

August 2002 - Wilhelmshaven Mini Reunion - John Hollingsworth

This August, having decided to join the trip to Wilhelmshaven, Charles Passant and I (Collingwood) and Mavis (Thompson) Rogers (Howe), set off by car. We had booked in at the Hotel Am Stadtpark on the outskirts. Not because 've wanted to be alone' but at our age we deserve a bit of comfort.

Driving down to the school (it is still the school, despite the years since it closed), we gained access through the old gate facing the railway sidings and drove through and out the Main Gate. All three of us were saddened by the run down air of the place. Grass growing through the roads and pavements, etc. The town have inherited the site from the Navy and are trying to sell it. In the meantime lack of funds mean that upkeep is of low importance. I understand that the site is listed so there is hope for the future. Mike Keen was overheard trying to buy Collingwood on the Saturday but the Mayor said that it is all or nothing.

Walking along the Deich, we discovered Bryan Jacob (Collingwood) holding court in one of the bar/restaurants with a number of other returnees.

On the Saturday, we all assembled at the Main Gate to see the projects that had moved in to (what I call) the new classrooms. We had Nissen huts. Schools take their classes to ecology/marine biology studies. A group of artists, including Elke Dore, have an Atelier there as well. The Mayor, a lady, arrived and welcomed us all. She said that she hoped that we would continue returning to what was for a large number of us, our second home.

Evenings were spent at the Pumpwerk. Outside to start with but when a torrential downpour started, all but the most hardy, protected by the large umbrellas, moved inside.

Two groups disputed where the Sportsplatz used to be. Both having visited it by different routes. It turned out that they were both talking about the same site. It just appeared to be in a different place due to the differing scales of the different tourist maps they were using.

A trip to Jever and Hooksiel followed on Sunday, both lovely little towns. Jever not as I remember it when Stan Sackett took choir members out for a drive in his Ford Anglia (or was it Popular) and let us have a drive! And, joy of joy, out of three tickets bought for the Jever town lottery, two were winners. A packet of five postcards and six bottles of Jever beer in a cloth carrier bag! For someone who has always tried to win a car in the Cologne Cathedral lottery whenever there, it was a triumph, wins being limited to a 'freilos'.

Few had come just to Wilhelmshaven, most were visiting other memories. After a last drive round the site and sad farewells to ex class/roommates, we headed off to Dusseldorf where my family had lived for seven years. Primarily I needed to stock up on Altbier. That particular brew only known in Dusseldorf/Cologne area. Mavis wanted a Bratwurst and to visit her old home (one of many in Germany) in Jagerhofstrasse. Arriving at the street, I thought she would be disappointed as a new, long office building stood on the corner. Luckily, it finished where number 12 had been and Mavis had lived at 14.

All in all a memorable trip for all concerned. I know that, logistically, a large organised trip can be a nightmare for some poor souls charged with the organising of it but, I feel that 2005 ought to be in Wilhelmshaven. With a list of hotels, in different categories, people can make their own bookings and a small programme could be worked out with just one large gathering early on. Just a thought.

John Hollingsworth,
Past President and Current Hon. Secretary of The Society of London Toastmasters