

Audioguide for English adults

**Kochberg Castle, Park and
“Liebhabertheater”**



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310: Welcome and Introduction

Dear visitors, welcome to Kochberg Castle!

Once, these rooms were home to Charlotte von Stein, a renowned figure best known for her long relationship with the great German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe himself often stayed here in Kochberg. In Weimar's 'golden age', Charlotte von Stein was one of the most interesting women at court. Highly intelligent, she had a strong artistic streak and very much a mind of her own. She wasn't only greatly admired by Goethe, but also by such luminaries as Schiller, Herder and Lenz. Charlotte von Stein spent much of her time here in Kochberg on her husband's estate, not only staying here to ensure things were running smoothly, but also to relax and recuperate in this secluded village. Life at the Weimar court could often be very taxing, with all its social obligations, constant stream of gossip and countless intrigues.

We'd now like to take you on a short journey back in time – back to 1820. The now elderly Charlotte von Stein is taking a turn through the castle's rooms and grounds. She is accompanied by her eldest son Carl, who inherited the estate from his father, and made sweeping changes to it. As Charlotte and Carl look around, they chat privately about their lives in Weimar and Kochberg, their family – and, of course, about Goethe. And now you can listen in on the two of them – but before you do, first climb the stairs.

We hope you have an enjoyable visit!

426: Staircase



Carl:

Do you know what, my dear mama? Our estate is a real treasure trove. Just look at how many precious things have accumulated here down the decades! Let's stroll through the rooms and look them over.

Charlotte:

We can start right here on the landing. Look – that document certifies that Christoph Heinrich von Stein, a great uncle of your father, was granted the title of Count. And by none other than Joseph I, the Habsburg Emperor. That was back in 1710. The family coat-of-arms is truly magnificent, isn't it?

We Steins have lived in this area for centuries – with the earliest written record of our family in the 12th century. But Kochberg only came into the family much later...

... in 1733, to be precise. At that time, your grandfather Friedrich Christian Ludwig von Stein purchased the castle and manor estate from another aristocratic family, the von Schönfelds.

I wonder if he knew what he was letting himself in for? A lord of the manor has many obligations. I should know – I'm

one myself now. You have to provide for the families, collect rents and taxes and manage the hunts – and you're also the chief magistrate.

Juggling all of that is no mean feat – even with a capable steward at your side.

I never knew the old Baron von Stein – he died in 1739. Your father was hardly more than a toddler then – just four years old. And I hadn't even been born!

Talking of father – come with me to the family portrait gallery and we'll take a closer look at him.

427: Family portrait gallery



There they all are – our dear family! How magnificent they all look! And over there, on the left of the door, my dear papa. How sensitively the old court painter Heinsius has captured his likeness!

He was an imposing figure, my Josias – as he well knew. Just look at his stately gaze.

He was also a man of many talents. He spoke French, he was a divine dancer, he could play the flute and he was a real gentleman. And, of course, he was a first-rate horseman. When you think of your father, what's the first thing that comes into your mind, Carl?

Sad to say, the first thing I recall is that he was almost never home.

That's true, but as Master of the Horse for Duke Carl August, he had many duties to attend to. He had to see to the coaches and carriages ...

... and supervise the care of over 100 horses in the duke's stables .. and also manage

the royal stud farm in Allstedt, which the Duke was especially fond of...

... and as one of the duke's leading officials, he had to dine at court every day and, naturally, accompany his Grace the Duke on his travels. That didn't leave much time for anything else.

But I think he found it a pleasure and a privilege. He was so proud whenever he acquired the most magnificent horses or the very latest coaches for the court!

He even had a laboratory, where he developed new paints for the coaches.

Sadly my father's experiments in agriculture here in Kochberg were far less successful – except for the brandy distillery he started, that brought in a bit of money. But he'd also inherited huge debts from our dear deceased ancestors. And you always have to keep a close eye on the stewards as well ...

Yet the way he died was so terrible! First, the headaches. Then long periods of deep depression. And then finally in October 1788, the first stroke...

And you looked after him until the very end!

For five long years, until he died in 1793. It was a difficult time. In his final hours, you were at his side, and at my side, in our house in Weimar.

