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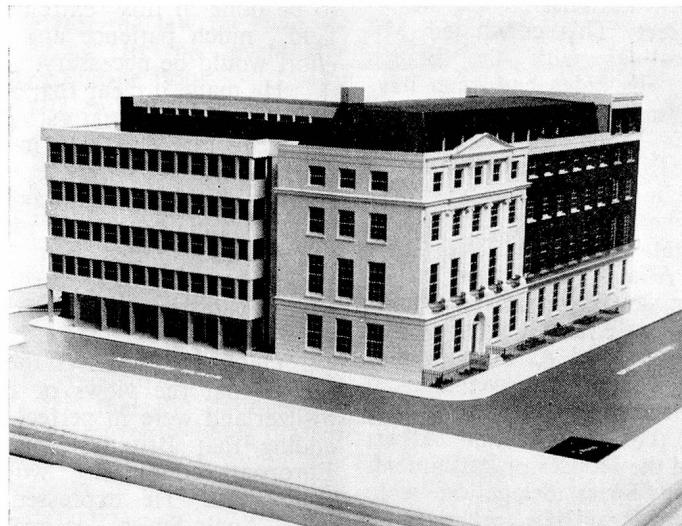
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THE NEW SWISS EMBASSY IN LONDON



The new Swiss Embassy in London was officially opened on Wednesday, 23rd February, by Mr. Pierre Gruber, head of Switzerland's diplomacy. On the previous Monday, he had received about 700 Swiss residents in London during an inaugural reception.

Built on the site of the old Legation acquired by Minister Paravicini in 1924, and on the extra plot purchased by the Confederation in 1962, an impressive Embassy-Consulate-Residence complex occupies the angle between Bryanston Square and Montagu Place, hardly a hundred yards away from the Embassy's former rented premises. The new building stands where the Legation and then the Residence stood until 1965. The building had been bombed and severely damaged during the war and a 1,000 lb. German bomb was found in the foundations at the beginning of the works in 1969. The incident was abundantly reported in the National Press.

The building was designed by the Federal Office of Construction. The scheme was ready by November 1964 and a credit of 11.7 million francs voted by Parliament in March of the following year. The architects had to contend with the Town and Country Act under which the four corner build-

ings of Bryanston Square had to be preserved intact. They also had to protect the Georgian facade of the square, and that is why the wing of the building overlooking Montagu Place, which houses the administrative departments, is different from the part facing Bryanston Square, which contains the Residence. Both erections have a different number of floors.

Work was started in May 1969 and completed by November of last year, when Embassy staff began moving from Gloucester Place. The final cost lies at approximately 14,250,000 francs, which falls within the original estimate, when the devaluation of sterling and rising building costs are taken into account. The cost appears remarkably small in view of the quality of finish and the size of the building.

Designers and Superintendents were the Federal Office of Construction, Section Abroad and Section Interior. The British skills involved in the project came from the firm of R. T. James & Partners (Structural Engineers) and T. P. Bennet & Son, Architects (Production Designs and Supervision).

The Residence appears so comfortable that it wouldn't be surprising if the appeal of the London post had

received a powerful boost recently. Its main features are a spacious lobby, hall and lecture room on the ground floor. This area is ideal for conferences and receptions, all the more so that the building has a stand-by generator, which has already proved useful to the Colony during the recent coal strike as a venue to the Nouvelle Société Helvétique's February meeting.

The first floor has two salons and a dining room accommodating up to 36 guests. Furnishings and decorations are simple, modern and elegant. They all come from Switzerland. The Ambassador dwells on the second floor. His apartment has five bedrooms, a study, a dining room, a living room, dressing rooms and two guest apartments. His housestaff and laundry installations are on the third floor, while the fourth has a "hobby room".

The administrative wing on Montagu Place is extremely vast and in fact contains several spare offices which will doubtless be used as the Embassy's commitments expand. The Chancery on the ground floor is immense. Everything is plush and glistening. One has the impression of being at an airline terminal. The floor above houses services linked with consular work, such as Registry and Old Age Pensions. On the third are located the Commercial Services, pertaining partly to the Consulate and partly to the Embassy. One more floor to the Political, Cultural and Military Sections, and crowning all this on the fourth floor are the Ambassador's office, the First Counsellor's and the Press Attaché's offices. Finally, there is a canteen, a library, a radio and telex office on the fifth and top floor.

To complete this short description, we must mention the existence of two basements, a 36-car garage, store-rooms, strong rooms, an incinerator and other ancillaries which would enable the Embassy to stand a long siege.

Although the windows (which are double-glazed and pivot both horizon-

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tally and vertically) are Swiss, and so are many of the materials used in the buildings interior finish, the furniture is English and acquired in co-operation with Mr. O. Hartmann, Honorary Consul in Edinburgh, who runs an interior design business. A further refinement is an internal ventilation system, a most efficient heating system, four passenger lifts, a food lift and a document lift. The architects who planned the new Embassy could have hardly conceived a more refined showcase for Switzerland.

