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New Helvetic Society thanks retiring president

NEVER has the lack of a real Swiss Club in London with adequate premises of its own able to offer its hospitality for the functions of our numerous societies been felt more than now.

The venerable Nouvelle Société Helvétique, recently renamed New Helvetic Society, had for the first time to split its main annual event into two separate functions held in different places and on different dates.

The annual general meeting enjoyed the hospitality of our Embassy on February 22, whereas the annual dinner had to be deferred until a week later in order to be accommodated at the Swiss Centre Restaurant.

Admittedly neither of these alternatives, perforce resorted to by the enterprising leaders of the NHS, could have been improved upon. The lecture hall at the Embassy, available for culturally important Swiss events at the Ambassador's discretion, is certainly one of the most beautiful meeting venues in the British capital.

And nowhere else could a better buffet dinner be made available so gracefully than at the Swiss Centre.

All the same it is to be hoped that sooner or later the separation of the two functions forcing loyal members and friends to double the effort and time of attendance may be remedied again. The older generation can remember happier days in this respect!

Opening the AGM for the last time as the society's president – she has led it so devotedly and brilliantly during 15 years – Mrs Mariann Meier had the pleasure



Mrs Mariann Meier... the society's president for 15 years

of welcoming our Ambassador Monsieur and Madame Francois-Charles Pictet, who attended the AGM as well as the annual dinner the following week.

He also graciously accepted his traditional nomination as honorary president of our society.

In his address to the meeting, Monsieur Pictet expressed his appreciation of the society's work, assured it of his full support and particularly thanked Mrs Meier for her devoted and distinguished stewardship during the last 15 years.

Mrs Meier also welcomed with particular satisfaction the presence of the president of the

Federation of the Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom, as well as that of the presidents of a number of individual Swiss societies whose growing cooperation with the New Helvetic Society is warmly appreciated.

The extent and steady expansion of this cooperation in our community which has been stimulated so successfully by Mrs Meier are best shown in the ever lengthening lists in the societies' annual reports of Swiss events actively supported by the NHS.

This includes its own lectures, discussions and seasonal social gatherings, numbering no less than 27 in the last report.

Of special interest were a

number of cultural events organised in conjunction with the Embassy, such as a talk by Prof J. Hersch (Geneva University) on "Problems of Youth today; the Enemy is Nihilism", a reading by Walter Muschg from his work, a talk by Mr M. Ney, director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad on "British Traces in Switzerland", a talk on "Switzerland and the EEC" by Dr J. Kellenberger of the Embassy, an illustrated talk on "Aspects of Contemporary Swiss Art" by Minister C. Caratsch of the Embassy, a talk by the well known Swiss author H. Loetscher, and a discussion on "Should Switzerland join the United Nations", introduced by Minister Caratsch and other members of the Embassy.

No less impressive reading in the annual report was a survey by Mrs Meier of the most outstanding lectures and political events during her 15 years' presidency.

She recalled with pride that she was the first woman ever to be leading such a big society in the UK.

According to the revised rules, "our aims are to keep members and friends informed on all matters Swiss, to act as a forum for discussion of Swiss problems – especially those affecting compatriots abroad – to cooperate with all Swiss organisations in the UK and in Berne, and to foster friendly relations between Great Britain and Switzerland".

The New Helvetic Society has, as Mrs Meier believes, enhanced its *raison d'être* in no small way by steadily pursuing these inspiring aims, a claim encouragingly

rewarded also by the society's steadily growing membership.

As with her predecessor Dr Hans Egli, Mrs Mariann Meier was appointed honorary vice-president of the society on her well earned retirement.

She was also given an Edwardian silver bowl as a token of the great esteem of all members who were happy to be assured of her continuing interest and active cooperation in the society and its council.

In view of the growing costs of administration, the AGM raised the society's annual subscription from £3 to £4. It also elected two members of the council, Mrs K.R.H. Allen and Mrs A.M. Doy, in the place of two retirements.

The council then succeeded at a subsequent meeting to persuade Mrs Allen to accept the presidency and Dr Heinz Schneider to act as vice-president.