It was terribly sad – and they only discovered the reason for his suffering later.

Yes, after the autopsy. A splinter of bone had broken off his skull and become lodged in his brain... probably caused by a fall from a horse.

428: Goethe – Charlotte – Kochberg

Look...that's more or less what Goethe was like when we first met. It was just after he arrived in Weimar in November 1775. A handsome man, he was ... No wonder all the ladies loved him.

His bust here makes him look like an ancient Greek, but of course the image is supposed to be timeless. In fact, Goethe always wore the latest fashions ...

Yes, he really cared about that....well, he was rather vain, you know. Heavens, when I first met him, he was so very young – just 26! And I was 33 and had already been married for eleven years ... Ernst had just turned eight, and you were ... 10 years old.

And Fritz was three, wasn't he? Did you like Goethe right from the start?

Well, ... he was a rough, unrefined commoner's son. He was forever committing social faux pas, using vulgar expressions, even swearing – and encouraged the young duke to do the same. He did it on purpose, of course, just to fly in the face of court etiquette. Goethe could get away with it because he was already a celebrity. A year earlier he'd published "The Sufferings of Young Werther" – and quite simply, absolutely everyone had read it, even abroad! Do you know ...when I first met him, I found him a little bit too much in love with himself. But then... he had this way of looking at you... and soon I began to appreciate him ...

And very soon after that, he came to Kochberg.

Yes, it must have been early December, just four weeks after he'd arrived in Weimar. He was a very frequent guest here, especially in his first years in Weimar. He usually

came in a carriage or sleigh ...

... and sometimes walked over. Look here, in the display case next to the bust. There's a letter from Goethe describing one of his treks here:

"Kochberg, Saturday, 12th July. 8 o'clock in the morning. This week I did not feel comfortable in the town again, and yesterday I took flight, setting out on foot from Weimar at half past five in the afternoon and reached here at half past nine, where all was already locked up and the inmates getting ready for bed (...)."

To walk from Weimar to Kochberg in four hours? That's pretty good going, I must say. But perhaps Goethe allowed himself a little literary understatement!

429: The Goethe Room



Goethe's writing desk is over there in the corner on the right – and do you remember how he used to work at it when he was here?

He couldn't resist immortalising himself on the desk top either. Look at the datenwritten in ink –“6 Dec 75”.

That must have been on his very first visit.

There are two more dates: “4 Oct 80“ and “5 Nov 80“.

But mainly Goethe spent his time here writing. He was an obsessive letter writer – perhaps even more than we all were in those days. He sent over 1,700 letters and notes just to me alone, often writing several times a day.

Yes, he was never short of something to say!

So true! About his travels, his ideas for new books, his scientific studies, comments on art – in fact, more or less all the things he experienced and felt ...

And what did he write about you in his letters?

Now, now, Carl – some things are best passed over in silence. You know very well how close we were... Do look at the silhouette on the left of the writing desk. That's Goethe himself with your brother Fritz.

Fritz always was his favourite.

He was almost like a second father to Fritz. For a while, Fritz even lived in Goethe's garden house and accompanied Goethe on his travels a few times, for example, when they went to the Harz mountains ... But Goethe liked all three of you – including you and Ernst.

I'll never forget how he played games and sketched with us. He took us for walks in the area. He also had a funny name for us. Oh, what was it now ...?

The “grass monkeys”! What a funny name....

430: The Blue Salon



Here in the Blue Salon we have a lot of Baroque and Rococo furniture – for example, that wonderful little chess table. At that time, it was very much en vogue. Everything was so playful and ornate. Later, people yearned for a new simplicity, and looked to classical antiquity for inspiration.

When did you start as lady-in-waiting to the Duke's mama?

To Duchess Anna Amalia? I was one of her ladies-in-waiting when I was just 16 –and stayed with her until I married your father. After that, she and I remained very close for almost 50 years, until the day she died.

I do so admire how you kept your good name over so many years in those royal circles. Don't misunderstand me, my dear mama – but it can be so very easy to slip up at court.

