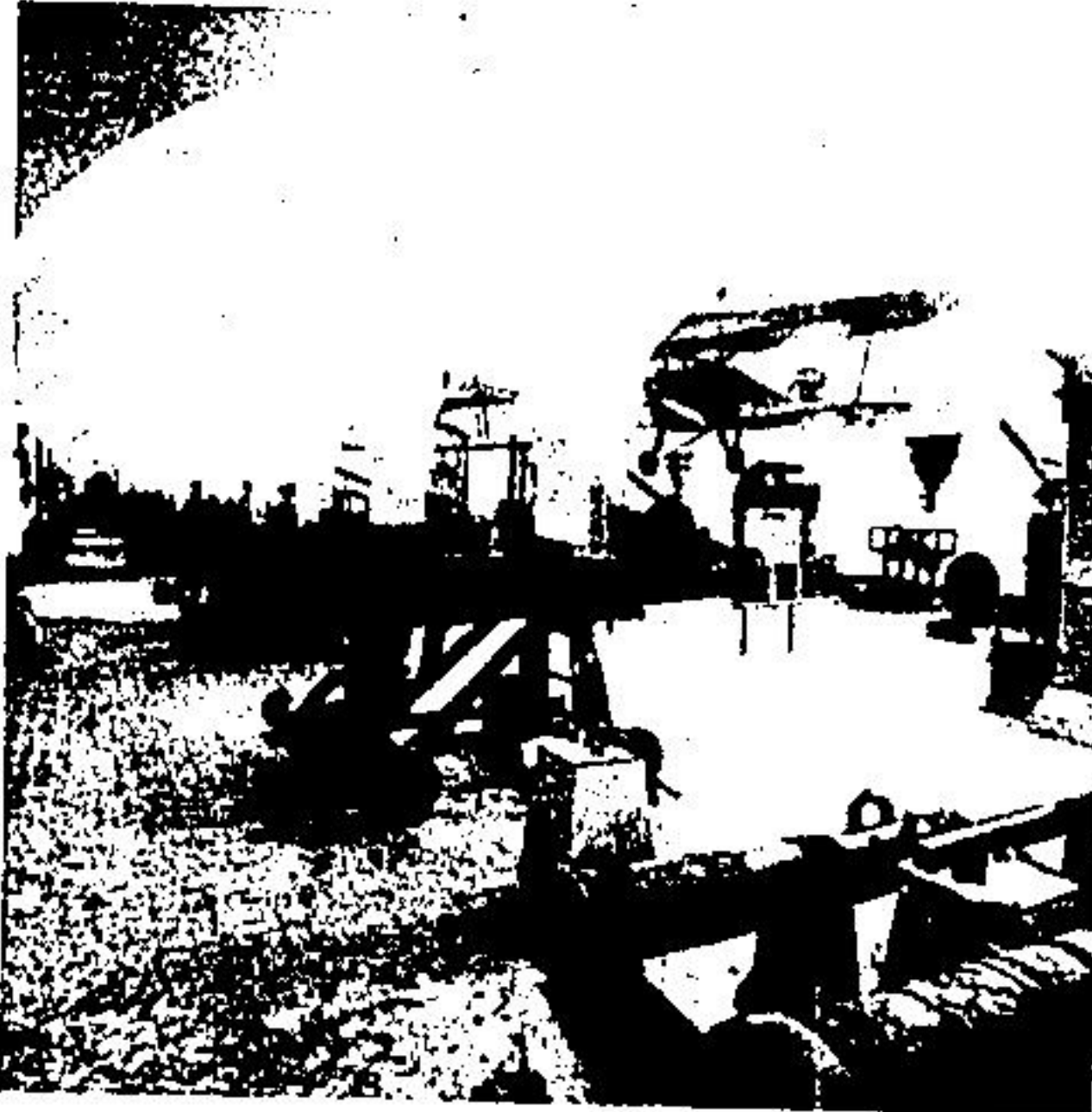


Vacation Guide

The Royal Danish Museum

Sequestered away in an easily overlooked "crevice" of the Christiansborg Palace complex, now home of the Danish Folketing (Parliament), is one of the largest and most lethal-looking collections of ordnance in Europe. Denmark's remarkable Tojhusmuseet (the Royal Danish Arsenal Museum) is situated on a narrow by-street that practically sideswipes the Parliament building. Yet the only clue to its inauspicious whereabouts is the friendly red-jacketed guard who paces up and down in front of the entrance, pausing now and then to salute visitors.



You don't have to be an expert on guns to find a visit to Tojhusmuseet — the Royal Danish Arsenal Museum — a paying experience. It is one of Europe's largest and definitely an unparalleled collection in all the world.

Appropriately enough, the building was built as an arsenal by King Christian IV, Denmark's famous "Builder King", between 1598 and 1604. It has never been used for anything else. The massive building is a masterpiece of deception. The front facade looks more like the entrance to a cloister than an armory. But once inside, a small antechamber feeds into the gaping maw of the Cannon Hall on the ground floor. This mammoth room is the longest vaulted hall in Europe — 156 metres long. And it is crammed full with the engines of war. Again, the element of deception creeps into the design — the rows of cannons seem to go on forever. It's an awesome optical illusion.

The history of armaments goes sword in hand with the evolution of technology. The "thunder of the earth" — gunpowder — was invented by the Chinese and brought to Europe by the Arabs. But it was European ingenuity that produced the first really serviceable cannons.

