

## FROschTOsch team meets 2 Germans born in Gostynin

*by G. Fiedler (BvA)*

On March 23, 2010 the FROschTOsch project meeting had the privilege to welcome two very special guests, Ms Erna Funk and Dr. Stephan Lipski. They were both born into the German minority in Gostynin before World War II and told the FROschTOsch team about how Germans came to live in Poland 200 years ago, what life was like as a German among Polish neighbours and what they experienced under Nazi German occupation.



*A lesson in oral history: Polish, British and German students interviewed Ms E. Funk (Langenfeld) and Dr. Lipski (Hilden)*

In the mid 1700s a group of German Protestants found religious freedom after settling in Gostynin, Poland. They also kept their culture and language although they became Polish citizens. Dr. Lipski told his audience that he only learned Polish from an older Polish girl who helped in the family. He went to the very school in Gostynin that participates in the FROschTOsch project. Lately, he sat in his former classroom when visiting the school .

When German soldiers occupied the town the Lipski Family – like other members of the German community – was confronted with Nazi ideology. Their “Back into the Reich”-concept led to the request to sign the German “Volkliste”, change Polish names into German equivalents and to adopt German nationality. If Gostynin Germans did not conform with those requests the consequences were harsh. Dr. Lipski lost an uncle and cousins because they refused to comply. They were taken to the concentration camp in Auschwitz and killed there. In 1945 Dr. Lipski and his family had to leave Gostynin and together with many other Germans came to Langenfeld and Hilden. Since 1965 meetings of the former German community from Gostynin are held in Langenfeld and in 1999 Langenfeld and Gostynin became twin towns.

The young listeners as well as their teachers were moved by the reports from the past. With all the history lessons about World War II and Nazi Germany, this encounter with witnesses was of a completely different nature. Not only that the British and Polish students had never heard of Germans also suffering under the Nazi regime, to hear authentic witnesses of the past made the difference.

Asked, how young Germans born after the war should live with the reputation irreversibly linked to their nation, Ms Funk and Dr. Lipski answered that working on links between the countries and setting a positive example of friendship is the only way to show that Germans have learned from the past. Both of them are dedicating an enormous amount of their time to build bridges between German and Polish people. Their commitment is a role model for the FROschTOsch team to follow.