You certainly need a talent for diplomacy to survive, without doubt. But you need other skills as well. A lady-in-waiting must be able to dance, for instance – to cut a good figure at the balls. Et bien sûr, parler français ! Il est très important en effet de pouvoir s'exprimer avec aisance et esprit dans la langue de Molière, même sur les sujets les plus futiles.

Bravo, mama! Incidentally, the woman on the silhouette to the left of the window – that is Anna Amalia, isn't it?

No don't you recognise Duchess Louise, her daughter-in-law? She was very fond of me. A very sensitive woman and a great believer in the importance of court etiquette. She's wearing a dress with a 'Cul de Paris', or "Paris bottom" – très chic in those days. Of course, you won't find a court culture like that anymore – things were quite different back then.

Look over there... on the other side of the window, there's a portrait of Louise's husband, Duke Carl August.

From the way he's depicted, he seems to be something of a rough-and-ready character. Actually, the two aren't very well matched. Carl August is also quite a ... characterhow should I put it? As a young man, he often flouted etiquette. And we all have to grin and bear his all too public relationship with that actress...

He still looks just like he does in this picture.

Well, the portrait isn't very old. If you compare what he's wearing to the fashions in the silhouettes of the ladies, you can see how times have changed. What with the peaked cap and the short, plain jacket, Carl August could almost pass for a commoner.

431: The Red Salon



Here we are in the Red Salon, our drawing room! My favourite piece of furniture here is against the wall on the right – the lady's writing desk, a 'roll-top bureau', as it's known.

Which brings us back to Goethe, who really deserves the epithet 'universal genius'. He dabbles in everything, often with outstanding success

He was taken on as tutor to the prince of course, and then appointed Privy Counsellor, of course, but there are no end to his talents. He designed this desk in 1779, and had it built by the court carpenter in Weimar. The desk was Goethe's present to me on my name-day.

A very personal gift.

With this desk in the room, Goethe was somehow always here too, even when he was away on one of his many journeys. The desk forged a kind of eternal bond between us. In my generation, there was of course a major friendship cult – and you know how important such gifts were in those days.

Especially as you weren't always able to see Goethe.

With his wide-ranging official duties, he frequently travelled on business, right

across the Duchy – sometimes even further afield. But we always remained very close. While on his travels, Goethe often sent me sketches of the interesting things he saw and that way, I could share in his experiences, even from afar.

Didn't you also write your plays at this desk?

Indeed, I did. I always used the desk when I worked on my plays, and also when I wrote some poems. You know that Schiller was enthralled by my tragedy "Dido" – something I'm still very proud of.

432: The Red Salon II

Let's take a closer look at my portrait beside the stove.

The artist has really captured your likeness. Sober and serious...yet you also have a kindly and benevolent air.

Oh, now, let's not exaggerate.

How time flies! You've been here in Kochberg since 1796. And what a long and winding road you had behind you! Do you remember your years as a student in Helmstedt and Göttingen?

How could I forget?!

And then you spent many years at the court of the Duke of Mecklenburg. Your worthy papa obtained a place there for you as groom of the chamber and squire of the court.

Those days in Schwerin were not exactly pleasant. I couldn't even afford a riding horse. And how dull it all was! I'm simply not cut out for life at court. Even now, I only ever travel to Weimar at the Duke's bidding and if I really have to go. For me, taking over the estate was a blessed release.

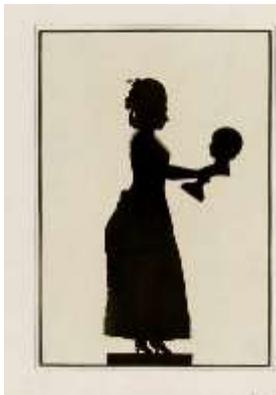
And when you're here, you don't even have to concern yourself over your contacts with Weimar since your dear wife Amélie does that all so expertly. A delightful woman! I must say, I am exceedingly fond of her.

And rightly so! Though I sometimes think you're even fonder of her than I am myself.

Oh, don't rake over the embers of that old argument again, Carl! Instead, tell me why is it you've never managed to pay off the estate's debts once and for all – even though you've always tried so hard!

