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A Famous Student of the London SMS College

by Mariann Meier

In case some readers are not aware of this well-established language college in the heart of London, they may like to hear a little bit about it.

The Swiss Mercantile Society was founded in London in September 1888. It became a section of the "Schweizerische Kaufmaennische Verein" (now "Verband"), at that time 15 years old.

English was soon declared the official language and evening classes were started. An employment agency was added and the Swiss Government promised a subsidy to cover part of teachers' salaries. As classes prospered, social life flourished too and already in December 1887, the first annual banquet was held.

Whilst activities of the Society's educational sector were dormant during the war, the social side continued. Twice the SMS entertained wounded soldiers as a gesture of friendship and appreciation. From 1917 onward, evening classes were resumed in six different places.

When the Aliens Act of 1920 put a stop to free immigration, and young Swiss were no longer able to work without permit, day-time courses became necessary. A suite of six rooms was rented in Henriette Street off the Strand, and in January 1923, the College started its successful life. By the summer, 50 students were enrolled, and evening classes, too, have been a regular feature ever since.

Premises became inadequate. The Society was able to buy the remainder of the lease of Swiss House in Fitzroy Square, W1,

two houses which had been a hostel for Swiss girls for many years. At last, Society and College were housed under the same roof.

At the outbreak of World War II tuition ceased and the 200 students left. The College served as mobilisation centre for Swiss called up for military service at home.

Swiss House was badly bombed twice. When hostilities ceased, the College resumed its educational activities. It went from strength to strength, with an annual intake of 500-700 students. The freehold was acquired, and later the premises were brought up to date and refurbished, modern facilities like a language laboratory were added.

Thanks to a subsidy by the federal authorities (BIGA), the College is able to engage first-class teaching staff and thousands of students, male and female, have been enjoying excellent tuition. The standard of instruction is high and the College Diploma ensures respect by the business world at home.

Last year the College applied to the British Council for recognition. This was granted after an inspection in depth of every aspect of tuition, college life, welfare, social activities, even visiting families recommended to students by the College. In a seven-page report, the inspectors considered the SMS College "an interesting and unusual establishment" with excellent teaching and administrative staff and very satisfactory tuition

standards, "a highly efficient school". This recognition has allowed the College to become a member of the Association of Recognised English Language Schools. After this introduction, we come to the

famous student

He is none other than the Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi. Whilst our compatriots at home are familiar with faces and voices of members of the Government, we Swiss abroad are not as well acquainted with our Federal Councillors. On Saturday, 29th June, Bundesrat Ogi will be the main speaker at the big Swiss Fair at Battersea Park, and this will afford an opportunity of meeting a member of our Government in the flesh.

As a former student of the SMS College, Mr Ogi will also attend an evening party organised by the Swiss Mercantile Society and the College on the eve of the Fair. The SMS is arranging a special programme for students to come over to London for that weekend in June — a splendid chance to walk down memory lane, and also to see the refurbished College on Saturday morning when there will be "Open House" prior to coach transport to Battersea Park.

A number of former students are resident in the UK and they too will be warmly welcomed at Friday's gathering. The "Festival of Switzerland 1991" will offer many unique events — to meet one of our Federal Councillors is just one of them.

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(Dr Duttweiler)
Dunfermline Tel: 0383-723540 (Mrs U. Ditchburn)
Edinburgh Tel: 031-334 2430 (Mrs U. Ross)
Guernsey Tel: 0481-48188 (Mrs Ferbrache-Amman)
Liverpool Tel: 051-427 1816 (Mrs M. Moor)
Manchester Tel: 061-483 7727 (J. Illi)
Midlands Tel: 021-631 4050 (Erich Westacott)
N. Ireland Tel: 0232-648239 (Hans Egli)
Swiss Rifle Assoc. Write to: Urs Schaerer, 143 Greenvale Road, Eltham Park, London SE9 1PG
Southern Tel: 0252-615149 (Marcel Gret)
South West Write to: Mrs Guppy, 101 Green Way, Bishops Lydeard, Taunton TA4 3DB
Surrey Tel: 081-647 9630 (Mrs Heidi Miller)
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Mothers Group Tel: 0992-46687 (Marlies Davies)

Swiss National Tourist Office Tel: 071-734 1921
Swiss Relief Society:
Liverpool Tel: 051-486 1168 (Mrs Stevens)
Manchester Write to: P. Senn, Cloud Park Farm, Dial Lane, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 3QJ
Swiss Welfare Office Tel: 071-387 3806 (Mrs M. Lyster) or 081-458 3859 (Mrs A. Ficker)
Swiss Youth Club Tel: 081-340 9740 (Monika Faes)
Union Ticinese Tel: 081-568 3916 (Mr Berti)

New Clubs?

