

 HAUS DER MUSEEN  
Historisches Museum Olten

Welcome



# Introduction

## For more than a century ...

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The museum has been collecting historical objects and documents from the city and region of Olten for over 100 years now. It also stages exhibitions on various themes of cultural history. Planning began for an historical city collection in 1901 on the initiative of a group of prominent Olten citizens. Since 1932 the Historical Museum of Olten has been located in the newly built administrative headquarters and school building at Konradstrasse road in the Hübeli quarter, and that is where it has remained ever since, even after the 2016-2018 renovation.

## 'Olten: all passengers are requested to leave the train!'

### The permanent exhibition of the Historical Museum

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Let us bring you on a journey through the eventful history of the city of Olten.

It is a city that everyone has heard of, but few know anything about. Did you know, for instance, that one of the first Federal Councillors came from Olten? Or that it was not just lorries, cars and shoes that were made in the Olten region, but also up-market foods, and that the latter are still being produced here? Or that numerous organisations, including one of the major political parties, were founded in the legendary restaurant at the train station?

The permanent exhibition is divided into two sections. One deals with the so-called area of transition, the other with the city itself. The exhibition plays on opposing views, from the inside and from the outside.



Olten:  
all passengers  
are requested to  
leave the train

# Historical Museum 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

History of the city of Olten, permanent exhibition



**Western forecourt**  
Fire & light



**The restaurant at Olten railway station – the nation's conference room**



**History workshop**



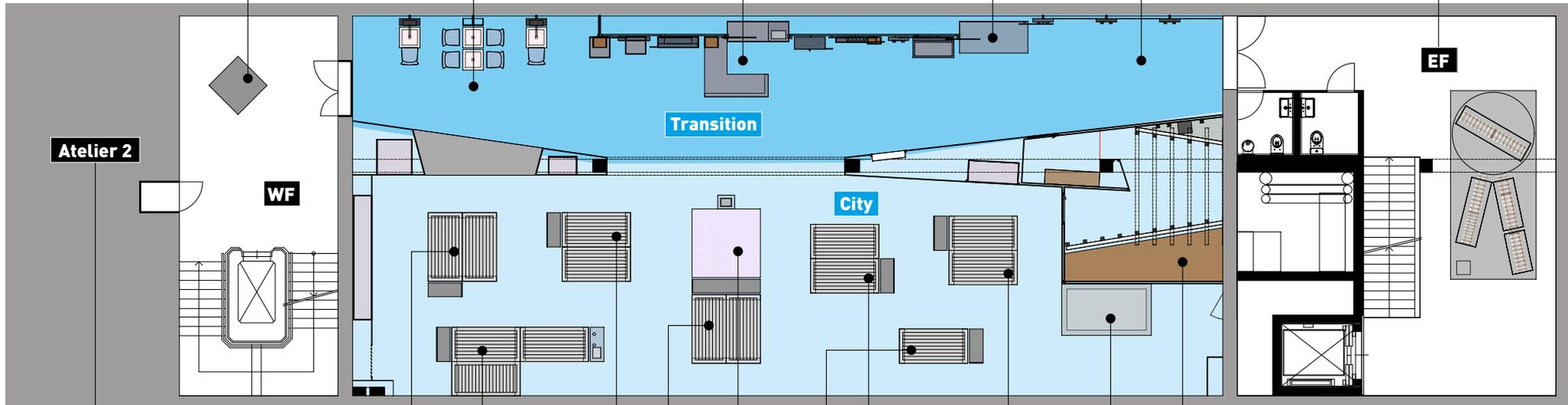
**The Frohbürgs – every town needs a founder!**



**Olten? Olten.**



**Eastern forecourt**  
One train after the other



**Atelier 2**  
Workshop



**Faith & struggle**



**Conflict & change**



**Coming & going**



**Trade & industry**



**Trains & stations**



**People & motors**



**Tunnel stories**



**Rights & duties**



**Geography & history**



**Water & power**

# Olten

## The transition area



The restaurant at the train station in Olten: the nation's conference room



The coat of arms of the Counts of Frohburg.



The historical centre of the city is clearly visible.



