

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: - (1973)
Heft: 1655

Rubrik: Swiss Club Manchester

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

The Swiss Mercantile Society held its Annual Dinner and Dance on Saturday, 3rd February. As usual, the Orchid Suite at the Dorchester was neatly filled with members and guests, many of whom had probably been present at the same function ten or more years ago.

The usual Reception preceded Dinner. The Menu was up to the Dorchester's usual level, although the *Mousse de Haddock Fumée Mimosa* served as entrée was for many a distinctly new gastronomic experience. A second course consisting of veal, noodles and *petits pois St. Cloud* left just about enough room for a delicious vanilla ice cream with *vacherin fruitière*.

The general hum of conversation was interrupted by traditional toasts to *The Queen* and *Switzerland* proposed by Mr. A. Jaccard, the S.M.S. President.

Regular attendants at this function noticed that a new and highly efficient Master of Ceremonies, proudly displaying his war medals on his red frockcoat, had taken office. He told the guests that if they so wished, they were forthwith permitted to smoke, with admirable pomposity. His elocution need not have been any better had he been officiating at a presidential investiture.

The first cigarettes were two-thirds consumed when Mr. Jaccard, heralded by the Master of Ceremonies, rose to welcome us all and particularly the guests of the Society. He mentioned by name every guest, members of the Society's Committees and Staff, and made particular reference to the Swiss Bank Corporation (represented in the Orchid Suite by its Deputy Manager, Mr. Albert E. Wilkins) and its gift to the S.M.S. on the occasion of its own centenary last year.

Mr. Jaccard ended his address with a toast to the guests and the ladies.

Dr. Jüng Iselin, Plenipotentiary Minister (or the second in command) at the Swiss Embassy was then invited to reply to the President's welcoming address. He recalled that it was his third opportunity to be present on this "festive occasion" and joked that he would probably be watching "Match of the Day" had he remained at home. He conveyed the greetings of the Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer, who had been unable to attend, and paid tribute to the work of the Swiss Mercantile Society. He said that its students were the "real ambassadors of Switzerland" and expressed his pleasure to know that the S.M.S. School had managed to raise the funds to acquire the freehold of its Fitzroy Square premises and make arrangements for the modernisation.

It then became incumbent on Mr. Albert Wilkins, of the Swiss Bank Corporation, to reply for the guests. "I feel like a small man about to marry a

much-married film star — aware of my duties but uncertain of my performance". This opening quip set the tone to a fine example of after-dinner speaking, the idea of which is not to say anything meaningful but to entertain. The writer fails to remember how Mr. Wilkins married the purpose for which he had been asked to speak — "replying for the Guests" — and a scintillating dissertation on women studded with quotes from Goethe Plotinus and Keats, and three jokes.

Mr. Wilkins put the attendance in the right mood for dancing. Tables and chairs were moved so as to make room in the centre of the hall, and the orchestra made its appearance.

Dancing held sway uninterruptedly until the traditional ending of S.M.S. dinner dances: everybody linked hands round the President and Mrs. A. Jaccard and hoored them with a unanimous *Auld Lang Syne*.

SWISS CLUB MANCHESTER: SUCCESSFUL RACLETTE PARTY

To go or not to go . . . this was the dilemma which faced many of us when deciding to join the *Raclette-Party* which the Swiss Club of Manchester had arranged at the Cottons Hotel in Knutsford for Thursday, 18th January, 1973. As can so frequently happen in this particular period

of the year, fog and ice had descended upon us bringing in their wake uncertainty, road bottlenecks, chaos and accidents, if not worse. Phones were ringing, assurances and advice sought, eventually resulting in a good many people not attending. But in the end, a good 100 of our members and friends, many living near to the meeting-place, were able to defy those atrocious meteorological conditions — bravery indeed.

Again a very happy and lively party, as such functions usually are. Certainly the "Raclette-cheese" from the Goms Valley in the Valais was excellent and enjoyed by everyone. When provisions trickled out, our experienced "cooks" took off their aprons and joined in the dance which soon followed. Eventually, our President, Dr. H. R. Bolliger, called for attention, and everybody crowded into one room where a big surprise had been prepared for us to see. As Mr. B. Simon and his family were soon moving South, the members of the Club wished to show him their appreciation for the many years of hard work done for us all, always in a spirit of helpfulness and good cheer, and always ready to give good advice. Off went the cover and we all admired a beautiful set of tables, which were presented to him amidst the great applause of the attendance.

