

## 2012 Austria Swiss German fellowship: making new friends

I would like to start off by thanking the British Orthopaedic Association for selecting me as the 2012 Austria Swiss German (ASG) Fellow from UK (Figure 1).

### Introduction

The ASG Travelling Fellowship was first introduced in 1979 by the Orthopaedic Associations of the 3 German speaking countries Germany, Austria and Switzerland to allow orthopaedic surgeons from these places to visit UK, Canada and USA to form stronger ties with these reciprocal orthopaedic communities and promote more exchange of scientific and clinical ideas. Over the years, initially the American and subsequently the Canadian and British Orthopaedic Associations started reciprocal arrangements to visit these German speaking countries. In its current form, 2 American, 1 Canadian and 1 British orthopaedic surgeon travel for 4 weeks around Germany, Austria and Switzerland visiting various centres of excellence every 2 years. Every alternate year, 4 European surgeons then travel to UK, US and Canada in turn.

A *Circle of ASG Fellows* was founded in 1983 and this group currently has 150 members. This is a very prestigious and elite membership amongst the orthopaedic community of the participating European countries and they meet annually at the German Orthopaedic Congresses in Baden-Baden and Berlin and at the AAOS meeting in spring in the US.

The UK application and selection for 2012 took place in September last year and I was delighted to be informed that I had been selected as the 2012 UK ASG Fellow. The itinerary was organised for us by the German Orthopaedic Association and I was given a provisional start date of 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2012. This year's ASG Fellowship program was organised by Professor Dr. R. Krauspe (ASG Fellow 1995) from University Hospital of Düsseldorf.

### The Tour

I flew to Frankfurt from Heathrow on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and met my fellow ASG colleagues of 2012 - Dr. Theodore Blaine, Chief of Elbow and Shoulder Surgery at Yale University, Connecticut and Dr. Charles Nelson, Associate Professor and Chief of Adult Reconstructive Surgery at University of Pennsylvania,

Philadelphia. There were no Canadian Fellows this year. The 1 ½ hour flight for me was like a normal day's travel to work in London. Certainly seemed like a big advantage especially as I saw the weary eyes of my American colleagues after their 10 hour trans-atlantic flights! We were greeted that evening by our local host Prof. A. Meurer (ASG Fellow 2006), Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery at University Hospital of Frankfurt, along with some of her colleagues, and enjoyed dinner at the Holbein restaurant, located within the famously stunning Städel museum of Frankfurt (Figure 2).

Our formal tour started next morning with a visit to the orthopaedic department at the Universitätsklinik Friedrichsheim GmbH. This was a hospital steeped in orthopaedic history, having seen the likes of Hoffman and Hoffa work here during their careers. Our schedule consisted of a visit to the operating rooms where we observed primary hip and knee arthroplasty by Professor Meurer and Professor Hovy, followed by lunch and some exchange of ideas and subsequently a tour of the hospital. We also visited the German Orthopaedic Museum located within the hospital building, which had the most fascinating collection of early orthopaedic instruments and implants collected from all across Germany and displayed in this single location.

Our next stop was Heidelberg, where we were hosted by Prof. V. Ewerbeck and his protégé Dr. Tobias Gotterbarn. Heidelberg orthopaedic hospital is one of the largest orthopaedic hospitals in Germany situated in an exceptionally picturesque location, surrounded by hills and woods and on the banks of the River Neckar (Figure 3). Both the Heidelberg and Frankfurt hospitals were old cripple homes that eventually got converted to orthopaedic hospitals. We had 2 days of operating room visits and observed lots of interesting arthroplasty cases. It would appear that most of the surgeons here use the direct anterior approach for their THR, causing much frustration to my American hip and knee specialist colleague who is an enthusiastic proponent of the posterior approach! There were plenty of exchange of ideas, along with good food, beer and some sight-seeing, including the Heidelberg castle with spectacular views of the town below.

We then travelled to Würzburg, hosted by Chief of Orthopaedics Prof. Rüdert and his colleague Professor Ulrich Nöth (ASG Fellow 2008). The Würzburg orthopaedic department has very strong links with SICOT and thus hosts a lot of international travelling fellows in their department some of whom we met. We also saw the building where x-rays were first discovered by William Roentgen and had our first educational sessions of the tour. Dr. Blaine spoke on biceps tendon repair and Dr. Nelson spoke on reconstructive options in revi-

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Figure 1. Raj Bhattacharya, ASG Fellow 2012 from United Kingdom.



Figure 2. Austria Swiss German Fellows being hosted by Professor Meurer at the Städel museum Frankfurt.



Figure 3. With Dr. Tobias Gotterbarn outside the Heidelberg Orthopaedic Hospital.

sion hip surgery. I spoke on my biomechanical work comparing flanged and unflanged cups in cemented THR and Professor Ulrich Nöth gave us a fascinating update on cartilage engineering works currently being undertaken in Germany (Figure 4).

