

Welfare Office for Swiss girls

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Annual General Meeting of the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Gt. Britain took place on Monday, 1st May, 1967 at the Swiss Hostel for Girls, 9 Belsize Grove, London N.W.3. Mrs. Ellis, the President, was in the Chair.

The following is an extract from the Annual Report of the Committee for the year 1966/67:

The year under review was one of the most satisfactory periods in the life of the Welfare Office inasmuch as the Committee had no Staff problems. Mrs. B. Kind, who had taken up her duties in February 1966, had been assisted by Miss F. Biemann, a student trainee, and later by Miss S. Denicolà, also a student trainee. Mrs. Sharp had continued to work part time whenever necessary and the Staff had worked well together as a team.

The Welfare Office continued to depend for its maintenance on the annual federal subsidy from Berne, the annual contributions from the Swiss associations: *Amies de la Jeune Fille* and *Pro Filia* (formerly *Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein*), and the Swiss Benevolent Society. Donations from the various sections of the *Schweizerischer Verband Evangelischer Frauenhilfe* were increasing.

The members of the Committee very much regretted the departure at the end of 1966 of their Honorary President, Madame B. de Fischer, who had always taken such a keen interest in the Welfare Office. They are grateful that Madame O. Long has kindly agreed to succeed her. A further loss was suffered on the retirement of Miss R. Preiswerk for whose assistance the Committee had always been grateful and who as Warden of the Swiss Hostel had given so much help to the Staff. Mrs. E. Cottet who was familiar with the activity of the Welfare Office had been invited to replace Miss Preiswerk on the Committee and had accepted.

Changes had also taken place among the officers of the Swiss Associations with whom the Welfare Office works so closely. Frau Dr. Lutz had completed her term of office as President of *Pro Filia* and Frau Wyrsh had retired from the Presidency of the *Amies de la Jeune Fille*. These resignations would, however, in no way affect our friendly relations with the Associations.

Last Autumn the Committee learned of a suggestion that had been made to the *Département Politique* in Berne by Mr. E. Kunz that the Welfare Office might be moved to the Swiss Centre. The question was discussed at an extraordinary meeting of the Committee held in December, at which Monsieur Jaccard of the *Département Politique*, who happened to be in London, was present, as well as Dr. X. Speckert and Consul Tosio. The majority of those present favoured the removal of the Welfare Office to the West End. The whole question, however, depended on finance and since it was beyond the means of the Welfare Office to pay rent for premises in the West End, no decision could be taken, the more so as Monsieur Jaccard could hold out no hope of any immediate increase in the annual federal subsidy. Notwithstanding the fact that the Welfare Office enjoys free accommodation at the Swiss Hostel, Monsieur Jaccard advised the President not to drop the matter and suggested that a survey be made of the reac-

tions of Swiss girls to the proposed move. This survey was carried out by Mrs. Kind in collaboration with the Swiss Churches with the result that the majority of the girls questioned expressed a preference for the Welfare Office to be housed at the Swiss Centre.

The Committee were proud and delighted that their President, Mrs. Ellis, received recognition of her efforts as Hon. Organiser of the Kent Council for Social Service and was awarded the M.B.E. in the New Year's Honours List.

Early in 1967 the Committee heard that the authorities in Berne had increased their annual subsidy to the Welfare Office and found this gesture on the part of Berne most encouraging.

The report concluded with an appreciation of the assistance given to them by the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Churches, the Swiss Benevolent Society and the Swiss Hostel. A tribute was also paid to Mrs. Meier, Editor of the "Swiss Observer" for giving publicity to the Welfare Office, and to the Auditors for their services. Finally the Committee wished to place on record their confidence in Mrs. B. Kind, who has proved herself an excellent Welfare Officer, and their gratitude to Mrs. Sharp for her efficient service.

A report on the activity of the Welfare Office for the year 1966 had been prepared by Mrs. B. Kind, of which the following is an abstract:

The activity of the Welfare Office had been maintained, 576 girls having contacted the Welfare Office during 1966 as against 538 in 1965. In order to illustrate the activity of the Welfare Office the work had been divided into the same four categories used for the report of 1965, e.g. General Information, Employment, Help for Students and Welfare Cases.

General Information followed the usual pattern and covered enquiries concerning new jobs, schools, accommodation, charter flights, possibilities of work in England, etc. The distinction between "Au Pairs" and "Mother's Helps" became more confused after the introduction of the Selective Employment tax, which resulted in more employers trying to evade the tax and purchase of Insurance Stamps and gave rise to a new type of situation called "Au Pair Plus" where the girl was offered a higher wage on condition she worked longer hours. The Leaflet issued by the Home Office which mentions five hours work daily as normal, and which is handed to every "Au Pair" girl arriving in this country, frequently causes discontent among "Au Pair Plus" girls who overlook the fact that as they earn more money than is usually paid to an "Au Pair" girl they are expected to work longer hours.

Enquiries about prospective employers could be passed on to the British Vigilance Association. Letters of welcome were subsequently written to the girls on their arrival in England. It was noticed that in the autumn several girls moved from the country to London. Domestic jobs in schools, nursing homes or hospitals often proved to be more satisfactory for some girls who could not settle down in English families. A number of visits were made to check the circumstances of girls who had accepted posts without previous enquiries about the suitability of the families.

There were fewer mental cases than in previous years. The Welfare Office helped eleven girls to return to Switzerland and one girl was accompanied by a social worker.

There were fewer pregnancies than last year and most of the girls were helped to return to Switzerland. Mrs. Ellis aided twenty-three girls who were refused permission to land, some because they were pregnant.

