

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 74 (2008)
Heft: [1]

Artikel: Blaze guts historic guild house in Zurich
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943600>

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HELVE⁺IA

Magazine for Members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc

NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND

Blaze guts historic guild house in Zurich

One of Zurich's most historic guilds has been gutted by a fire. The 650-year-old building was extensively damaged and many of its historical artifacts destroyed. It is the latest in a line of important Swiss monuments to be hit by fire. The building's destruction has been compared with the burning of the Chapel Bridge in Lucerne (1993), Kreuzlingen Abbey (1963), the castle and church in Grüningen (1970) and the Bergkirche in Rheinau (2004). The Zimmerleuten (or carpenters') guild house was one of Zurich's most important historical landmarks.

The guilds played an integral part in the political and social history of Zurich when everyone with a trade had to be a member of one of the guilds.

The Zimmerleuten guild house building was first mentioned in the 14th century as the home of Zurich Mayor Ru-

dolf Schöno. In 1428 it was sold to the society of Coopers. In 1459 it was taken over by the carpenters' and bricklayers' guild to which it belongs to this day. Zurich has 26 guilds

representing a variety of trades and local communities.

One of the original 13 guilds, the Society of Constables, was formed by local knights and nobility but was forced to welcome undesirable trades such as executioners and beggars in the 15th century. A law in 1490 required every tradesperson to enter a guild in order to conduct their business. As Zurich was growing in size it welcomed new citizens, but by the 16th century the

city was so large it stopped the right to buy citizenship. The invasion of Napoleon's armies in 1798 saw the beginning of the end for the guilds' old powers with the Swiss constitution of 1848 driving in the final nail.

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