

## LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

January 2024

Dear Franconians,

**May I wish you all a peaceful and harmonious New Year.** 2023 ended with our world remaining under threat from the warming which began during the Industrial Revolution in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It has taken hundreds of years to realize what we were doing to the planet and to our own health, and, while the deniers are gradually falling silent, greed is still locked in a struggle with common sense, preventing our politicians taking the correct steps to make our air less harmful, our climate more predictable, indeed life altogether more sustainable.

2023 was also a year when peace and cooperation between nations suffered huge damage. There is a great danger that the armed conflict in Ukraine will continue for many months to come. To that worry comes the appalling situation in the so-called "Holy Land". Currently there is little that is "holy" about it. We each know deep down that the bombing of great swathes of the Gaza Strip will not have a good outcome. Many of us are quite old now and observe the fragile situation in the Middle East with trepidation.

And yet, at the beginning of January, we know that the bleakness of mid-winter is bound to yield, sooner or later, to the huge regenerative power of nature. As the days lengthen, the warmth of the sun will reach the bulbs still asleep below the frozen soil. There will be a new awakening. We don't have to hope for this, it will come automatically. From that we can draw comfort.

Only a very few years ago we were all suffering from the uncertainties created by covid. It was a worrying time. Restrictions were the order of the day, face masks and all, and most people dutifully went off to their doctors for their repeated vaccinations. It seemed to work. We emerged from the tunnel into the daylight delighted that the familiar hadn't gone away. That should make us all happy. Our Potluck Supper on December 8<sup>th</sup>, however, proved to be the perfect opportunity for the virus in its new variety to spoil our fun. From what I gather, a very large number of those who attended this excellent evening came down with covid in the days that followed. This time though, thanks I believe to the vaccinations, the illness invariably took a mild form. My whole family caught it, but no one was struck down for long and in a few days, we were all testing negative again. I fear, however, that the 2023 Potluck Evening will be remembered for covid rather than the very pleasant evening we all enjoyed. The culinary delights were as good as ever, the quiz (Yvonne) was entertaining and the singing and musical accompaniment (Becky) excellent.

Covid, of course, was the reason why Dr. Haberkamm was unable to give his talk on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Our Stammtisch Bazaar did take place, however, and the proceeds came to €1,277. Once again, I would like to thank all the ladies who spent so much time creating the lovely items that were on sale. In this way, our charity pot could be topped up again. Information on the recipients of our donations will be made public later.

The Dinner Club outings took us in the last two months to the excellent Italian restaurant Il Sapore im Bärengarten. Bridget took over the organisation, and I remember her saying that the attendance was relatively good, but that not everyone who came had registered beforehand as requested. The restaurant was full in the run-up to Christmas period, so it was a bit of a squeeze, but everyone seemed to be in a cheerful mood and were accommodating and we had a good time.

Let me turn now to our December outing to Forchheim, which was ably organized by Valerie. It was decided to take the frequent and inexpensive train service from Erlangen to Forchheim, where we were met at the station by Dr. David Branston, an Englishman from Sheffield who has lived in the area

for a great many years and turned to tour-guiding on his retirement. Those familiar with Forchheim will know that the railway station is a little walk from the town centre, but that wasn't a problem for the very knowledgeable David, who filled us in on the town's history from early days to its fairly rapid growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as we made our way to the Old Town. Here a lot of vital restoration work is in progress and I, for one, am looking forward to returning in the hopefully not too distant future to admire what has been achieved. Having crossed the Old Town admiring the many half-timbered buildings on the way, we finally reached the picturesque Prince-Bishop's Palace dating back to the late 14th century and the Christmas Market. David then showed us the massive fortifications protecting the town during times of siege. The "Forchheim Fortress" is one of the oldest and most important fortifications in southern Germany with a bastion defence system and within a part of this is the Heritage Museum with which we concluded our tour. Actually, our trip to Forchheim ended with a satisfying "Franconian" meal in one of the town's oldest restaurants. Thank you, David, and thank you, Valerie, for organizing everything.

As far as our walkers go, I had planned an early winter walk around the Rochus Cemetery, but the weather conditions were unfavourable, and I decided to cancel it. I believe the same thing happened to Mairi in the previous month. As soon as the weather "improves" we can start planning again.

My originally rather brief letter has grown in size. Perhaps it would be even longer had one of my main sources of information not been out of action for a few weeks. I'm, of course, referring to Bridget who decided that a knee operation was unavoidable, such was the agony she was in whenever she took a few steps. I am very pleased to report that everything has gone well, and that she will be returning from rehab in the next couple of weeks. (Dr.) Friedrich Graef has also had surgery on his hip. I saw him a couple of days ago, and I can report that he also seemed to be recovering extremely well. I hope I haven't missed too many others who have been poorly or have had operations in the latter part of the year. My apologies, if I have.



**Picture: Karen Christenson**

Our former President, Marie-Luise Murphy, celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday just a few days ago. Her mind remains as sharp as ever, her humour undiminished, her elegance equally so. She took over the leadership of the Franconian Society after our first President, Paul, decided to step down in 2009, at the age of 75. She was a founding member of the Society and dedicated her time and energy to maintaining the Society's traditions and goals with remarkable endeavour and determination. For that we have much to be thankful for.

Looking to events in the future, the February Stammtisch will be a description of a trip to northern India undertaken by my wife and I in February last year. We saw wonderful things. Let me simply leave you with a couple of examples:





*Rural life and the Taj Mahal*

To you all, may 2024 lead us towards a more peaceful and harmonious world. And may you all remain healthy and resilient and in good spirits.

Frank Gillard