

## Research Visit to Frauenau, Germany, 16 & 17 February 2015

Frauenau is situated in the 'glass corridor', an area steeped in glassmaking history that runs from Eastern Bavaria to the region of the Czech Republic formerly known as Bohemia. Unlike the glassmakers of Britain, who were forced by King James I & VI to switch their fuel source from wood to coal resulting in widespread migration and settlement in areas such as Stourbridge, the Bavarian glassmakers were able to remain in the plentiful forests and continue their tradition of making green waldglas (forest glass) for centuries. Despite its rural location and small population, Frauenau was home to several large glass factories and, as the birthplace and home of Erwin Eisch, one of the founding fathers of the studio glass movement, its role in the history of glass should not be overlooked or underestimated. So it should come as no surprise that the town is also home to a fabulous glass museum.



Image 1: View of museum and glass garden



Image 2: View of cafe and art installation

The museum was founded 40 years ago, in 1975, in the remains of an old sawmill by a group of enthusiastic visionaries, comprising Alfons Hannes, who held the position of Mayor of Frauenau for thirty years, Helmut Schneck and artists Erwin and Gretel Eisch. Ten years ago the museum underwent an enormous renovation and extension project that resulted in more than ten times the original display space, a large reception area, a cafe, lecture hall, museum store and temporary exhibition space. The result is impressive and interesting, yet understated.



Image 3: View of museum reception area looking towards cafe



Image 4: Stained glass windows in lecture hall showing important buildings of Frauenau by Gretel Eisch

The museum tells the worldwide story of glass, from ancient origins to contemporary artform. The displays are split into chronological 'chapters' with each phase of development marked by a change in style of presentation, colour-scheme, motifs and physical features such as glass thresholds with 'archaeological' remains of the period.



Image 5: Archaeological display of Ancient glass



Image 6: Opulent display of glass from Biedermeier period



Image 7: Modern display of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century glass



The ground floor displays culminate in a circular area focusing on the processes and equipment found in the typical 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century factory. The museum owns an exceptional studio glass collection which is beautifully displayed across two floors. Outside, in the gardens and along the pathways leading to the museum, there are glass sculptures, some of which invite the viewer to interact with them. Next door is a contemporary glass gallery and shop, run by Erwin and Gretel Eisch, and within the town there are other glass shops and studios.



Image 8: Recreation of a glassmaking factory or workshop



Image 9: Studio glass on display



Image 10: Glass boat sculpture in the Glass Garden



Image 11: Mirror maze sculpture in the Glass Garden



Image 12: Eisch Gallery temporary exhibition gallery

Our hosts – Karin Rhül (director), Sven Bauer (curator) and Iveta (administrator) – were extremely generous with their time and a large part of our visit was spent in discussions over funding, staffing and sustainability as well as facilities, exhibition design and partnership building. We are sincerely grateful for the warmth of their welcome and their willingness to share their experiences with us.

### What did we learn?

- Know your story – never lose sight of the story you are telling (this was Karin's top tip)
- Show off your assets, play to your strengths, don't try to 'manufacture' them
- Incorporate the building into the displays – floors, walls, ceilings, windows and outdoor spaces can all play an active part in the visitor experience
- Incorporate artworks/commissions into the building and museum displays
- Explore all avenues for funding, don't be put off by potential 'strings attached'
- People are the most important asset – no matter how good your displays and text panels are, they can't be beaten by a warm welcome from a real person!

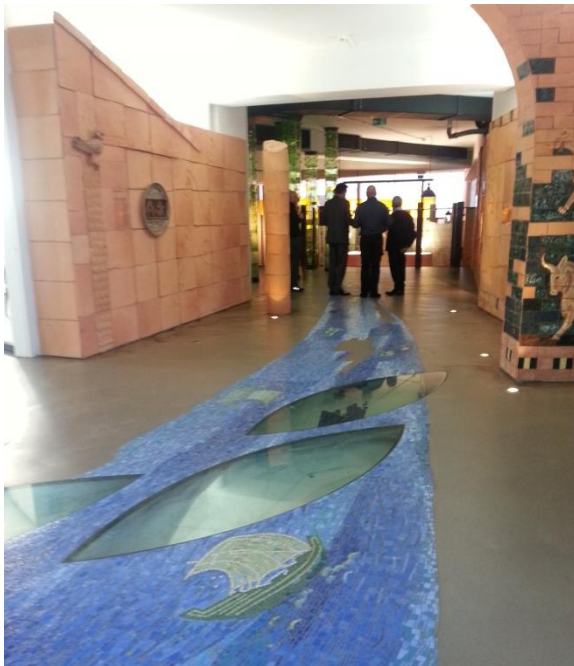


Image 13: Entrance to museum galleries featuring mosaic installation and archaeological displays

