

## **Centuries after the battle: New Museum in Lützen gives 47 fallen soldiers their identity back**

**The Saale-Unstrut holiday region is located in the very south of Saxony-Anhalt, where vineyards, castles, cathedrals and small towns tell stories about their past. But not all the historical sites are only edifying. The idyllic area was also the scene of some of the most brutal battles of the Thirty Years' War. The new "Lützen 1632" museum shows how these stories can be told today - with impressions that have been prepared in a truly special way.**

It was November 6, 1632. The Thirty Years' War was entering its fifteenth year. Near the small town of Lützen, the autumn morning mist was still wafting over the almost flat fields. Two armies, 35,000 men, were marching towards each other: the Swedes coming from the south, led by King Gustav II Adolf, and the troops of the Catholic Alliance under Wallenstein from the north. The first shot was fired at around 11 a.m. A little later, the thunder of cannons and rifle shots, orders from officers and cries of pain from the wounded, battle cries and the neighing of horses filled the air. When the gunpowder smoke cleared in the evening, the earth was soaked in blood. 6,000 to 9,000 people had lost their lives, among them the Swedish King Gustav Adolf. His body had not been spared from being plundered either. But because of his status, he was not left behind among all the other fallen.

The Battle of Lützen was one of the cruelest in the Thirty Years' War. The fact that it became one of the most famous - although it did not decide the war - is mainly due to the death of Gustav Adolf, the charismatic luminary of Protestantism. Immediately after the battle, a boulder was rolled to the place where he died and then crowned in 1873 by a canopy designed by Schinkel. This was followed by a memorial chapel and two wooden houses. Thousands of other dead were forgotten. Robbed of their belongings, hastily buried by comrades and the civilian population.

### **Modern archaeology shows the course of the battle scientifically correctly**

When an untouched mass grave was discovered in 2011 by researchers who also systematically examined the battlefield with metal detectors, a different era in historiography had long since dawned. What's more: finds such as the Nebra Sky Disk or the Bad Dürrenberg Shaman had made Saxony-Anhalt a hotspot for German archaeology. State archaeologist Prof. Harald Meller explains why the grave of the 47 fallen soldiers near Lützen can be compared with these world sensations: "November 6, 1632, was described in the old chronicles according to interests and embellished with legends. Only modern archaeology makes it possible to present facts about the course of the battle in a scientifically correct manner. Thousands of finds revealed where the Swedes were, where Wallenstein's troops were. And then we found the grave; 47 skeletons, whose individual biographies could be partially reconstructed using the latest analysis methods. Mass graves with well-preserved and therefore meaningful remains of soldiers of this period are very rare; only the one in Wittstock is comparable."

### **Restorers researched the origins and lives of the soldiers**

In order to tell the story of these people - as they have done of the military leaders for centuries - Meller and his colleagues from the State Museum of Prehistory, together with battlefield archaeologists from other European countries, designed an exhibition at the scene of the massacre. The centerpiece is the grave, which was lifted out of the ground in two blocks of earth weighing a total of 54 tons, brought to the State Museum in Halle, where it was analyzed and preserved.

"In our restoration workshop, we gave the men back their individuality. For example, we used their teeth and bones to determine what they mainly ate at which stage of their lives, whether they had to go hungry, where they came from, what illnesses or injuries they had suffered, how and at what age they ultimately died on the battlefield. Then we put the skeletons together as we found them - on top again the man who lay on top of the others like the crucified man with his arms spread." The aim was not to heroize the fallen, "...but to depict the horrors of the battle in which people died for a cause that was not their own. Like all wars, they are senseless human deaths."

### **Unique exhibit: the preserved mass grave**

Visitors to the newly built "Lützen 1632" museum learn a lot about the Thirty Years' War - as in other museums. But then they enter a dark room in the basement with the unique exhibit. "First of all, however, they look at the familiar faces," explains Manuela Dietz, the director of the Lützen municipal museums. "They see the proud military leaders. Until they turn around and look at the mass grave." Carefully lit, it stands upright, without any glass in front of it, like a huge painting, like a triptych. At some point, those entering notice the exhibits on the walls of the sacred-looking room: finds from the battlefield in front of the door, maps, letters, the coin that a soldier probably hid in his foot rag before the fight. At the push of a button, curious people can also get close to each of the 47 individuals and read what the archaeologists have found out about their life and death.

### **Walk around the memorial and go on a journey through time**

The simple new building, which opened in autumn 2024, has given the memorial on the outskirts of Lützen, which has grown over the centuries in keeping with the spirit of the times, a completely new facet. Originating from a place of pilgrimage for admirers of the fallen Swedish king, it became a place of remembrance. In one of the red wooden "Swedish houses" there is an exhibition about the changing views of Gustav Adolf; the question "war hero or war criminal?" is even asked.

On the seven-kilometer-long "battlefield path", which leads along field paths to Lützen, visitors can walk around the memorial, pause at seven life-size metal silhouettes of protagonists and go on a journey through time using a QR code. This makes it almost possible to hear thunder and screams...

**Author: Marlis Heinz**

**More Information:**

<https://museum-luetzen-1632.de/>

---

Additional assets available online: [Photos \(3\)](#)

<https://press.invest-in-saxony-anhalt.com/2025-03-24-Centuries-after-the-battle-New-Museum-in-Lutzen-gives-47-fallen-soldiers-their-identity-back>