Mrs Lisa Hall and Mrs A.R. Sharp were reappointed as hon. secretary and hon. treasurer respectively. Messrs Bonnet and Oggier kindly agreed to continue as hon. auditors.

H.W.E.

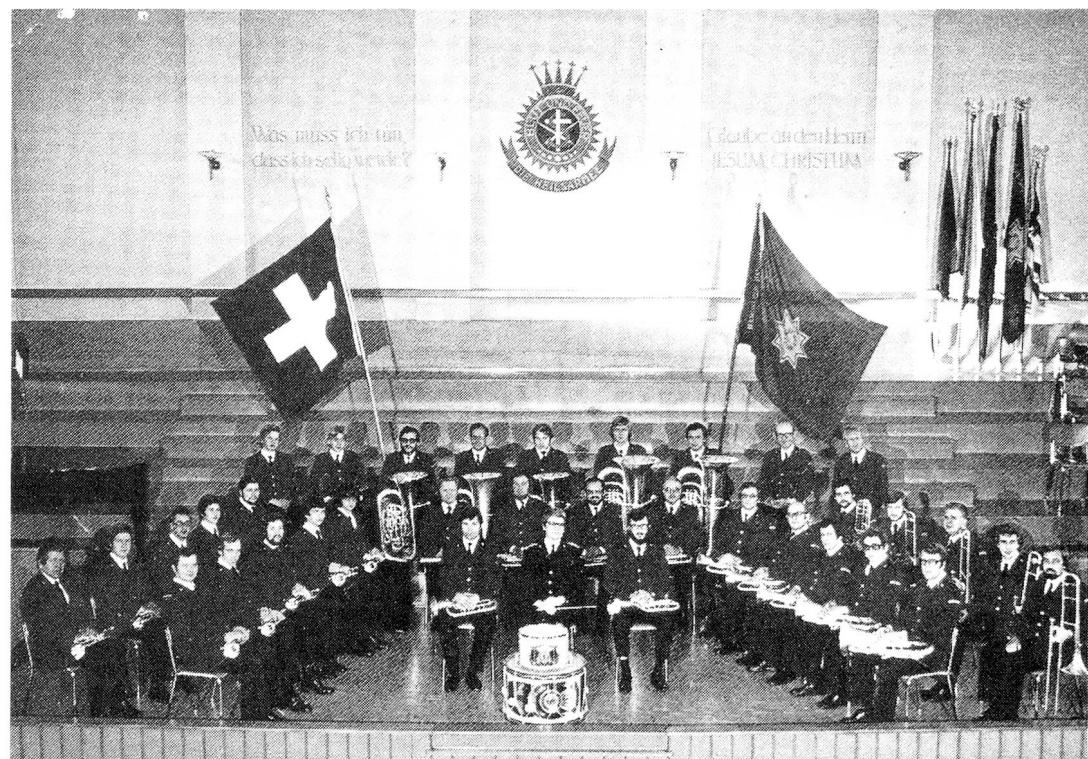
First open meeting

THE first open meeting of the New Helvetic Society was held at the lecture hall of the Swiss Embassy in London.

It had been announced that the Swiss Cultural Attaché, Monsieur Benoît Junod, was going to give a talk, illustrated with slides, on "A few aspects of contemporary Swiss art".

In the event, Monsieur Junod had to depart for Sweden in his official capacity.

His place was taken by the Minister at the Swiss Embassy, Monsieur Claudio Caratsch. He deputised most ably, and his talk



The Zurich Central Corps Band of the Salvation Army

was extremely interesting, which included a fascinating selection of pictures.

His informed comments proved how knowledgeable he was on the subject.

The second open meeting of the NSH was held at the Swiss Embassy on February 22. The subject was the Swiss Air Rescue Service - REGA.

Mrs Mariann Meier gave a talk on the history and activities of this unique humanitarian organisation which was founded in Switzerland more than 30 years ago. (See the report on Page 8).

Following the talk, a REGA film was shown, "Heli-Fox Fox". This was a reconstruction of an actual rescue operation, a most daring and spectacular mission which eloquently demonstrated the valuable work done by this rescue service.

Mariann Meier

Musical festival

THE Salvation Army of Stockport played host on Thursday April 19 to the Zurich Central Corps Band of the Salvation Army in Zurich.

