



BREZEL-NEWS

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Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Hello, dear Saturday School families in Hackney and Islington, dear readers,

Since September, our school in Hackney Wick has also started to feel really big. A short retrospection of our Saturday School history: In 1998 there were 30 children in 3 classes in Islington. Our Saturday School community was small and manageable, everyone knew everyone else. However, each year we added a new beginners' class and the school grew and grew. "Old hands" amongst our Saturday School families began to barely recognise the school they had founded. There was some discussion as to whether we even wanted to continue growing. On the other hand we were pleased with our success. Also, we couldn't simply close the school to new children as we always had younger siblings coming up. Above all, we didn't want to become a "closed" society.

What happened next is already well-known: The school in Islington was completely full and our waiting list so long that in September 2011 we founded Hackney Wick. At the moment there are around 180 pupils in 13 classes in Islington and around 70 in six classes in Hackney. Naturally, the atmosphere in a large school is more anonymous but we try to preserve the personal character of our Saturday schools as much as possible. Most importantly, we hope that the children to feel "at home" in their groups.

It was a huge compliment to us that our first GCSE pupils, who took their exams ten years ago, wanted to continue coming. They were the ones to give us the idea to offer A level preparation – as the first German Saturday School in the country. This year, a record number of 19 Saturday School pupils from Islington passed their GCSE exams with outstanding results, five students took their AS and three completed their A level exams. We have similar hopes for Hackney.

The 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Germany exhibition at the British Museum are also major topics in the Saturday School community. In the older classes in Islington, "contemporary witnesses" amongst our parents,

who were in Berlin 1989, shared their memories. Many thanks to all volunteers, in particular to Philipp Girardet who summarised those memories. Martina found out how our Saturday School families experience the exhibition at the British Museum, and the Saturday School choir performed an anniversary concert at the oldest German church in London.

With so much "German" going on, we are pleased to have "our" Swiss teacher Jennifer Norrbín from Hackney as well as Gabriele Wölfe from Islington report on a workshop at the Austrian Cultural Forum, because we do not want to be a closed society in this regard either: All German speakers are welcome.

An enjoyable end of year spurt and good bye until 2015!

Cathrin & Ulrike xx

Cathrin Cordes, School Director Islington
Ulrike Hensel-Burg, School Director Hackney Wick



Germany exhibition at the British Museum

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Meistersingers on the Trail of German Immigration

10-year anniversary concert at the oldest German church in Great Britain

Our Saturday School choir celebrates its 10th birthday this year. "Why don't we try singing?" On a Saturday in the autumn of 2004, about a dozen parents translated into action the idea to use their children's lesson time more productively. Under the musical direction of Hildegard Maier, the "Islington Meistersingers" have been singing enthusiastically ever since. Every Saturday, they sing during the second lesson and also meet for private "evening rehearsals". The name is an ironic reference to the famous Wagner opera and "our" choir's repertoire ranges from seasonal songs, Christmas carols, barbershop music and madrigals to Bach chorales.

On November 15th, the Meistersingers celebrated their anniversary with a concert at the oldest surviving German church in Great Britain. St. George's German Lutheran Church first opened 1763 in East London. In the 16th and 17th centuries many German immigrants came to London, predominantly Protestants on the run from repressive measures. By 1700 there were already several German churches in London, and in the first half of the 18th century, religious immigrants were bolstered by the arrival of the Royal Family of Hannover 300 years ago. However, the German community in Whitechapel was mostly based on economic migration. The sugar refining in London, which was first developed in German Hanseatic cities, remained in German ownership for many generations.

In those days, the number of Germans arriving was so great that a neighbouring building was taken over and converted into a school building by the foundation of "German and English Schools", which existed in this neighbourhood from 1765 until 1917. Even today an inscription on the building aptly commemorates these predecessors of our modern day Saturday Schools: "St. George's German and English Schools Supported by Voluntary Contributions" can be seen written on the frieze outside.