Calling Chester . . .

Stefania Beech is a Swiss citizen who lives in Chester. She would like to arrange informal meetings with other Swiss people in the area with a view to organising a new Swiss Club Chester.

If you are interested in joining or helping to start such a club please contact Stefania at the following address:

Stefania Beech
4 Badgers Walk
Caughall Manor

Upton by Chester
(Telephone 0244-381425)

. . . and Cheltenham

Nicole Askell would like to hear from any Swiss-German speaking mothers who reside in the Cheltenham area of Gloucestershire with a view to arranging regular get-togethers.

Anyone who is interested is asked to contact Nicole Askell (Telephone 0242-820581).

Consular News

Hullo . . .

Mr Felix Naef has taken up his new appointment as Consul in the Consulate General of Switzerland in Manchester. He succeeds Mr Bruno Ritter, Consul, who has been transferred to Damascus. Born in 1943, Mr Naef is a former student of the Swiss Mercantile Society College in London. He entered the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 1970. After various posts in Rome, Paris, Johannesburg and Washington he was employed for eight years in Bern before moving to Manchester.



Mr Felix Naef

and Goodbye

Dear Friends,

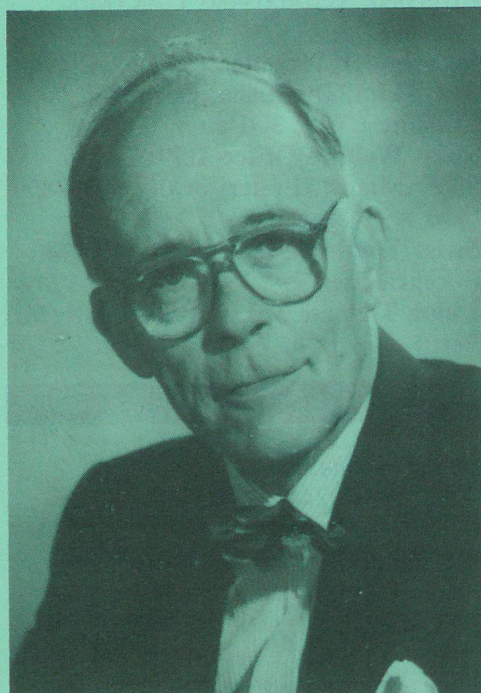
When you read these lines we shall probably already be on our way to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Our task there will not be easy but we are very much looking forward to making our small contribution to the efforts to resolve the immense problems of the Third World.

Leaving London is hard for everybody. For us, who had the pleasure of meeting so many compatriots on numerous occasions in nearly all of the counties of the consular district, it is even harder. Happy and wonderful memories will help us to make a new start under very different conditions.

Thank you, dear compatriots, for your hospitality, friendship and support. We are especially grateful to all the members of Swiss societies who do a lot of work for the benefit of the whole community, very often behind the scenes.

With our best wishes, and hoping to meet many of you again somewhere, some time . . .

Renate and Albert Mehr



Bernard Simon

Manchester Swiss club celebrated its 140th birthday last December. One hundred and ten members of the club and their friends attended an anniversary dinner dance at Manchester's Hilton International Hotel. Among the club's guests were Consul General and Madame Schlaefli and Jeffrey Long, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom. Bernard Simon has been investigating the club's history . . .

The Swiss Club Manchester was founded in 1850 although the first documents in its archives date only from 1872. In those early years there were actually three different Swiss organisations based in Manchester. There was the 'Schweizer Verein', which at an unknown date changed its name to the Swiss Club Manchester. There was also the 'Schweizerverein Alpenroesli' and the 'Union Helvetia'. Relations between the three clubs were difficult. Their club programmes were almost identical and they tried to poach each other's members. The 'Schweizer Verein' and the 'Alpenroesli' then merged, but the fate of

the 'Union Helvetia' is unknown.

Towards the end of the last century the Swiss Club Manchester met every Friday. The club had a gymnastic section and a male choir. The latter had weekly rehearsals, though in 1970 'Jassen' was prohibited at the rehearsals since those who played cards were too noisy and interfered with the singing!

