

## Short Information in English

### The Schaffermahlzeit in Bremen, Germany

Every year on the second Friday of February in the upper banqueting hall in Bremen's town hall, the Schaffermahlzeit<sup>1</sup> takes place. It has been a traditional fraternity dinner for ships' captains, ship owners, and merchants since 1545.

Originally the feast, organised by the merchants and shipowners, served as a farewell dinner for the captains sailing in springtime. It was an opportunity to discuss all topics concerning shipping, politics, trade, and industry<sup>2</sup>. Over the years the Schaffermahlzeit developed into a social event where ship's captains, merchants, and their guests and out-of-town business partners were invited. However, it does serve as the focal point for a charity that supports retired and poor seamen and their widows. It is indeed a very traditional event and very few changes have ever taken place.

The Schaffermahlzeit has about 300 participants; there are 100 commercial members who did their duty as 'Schaffer' before (explained below), 100 nautical members, and about 100 external guests. An external guest, however, can only participate once in his lifetime. Each year, one guest of honour is invited - usually a public figure who is supposed to make a speech on Germany and Bremen. Guests of Honour have included the German Federal President (in fact every Federal President since the German Federal Republic was founded), the German Chancellor, the German Foreign Minister, Minister Presidents of neighbouring Federal states in Germany, as well as a couple of foreign politicians.

There is one exception to the 'once in a lifetime' rule: Bremen's Mayor, in his function as a host of Bremen's town hall, is invited every year, even though he is just a guest and not a member of the Haus Seefahrt. Apart from that, only one guest has participated twice, namely the first German President Theodor Heuss. He was accidentally invited by Bremen's Mayor Kaisen, who didn't recall that Heuss had already been Guest of Honour. Both Heuss and Kaisen would be embarrassed if Heuss's invitation were withdrawn, so this was solved diplomatically not by inviting Theodor Heuss personally, but by inviting the second German President, as it was Heuss's second term in office.

The meal is organised by three elected 'Schaffer', who not only have to organise the event, but also have to pay for the meal all by themselves. So, while it is considered a great honour to be elected as a Schaffer, the Gentlemen being elected usually have to provide the financial background to fulfill this job. After having done this they have to be invited for their lifetime combined with the right to propose one external guest every year.

### The Order of Courses

Being a traditional meal, it is not surprising that the courses are also highly regulated. The whole meal is derived from a simple sailor's diet.

#### Courses in Order

1. Chicken Soup
2. Dried cod with mustard sauce and potatoes
3. The main course (meat course) is brown cabbage with a local speciality 'Pinkel', salted and smoked pork, sweet chestnut and fried potatoes<sup>3</sup>
4. Seefahrtsbier ('sea-fare beer'), a dark beer brewed especially for this occasion by the local brewery Beck & Co.
5. Roast veal with celery salad, prunes and steamed apples
6. Riga flounder, anchovies, German sausage, ox's tongue, a collection of cheese and some fruits, just in case someone's still hungry

After the meal, coffee is served and clay pipes are smoked; these are manufactured especially for this event. Every hundred years there is a second fish course served after the dried cod; the last time this happened was 1996.

### Etiquette

- All participants are supposed to wear a tailcoat, except for captains who attend in uniform.
- If you are ever invited to the Schaffermahlzeit as a guest, rent or buy a tailcoat rather early, as they are always sold out in Bremen by mid-January.
- Wearing decorations is not technically forbidden, but is frowned upon. This stems from the Hanseatic custom not to accept any decoration whatsoever. A Bremen resident doesn't show off, understatement is everything.

• While the Schaffermahlzeit is a very festive event, it is deliberately different from eating out in a fancy restaurant. Every guest only gets one set of cutlery, one is supposed to wipe it clean with a piece of paper laid out and to use it again for every course. Moreover, salt and pepper are put on the table (in small silver and gold paper bags, reminding people that salt and pepper were very expensive in the past) and it is no faux pas to actually use them.

• The whole meal lasts about five hours; during its course 12 speeches are to be held by the three Schaffer, the &ldquo;Verwaltende Vorsteher&rdquo; (administrating superior) and two captains, and the Guest of Honour.

#### No Women Allowed?

A rather common opinion regarding female participants is that only men are permitted, and that this has proved its worth for more than 400 years, so why change it?

However, this tradition has already been discontinued in 2004, in the Hanseatic custom of not making a big fuss of it. On 13 February, 2004 Captain Barbara Massing attended the Schaffermahlzeit as a regular nautical member (which she is since 1996) of the Haus Seefahrt. Captain Massing is indeed a commissioned Captain on fourth-generation container ships - read: the really big ones. As matters stand, it is her turn to be a nautical schaffer in 2015.

Three years later, this time with considerably more public attention, the first female guest attended the 463th Schaffermahlzeit on 9 February, 2007: Germany's Chancellor Mrs Angela Merkel, who even was invited as Guest of Honour and in this function she held the last speech of the meal. The common opinion among the members of the Haus Seefahrt seems to be that it would be a faux-pas not to invite someone exercising such an important office just because of her gender<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Schaffer is the old German word for the person on board a ship responsible for organising and preparing the meal (Mahlzeit).

2 Bremen is one of the cities of the Hanse (Hanseatic League). Since medieval times, trade and merchandise has been (and still is now) extremely important for Bremen's economy.

3 Kohl und Pinkel for northern Germans.

4 Sometimes it's just as simple as that.