

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1951)
Heft: 1165

Artikel: Baume & Company LTD. and the festival of britain
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694627>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 03.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

BAUME & COMPANY LTD. AND THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

Recently we had the pleasure of mentioning in these columns a firm of Swiss origin (Hagenbach & Sons, Ltd.), who were appointed chief catering concessionaires for the South Bank Exhibition Festival of Britain.

To-day, we are delighted to inform our readers of yet another firm which originated in Switzerland, to whom the planning, installing and maintaining of the entire clock system at the South Bank Exhibition as well as the majority of the clocks at Battersea Park has been entrusted.

Those of our readers, who have visited the Festival Pleasure Gardens, have, no doubt, seen the famous 'Festival Clock', which is an outstanding feature of Battersea Park, attracting thousands of visitors.

The firm of Baume & Company is deservedly proud of having been entrusted with this masterpiece.

The clock is 25 ft. high and is an all metal construction to withstand the inclemencies of the English climate. It stands on the main carriageway through the Gardens.

The clock itself is electrically operated from the mains supply, and the figures of the Zookeeper, Mad Hatter, Marionettes, Toucans, Fish and Ostrich are driven by electric motors which operate every quarter of an hour to the accompaniment of a musical box.

The sequence of events is, the clock chimes each quarter, and the musical box plays "Three Blind Mice". The Ostrich appears from a chimney and surveys the crowd moving first in one direction and then another, the double doors open revealing a tree on which the words "Guinness Time" appears in lights, and two Toucans peck at the tree which has watches of different sizes to represent leaves. The rays of the sun revolve and the Zookeeper appears under an umbrella ringing a bell to call everyone's attention to the fact that it is "Guinness Time". Next the Mad Hatter appears at the top of a tower overlooking a well in which he starts to fish. He catches a very large fish, but that is not all. The large fish disgorges a smaller fish, the smaller fish a smaller fish yet from whose mouth appears the smallest fish of all, but just as this tiddler is within the Mad Hatter's grasp it falls back into the fish beneath it— and so on until the largest fish, with the other three inside it — disappears into the well.

Higher up the clock, yet wilder things are happening. The roundabout opens up and Marionettes unfold from beneath the vanes then spin gaily round in a gyratory whirl.

The musical box reaches a crescendo and one by one the animated features cease to perform. The roundabout stops and the Marionettes fold up under the vanes, the Zookeeper disappears under his umbrella and the doors close on the Toucans. The whole operation takes about 5 minutes and until the next quarter is struck the only movement is the Zodiac revolving round the dial of the clock and the only sound a loud ticking noise.

No clock of comparable complexity has been made in England for 300 years.

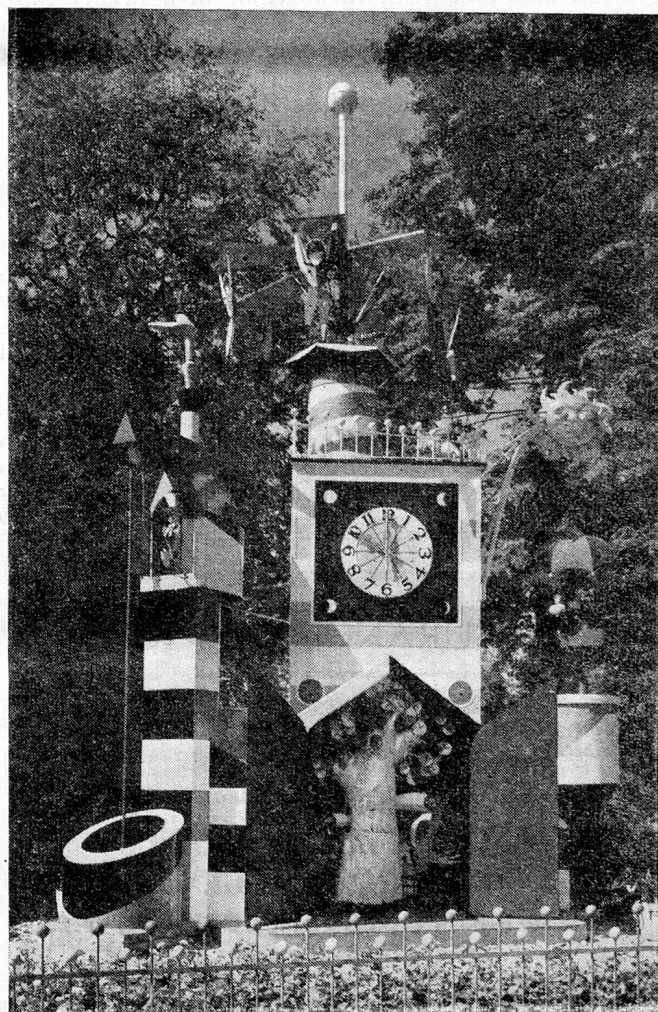
We take this opportunity of publishing particulars of this firm, which has had a long connection with

the watch trade and with the famous Longines factory at St. Imier, which was founded in 1867 by Ernest Francillon, a nephew of the reputed Swiss biologist, Louis Agassiz.

