

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

May 2022

Dear Franconians,

“April is the cruellest month”, T. S. Eliot famously wrote in his ode on European civilisation following the disaster of the Great War. And how right he was. And how prophetic. We are all struggling to comprehend the Waste Land of the Ukraine, its agony and despair, and uncalled-for grief. The frightened looks of young children show it, as do the wrinkled faces of widows who have been through it all before, and the tears of fathers bidding last farewells as their trains leave once again for the Ukrainian front where equally hapless soldiers await them – on both sides.

And all I can do this April is to write a few clever words in the warm comfort of my home. “By the waters of Leman (Geneva) I sat down and wept...”, wrote Eliot, referencing the plight of the Israelites held in captivity and his own depression. There is little joy in weeping, but at least it is more honest than pretending that all is right with the world. And when we have finished weeping, we can all of us stand up and see what we can do to help. I know of an English woman teaching German to a young Ukrainian couple, of a family who have taken in a group of refugees, of a Ukrainian teacher who has managed to bring members of her own family back to her home where there is peace and safety. There must be more that I can do, that we can do. Perhaps we could share our thoughts.

Corona is another war that we have struggled to deal with effectively. Unlike the Chinese government we haven't trodden the path of zero tolerance and uncompromising lockdowns, but even the few Chinese I know wonder whether President Xi's approach is still the right one. Here in the west, we are learning to live with the virus, some better than others, and with all its facets – medical, emotional, psychological. A number of our members have come down with it in recent weeks and most say it wasn't fun. Many of them are a little older and have background health issues to contend with and so we keep our fingers crossed that in the fullness of time they will all recover.

There may be some of you who have been very wary of going out during the pandemic and now find yourselves somewhat isolated. If you are one of those, we sympathize with you completely, but have a request to make. Please, please reach out to your fellow Franconian members, if only to have a chat on the phone, have a coffee and cake in an outside café, to find out what you have missed. And if you are a Franconian with the capacity to help, why don't you leaf through our directory and give someone a cheering call.

Further on in this issue of the Franconian you can read about our proposed trip to Schillingsfürst. We have only been advertising a couple of days and already 15 people have signed up. In other words, it looks as if it will definitely take place, so my advice is that you sign up as soon as possible! I drove out there the other day and was impressed by the Baroque architecture of the Schloss and the very charming Fürst Constantin zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, whose pile it is.

And what about a May walk (29th) to get rid of some cobwebs. Just outside of Lauf there is a wonderful gorge called the Bitterbach. Afterwards we could wander back into Lauf where

there are plenty of restaurants and even a train station! If you want to come by car, then head for the parking area **Daschstrasse/Am Bitterbach at Lauf an der Pegnitz**. The coordinates are: 49.513888, 11.265633. **I suggest we set off from the parking area at 11pm.**



The prince and his pile

The walk and the trip to Schillingsfürst are just two examples of how our activities are picking up again. We have a variety of talks planned for our Stammtisch evenings, a possible visit to the Landesausstellung in Ansbach (It's all about Franconia!), Dinner Club evenings, museum visits and more besides. So there is much to look forward to in the months ahead.

Last time I left you with a spring daffodil. This time I greet you with a gorgeous peony which is at its brief best in the month of May. The Chinese sometimes refer to it as the "huawang" (花王) "the king of flowers", and it's easy to see why. It's intricate and delicate and comes in a variety of subtle shades. It's named after Paeon, a student of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and healing. In Greek mythology, when Asclepius became jealous of his pupil, Zeus saved Paeon from the wrath of Asclepius by turning him into the peony flower. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the wrath in the world could be transformed into something of matchless beauty like the peony? Putin the peony. Just a dream.



Frank Gillard