

Activities Report – Yearly Meeting Prague/Pilsen Tours

Thursday 26th April in the morning we gather at the entrance of the UPM and meet Mrs. Koenigsmarkova for a tour of the nearby **Lord Mayor's Residence (Rezidence Primatora)**. Our gracious tour guide meets us in the entry of the residence and leads us through the building. This building is from the entry hall to the bedrooms, the carpets, the drapery, the furnishings *and* the lamps, completely decorated in Art Deco style. Built between 1924-1928 and designed by the architect Frantisek Roith, it is a wonderful example of how integral the lighting is to the complete package of an architectural work. This building is only open to the public on open house days and even then, one does not see all of the rooms that we were able to visit. Mr. Peter Rath added an anecdote to our tour by explaining how he and his wife had the privilege of staying the night in the building as he travelled through Prague during his 530 km. journey with a wheel-barrow of glass from Northern Bohemia to Vienna back in 2009.

Before we returned to the UPM, Mrs. Koenigsmarkova had a surprise visit for us in the form of a stop-over in the **Jewish Community centre**. These rooms are not usually open to non-members of the community and therefore we were privileged to be able to view the lecture room which is adorned by three metal-arm chandeliers with rich glass-trimmings. A number of us suspected at the time that the chandeliers originated from the Northern Bohemian manufacturer of Elias Palme. The building was constructed in 1904 and it has been confirmed that the chandeliers date from this time. The school in Kamenicky Senov has also since confirmed that they are the work of the manufacturer Elias Palme.

After a lunch break in the **UPM (UMĚLECKOPRŮMYSLOVÉ MUSEUM)**, we continued our tours with a visit through the beautiful building that houses the Museum for Decorative Arts. This building was built between 1897-99 by the architect Josef Schulz and is richly decorated in Historical style. The lighting in the stairways and halls were originally for gas and later converted to electricity.

Friday, 27th April

At the end of our lecture series, we walk to the **Municipal House (Obecní dům)** the city administration awarded the project of creating this building in 1903 to the architects Antonín Balšánek and Osvald Polívka. They designed the Municipal House, following instructions from the city council, as a multifunctional building, which included areas for ceremonial purposes, exhibitions, concerts as well as restaurants and shops. We were again privileged to have a tour tailored to our interest which was led by a most enthusiastic tour guide with a good dose of Czech humour spicing up all the historical facts.

A particularly interesting part of the lighting were the ceiling lights in the Smetana hall – being very high on the ceiling, it was difficult to imagine how one would perform maintenance. An ingenious system in the ceiling allows the technicians to open the lamps from the reverse side to change lightbulbs and carry out other necessary work.

The numerous rooms are each unique and all are completely decorated in Art Nouveau style, the original electrical lighting included. Many Czech artists were given the contract to decorate the interior, including Alphonse Mucha, Max Švabinský, Jan Preisler, František Ženíšek and many other painters. Sculptors also excelled in the decoration of the Municipal House, particularly Ladislav Šaloun and Karel Novák.

In spite of the fact that this building is one of the main attractions in the city of Prague, most of our members had never visited it and while this tour included many details and lasted much longer than the usual tours, it was greatly enjoyed by all. We had the opportunity to examine and discuss many elements that would not normally be possible to observe in a tour for tourist groups.

Our tour of the Municipal House was so extensive that we had no time for the planned visit to the Cubist Museum, but that means that we have something to visit next time!

Before our dinner in the Plzenska Restaurant of the Obecni Dum, we visited the grand showrooms of Preciosa on the Rytířská 536/29 and were welcomed with an apéro and background information on the chandeliers by our members, Andreas Klug and Michael Vasku together with their team.

Saturday 28th April

Our Bus picks us up in front of the Hotel Orea and brings us to the doors of the **West Bohemian Museum (Západočeské muzeum)** in Pilsen where Jan Mergl awaits us. After a presentation from Mr. Mergl informing us about details of the early electrical lighting in Pilsen, we visit the exhibits in the Museum – starting with the Křižík arc lamp in the entrance foyer. After being inspired by a visit to the 1878 Paris Universal Exhibition, František Křižík invented a differential arc lamp in 1880, which was displayed at the International Exposition of Electricity in Paris in 1881. This lamp, with self-adjusting brushes, won the gold medal from among 50 similar devices. Křižík was a pioneer in practical electrical engineering and in the electrification of Bohemia.¹

The museum was built between 1896-1899 by Josef Škorpil in neo-Renaissance style and has a rich glass collection as well as many other beautiful objects from the decorative arts ranging from ceramics to weapons and door-locks. These are all displayed in the original display cases from the 19th C. which adds to the beauty of the rooms. The lighting in the exhibition rooms is however not original but was replaced in a style corresponding to the interior of the building.

