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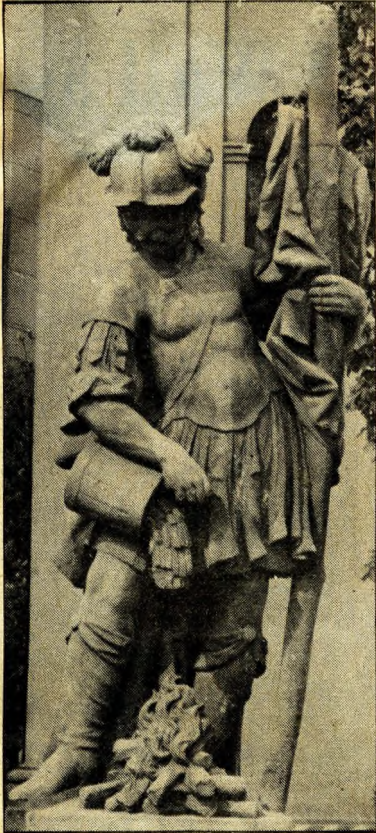


PHOTO MTI — TAMÁS FÉNYES
The statue of St. Florian in front of the parish church

Óbuda, as Budapest's District Three is known, was once one of the three constituent little townships (with Buda and Pest) that were merged in 1873 into a single administration that produced Budapest. The little township was famed for its legendary and atmospheric little taverns, windings, cobbled streets and one-storey houses. That old world charm is now rapidly disappearing in a large-scale housing clearance scheme that is transforming the face of the district, bringing it into the 20th—and 21st—century. The old winding streets, Gyűrű (ring) road, encircling the whole district, the narrow dust lane opposite the Kiscell Hill, the small one-storey houses, and the orchards and vineyards have almost completely disappeared, to give their place to a new modern housing estate.

However, some of the old curiosities of Óbuda can still be found: on Kiscell Hill once stood the church and monastery of the Kiscell friars. The magnificent late Baroque church and monastery was only used for a few decades by friars of the Trinitarian order. King Joseph II (1780-1790), after suppressing the orders, handed over the buildings and the adjoining property to the Treasury, and it was mostly used as a military depot. The famous building passed into the hands of well-known furniture manufacturer Miksa Schmidt at an auction at the turn of the century. He used it as a show-place for his fine furniture. Some interesting features of the building, its gateway, richly ornamented with guns, helmets and other military paraphernalia, had once decorated the Ministry of War in Vienna. When that building was pulled down, Schmidt bought the valuable

Walks in Budapest—VII

Óbuda—a vanishing old-world township

carved stones and had them transported to Óbuda on the Danube. In the gate of the building there is a huge metal dragon rampant—rearing on its hind legs and with forelegs elevated. The monster's way to Óbuda was an adventurous one. In 1867, it stood on the coronation hill on the Pest side of the Danube, and later, together with its twin, guarded the entrance to the Városliget (City Park). During World War II one of the dragons was badly damaged, and the other was placed in the gateway of the Kiscell monastery by the City Council. The buildings now house the Modern Age department of the Budapest History Museum, but are closed to the public at the moment as extensive renovations are in course.

From the top of Kiscell Hill, one can take in a view of the whole of Óbuda. We can see the amphitheatre, a 2,000-year-old relic of Aquincum, the largest Roman town in the Carpathian basin, with more than 100,000 inhabitants. When the new Óbuda was being built, Roman ruins were unearthed on the site of almost all buildings. A part of these unearthed ruins are now organic parts of the buildings. On Flórián tér, in the basement of the Centrum department store, the portions of Roman walls form the backdrop for an espresso. Similar ruins can be seen in the Spa museum which is in the basement of another new building. In Herkules utca (Hercules Street), the beautiful mosaics of the one-time Hercules villa are on show.

However, the original old Óbuda can now only be found at a few spots, also known as "reservations". About Fő tér (Main Square) there still lingers the atmosphere of the turn of the century. The main building of the square is the Zichy château, which houses—some-what paradoxically—the Museum

Roman urn and ruins of a Roman wall in the courtyard of a house in Kórház utca

PHOTO MTI — TAMÁS FÉNYES



of Lajos Kassák, one of the most important representatives of Hungarian avantgarde. One of the other buildings in the square, more than 200 years old, houses a museum of furnishings. The Vörös Postakocsi (Red Stage Coach) restaurant and the old transformer station in the centre of the square will always be symbols of the old Óbuda.

Those who wish to visit Óbuda's peasant houses with their surrounding gardens had

PHOTO MTI — TAMÁS FÉNYES

This oval building was once a silk mill. After extensive restoration work it now houses art studios



better hurry, as in a few years' time they will disappear in the second phase of the reconstruction project. Today some of them still exist in the shadows of the modern highrise buildings in Kenyeres utca, San Marco utca and Föld utca.

The last stop of our walk is the old parish church of Óbuda. The early Baroque building and the old statue of Florian, patron saint of firemen, together with a few remaining houses in Lajos utca, and the 200-year-old synagogue, built in neo-classic style and housing a museum, all form a part of the picture of Óbuda. After our long walk we can take a rest in Híd (Bridge) restaurant, at the back of the Parish church, and next door to the onetime house of famous Hungarian writer Gyula Krúdy (1878-1933).

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