Still, the earliest cannons were crude contraptions. One of the first recorded uses of cannons in warfare was by the English in 1346 at the battle of Crécy in Northern France during the Hundred Years War (1339-1453). It was during this conflict that cannons came into general use. But they were small primitive pieces made of iron or cast bronze and were only capable of firing lead or iron balls a few hundred feet at best. Placed directly on the ground, they had to be elevated with earth.

The Danes first found out about the cannon rather abruptly in 1362. During a sea battle in the Sound between the Danes and the Lübeck Fleet, King Valdemar Atterdag's son, Squire Christoffer, was said to have been "struck to the quick" by a cannonball! One

wonders if it hit him on the head! By the middle 1400's, the little peashooters that fired one or two pound pellets, had grown into gigantic bombardiers. Built in 1382, Dulle Greite, the giant bombarde of Ghent, has a 25-inch caliber and fired a 700 pound granite ball!

Own guns from 1500

Despite great advances in weaponry, the Danes didn't start manufacturing cannons or gunpowder until around 1500. This, perhaps, is the secret behind the enormity of Denmark's Arsenal

Museum, as well as its rich diversity. Because Denmark lacked a burgeoning arms industry, the

Crown was compelled to concession cannons and other weapons from armsmakers scattered across Europe. Naturally, it was also a policy for the military to scavenge neighboring countries for new types of cannons and other hardware. After all, the arms race is not new! Others, of course, were captured in battle (or lost just as easily).

The museum is divided into two sections — the Cannon Hall on

the ground floor and the Armoury Hall on the first floor. In sheer numbers, the collections are staggering. For some a stack of old guns may be a bit boring. But there is a long and fascinating history behind nearly every piece in the museum. The Cannon Hall has over 500 historic cannons, mortars and howitzers, as well as artillery accessories, a tank and even a German V-1 rocket.

There is, in fact, a cannon for every occasion — scrapped cannons, show cannons, proof cannons, trophy cannons and experimental cannons, some of which have never even been fired. Faced with such a concentrated display of annihilation, the charge of the Light Brigade might never have taken place.

The collection has some very unique, rare pieces. A number of the cannons are vintage field pieces. For example, the two large ornate show cannons with matching mortar, cast as gifts to King Frederick IV during his state visit to Venice in 1708-09, have never been fired.

The oldest cannons in the collection date from around 1400. They were salvaged in 1847 from a wreck near the island of Anholt in the Kattegat. These fascinating relics are simple stocked wrought iron breechloaders. However, the first breechloaders proved unreliable because the breech could not be sealed against the escape of powder gases, and the crude breech

locks often cracked under the shock of firing. So muzzle loaders were commonly used up until the 19th Century. Nevertheless, gunmakers and cannon casters were continually trying to perfect the faster firing breechloaders. And

the collection contains some unusual "one-of-a-kind" experimental models.

The Arsenal Museum has examples of nearly every stage of cannon-making. Many are works of art, beautifully handtooled and embellished with ornate flourishes. One of the prizes of the collection is a 27 pounder brass cannon with the entire genealogical tree of the Oldenbourschs engraved on it.

Unparalleled collection

Up a winding flight of stairs is the Armoury Hall. Like the Cannon Hall, this floor was also used for the storage of fire arms. This hall is 159 metres long and contains about 5,000 guns and pistols, certainly the largest collection in continental Europe. Only the formidable Tower of London may exceed it in volume.

With 1,000 of the exhibits dating earlier than 1700, this makes the museum one of the most unparalleled ordnance collections in the world. Because of the Danish Crown's policy of routinely buying large quantities of guns from other countries, as models, many of the muskets and rifles are irreplaceable. Three French military muskets from the 1670's are so rare, that they are no longer available in France.

"Many of these guns have been in the collection since the day they were made", observes Arne Hoff, director of the museum. He has a doctorate in history from the University of Copenhagen and is the museum's first civilian director.

Some of the most priceless pieces in the Armoury Hall found their way into the museum as captured booty. In 1848 when most of Europe was aflame with revolution, the Royal Duchies of Slesvig and Holstein revolted (unsuccessfully) against Copen-

hagen. "As a result," explains Dr. Hoff, "this part of the collection was augmented in 1852 by the donation of the entire armoury of the Dukes of Gottorp in Holstein."

The oldest fire arm in the armoury is a Danish wrought iron handgun from around 1400 that was dug out of the rubble of Vedelsvang Castle in Slesvig, which was destroyed in 1426.

A number of the hunting rifles that date from before 1750 are dazzling treasures. Many of the stocks are inlaid with gold, silver, ivory, gem stones, and mother of pearl. Almost all of them bear royal monograms, testifying to pure pedigrees. "And all of these guns are in perfect working order," affirms Arne Hoff.

The Royal Armoury wasn't transformed into a museum until 1838 and it didn't open its doors to the public until 1854. The collections were first sorted out and cataloged by the famous Danish scientist and archeologist, Christian Thomsen.


The vast collections also contain 600 700 regimental colors (three of them from the Thirty Years' War), plus medieval armour and a model display in the loft. Over 100,000 visitors troop through the museum every year. "In all we have a staff of 40 and an annual budget of 3.5 million. Although this isn't a fortune," adds Dr. Hoff, "we plan to renovate some of the displays in the Armoury Hall with the idea of making them more interesting and appealing to people of all ages."

The only irritating fact about the museum is that it is only open July from 1-3 p.m. Barely enough time to plump the sea of weapons. But for that, Director Arne Hoff has a ready answer: "Come back a second day."



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