We then headed to Berlin which coincided with the Easter weekend holidays. Trains were absolutely packed due to the Easter weekends and reminded me of the busy train journeys in the UK although unlike UK, here the trains kept to their times immaculately! Our Berlin trip was restricted to sight-seeing and only an outside tour of the famous Charite' hospital due to the holidays. My rich American colleagues could not put up with the disappointing weather in Berlin and decided to take a detour to Monaco and Nice! Too expensive a trip for a poor British orthopaedic Consultant to afford, hence I decided to soldier on in Berlin while they basked in the sunshine in Southern France and gambled away oodles of their extra cash at the Casino. I also had the unfortunate experience of getting a fine for possessing an illegal train ticket, despite having purchased them from the railway station counter in Berlin. Apparently, all tickets in Germany have to be pre-validated before getting on the train. The guy at the ticket counter obviously didn't think it was information worth sharing with me when he sold me the ticket. My Easter present to the German Rail service to the sum of 40 Euros. You are welcome, Deutsche Bahn!!

Next stop was Magdeburg, hosted by Prof. C. Lohmann (ASG Fellow, 2005). The Magdeburg orthopaedic department is very active on research in metallosis in THR and receives a lot of explanted implants from local centres around the area for testing. In theatres, we observed a TKR by Professor Lohmann using the Inex system. Following this we participated in the educational program where once again the ASG fellows gave our respective talks (Stiffness post TKR by Dr. Nelson, Glenohumeral instability by Dr. Blaine and Revision ACL in Generalised Ligamentous Laxity by myself) along with talks from local surgeons and trainees on biomechanical testing of meniscal root lesion repair, osseointegration of metaphyseal humerus stem and metallosis in metal on metal hip articulation. We also had a delightful reception and dinner at Professor Lohmann's house during the tour (Figure 5).

From Magdeburg, we headed to Halle, the birthplace of the famous music composer Handel, where we were hosted by Prof. S. Delank (ASG Fellow 2010). We visited the local University Hospital, named after Martin Luther where we had the academic session with our talks and a couple of talks from the local trainees and surgeons. We heard about some interesting work being done here with a

database of 3D models being set up for various research works. Professor Delank had very kindly organised a guided tour of Halle for us and we visited some of the famous locations including Handel's house as well as the market church where demonstrations had taken place during German revolution leading to the fall of the Berlin wall.

This was the first time that the ASG Fellows had travelled to erstwhile East Germany and there was a considerable effort made to make us feel welcome and special here (Figure 6).

From Halle, we headed to Munich where we were received by our local host Prof. A. Imhoff, Chair of the Sports Medicine Unit at the Munich Technical University. At Munich, I met up with an old friend Benedikt Gallitz, a GP in the outskirts of Munich. We had worked together in the UK 10 years ago and had lost touch all this while, till facebook conveniently reconnected us a few months ago. The marvels of modern technology! He took me out on a tour of Munich at night and we managed to stop by most of the important landmarks in Munich, including watching 2 surfers, surfing on the river Isar at midnight!

Professor Imhoff was running an elbow workshop at the time which we were also invited to. I also witnessed some interesting procedures there, including collagen meniscus

transplantation, HTO using the PEEK plate and injection of ACP (autologous conditioned plasma) post ACL and meniscal surgeries. And of course no trip to Munich could be complete without the traditional Bavarian food, wine and beer (Figure 7) and the customary visit to the Bayern Munich stadium and the fascinating BMW factory and museum.

After Munich, we temporarily left Germany for our only stop in Austria, to Salzburg. Despite all three of the ASG Fellows having boarded the train together from Munich, only one third of the group *i.e.* the lone Brit reached Salzburg station. Unfortunately, my American colleagues decided to get off the train at its scheduled arrival time without realising it was running a few minutes late!! They dashed out of the train, only to see the doors close behind them, while the station name of Freilassing stared at them from the giant board on the platform. They were travelling first class as opposed to the poor British fellow taking the standard class. It did make them acknowledge though, how I had been, till then, managing all the journeys and itineraries for them! Thankfully Dr. Nelson and Dr. Blaine joined soon afterwards and we had an update on our proposed schedule in Austria by Professor Ulrich Dorn (ASG Fellow 1987), the Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery *i.e.* at the local private



Figure 4. With Prof. Rudert and Prof. Nöth at Würzburg.



Figure 6. With Prof. Delank and his orthopaedic team in Halle.



Figure 5. With Prof. Lohmann and Mrs. Lohmann at their residence in Magdeburg.



Figure 7. Enjoying a traditional Bavarian dinner and drinks with Prof. Imhoff and his team in Munich..

Paracelsus University Hospital, where we also met Prof. Herbert Resch, the dean of the University.