The history of Baume & Company is closely bound up with the history of the Baume family. The wonder fully organised industry Switzerland possesses to-day for the manufacture of watches is a heritage from just such families. Son succeeds father, grandson follows son and, almost unnoticed at first, the cottage industry becomes a village industry, the village industry a provincial, a national, a universal undertaking. That is how the Swiss watchmakers, whose methods, factories and schools are now a pattern to the world, became famous.

The story of the Baume family is linked to the story of that part of Europe which, until a hundred years ago, changed hands between France, Prussia and Switzerland.

The County of Neuchâtel, which included the town of that name, was founded by the Emperor Conrad II (crowned King of Burgundy in 1032, at a time when the kingdom of Burgundy was united to the German Empire), but it is believed that the first inhabitants



did not arrive in the Franches Montagnes until near the end of the fourteenth century, although Montfaucon is known to have been inhabited by 1139. Some two hundred years later than that Le Locle was founded, and towards the close of the same century the name of La Chaux-de-Fonds is first mentioned.

The Baumes, originally from Baume-les-Dames and Baume-les-Messieurs in the Franche Comté, first came to the mountains of the Jura Bernois in about 1543. Various families of that name were, in the early sixteenth century, among the most powerful of the Catholic adherents in eastern France and their move to the Jura Bernois was almost certainly connected with the activities of Guillaume Farel, who brought the Reformation to Neuchâtel in 1530.

The parish of Les Bois, near La Chaux-de-Fonds, was founded in 1610 by a Paul and Jean Baume, who subscribed respectively the sums of ten and five Basel pounds for the purpose. It is thought that these two were original emigrants from the Franche Comté, and that all the others in that district were their descendants.

The origins of the particular branch of the family with which we are concerned are rather vague, because the Civil Register of Les Bois, begun in the year 1645, only records births. The first definite entry is that of the birth of a certain Jean Nicolas Baume in 1675, son of a Jean-Jacob Baume of whose dates nothing precise is known. There is no doubt, however, that Jean Nicolas and Jean-Jacob came of a family influential in the neighbourhood, and there are records of two parish priests of the name, probably near relations, who left considerable fortunes for the benefit of the poor of Noirmont and Les Bois.

Four years after the birth of Jean Nicolas Baume, a merchant named Peter showed his London-made watch to a young blacksmith of La Sagne, Daniel Jean Richard, and asked him to repair it. Not only did Daniel succeed in this, but he actually made a copy of the movement, a task which took him eighteen months. A hundred years later, Le Locle and La Chaux-de-Fonds alone were sending abroad over 40,000 watches a year, an important contribution to the by then dominant Swiss industry.

Throughout the eighteenth century political happenings were stormy and uncertain in the county of Neuchâtel. Civil and religious strife was bitter, and if the Baume family flourished, as it did, it sometimes

encountered strong sectarian opposition. There is evidence of this in a long drawn out argument between the clerical and lay authorities about the establishment of a Capucine convent in a large house and grounds which one Louis Joseph Baume gave for the purpose to the village of Noirmont.

Political unrest and persecution often impinged upon the unpolitical watch industry, too, as on the occasion in 1770 when a number of skilled workmen who fled from Geneva appealed for help to Voltaire at Ferney, as an enemy of tyranny. Voltaire, at seventy-six as energetic in deed as in word, promptly set up a watch manufactory in his own grounds at his own expense, selling large numbers to Frederick the Great and Catherine of Russia.

The Baume family were probably more cautious than that in their approach to the new industry. The date at which they first became interested in the trade is not known, but there were certainly watchmakers of their name in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1801, and probably for many years before that.

The junction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not an encouraging time for the development of young businesses in that part of Switzerland. The backwash of the French Revolution was making itself felt. The Diocese of Basel, proclaiming itself a republic in 1792, was promptly annexed by France in 1793. In 1806 Neuchâtel passed from the hands of Frederick William of Prussia to those of Napoleon; in 1813 it was occupied by the Austrians and reverted once more to the King of Prussia. Then, in 1815, the

INSURANCE SERVICE

The members of the SWISS COLONY in this country can obtain free expert advice on any insurance matters.