After our lunch break we walk up the street to the **Town Hall (Měšt'anská beseda)**, which is used for concerts and other cultural events. The Town Hall was also built in neo-renaissance style by the Pilsen architect František Kotek, with a lovely Art Nouveau café. Pilsen is Mrs. Koenigsmarkova's hometown and she was therefore nostalgic remembering her youth in Pilsen and learning to dance at events in this building. The rooms are still lit with the original electrical lamps, these have been recently restored and therefore appear to be quite new with their shining brass surfaces.

Our next stop is the **Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre (Divadlo Josefa Kajetána Tyla)**, was built in 1902 by Antonín Balšánek and is considered one of the most important historical monuments in the city. This theatre continues to serve the community today in presenting ballets, operas, dramas and other performances. Our tour guide was fortunately well-informed about the history of the building and was able to add some details to our tour. This theatre was again built in a neo-renaissance style with Art Nouveau features. The large chandelier in the main hall was of a very special form, featuring a brass frame with egg-shaped opaline glass balls strung on brass rods and with brass garlands festooned around the outer frame with clusters of round light-bulbs. The glass was not the original but made in a similar style and matches the glass on many of the other lamps in the building. As Jan Mergl mentioned in his presentation on electricity in Pilsen, the name of the chandelier maker was the Metalworks Suda & Kotesovec, Prague.

For our next visit, our chauffeur picks us up and deposits us at one of the Loos Interieurs Buildings, the Semler House on 19 Klatovska Street². This building is in rather desolate condition at the moment and our tour was the very last tour to visit the house in this condition. It will now be closed for extensive renovations to be re-opened as a protected historical monument connected with a café and book/gift shop. It was quite a contrast to all of the highly decorative, neo-renaissance/art nouveau buildings that we had seen before but no less important to the history of design in the city of Pilsen. This apartment, along with a number of others in the city, was designed by the architect Adolf Loos³, a Czech-Austrian architect born in Brno. Mr. Loos came to fame through the Museum-Café in Vienna and carried out numerous projects as well as being the author of books on subjects ranging from architecture to how to be well-dressed.⁴ The residential interiors in Pilsen were carried out between 1928-1933, many of which have now been restored and are under protection. His careful selection of materials, passion for craftsmanship and use of 'Raumplan'-the considered ordering and size of interior spaces based on function - are still admired today.

We return to the West Bohemian Museum for our General Assembly before walking over a bridge to the historical Pilsner Urquell Brewery, where we are greeted by the scent of fermenting mash wafting on the breeze. Our tour is a little rushed as our time is running short, but we are able to view some of the more

¹Wikipedia

²<http://www.adolfloosplzen.cz/projects-and-investors-in-pilsen/19-klatovska-street/>

³<http://www.adolfloosplzen.cz/adolf-loos-en/>

⁴Wikipedia

important history of the brewery, the enormous copper kettles of beer and the cellars, where we are able to sample some of their special, unfiltered, traditionally in wooden cask brewed beer. This is only available on tap in 3 locations in Pilsen. Later, after dinner, our bus chauffeur manages to navigate our bus through the historical gates of the brewery, built in 1892 to celebrate a 50-year anniversary but rather narrow by today's standards.



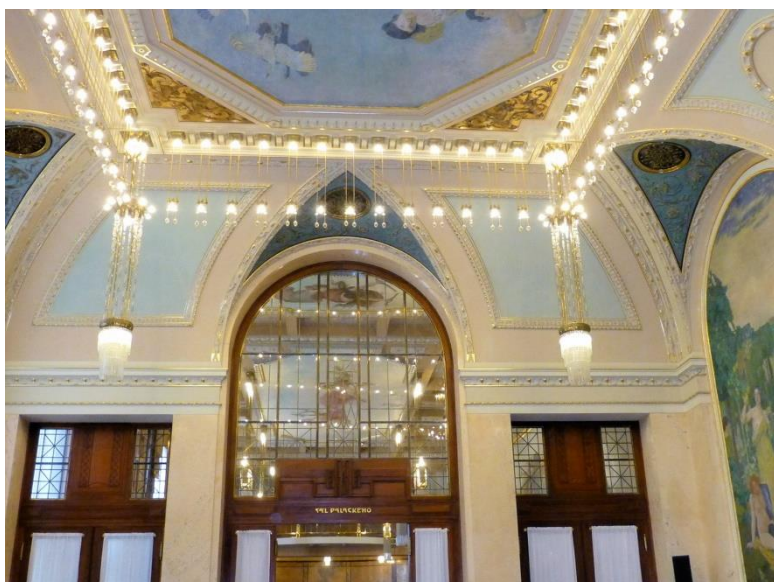
Lord Mayor's Residence (Rezidence Primatora)