The choir was a male choir since women were not allowed to become club members. At a meeting in 1905 somebody suggested inviting women to a special function but this was rejected after a vote. Subsequently the matter was raised again. It was agreed to organise special ladies-evenings at some later date. But it was 1930 before the ladies were allowed to attend the 1st August celebration!

In 1905 the vice-president of the club was of the opinion that the club did much for the enjoyment of its members but very little for science. The library, he felt, could do with some improvements. The club had a room in a local hotel for the sole use of members. This room was decorated with pictures. It contained bookcases and other furniture as well as the club's piano. The piano was sold in 1935 for £2!

According to the club's minutes members were particularly keen on good food and plenty of drink — though in 1927 the treasurer was in deep trouble after he had paid £2 for eighty glasses of lemonade. Nevertheless, other activities were also contemplated. In 1906 it was suggested that the club organise an outing by motorcoach. But the costs were prohibitive and there were severe doubts about the reliability of these vehicles.

The Swiss Club Manchester has always enjoyed close relations with the Consulate. In 1916 serious discussions took place within the club with regard to the establishment of a Swiss Consulate in Manchester. "We need an able consul capable of dealing with industrial and commercial problems," declared the president. "No chance! Liverpool is geographically more important," suggested another committee member. In April 1917, however, Mr A Guggenheim was nominated by the federal council as the first consul in Manchester.

Early in 1924, following the death of the then consul, it was suggested that the

Consulate might be transferred to Birmingham. The Swiss Club Manchester mounted fierce opposition and wrote to the federal authorities that it wanted to participate in all discussions on the matter, demanding that its voice be heard before any decisions were made. Later that year a new consul, based in Manchester, was appointed. Manchester had won and the Consulate remains in Manchester to this day.

The Swiss Club continued to flourish until the Second World War, when activities were seriously curtailed. It was probably at this time that the club decided to adopt English as its official language. In 1917 it had been decided that 'Schwyzerdeutsch' should remain the club's official language. Now it was felt prudent to prepare all minutes and other documents in English, in order to be above suspicion.

In the last forty-five years the club has extended its activities. For one thing it was officially accepted in 1956 that women should be admitted as full members. The women have always maintained that the reason for this change of heart was that club urgently needed more funds.

The 1960s and 1970s saw much greater activity by the club in the wider colony matters. The club involved itself in the activities of the NSH, the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in Bern.

Today the Swiss Club Manchester is facing the well-known problems of many other Swiss Societies. There has been a slow decline in the number of members. At the same time the existing membership is increasing in age. Swiss nationals who come to this country for relatively short periods are not necessarily attracted to Swiss societies. Those Swiss who come for longer periods and might be interested in joining a Swiss society are relatively rare.

The Manchester club wishes to undertake a recruitment drive among Swiss living in the area. The club presents a varied annual programme and hopes that this will stimulate an interest in the Swiss Community in and around Manchester.

For further information about Manchester Swiss Club please contact Bernard Simon (061-926-8153).



Jassplausch



There will be a Jass Tent at Battersea 1991 where, if you are lucky, you can play with or against Anton Mosiman and other well known members of the Swiss community. If you wish to have some training sessions before the big event, please contact Mr and Mrs Josef Tresch, 18 Eriswell Road, Burwood Park, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey (Tel. 0932 241043) or Mr Armin Loetscher, St. Moritz Restaurant, 161 Wardour Street, London W1V 3TA (Tel. 071-734 3324).

Who Plays the Alphorn?

(See Swiss Review 4/90, Green Pages). Anton Habermacher's correct phone number is 021 459 5535.

Swiss Church Bazaar

For well over two decades the Biennial Bazaar of the Swiss Church in London has attracted larger numbers of visitors than any other gathering in the community. Old and young, families and individuals meet at the Swiss Church in London's Endell Street, an opportunity for renewing old friendships and making new ones, of buying Christmas presents and Swiss food and drink and of enjoying Swiss specialities for lunch and tea. This year the Bazaar will be held on Saturday, 16th November.

For details, please watch out in the next issue of the 'Green Pages'. Just make a note in your diary for the time being.