In the evening the Swiss band presented a Musical Festival in the presence of Mrs Walter Allen, the Lady Mayoress of Stockport, and of the Consul General of Switzerland in Manchester and Mrs Charles Glauser.

The programme included marches, a piece for two cornets, selections and suites both modern and classical. To the delight of the audience some band members doubled as a choir and performed - in Swiss costumes - some original Swiss folksongs as well as an alphorn trio.

The band, formed in 1928, was under the able direction of Mr Daniel Steck, a lawyer by profession. It is largely due to his perseverance and unflagging zeal that the band reached its present high standard of performance.

Major Paul Marti, divisional commander of the Zurich Division of the Salvation Army, was the organiser of this trip to England. He is an accomplished musician, has a number of band compositions to his credit, one of which was performed under his baton at Stockport.

On Good Friday the Zurich Central Band gave a well received concert in the Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester and on Saturday and Easter Sunday, the band performed both afternoons and evenings on the Central Promenade in Blackpool, before returning to Zurich on Easter Monday.

"HER Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" was the heading to the official programme of the visit of Federal Councillor Pierre Aubert, Head of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs, and Madame Aubert.

The distinguished visitors arrived on April 1 for two days, and their programme was extremely crowded.

The Foreign Minister was accompanied by Ambassador Jean-Pierre Ritter, Head of Political Secretariat, Ambassador Francis Pianca, Head of Political Division 1, Monsieur Michel Pache, Head of Press and Information, all of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Berne. Also of the party was Monsieur Philippe Jaccard, his private secretary.

Prior to the arrival of the party from Switzerland, there was a

Swiss Foreign Minister's visit to London

briefing at the Foreign Office when Swiss journalists in Britain were given an outline of possible discussions.

As the Minister at the Swiss Embassy, Monsieur Caratsch, stated at the briefing, there were no real problems and relations between Great Britain and Switzerland were "of a sunny nature".

Naturally, Britain wanted to improve the trade balance, at present vastly in Switzerland's favour (£2bio; £1.4bio). Britain would

also like to welcome Switzerland in the United Nations Organisation, but there would not be any pressure.

In the event, the meetings went very well.

Swiss journalists were given an account by Federal Councillor Aubert at a reception at the Swiss Embassy. They were informed of the discussions with Lady Young, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and an expert on Western Europe.

The problem of Turkey and Greece and the Council of Europe was discussed and the matter of the Soviet soldiers interned in Switzerland. They were in the care of the Red Cross and would be free to leave for home or another country. There was no automatic right of asylum in Switzerland.

Another question discussed was the USA's planned retirement from UNESCO. Switzerland would not accept any increase in

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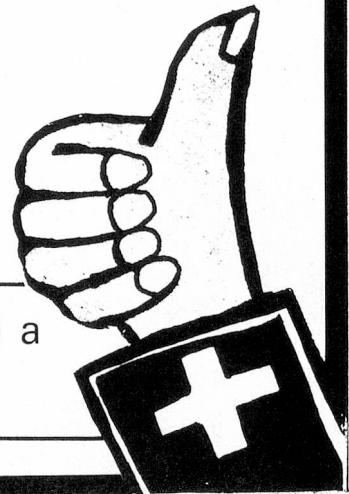
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er contribution once the 25 per cent of the present budget now carried by USA fell away. Switzerland has no intention at the moment of leaving UNESCO, and is in full agreement with Britain on the subject.

The discussions with Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, centred on the Disarmament Conference in Geneva – Monsieur Aubert is not too optimistic – on human rights, on the meeting in Athens and the debts of some countries, especially Poland and Yugoslavia.

Sir Geoffrey expressed thanks for Switzerland's services representing Britain's interest in Argentina.

Thanks were also expressed most warmly by Mrs Thatcher when Monsieur Aubert paid a courtesy visit. Both the Prime Minister and Federal Councillor Aubert share anxieties over the situation between Iran and Iraq.

The Federal Councillor also visited the Opposition Spokesman on Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Denis Healey. The latter was open and direct and said that in opposition he had far more liberty of speech than in office.