My dear mama, that's partly due to the pension I pay you, as you well know. And partly because I had to pay my brother Fritz for his share of the estate when I first came here – a vast sum, I can assure you! Still, I'm happy to be here – the theatre at our doorstep, the delightful park, and the many visits from our friends. Why, it's almost like a miniature Weimar!

433: Charlotte von Stein



A room full of pictures – how marvellous!
The large silhouette on the right must be
of Fritz ...

Quite right – your little brother.

And typically Fritz, your favourite son, is
presented to visitors as a life-size figure ...

Oh, now, Carl ...

Didn't you tell me that Goethe first saw
you as a silhouette?

*Yes, he did – look over here, around the
corner on the right. That's me – the figure
in the centre. At that time, Goethe was fas-
cinated by the work of Johann Heinrich
Lavater, a pastor from Zurich ...*

... oh, yes, the publisher of "Physiognomic
Fragments". Four volumes full of silhou-
ettes and portraits of the most diverse peo-
ple – from the aristocracy all the way down
to dangerous criminals. In those days, half
of Europe was amazed by Lavater's work!

*Just so – and there was a silhouette picture
of me in the book, similar to the one here.
Goethe saw it during a visit to the physi-
cian Johann Georg Zimmermann in Stras-
bourg in the summer of 1775. Zimmermann
was one of Lavater's many helpers who
collected pictures for him. And Zimmer-*

*mann told Goethe about me, since we'd
met two years before when I was taking the
waters at Pyrmont.*

Lavater believed you could tell a person's
character from the shape of their head.

*And that's just how Goethe interpreted my
silhouette. In the display case around the
corner, you can read what he had to say.
Here at the bottom, on the right. He com-
pared my silhouette with that of another-
woman, a certain Marchesa Branconi.*

Resolute ... pleased with herself ... Loy-
al ... Captures you in her web.
Oh ho, my dear mama, Goethe has got you
down to a T!

434: Charlotte von Stein II



Goethe also sketched a portrait of me – here, above the display case – the one with the dark background.

You look both beautiful and stern! But there's also a hint of melancholy playing around your mouth.

You shouldn't forget Carl – when I sat for Goethe, I'd already had seven children. You three boys and four other children, all of whom died soon after they were born. No woman ever entirely gets over something like that.

It's certainly a sad topic – and on the subject of misfortune, why did your relationship with Goethe end so abruptly? You were so close for so many years.

Why, indeed? After eight or nine years at Carl August's court, Goethe had a crisis. He felt too limited by Weimar, and no longer believed that all the energy he'd invested in his various political offices was actually bringing any real advances.

He even wrote that famous line about it ...

“Whoever devotes himself to administration without being a ruling prince is either a Philistine, a scoundrel or a fool.”

So true! ... But perhaps he also wanted to create some distance between you and him?

... Goethe thought the time was right to reinvent himself. And that's why he set off to Italy in September 1786. But the worst thing was that he hadn't breathed a word of it to anyone! Not even to me!

In August, we spent a few lovely days in Carlsbad. And then suddenly, without warning, he was gone. For nearly two whole years. Without a word! I could never forgive him for that. And then, shortly after his return, he started up with Christiane Vulpius.

So in 1788, when he came back to Weimar, you gave him rather a frosty reception?

At our first meeting, I gave all my attentions to my sweet little Lulu ...

... your dog!

That annoyed Goethe no end. He really couldn't stand dogs.

But as time went by, you eventually became reconciled.

Though it was just a pale shadow of what once had been. Those first years with him were the best years of my life. When he went off to Italy, those times were over. Forever.

435: Guests in Kochberg

Goethe was by no means the only interesting guest in Kochberg.

Certainly not. For example, on the right, next to the door, there's a small portrait of Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz – after Goethe, perhaps the most talented dramatist of his time. Lenz spent several weeks here in the autumn of 1776.

His plays “The Soldiers” and “The Tutor” were truly great works. But Lenz was also a tortured soul. Later, he moved to Russia. There, he gradually went mad and died in abject poverty in Moscow.

But Lenz was quite well when he was in Weimar. I'd invited him to Kochberg to teach me English and drawing. We read Shakespeare together in the original. Wonderful!