Evidently taken by surprise and deeply moved, Mr. B. Simon thanked our President for his friendly words and,



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through him, all of us. He assured us that, after all, we had not seen the last of him. Anyone passing into Buckinghamshire will be assured of a warm welcome in his home, even if a "No Coaches" sign will hang above the entrance!

Dancing and enjoyment went on well after midnight. By then, the fog had lifted, another miracle, and everyone had good road conditions for their journeys home.

Ermanno Berner

A MAD SWISS ARTIST

While crowds flocked to see the impressions of Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and other Impressionists on sceneries which they could see in real life by standing on Charing Cross Bridge, a few hundred yards away, it is doubtful whether two large halls on the lower floor of the Hayward Gallery received the same attention. They were devoted to the works of *Dieter Rot*, a Swiss painter born in Switzerland but often considered as a German due to the fact that he has lived a long time in Germany.

Dieter Rot embodies a tendency which is often found among German-Swiss artists: a genius for extravagance and absurdity all the more striking in comparison to the generally staid and conservative environment in which they work.

Rot obviously poked fun at those who were trying to understand whether he had any message to convey. Several large frames covered with a shining plate of glass contained a little box in which there was just nothing, or a little piece of crumpled paper. Other displays of a simi-

lar vein consisted of newspapers slashed into strips with a razor blade, or an ugly scribble on a huge, empty background. In fact, the closest example of the actual promotion of human and animal excrement to the status of an artistic theme could be witnessed during February at the Hayward Gallery. Some doubt remains whether the lumpy, brownish and amorphous things enframed on the walls

of the gallery were real, hardened animal droppings, or whether they were just a heavy caking of paint.

Other glorious brain children of Rot's enflamed imagination consisted of books hanging from pieces of string with pages full of meaningless nonsense or one same monosyllable repeated over a whole page. Hardly the kind of literature one would be tempted to take on a flight from London to Geneva. Presumably, these items have to be taken with plenty of sense of humour. They are, after all, fairly funny visual jokes.

Rot nevertheless managed to prove that he still belonged to the world of sanity with a series of dazzling graphic displays, painted photographs and patterns in which he carried his experiments in the art of composing symphonies of shapes and colours a very long way.

For those with no preconceived ideas about art, the Rot exhibition should be entertaining and instructive. A third exhibition on the intricacies of producing Shakespearean plays was also staged on the lower floor by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

WAITING FOR HOWARD HUGHES

The spectral
millionaire
looked after by
a compatriot

Mr. Hughes was staying at the time with his aides.

Howard Hughes (owner of Hughes Aircraft, Hughes Machine Tools and a good part of Las Vegas, and former owner of TWA) arrived with hardly any advance warning. His trip appeared to have been made in such haste that arrangements had not even been made for the renewal of his passport. The eccentric millionaire who has not been seen for fifteen years managed to pass through the Customs at London Airport thanks to top-level intervention.

Mr. Wagner himself claims he never saw him as he disappeared in his suites and has hidden behind its closed blinds ever since. But the Press were soon enough on the spot and caused a couple of hectic weeks to Mr. Wagner and his staff. Invaded with feretting journalists and various brands of nuts who were prepared to go to any extravagance and expense to catch a glimpse of Howard Hughes, Mr. Wagner had to hire special Securicor guards and double the usual security arrangements of the hotel. Nearly every important paper in Europe and the U.S. booked a room for their special correspondents in the Hotel. All of them came home empty-handed, thanks to the efficient organisation setup at the Inn on the Park. Some reporters even questioned whether Howard Hughes actually existed.

Over a year ago, the Rothschild International Bank in the City made a reservation at the Inn on the Park Hotel, which rises off Park Lane at a minute's walk away from the Dorchester. They asked its Manager, Mr. Eugene Wagner, a Swiss of London known to many in the Colony, to book 2 suites and 10 rooms covering practically all the west side of the ninth floor of his hotel.

Rothschild's had done regular business with Inn on the Park. Moreover, they were Mr. Howard Hughes' bankers and Mr. Wagner soon realised the likely identity of the future guest that required such vast accommodation. His hunch was confirmed when he was asked to alter the decoration of the suites in order to conform to the recluse millionaire's taste. In particular, the wallpapering of the rooms was changed.

HECTIC ARRIVAL

Mr. Howard Hughes had long planned to fly over to London and had made advance arrangements with his London bankers. They had recommended the Inn on the Park. His surprise arrival in London was precipitated by the earthquake that devastated (on Christmas Eve) Managua, the Nicaraguan capital, where

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