Please phone or write for particulars to:—

**ANGLO-SWISS INSURANCE
AND REINSURANCE AGENCY LTD.,
29 & 30, HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.1**

Tel.: CHAncery 8 5 5 4 (5 Lines)

GIVE - HIM - OR - HER - that special Swiss atmosphere!

SWISS WINES ·

Grand Vin Mousseux; mi-sec; sec; brut.

(Produced by Maison Donvar S.A. Champagne-Vaud)
(Suisse)

All other Wines prices on application:—

SPIRITS & LIQUEURS:

**Kirsch de Zoug, Zwetschgenwasser, Gentian,
Crème de Kirsch, Cherry Brandy,
Appenzeller Beverage Bitters, etc.**

SWISS CIGARS:

Rössli and Blueband B.S.B. & F.T.B.

The most popular brands in Switzerland.

Wholesale only

J. J. KELLER (Import & Export)

Room 26/28,

32 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE - LONDON - W.1

Congress of Vienna recognised the Swiss Constitution and Neuchâtel was added to Confederated Territory, while the former Diocese of Basel was united to the Canton of Berne.

For a time prospects of settled business grew brighter and we find that on May 30th, 1821, another Louis Joseph Baume (born 1783), was given a Bernese passport stating:—

“Allant à Beaumont les . . . près Pont l'Evêque département du Calvados et autres départements du Royaume de France pour affaire de succession d'un de leur oncle et autres affaires.”

In 1831, however, the republicans of Neuchâtel rose once more against Prussian rule and seized the castle, only to be defeated by government troops, who also invaded La Chaux-de-Fonds, already known as a hotbed of republican sympathisers.

Only three years after the storm, in 1834, the firm of Frères Baume was started in Les Bois by Louis Victor Baume and Pierre Joseph Célestin Baume. They had learned their business thoroughly in the traditional way and their factory at Les Bois was, like others of the time, a combination of dwelling and workshops in one accommodating building. They prospered, and the district round about was soon humming on their behalf with hundreds of home workers, many of them personally trained by Victor and Célestin.

One of the problems of such a very widespread *atelier* was, of course, that of liaison and transport, particularly transport. There was, for instance, a little colony of workmen at the village of Tramelan, some miles away over mountainous country, who specialized in assembling escapements, and a great many of whom worked for the brothers Baume. Their work was so important that the factory employed two messengers to make the journey between Les Bois and Tramelan on foot, twice in every week.

The more elaborate watch cases, gold, jewelled and enamelled, were not made locally but were “imported” from Geneva, where Frères Baume had built up strong connections: Geneva had long been world famous for this kind of work. Silver cases, however, they made for themselves at Les Bois by the same cottage industry system as that employed for the mechanical parts. Their craftsmen attained a high degree of artistry in the making of what were known, from an English fashion, as “English style” cases, which led naturally to a development of the firm's

British market and influenced their decision to found a London house.

In 1844, then, ten years after their Swiss venture began, Célestin Baume set out for London to found the firm which was at first known as Baume Brothers and which later became Baume & Company. The Swiss and the London Companies were separate businesses from the start, the former remaining a purely manufacturing concern.

From 1844 until the present day there have been members of the Baume family at the head of Baume & Company, beginning in Clerkenwell, moved to Hatton Garden in 1887 and has remained there to this day. The control of the Company has tended to pass rather from uncle to nephew than from father to son, in itself an indication of family solidarity, for the Swiss and English concerns were independent in everything but their origins, and under other directions might easily have grown away from each other.

Célestin Baume maintained control of the new business for more than thirty years, during which time he established agencies all over the British Empire, and took over the Longines connection. He was succeeded in 1876 by his nephew Arthur Baume, younger son of Victor, who held the position in his turn for nearly fifty years until his retirement in 1923.

Arthur Baume's reign witnessed the growth and fruition of the seeds which his uncle had sown. During the combined eighty years government of these two exceptional men, the name of Baume & Company became known all over the world.

M. Célestin Baume was one of the Original Founders of the French Hospital, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, which was founded in 1867. Subsequently Mr. Arthur Baume joined the Management Committee in 1894, became President from 1914-1922, and “President d'Honneur” from 1922 until his death in 1936.