Back to the music: The church organ, too, is German and was built in 1866 by the famous organ builder E.F. Walcker. The anniversary concert was opened by organist Tim Roe who played, amongst others, works by Händel, Bach and Mendelssohn on the historic organ. Then, the Meistersingers entertained with a repertoire of songs on the topic of "Wine, Women and Song" and rang in the Christmas season in the second half of their concert: A contemplative afternoon of German history and German music in East London.

There was, of course, a celebration with sparkling wine, too. And in honour of the anniversary, the choir has recorded its first CD. They started recording more than a year ago and of course the CD also features their favourite "capricious trout". Many congratulations, Meistersingers!

By Cathrin Cordes



The Meistersingers after their concert

Saturday School Dates

13th December

last day at school & Christmas

10th January

first Saturday school in the New Year

14th and 21st February

Half-Term Holiday

14th February

VDSS teacher training

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"Deutsche Samstagsschule Islington", "German Saturday School Islington", "Deutsche Samstagsschule Hackney Wick", and "German Saturday School Hackney Wick" are the trading names of The German Saturday School

Which exhibit did you like best?

Saturday School responses to the Germany exhibition at the British Museum

The British Museum is marking the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall with an exhibition. The exhibition "Germany – Memories of a Nation" shows Germany in a new, more positive light and gives an overview of 600 years of German history.

There is a tendency in Great Britain to reduce German history to the twelve years of the Nazi period. The new exhibition is something of an educational project and introduces visitors to aspects of German history that will have been unfamiliar to them until now. The man behind the show is museum director Neil MacGregor, a Scottish art historian, who has been interested in Germany since his youth and has also studied German. He wanted to change and adjust Britain's image of Germany, to give his countrymen some food for thought, so MacGregor.

The 200 objects at the British Museum seem like a pick'n'mix collection that stretches from Luther bibles to the VW beetle. However, all exhibits are of historical importance or help illustrate German mentality. It's recommended to make use of the audio guide. It's even better to listen to in advance the altogether 30 15-minute radio broadcasts that were produced to accompany the exhibition and that illuminate the context.

We German visitors naturally experience the exhibition in a different way to non-Germans, as German history and many of the exhibited objects are more familiar and recognisable to us. But we too experience moments of surprise, astonishment and occasionally emotion – while visiting the show or listening to the podcasts.

With her question about which exhibit we had liked the most, Libby, our Saturday School teacher in Hackney Wick, gave us the idea to examine our Saturday School parents' feedback to the show. Many have already visited the exhibition and have given an overall positive response. My survey revealed that by far the most popular exhibits were the Gutenberg and Luther bibles, the Bauhaus furniture and the enormous rhino made from Meissen porcelain. Other favourites included a broad range of objects, many of which had personal meaning for those questioned.

The Gutenberg bible had many fans, for example Petra: "Because you rarely see something like this. Also, it was presented in a beautiful way." Carlos found it fascinating that within 50 years of Gutenberg inventing the printing press in around 1450, more than 30 000 books had been printed in 350 cities. "I find it simply astounding what was being produced at that time", says Uli. "Also, I was

quite impressed with the photo near the entrance. The photo shows a border soldier. The soldier's facial expression... what was happening then was simply incomprehensible to him. I really liked that." Tanja's favourite exhibit was the Gutenberg bible, too. "Because it was one of the first bibles", she says, "and because it was so beautifully placed. I also very much liked the Bauhaus exhibits, especially the cradle. That part of the exhibition could have been bigger." Kirsten agrees: "I liked the Bauhaus cradle and the tea set best of all. I found them surprisingly modern for their time." "The Bauhaus furniture was my favourite part of the show", asserts Philipp. "That was very interesting because I didn't expect this furniture to appear as some of the highlights of German culture."



Anton admires World Cup memorabilia at the British Museum

"The exhibition was very good as it presented a relatively objective view of Germany", says Sabine. "My favourite exhibit was the model of the Friedrichstraße station. It has a personal connotation because I visited Berlin as a 13-year-old on a school trip and I remember the station very well. Also I really liked Ernst Barlach's "hovering angel". This suspended bronze figure was a pacifist war monument, created by the artist in 1927. Barlach was part of the expressionist movement and under the Nazis his sculptures were removed from everywhere." The hovering angel was cast again from the original mould in 1953. Apropos connotations: As a teenager Libby learnt the Goethe poem "Prometheus" off by heart. The line "Shroud your heaven, Zeus, with cloudy vapours" was her favourite, as was Tischbein's painting of Goethe, complete with dark clouds: "The fact that one leg was a bit longer than it should have been has only added to the attraction of the painting." Also, Libby enthused about the bible with Luther's very own signature and the hat which none less than Napoleon had actually worn on his head.

