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# A SWISS CROWN IN LEICESTER SQUARE

## *THE SILVER JUBILEE AND TEN YEARS OF SWISS CENTRE IN LONDON*

On 26th April, 1977, the British Tourist Authority gave a Press Reception at the Swiss Centre to open the Silver Jubilee festivities in the heart of London. For the first time in the ten years of their existence, the Centre Restaurants have "gone British": they present aspects of British life in their showcases and serve some special British food and indeed wine as a mark of respect and gratitude to the host country. British and Swiss flags and pennants gaily proclaim Swiss involvement in Royal Britain on the outside of the building.

The large showcase at the top of the stairs displays a portrait of the Queen and a photograph of the Royal Family in relaxed holiday mood, with replicas of the Crown Jewels exhibited in front of the pictures. On one side, a yeoman of the guard, commonly known as "beefeater", resplendent in red and gold, on the far right an old Swiss warrior in red and white, beard, halberd and all.

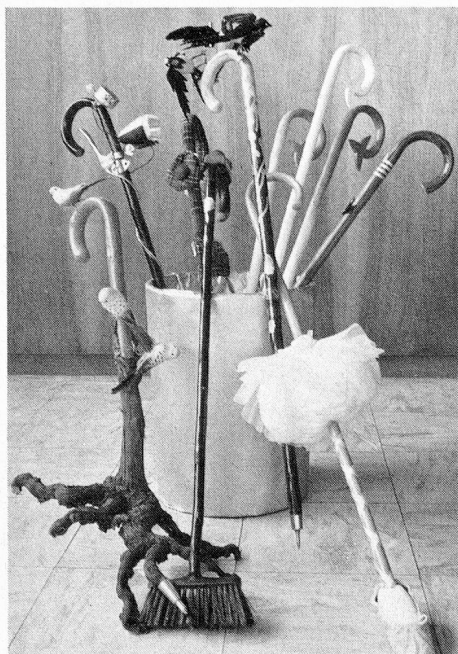
Colourful mobiles hang from every ceiling in the Swiss Centre, the Jubilee emblem on one side and the Swiss Centre logo on the other. Within the restaurant and shopping area, a number of showcases depict holiday regions of Great Britain, each with a caricature figure (by John Farman and Allister Bowtell), landscape pictures and products of industry, art and craft inviting one to an attractive district. It's all there — crystal glass and linen from Northern Ireland, cheese and homespun shawls from Wales, whisky and tweed from Scotland, fish and mints from the North, cider and honey from the West Country, woodcraft and ale from Central England, and the produce from the orchards of the South.

The Royal Britain displays are staged by the British Tourist Authority at the invitation of the Swiss, and prepared by Graffiti Design.

The British fare offered represents

seven restaurants from Bath (Popjoy's), Essex (Le Talbooth, Dedham), Anglesey (Glantraeth Restaurant, Bodorgan), Oxfordshire (Plough, Clanfield), Berkshire (Copper Inn, Pangbourne), Bournemouth (Carlton Hotel), and Perthshire (Locheearnhead Hotel). The dishes' preparation is supervised by visiting chefs from these leading eating places, and traditional viands are served from *British Cookery*, a BTA publication in conjunction with the British Farm Produce Council.

It is often said that the Swiss have no sense of humour. But that notion was indubitably quashed at the official opening of the three-month-long celebration, when the Director of the Swiss National Tourist Office in Zurich, Dr. Werner Kaempfen, presented amusing walking sticks to a number of British personalities concerned with "Royal Britain 1977".



Walking sticks? What have *they* got to do with the Silver Jubilee? As it happens, the Swiss Centre is at the starting place of the "London Silver Jubilee Walkway" which was dedicated by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on 9th June. The five and a quarter mile Walkway passes nearly 50 famous London landmarks on both sides of the Thames between Leicester Square and the City. That prompted the SNTD and their designer to create 100 funny walking sticks arranged in comical parade along the front windows of the Swiss Bank Corporation, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swissair. There they are in all shapes and sizes, from the "overtaker" with a bicycle mirror, the "toddler" and the "Currency Snake" to the ones with a crook lock, or a self-winding device, a shower to refresh the feet or four handles representing the Common Market. The "newsreader" is there with magazine attached, the "hitchhiker" with a Brighton direction sign, the floating pound and, of course, the "Gnome of Zurich". In other words: a walking stick for every occasion.