A couple of months earlier, Lenz had suddenly appeared in Weimar, on the doorstep of his friend Goethe.

Yes, the two of them first met in Strasbourg.

But Lenz's time in the royal capital of Weimar didn't last too long either.

That's true enough. Scarcely six months passed before Goethe used his influence with the Duke to have Lenz expelled from court. You see, Lenz was constantly scandalizing people at court, rubbing them up the wrong way.

On the wall opposite the entrance, I can see another of Weimar's famous residents – Johann Gottfried Herder. He often came to visit us here. His portrait is on the right of the display case.

Johann Gottfried Herder – yes, he was another all-round talent. Not just a poet,

translator, and philosopher, he was also Weimar's leading Protestant theologian, in a position more or less equivalent to a bishop. I also got on well with his wife, Caroline. I even became godmother to their children.

There was only one thing you two didn't agree on – and that was the French Revolution. Herder initially welcomed it ...

And wasn't the only one. To this day, I just can't understand it.

436: Lengefeld/Schiller



And now we come to a particularly dear friend of mine. To the right, in the centre of the wall with the window, there's a portrait of Charlotte von Lengefeld...

... the wife of poor Schiller, who was sadly taken from us much too soon ...

... what an intelligent creature she is! Literature, philosophy, even the natural sciences – she knows it all!

And naturally Schiller immediately fell head-over-heels in love with her ...

That's only half true. Quite literally! Initially, Schiller was rather attracted to Charlotte's sister, Caroline – here at the top left. He dithered for quite some time before finally becoming secretly engaged to Charlotte...

Luise von Lengefeld, the mother of the girls, wasn't exactly pleased with some unknown commoner's son suddenly appearing in Rudolstadt and turning both her-daughters' heads. And what's more, Schiller was totally penniless.

But then he was offered a professorship in Jena, and the Duke granted him a small annual pension. And that convinced Luise von Lengefeld, a strict governess and tutor to the royal family, that Schiller would actually make a respectable son-in-law. I also had a small hand in the affair.

And what about Goethe? You brought them together, Schiller and Goethe, those two great minds.

Well, when Goethe was here for the last time in autumn 1788, we went to visit the Lengefelds. Rudolstadt is only a few kilometres away. And that's where Goethe first met Schiller. To begin with, though, they couldn't stand the sight of each other. Schiller found Goethe arrogant. For his part, Goethe was worried since Schiller was becoming increasingly famous as a dramatist. After all, they were rivals. They only became firm friends many years later.

437: Painting of the Private Theatre (Liebhabertheater)



Yes, I'm the one wearing the dark jacket.

*Naturally, the master builder himself –
holding a pair of dividers in his hand!*

The picture was painted when I had the old summer house transformed into a theatre – a good 20 years ago now. In the left background, you can see a corner of the building.

And if you look out of the window here, you can see the real building directly adjacent.

I think it's time for a breath of fresh air – let's walk across the courtyard and look at my wonderful theatre.

Just before we leave, let's look at this small painting.

Oh yes. "The master builder and his assistants". One of your own works, Carl, unless I'm much mistaken. You certainly have a talent for painting and sketching.

I inherited that from you, mama...

In my case, painting and sketching were simply a must. In Weimar's heyday around the turn of the century, there was a real mania for art. I remember it so vividly – for a while, literally everyone was trying their hand with a pencil and paintbrush whether Anna Amalia or Goethe, or even the young well-to-do girls from the town. In 1776, the Duke founded the "Royal Drawing School". Since then everyone, no matter what their social status, has been able to take painting lessons – and what's more, all for free! But my dear Carl, your picture is also a fine self-portrait.

438: Building history



Look at our magnificent little castle! And just think how old the estate is!

Centuries old, my dear! In 1270, we know that this was the manor of a knightly family.

And there's also a theory to explain why this spot in particular was chosen. Kochberg could derive from the old southern German word "Kochbrunnen". That's a place in a stretch of standing water that, even in the depths of winter, never freezes over, usually due to a powerful spring of water nearby. The moat here also such ice-free spots, and that can be very useful – for fish farming, for example.

