

# Breathing Life into Old Walls

## Museum of Tyrolean Farms



Located in the idyllic scenery of Kramsach, Austria, the open-air Museum of Tyrolean Farms offers a glimpse back into pre-industrial times, when the daily life of rural folk was centered around hard labour and a struggle to live from the land.



EVA-MARIA KIENAST & THOMAS  
BERTAGNOLLI

Founded in 1974, the museum provides a vivid insight into the agricultural history of the State of Tyrol, the western region of Austria. Fourteen historic farmhouses and twenty-four annexed buildings, such as a sawmill, a blacksmith's workshop and two chapels, from different regions of North, South and East Tyrol have been dismantled with great care and rebuilt on the museum grounds. As these farmsteads were once home to a living and breathing family, they still retain their special atmosphere and thus bridge the gap between times gone by and the daily cares of a modern visitor. To enhance the experience of stepping back in time, the buildings are brought to life again: video projections in selected farmhouses, live displays of traditional handicrafts, performances of alpine music bands or the annual "Kirchtag" fair give an impression of how bygone generations lived, laughed and loved.

Additionally, once every summer, a living history event transports the audience back into medieval times and allows the visitors to experience the past with all senses.

The museum's director, Dr. Thomas Bertagnolli, explains the didactic concept:

*"The events held here at the museum, especially one like the living history weekend, are intended to bring the historic farmsteads to life. Last year we implemented a new and exciting way to present the houses to our visitors. Short films projected onto the walls of several of the buildings give a glimpse into the simple and often difficult lives of the farmers of the time. These often emotional film clips burst the idyllic bubble of the ideas many of us have of this period and instead portray a more realistic picture of our history. For our younger visitors we have installed hands-on play areas, enabling them to enjoy their visit to our museum. With the installation of new information boards we have been able to show how the houses looked before being dismantled and brought to us here in the Museum of Tyrolean Farmhouses."*



## Animating the Past - Living History as Crowd Puller



Eva-Maria Kienast is a media professional by trade, works as a secretary at a university and has been fascinated with the Middle Ages since her childhood. She specializes in historic embroidery techniques and fashion development in the 14th century and is part of the Tyrolean living history group "vrouwen maere" ([www.mittelalter.tirol](http://www.mittelalter.tirol)) and the "IG 14. Jahrhundert in Österreich" ([www.ig14.at](http://www.ig14.at))

The scenic setting of the farmsteads, in its peaceful surroundings - hidden away from the distractions of modern life, free from traffic, street lights, ugly electricity pylons and the like, makes the Museum of Tyrolean Farms an ideal place for a living history event. Working alongside the Austrian

"Interessensgemeinschaft 14. Jahrhundert in Österreich" and the Northern Italian living history group "Niedertor mit Gefolge", for one weekend in August the historic "Franzl's - Klaisla's" farmhouse in the museum was filled with life again.

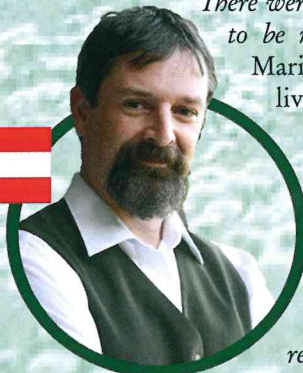
The event was titled "Farm Life in Medieval Tyrol" and demanded

high standards and diligent preparation by the interpreters.

"There were multiple challenges to be met," explains Eva-Maria Kienast who, as a living history interpreter herself, was responsible

for the thematic briefing of the participants as well as the organisational aspects of the event.

"As none of the interpreters had experience of farm work, a lot of research had to be done in preparation for the event to be able to portray the farmer's household accurately."



Thomas Bertagnolli was appointed Curator of the Museum of Tyrolean Farmhouses in 1998 after studying History at Innsbruck University. The research of the historic farm buildings with specific reference to the varying Tyrolean landscape and economic development between the different regions of Tyrol is the main focus of his work.

## Preparing the Interpreters - Research and Understanding

To meet this goal, the participants read literature on Medieval rural society structures, the daily work routines of a farmstead, the animals and plants cultivated, the gender-specific distribution of work on a farm and immersed themselves in detailed research of regional peculiarities: Who were the

feudal landowners in the County of Tyrol? What was the history of the farmstead that would be occupied

during the event and how did the law of

inheritance

affect its resident's life?