Look over our shoulders and find out more about the work that goes on behind the scenes.

### The restaurant at Olten railway station – the nation's conference room

Die ganze Schweiz trifft sich in Olten. Für Zusammenkünfte und Besprechungen ist das Bahnhofbuffet der ideale Ort. Hier kommen Menschen aus unterschiedlichen Regionen zusammen. Die Vermischung verschiedener Deutschschweizer Dialekte wird von manchen Leuten der 'Bahnhofbuffet-Olten-Dialekt' genannt. In Olten wird aber nicht nur geredet, sondern es entstand auch Neues: Vereine und eine grosse Schweizer Partei wurden hier gegründet. Geschrieben wird in Olten ebenfalls: Die Stadt ist Heimat mehrerer bekannter Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftsteller. Setzen Sie sich zu ihnen an den Tisch und erfahren Sie Bekanntes und weniger Bekanntes.

### Olten? Olten.

Olten has more to offer than just a train station. The town developed rapidly because of the railway, but its beginnings date back much further. The area was settled as far back as Celtic and Roman times. In the Middle Ages the town changed hands several times and was governed by the Counts of Frohburg, the Bishop of Basel and finally Solothurn. Both travellers and traders stayed here in the past, providing welcome revenue for the town. The factories that were built in Olten in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries produced soap, lorries and foodstuffs which were sold all over Switzerland as well as abroad.

### The Frohburgs – every town needs a founder!

Olten is believed to have been founded by the Frohburgs. In the Middle Ages they were an influential noble dynasty. Their ancestral castle stood on a rocky ridge above Trimbach. Nowadays it is one of the largest medieval castle ruins in the Jura region.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century a member of the Frohburg line became Bishop of Basel. The family's special status was borne out by the fact that they were one of just a few dynasties allowed to mint their own coins. But was Olten really founded by the Frohburgs? Perhaps they were only declared the founders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After all, the new federal state was at the time experiencing a growing historical awareness and increased interest in the Middle Ages.

### History workshop

An historical museum recounts history using documents and objects. It collects these cultural goods and stores them on our behalf and also for future generations. The objects and their history are put on display in exhibitions. However, telling stories by means of objects requires a lot of work, although this is often not immediately obvious to visitors. The history workshop gives you an opportunity to look behind the scenes and get an impression of how an object can be used to tell a story or to relate history.

# Olten

## The city area



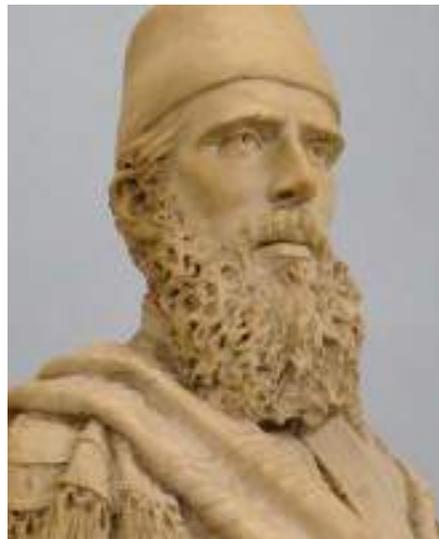
An 18<sup>th</sup> century set of rosary beads made of coconut wood.



Citizens' beakers served as naturalisation fees.



During the First World War the Fortress Hauenstein also included the city of Olten.



Carving out a career in the Ottoman Empire: Werner Munzinger from Olten aka Munzinger Pasha.

### Faith & struggle

Olten is not one of the places where the Reformation made a great impact. The Counter-Reformation, however, brought a Capuchin monastery to Olten. It was hoped that the monks would provide pastoral care to the local population. The town remained largely Catholic until the period of Industrialisation. It was not until 1860 that the first Protestant church was consecrated in Olten.

The so-called 'Kulturkampf' [culture struggle] took place towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also affected the region of Olten. It was a conflict between conservative and liberal Catholics. It was also a crisis of modernity, however, which led to a reorganisation of the relationship between Church and state. The consequences of the conflict were felt well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Conflict & change

Political and social change had a direct impact on the people in the town and region. The Swiss Peasants' War led to Olten forfeiting some of its rights because it had chosen to support the losing side. Following the French Revolution and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the people of Olten struggled at the highest level to create a new social order. International conflicts shaped people's everyday lives in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Poverty and the lack of political participation led to the Swiss General Strike in 1918. The oil crisis of the 1970s awakened an awareness of the finite nature of resources. And today? What are the current challenges?