Dr. Kaempfen presented the first of the individual sticks to the Lord Mayor of Westminster, a keen cyclist, and his gift was complete with a wheel, lamp, brake and bell. "I fully realize that the Jubilee Walkway is reserved for pedestrians. But I am sure, for the Lord Mayor of Westminster a compromise will be found — if not, I am prepared to pay the fine."



Air Commodore W. I. C. Innes, C.B., O.B.E., D.L., accepted the stick specially made for Lord Elworthy, Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London and Marshal of the Royal Air Force, as well as one for himself, appropriately created for a flying start.

Next, Dr. Kaempfen referred to the Earl of Drogheda (pronounced Droyda), Chairman of the London Celebrations Committee, who is not keen on marches. He was presented with a delicate walking stick dressed up as a ballerina.



"Lord Ponsonby, Chairman of Greater London Council, has set himself the task to brighten up London", said Dr. Kaempfen and offered him a "most versatile walking cleaner from Switzerland".



Sir Alexander Glen, Chairman of the British Tourist Authority, had earlier welcomed the guests and spoken of the British love for Switzerland. Dr. Kaempfen called him "this year's world champion in tourism" and handed him a tartan-covered stick with a "wee bottle of Glen Alexander Whisky and a purse containing some holy Swiss *geld*" which should see him over the highlands of London, Scotland and perhaps even Switzerland.



Dr. Kaempfen presented a stick ending in a beautifully gnarled rhizome and decorated with small birds to Mr. Max Nicholson, Chairman of the Committee of the Environment.

The last special walking stick was proffered to Mr. John Bosman, Chairman of the Leicester Square Association, who has done so much to improve that Victorian Square. Dr. Kaempfen gave him a stick carrying three lovely birds, more "residents" for his Square.

Before the Reception came to an end, Dr. Kaempfen and Mr. Kunz led a procession of distinguished guests carrying their special walking sticks on a "walk-about" in Leicester Square. The mid-day crowd was highly amused to see the weird sticks and obviously did not know what these had to do with a Scottish Pipe Major who accompanied the contingent.



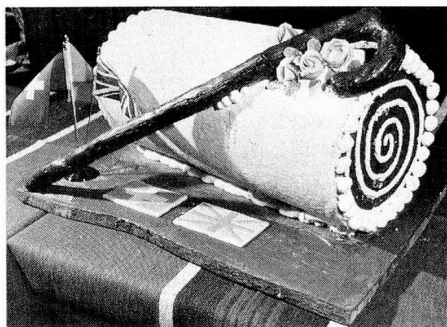


Amongst the nearly 200 guests were not only the above-mentioned gentlemen, but also the Mayoress of Westminster, the Swiss Ambassador and the Pearly King and Queen in their inimitable garb. They handed every departing guest a handsome *alpenstock* with a British and Swiss pennant attached and an *edelweiss* carved beneath the handle. To add sound to colour, there was a Scottish Pipe Major, as ever grand and proud.



But as PHS said in the *Times Diary* the next day: "...the Swiss are not letting the natives have it all their own way ... they are pushing the virtues of their own national dish, the Swiss roll". This is, of course, not quite so; in spite of extensive research, the origin is still not known. This was announced by the General Manager of Swiss Fair Ltd, Mr. Robin Oldland, when he addressed the gathering. Since all efforts proved of no avail, the Swiss Centre *pâtissier* and

*confiseur* brigade created a "Swiss Swiss Roll" which is a far cry from the usual sponge and jam layers – the first week's roll had a filling of fresh strawberry Chantilly or mocca kirsch. At the



Reception a giant Swiss Swiss roll was on show and later, eagerly devoured, sweet walking stick, flags and all, by the invited company of guests; it tasted delicious, be it with British or Swiss wines.