Two girls and one woman had to appear in Court for shoplifting, because of moral danger and for infringing the aliens police regulations and the woman because she was found to possess dangerous drugs. So far there is no evidence of drugs being a danger to Swiss girls.

Temporary financial assistance was given to thirty-five girls by the Welfare Office. Practical assistance was also given to Father Scherer, Pfarrer Dietler and the Swiss Benevolent Society.

Several journalists wrote articles about Swiss girls in Gt. Britain for newspapers and magazines in Switzerland. The Welfare Office arranged interviews for them with girls in London. Swiss Television sent a team to produce a film on "Au Pairs" in England.

None of the girls in serious difficulties contacted the Welfare Office. Co-operation with the Welfare Office by everyone who has to deal with Swiss girls is therefore most important. Cases were referred to the Welfare Office by the Swiss Embassy, by organisations in Switzerland, by English organisations and authorities, by the International Travellers' Aid, by the Swiss Churches in London and by employment agencies.

The Welfare Officer gratefully acknowledged assistance and co-operation received from the Swiss Embassy, the Wardens of the Swiss Hostel, the Ministers of the Swiss Churches in London, the Swiss Benevolent Society, British Vigilance Association, the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, Aliens Police Registration Office, etc., understanding employers and friendly families.

The Committee of the Welfare Office for 1967 consists of the following members: Mr. M. H. Ellis, M.B.E. President, Mrs. A. Zumstein (Vice-President, representing "Pro Filia"), Mr. J. Zimmermann (Vice-President, representing Swiss Benevolent Society), Mrs. R. Thomas (Hon. Treasurer), Mrs. H. Knoll (Hon. Secretary), Mrs. A. Woods (representing *Amies de la Jeune Fille*), Mrs. E. Cottet, Mrs. O. Grob, Monsieur F. Ansermoz (Swiss Embassy), The Rev. Father J. Scherer (Swiss Catholic Mission), Pasteur A. Nicod (Swiss Church), Pfarrer M. Dietler (Swiss Church).

E.K.

NEWS OF THE DUNFERMLINE SWISS CLUB

Activities have been on usual lines. In April, members enjoyed a film evening. In May, the Club organised a skittle competition in conjunction with the Edinburgh Swiss Club. Also to the film evening, over a dozen members had travelled over from Edinburgh to Dunfermline.

On 14th June, the Club was honoured by a visit of Consul and Madame Brunner from Manchester. He kept the members up to date on political and other developments affecting the Swiss Colony in Great Britain. Everybody enjoyed a "home-made" meal with a very professional look, prepared by the Club's expert cook (Mr. Eisenegger) and rounded off with specialities provided by numerous Swiss *Hausfrauen*.

C.B.

CITY SWISS CLUB DINNER DANCE

On Friday, 30th June, our Club held the Annual Summer Dinner and Dance at the Monkey Island Hotel near Bray-on-Thames. And what a beautiful day it was! As the first guests were arriving in the lovely setting on the river, a beautiful summer day was drawing to its close; but we had enough time to enjoy to the full one of the first really pleasant evenings of this late summer. The Monkey Island Hotel is, of course, the ideal setting for such an event and we must surely congratulate the organisers for such a lucky choice. The members were enjoying themselves on the green lawns outside the well-attended bar from where we could watch the boats going up and down the river.

The response had been tremendous, and I am sure fully justified itself as the evening was a great success. With considerable difficulties our organiser, Mr. Lucien Jobin, managed to convince the Hotel Manager to accept about twenty people more than was originally planned, and I am sure that all those who were accepted at a late stage were grateful to Mr. Jobin for his efforts, not only to allow as many people as possible to enjoy our evening, but for conducting the whole party, which surely could not have been an easy task for anybody. Thank you Lucien, you did an excellent job!

Amongst the guests enjoying themselves we noticed our new President and Mrs. Nater and also our Immediate Past President Mr. Bonvin and his wife. It was with regret that we learned that H.E. the Swiss Ambassador was not able to attend due to pressing engagements and we can only hope that we may soon have the pleasure of welcoming him on a future occasion.

After about one hour of cocktail time outside, we all joined up in the River Room for dinner which was served with quiet skill and which everybody seemed to enjoy tremendously if you could judge from the exuberant atmosphere which prevailed. One of the nicest things of the evening must have been the informality and friendliness of the members, which made everybody feel tremendously welcome and at ease. After dinner, a three-piece band with a very attractive young lady singer provided dance music until 1 a.m. and it was nice to see that the dance floor was packed right up to the last tune which included some Swiss-flavoured waltzes. Not quite the *Ländler* some of us were expecting, but quite good. — We certainly had a lot to talk about. Amongst other things, we heard that the son of the Editor of the "Swiss Observer", had been married at the Registrar's Office that very afternoon, and the Church Wedding was to take place the following day. It is a great compliment that Peter chose his late father's old Club on the eve of his wedding. His mother and three sisters were all of the party, not to speak of his bride, Miss Sandra Hobro, and a most charming couple they were. Our heartiest congratulations to Peter and Sandra.

The evening was altogether a great success, and I think it is only right that we should say here how much we all enjoyed this summer dance, and how much the excellent work which was done by the committee and especially by Lucien Jobin is being appreciated by all of us. We know it was not easy, but we are very grateful. After such a good evening I am sure quite a few of us saw the bridge from Monkey Island to the mainland swing much more than it really did. But after all, what are the railings there for? I am sure we are all looking forward to another evening as delightful as this one was. R.M.