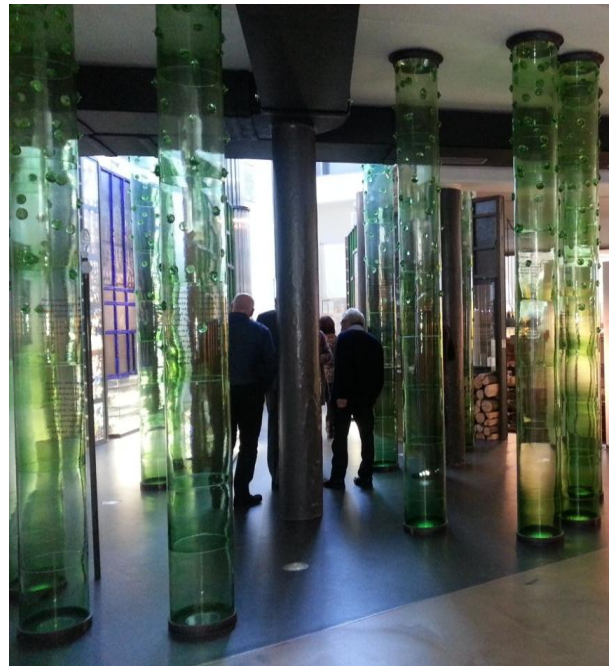


Image 14: 'Waldglass' columns inspired by the traditional glasses made in this area

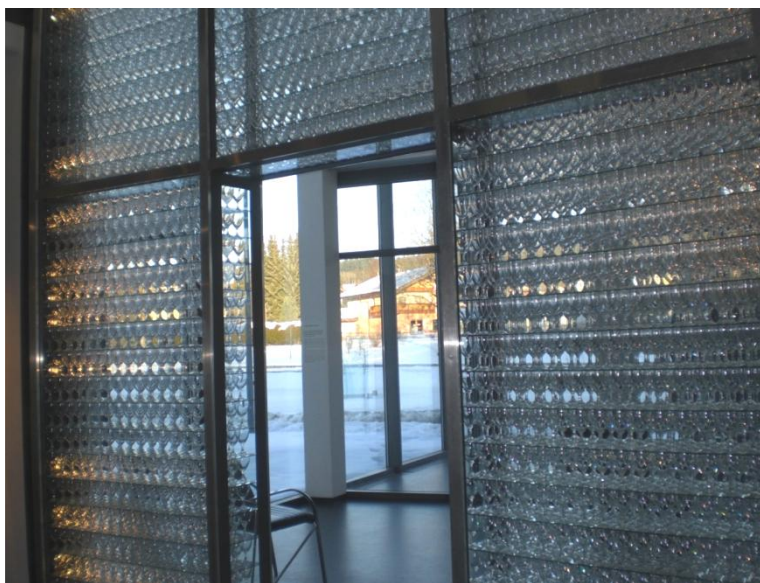


Image 15: Installation wall of wine glasses

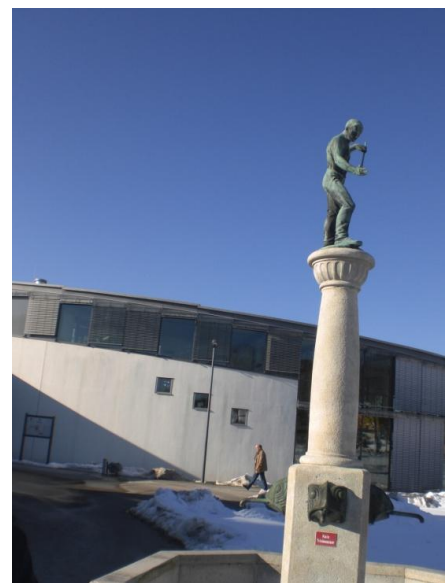


Image 16: Glassblower fountain



**Thanks to** Karin and her staff for their hospitality, Brian for suggesting the visit and establishing contacts, Graham and Lynn and the BGF for organising and funding the visit, Ian and Larry for sharing their enthusiasm and professional perspectives, and to Dudley MBC for allowing me to take part in the visit. It was definitely time well spent!

**Kari Moodie**  
Keeper of Glass & Fine Art  
Dudley Museums Service



Image 17 left to right: Graham Knowles (Chairman of the BGF), Karin Ruhl (Director of Frauenau Glasmuseum), Lynn Boleyn (Secretary of the BGF), Brian Clarke (Chairman of the Glass Association), Ian Harrabin (Director of Complex Developments), Kari Moodie (Keeper of Glass & Fine Art, Dudley MBC) and Larry Priest (Architect for BPN Architects)