The years between, roughly, 1860 and 1910 were the heyday of the great universal exhibitions for which Prince Consort had set the fashion, and the firm's records at this industrial tournaments give us an indication of its standing in the face of international competitions. Baume & Company exhibited watches at Paris on four occasions, at London, Vienna, Philadelphia, Amsterdam, Melbourne, Antwerp, Zurich, Geneva, Brussels, Milan, Berne — even in their natal town of La Chaux-de-Fonds: between 1880 and 1910 they won no less than five Gold medals and numerous others trophies in the teeth of jealous rivalry, during

**SHIPPING
FORWARDING
INSURANCE
PACKING**

ALLIED HOUSE:
SWISS SHIPPING Co. Ltd.,
RITTERGASSE 20,
BASLE.

COMPTON'S

LIMITED

**12a & 13, WELL COURT,
BOW LANE, LONDON, E.C.4**

SPECIAL SERVICES TO SWITZERLAND
by TRAIN FERRY (the ALL RAIL Route)
by RHINE CRAFT (the ALL WATER Route)

**SEA
LAND
AIR
RHINE**

ALLIED HOUSE:
JOHN IM OBERSTEG & Co. Ltd.,
AESCHENGRABEN 24/28,
BASLE.

CONTINENTAL FREIGHT AGENTS TO THE BRITISH RAILWAYS

Tel.: CITY 4053

Cables: COMNAVIR

which period the Longines movements also gained ten Grands Prix.

When Arthur Baume retired in 1923 he was succeeded by his nephew Alexandre Baume, the elder son of his elder brother Alcide (principal of the Swiss House from 1876 to 1910). Alexandre Baume had worked with his uncle in London since 1904, after two years with the Swiss firm, and in 1912 was taken into partnership. In 1925 he was joined by Alexandre H. C. Gibson (Arthur Baume's son-in-law), who retired in 1939. After thirty-five years at the helm, Alexandre Baume retired in 1947 in favour of his son Louis and of Arthur C. Gibson (grandson on his mother's side of Arthur Baume) who had become a partner in 1939.

The present directors both returned to the business after eventful war careers — Arthur Gibson with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal Armoured Corps and Louis Baume, who was in the Royal Artillery, from three and a half years in Japanese prison camps.

* * *

This then is the story of a firm who, by sheer tenacity, hard work and great integrity has achieved fame, and we are proud that this concern has originated in our country.

The later generation of the Baume's have all rendered conspicuous services to the Swiss Colony in London in various capacities and we tender to the present heads of the firm, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur C. Gibson and Louis Charles Baume our best wishes for continued success.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION.

The Swiss Bank Corporation have announced the creation of a new affiliated Company in Montreal, Canada, which will function under the name: Swiss Corporation for Canadian Investments Ltd., and commenced business officially on the 1st of August. Its business is to be strictly confined to securities and does not comprise general banking activities. The authorised Corporation for Canadian Investments Ltd., which commenced officially on the 1st of August. Its business is to be strictly confined to securities and does not comprise general banking activities. The authorised capital is \$2,000,000 (Canadian) and the Board of Directors consists of Mr. F. H. Gunther (an Agent of the New York Office and formerly well-known in London) as Chairman, Mr. J. W. Kraft as Vice-Chairman, and Mr. J. A. Noonan. The Management is in the hands of Mr. J. W. Kraft, hitherto a Pro-Agent of the Bank's New York Agency, and Mr. A. Engelbert, who was well-known in London as Head of the Swiss Authorisation Office. The offices of the new Corporation are situated at Royal Bank Building, Montreal.

A further indication on the development of Swiss financial interests on the other side of the Atlantic, is given by the announcement that the New York Agency of the Bank, at 15, Nassau Street, New York, have opened a local branch office which will be known as the Rockefeller Center Office and is situated at 10, West 49th Street, New York 20.



Lindt

THE
CHOCOLATE
OF THE
CONNOISSEUR

**HOTEL
PLAN**

**THERE'S
STILL
TIME**

**TO BOOK A WONDERFUL CONTINENTAL
HOLIDAY and TRAVEL IN COMFORT by our
SPECIAL TRAIN from June 29-Sept. 7 incl.**

SWITZERLAND 10 days "All-in" £19.10.0.

***Holidaying at its best—book
all your travel through
HOTEL-PLAN LTD.***

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL ORGANISATION

245, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.1
Telephone GRO 8921 Manager: MAX SCHULER

For all Business and Holiday Travel

AIR • SEA • RAIL • ROAD • HOTELS • THEATRES