

SIMONE WHETTON

REPORT

TO

AUSTRALIAN GERMAN  
ASSOCIATION/  
GOETHE INSTITUT/  
LUFTHANSA GERMAN  
AIRLINES

ON THE  
1997/1998  
AUSTRALIA/GERMANY  
EDUCATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP



## OVERVIEW

The time I spent in Germany on the fellowship late last year and this year was very rewarding and productive. The intensive language course that I attended at the Goethe Institut in Mannheim was excellent and I successfully completed the Zentrale Oberstufe Prüfung (the highest examination available to students) achieving a very high credit. After the language course I spent the next 6 weeks travelling through Germany visiting heads of industry and in-house counsel, lawyers in German law firms, professors at various universities, chambers of commerce and representatives of government and trade organisations.

I also found time to see several German plays (a great passion of mine) and visit many exhibitions in art galleries in Germany. I was also fortunate to spend a week in Berlin looking at all the new and exciting developments both of a construction and cultural nature as the city gears up to the move by Parliament from Bonn.

Below is a report detailing my activities more specifically and some of the meetings with people I visited and the impressions I gained from these meetings and from the people and the country generally.

In terms of advantages to my professional life, the trip enabled me to meet with many German companies who are interested in doing business in Australia and to be allowed the opportunity to inform them of the requirements for setting up business in Australia and learn about the differences between Australian and German requirements. I was also able to learn about prominent German companies, their products and the way they do business.

During the fellowship, I also met many new friends, especially during the course at the Goethe Institut. Many of these people came from other countries and were there to improve their German so that they could take the extra knowledge back to their country and improve their country's relations with Germany. I also met many new German friends and have already had several letters from them since my return.

## GOETHE INSTITUT - MANNHEIM

I attended the Goethe Institut in Mannheim for the 2 month period December 1997 - January 1998. While I was there I was placed in the highest class (Mittelstufe 3). The class had 7 students who were from all over the world including Poland, Ukraine, Sweden, Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan.

The class participants were all very good German speakers and accordingly our lessons were at a very high level. We were able to debate current topics in Germany such as politics, the economy, education, women, the introduction of the Euro and the implications for Germany in the European union. We also were able to have a full revision of difficult areas of grammar as well as concentrated writing tasks to improve our written German.

We also visited many companies in Mannheim. One example of such a visit was the BASF factory. We were given a tour of the plant and offices. This was a wonderful opportunity and exposed us to very technical German language. We also visited the art galleries in Mannheim and the City Museum and had guided tours of the current and permanent exhibitions.

As an ardent fan of the various German dialects, I saw many of the "Mundart" theatre pieces spoken in "Pfälzisch". Although difficult at first, it is eventually quite comprehensible! My later visit to Hamburg to see a "Plattdeutsch" performance at the Ohnsorg Theatre was not so



easy to understand!

The highlight of our external visits were the 2 days that we spent with the Oberbürgermeister responsible for women's affairs in Mannheim. We had a tour of the areas of her responsibility in Mannheim. She was also involved in a project with other city councils in the state to fix plaques to various houses or buildings where famous women had lived. Such women had often contributed in some material way to the town or city. In Mannheim for instance, Dora and Rosa Birnbaum were two pioneering women in kindergarten education for children. They established the first kindergarten in Germany in the early 1900's. The kindergarten was built in very modern Bauhaus design and is an architecturally significant building in Mannheim today.

The German course at the Goethe Institut also enabled me to participate in many cultural activities and I attended the National Theatre in Mannheim several times as well as attending various concerts organised by the Goethe Institut.

The accommodation provided by the Goethe Institut was of a very high standard and very welcoming. I had the good fortune to stay with a lady in Mannheim who had several rooms in the upper part of her house available for foreign students. She was very kind and her assistance made the transition from Australia to Germany very easy.

At the end of the course I was invited to participate in the Zentrale Oberstufe Prüfung and I was one of only two candidates selected to do this exam. I was delighted to receive a very high credit.

## LATE JANUARY TO EARLY MARCH

As I mentioned above in the overview, I spent this period visiting many German companies, German law firms, German professors and trade and government bodies.

Attached is a list of all the people I visited and below is a summary of the highlights.

During this period I visited the following companies:

- ABB GmbH;
- BASF AG;
- Blohm + Voss AG;
- Robert Bosch GmbH;
- Helm AG;
- Stinnes AG;
- Siemens AG;
- Lurgi AG;
- Gauselmann AG;
- Glunz AG;
- Krone AG;
- Thyssen Aufzüge GmbH;
- Audi AG;
- Deutsche Babcock GmbH;
- Dornier MedizinTechnik GmbH;
- König + Neurath AG;
- Krupp AG;
- Drägerwerke AG.

