



# Moor House School News and Events

## Key Stage 4 Educational Visit to Berlin

**25th - 27th February 2010**

On Thursday 25th February 28 sleepy students in Key Stage 4 and 14 bleary-eyed adults were woken from their slumbers at around 3am. Despite the reduced amount of sleep it didn't take long for the excitement to kick in as we had breakfast and waited for our coach to turn up, because the day had finally arrived - we were off on our Educational Visit to Berlin!



Our EasyJet flight departed from Gatwick Airport on time and as we flew in over Berlin we could see snow covering the landscape, confirming the recent reports of freezing cold weather. After landing we collected our luggage and found the coach that took us to our hotel. We were shown to our comfortable rooms and then enjoyed a late breakfast of tasty German food.



After breakfast we headed off to our first visit of the day - the Berlin 1936 Olympic Stadium! Berlin was originally going to host the Olympic Games in 1916, however due to World War I these games were cancelled. When Berlin was selected to host the 1936 summer games a new stadium was built and it is still there today - although it has been given a modern new roof to keep the rain off the spectators.

In 1936 Adolf Hitler and his newly elected National Socialist party - which is now commonly called the Nazi party - hoped to show the world that the Aryan 'master race' athletes were the best. Nazi propaganda promoted the Aryan race as being better than all others, and considered people of other origins as inferior or even as sub-human. Hitler was disappointed to find that Jesse Owens, an African American, proved this idea very clearly wrong by going on to win four gold medals at the games.



These days the stadium is home to the Hertha BSC Berlin football team, and in 2006 the Fifa World Cup Final was held here. National and international matches are regularly held here, and although the only thing on the pitch when we visited was snow, it did not stop people enjoying the sights and taking in the history of this amazing location.



After visiting the stadium - and the stadium shop - we headed on to our second destination of the day, the Charlottenburg Palace. This is the largest palace in Berlin, and has a very personal connection to one of our students who is related to the Prussian royalty who lived in this palace for a time! Although the beautiful gardens, modelled on the gardens at Versailles in Paris, were covered by snow it was evident that this would have been a wonderful place to live.

Our final stop for the day was Humboldt University, the oldest university in Berlin. Many famous people from German history studied here, including Albert Einstein. However, it is also remembered because Joseph Goebbels - the Nazi Minister for Propaganda - organised the first of the infamous Nazi book burnings in the square just outside the university. 20,000 books were burned because they contained ideas and opinions that the Nazis did not want people to learn about. A memorial to this awful event is hidden underground in the square - a library that has no books.

With that done, we headed back to the hotel for a delicious dinner and a relaxed evening with some games where the students got to learn some interesting facts about the staff that they thought they knew so well!



We had another early start on Friday morning as we headed off to the Reichstag - the home of German parliament since 1999. It was previously used as the home of German government from 1894 until 1933, when most of the building was destroyed by fire, probably set on purpose by the Nazis to create an excuse to suspend human rights and seize power.



When East Germany and West Germany were reunified at the end of the 20th century, the government of Germany returned to the Reichstag in Berlin, and a brand new glass dome was installed on top of it. This glass dome sits directly above the debating chamber. Visitors can go into the glass dome and look down into the chamber. A spiralling slope inside the dome takes visitors to the top and gave us a superb view of the surrounding Berlin cityscape.



We then went to the Brandenburg Gate, a former gateway to the city of Berlin. It was built in 1791 and modelled on the entrance to the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. In 1933, the National Socialists - the Nazis - marched through it, introducing the darkest chapter in German history which left the city destroyed

and Germany divided. Some green statues by the Brandenburg Gate turned out to be human beings but they were kind enough to let us have our photo taken with them!

Next to the Brandenburg Gate is the Holocaust Memorial, built in 2004. It is made up of 2,711 concrete slabs in a grid pattern on a sloping field. The design is meant to produce an uneasy, confusing atmosphere that represents a supposedly ordered and logical system that has gone terribly wrong. Although it sounds a bit odd, the memorial certainly succeeds in creating this creepy feeling of being lost and confused.



