

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

November 2017

Dear Franconians,

For a good many days now we have enjoyed a spectacularly beautiful autumn, an Indian Summer, a Golden October. Actually, when I think back, the beginning of the month was a bit dicey weather-wise, so I was particularly pleased when a band of high pressure decided to get stuck over southern Germany. Those of you who were on the excursion to Schmalkalden and Eisenach will know why. The sun-lit autumnal forests stretching away from Wartburg castle into the distant horizon were an uplifting panorama of golden-yellow and russet shades, interspersed with the green of spruces and other conifers.

Since the last Newsletter's letter we have seen a number of ventures into the outdoors. Valerie Hellmann's excellently organized excursion to Coburg may have been threatened for a while with a touch of English rain, but all in character you could argue, because our thoughts never strayed far from Queen Victoria and her beloved Albert. It was an informative trip as we got to see the very loo that Victoria insisted on having imported from oh so civilized England. How many of you, I wonder, have a mahogany loo at home? We toured both Ehrenburg Palace in the centre of Coburg but also Rosenau Palace, the summer residence where Albert had spent so many of his early days. And which Victoria felt so sad to leave when her coach started the long journey back to distant London.

Happy Hiking Boots on October 1st also seems to have been rather special. Thanks again go to Mairi, who knows the area extremely well, for all her careful planning.

And exactly one month before that, on September 1st, we had our guest speaker from *Médecins Sans Frontières* describing his work in the Central African Republic. This is a war-torn country rich in minerals – diamonds, gold, oil and uranium – but its people are desperately poor and in constant need of medical care. Current life expectancy for men is 48, for women 51. Our speaker was the pediatrician Dr. Nico Stenger from the children's hospital in Erlangen and I think we all stood in admiration of someone who is willing to give up so much to help others who are suffering and in need.

Another Stammtisch evening – this time a presentation on the significance of Martin Luther given by myself – took place on October 6th. It was quite well attended, but a faulty cable going to the projector, and a rather jovial gathering of people celebrating an anniversary in the adjoining room almost ruined the proceedings. I tried to use a microphone, but that meant my voice was being heard by the partygoers in the next room, much to their annoyance. In turn, they were consuming so much food – God bless them – that our meals were delivered later than usual. It is so difficult to concentrate against the noise of a happy refectory. Luther probably wouldn't have cared a whit as he had great understanding for a hearty monastic belch! But even the noise of plates and cutlery can be distracting. Our committee, I'm sure, will do its best to sort out these problems, but it will probably involve a few financial outlays.

A completely different affair was an event which took place on September 17th. A well-known Erlangen journalist, Margrit Vollertson-Diewerge, author of several stories about different parts of the world, asked a couple of us to read from her recent work about Shakespeare (with his fool), Goethe and Schiller. It all took place in the Logenhaus in the Universitätsstr. on a Sunday afternoon with Bridget pretending to be Schiller and myself Shakespeare. I don't think we let anyone down. Although we advertised it in the Franconian, very few actually attended, but nonetheless we managed to raise over a hundred euros for the Erlangen charity "Wabe" which helps people with mental issues become better reintegrated into society. I talked to the head of their workshops and I want to organize a trip there sometime in January or February.

And now I come to that part of the letter when we can look ahead to upcoming activities. On Sunday 12th November we have the visit to The Horseradish Museum in Baiersdorf (please see September's Newsletter for more information and this Newsletter for travelling instructions). We will go there by car, so please register

soon so that we can form carpools and organize transport for those without cars. Teresa has also found a suitable restaurant for afterwards.

I hope that our next Stammtisch on Franconian Dialects will be well attended, or should I write, will have been well attended. And I am also looking forward to the next Dinner Club on November 18th at Maalula well known for its Arabian cuisine. That sounds a must!

One December event which I would like to see happen is a trip to the Transport Museum in Nuremberg (see the article on Aspects of Franconia). I hope that we can decide on a date at our next committee meeting so that we can inform you in good time.

When I next get to write, it will be a new year, 2018. Allow me then to wish you all, in the name of our committee, the very best for the upcoming Christmas season. Tread softly, especially over patches of ice, enjoy and indulge wherever you feel it is appropriate, relax in the company of dear friends, relish the extra time spent with your families - and let's see each other again in the new year for a fresh round of outings and talks, quizzes, dinner clubs and rambles.

Remember, though, that for some, I hope for very few, Christmas can be a rather lonely affair. Some of our members, as they grow older, find themselves ever more isolated through illness or a lack of family members living close by, so why not make a point of ringing up whoever you know is in this situation and inviting them over for a cup of tea and a chat, taking them out to the shops or to a Christmas market. Allowing them to enjoy your company, and, as invariably happens, enjoying their company in return. That, surely, is the Christmas spirit acted out in a truly meaningful way.

Until 2018 then, take care and stay well,

Frank Gillard