A difficult aspect of the exhibition was the representation of the Holocaust. "On show was a replica of Buchenwald concentration camp's iron gate with the words "To each their due"", says Saturday School mum Nina. "I was very impressed by that, because I found out something I hadn't known before: The gate was the work of a former Bauhaus student (Franz Erlich). Under the Nazis the Bauhaus was classified as "degenerate art". I just found that contradiction very interesting."

Like many others, Kathryn was thrilled by the rhinoceros made from Meissen porcelain. "Porcelain is meant to be fine and delicate, but this gigantic rhino is so big and heavy. I had already seen an exhibition of these porcelain figures at the Zwinger in Dresden. There aren't that many because most of those enormous figures simply "exploded" back then. – No wonder." "The Meissen rhino was beautifully made and so huge", says Pia. "I also thought the small painting by Caspar David Friedrich was really beautiful."

"My favourite was the automated model of a ship from 1580 which used to move across a table as a kind of party entertainment", says Anna. "The model is made of gold, plays music and fires from small canon while rolling along the table. I've never seen anything like it. I found it astonishing that such highly developed table culture already existed in the 16th century."

Many of the artworks in the exhibition are known to us from books or we may even have copies of them hanging on our walls. "I liked the Holbein best of all", says Constanze, "because it is an object that I have known for a long time but have never seen in real life." "My favourite object was the Portrait of a Lady with Squirrel and Starling by Holbein the Younger from 1527", Charlotte reports. "I like it so much that it has been hanging above my desk for some time." "The Goethe portrait by Tischbein", says Alexander. "It was just great to see the original."

"The Riemenschneider altar was the object I liked the most", says Maren. "It's really superb. It's astonishing that they managed to get it for the exhibition. Everything Riemenschneider made is so elegant and beautiful. It just looks as though it's alive." Volker, too, liked the wooden Riemenschneider sculptures. "The figure of Luke was particularly beautiful", he says. "The podcast to go with it was incredibly well done and made quite an impression on me. Unfortunately, the exhibition ends quite abruptly, which is probably because of the limited space available." However, another visitor commented that the Barlach angel and the Richter picture (Betty) rounded off the show quite nicely.



Martina and family pose in front of a classic VW Beetle

Many visited the exhibition with their children who were particularly interested in the historical dimension. "The story of the wall and the model of Friedrichstraße station", says Louis, 9. Caspar, 13, says: "I thought it was great, the way Germany was portrayed. I especially liked the maps at the beginning of the exhibition where you could see how the German borders changed in the course of time." Anton, 12, was thrilled by the coins: "There were almost 200 different coins from different regions of Germany. They all looked different, one was even square. Each ruler was entitled to have coins with his own head on them. In Great Britain there was just one – with the King on it. That was interesting." Amelia, 5, found the classical music on the audio guide more thrilling than the exhibits.

I heard very little criticism of the exhibition: The majority of those questioned graded it very good and good. For some, certain aspects of German culture and history were missing, for example the great German philosophers or the famous composers. Very few expressed a really negative opinion regarding the show. "The exhibition was as though we had become extinct", says one critic. "As though the Germans no longer existed and these objects had been found during archaeological digs and brought together for this exhibition. I didn't like that at all." Another critic would have wished for more engagement with federalism in today's Germany and its role in Europe.

In my opinion, important and valuable objects from all over Germany were brought together for this exhibition; objects that have never or very rarely left their museum and can be seen at the British Museum in London until January 25th as part of a kind of intellectual declaration of love.

