

# The History of the Swiss Church in London

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## THE HISTORY OF THE SWISS CHURCH IN LONDON.

There is nothing more stimulating in the cultural life of a national colony on alien soil than the practice of a common worship. Not only are the worshippers' spiritual needs thereby taken care of but a strong link with the distant homeland is created by the intimate atmosphere of the services and the familiar forms and language in which they are conducted.

The necessity for a national worship was recognized by the London Swiss at an early date. That a vigorous and organised Swiss Colony existed in London in the reign of King George I, and probably before, was discovered through the historical researches undertaken by Dr. A. Latt. There is evidence that a "Société des Suisses" was founded in the year 1703 and that the Swiss Colony was important and numerous enough to offer King George the recruitment, at its own expense, of a Swiss regiment consisting of 500 men. (There is some confusion about the date of this episode; the Rev. A. Roehrich places it in 1745, Dr. Latt mentions 1721).

The beginning of a Swiss Church in London cannot be traced with certainty. There is a tradition that in 1722 King George I had granted permission and offered a plot of land near Charing Cross for the construction of a national church. What is certain is the establishment of a "Eglise Helvétique" in 1762, the first minister being the Rev. Antoine Bugnion from Lausanne. For 13 years religious services were held

in a large hall situated in Castle Street, Leicester-fields. In 1775, thanks to the generosity of a number of Swiss residents, it became possible to build a proper chapel to be used exclusively by a Swiss congregation. It stood in Stidwell Street, Soho, now disappeared, and remained the place of worship for the London Swiss during 80 years.

Finally, in 1855, the present Church in Endell Street, in all its impressive and tasteful simplicity, was completed. The financial problems involved, cost of land, freehold and building, were considerable, but somehow the necessary funds were collected and on Feb. 4th 1855 the Rev. Ch. Chappuis preached the inaugural sermon before a numerous congregation. The Swiss Church, l'Eglise Suisse, as we know it today, had become a reality.

In 1898 Pastor Roehrich published a brochure, now out of print, in which the history of the Swiss Church from its early origins was chronicled. On the initiative of Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, our Swiss Minister, this brochure was reprinted and to it was added a history of the Church from 1898 to the present day, admirably written by the Rev. C. Reverdin. The combined records, collected in one volume, entitled "l'Eglise Suisse de Londres" are available at the moderate price of 2/6 and can be obtained at l'Eglise Suisse, 79 Endell Street, W.C.2.

The past history and the description of the work and activities of the Swiss Church, as set out in this brochure, are intensely interesting and we warmly recommend it to all our readers.

J.J.F.S.

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