Prior to leaving Australia I had written to senior management in these companies and asked if



it was possible to visit them. Many of them responded very enthusiastically and lined up appointments before I had left Australia. Others asked me to call them on arrival to arrange a meeting. They were all delighted that I had taken the trouble to come and visit them and were very interested in my work in Australia and the fellowship. Many of them had been to Australia on holidays and some had worked at referendare in Australia.

One of the highlights was visiting Lurgi AG in Frankfurt. This was organised through John Taylor, Managing Director of Lurgi Australia and Andrew Grummet and was towards the end of my travelling time. I met with Stuart Sneyd, an Australian working at the Lurgi office. He was one of the technical engineers and showed me around the vast offices and plant. I also had the chance to speak to the human resources and client services people.

Another very enjoyable visit was with Klaus Wolff at Blohm + Voss in Hamburg. The Blohm + Voss offices are very difficult to get to. The offices can only be reached by either a very long trip around Hamburg or through an underground tunnel which has an elevator for cars. It is an old elevator that originally took the Blohm + Voss delivery truck and even earlier I believe, took horses and carriages!

My visit to Audi AG was also enjoyable and not just for being able to drive in one of the latest cars! I also thoroughly enjoyed meeting the management team at Stinnes AG in Mülheim an der Ruhr. Their general counsel, Jürgen Kley is a delightful man and I enjoyed a lovely lunch with him and his team.

Another highlight was meeting Wolfgang Niedermark and Ingrid Hachmack at the Australian and New Zealand Association in Hamburg. Wolfgang is a colleague of Gerd le Bell and was very helpful and informative. He invited me to the annual dinner of the Australian and New Zealand Association in Hamburg where I met several members of senior management from Deutsche Bank, Columbus Lines, A. Hartrodt GmbH and Bremen Woll. Kammerer AG Bremen.

My visit to the Australian Investment Trade Commission in Frankfurt was also very worthwhile. Bernd Neubauer heads a very exciting section which receives a large number of requests from German companies seeking help in setting up business in Australia. They were very pleased that I assisted German companies in Australia and will pass on my name to companies that may need such assistance.

I also had the good fortune to meet with Professor Ingo von Münch and Professor Dr Hans-Peter Schwintowski. Both professors have a strong link with Australia and in particular Sydney University and are involved in exchanges for students and ongoing work with lawyers in Germany and Australia. I also met with Professor Nerlich at the University of Köln who is the representative for the German-Australian Lawyers Association of which I am a founding member.

Since this meeting, we have been in regular contact and facilitated a number of German lawyers to come to Australia to work for a short term. We have also assisted some Australian lawyers (though not as many!) find short term work in Germany.

## **CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

The 6 weeks I spent travelling visiting all of the abovementioned companies were fairly exhausting but I did manage to squeeze in some exciting visits to famous German castles and other German sights. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing how much Berlin had changed from my last visit 8 years ago. The city is certainly gearing up to its new role as the capital of Germany.





I have never seen so much construction in the centre of a city before. The developments are exciting and the buildings that have been built are innovative and impressive. The Information Box located on the Potsdam Platz was a place that I spent many hours poring over the plans for the various sites where the wall once used to be. At the time I was in Berlin, the Brandenburg gate had just been opened to through traffic (a situation which was not intended to last for more than a month) and I was fortunate to be able to drive through on the first day.

In Potsdam, I visited the wonderfully restored Sans Souci Palace and in Südbayern I visited Neuschwanstein - certainly very different building styles.

I also managed to visit the following beautiful towns in Germany: Dresden, Nurnberg, Regensburg, Passau, Munich, Königsee, Bodensee, Überlingen, Meersburg, Stuttgart, Heidelberg, Tübingen, Baden-Baden, Hamburg, Lübeck, Minden, Düsseldorf, Essen, Bochum, Köln, Wuppertal, Duisburg, Frankfurt, Würzburg and Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

## **IMPRESSIONS**

During my time in Germany I paid particular attention to reports in the media on various aspects of German day to day life and how the Germans perceive other countries and their activities.

### **The economy**

In respect of economic aspects of Germany, I found that various parts of the country, especially the Ruhr area did not appear to be as prosperous as they had been on my last visit to Germany in 1990. One could really tell that reunification had depleted the funds usually available to German cities for upgrade and maintenance.

Further, there was clear evidence of lower living standards for many of the foreigners and guest workers in Germany. Many Germans expressed concern to me that the amount of money needed for reunification and equipping the former East German states with necessary infrastructure had exceeded everyone's expectations by an enormous amount. Accordingly, the Germans and the new immigrants from other European countries had been required to take a cut in living standards. There was much debate on the threat to the high standards of German health care and education because of the costs of reunification but it was also reassuring to hear all Germans that I met, say that the benefits of reunification certainly outweighed the costs.