Jewish Community Centre



UPM Exhibition Room



Municipal House (Obecní dům)



Preciosa Showrooms



Dinner in Strahov Monastic Brewery





Dinner in Strahov Monastic Brewery



Dinner in Restaurant Plzenska, Obecní dům



Křižík Arc Lampe



The West Bohemian Museum



West Bohemian Museum

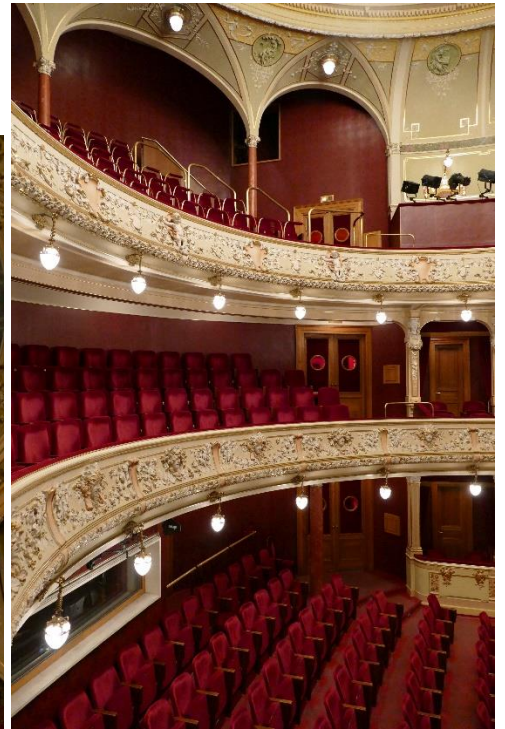
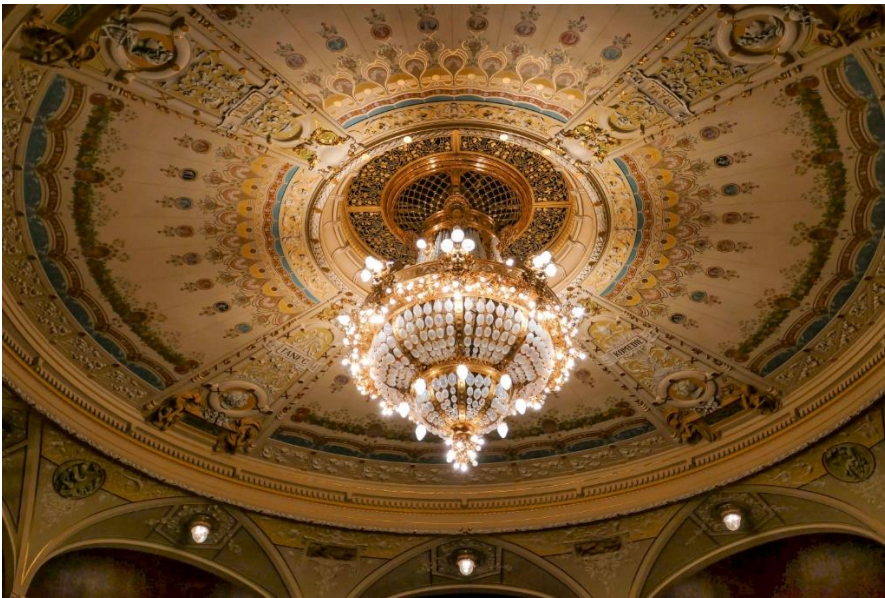
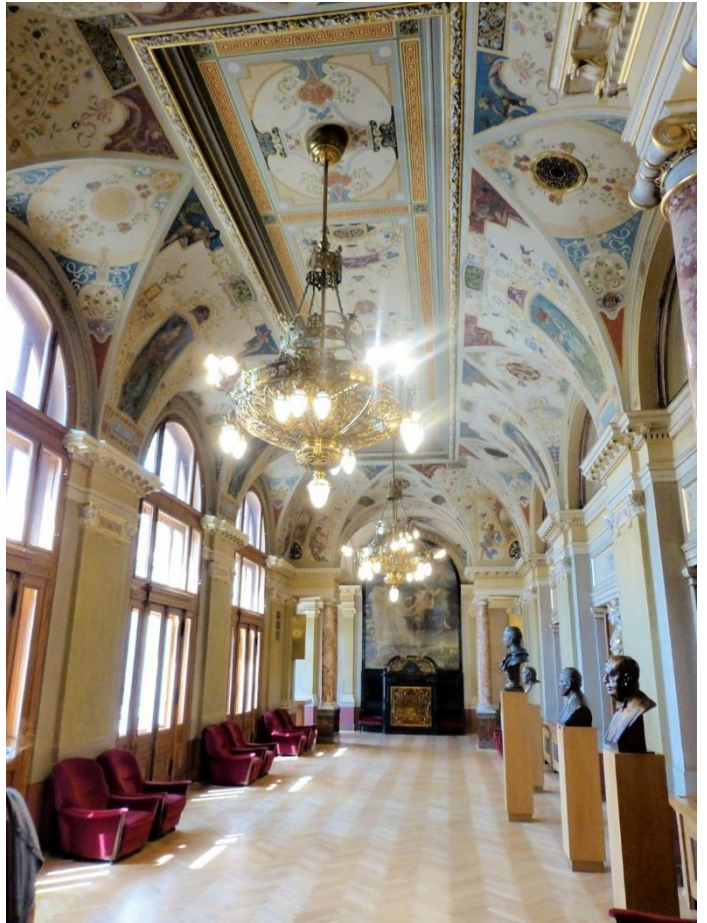