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for young people
31 Conway Street,
London W1p 5HL
Telephone: 071-387
3608

Underground Stations:
Great Portland Street, Warren Street

Where There's A Will

None of us is immortal but few of us care to think about death. Dunfermline Swiss Club however recently did just that when it invited one of its members, Janine Pennel, a solicitor, to give a short talk on the subject of wills. Mrs Pennel stressed that it is important for everyone to make a will. Only with a valid will can you be certain as far as is possible that what you want goes to the people whom you choose. Mrs Pennel distributed information leaflets published by and available from The Law Society of Scotland and the Scottish Office. Before drawing up a will it is strongly recommended that you consult a solicitor. If you do not have a solicitor, look in Yellow Pages or enquire at your local Citizens' Advice Bureau or look up the Directory of General Services issued by the Law Society of Scotland, which you can find at public libraries in Scotland.

Readers should note that the law regarding succession in Scotland is different to that which applies in both the rest of the UK and Switzerland. It is hoped that a future issue of the Green Pages will carry an article on the law in Switzerland.

British-Swiss Research

The British Council and the Swiss National Science Foundation have joined forces to fund a new programme for joint research between the United Kingdom and Switzerland. The scheme is intended to promote the development of scientific and academic research collaboration between higher education institutions and academics in both countries.

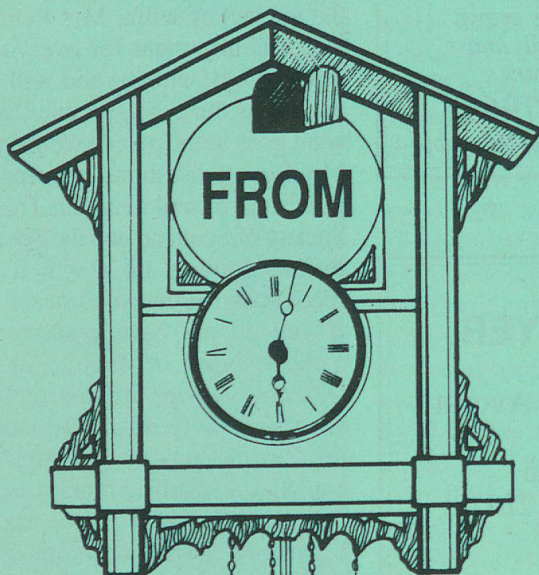
Further details are available from the Europe Unit, The British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN.

The Green Pages

The Editor of the Green Pages welcomes letters and comments from readers. Correspondence should be addressed to:
Dr David Ditchburn,
Department of History,
University of Aberdeen,
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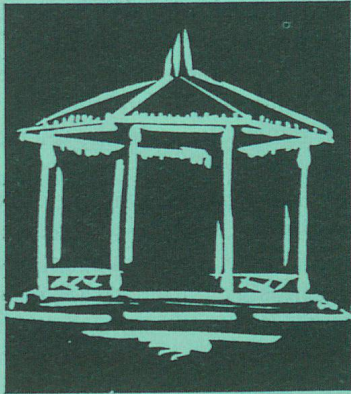
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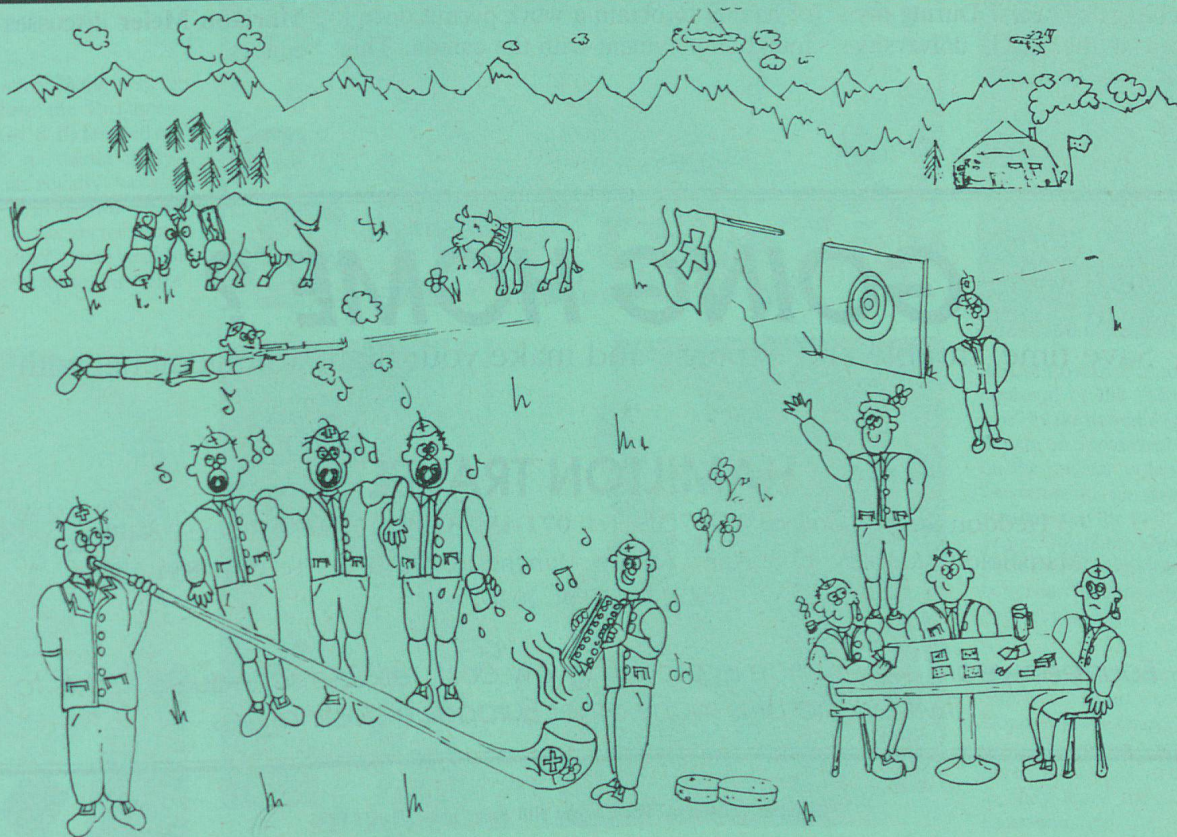
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Impression of a Swiss Fair

