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So friendly in Tenby

I CAME to the UK via Le Havre and Southampton.

I had to travel to Tenby, which at that time was in Pembrokeshire, and I was very worried especially as I had to change trains at Cardiff.

I did not have to change platforms, but to make sure, when my train arrived, I pointed it to an employee and asked "Tenby?" which was all I could say in English.

The man said "Yes", and lots more beside which I did not understand, but I took a chance.

I found Tenby an enchanting town and the people there so friendly.

In those days there were so few cars that the town was never over crowded. Thanks to the two sandy beaches and the numerous walks, I have kept an undying memory of my first year in the UK. I was very busy trying to learn English and teaching French to small classes of children from six to 14.

The food was monotonous –

The year was 1927 when young Gabrielle André first put her foot on English soil. She came to polish up her English and see a little of the country – but has now been in England for more than half a century.

Today, Mrs Gabrielle Laurence lives in Yorkshire with some very keen memories of her first days in England.

the same menu on Monday (cold), Tuesday (mince) etc – but I was happy. Now I realise that transport was to blame for the lack of fruit and vegetables in those days. Oh! but their teas were fabulous. It was like a party every day.

Before the school year was finished the principals invited my mother for a fortnight's holiday at the school. After that my mother and I decided to visit London for a week.

At that time a pound note was worth Sfr. 25. Bed and breakfast at the Hotel Imperial

in Southampton Row was 7s.6d (37½p) with full English breakfast. A good lunch would cost from 2s.6d to 4s (12½p to 20p). Teas at Lyon's Corner House were also 2s.6d.

We did a lot of sightseeing by open top double decker buses as well as in covered ones, and we also went by underground when it meant a longer journey.

The underground was clean and safe at any time, and it didn't seem to smell as it does today!

The policemen were wonderful – very smart, always pleasant



and helpful, especially when we found ourselves locked up in the loo!

One thing I can remember were the rows of houses backing onto the railway line – all alike and all with a tin bath hanging from the back door, obviously they had no bathrooms.

Like many others, I intended to stay in this country just long enough to learn English but 50 years later I am still here! However, I have kept in touch with Switzerland, and my husband and I try to go there every other year.

Come and join us, says Swiss Club

VERENA Rudkin, secretary of the Southern Area Swiss Club writes:

Having read the article in the January Woman's Observer, "Sharing the Heartache of Acclimatisation" by Sophie Forrester, I feel compelled to write and tell you about the Southern Area Swiss Club.

We are still a very informal and most friendly group with varying backgrounds and languages.

Farnborough, where we meet, is a very convenient and central

place, and some of our members manage to travel from quite some distance to attend the monthly meetings. Sometimes they come only once or twice a year, but the link with people in the same situation is made and it helps a lot to find that one is not at all unique. I have lived in England for 25 years and have not cut my ties with Switzerland at all.

As I have been fortunate in being able to find an interest in the community, first as the leader of a very large

playgroup, then as evening secretary in a further education and community centre and now as school secretary in a large junior school, I have had a wonderful opportunity to learn to accept and fit into the English community.

When I eventually met some other Swiss ladies, we formed the Southern Area Swiss Club, through which we have gained encouragement, friendships and a mutually beneficial exchange of views, ideas and experiences.

Our programme for 1983-84 is

a full and varied one, and is available if you write to me.

The addresses of our chairman, secretary (myself) and treasurer are:

Chairman: Mrs Ann Doy, 8 James Way, Camberley, Surrey. Tel: Camberley 64208.

Secretary: Mrs Verena Rudkin, 1 Chiltern Avenue, Farnborough, Hants. Tel: Farnborough 547948.

Treasurer: Mrs Maria Fraser, 6 Homefarm Close, Farnborough. Tel: Farnborough 513524.

Married an escaped PoW

A SWISS national, I was born and lived in Geneva. During the war I worked at the world headquarters of the YMCA in Geneva.

In 1943 I was asked, because of my knowledge of the English language, if I would be prepared to help out in entertaining for a few days a British "evadé" serviceman who was being invited to have a short holiday break with a Swiss soldier friend.

Evadé was the official description given to prisoners of war who escaped into Switzerland from the Axis prisoner of war camps. They could not be interned as Switzerland was a neutral country.

This young man, Eric, was one of the first of many who escaped from captivity in Italy, bringing 12 others with him. He had been captured in North Africa on June 6 1942 and arrived in Switzerland towards the end of 1943.

It so happened that we fell in love and became engaged.

Unfortunately, in July 1944, he contracted polio and was desperately ill in the hospital in St. Gallen. He was eventually moved to the orthopaedic hospital in Lausanne for further treatment.

In January 1945 he was given

The name Betty Ridley sounds as English as any that you could wish to quote. But the Betty Ridley who now lives in Bridgnorth, Shropshire, was born Elizabeth Beatrice Liernur. How did the transformation take place? She tells her own story to Woman's Observer.

the opportunity of returning home to England through an exchange convoy of wounded prisoners of war, supervised by the International Red Cross.

In spite of many difficulties, we managed to marry three days before his departure. I was given the chance of following him to England a few months later. Which was exactly one week before VE Day.

And so it was that I experienced a most extraordinary journey across France, together with five other ex-Swiss young ladies, who had also married British "evadé" servicemen, and I joined my awaiting husband at Victoria Station, London.

You can imagine my excitement, this being my first visit to England, combined with the imminent end of hostilities and being re-united with my husband.

From there, we travelled to his family home in Shropshire.

We have two sons, now both married with their own children. The eldest son is now managing director of the family agriculture seeds business and his brother is a senior scientific officer at the Daresbury Nuclear Research Establishment in Cheshire.

He also worked for a short while at the CERN nuclear centre in Geneva.

In 1969, my eldest son – at the age of 23 being a county, district and borough councillor – was made Mayor of Bridgnorth and I was the Mayoress.

Last year, he was again made Mayor and I the Mayoress until the coming month of May.

In the intervening years I have been a member of the Women's Institute, Townswomen's Guild, and local Red Cross branch and the tennis club, where I ran the junior sec-



tion.

The town of Bridgnorth is twinned with Thiers, near Vichy in France, and my ability to speak French is of great value to the organisation.

This area of the British Isles is truly beautiful, its people extremely friendly and easy to get on with and I am very happy here. Of course, at the beginning, I was homesick but we have made many visits to Switzerland and obviously hope to make many more.

I possess dual nationality and feel truly a national of both countries, feeling perfectly "at home" in one as the other.



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