

DAILY NEWS

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Walks in Budapest-III

At the geographical centre of Budapest, a few hundred yards from the Pest end of the Elizabeth Bridge, one comes across a monument which speaks of the history of old Pest. One sees here a surviving section of the old city wall that used to embrace the town in a semi-circle from the present Roosevelt tér (square) to Dimitrov tér, and was demolished about a hundred years ago when the then three separate towns of Óbuda, Buda and Pest were unified. Surviving sections of the old wall are still to be found in courtyards and basements of houses in this area.

On the corner of Múzeum körút and Bródy Sándor utca, there is a restaurant that was originally built over a hundred years ago and was called Múzeum Café. It used to be a favourite haunt for university students, writers and artists. The interior is decorated with Károly Lotz's frescoes, ceramic reliefs made in the famous Zsolnay majolica factory, and an old silver mirror, which retain the fin-de-siècle atmosphere, when there were over a thousand cafés in Budapest.

Blocks of flats in this region have elegant staircases decorated with frescos, for example, the facade of No. 3 of Bródy Sándor utca is also decorated with Károly Lotz's mythological murals, so is the beautifully designed staircase of the one-time Károlyi-Palace in Múzeum utca No. 11. Few people know that the one-storey classicist building standing opposite to the garden of the National Museum in Bródy Sándor utca, which now houses the Italian Cultural Centre, used to be the headquarters of the first Hungarian Parliament after the Hungarians settled their claims with Imperial Austria in 1867.

The houses in Bródy Sándor utca have a number of other interesting features. The building on the corner of Puskin utca is decorated with a sun-dial. Next door to the centre of the Hungarian Radio stands the one-time headquarters of the chimney-sweepers' guild and their memory is kept alive by a small statue of a chimney-sweep on the façade of the building. Walking towards Rákóczi út through Szentkirályi utca one passes one of the most beautiful Art Nouveau buildings



PHOTO TAMÁS FÉNYES

The ceiling fresco of the staircase of Múzeum körút No. 11, painted by Károly Lotz

of the capital, which has been classified as a monument to be preserved. A few steps ahead, one comes up to an early Baroque monument, called the Rókus Chapel, the interior of which is decorated with the statues of the Saints of the Árpád Dynasty (the Hungarian royal family which died out in the 14th century). Two more blocks up north one arrives at Blaha Lujza tér where the old National Theatre building used to stand. Today it is remembered by a statue standing on its former site. Across the square there is a large block of flats, the staircase of which is decorated with murals and a sculpture of a female figure holding a lamp which was modelled after Ilka Pálmay, a famous prima donna of the National Theatre, and the later proprietor of the building. Next time we shall take a walk in the region around Népköztársaság út.

Tamás Fényes



The old city wall of Pest seen in the courtyard of the house standing on the corner of Múzeum körút and Magyar utca



The statue of a chimney-sweep in Szentkirályi utca in the building of the one-time chimney-sweepers' guild