

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Zeitschrift:</b> | The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK         |
| <b>Herausgeber:</b> | Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom                                     |
| <b>Band:</b>        | - (1983)  |
| <b>Heft:</b>        | 1800  |
| <br><b>Artikel:</b> | The postmaster's son who became an eminence grise                                       |
| <b>Autor:</b>       | Barber, Peter M.  |
| <b>DOI:</b>         | <a href="https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686553">https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686553</a> |

#### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

#### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

#### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 22.02.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

IN the years following the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession St Saphorin established himself as perhaps the most important of all the Allied envoys in the area.

He got to know the British envoy, Abraham Stanyan, and, after 1709, when (confusingly) he represented Berne at the peace negotiations in the Netherlands, he became friendly with the British Ambassador, Viscount Townshend.

By 1714, when the war finally ended, St Saphorin was a major-general in the Austrian army, the representative of a string of German princes, including Hanover, in Switzerland and was in regular correspondence with the Dutch and British leaders.

Prominent among them was Lord Townshend, who was to be one of the two British Secretaries of State (effectively foreign ministers) for most of the next 15 years.

By 1716 it had become clear to the British ministers that they needed a permanent representative in Vienna to conduct the endless negotiations between the two courts, and that St Saphorin (whose elder brother had died several years earlier) was – or seemed to be – the best man for the job.

In October 1716 he was given credentials by George I as his personal representative and, in lieu of direct payment, was created a British lieutenant-general.

In March 1718 he took another step upwards when he was created George I's official resident in the imperial capital. The post was theoretically rather lowly – it had to be in order to minimise grumblings inside parliament.

It irked St Saphorin, too, that native born Englishmen were occasionally sent out to assuage the sensitivities of the English country squires and to meet some of the requirements of the law.

But there was never any doubt that St Saphorin was in effect the

# The postmaster's son who became an eminence grise

British ambassador in Vienna, and his salary – £500 a year plus £5 a day for expenses plus his military pay – was the equal of any ambassador's.

Until early in 1721, St Saphorin's work was crowned by success. A series of alliances between George I and the Emperor Charles VI and other powers were negotiated.

The Emperor was delighted at being able to expel the Spaniards

dislike and suspicion, which was all the greater because the earlier friendship had been so warm.

St Saphorin worsened the atmosphere still further by continuing to meddle in court intrigues, and his fervent Protestantism, which had previously gone by almost unnoticed, increased the mutual antagonism between himself and the strongly Catholic court of Vienna.

In 1727, St Saphorin was

## By Peter M. Barber

from Sicily and to acquire the island for himself. This was thanks to British naval assistance during a short war with Spain.

The British leaders were equally satisfied with the superlative quality of the information about the imperial court with which St Saphorin supplied them in twice weekly dispatches. They commonly exceeded 30 pages in length and, once or twice a year, ran on for 200 pages or more.

After 1721, however, the mission went sour. In large part this was inevitable for the British replaced the Austrians with the French and Spanish as their principal friends in Europe, and the Emperor and his ministers were naturally angered and alarmed at this development.

But St Saphorin undoubtedly made matters worse. His friendship with the Austrian leaders, previously such an asset, turned into uncomprehending mutual

expelled from the Austrian dominions in reprisal for the expulsion of the Austrian resident from London. But for several years past Anglo-Austrian relations and his own relations with the Emperor's ministers had been so bad that he had ceased to survive any useful purpose and had only further embittered matters.

Despite his own efforts and wishes, he was not sent back to Vienna when relations began to improve again. Lord Waldegrave, a polished aristocrat, former Catholic and grandson of James II, who did go, was much more to the Viennese taste.

St Saphorin himself retired to St Saphorin from whence he continued regularly to bombard George II's ministers with lengthy memorials ("St Saphorins," they called them) on European affairs until he died in 1737.

His grandson became not an English but a Danish diplomat.

The other major Anglo-Swiss diplomat of this period was Lucas (or Luke) Schaub, a younger son of the postmaster of Basle.

Although he was a close friend of St Saphorin and, indeed, was to marry the latter's widowed daughter-in-law, the two men were very different.

Schaub was a generation younger, having been born in 1690. He took religion, and life generally, a good deal more lightly than the older man and had little of St Saphorin's perseverance (though his dispatches were sometimes almost as long).

He owed his diplomatic career partly to his intelligence and knowledge of languages, law and European affairs, but mainly to his beautiful handwriting. It was this that attracted the notice of Abraham Stanyan (whom we have met earlier) when he was looking for a secretary in 1711.

