

Heidelberg Exchange Visit 2010

The oldies had an outing, they came from near and far, some came by Eurostar and one by motorcar.

Seven intrepid U3A members took part in the exchange visit to Heidelberg from 1st-8th September this year. Travelling by Eurostar was more enjoyable than other means, and offered

scenic views of northern France and Belgium and a welcome break in either Paris or Brussels.

We stayed at the Vierjahreszeiten Hotel on the bank of the Neckar near the historic old bridge, close to the old town.

We were guests of the Akademie für Altere (AfA), the Heidelberg equivalent of the U3A, and were treated with generous hospitality. This year it only rained on the last day, whereas in 2008 it rained every day except the last!

Our introduction was enhanced by the gift of a beautifully illustrated mini-brochure produced by the AfA organiser, Hedi Weber, containing coloured photographs of everywhere on our official itinerary and a spectacular photograph of the castle and the old bridge on the cover.

An informal get together on the first evening allowed the Brits to meet or renew acquaintance with members of the AfA and later supper in a local Bauhaus. On the second morning we were taken on a tour of the "Altstadt" with Hedi, and her husband, Kurt, interpreting. In the evening we were invited to dinner at the Ritter Hotel which is one of the most attractive Renaissance buildings in Heidelberg. After dinner, Jean made a speech in response to the speech of welcome which raised applause for its fluency.

Friday was a bus tour to Maulbronn Monastery in the morning then for lunch - Maultaschen soup followed by Maultaschen for the main course. For the monks,

Maultaschen were a means of disguising the forbidden meat by concealing it in pasta pockets. Strangely, there didn't seem to be a Maultaschen pudding.

In the afternoon we visited the Dr. Faustus museum in Knittlingen, where the young female curator gave us a staggeringly detailed account of his life and times, all faithfully translated by Kurt. Unfortunately, there were very few chairs so our appreciation was dulled by having to stand on one leg then the other. Apparently, Dr Faustus suffered from bad PR, and was much misunderstood at a time when knowing more than most got you classified as being in league with forces of darkness. His accidental death was caused by a chemical explosion, it is now believed, and not by having his soul collected by Mephistopheles.

On Saturday, we caught a bus to Ziegelhausen, on the opposite bank of the Neckar to Heidelberg, and walked down the Philosophenweg, a beautiful forest path away from the hubbub of the town, downhill most of the way. This was followed by lunch on a ship restaurant moored near the Philosophen Gaertchen. Sadly, Jean left her camera behind, and although she got it back, the chip which stores pictures had been stolen.

At 7 pm, we boarded another boat for a river tour and a ringside view of the fireworks on the old bridge and castle illuminations.

On Sunday, we paired up with partners from the AfA to make individual outings.

Jean and Sandra were entertained by Gerhard and Heidi Koch in Karlsruhe and attended a church service conducted by Gerhard. After a delicious lunch in their garden, they were given a guided tour of the Federal Courts and surrounding park.

Several of us went to a "concourse d'elegance" of veteran cars at Schwetzingen where we saw some quite amazing pieces of history and some experimental modern stuff such as a car with 2 Mercedes V8 engines, designed and built by the Graf von Herzberg who was formerly a chief designer for Porsche.

One of our number had his toothache very efficiently treated by the emergency dentistry service on the Sunday morning, before setting off to Schwetzingen.

On Monday, there was a reception at the Rathaus (town hall) where we were welcomed by Dr. Ursula Lorentz, a city councillor with responsibility in the Cambridge-Heidelberg

partnership scheme. Peter made a speech of acceptance in which he tried to explain how he “almost accidentally” learned German in his mis-spent youth; the humour was clearly appreciated.

This was followed by a three course meal in the decorated vaults.

In the afternoon, the funicular railway took us up to the castle

overlooking the town, or for some, to the Koenigstuhl at the very top of the hill. For the castle visitors, an unexpected bonus

was a visit to the museum of pharmacy. An endless cavern of tiny rooms were lined with shelves of archaic medicines and

equipment and a still for concocting cures.

On Tuesday, in the care of Karin, we took a tram to Mannheim to look around the Schloss, an impressively large castle that was the seat of administration of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. This was followed by a short walk through the cartesian grid of the town centre to Luisenpark. After returning by tram, we met up for a final evening together, the details of which seem strangely blurred.

I remember, after singing German folk-songs and an impressive solo performance by Philippa, being an ugly sister for some of the time, maybe Jean can tell me why. Excerpt from Jean follows.

On the last evening we met in a Greek taverna . The atmosphere was greatly enhanced by a spontaneous folky sing-song afterwards and we surprised our hosts by providing a short entertainment, an adult ‘take’ of Cinderella. Any doubts about how well out panto might be received were quickly dispelled as even the ugly sister’s false nose and our dead-pan expressions caused great amusement.

The week had been a great success due to the wonderful hospitality of our hosts and the care and efficiency with which Hedi had organised each day’s activities. We look forward to the return visit of our German friends next July and the continued partnership between U3A Cambridge and the Akademie fur Alterer in Heidelberg.

Peter & Jean