Salzberg was an absolute medley of orthopaedic as well as tourist highlights. The Paracelsus University houses the Synthes Innovation Centre where any orthopaedic surgeon can walk in and put their ideas into creativity and come up with prototypes for further research. Helped immensely by technological marvels like a 3D printer and computerised lathes. We toured the hospital and theatres and presented our respective work at the academic session. Salzberg as a tourist attraction itself is second to none, and Prof. Dorn very kindly ensured we could get a glimpse of some of the more renowned attractions like the Hohensalzburg Castle, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's house, and the castle and nunnery of the famous blockbuster Sound of Music as well as experiencing lunch at the famous Tomaselli cafe at the city centre. We also had a delightful dinner, hosted at Professor Dorn's house (Figure 8) where we were treated to some fine venison and some exquisite wine including the famed Fragolino. We also had a glimpse of Professor Dorn's classic car collection that included a 1956 Alpha Romeo and a 1970 Lanija. We then headed to Zurich, our only stop in Switzerland. The passport check on the train to Zurich was a reminder of Switzerland's abstinence from the Eurozone which also caused us some difficulty, having to change currency to Swiss Francs and then back to the Euro again after a few days. We were received in Zurich by Dr. Jose Romero (ASG Fellow in 1999) who currently works as a knee specialist at a private clinic in Zurich called Klinik Hirslanden. He was previously head of Knee Surgery at the nearby Uniklinik Balgrist and despite having left the University Hospital, works closely with the place. We checked in at the beautiful Hotel Sonne on Lakeside Zurich, in Küsnacht, famed for being the home of singing legend Tina Turner. Our other host here was Dr. Sandro Fucentese (ASG Fellow 2011) at Uniklinik Balgrist.

We were particularly impressed by the Locomot, a robot that has been developed here in order to help paraplegics rehabilitate by retraining their lower limb muscles along with another robot used for exclusively for upper limb training. The spectacular views from our hotel over Lake Zurich and stunningly beautiful surroundings reminded us why Zurich is such a popular tourist destination although it remains one of the most expensive cities of Europe. The operating theatre at Uniklinik Balgrist was very interesting. There were 4 operating stations all under the same roof with a single removable glass barrier between each station and full access between all. The term *Multiplex Theatres* came to mind! We got to observe lots of interesting cases both at

Uniklinik Balgrist as well as Klinik Hirslanden including Ganz' periacetabular osteotomy, custom made knee replacements and knee arthrodesis amongst other things.

More dinner and drinks in Zurich included a special dinner with a Spanish theme hosted in our honour at Dr. Romero's stunning seaside residence. We also had a chance to experience a traditional Swiss Raclette made of Bagnes cheese and melted over a log fire and scraped off and served hot. It was absolutely delicious and did not good to my already bulging waistline (Figure 9)!

After Zurich, we were back to Germany for the last leg of our tour. The last week involved setting up our base in Schloss Mickeln, a beautiful small castle surrounded by natural greenery just outside the city of Düsseldorf and exploring all the hospitals in and around Rhineland. Prof. Krauspe and Dr. Christoph Zilkins had organised a fitting final week of our tour that started off on the Sunday at the *Weingut Piedmont* a private vineyard situated just outside Trier, and owned by Claus Piedmont, the uncle of Dr. Christoph Zilkins (Figure 10). We had a wonderful lunch with varying types of wine to match the food and then had a wine tasting session with over 25

different varieties of fine wine. Here we met Dr. Jan Zilkins, one of the first ASG Fellows from Germany in 1981, who also happened to be Dr. Christoph Zilkins' father.

The next few days were spent exploring the hospitals of Rhineland and we started at the University of Düsseldorf hospital where we attended Theatre sessions in the morning and then had a tour of the hospital and the research laboratories. Following this we had our lecture sessions where we presented our individual works along with presentation of some work by the Dusseldorf Orthopaedic unit including d-GEMRIC imaging of cartilages, biceps tenodesis and rotator cuff fixation methods (Figure 11).

The following day we headed to Köln, where we were greeted by Professor Eysel, the Chief of Orthopaedics (ASG Fellow 1998). Köln is one of the largest cities in Germany and has a slightly different arrangement as compared to the rest of Germany since Orthopaedics and Trauma are combined into one single unit here, headed by Professor Eysel. The trauma part is headed by Professor Muller and the residents work as a combined unit. We had our customary theatre visits and academic ses-



Figure 8. With Prof. Dorn and Mrs. Dorn at their residence in Salzberg.



Figure 9. Enjoying a course of Raclette with Dr. Romero and Dr. Fucentese in Zurich.



Figure 10. At the Weingut Piedmont with Prof. Krauspe and his team.



Figure 11. At the wine cellar in Weingut Piedmont.

sions here and then had a trip to the architecturally stunning Köln cathedral (Figure 12).