By Martina Köpcke

Time Witnesses at Saturday School: 25 Years Fall of the Berlin Wall

25 Years ago the Berlin Wall fell. Many parents of our Saturday School students experienced the fall of the wall in Germany – many were still at school themselves. For our Saturday School students, however, the fall of the Wall is more likely to be the subject of history lessons. So we asked parents to share their stories with our students, just as we did five years ago.

Many were happy to join in. On November 8th, Oliver Bärwald, Heike Gauglitz, Philipp Girardet, Judith Jammers, AnnaMaria Kardos, Janet Kroll, Andreas Staab, Frank Stolte and Agnes Treplin were our time witnesses from West and East Germany at the Saturday School. They brought along their memories and many small mementoes from those exciting days in 1989, for example old photos, East and West German passports with many different stamps, a pioneer shirt and neckerchief as well as newspaper cuttings.

Cathrin allocated witnesses to allow each class to hear different perspectives and stories. All classes with students aged 10 years and older participated, as did our two adult groups. The feedback was positive all round. We would like to summarise some contributions and student reactions.

Melanie's class was visited by Andreas and Agnes. Andreas was a politics student in the West and he and his friends jumped into an old VW van to drive to Berlin and experience the atmosphere at first hand. The English soldiers at the border handed out tea and sandwiches. Caspar was interested to hear from Andreas that almost immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Western companies such as Coca Cola and Bahlsen were targeting visitors from the East with free samples of their products.

In November 1989, Agnes was a student in West Berlin. On November 8th she was at the cinema with friends. It was a late showing. Suddenly, someone in the cinema stood up and shouted that the border was open. But everyone wanted to see the end of the film and at first no one really seemed to believe the news. After the film, Agnes quickly made her way to the Wall, saw that the border was really open and climbed up onto the Wall to join the hundreds of Berliners already celebrating there. Agnes also talked about how in the East people tended to cultivate closer friendships than people in the West. There was less "entertainment" and politically you had to tread much more carefully.

Melanie is from the former East Berlin and brought her perspective to the discussion: "I thought it was funny that Andreas mentioned how many East German products were no longer sold or used after

reunification as they were simply not good enough. But a few years later, there was a bit of a revival and now there are shops all over Germany that only sell East German products. I myself imported "Rotkäppchen" sparkling wine from Berlin for my wedding reception in July 2007."

Gabriele, Mascha and their class were visited by Agnes, Heike and Philipp. Heike is from Dessau and shared a great story about how she spent the evening of the fall of the Wall. She had invited friends to her house for a dinner party and prepared a very elaborate Curry meal and the ingredients had not been easy to find in the former GDR. When news of the border opening transpired, Heike's friends got up and left, one after the other: An amusing memory of a small dinner party that was overrun by historical events.

Philipp told the children that he was at school in West Berlin in 1989. His school was close to the Brandenburg Gate and in the morning, all students naturally bunked off school and made their way to the Wall. Philipp also spoke of the "welcome money" of 100 German Mark which was given to East German visitors to the West. Everyone in the class thought it was great that you could just walk into any bank to pick up some money. Everything was quite different in those days. Philipp also recounted how he showed East Berlin to his West Berlin friends. He knew East Berlin well as he had lived there as the son of a diplomat for six years. During this period he had to cross the border nearly every day to get to his school in West Berlin.

Mascha, classroom assistant in this group, was impressed by the incredulous facial expressions of the children who just couldn't understand why nobody had tried to just blow up the Wall "with huge amounts of dynamite. It was really emotional and by the end of the lesson Gabi and I were really moved."



Our witnesses in the Saturday School: Frank Stolte, Heike Gauglitz, Philipp Girardet, AnnaMaria Kardos, Andreas Staab, Judith Jammers, Oliver Bärwald as well as (not in photo) Agnes Treplin and Janet Kroll



Frank shows the many stamps in his old GDR passport

Barbara's class was visited by AnnaMaria. AnnaMaria was born in Hungary but grew up in the GDR. In 1989 she was a high-school student in Dresden and took part in the big demonstrations there every Monday – initially just with candles but then increasingly with political posters. That was not without risks as no one knew how the police or Stasi would react to those demonstrations. When the news of the opening of the Wall reached Dresden, AnnaMaria and her friends jumped into an old Trabant car and drove to Berlin. There she took part in the jubilant celebrations. She talked of the new-found freedom to travel, but also mentioned the rise of consumerism among East Germans.

