

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

Volume XXVIII, Number 10 *A parish in the classical Anglican tradition* March 21st, 2017

FROM THE RECTOR

A place where marriages start with a torture evening

Charlotte's recent trips down memory lane have taken her back to our home in the Taunus Mountains not far from Frankfurt am Main, Europe's financial capital and, during the Cold War, location of the U.S. Air Force's vast Rhine-Main Air Base, the gateway to Germany for American service personnel.

Adding the suffix "*am Main*" to Frankfurt might sound a bit pedantic, but actually there are two towns named Frankfurt in Germany, both situated on rivers. The other is Frankfurt *an der Oder* in what in those days was East Germany. The River Oder lies on Germany's border with Poland.

One of the reasons we chose to live in the small village of Ruppertshain was that we wanted to get to know what life was like for ordinary Germans. Did they really conform to a popular and much less than flattering stereotype – humorless conformists, interested only in working hard and saving money?

This ruled out house hunting in the fashionable mountain towns and villages, popular with the wealthy expatriates who worked in Frankfurt, where English was the unofficial *lingua franca*. Instead we looked for a village where expatriates were a rarity and where we would have to speak German.

As it turned out we were pretty well the only native English speakers living in Ruppertshain and few of the villagers spoke English. But, then, not many of them spoke *Hoch Deutsch* (standard German) either. Rather they spoke a curious – and not entirely attractive – dialect affectionately known as *Ruppsherplatt*. This complicated matters because there were substantial differences between *Ruppsherplatt* and standard German, thus mastery of the dialect was essential for daily activities such as grocery shopping and the like.

Charlotte rapidly became fluent in *Ruppsherplatt*. She started learning from Day One when a welcoming committee of local ladies arrived on the doorstep to introduce themselves to their new neighbors. They were fascinated by everything about Anglo-American life, from the food we ate to the color of our window drapes – so different from the locals' lace curtains.

I was nowhere near as fluent in *Ruppsherplatt* as Charlotte, but then, while Charlotte spent most of her time in the village, I spent most of my working week in Frankfurt or one of West Germany's other major cities. Even so, once my ear had become attuned to it, I didn't have too much trouble making myself understood.

That said Charlotte's brand of German was greatly admired in the village while my fluent *Hoch Deutsch* was a source of constant amusement. The local comedians nicknamed me "*Herr Von und Zu*" – a satirical reference to my supposed aristocratic pretensions.

The village baker was blunt, but more sympathetic. When I arrived to buy our breakfast bread rolls, he would sigh and say in his thick *Ruppsherplatt*: "Ach, Herr Hufftin, it's such a pity your German is so comical when your wife speaks it so beautifully."

I can't help thinking my German teacher – an elegant, linguistically fastidious Viennese lady – would have shuddered at this kindly meant observation. She had worked long and hard to equip me with an accent that would enable me to enjoy coffee and cake without embarrassment in polite society.

Interestingly, the use of *Ruppsherplatt* seemed largely confined to Ruppertshain itself. To our surprise, it was apparently relatively incomprehensible even to folks from Kelkheim, the county seat only a couple of kilometers down the mountainside.

That, at least, was the claim of Martin, our neighbor, and his wife, Brigitta, Martin was born and bred in Kelkheim, while Brigitta came from Ruppertshain. According to Martin, when the couple first met, he found it so difficult to understand Brigitta's dialect they carried out their courtship *Hoch Deutsch*.

We soon discovered that *Ruppsherplatt* was by no means the only thing that made Ruppertshain unique. Their marriage customs were also decidedly unusual, at least by American standards.

When a couple announced their engagement, their friends organized what was known as a *Polterabend*. Dictionaries translate it as "Bridal Shower" or "Eve of Wedding Party." In Ruppertshain, at least, such translations would not come anywhere meeting "truth in advertising" standards. Literally translated, *Polterabend* means "Torture Evening"

– a name that aptly describes Ruppertshain's version of engagement celebrations. Friends of the couple collect vast quantities of junk – old tires, broken vacuum cleaners, worn out car parts, assorted household detritus. On the day the engagement is formally announced, they cart it along to the bridegroom's home and pile it in the yard. Then the party starts in earnest.

"The idea," Martin explained, "is that clearing up the mess is the first job the couple will do together. It's a practical way of enabling them to find out how they well they work together. I guess it gives them a chance to get out of the arrangement if one of them turns out to be a shirker."

