

Case Study 1 - Vienna comes to Southampton

This is the one that started it all. If it had not been for Gerda Cohen's enthusiasm about a Christmas party for her Year 9 second-language German class, the whole idea would not have been born. The children wanted an end of term celebration.

"Mmm," said Gerda. "We ought to have German or Austrian cakes and goodies."

"And Apfelsaft," said one of the children - they had touched on food and drink in Deutsch Heute 1.

"Well, I'll certainly need to have some 'Kaffee' - perhaps a nice 'Mélange'", said Gerda, and soon the pupils were wide-eyed as they listened to stories of the Viennese coffee houses, the many types of coffee and the hours one could spend there, after "renting" a table - Viennese coffee houses are not cheap - chatting to people with similar interests.

That was the "Kaffee". Now came the "Kuchen"

"We'll have to have 'Apfelstrudel'", said Gerda, "and 'Kipferln'."

"You must have some 'Stollen'", said another colleague, a teacher of English, who happened to be German, and she donated the one that had been sent to her from Germany. A large improvement on Tesco's own, which wasn't available then, anyway.

Word spread. One or two of the pupils had German relations. One volunteered a Sachertorte, another a Christmas tree, decorated in German fashion.

"Do you have a tape of German Christmas carols?" asked Gerda. I did indeed.

"The tape's good," said Gerda. "But some live music would be even better. I think I'll just go and have a word"

The school orchestra were persuaded to play some Viennese waltzes. And Gerda had several other words, with several other people. The Head of Resources produced an OHT of the Riesenrad from the Prater. We projected this on to the far wall of our lecture room. The Head of Food Technology organised lunch time sessions demonstrating how to make Kipferln and Apfelstrudel, and oversaw the carting arrangements on the day. A German Mum came in and showed her version of Strudel making. Gerda too had a version - a cheating one, using ready made pastry, but it was delicious.

The young music teacher complained.

"All this sugar is bad for you," he said.

"Alright, you can have cabbage Strudel," said Gerda. And she made him one which he adored. Just as well. We wanted the orchestra to do their best.

I am convinced this is how they fed the five thousand. The effort of a few in donating food inspired others to do the same. Soon, we were overwhelmed with offers of cakes.

The children were a little overwhelmed too. Their party was being taken over. They were in danger of being swept aside. But Gerda's enthusiasm fired them, too.

"We could dress up as waiters," said one boy.

"We ought to charge people to have the cakes, and then we could raise money for charity," said one of the girls.

And so we did. Every child in that Year 9 group was involved one way or another. Some volunteered to wash up and help clear up afterwards. Some brought cakes from home. Some made the drinks. And some waited on the tables and served the cakes. Two set themselves up as cashiers at the exit to the hall. No adult was allowed to leave without giving a substantial donation to our cancer research charity.