Pupils in Boris' class were astonished when Judith, who was also studying in West Berlin at the time, told them that many West Berliners were rather sceptical after the fall of the Wall. And that following the fall of the Wall, it was not immediately obvious that Germany would become reunited in one state. Judith also visited Carola's adult course: "They wanted to try and guess whether I was from the West or the East. I tried to throw them a red herring but they figured it out pretty quickly anyway. One clever question was whether I had colourful exercise books at school."

In Christine's class, Frank - who was living in Beeskow near Berlin – talked about his plan back then (before the fall of the Wall) to use a homebuilt surfboard to escape to the West via the Baltic Sea.

When the Wall fell, that particular adventure was no longer necessary, of course. Christine teaches our oldest class and this autumn they had been studying the film "The Lives of Others" as part of their A level preparation. Therefore they were particularly interested in people who had experienced life in the former GDR, especially as the children's parents are all from West Germany. Frank described life in the GDR as a life with a different rule book where some of the rules were devoid of any logic.

Heike also reflected on the development of her home town following reunification. Dessau which is known for the Bauhaus architecture, had 100,000 inhabitants in 1989. Today only 50,000 people live in this formerly prosperous city and the prognosis is for more migration from the area to take place with only 40 000 inhabitants – mostly older people – remaining. Maya felt that East German opinions are different from West German ones. Leon found it interesting that former GDR citizens believe that there has been no real reunification and that the West simply incorporated the East into its Western system to create the new Germany.

Unfortunately we cannot reproduce all of the stories here, but hope that this article has given you an idea of the personal and often exciting and amusing time witness reports. The children asked many questions. Why didn't people just climb over the Wall? Why did the East German border guards not shoot at people in the night of the fall of the Wall? The children were also interested in the positive aspects of the former GDR – in the close relationships within friendship circles, the cheap rents and that everyone had employment.

Altogether nine classes and nine time witnesses took part in our interactive memorial lessons. Teachers had prepared for the event with video clips and historical background information and we are especially grateful to our time witnesses. One of the reasons why Cathrin decided to repeat this event after five years was "that my two sons who



Heike with children in Christine's class

were 11 and 13 then still remember that particular Saturday School day. I hope that in future we will have as many nice parents willing to volunteer for similar events."

Back to one of our time witnesses, AnnaMaria: "It was such a long time ago. I haven't spoken about this for ages. It is as though it was another lifetime, it's in the history books, and now you're asking me to remember it – that's what I thought when I saw Cathrin's email." And her conclusion: "It felt good but also strange to talk about it at the German Saturday School here in Islington: to reflect upon history, yes. But to do so without personal experiences is unimaginable and very abstract, just as with any other topic. It highlights that we grow up in our environment as a matter of course. It is easy to understand why the students' questions enquired about everyday living conditions."



Agnes in Melanies Group

Hopefully, our project will have made a small contribution in bringing to life the historical importance of the fall of the Berlin Wall in this 25th anniversary year.

Philipp Girardet with feedback of other participants

New to the team

In both schools we have new team members: Completely new to Islington is **Caroline Hobkinson** who has been teaching the seven-year-olds since September. Outside of Saturday School Caroline is an artist whose work relates to food and all rituals associated with it. Last year, **Natalie Denby** joined the team as an assistant in Melanie's GCSE class. Since September she has been teaching her own class – the second youngest. Natalie brings her expertise as a qualified Montessori teacher to our Saturday School. She is supported by **Barbara Gross** whose daughter has been attending Saturday School for the past three years and is currently in Boris' class. In her new role, Barbara particularly enjoys "discovering the various personalities and abilities of the children".

In Hackney Wick, **Libby Kelly** has been in charge of the oldest class since the summer term. Libby's



Kaj in action in Hackney Wick



Natalie (right) and Barbara with their own Saturday school children Yasmine, Martha und Rosa (from left to right)

older daughter Marianne prepared for her A level exams at the Saturday School Islington and her younger daughter, Sophie, is also currently doing so. Libby herself is half German and a qualified Secondary School teacher for German, although she mostly taught German to her daughters and gained her teaching experience through teaching English as a foreign language. Finally, **Kaj Blunck**, a trained photographer has been teaching the youngest class in Hackney since September.

