

## **German Exchange: February 2010**

For eleven years Beauchamp College has run a successful exchange programme with the Wilhelm Raabe Schule in Germany. This year, the Exchange was run in collaboration with the History Department to celebrate twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and build on the History syllabus.

### **The Project:**

We applied to the British Council for funding for the trip based on the value of our collaborative project to student learning. As the GCSE History course covers the building of the Berlin Wall but not its fall, we thought the twenty year anniversary was an ideal opportunity for History students to extend their knowledge. The sites visited and the opportunity to meet with and talk to people who lived through these momentous historical events was also an ideal opportunity to study history from a social perspective instead of a political one.

The students who visited Germany could then present this information to their History groups, so that all students benefited from the first-hand visit.

Although our initial application for funding from the British Council was turned down, they liked our project idea so much that they looked for additional funding and were able to allocate £5000 towards our expenses. This meant that we were able to reduce the cost which opened the trip up to many more students, as we were able to offer the option of a hostel stay for those who did not want to participate in a home-stay.

### **The Trip:**

A total of 23 Year 10 students boarded a plane, armed with an information booklet, a German phrase book (for the non-German GCSE students!) and some thermal underwear to combat the freezing European winter!

First impressions of Germany were positive; "Germany's quite westernised, isn't it?" was the astute observation of one student!

The first task was to meet and settle in with the German families. Those who had been terrified of unrecognisable food and having to use hand signals to communicate were relieved to discover that German people eat the same foods as English people and that they also spoke excellent English.

Meanwhile, the hostel group had their first taste of what their year-out before university will be like – basic but comfortable! Many were shocked the following morning by the 7am breakfast call – far too early!

To help ease the transition, a bowling evening was organised so that all the students could relax and get to know each other. By the end of the night, the students had divided into two groups; not German and English, but the same two groups everyone divides into when they go bowling; those who can... and those who need lane guards!

Our students had a busy schedule of sightseeing, but by far and away the day in Berlin was the most enjoyed day. Although stunned by the freezing temperatures which dipped to minus 14, the students were kept warm with a busy sightseeing schedule across the city. A small panic ensued when a few students failed to depart the train at the right stop, but mobile phones saved the day and the party was reunited!

The whistle-stop tour of Berlin included all the important sites; the Reichstag, the Holocaust Memorial, Brandenburg Gate and of course, the Checkpoint Charlie Museum. Students found the visit to the Stasi prison the most interesting and saw the conditions in which the East German police kept those they suspected of espionage.

Students further explored the division of Germany with a visit to the museum at Helmstedt and border monument at Hotensleben. A visit to Marienborn gave students the opportunity to become East German border guards in the watch towers and explore the underground tunnels.

All in all, these visits brought history to life

#### **Outcomes:**

In terms of extending the students' historical skills and knowledge, the value of the trip has certainly been apparent in the students' work and discussions. On their return, students who had visited Germany were describing the remains of the Wall to the other students and recounting the imaginative and brave escape attempts they had learned about during their stay. They have also agreed to lead the revision lesson on the Berlin Wall before their exam this summer, as they feel confident in their knowledge about this topic.

They are also more aware of the effects of the Cold War on regular people and their daily lives. When we were discussing the differences in the lives of East and West Germans, one student commented "I'd be well annoyed if I was born in the bad bit!" A student who had visited Berlin then went on to explain how you could still tell which parts of Berlin had been East and which had been West. This fascinated the group and led to an excellent discussion about the impact of the Cold War on today's world. History suddenly seemed relevant to their lives today.

An unexpected outcome was the possibility of a musical collaboration between the two schools. Nilesh Champaneri, our resident expert on all things musical, is busy arranging for a group of students to return to Germany for a music workshop this summer. There are also plans for the music departments of the two partner schools to work together in future, thus further developing Beauchamp's opportunities for creativity.

The musical theme was continued by the students, who created a rap song about their experiences – Britain's Got Talent here they come!

The return visit of the German students was equally successful, and the students have produced some fantastic project work, some of which will be on

display around the college in the History and Language Departments and in the foyer this summer term as part of the Global Citizenship theme of 'Divided Societies'.

**Overall...**

The Eleventh Exchange was a resounding success and further strengthened the relationship between our two schools. Some students have already planned return visits to Germany to visit their German exchange partners this summer, and it seems as if some lasting friendships have been made.