### **Politics**

During my time in Germany I also experienced the vote in the state of Niedersachsen where Gerhard Schröder of the SPD Party was the victor. This was an exciting time as it was clear that the SPD would put Mr Schröder up against Chancellor Kohl for the next federal election. Mr Schröder's victory in the recent German federal election will change Germany's direction and I will be following his first year as Chancellor with great interest.

Also of interest in the political sphere were the debates on cuts to BaFög - the equivalent of Ausstudy. Many students at universities demonstrated in various cities and were supported by the academic staff.

### **Education**

I was very fortunate to visit a local high school in Mannheim arranged through the Goethe Institut and speak to the students about their personal future plans and also their views on



Germany's place in Europe. The students were well aware of the length of time ahead of them for studying at universities but were unfazed by this prospect. When I explained to them that Australian students had far shorter courses and enrolled at university earlier than their German counterparts they were quite amazed and could not imagine it. Many of the German high school students had been to several other European countries and spent considerable time there learning other languages. This is such an advantage to high school students and Europeans generally - something that we can never hope to achieve in Australia due to our geographical location.

I also spent some time at universities in Berlin and Mannheim and spoke to students studying law at these universities. Very few of them were preparing for careers in large law firms and were looking to other law-related fields. I think this is a trend that will be mirrored in Australia more and more in the future as people make lifestyle decisions and investigate other career opportunities in law. Many of the German law students at university were looking to work in overseas postings for a short period and had targeted Australia as a possibility. Through my connections with the Australian/German Lawyers Association I was able to provide them with much information and other points of contact for the future.

### **The Arts**

An important part of my trip to Germany was to absorb as much theatre, film and art as possible. In Hamburg and Mannheim I visited the "Mundart" (dialect) theatres. Although difficult to understand at first, I relished the fact that by interval I could understand all the jokes and laugh at the appropriate spots. Whilst I haven't yet mastered the speaking of many dialects, I can certainly manage a few short phrases very well.

In Berlin I managed to see a performance of Berthold Brecht's "The Rise and Rise of Arturo Ui". This play tracks the rise of Hitler in Germany and was performed at the Berliner Ensemble with a cast that featured mainly former East German actors. It was a fantastic experience. The theatre was packed and the performance was held during the Berthold Brecht celebration week in Berlin.

As I mentioned earlier, I visited the National Theatre in Mannheim several times and saw the German version of "Callas" - a play about Maria Callas and her life as well as many other modern pieces which were highly controversial and at times quite shocking. Avant garde German theatre is well known for its ground-breaking pieces and use of new techniques.

On my visit to Wuppertal I had the opportunity to visit friends who perform in a highly regarded local choir who sang church and other occasional musical pieces.

In Stuttgart I visited an "off Broadway" type of theatre and saw a performance of a play dealing with the controversial topic of whether God may have been a woman. The play was written by a young German playwright and was very humorous and yet very ironic. It was the premiere performance of this play and I understand that it has since toured nationally.

During my time in Germany I also took the opportunity to see many German films including "The Comedian Harmonists". This is a film dealing with a group of accapella singers who performed in Germany in the 1920s and 30s. At least 3 members of the singing group were Jewish and were forbidden by the Nazi Party to perform as the war approached. The film deals with the internal rifts that the political tensions caused between the group but also their popularity and achievements in their short but inspired musical career. I hope that this film is translated into English and reaches our screens shortly. I also saw the German movie "Der



Campus" by up and coming German director Sönke Wortman and the acclaimed German movie "Der Trio" starring Götz Georg.

In terms of art, I am a very keen student of the German art movement "Neue Sachlichkeit". This movement arose in the early 1900s and its main exponents included George Grosz, Otto Dix and Max Beckmann . I was fortunate to see many of their paintings in the art galleries in Köln, Frankfurt and Berlin. Many of the German art galleries contain extensive works of other European painters and I also had the opportunity to see a wonderful exhibition by Robert Delauney in Berlin.

## **SUMMARY**

The trip to Germany on the fellowship had several aims for me:

1. to improve my German;
2. to meet important contacts for my professional career;
3. to meet new friends and establish good relationships; and
4. to enjoy cultural and educational activities in Germany.

I am delighted to say that all my aims were very successfully filled and I am sincerely grateful to the Australian German Association, the Goethe Institut and Lufthansa German Airlines for awarding me the fellowship and allowing me the opportunity to act as an ambassador for my country.

Since my return I have been able to assist in a professional capacity several of the companies that I visited in Germany with their operations in Australia. I recently hosted a dinner at my home for 7 German and Austrian lawyers visiting Australia on a conference and some of these lawyers were people I had met on my trip earlier this year.

I look forward to continuing my association with the AGA in a professional and social capacity. I would be very happy to assist future fellowship winners in preparing for their trip so that the maximum benefit can be gained as well as forming an association of past fellowship winners so that support for the AGA can continue to grow.



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