Our three A level students from last summer continue their Saturday School careers at both locations: **Susan Müller** and **Sebastian Birch** help out in Yasmine's and Martina's classes in Islington, and Karla Kaucky supports Jana in Hackney.

Austria Day in London: The “DACH” Principle

Jenny (CH) and Gabi (D) about workshops at the Austrian Cultural Forum (A)

On October 11th, 2014 the Austrian Cultural Forum London hosted an “Austria Day” in central London. As a representative of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick, I – Jenny, Saturday School teacher in Hackney Wick for the past two years - was happy to participate in this great event. Among those present were mostly teachers of German as a second or foreign language. The entire day was filled with an exciting programme: lesson ideas with Austria-related materials, a workshop on the artist Gustav Klimt and a workshop on Salzburg as a city and a region. On top of that, we were able to enjoy a wonderful musical performances and the finest Austrian cuisine.



Klimt presentation at the workshop at the Austrian Cultural Institute

For both workshops, the speakers had travelled to London from Austria: Helga Mitterhumer introduced us to the city of Salzburg and its diverse region. She showed us how geography themes can be used in lesson in a meaningful way. Brigitte Kovacs introduced us to the life and work of the Austrian artist Gustav Klimt. In her cleverly devised series of lessons she combines art with creative reading and writing activities as well as interactive listening and speaking tasks. While the reading and writing tasks mainly deal with information on Klimt's biography, the listening and speaking tasks relate to Klimt's pictures. We were, for example, introduced to a “picture dictation”, for which the pupil has to describe an artwork by Klimt in as much detail as possible while the rest of the class tries to draw this picture “blindfold”, i.e. guided by nothing but the other pupil's description. Further speaking tasks were the contrasting and comparison of two different artworks by Klimt or the “impersonation” of Klimt's pictures in a role play.

In previous years, Sabine Ballata from Hackney Wick and Gabriele Wölfe and Charlotte Schulze from Islington have participated in the Austria Day and come back with valuable new insights.

Gabriele, who has been teaching in Islington for the past five years, reflects:

When I attended the Austria Day two years ago I was especially impressed by the introduction of the so-called “D-A-CH-Principle” (from Deutschland-Austria-Confoederatio Helvetica/Switzerland. From the very beginning, the German language has been a pluricentric language. Political and historical events in the German-speaking regions prevented the formation of a single national central language, something that is very vividly demonstrated by the current “Germany” exhibition at the British Museum. As a consequence, there are different and sometimes even inconsistent communication structures within German speaking countries. The so-called “High German”, which is spoken in Northern Germany, takes a dominant position and it is the language which is normally used for example in translations. This variant of the German language is associated with a higher prestige and is generally considered to be “correct German”, while regional variations of the German language (including dialects) are often derided or considered “folkloric”.

Since the 1980s, representatives of German teachers' associations from Germany, Austria and Switzerland have been working towards the general recognition of the diversity of the German language in the setting of German tuition. Together they developed the D-A-CH principle, according to which all variants of German are equally relevant. The workshop introduced methods for bringing the variety and complexity of the German language to the classroom, e.g. in terms of teaching culture and geography. We were given a lot of ideas and material.

I myself am from the border triangle on Lake Constance, a region in Europe where Austria, Switzerland and Germany are directly connected through the Lake and actually cooperate with one another. Thus I grew up with the different German standard languages and with a variety of the Alemannic dialects spoken in this region. The background information given at the workshop has confirmed what I have known for a long time: There is a real variety and tolerance with regard to the German language which I do not want to do without.

The atmosphere at the Austrian Cultural Forum was elegant and relaxed and I felt like a very welcome guest. And yes, we were also indulged with culinary delicacies such as “Wiener Schnitzel” and “Kaiserschmarrn”.

By Jennifer Norrbin and Gabriele Wölfe