No doubt, Georg von Schönfeld from Rudolstadt also appreciated that too. He bought the estate in 1577.

The von Schönfelds built the castle ensemble as we see it today – with several wings surrounding a narrow inner courtyard and the main building on the right, the "Tall House".

Originally, there was a huge stair tower. But it was falling to pieces, and demolished shortly before my time.

When my grandfather took over Kochberg from the Schönfelds in 1733, they were in the middle of totally refurbishing the castle. They wanted to modernise it, which in those days meant redesigning it in the Baroque style. So the rooms and windows were all rearranged; the early façades weren't as regular as they are now.

And then you came along, Carl.

Yes, and I've also left my mark here too. The small extension to the west wing on the left, for instance, has just been completed.

It has pointed arches, just like in the Middle Ages. Is the Gothic style of architecture supposed to be coming back into fashion?

If it were up to me, it should! But let's move on. The theatre over there is calling – let's make our way over to it.

439: Private Theatre (Liebhabertheater) I



Dating from around 1800, the - Liebhabertheater” – the Private 5 Theatre – is a special architectural gem – the only private neo-classical theatre in the world. The site was originally occupied by a Baroque summer house, which Carl von Stein had transformed into a theatre at the end of the 18th century.

He located the auditorium in the central section of the old building. In an extension to the south, towards what had previously been a farmyard, he commissioned a large brightly lit stage and then added the final highlight of the neo-classical façade and foyer to the north at the entrance to the park. Carl’s passion for this “private theatre” had its roots in a tragic catastrophe.

When you were just eleven years old, my dear Carl, a fire swept through the City Palace in Weimar, leaving it a ruin – and destroying the court theatre. That was in 1774. Do you remember? As a result, Weimar, our royal capital, had any number of cultured and musical individuals, but no longer had a theatre. One year later, Goethe arrived in Weimar. And then people at court started to organise their own plays and act in them – and the golden age of Weimar’s “private theatre” was born.

That was a crucial time for me, my dear mama. It was then that I decided to create your own little “court of the muses” here in Kochberg.

Yes, you really take it to extremes with your theatre.

I just write a few pieces that are staged here, whether it’s a little comedy or a dance. And what if I do? We also perform plays by renowned modern authors such as August von Kotzebue or Theodor Körner.

And in addition ...

Well, alright – I’m also the director, and paint the sets.

The only thing you don’t do is play all the parts yourself.

Just as it was in Weimar in those days, friends and family also help out – as well as a number of performers from the court at Rudolstadt such as, for example, our friend Methfessel, the court singer. And after all, what do I have all these servants for?! My major domo, dancing teacher, and secretary! They all have to do their bit. Whether they play the great lover on the stage, or are just the prompter. But you can believe me when I say they don’t do it unwillingly. And then I can always prepare a special treat for my dear wife Amélie on her birthday. Do you still remember how I took the horse-drawn sleigh to Weimar through the snow in the depths of winter because we still needed a green fan, make-up and a false nose for the performance to celebrate her birthday on 8 January?

Yes, yes.... What a magnificent entrance and foyer with its Doric columns! So perfectly inspired by the columns at the Roman House in the Ilm Park at Weimar. And the frieze with the lion’s heads. Let’s go to the entrance – from there, we can have a look inside.

440: Private Theatre (Liebhabertheater) II



When you look through the door, it's hard to believe that the entire interior design was constructed from what were at the time very low-priced materials. The auditorium and stage were festively decorated with a range of marbled wallpapers. Every individual piece of wallpaper was marbled by hand.

The complete design in marbled wallpaper is quite unique – and what seemed so affordable then is now rare and valuable.

The painted friezes, bordures and garlands of flowers emphasised certain architectural forms, bringing out particular features. In Kochberg, Carl constantly had money worries, but he proved to be exceptionally creative and inventive.

The beautiful sky blue colour for the stage area! And the decorative Ionic columns and gallery – and how elegant the grey columns and walls look in the auditorium! You are a crafty old thing, my dear Carl...