Following this we visited the Memorial to the German Resistance museum. Here we learned about people who had opposed and resisted the Nazi regime such as Claus von Stauffenberg, a German Army colonel. Stauffenberg planted a bomb that was meant to blow up Adolf Hitler. Unfortunately the plan failed and he and the other conspirators were executed. Some were shot in the courtyard outside the museum.



After lunch and a hot drink at Starbucks we headed towards our next stop, but got waylaid by a street vendor selling furry replica Russian hats. Mr. Mayes had been tasked by Mr. Bathe to obtain one of these, and unwittingly started a craze of Moor House School students buying their own. The street vendor was very pleased with this and probably made a whole days' sales in about 30 minutes! However his profits were somewhat reduced by Susie Simpson's impressive haggling skills, including the internationally recognised 'Do I look bothered' expression!

This detour completed we headed on to The Topography of Terror, an outdoor exhibit housed in the excavated ruins of the SS and Gestapo buildings. Our guides explained much of the history of Germany during World War II using a

combination of their excellent English and also the source documents and photographs, all of which made a big impression.



Our final stop for the day was the famous Checkpoint Charlie, the main crossing point between East and West Berlin. For many years the city was divided by the Berlin Wall. In the museum we discovered many clever ways people had managed to secretly cross the border. Then it was back to the hotel for a fun evening filled with chicken-wings and music!



Saturday morning had another early start (are you spotting a pattern here?) as we left Berlin and headed north towards the town of Oranienberg. Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp - based just outside this town - was used as a working camp between 1936 and 1950. The freezing cold weather was appropriate for this was a place of death. 200,000 people were taken here, and over half died; from the extreme cold, from disease, from medical experimentation, from torture or by being shot.



The stories we were told here were quite shocking, the more so because they weren't just stories, they were real historical accounts of what people went through. From learning about roll calls that lasted longer than 24 hours, during which people would literally die from cold and exhaustion, to finding out that the

entry point was called 'Station A' whereas the exit point - the gas chamber - was called 'Station Z' as it was 'the end', the experience provoked some emotional reactions from students and staff.

The 'Arbeit Macht Frei' sign, that promised the prisoners that work would make them free, was a cruel trick. For many their only escape was death.



Our last visit was more uplifting - literally - but no less steeped in history. The Berlin TV Tower, built in East Berlin in the 1960s, is at 364m high the tallest structure in Germany, and the fourth tallest freestanding structure in Europe. When the sun shines on the stainless steel dome the reflection usually appears in the shape of a cross of light. People named this 'The Pope's Revenge' to mock the Communist Government of the time, which did not believe in God.

After a visit to the Alexanderplatz shopping centre to stock up on souvenir postcards, chocolates and sweets, we took a high speed elevator to the visitor platform of the TV Tower, 204 metres above the ground, and admired the excellent view of the city below us.



Eventually it was time to come down to earth and start our journey home. After a final opportunity for photos we headed to the airport to catch our flight. Tired out after a full-on three days, it didn't take some people long to fall asleep!

In conclusion, it was a real pleasure to spend time in the company of students and staff who, together, showed what a fun and rewarding experience learning can be.

The students were extremely good company on what was a physically and mentally demanding educational visit and they were excellent ambassadors for Moor House School and the UK.

The visit would not have been possible without the dedicated support of Leanne Boyhan, Sue Brady, Mrs. Carter, Miss Gerety, Mrs. Greig, Mr. Kitchen, Mrs. Lee, Mr. Mayes, Mr. Osborne, Susie Simpson, Mrs. Vallance and Mrs. Hanscombe-Vinton. It is a genuine privilege to work alongside such complete professionals who always put the interests and well-being of the students first.

Thanks are also due to all the parents (and staff) who contributed to making the visit possible, particularly Nikki Lawton and Helen Cuthbertson, Linda Squire in the Front Office, as well as Evelyn Demadema and Jill Pascoe in the accounts department.

Lastly, my thanks also go to Andy Turner (and the team at Sporting Destinations) for the invaluable support they provided before, and during, this educational visit.

Report by Mr. Hart