The two men rapidly became firm friends and in 1714 Stanyan, who was extremely well connected, saw to it that Schaub was sent to Vienna as secretary of the embassy.

The rapid turnover of British envoys there before 1716 meant that for much of the time Schaub was the British Chargé d'Affaires. Thanks to St Saphorin's assistance, his work was largely successful. He became known to George I's ministers and in particular to James Stanhope who, between 1716 and 1721, was the *de facto* first minister.

So impressed was Stanhope with the young Swiss (who was still in his 20s) that in autumn

1717 he appointed Schaub his secretary.

For the next three and a half years Schaub was active in the heart of the British government, drafting papers and letters in the names of Stanhope and the king himself, contributing his own ideas, through Stanhope, to the formulation of British foreign policy, accompanying his master on his almost ceaseless diplomatic rovings across western and southern Europe, and undertaking a few brief but important diplomatic missions himself to Vienna, Madrid and Paris.

In the process he got to know all of the leading west European statesmen and became particularly friendly with Abbé (later Cardinal) Dubois, the French Regent's confidant and later first minister.

When Stanhope suddenly died in February 1721, it seemed natural that Schaub should be sent to Paris to assure the French government that British policy would not alter.

Perhaps made over-confident by his good fortune of the previous five years, Schaub secured the recall of the English envoy there, Sir Robert Sutton, and – now knighted himself – he settled

down for a long stay in France.

The influence of the Swiss on British foreign policy, with a Bâlois and a Vaudois at the two most important continental courts, had reached its apogee.

It was to be of short duration. Little more than a year after Stanhope's death, the latter's associate, the Earl of Sunderland, died too and Schaub's new patron, the youthful Lord Carteret, had neither the stomach nor the stamina for a prolonged struggle with his rivals, Robert Walpole and Lord Townshend.

The two men realised that so long as Schaub remained in Paris, basking in the favour of the French leaders, Carteret's position would be unassailable.

In summer 1723, they sent Robert's brother Horatio Walpole to Paris, ostensibly on a private visit but in fact to undermine Schaub. This he did with relish, sending private letters to Townshend, which Townshend ensured were widely circulated, in which Schaub was mercilessly ridiculed and his influence with French leaders, on which he prided himself, was unjustly belittled.

This would probably not have done him undue harm were it not that fate once again took a hand.

Cardinal Dubois died in August 1723 to be followed that December by the former French Regent, the Duke of Orleans, himself. This deprived Schaub for the *raison d'être* for his presence in Paris.

His fate was sealed early in 1724 when, overestimating his influence with the new French leaders, he tried and failed to secure a dukedom for the Marquis de la Vrillière, the prospective husband of one of George I's nieces. Schaub finally left France in June 1724.

He represented the King of England only once again – in 1730-31, after Townshend's fall, when he succeeded in negotiating an alliance with King Augustus II of Poland and Saxony.

Despite this, he did not distinguish himself, for he succumbed to the temptation of dabbling in the intrigues that were endemic in King Augustus's court, and unfortunately on the losing side.

Not that this mattered much to Schaub. He retired to London where he enjoyed the friendship of George II and his Queen, and of most of the leading figures in English society.

His Irish pension and, after 1740, his wife's considerable

wealth enabled him to live in style and to amass a fine collection of old master paintings.

He suffered none of the homesickness for Switzerland that had afflicted his friend St Saphorin (who complained repeatedly of his *hémé* or Heimweh while in Vienna) but he did do his best to champion Basle and Berne's interests in London and to use England's influence with France on their behalf.

For this, during his regular visits to Basle in the 1730s, he was honoured.

In the early 1740s he briefly acted as an *eminent grise* when his friend, Lord Carteret, returned to power. He helped to raise Swiss troops to defend London against Bonny Prince Charlie (Prince Charles Edward Stuart) in 1745 (they were not needed in the end) and, in 1751, for service in India.

For most of the time, however, he seems simply to have enjoyed life until he died in London in 1758, leaving a widow and two daughters, the elder of whom married and had children in England.

*To be concluded*

© P.M. Barber, 1983

**VELCRO**  
the name to stick to

**TOUCH AND CLOSE FASTENER**  
Sole U.K. manufacturer, Selectus Limited, Biddulph,  
Stoke-on-Trent ST8 7RH. Telephone: Stoke-on-Trent (0782) 513316

**VELCRO®**