Ah, that famous “Turkish” marbling – a considerable effort, but also magnificent effect! Marbling does not create a repeated pattern. Instead, every sheet is unique – and a mass of individual pieces, each roughly an arm's length, all had to be marbled by hand. Everything here is only constructed from wood, pasteboard and paper. But as you know only too well as a lady-in-waiting – it's the façade that matters!

From outside, you'd never guess just how many little rooms there are in the theatre as well – it's an entire house!

Even today, thanks to the generous use of wood in the stage area, the acoustics are marvellous. Nonetheless, despite these qualities, after Carl's death, this neo-classical private theatre went into, as it were, a long period of hibernation.

During the years of East Germany, the rooms were even used to store mattresses for the children's holiday camp housed on the castle site. In 1975, the theatre was freshly renovated and restored. It was then re-opened, and performances were given here.

Today, the theatre puts on an attractive weekend programme of operas and plays, chamber music concerts and readings every year from May to October. The audiences come from all across Germany. Nowadays, the stage once inaugurated by amateur players showcases renowned performers. The theatre's programme primarily concentrates on Baroque, neo-classical and Romantic works, and sets great store in faithfully performing these plays just as they would have been shown at the time.

In other words, here you can see, for example, an opera or concert staged just as in Goethe's day. The theatre belongs to the Historic Theatres in Europe organisation, founded in 2007, which has now developed into the European Union's largest cultural project.

441: Park and grounds I: Introduction (theatre forecourt)

After your 'private theatre', we move on straight away to your next hobbyhorse – the park and grounds!

My dear mama, planning the park was simply a pleasure – and, as you know, I largely designed the park's layout myself. It started to take shape in my mind at some time shortly before 1800. That was after I'd come back from my visit to England, where I'd been inspired by some of the parks and grounds I saw.

Once again, you were at the forefront of developments! There was a new fashion for landscaping parks and gardens at that time, especially among gentlemen of noble birth. If I remember correctly, even the Princes at Weimar's royal court received some tutoring in landscaping.

Didn't you ever want to change the old garden yourself?

No, not really. Our castle garden with its beautiful Italian poplars was quite enough for me. Besides, the garden gave us everything we needed. In those days, we had any number of orchards, a kitchen garden and a herb garden. And don't forget, for many years, it was my custom only to stay here in the summer months. I spent most of the year in Weimar.

Yes ...but I'd lived in Kochberg exclusively for many years at the time when I started to consider landscaping the park. So I was really keen on designing the grounds to my taste.

When Carl was drafting his plans for his new park, the English style of landscaping had already been established on the European mainland for around twenty-five years.

In sharp contrast to the strictly geometrical French Baroque garden previously so popular, the English landscape park creates vistas and features in a seemingly natural landscape.

Here in Kochberg, you can find that natural style of landscaping. Perhaps Carl had indeed been inspired by a trip to England. Certainly, the records show he was there – and what's more, his daughter Louise married an English gentleman.

442: Park and grounds II: Grotto



Here, you have reached the quietest place in the entire park. The dark green of the yew trees, now around 50 years old, resonates with the grotto's faintly mysterious and melancholy atmosphere. A stone inscribed

“Alles ist vergänglich”
“*Nothing lasts for ever*”

has been set up at the entrance of this secluded location, possibly even placed there at the time of Charlotte von Stein. A number of grave crosses also once stood here, though they have long since disappeared. But there is a real grave where you can see the stone.

Carl von Stein's mother-in-law was buried here, as was his son Fritz, who died of an illness when he was only 31, and Carl's four-year grandson from the neighbouring Hirschhügel estate.

Perhaps Carl deliberately designed the path through the park so it passed by these graves – especially as it was common for English landscaped gardens to include a features which, for a moment, reminded those out walking of their mortality. The path through a park was always a path of discovery.

Some parks and grounds in Britain have tunnels leading to an underground stream – an echo of the underground River Styx in Greek mythology that forms the boundary between life and the realm of the dead.

This grotto also does something similar in a more discreet way. Together with the real burial site, it becomes a memento mori, a reminder of the transience of life and our own mortality.



