

## Letter from your Chairman

Dear Members and Friends,

In previous years I have written at length about Brexit and Covid. This time my main topic is the 70th Anniversary of the Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft Rhein-Main e.V. Many of you will recall the party we gave in summer 2019 to celebrate the founding of the DBG overall in 1949. DBG R-M was launched initially as the Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft, Landesgruppe Rhein-Main, in 1951, so it has been our turn to celebrate in 2021. We had hoped to hold a real party in mid-year but Covid put paid to that. Instead we celebrated on 24.06.21 with an online event including a wonderful recorded message by Volker Bouffier, Prime Minister of Hesse, and live speeches by Mark Weinmeister, Hessian State Secretary for Europe, Dr. Andreas Fabritius, British Honorary Consul Frankfurt, Henning Horstmann, departing Chairman of DBG Berlin, and yours truly. This was followed by a celebratory lecture by our friend, Prof. Rüdiger Görner, on his new novel, „The Marble Song“. Covid sadly also thwarted our attempt to arrange an in-person follow-up celebration on Campus Westend towards year-end. By way of (partial) replacement, we were able to add a special feature to our final event of 2021, „Casanova and Boswell, a dramatised reading“ by Jo Ripper and Mike Marklove on 16.12.21: registered attendees received a bottle of 2020 Hochheimer Königin Victoriaberg Riesling from Weingut Flick, and we all raised our glasses online to DBG R-M at the beginning of the event, and again at the end, this time to DBG overall. A fitting finale to our anniversary year!

How was the year for DBG R-M?

For obvious reasons our 2021 events all took place online, which was a pity. That said, we had many first class events with excellent speakers on fascinating subjects. An absolute highlight for me personally was Dr. Hannah White's talk on „Brexit, Covid-19 and the (British) Constitution“ on 14.10.21. Also, our Zoom technology generally worked well. Michael Gehrig has already compiled a full event programme for 2022. This includes a new format, „Junior Talks at DBG R-M“, starting with Juliane Clegg on „Financial Policy in late C20 Britain“ on 27.01.22. Michael has been your Geschäftsführer for nearly 40 years now! He does a great job and deserves huge thanks from all of us! Our Individuals/Couples Membership has remained stable, and I am happy to announce a further Institutional/Corporate Member, Greenhill Europe GmbH & Co. KG. Unlike various similar non-profit organisations which are struggling under Covid, DBG R-M's financial position remains sound.

It was important that the Dagmar Westberg-Preis be awarded this anniversary year. And, indeed, two highly deserving winners were recently announced: Alina Aulbur with „Matrimon(ey). From the marriage Market to Domestic Bliss in Selected Works of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth & Jane Austen, and Ivona Bilusic with „Crossing the Boundaries of Genre and Gender in Mary Shelley's „Frankenstein“.

**Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft Rhein Main e. V.**

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What about the DBG overall in 2021? Thomas Matussek, who was German Ambassador in London in 2002-2006, has succeeded Henning Horstmann as Chairman of DBG Berlin. Cooperation between the several geographical chapters has become much more active. We have an online "Netzwerktreffen des Beirats der DBG-Vereinigungen" on a quarterly basis. And, equally important, DBG Berlin, Rhein-Main, Düsseldorf are sharing events and inviting guests from other chapters to their talks. The Königswinter conferences, an absolutely key contribution to German-British relations especially post-Brexit, have also taken place, albeit in online or hybrid format, during this challenging year.

And now, after all, a word on post-Brexit Britain. Personally I am becoming a little bored and rather irritated by recent post-Brexit shenanigans (mainly on the British side). Hearing about potential conflict on fisheries around the Channel Isles earlier this year, I was reminded of the Cod Wars between Britain and Iceland in the 1970s. I was also taken back to history lessons at school in England: to the naval Battle of Sluys in 1340 which effectively launched the Hundred Years War between England and France. I imagined Boris Johnson at a second Battle of Crecy extolling the yeoman virtues of his English army versus arrogant French knights and proclaiming the superiority of English technology (the longbow) over French armour. I further thought of him declaiming like Laurence Olivier or Kenneth Branagh as Henry V at Harfleur: "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up with our English dead."; or at Agincourt: "But we shall be remembered – we few, we happy few, we band of brothers..." That's enough historical musing!

Now back to political reality. Despite his substantial majority in Parliament, Boris Johnson is wobbling. First, we had the early December scandal of the 2020 Christmas Party in Downing Street (in clear breach of Covid restrictions at the time). Then public doubts resurfaced about how his absurdly expensive flat refurbishment was financed. And then there was a Tory rebellion in Westminster on 14.12.21 against his proposed additional measures to combat Omicron (the measures were eventually approved, but only with very strong backing from Labour). On 15.12.21 the Tories lost to the Liberal Democrats in the North Shropshire by-election a seat which they had won with a huge majority in the last general election. To cap it all, Boris Johnson's Brexit Minister, Lord Frost, resigned from the Cabinet on 18.12.21. All this clearly illustrates his shattered authority in Westminster and shows how unpopular with the voting public Boris Johnson and his core team have become in recent weeks. There is talk of his being "toppled" before he can do any more damage. Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance Minister), Rishi Sunak and Foreign Minister, Liz Truss, are already being mooted as potential successors. One senior Tory commented on Boris Johnson's recent performance with a baseball image: "Two strikes; next one, you're out!" Another said "The Tory Party takes no prisoners!" And a third described him as "drinking in the last chance saloon". Watch this space!

A brief word, too, on Covid. I am relatively fortunate in that hardly anybody in my extended family or amongst my friends has been seriously affected, although I am aware of several

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deaths amongst earlier business contacts of mine. I truly hope that you, dear Members and Friends, have fared no worse than this!

Last December I quoted a poem by Philip Larkin about the wonder of spring bursting out from gloomy, cold, depressing winter, a message of hope in Covid times. This September, enjoying my first overseas holiday (in Greece) since March 2020, I hoped that we had Covid behind us but feared that the coming winter might prove me wrong. Now we are back in the midst of Covid. Larkin's spring hope seems a long, long way away. I think instead of T.S.Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi", a poem about personal spiritual rebirth. This topic is basically positive but also involves effort, discomfort, even pain, as in the first lines of the poem:

A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.

I also think at this time of the popular anonymous poem "The North Wind" and what I see as its comforting message of resilience:

The north wind doth blow,  
And we shall have snow,  
And what will the robin do then, Poor thing?  
He'll sit in a barn,  
And keep himself warm,  
and hide his head under his wing, Poor thing!

It is time for me to come to a close. Thank you as always, dear Members, for your continued support throughout this year. As for you, dear Friends, I hope that, looking back on DBG R-M's successful 2021 and forward to a promising 2022, many of you will now take the momentous step towards full membership!

Last, but certainly not least, I wish you all all the best for 2022! Stay happy & healthy!

Nick Jefcoat  
Chairman  
DBG R-M  
27.12.2021

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