

A Farewell President's Letter...

Dear members,

As you know, I will soon be stepping down from the office of President of the Franconian Society and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support I have been given over the last ten years or so. We have done a lot of good things together, so I obviously have a heavy heart, but I think I have made the right decision.

It's obviously wise to step down while one still has a little energy left to enjoy one's family and friends, and a few marbles to be aware of the world around, perhaps to re-engage with old hobbies or indulge in fresh pursuits, ... and still blessed with joints that don't overly squeak. Of course, with hearing loss, the odd squeak might go unheard, but that's not the point if other people get rightly irritated because words get lost in transit. Hearing loss is not amusing for anyone.

It's surely time for a fresh team with new ideas to pick up the reins. It's time for a farewell president's letter and to pass on to the new committee and to all our members my very best wishes for happy, satisfying years ahead.

Of course, one has many fond memories as well as the odd regret. When Ingeborg asked me to take over the Presidency over a decade ago, I had visions of increasing the membership and helping to revitalize our programme of events. After several years I began to realize the difficulty of such a task. Perhaps with the passing of years I had become a little out of touch with what our membership really wants. Perhaps, inevitably, the old energy is no longer at hand. Yet setting that aside, I still feel strongly that the Franconian Society still has a purpose in life, namely, in a very supportive, warm-hearted fashion, to serve an English-speaking community looking to inform itself about what it now calls "home", as well as other issues of the day.

I would venture to say that in that endeavour we have been quite successful in several significant ways. We have, for example, a Newsletter that is admirably readable. It has a regular section on our region, and a near-regular section on language matters, and it's lay-out is admirable. Several people, who'll have to remain anonymous, but they know who they are, deserve particular praise for this.

Likewise, looking back over the years, I can think of many activities that have truly interested our members: Visiting organisations that do great work in the community and further afield, going to museums and exhibitions, having good speakers offering excellent lectures on matters of general and specific interest. We've enjoyed talks on a wide range of subjects – Brexit, the American elections, historic events, contemporary culture. I hope they have been much appreciated.



A typical Stammtisch

evening!

Our work to help different charities, but also individuals who have encountered challenging situations, also makes me very proud, should make us all very proud. A case in point is the support we gave to Marwa, the young girl so badly burned in an explosion in her home in Syria. I'm hearing that her life has improved for the better since her treatment in the States.

Another example is the emergence of our handicrafts group, which is marvellous in every sense of the word. The small number of people behind it deserve a huge amount of thanks. Other activities such as the Dinner Club or the walking group should also be mentioned.

In the last few years we have lived through very challenging times. Covid has had an enormous negative impact on society in general as well as our own society. Do you remember the special editions of our Newsletter that we put together to spread a little cheer among our members. They were made possible because some of you, again let me respect anonymity, wrote articles and suggested all manner of activities to keep us mentally engaged and hopeful. I thank everyone involved.

The world is ever changing, is it not? I'm told that the younger generation is not as interested in joining societies, certainly not of our type with its ageing membership. Social media has also become a dominant force in the lives of many, and our older members, understandably, can be excused for being somewhat baffled by it all and consequently failing to engage. There are so many English-speaking groups in our area happily "chatting away" with each other that we can as a consequence easily feel redundant.

Yet, reflecting on the past, there are many happy moments I can recall. There was a time when we used to sell books to raise money for charity. Those behind the idea did a great job, but ultimately it was rapidly becoming a thankless task. The market for second-hand books drowned, seemingly, in its own success, but I remember fondly those days when the tables in the Turnerbund creaked under the weight of so many readable books. However, let us not forget the huge amounts of money we were able to raise and pass on to worthy causes in Franconia and further afield.

A few years ago, we were very active contributing to local events like the Rädli or the Spring Fair in Erlangen, where we had our own stand and members made delicious cakes and jams for the general public. That was another source of income!



And what about our excursions and outings, by coach or train? A very large group of us travelled down, on one occasion, to Prague, and on other occasions to Passau, Maulbronn, Ansbach and Augsburg, to Waldsassen and Cheb. It was far easier in the early days because we had more members, but now filling a coach has become a struggle. And the cost of hiring a coach has grown and grown. I am pleased though that we have become "creative". We travelled to Forchheim by train, and to Schweinfurt, and really enjoyed the shared experience.

Yes, being a member of the Franconian Society means participating in **shared** experiences. That surely is why we will shortly be celebrating our 40th anniversary. And I hope with all my heart that the new, soon to be elected Board and Committee, will steer our Society successfully to its half-century. And I trust that we will all bear in mind its uniqueness, its English-speaking voice embedded within this Franconian culture we all enjoy. That it will continue to inform and entertain, will provide a harmonious and supportive meeting-place for its wonderfully diverse membership.

And now, as is traditional, let the President's Letter turn to what has been happening in the recent past. I was in Britain for a good couple of weeks enjoying the bracing climate of the Gower peninsula in South Wales, but also admiring my new grandson, so I missed Mairi's walk, or, should I say, guided tour in Erlangen through the Neustädter Friedhof and to the site of the cemetery of the First Reformed Church, now under the University Library. Reliable sources told me that it was very well planned and super-informative. I also couldn't be present at the Asian restaurant Turandot. This establishment has hit on the novel idea of having one's ordered food being delivered by robots. Since it is difficult and dangerous to have an altercation with a robot and I haven't heard of any injuries apart from those to the eardrums and bank accounts perhaps, let me assume people had a good time. A big thank you to the organizer, Teresa.

What I did enjoy was yet another excellent pub quiz from Yvonne and, of course, part two of Bridget's presentation on Shakespeare and the New Globe Theatre: "Shakespeare's Globe Reborn". She gave a very personal, almost moving account of visiting the theatre with her daughter and witnessing for herself the early days of this fabulous project. We felt very privileged to be able to share these memories with her.

Moving on, Dinner club events in late April and May have also been decided upon, and the Bergkirchweih gathering at Fleischmanns Garten on May 25th has also been arranged. And please look out for an email alerting you to a pleasant walk close to Erlangen in a hopefully dry and sunny early May.

In the next phase of the year, of course, we will have our AGM when a new Board and Committee will be appointed. A little later, on the 15th June, we will be celebrating our 40th anniversary with a special evening

at the Turnerbund. The buffet has been carefully planned and the question of entertainment decided upon. All this was done while I was away but I am sure very wise choices were made and I am looking forward to a well-attended and very enjoyable evening.

Before I put down my pen, let me tell you that, if people so desire, I will be more than delighted to stay on the committee and offer the occasional walk or talk as the Board sees fit. Of course, I do want to have more space for my family, and for several other projects, but as a founding member all those years ago I would like to remain close to a Society that has offered me so much over the years. I also have so many people to thank for their personal support. Quite naturally, our wonderful Committee and Board spring to mind. It is their commitment and advice, their support and wisdom that has allowed me to be President these last few years. My gratitude to them comes from the bottom of my heart.

And now may I wish you all a safe and sunny transition into an enjoyable Franconian summer.

Sincerely

Frank Gillard