by Steven Schaerer (14)





Rose-tinted Spectacles: Four Years of HSG With the Benefit of Hindsight by Till Geiger

There is no doubt in my mind that Prince Charles would not approve of the modernistic concrete structure that has housed the Hochschule St. Gallen (HSG) since the 1960s; and there can be no doubt that most students of the Hochschule would share his view. The students of the Hochschule tend to feel as ambivalent about the curriculum of their courses as the daring architecture of the place during their time at St. Gallen.

While a student of economics at St Gallen, I shared both these sentiments, only to find that over the years my views have changed quite dramatically. A virulent critic of my professors as a student, I am now rather appreciative of their efforts to instil economic thought into my young and rather unresponsive brain. And despite the fact that I am a lover of romantic art at heart, I slowly, but surely, warmed to that mass of concrete which characterised my alma mater. Sometimes I wonder whether my fellow students have undergone a similar transformation, from hardened critical students to alumni with rose-tinted spectacles. With hindsight, my years at the HSG seem a rather worthwhile experience rather than the complete waste of time that I once thought they were.

You might well ask why this fundamental change of heart? During my first two years at the HSG, university

seemed a rather daunting experience. The curriculum expected a gruelling 40 hours of lectures, seminars and tutorials per week for rather unsuspecting first-years. Lectures in Swiss Law and Business Studies seemed hardly relevant for an aspiring economics student. Classes tended to be large and often over-crowded. Contact with my teachers seemed minimal. And I seemed to lose the inevitable struggle for library books. At the end of my second year I wanted to leave, but to my surprise I found the problems almost insurmountable. Despite its reputation as a place of outstanding education among businessmen in the German-speaking world, other universities were more than reluctant to accept HSG examination results. Since my unsuccessful attempts at escaping from the HSG, I have studied and worked at two universities in this country, and I must admit that my HSG education equipped me rather well for the pursuit of my interests. There, as well as here, I guess it really depends on what you make of the experience.

An even greater culture shock for me (a rather naive 20 year old German) was Switzerland and Swiss xenophobia. There was, of course, a constant need to reapply for residence permits and later the hassle of having to obtain a work permit once I found employment with the canton. This

is a rather surprising characteristic of a country which is among the richest in the world, with an economy which, to a large extent, relies on the hundreds of thousands of foreigners living in its midst. While I soon appreciated why the Swiss dislike many of my countrymen because of their rudeness, it was rather an eye opener that the very same people can be just as brash to their fellow Swiss in the Ticino and Grischun.

In the end what made the experience so worthwhile was that, as well as learning about economics, I was confronted with a totally different culture. It made me rather more appreciative of how difficult it is to understand a different country as an outsider — but also how easy it is to remain an outsider.

Next Issue

In the next issue of the Green Pages **Joe Brogini** examines the Executive of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and **Mariann Meier** discusses the subject of editors.

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