The popular shopping section of the Centre, the Gourmet Corner, is also part of the Jubilee theme, and a number of British articles are on sale there, the cookery book, souvenirs and Swiss chocolates in pretty "royal" boxes.

One of the attractions in the restaurants is the "Golden Shot" event where customers can try their skill with the crossbow.

But lest anyone should think that it is all just fun and junketing, we should like to mention the beautiful, genuine Swiss inn sign, a gilt crown, which the Swiss National Tourist Office discovered in an antique shop in Solothurn. It is 150 years old, meticulously restored, and is now hanging outside the Centre in the pedestrian precinct, symbolising in a subtle and charming manner the long friendship between the two countries.

Also on the serious side are the nine pictures in the windows of the Tourist Office – above the walking sticks. They represent famous Britons who had strong connections with Switzerland. Charles Brown, one of the two partners who founded the world-famous engineering company of Brown Boveri & Co., Thomas Cook and Sir Arnold Lunn, both promoters of Swiss tourism; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Lord Byron, an author and a poet impressed by Switzerland, as was the painter William Turner; Edward Whymper who first climbed the Matterhorn in 1865; and finally Churchill who made his famous speech on "Let Europe arise" in Zurich in 1946.



The SNTTO in London under its indefatigable Manager, Mr. Albert Kunz, the Swiss National Tourist Office in Zurich and the Swiss Fair management must be congratulated not only on their initiative, but also on the splendid way the whole idea was realised in conjunction with Swiss Centre Ltd. The whole conception is humorous and light-hearted, yet full of deep respect, and a fine tribute to Britain.



personalities in Switzerland, the Cultural Forum of Switzerland could not be realised for lack of funds. For this reason it is all the more important that the existing Centre should fully reflect the best of Switzerland.

The British Tourist Authority reckons that over 11,000,000 tourists are visiting Britain in Jubilee Year, and most of them go through London. The influx has reached its peak, and business is flourishing, not least at the Swiss Centre. Let us hope that the high standards will be maintained in the second decennium. The telephone number is —significantly— (734) 1291. That is when it all started for Switzerland, and that is when it began in London ten years ago. So may all concerned with the running of Swiss Fair activities be given wisdom and sound counsel in the possibly leaner years to come to carry on. And should they need support, there is always a splendid selection of walking sticks to help them on their trek.

Mariann Meier

The Swiss Centre celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. The idea of having a showcase of Switzerland in the heart of London goes back to the early 'sixties. It was realised thanks to the initiative of the Swiss Bank Corporation, the Swiss National Tourist Office and Swissair who are joint landlords (all three organisations were represented at the Reception in April). Offices are housed in the 15-storey tower block, and the three initiators have their agencies on the ground floor. Swiss Fair Ltd., in which over 60 Swiss firms are concerned, run the shops and the four restaurants on the lower ground floor, corresponding to the four regions of Switzerland, plus a recently added coffee shop on the ground floor level.

The first of the restaurants was opened on 16th November, 1967, and from the word go they were a success, though difficulties have been considerable, not least in getting Swiss and other well-trained staff. Much of the success is due to the General Manager who returned to Switzerland last summer, Mr. Oskar Gontersweiler, affectionately known as Gonti, and his senior staff such as Mr. Rinaldo Veri, the Restaurant Manager. Gonti had ideas and was open to suggestions. A born restaurateur, he knew how to look after his customers. He understood the Swiss as well as his British visitors and was aware of the importance of giving value for money. Above all, he never forgot that Swiss Fair had to live up to the tradition of best Swiss hospitality and standards.

Unfortunately, in spite of valiant and determined efforts by a group of people, above all Dr. H. W. Egli and Mr. Albert Kunz in London and a number of

