



CONTENTS

THE CASTLE DISTRICT7

THE LESSER TOWN41

CHARLES BRIDGE57

THE OLD TOWN67

THE JEWISH QUARTER85

THE NEW TOWN95

BEYOND THE OLD GATES103

View of the Lesser Town and Prague Castle across the Vltava.



The Loreto Lane in the Castle District.

THE CASTLE DISTRICT

The old imperial stronghold of Prague Castle and the adjoining Castle District [Hradčany] are situated on an elongated rocky hill on the left bank of the river Vltava. The name of the district is derived from the Czech term “hrad”, meaning castle. Besides the extensive castle itself, it also comprises the impressive Strahov Monastery, once on the periphery of the castle, as well as the Royal Gardens and the Belvedere Summer Palace. The most influential noblemen of the country built their palaces in this fashionable quarter, in close proximity to the king. The families of Martinic, Czernin, Lobkowitz, Rosenberg, Schwarzenberg and Dietrichstein lived there, at eye-level with his Imperial Majesty. Building plots in the Castle District became scarce in the 17th century, so that the nobility was eventually forced to move towards the foot of the hill, to the Lesser Town.

The origins of Prague Castle stretch back to the 9th century, when the first Christian Přemyslid ruler, Bořivoj I, moved his capital from Levý Hradec to the banks of the Vltava (875). A few years later in 890, a stone church consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary was built at the wooden castle, protected by ramparts and a moat. Bořivoj's son, Vratislav I, had a second church built on the site now occupied by St George's Basilica. After the

establishment of a diocese of Prague during the reign of Boleslav II in 973, the castle also served as the seat of the bishops.

Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg rebuilt the castle which had fallen into ruin after the time of Přemysl Otakar II, and made it the focal point of the Holy Roman Empire. When Prague was elevated to an archdiocese in 1344, he ordered a Gothic cathedral to be built – St Vitus' Cathedral.

After several years of decline following the Hussite wars, it was the Jagiellonian kings who brought back a glittering and bustling lifestyle to the castle at the end of the 15th century. The Royal Court in the Old Town, although comfortable, was undefended and they no longer felt secure there during the uprisings of 1483.

The Habsburg dynasty, in power after 1526, surrounded the estate with gardens, built the splendid Belvedere Summer Palace and transformed the inhospitable fortress into a luxurious residence.

The fire that devastated the Lesser Town and the Castle District in 1541 breached the medieval character of the city. However, the necessary building and rebuilding which resulted helped the Renaissance, which was already on the rise elsewhere, to make the final breakthrough into the Castle District.



View of residential buildings in the Lesser Town; in the background are the slopes of Petřín Hill and Strahov Monastery. In the front right, the bottom of the staircase which climbs to the Castle District's former Town Hall. In 1143, the Bishop of Olomouc, Jindřich Zdík, had a monastery built on one of the foothills of Petřín Hill at the gates of the town. Over the centuries, after numerous alterations and extensions, the Strahov Premonstratensian monastery developed into one of the most significant religious centres and richest abbeys in the country, as well as a place of arts and sciences.



ABOVE LEFT: The astronomical clock [orloj] on the City Hall's south façade reflects the mediaeval geocentric world-view: The planets revolve around the earth, not the sun.

ABOVE RIGHT: The house of Alexander Storch, publisher and bookseller, on the Old Town Square.

LEFT-HAND PAGE: View of the Old Town, in the centre the Týn Church, to the right the tower of the Gothic Town Hall.



ABOVE: The National Theatre has capacity for an audience of ca. 1,000 and is built exclusively from local materials. It is one of the most magnificent neo-Renaissance buildings in Prague.

RIGHT-HAND PAGE: The two cylindrical structures of the Dancing House, jokingly known as Fred and Ginger, are in contrast with the surrounding, almost uniform, turn-of-the-century architecture.

