I’ve always had a soft spot for Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s consort who was dutiful and prim (compared with his rakish older brother Ernst and his son, Edward VII) but also smart, visionary and enterprising. He worked hard to promote and improve British culture in favour of the “fairly half figure in white marble lurks in a shadowy picture gallery wonderfully reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan’s Ruddigore.

Albert’s family were great collectors, and the fortress is home to fine assemblies of armour, militaria and harnesses. It has several modern galleries of Old Masters and magnificent glass, a huge group of decorated slabs and carvings, and even some relics of Martin Luther, who stayed in the fortress for a while.

At the entrance to one of the most fascinating and unusual rooms in Germany, the 17th-century Jagdzimmer or Hunting Room. If I lived in Coburg, I decided, I would visit this room often to explore the endless intricate details of its many marquetry panels. They really show every detail of the ducal hunt, from reading the hounds to the boozey end-of-hunt festivities.

We stayed so long in the fortress that it was twilight when we left and Coburg’s lights were already glittering in the valley as we descended the wooded hillside. Halfway down, the natural history museum created a welcoming and enticing splash of light in the gathering darkness.

This well-modernized small museum is home to weird giant model insects, a creepy ethnography collection and several brilliant life-sized dioramas of different habitats. There was, of course, an Albert anniversary exhibition, which centred on an alert-looking replica of Benjamin Hawkins’ giant iguanodon, a hollow construction in which Hawkins and various celebrated naturalists ate their New Year’s Eve dinner in 1853. Albert was keenly interested in evolution. He visited Hawkins’ workshops while Hawkins was building his monsters for the Crystal Palace, and, as the museum’s exhibition showed, he also had many natural history books and specimens of his own.

Visual

After he died, Victoria gave Coburg a big statue of him, which now stands in the town square. I quietly greeted the statue next day on route to Schloss Ehrenburg, another Saxe-Coburg-Gotha palace. Now a state archive, we discovered in its high rooms a jewel-like set of large illustrations commissioned by Albert’s sister-in-law, Alexandrine, to record events in her life. Albert has bit parts in many of these detailed visual journals, and it seemed particularly sad to reach 1861 and find him as the main image for the year, supported by sorrowing angels, at the age of just 42.

But of course, Coburg isn’t just about Albert and the family. We also toured the excellent doll museum, whose curiosities include all kinds of 1930s china dolls, stuffed toy chess sets made with stuffed toys. And in St Moritz Church, we spent more than an hour examining the famous old alabaster altar, which stands 10 metres high and covered in mysterious creatures and sculptures.

We would certainly have visited more Coburg attractions, in particular Schloss Rosenau, where Albert spent his happy childhood – but now it was time to go. We were expected in a hotel in Munich, and I have to say it turned out to be a delightfully and very central one. Next day found us abandoned in Munich, and I have to say it turned out to be a delightfully and very central one. Next day found us abandoned in Munich, and I have to say it turned out to be a delightfully and very central one. Next day found us abandoned in Munich, and I have to say it turned out to be a delightfully and very central one. Next day found us abandoned in Munich, and I have to say it turned out to be a delightfully and very central one.