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Swiss Watching

Dead famous in Switzerland

by Diccon Bewes

When it comes to Switzerland, foreign celebrities are like elephants – they come here to die. Of course, the low rates of tax and high level of privacy might have something to do with it, but it is interesting how many stars are buried here. While their graves are strewn all across the country, they are particularly concentrated along the shores of Lake Geneva; in comparison, German-speaking Switzerland is relatively free of dead celebrities. Don't ask me why. It seemingly has little to do with language as few were native French speakers. In fact many were British-born. Perhaps it's just a low-tax variation of the British love-affair with France.

The list below is my pick of some the most famous foreigners buried in Switzerland. What's interesting is that most worked in the arts, and ten were authors, from literary heavyweights James Joyce (pictured) and Thomas Mann to pulp-fiction masters Alistair MacLean and James Hadley Chase. Although all were born abroad, some were Swiss by the time they died, eg Peter Ustinov and Hermann Hesse.

And while all of them will now remain Swiss, there is one corner of Switzerland that is forever England: in tiny Corsier-sur-Vevey cemetery, three great Britons are buried, with Charlie Chaplin laid to rest next-door to James Mason and over the way from Graham Greene. So if you are into a bit of cemetery tourism (don't laugh, it's astonishingly popular), Corsier is a good place to start, before

setting off in search of famous graves in the rest of Switzerland.

Canton Geneva

Richard Burton, British actor: (d 1984) Celigny
Alistair MacLean, British author: (d 1987) Celigny
Jorge Luis Borges, Argentinian author: (d 1986) Plainpalais Cemetery Geneva
Jean Calvin, French reformer: (d 1564) Plainpalais Cemetery Geneva
Sir Humphrey Davy, British scientist: (d 1829) Plainpalais Cemetery Geneva

Canton Vaud

David Niven, British actor: (d 1983) Chateau d'Oex
Vladimir Nabokov, Russian author: (d 1977) Clarens
Charlie Chaplin, British actor: (d 1977) Corsier-sur-Vevey
Graham Greene, British author: (d 1991) Corsier-sur-Vevey
James Mason, British actor: (d 1984) Corsier-sur-Vevey
Coco Chanel, French designer: (d 1971) Bois-de-Vaux Cemetery Lausanne
Pierre de Coubertin, French Olympic founder: (d 1937) Bois-de-Vaux Cemetery Lausanne
Peter Ustinov, British actor: (d 2004) Nyon
Henri Nestlé, German industrialist: (d 1890) Territet
Audrey Hepburn, Belgian actress: (d 1993) Tolochenaz
James Hadley Chase, British author: (d 1985) Vevey

Ticino

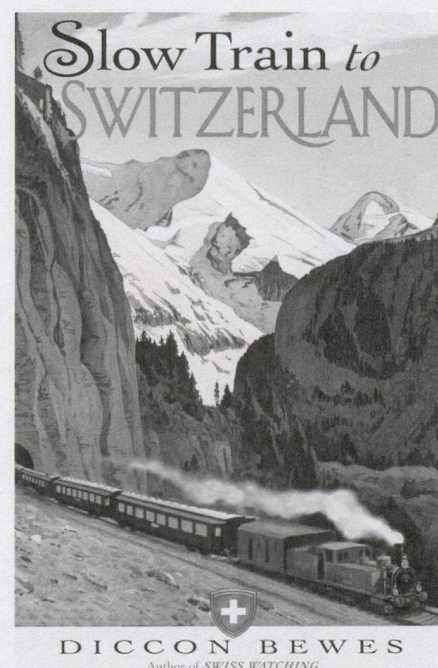
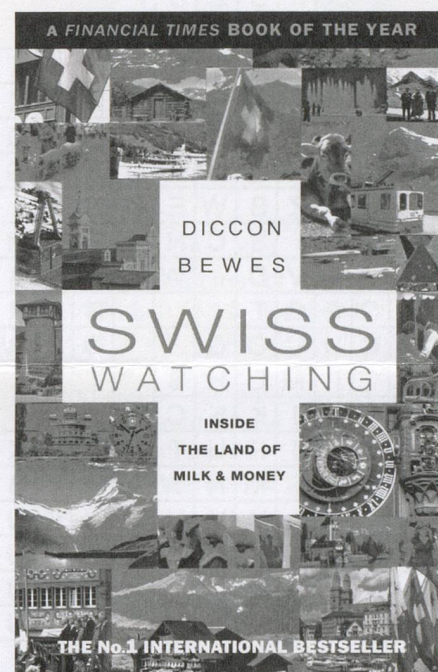
Robert Palmer, British singer: (d 2003) Lugano
Hermann Hesse, German author: (d 1962) Montagnola
Erich Maria Remarque, German author: (d 1970) Ronco sopra Ascona
Paulette Goddard, American actress: (d 1990) Ronco sopra Ascona
Patricia Highsmith, American author: (d 1995) Tegna

German-speaking Switzerland

Erasmus, Dutch thinker: (d 1536) Basel Cathedral
Meret Oppenheim, German artist: (d 1985) Birsfelden Cemetery Basel
Thomas Mann, German author: (d 1955) Kilchberg Cemetery Fluntern
James Joyce, Irish author: (d 1941) Fluntern Cemetery Zurich

Paul Klee, German artist: (d 1940) Schosshalde Cemetery, Bern
Elias Canetti, German author: (d 1994) Fluntern Cemetery Zurich
Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, German singer: (d 2006) Zumikon Cemetery Zurich

Diccon Bewes is a Briton living in Switzerland and has an uncanny talent to observe the intricacies of Swiss culture and character in his witty but insightful commentary. His book "Swiss Watching" ("der Schweizerversteher" in German) was published in June 2010 went on to be a Number 1 bestseller in Switzerland and a Financial Times Book of the Year. More recently, Diccon has published his new book "Slow Trains to Switzerland". Diccon has kindly allowed us to publish the occasional article written by him. Order online through bookdepository.com



James Joyce's grave site