

History of belfries

Belfries in the Czech Republic, and this one too, significantly influence the genius loci of the landscape and give the church premises a highly suggestive and poetic nature. The belfry is a characteristic structure in the National Heritage of the Czech Republic. In ancient times, belfries could be used as a defence structure, watch-tower or a gate of church premises.

The belfry in Rovensko pod Troskami is made of wood with an octagonal stone underpinning wall. It is a massive structure, tiered with a tent-like roof. The structure itself combines two building frames. The wooden corner columns create the load bearing structure of the circumferential coat of the belfry and the roof. The strut structure bears the weight of the bells.

The original beams are worked manually with a carpenter's broad axe, this was done by our ancestors.

Under the roof there are windows, called "bell windows", through which the sound of the bells is transmitted from the belfry to its surroundings.



Ancient plague coffin.

Inside the belfry, there is a gallery for visitors on the ground floor, leading around the whole perimeter of the belfry.

Thus the visitors can perceive the space of the centuries old building that for almost four hundred years has witnessed the events, happening at that place and time. The visitors will also see the ancient "plague coffin" and undecorated biers that remind us of the last moments of life. The bells are accessed along 33 wooden stairs which represent 33 years of Christ's life.

In ancient times people believed that evil spirits can be kept at bay by chiming.

"I call the living souls,
I mourn the dead,
I drive away the thunders."

The bells were made by people as a symbol of peace in their thoughts

and deeds.

The belfry with the rebel bells – that means bells turned upside down – is already 375 years old.

This is a great anniversary of this unique wooden structure where the bells and the belfry have been the witnesses of the time, place and people for almost four centuries.

The local inhabitants, especially children, believe that a good goblin called the Bell Chimer lives in the belfry. The person who catches a glimpse of him will be lucky in life.

Thank you for your visit.



You can see and hear the beautiful sound of bells and the remarkable work of the four bell-ringers every Sunday and on public holiday at 12:00 o'clock. The volunteers from Rovensko ring the bells and thanks to them we can hear the bells even these days.

You can hear the recording of the bells' voices at www.rovensko.cz



Zvonice s obrácenými zvony

(z roku 1630)

REBEL BELLS – WOODEN BELFRY, from year 1630



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English

Rovensko pod Troskami



THE BELFRY WITH BELLS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN (FROM YEAR 1630), ROVENSKO POD TROSKAMI

Rovensko pod Troskami is located in the Bohemian Paradise between Turnov and Jičín and it is a part of the Liberec region. The first written mention concerning this town goes back to the year 1371, to the reign of the famous Bohemian king and emperor, Charles IV.

To the north of the Rovensko square, on a small hill, there is the parish Church of St Wenceslas and an ancient belfry, the only remnants of the former medieval fortress and settlement called Týn.

The original belfry was built around the year 1370 together with the Church of St. Wenceslas. After the fire in 1629 it was destroyed, including the bells that were molten by the heat.

The Jesuit Burnatius had the belfry burnt down because the bells were used to raise alarm and call the people together. The citizens of Rovensko resisted stubbornly the Catholicization, they were mainly of the Protestant denomination. Burnatius was to make the people convert to Catholicism. He summoned against the Rovensko rebels a group of the emperor's cavalry men who set the belfry on fire when withdrawing from the town.

All this happened under the reign of King Ferdinand II – a Habsburg, the ruler in whose times 27 Czech noblemen were beheaded. As early as in the following year 1630, the belfry was constructed again.

It contains three bells, so called rebel bells because they are fixed upside down – with their hearts pointing upwards.

The bells

The bell measures the time, it announces fateful events in the life of both a person and whole nations. The bells reminded people of prayer times, they announced significant events and imminent danger, the invasion of an enemy, fires and natural disasters. Since the 6th century, the bells have been used as objects in Christian worshipping.

How long have bells been sounded in Bohemia? For a thousand years. Many of the ancient Bohemian bells had their origin in the war loot which was brought in by Břetislav I. from Poland, in the year 1039.

The bell is a musical percussion instrument of a chalice-like shape. It is chimed either by a stroke of a loosely suspended heart onto the internal parts of the bell with the aid of a rope or by a hammer hitting the external side.

All these definitions are invalid when you appear in the Rovensko rebel belfry. Here the bells are fixed with their hearts pointing upwards and are put into motion and chimed by stepping.

This is the only wooden belfry in Bohemia where the bells are chimed in this way.

There are three bells here and the whole group of three is tuned into a chord and requires chiming in a certain rhythm.

The bells are fixed with their hearts up and a lever is fixed to their heads – a beam. By stepping on the lever the bells are swung and they ring. The bell swings down and returns to its vertical position, with its heart up. This is an exceptional way of fixing the bells and an exceptional way of chiming and thus it is considered to be "rebel". The bells have a wooden comb that lies on metal bearings which are greased for smooth operation with goose grease.

There are other versions why the bells are turned upside down. According to one, it was done by the nobility as a punishment to the Rovensko rebels who resisted the Catholic faith and to prevent them from calling people together so easily.

The second version says that the bells turned upside down remind of a Hussite chalice and thus represent the faith of the then citizens.

All the three bells were cast by the bell-maker Martin Schrötter of Hostinné nad Labem. The first two bells were cast in the year 1630, the third one, the smallest bell, in the year 1639. The crowns of the bells are decorated with Latin inscriptions, quotes from the Bible psalms.



Saint John the Baptist – the bell nearer the church

It is 1 metre high, its chalice is of 110 cm diameter, weighs 15 q, is tuned in G flat.

It bears the Crucifixion relief, the date 1630 and the coat-of-arms of Rovensko

There is an inscription: "Praise the Lord, sonorous bells, with joyful sounds, praise Him everybody whose ears perceive the spirit of the life. / Psalm 101

St Wenceslas – the largest, central bell

It is 118 cm high, its chalice is of 129 cm diameter, weighs 24q, is tuned in F flat.

Inside it bears the Crucifixion relief, on the other side the coat-of-arms of Rovensko

There is an inscription: "Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will

praise the Lord as long as I live. / Psalm 146

St. George – the smallest bell towards the cemetery

It is 80 cm high, its chalice is of 85 cm diameter, weighs 6 q, is tuned in B flat. Inside it bears the seal of Rovensko, above it the year 1639.

There is an inscription:

"Praise him with sounding cymbals, praise him with loud clashing cymbals. / Psalm 150

During both the World Wars, the bells used to be requisitioned by the army and were utilized for casting canons and other weapons. However, the Rovensko belfry was spared this requisitioning because as early as at those times its bells, turned upside down, were considered to be an exceptional rarity.

The belfry is administered by the Parish Office in Rovensko pod Troskami and can be visited with a guide. Call 481 382 226 (00420 481 382 226 when calling from abroad) to agree on the visit and chiming the bells.

The belfry is open to the general public all year round:

Tuesday – Saturday:

8.00 – 12.00 13.00 – 17.00 o'clock

Sunday:

12.00 – 16.00 o'clock

