

“MEISTERTRUNK” / “MAYOR’S DRINK”

*From Rothenburg to Oberammergau –
The Historical Festival Pageants*

Among these there are historical festival pageants on open-air stages or even regularly recurring historical plays performed in the city itself. One such historical festival performance is the “Master Drink” (“Meistertrunk” in German) in Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber. In this historical play the well-preserved old town (which, as is the case with so many well-preserved towns in Germany, owes its preservation to the loss of economic importance since the 16th century) is included in the production. As early as 1880 the city fathers of Rothenburg wanted to do something to attract tourists and so they created the “Master Drink” (premiere 1881). It tells the story of how the city was saved from imminent destruction in 1631 during the Thirty Years War by a mayor who was able to hold his liquor.

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The *Meistertrunk* (“Master Draught”) play in Rothenburg tells the story of the town’s mayor who, on a bet with an enemy general, drank in one gulp three-quarters of a gallon of wine, thus saving the town from destruction. In the town square a clock with wooden figures enacts the local legend.

The best known examples in this country are the “Meistertrunk” together with the historical shepherds’ dance in Rothenburg ob der Tauber between June and August and the “Kinderzeche” in Dinkelsbühl which this year takes place from July 13-22.

Historic pageants and events

Please see under ‘Annual Events’

The ‘Meistertrunk’ or ‘Mighty Draught’

This has been played annually ever since 1881 at Whitsuntide by amateur groups to audiences of ten thousand or more and recently on the second Sunday in July (Festliche Sommertage) and in September (Reichstadt Festtage).



The historical play, „Meistertrunk“ or the Mighty Draught, during the city’s summer festival. Here, we see Rothenburg’s citizens pleading for mercy from Tilly and his troops.

The play is about the remarkable saving of the town on October 31st, 1631 during the Thirty Years’ War. Because of the heavy resistance the town had put against its besiegers, Tilly, general of the invading forces, was furious when he finally took the town and vowed as was customary to hang every man jack of the city council. All appeals to him for mercy were of no avail and the mayor of the city, Bürgermeister Bezold was summoned to fetch the executioner. In the meantime, however, the general was offered an enormous tankard containing three and half of the best Franconian wine (nearly seven pints!). Tilly, on seeing this, thereupon promised to show mercy if one of the councillors could swallow this off in one draught. Former Bürgermeister Nusch accepted the challenge and succeeded in finishing off the wine in one go to the amazement of Tilly who was constrained to keep his promise and so the town’s population fell to rejoicing.

Then the season of history plays in the summer sets in; here, the “Meistertrunk” or “Master Draught” in the medieval town of Rothenburg, that gem on the Romantic Road, is the pride of the town. The play describes an interlude of 1631 A.D. when the imperial commander Tilly took Rothenburg in the Thirty Years’ War and sentenced the entire town council to death. Then, following a sudden impulse, he promised to revoke the sentence if one of the councilmen could empty at one draught a tankard containing about three and a half quarts of wine. Bürgermeister Georg Nusch accomplished the feat, rescuing the council and the whole town.