### Rights & duties

Who has a right to citizenship? Who has the right to vote? How much taxes does one have to pay? These are the burning questions of today. Each community defines the rights and duties of its members. The town of Olten once had the right to appoint its own Schultheiss or mayor and had its own court of law. Later, it came under the dominion of Solothurn. Whether or not one could become a citizen of the town was in the past determined by one's wealth. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, new citizens had to contribute a so-called citizen's beaker, along with a sum of money, and they also had to own a fire bucket. Political participation, however, long remained dependent on one's gender. It was not until 1971 that women in Switzerland were given the right to vote and to hold political office. The women of Olten played a vital role in this struggle.

### Coming & going

Thanks to the River Aare, the bridge and the Unterer Hauenstein Pass, Olten was an important transport intersection from early on. Three professions in particular benefited from this: publicans, smiths and tradesmen. They all gained in wealth and stature. As a consequence, people associated with these occupations also had political influence. Two Solothurn Federal Councillors came from Olten. Both were sons of wealthy publicans and merchants. Olten, however, was also a place from where people emigrated, searching for work or adventure and founding companies abroad. Some even left their mark on European history. In the second half of the

## Olten The city area



Between the River Aare and the Jura mountains: the city of Olten.



Olten railway station: an intersection of many paths.



The old street lighting in the city.



This global corporation also produced its wares in Olten.

19<sup>th</sup> century, immigrants began to change the face of the town. Railway construction and Industrialisation led to the population number multiplying sixfold. The quiet little rural town gradually developed into a modern city.

## Geography & history

The present-day city of Olten is divided into two halves by the River Aare and surrounded by the foothills of the Jura mountains. The first part of the presentation shows the influence that the location of Olten and its transport routes had on the city's development. In the Roman period, the passage through the Unterer Hauenstein opened up links to the north-west. Later, railway construction brought about a number of changes to the city and its surrounding area within a very short period of time.

The second presentation is devoted to the changes in the cityscape. For a long time, Olten was a small town. The historical centre of the city was limited to the area of the Late Antique castrum. The 19<sup>th</sup> century and the period of Industrialisation brought about massive growth.

## Water & power

The production of goods requires energy. For a long time, water was the main source of energy, initially to drive mills and crankshafts, later for turbines used in the production of electricity. In 1896 one of the earliest large hydroelectric power plants went into operation south of Olten. Railway construction and coal shortages during the First World War expedited the production of electricity and the expansion of its networks. In order to fulfil the great-

er energy demands in the boom years of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Gösgen nuclear power plant was added to the electricity grid in 1979, making the Olten area one of the nuclear power regions of Switzerland.

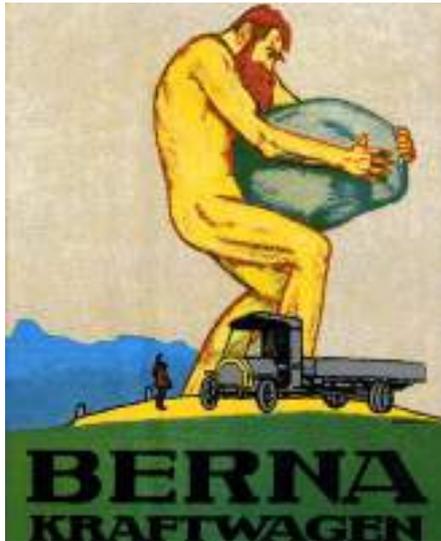
## Trains & stations

Railways fast-tracked the country's development towards an industrialised society. With the opening of the Hauenstein line in 1858, Olten became a transport hub, which was also connected to the European rail network. The headquarters of the Swiss Central Railway (which later became the Swiss Federal Railway, SBB) was one of the region's main employers. The railways also provided a platform for other economic sectors to set up their businesses in the region. Life in the town was shaped to a considerable degree by the railway employees and their associations.