MR. GRABER IN LONDON

Mr. Pierre Graber, Head of the Political Department, came to London on an official visit between Monday, 21st February and Thursday, 24th February. It was the first official visit ever made to London by a person in his capacity. The original purpose of Mr. Graber's journey was to open the new Embassy. The British government however took this opportunity to invite him officially, so that his visit took an official visit on the day after his arrival.

He arrived by a normal Swissair flight and was greeted by Mr. Anthony Royle, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Not counting the many wives in his party, Mr. Graber was accompanied by the following Ambassadors: Mr. Ernesto Thalmann, Secretary General of the Political Department; Mr. Paul Rudolf Jolles, Director of the Commerce Division of the Department of Public Economy; Mr. René Keller, Head of the International Organisations Division of the Political Department; Mr. Antonio Janner, Head of the Administrative Division of the Political Department. He was furthermore escorted by Minister Pierre Thévenaz, Head of the Political Secretariat of the Political Department, and Mr. Pierre-Yves Simonin, his Private

Secretary.

Before attending the first of two inaugural receptions at the Embassy, Mr. Graber had informal talks with Mr. Dennis Healey, Labour spokesman for Defence, on Monday afternoon.

The next morning, Mr. Graber had a long discussion with Mr. Anthony Barber, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and played host at a lunch at the Residence. In the afternoon he had talks with Sir Alec Douglas-Home at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He was his guest for dinner at Lancaster House, together with many eminent Labour and Conservative personalities.

On Wednesday morning, he had talks with Mr. Geoffrey Rippon, Britain's chief negotiator to the Common Market and was guest at a Dinner given by Mr. Edward Heath at 10 Downing Street. This concluded Mr. Graber's dealings with the British Government. His aides had been having separate talks with Foreign Office officials, thus Ambassador Jolles and Ambassador Bindschedler had talks on Tuesday, 22nd February with Sir Thomas Brimelow, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Ambassador Bindschedler saw his British counterpart, Sir Vincent Evans, Legal Adviser to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Mrs. Graber was well looked after by Government hospitality, and was shown the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Houses of Parliament. Most of the Swiss delegation were housed in the Residence, others were graciously accommodated by the British Government at the Churchill Hotel Portman Square.

Mr. Graber, who doesn't speak English, delivered a Press conference after his dinner with the Prime Minister, in the national languages. The British journalists who turned up showed a high degree of apathy and didn't ask a single question leaving it to their Swiss colleagues (many of whom had come expressly from Switzerland). This was reflected in the almost inexistant coverage on Mr. Graber's visit in the national dailies. There was no hint of his Press conference in either the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph* or the *Financial Times*. The *Times* had an article entitled "British and Swiss see eye to eye", which in fact produced the Press handout in English. One probable reason for this oversight was that the British government had been having talks at the same time with Mr. Bruno Kreisky, Austrian Chancellor, and Mr. Pierre Werner, Luxembourg's Prime Minister. Mr. Kreisky's visit had a very similar purpose to Mr. Graber's because Switzerland and Austria, as two neutral countries, do not wish to enter the Common Market but seek some form of association with the enlarged European Community.

Despite the absence of publicity over his visit, Mr. Graber was satisfied with his talks with the British government. The three subjects discussed were: The future of Europe; the relationship of Europe and the U.S.A.; and East-West relations.

Press conferences, or official statements, hardly ever bring out anything new. Mr. Graber's was no exception. He said that his British hosts had shown understanding for Switzerland's policy of "permanent neutrality". He was particularly concerned about improving trade relations between Europe and the U.S.A. and said that Switzerland wanted to work for a removal of barriers to trade across the Atlantic. On East-West relations, and in particular the proposed conference on European security, Mr. Graber said that the British and Swiss Governments agreed that, if constructive work was to be done in this "extremely delicate field", much patience and continuous effort would be necessary.

He made it clear that Switzerland, while careful to remain strictly neutral, would be ready to help in any supervisory body that may be needed to control a disarmament agreement on mutual and balanced reduction of forces, underlining that Switzerland could not be involved with problems which were the sequel of the second world war.

On Europe, Mr. Graber had said earlier that the views of Britain and Switzerland were in perfect agreement, adding that Britain's entry into the European community would be of great value. He expressed the hope that Anglo-Swiss co-operation, so fruitful within EFTA, would continue to blossom after Britain's entrance to the community next January.

Mr. Graber's London trip may have helped to strengthen Anglo-Swiss relations. It certainly demonstrated the firmness of Swiss foreign policy, which for the past 40 years has unflinchingly followed the path set out by the principles of permanent neutrality.

(PMB)

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