

Gardelegen Is Complex And Worth Getting To Know Better

It's a fine line to walk in writing about a town like Gardelegen in the [Altmark](#) region. It's a town more than a thousand years old, the site of an unspeakable tragedy less than a century ago, the home town of a well liked German entertainer, and they got a 700 year old beer.

Yeah, how to do you sum that up?

I'll give it a good try.

Just as many medieval [German towns](#) there are a few reminders of life back during those days. You'll find them in places like St. Spiritus, not a church per se, but a hospital that opened its doors in 1285.

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Gardelegen's City Hall originally opened its doors to assist the town's citizens in 1241. Around that same time, right?

Even older is St. Marien's Church built in 1200, in the popular Romanesque style of its day. A century later St. Nikolai came along, created in the then popular Gothic style. It is churches like these that keep bringing visitors to towns like Gardelegen year after year.

Stop over at the *Salzwedeler Tor* and its Gate Guards, part of the town's original defense fortification. No proper medieval town was without one. But, not all of them had their own Roland; Gardelegen did.

A statue of Sir Roland in a market or church square was a medieval symbol that the town was a

“free town.” Gardelegen’s Roland was erected in 1450 and he collapsed almost 300 years later in 1727. Roland didn’t make another appearance until 2002; where he is proudly displayed.

A lot of Gardelegen’s history can be learned over at the Local History Museum. Here you can learn about Gardelegen Beer, a brew that’s been going strong for 700 years. If a place that’s been making something that long, it’s gotta be good stuff — so try it.

Gardelegen’s history also has a much darker side. In April 1945, Nazi SS officers killed over a thousand prisoners of war. Before all the bodies of those men were buried in a mass grave, U.S. troops occupied the town and saw what had been done at the local *Isenschnibber Feldscheune* (a barn) and brought one of the perpetrators to be tried for war crimes.

With the local residents and the United States military working together, all were given a proper burial; now known as the Gardelegen Military Cemetery.

Buried in another cemetery is Otto Reutter. Mr. Reutter was a late 19th – early 20th century entertainer. He was considered a very private man who when he retired just wanted to return back to his boyhood home. There’s a monument from the town to this famous local boy who made good.

Summing up a town as complex and historical as Gardelegen isn’t an easy task; but, it is worth getting to know a bit better.