## Trade & industry

Thanks to its excellent transport links, Olten became an attractive place for businesses to set up their branch offices. A variety of industrial enterprises settled in the Olten region in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from clothing manufacturers to heavy industries to producers of foodstuffs and hygiene products.

From the late 1960s onwards, however, these firms were coming under increasing pressure. They began to search for cheaper locations for their production facilities, and some were even sold. Numerous companies were forced to close their doors for good.



As powerful as a titan: utility vehicles of the Berna company.



Work in the Hauenstein base tunnel around 1912.



The height of fashion around 1903: motor car vis-à-vis a product of the Berna company .

## Olten The city area

Today, some firms that trade on the global market still have their branch offices in the Olten region. Besides these, many small and medium enterprises have proved successful in manufacturing high-quality innovative products.

### People & motors

In 1903, Joseph Wyss moved the headquarters of his extremely successful motor company from Bern to Olten. From that moment on, the city produced not only cars but more importantly lorries and other utility vehicles. However, from 1974 onwards, only individual parts were still being produced in Olten. Vehicle assembly lines were transferred to the facilities of the company's new owner 'Saurer' in eastern Switzerland. The old Berna company, however, remained an important employer up to the 1980s. Many parts were still manually produced or refined. High quality standards were part of the firm's concept. Some of its utility vehicles are still in use today.

### Tunnel stories

Two tunnels through the Hauenstein mountain had a major impact on the city and its transport links. The first tunnel to be built was a summit tunnel that linked Olten and Basel. A terrible event that has stayed in the minds of the people was a disaster in 1857 that claimed 52 lives.

Construction of the base tunnel lasted from 1912 to 1916. A settlement for tunnel workers and their families was built in Trimbach. The atmosphere between the local community and the newcomers was characterised by both tension and fascination. The geological formation of Hauenstein mountain was challenging. Massive contractual penalties increased the pressure on both management and workers even further. The onset of the First World War delayed the tunnel's completion. Its inauguration took place two years after the breakthrough.



Passion for detail: the models made by Prof. Aldo Balmas.

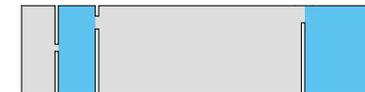


Magnificent lamps from the Hermann Müller collection.



Hands-on history!

## Forecourts East and west



### The eastern forecourt One train after the other

Olten is known as a railway town. This area is devoted to the fascinating world of locomotives and trains. In the 1960s, Aldo Balmas (1905-1977), engineer and professor of thermodynamics and material testing at the Technicum in Le Locle, together with his students, began to build a replica of a 2'Bn4v (A2/4) type locomotive of the Swiss Central Railway. The replica uses steam propulsion and a 7 ft ¼ in track gauge. He built the carriages after he retired.

The craftsmanship and precision of the work are quite remarkable.

### The western forecourt Fire & light

One of the most important collections of the Historical Museum of Olten is devoted to the topic of lighting. Thanks to significant donations, the displays cover a wide variety of ways that human beings have found in the past to make use of light and of fire. The objects date from the period between Antiquity and the modern era and originate from different cultural spheres.

## Atelier 2 Workshops



Atelier 2 is a space for workshops and supervised activities for both young and old. When there are no events taking place, it is available to our smaller guests and their chaperones to play in and linger for a while.

### **Haus der Museen**

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CH-4600 Olten  
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hausdermuseen@olten.ch  
www.hausdermuseen.ch

### **Opening hours**

Tuesday to Sunday 10 am – 5 pm,  
closed on Mondays  
Schools by appointment from 8 am  
The museum is closed on the following  
public holidays:  
Christmas Eve, Christmas Day,  
New Year's Eve, New Year's Day.

### **Admission fees**

Adults CHF 5  
Children, adolescents, schools  
free admission  
Swiss Museum Pass holders  
free admission

### **Getting here**

Bus stop (Olten Konradstrasse) and  
car park (Munzingerplatz)  
next to the building.  
The Haus der Museen is  
wheelchair accessible and  
has a restaurant (MAGAZIN).