443: Park and grounds III: Pond



The neo-classical pavilion at the upper pond is often called the ‘little bath-house’. With the steps leading down into the water, you could easily imagine Carl von Stein and his family and friends coming here on a hot summer’s day to cool off. However, at that time, bath-houses were equipped very differently – for example, they had their own heated dressing rooms.

This little pavilion may well have more been intended to evoke a temple, and endow this place with an especially solemn atmosphere.

There is a very special mood here – almost as if, for just a moment, one could immerse oneself in a different world. Yet actually the pond was constructed for quite practical reasons, wasn’t it?

The pond belongs to an entire system of basins and pipes. From here, the water runs through a series of channels to the fountain in front of the theatre. It then flows on underground into the moat, and finally into the village stream. Crucially though, this system supplies the moat with fresh water.

Which you need for fish farming ...

Exactly! I could never hope to keep trout in the moat without a supply of fresh water.

I find it so fascinating the way you manage to combine beauty and utility in our park and grounds.

And utility is actually very important – especially since we don’t have any other choice. Weimar is quite some way away. As far as we can, we have to provide everything we need ourselves.

Trout were also bred here in the upper pond. Today, though, the beech trees cast far too much shadow for trout to breed in these waters. The fish need light to grow.

Beech trees were planted extensively in the second half of the 19th century – as a supply of timber.

Since the majority of trees here in Kochberg date from that time, they are now around 150 years old.

444: Park and grounds IV: Artificial ruins



On the other hand, artificial ruins were also a subtle reminder of the noble family's heritage. Quite in tune with that message, it was also common to have the ancient structure – as here in Kochberg – covered in ivy, a reminder that with no provision to preserve what humankind created, it would simply revert to nature.

The artificial ruins are certainly one of the most atmospheric features in the park. Such ruins were often a feature in the English landscape parks and grounds. The aristocratic families laying out such parks regarded these pseudo-archaeological sites as one way of underlining the age and heritage of their particular dynasties.

There were two ways of including ruins in a landscaped park – either the park and grounds were built around some genuine archaeological ruins, or else – as was the case in Kochberg – the ruins were built of brick and mortar especially for the park. As a rule, such artificial ruins were not designed by an architect, but by an artist or even the wealthy nobles themselves. Consequently, the ruins may often seem rather amateurish. Nonetheless, artificial ruins were not just an eccentricity, but had a deeper meaning:

On the one hand, ruins are a classic 'vanitas' device, a symbol of the transience of earthly life. The ruins were supposed to generate a feeling of solitude and sublimity in anyone out walking in the park who suddenly caught a glimpse of them.

445: Park and grounds V: Flower theatre



In my walks through the park, I've often been struck by how few flowers are on show except here.

I deliberately designed the park like that. A walk through the park should develop its own dramatic intensity, with unexpected twists and turns – and so I collected all the flowers together at this location. I wanted to stage the flower garden in the most effective way possible – especially through the contrast to the rest of the park.

And you succeeded perfectly. In summer, in particular, the effect is quite overwhelming. Especially since the flower gardens are surrounded by trees and bushes, so you really only see them when you come around this corner.

Let's go stand in front of the 'linen cottage', as it's called, and enjoy the magnificent view from up here.

I especially like the glazed tiles around the ornamental flower beds.

I had them manufactured especially...

It is a wonderful vista, my dear Carl...with the circular, semi-circular and star-shaped flower beds, the green of the trees and bushes, and the way the higher trees frame a window for the view of the picturesque rolling hills....

That's exactly how I imagined it ...with a foreground and a background ...composed rather like a painting...

This area of the park quickly became known as the 'flower theatre', precisely due to this carefully composed vista down to the wonderful flowerbeds below. Yet that name is also related to the sandstone steps in front of the 'linen cottage': from those steps, the various plants cultivated in pots look down towards the stage of the ornamental flower beds. These pot plants, including many old sorts such as ornamental and scented leaf pelargonium, pomegranate, fuchsias, and angel's trumpets, spend the winter in the little orangery.

We have now reached the end of our tour and hope we could bring to life the world of the von Stein family in the early 19th century.

This was a Linon Medien production.

You have heard the voices of Dulcie Smart, Jonathan C. Sloane and John Barry.