The outcome of the discussions with the British Ministers was satisfactory. The one thing where no agreement has yet been given by the British is regarding the employment of stagiaires (student trainees). Switzerland would welcome such an accord which it has already with some 15 countries.

On the first day of Federal Councillor and Madame Aubert's visit, they attended the Great British Music Festival at the Royal Festival Hall. The host was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Lady Cockfield. It was followed by a supper at Admiralty House.

Sir Geoffrey and Lady Howe gave a luncheon, and there was a dinner party at the Swiss Embassy,

hosted by Federal Councillor and Madame Aubert. They resided at the Embassy during their stay in London.

A special programme was arranged for Madame Aubert, which included a visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Mariann Meier

'An Englishman thanks Liestal'

THIS was the heading in the "Basellandschaftliche Zeitung" of March 8.

It told the story of an English guest from Bedford whose enjoyable holidays in Switzerland ended in Liestal in an unexpected way.

He was fined by the police for drinking after time after spending a jolly evening with some local people.

His Swiss as well as his English money had gone, and one of his Liestal companions paid his fine. Because he did not wish to give his name, the Englishman had no chance of returning the money from his homeland.

He was not beaten, however, and sent a cheque to the value of Sfr. 50 to the Swiss National Tourist Office in London with the request to pass the money to a charitable institution in Liestal, chosen by the local paper.

The former London

correspondent of the "Basellandschaftliche Zeitung", Mrs Mariann Meier, was entrusted with the task. She informed the paper and handed over the money on a recent visit to Liestal.

The paper gave the money to the "Heilpaedagogische Tageschule" (Charitable day hospital and school for therapeutic treatment) in Liestal.

The friendly visitor from England hoped that the Liestaler who so kindly helped him out of a predicament would read the item in the paper on March 8 and that he would know just how grateful the unknown Englishman is to him.

Mariann Meier

Rail convention

MANCHESTER'S Grand Hotel is the place to be on Saturday, June 16 when the Manchester branch of the Swiss Railway Enthusiasts Society hold their European Rail Convention.

There will be displays of model railways, books, a secondhand bargain stall where enthusiasts can sell or swap unwanted items, films and videos.

Society members from London, Manchester and Bristol will pit their wits against each other in a Swiss rail quiz, with members

of SNCF in attendance.

The cost of the day is just £2, making it a real bargain for all rail enthusiasts.

Further details of the event and of the society's activities are available from Dave Howsam, 3 Balmain Road, Davyhulme, Manchester. Tel: 061-748 7850.

Obituary

IT is with deep regret that we announce the death of two Ticinesi friends: Mr Aurelio Tomasin Polti, of 116 Castellain Mansiona, Castellain Road, London W9, died on March 2 at the age of 90. He came to England in 1916.

Mr Charles De Maria, of Flat 4, 190A Streatham High Road, London SW16 died on March 19 at the age of 76.

He was one of the longest-standing members of the Unione Ticinese and served on the committee.

We express our deep sympathy to the relatives of these two loyal friends and shall treasure their memory.

★ ★ ★

WE have been informed by Mrs Lena Long of the death of her father, Mr Jakob H. Vogel.

Mr Vogel, who was 102, lived in Leominster in Herefordshire and was, as far as we are aware, our oldest reader.

POSTBAG

I AM writing on behalf of the London Young Members Group of the English-Speaking Union.

The English Speaking Union is an established educational charity and is known for its contribution to promoting friendship.

We are now very anxious to expand the Young Members Groups, especially in London and particularly want to appeal to young people from overseas to join us.

We would like to promote the

opportunity for overseas students to meet their contemporaries in this country and will be holding our commonwealth and international evenings on the second Monday of every month between 6 and 8pm in Dartmouth House, the international centre and club of the English-Speaking Union of the Commonwealth.

It also gives us an opportunity to introduce them to Dartmouth House and hopefully to generate some interest in our many other

social and educational events and also offer membership to those who would like to become more involved.

Anyone wishing to find out more about the ESU Young Members should not hesitate to contact Alison Cropper, the ESU's National Youth Officer – **Sarah Dobson, Publicity Officer, ESU London Young Members Group, Dartmouth House, 37 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, London W1X 8AB.**