

**The Miseries of War  
Marking the 400th Anniversary of the  
Beginning of the Thirty Years' War in 1618**



**2018 Town and Gown Lecture**

**Peter H. Wilson**

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All Souls College  
University of Oxford

**Tragedy, Violence, and Survival in Germany during  
the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648)**

The Thirty Years' War was the most destructive conflict in Europe prior to the two twentieth-century world wars. The population of the Holy Roman Empire, the war's principal battleground, was reduced by at least a fifth and did not recover its pre-war level for over 60 years after this terrible struggle was finally concluded in the Peace of Westphalia. Large swathes of the Empire were left depopulated, pockmarked with abandoned or burned-out farms. The war was brutal from the outset and was widely perceived as spiralling out of control to become what one later historian has called the "supreme example of meaningless violence." Closer examination reveals that this was not the case and that military operations remained under the authorities' control and were pursued to achieve political objectives. This lecture explores why most contemporaries saw things differently and instead felt that the violence exceeded all known bounds. Drawing on eyewitness accounts, diaries, memoirs, and contemporary images, it will examine how they perceived the war and especially the associated violence, as well as identify how they tried to cope with living through extraordinary circumstances. Without seeking to diminish the genuine horror, it will reveal just how varied peoples' experiences were, and how war and its effects were accommodated within 'normal' life.

Professor Wilson is Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls College. He has worked at the universities of Hull, Newcastle, and Sunderland, and has been a visiting fellow at the University of Münster in Germany. His books include *The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe's History* (2016), and *Europe's Tragedy: A History of the Thirty Years War* (2009) which won the Society for Military History's Distinguished Book Award. His latest book, *Lützen*, appeared in January 2018 with Oxford University Press.

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2018 • 7:00 PM**

UA Fred Fox School of Music • Alice Y. Holsclaw Recital Hall  
Reception to follow

Free and open to the public • For information, 520-626-5448