Also, how did the rich profane and religious customs that were so important to

Medieval people punctuate the essential structure of the agricultural year?

"In all the research, high priority was given to the aspect of regionalism. The people portraying the household occupants should be as credible and authentic as possible," clarifies

Eva-Maria Kienast. This demand proved to be an extra challenge for the 23 people from the three cooperating living history groups. Some of whom would normally portray city craftsmen and middle-class people and therefore needed a completely new set of clothes and accessories for their rural Tyrolean personas. Others, who usually portrayed a nobleman's entourage, had to adapt their outfits to that of working class farmers.

Another had to put together a complete kit that met the museum standards of authenticity.

"This was only successful as all participants had agreed the quality criteria regarding personal equipment and showcased handicrafts. They also brought with them a high level of enthusiasm and willingness to make the event a success," reveals the organizer. Nonetheless, a lot of discussion had to take place before the common standards were set and communicated to all participants.

## Capturing the Audience - Compiling the Event Schedule

When all the preparations were in order, the focus turned to the visitors' programme. "The aim was to connect the audience with the past and combine a mix of craft displays and everyday activities

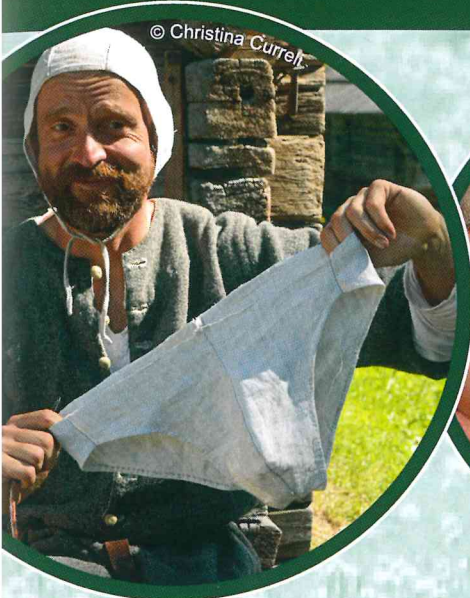


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in the farmsteads with semi-formal lectures at set times," explains Eva-Maria Kienast. Apart from being able to watch routine household chores like cooking on the open fire, mending clothes or caring for small children, visitors were to be invited to wander around the premises and admire displays of historic handcrafts

*The event was a challenge for the 23 people from the three cooperating living history groups.*

set up outside the historic farms. Here, the interpreters answered a never-ending string of questions regarding their craft or their appearance. The hourly lectures focused on one issue in detail and spanned a wide range of topics: including a 14th century fashion show (including the secrets of Medieval underwear), an insight into the production and trade of woollen and linen textiles in historic Tyrol, obtainable colors in plant-dyeing and the secrets of Medieval dishes. The audience flocked to all presentations in great numbers; a sure sign that the focus on regional aspects was a success and the promotional work effective.

#### Promoting the Event – Pictures do the Trick

Although it was a museum event that did not mean that the promotion had to be drab. "It proved extremely effective to label the presentations in Middle High German. People instantly felt addressed by this

simple means of communication. Photos of reenactors at work captured attention and print and online media channels helped to pull huge crowds into the museum," Eva-Maria Kienast summarises the promotional efforts.

And the museum's director, Dr. Thomas Bertagnolli adds, "For us, the living history event plays an important part in bringing the farmhouses to life and lets the visitor take an authentic look into the past." ■

The Museum of Tyrolean Farmsteads preserves old farmhouses and their adjoining buildings as witnesses of the pre-industrial rural way of life and culture. At the moment, the Museum of Tyrolean Farmsteads consists of 14 farmhouses and numerous adjoining buildings. All those buildings were reconstructed in the museum area. They chose right this area for the museum because it offers the ideal landscape for imitating the geography of Tyrol. For our younger visitors we have installed hands-on play areas, enabling them to enjoy their visit to our museum.



Visit the People's History Museum, housed in an iconic new building and magnificently restored Edwardian Pump House. There have always been ideas worth fighting for. Join a march through time following Britain's struggle for democracy over two centuries. Visit our community gallery and changing exhibition gallery. Enjoy fun interactives and activities for families and visitors of all ages. Browse our shop for unique gifts and make use of the sunniest riverside terrace in our cafe.

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