The next day was spent in Bonn where we were hosted by Prof. Wirtz (ASG Fellow 2004) and were taken around a tour of the Hospital including its impressive new Trauma Department and its excellent research facilities where a lot of work is being done exploring the role of stem cells in the treatment of osteolysis in prosthetic joint replacement. We also had a chance to hear about the DSTC courses and programs in Catastrophe Management that is being spearheaded by one of the local orthopaedic residents (Figure 13).

Next day we visited Essen where we met Chief of Orthopaedics, Professor Marcus Jäger (ASG Fellow 2011) and his team. Essen is again another hospital where trauma & Orthopaedics are in the process of merging. Professor Jäger had his hands full as he had recently also taken over as Chief of Trauma which meant the two departments were under the same head as an interim measure to see if this could function well. The two departments are located at different hospitals which are approximately 30 minutes drive from each other and it reminded me of the joys of working at split sites in the UK! We spent some time in the Theatres watching knee arthroplasty and then had a tour of the hospital. We were then taken to the other hospital campus where we had the scientific meeting. The ASG Fellows had by now come to memorise each other's talks!! There were also talks by local surgeons on the role of apoptotic agents in osteolysis in joint replacements and coagulopathy in major trauma patients. We then headed to see the house of Alfred Krupp, the founder of the Krupp steel empire. After this we went to a most extraordinary location just outside Essen. This was an old coal mine across a huge area where all the old industrial structures are being preserved and an entertainment zone is being built around these structures. We had dinner at a restaurant in an old coal miner's hallway and then went for desserts at another gourmet restaurant within the coal mine complex. This culinary environment was certainly novel for me (Figure 14)!

We headed to Aachen next morning where we were greeted by Professor Tingart (ASG Fellow 2007) and the hospital manager. This was one of the most unique buildings I had ever seen in my life and I could understand why some of our previous hosts had mentioned that we'd find the Aachen hospital building interesting! (Figure 15) The hospital had every department under a single roof including animal research laboratories. We were given a full tour of the hospital including a tour of the remarkable roof-top. Professor Tingart then accompanied us on a guided tour of the city

where we picked up on some fascinating bits of history and stopped by Charlemagne's residence and tasted the famous Printen biscuits of Aachen.

After Rhineland we reached our final pit stop at Baden-Baden and attended the ASG dinner hosted by the head of ASG club this year, Prof Anke Eckardt. The South German Orthopaedic Congress started the next day with the traditional ASG session where we gave our final talks along with a keynote lecture by the renowned Reinhard Graf (Figure 16). The session ended with the traditional asparagus lunch, somewhat spoiled by my inability to eat beef, which thus had to be

replaced by a chicken club sandwich attracting some disapproving looks from the traditionalists! During the course of the lunch, the three of us were formally admitted as ASG Fellows and the reciprocating fellows for next year's trip to US, UK and Canada were also announced (Figure 17).

A lot of our previous hosts had come down for the Congress which gave us a chance to say our final goodbyes. We had our final dinner at the sprawling lawns of the famed Kurhaus casino of Baden-Baden that evening. We bid adieu to all our hosts and to each other and I flew back to London the following morning from Frankfur.



Figure 12. With Prof. Eysel in Köln.



Figure 15. On the helipad of the Aachen hospital with Prof. Tingart.



Figure 13. In front of the hospital in Bonn.



Figure 16. With Prof Reinhard Graf at the Baden-Baden Congress.



Figure 14. With Prof. Marcus Jäger at Essen.



Figure 17. Austria Swiss German Fellows 2012, with Prof. Anke Eckardt.

We visited a total of 16 hospitals in 3 countries within a span of 29 days. The tour was reasonably hectic and like all such tours was not about improving operative skills but rather getting ideas and establishing contacts. It was an opportunity to experience how orthopaedics is run in a different environment with different set-up of resources, surgeons and patients and how junior orthopaedic surgeons are taught and trained differently. The separation of trauma and elective orthopaedics was quite a new experience for me and although some places in Germany were starting to embrace

the idea of a unified orthopaedics system, this was definitely more of an exception rather than norm. The hierarchical system within the departments was also very different to the UK and US systems.

I was overwhelmed with the hospitality that I received at every venue and was struck by the camaraderie enjoyed by the ASG community. Trips to the various hospitals, exchange of orthopaedic ideas, days of drinking the finest beer and wine, sight-seeing, shopping and most of all making wonderful friends and connections are the memories that I hope to be

able to keep hold of, for the years to come. I wish to once again extend my heartfelt thanks to the British Orthopaedic Association for giving me this opportunity, to the organisers for planning such a wonderful trip and above all to each and every person that we met who went out of their way to make us feel comfortable and ensured we had a great months' experience. I feel privileged to have been chosen as a part of the ASG family and hope to be able to continue with all the new friendships and contacts that I made through this tour.

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