair. This place of pilgrimage was not to see a revival of its former glory until Augustin Bartenstein became Provost of Mikulov. The entire Way of the Cross, including Saint Sebastian's Chapel and the bell tower, was repaired in the years 1862-1865. Saint Sebastian's Chapel was again consecrated on the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary (8 September). Two traditions - the Way of the Cross on Holy Hill and the pilgrimage to the Black Madonna of Loreto in Mikulov - have, therefore, been interlinked since 1865. The statue was originally placed in the Loreto Chapel at Saint Anne's Church (today's Dietrichstein crypt). The tradition of Marian Pilgrimages that began in 1865, with the statue of the Mikulov Madonna being taken up Holy Hill, has been interrupted only once, in the years 1938-1945, when the pilgrimages were banned. The entire Way of the Cross suffered considerable damage towards the end of the Second World War, though work on its restoration began immediately following the end of the war, and the first post-war pilgrimage to Holy Hill was held in September 1946. The ownership rights to the pilgrimage site passed in the same year to the Collegiate Chapter at Saint Wenceslas's in Mikulov, meaning that the church became both its spiritual and liable owner.

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