The *Polterabend* was by no means the only unusual aspect of Ruppertshain's marriage traditions. After the engagement, it was customary for the bride-to-be to move into her fiancé's parents' home where they would, to put it delicately, live as man and wife until she became pregnant – upon which they would marry.

The reason for this was the laws of inheritance in force in the region. Like many of the small villages in the Taunus, Ruppertshain was a farming community, and land was passed on in families strictly on the basis of *primogeniture* – the inheritance rights of the first born. If there was no direct heir in a family the land was shared out among members of the extended families. A consequence of this was that landholdings tended to become small, scattered and economically unviable.

Holy Week Schedule

9 April through 16 April

Palm Sunday

8 am: Said Eucharist

9.15 am: Choral Eucharist

11 am: Choral Eucharist

Holy Monday

6 pm: Said Eucharist

Holy Tuesday

6 pm: Said Eucharist

Spy Wednesday

6 pm: Said Eucharist

Maundy Thursday

7pm: Choral Eucharist & Stripping of the Altar

Good Friday

12 noon: The Seven Last Words from the Cross

3.30 pm: Children's Way of the Cross

6 pm: Communion of the Presanctified

Holy Saturday

7pm: The Great Vigil of Easter

Easter Day

8 am: Said Eucharist

9.15 am: Choral Eucharist

followed by Easter Egg Hunt (for children 9 and under)

11 am: Choral Eucharist

These marriage customs were a practical way of ensuring there would be an heir to inherit the farm or business.

The German Roman Catholic Church at the time was chronically short of vocations, and bishops tried to solve the problem by recruiting clergymen from abroad. And Ruppertshain, a predominantly Roman Catholic village, was served by a newly arrived priest from India who spoke little German and less English.

Ignorant of the culture, he was outraged by the procession of brides, "great with child" and incongruously swathed in white. In short order, he refused church marriages to all couples expecting babies.

The village was scandalized, but the language barrier precluded negotiations. In the end, a couple of village elders came to see me. "You speak languages," they said, "Explain to him that if Princess Luise couldn't stamp out the practice, how can a parish priest hope to do so?"

Communicating with him was not easy. His Latin wasn't much better than his German. I dropped the Princess Luise argument: she died in 1816. Instead I told him that if he didn't marry them, the protestant minister in Fischbach would, and this would be unlikely to please his bishop.

It was amazing how swiftly he got the point. As Dr. Samuel Johnson explained: "Depend upon it, gentlemen. The prospect of hanging in a fortnight wonderfully concentrates the mind." GPH*

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Timothy, Peter, June, Hilarie, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert*, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Courtney, Marie, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Adrian, Michell, Aida & Mai

IN MEMORIAM: David Dunston. **FOR THOSE WHO MOURN:** The Dunston family and Elizabeth Read

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Beth

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093
Office: 410 560 6776 · **Rectory:** 410 665 1278
Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Rev. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*
 The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*
 The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki and
 The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*
 The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*
 Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist
 9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)
 (3rd Sunday Choral Eucharist)
 11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)
 6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –
evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer
 Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist
 Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club
Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)
Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle
Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Lenten Study

Wednesday March 22nd & 29th 6.30 pm

Parish Youth Play Group

Saturday April 1st, 2.00 pm - 4.00 pm

Ladies Who Lunch

(Venue to be announced)

Wednesday April 19th 12.00 pm - 2.00 pm

Easter Flowers For St Stephen's Altar

Here is a selection of beautiful spring flowers to decorate the church for Easter. Please make your choice and return this form to the church office with your check by Wednesday April 12th. Flowers may be taken home after the 11.0 am service

Your Name: _____

Lilies Small elite 6" 4-6 blooms @ \$10 (# of plants.....) Field Azalea @ \$15 (# of plants.....)

Hydrangeas Four plus blooms @ \$20 (# of plants.....) Hiacynth @ \$10 (6" pot) (# of plants.....)

Tulips @ \$10 (6" pot) (# of plants.....)

Total # of plants _____ Total amount enclosed _____

My gift is IN HONOR, IN MEMORY OF, IN THANKSGIVING FOR (please circle)

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church
 11856 Mays Chapel Road
 Timonium, MD 21093

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