Introducing our new editor

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The Swiss Observer

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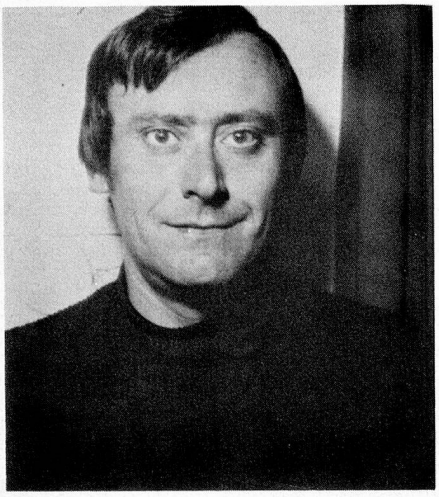
INTRODUCING OUR NEW EDITOR

Although he is obviously thoroughly anglicised, George Sommer can by no stretch of the imagination be described as a pure-blooded Englishman!

He is a true Cockney, born in 1939 in the German hospital in Hackney, East London, and in his lighter (or darker?) moments, wonders whether this event had anything at all to do with the outbreak of the Second World War. He hopes there was no connection between the two happenings.



His wife, Barbara, is a Lancastrian, born and bred in Ramsbottom. They have two young sons and live in Twickenham, a pleasant London suburb whose residents "adopted" them a good many years ago.

A Swiss by marriage, Barbara looks forward to helping George as much as she can in his new task.

His father, Emil, who died in 1965, was typically Swiss. Although emigrating from Summiswald, Kt Berne, he lived most of his early life in Grenchen, Kt Solothurn, where he served his apprenticeship as a watchmaker. He came to London in 1936 (originally for six months) and remained there for the rest of his life.

George's mother, who also came to London in 1936, but for different reasons, was born in the wilds of Lower Austria during the last few years of the Hapsburg era.

She came to London simply to get work. She was trained in the culinary arts by Franz Ruhm in Vienna but the employment situation prevailing in Vienna in the '30s was pretty desperate.

She met George's father while he, characteristically, was repairing a clock belonging to an Italian doctor for whom she was keeping house. They were married in 1938.

In passing, it might be of interest to note that her former employers include Lady Fleming (mother of Ian, of James Bond fame) and Sir Gilbert Inglefield, a fairly recent Lord Mayor of London.

George's early life was uneventful. He started school in Twickenham during the latter years of the war. He was a pupil of Thames Valley Grammar School and, later, of Kingston College of Technology where he studied electronics.

He did National Service in the British Army, serving 19 of the 24 months in Hong Kong where he was privileged to meet several of the local Swiss colony and to participate in their 1st August celebrations. He was, incidentally, surprised to discover during these celebrations that the Swiss and British National Anthems were sung to the same tune.

It was also during this period that the significance of his dual nationality was made clear to him. He had served just about a year of his time when he received, via the Embassy in London, a "most cordial invitation" to partake in the activities of a Swiss "Rektruten-schule". Reluctantly George had to decline the invitation because his commanding officer had other ideas. However, this slight misunderstanding was later sorted out amicably and he is still the proud possessor of both passports and a "Soldatenbuch" although he is now freed from all auxilliary obligations with the British Army.

George still has family in Switzerland whom he tries to visit as often as possible although, as he says, the visits are still too few. His family is rather scattered — most are in Grenchen (Solothurn) and the rest in Zürich, St. Gallen, Geneva and one in what is probably his favourite spot on earth — Salouf (Graubünden).

George is a journalist by profession — he currently edits the business section of the best known trade newspaper for the U.K. plastics and rubber industry — *Plastics and Rubber Weekly,* of which a few copies do find their way to Switzerland.

Little more needs to be said of him — indeed, he considers that this introduction already occupies enough space.

His introductory message is simply this —

"I am honoured to have been chosen as the new editor of the *Swiss Observer.* My predecessor, Pierre-Michel Béguin will, I know, be sadly missed and I must humbly ask him to guide me in the task that lies ahead. He has achieved much and I am somewhat daunted by the thought of following in his footsteps.

"Just as he did, I need the support of the Swiss colony in the United Kingdom — the readers of the *Swiss Observer,* its advertisers, the members of the various Swiss societies and organisations and everybody else who still preserves a love for Switzerland and things Swiss — in short, the task ahead of me would be impossible without *your* support.

"May I please look forward to hearing from some of you very soon? In the coming months I will endeavour to meet personally as many of the members of the colony as possible — meanwhile, I would be grateful for as much of your news, views and suggestions as you can muster.

The *Swiss Observer* is *our* paper. Only through all our efforts can it continue to flourish, to grow and to contain the sort of news I am sure we all want to see in it!"

The Chairman and Members of the *Swiss Observer* Advisory Council extend their greetings and good wishes to you George, for every success in your new appointment.

Oscar F. Boehringer

ON THE FRONT PAGE

An exciting general view of the new National Archive building in Schwyz.

Picture by courtesy of SNTO.