Café, Town Hall (Měšťanská beseda)



Town Hall (Měšťanská beseda)





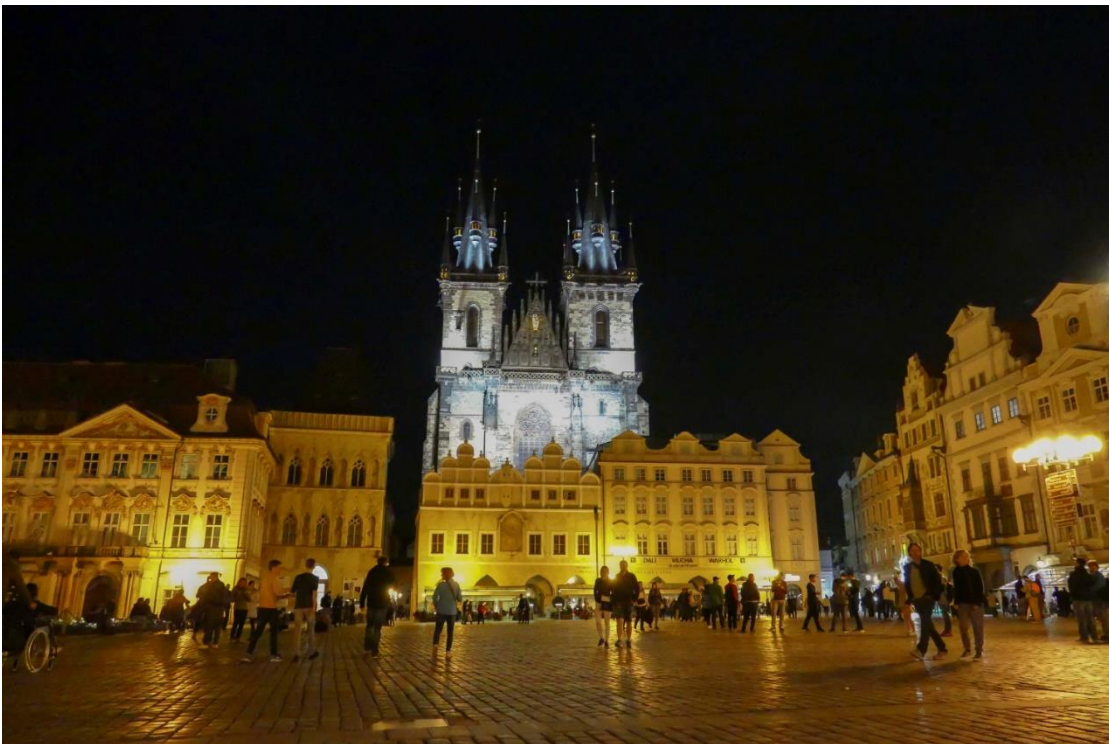
Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre (*Divadlo Josefa Kajetána Tyla*)



Loos Interieurs, Semler House



Pilsener Brewery



Prague by night

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