

# News from the colony : the cruising fete Suisse

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# NEWS FROM THE COLONY

## THE CRUISING FÊTE SUISSE

The gamble has come off — nineteen hundred people attended this year's Fête Suisse, and the weather held to almost the last minute. The organisers had realised that something different had to be offered to give the annual Swiss gathering a special mark. When the first Fête Suisse was organised just over one hundred years ago, it was a get-together of Swiss residents, and up to the war it relied mostly on local talent. For the past decade or so, groups of singers and dancers and well-known artists have come over from Switzerland, and the Fête Suisse changed in character in a similar way as the structure of the Colony altered. To celebrate the centenary last year, a special effort was made by the organisers, and nobody can deny that the eighty-sixth Fête on 8th May 1963 was a success, the humour and wit of the Cabaret "Rueblisaft", the lively singing of the Corale Unione Ticinese, the outstanding talent of Albert Ferber (piano) and the impressive massed voices of the "Männerchor" Zurich contributing towards a rich and varied programme.

But a jubilee celebration like that cannot be repeated, and the committee searched for new ideas. How could a rally of Swiss bring together the old and the young, the resident community and the floating population of youngsters temporarily in this country?

The outcome of much careful deliberation and painstaking organisation was a cruise on the Thames. True to type, most would-be participants ordered tickets late, and the sale did not really give any indication until about a week before the Fête was to take place. But by the time Friday, 12th June, arrived with brilliant sunshine and real summer warmth, the organisers could be certain of filling the boat, provided the weather held. And it did!

The neat motor vessel "Royal Sovereign" lay at anchor at Tower Pier, with the Swiss flag fluttering a welcome from the mast in the evening breeze. For an hour men, women and children boarded the boat in one continuous stream — hundreds of them, and a good hundred more had to be turned away! At 6.30 p.m. sharp the boat left loaded to capacity with Swiss and their friends all in a gay and festive mood.

The curious thing about this biggest of recent Swiss gatherings is that there is little fact to report. True, the Swiss Ambassador (accompanied by Madame de Fischer) gave an address following the chairman's welcome. But the vast audience could mostly only be reached through the loudspeaker, and much got lost. But it did not matter. That night, there was not a platform with distinguished guests — they were *of* the crowd. There were no reserved seats for eminent personalities — they mixed with their compatriots from less exalted walks of life. There were no expensive seats for the affluent — cheap seats for the students and "au pair" girls — they all mingled and sat or stood wherever there was room. And that, to my mind, was the outstanding merit of this year's Fête Suisse. Neither was there an imposed programme to which one had to listen, like it or not. One could roam to one's heart's content, and stay where and with whom one wanted, talk as much or as little as one felt like, and that went for eating and drinking, too.

I spent most of the evening chatting to the largest number of friends and compatriots I have met for a long

time, many of them I had not seen for a number of years.

On my "rounds", one of the most frequent questions was "Who is the Fête Suisse Organisation?" Perhaps an answer would not come amiss here. Mr. R. L. Thomas is its President in succession to a number of remarkable men, such as Mr. A. F. Suter, Mr. C. Chapuis and the late Mr. A. Renou. The organisation consists of the presidents of Swiss societies, ministers of the Churches, individuals like the former and the present editor of the S.O. and a few loyal stalwarts who have been connected with the Fête Suisse for years, to mention just one: Mr. J. Zimmermann. The full committee, however, only meet once or twice a year, and the real work is carried out by the Executive Committee of which Mr. Thomas is Chairman. It is to this group that our thanks are due. All the members pulled their weight, I am told, and they are, in alphabetical order, Messrs. V. Berti, E. Bonvin, M. A. Keller, A. Kunz, W. Roch (Embassy), E. Tobler, J. Zimmermann whose place was taken by Mr. A. Stauffer this time, the former being in hospital.

The trip down the Thames and back took four hours. One of the first attractions was when the boat sailed under Tower Bridge, specially opened for us! From the first moment restaurants, bars, snack bars and tea counters did a roaring trade — the caterers obviously had not reckoned with the eating capacity of the Swiss, and they could have sold the special Fête Suisse Menu of cold salmon and fresh strawberries at least three times over. Good thing they had plenty of other and also cheaper fare, provided one had the patience to wait. It was mainly the youngsters who complained about the catering shortcomings — the others mostly laughed it off — and even true Swiss grumbling did not seem to have the same effect afloat!

There was much singing, partly started by young people who, I have been told, were bored, as not enough entertainment had been provided for them, and there was not enough room for dancing. Though the Corale of the Unione Ticinese delighted a large audience with their popular songs, the loudspeakers did not work too efficiently, and much was drowned in the noise. The English professional accordionist, Miss Phyllis Gillingham, who had made her *début* at last year's National Day Celebration, gave a spirited recital and highly pleased her audience with Swiss songs and even "Ländler".

It was a marvellous idea to have special entertainment for the children. How they enjoyed the conjurer's performance and the Punch and Judy show! It was lovely to see a whole string of kids in their Sunday best, with faces aglow, trailing behind the Clown and singing to the strains of his accordion.

On the other hand, there was also what amounted to tragedy to those concerned. When the "Royal Sovereign" was well on the way to the Sea, it was discovered that a Spanish couple and their daughter had found their way aboard the vessel by mistake. They were to fly back to Spain later in the evening and wanted to spend the last hour on a short cruise in the Pool of London. Imagine their distress when they discovered that they were on their way to Gravesend and would miss their plane!

I am fully aware that this is the most unorthodox

report ever issued about a function in the Swiss Colony. But then it was an unusual kind of gathering. The most striking thing about it was the sense of easy enjoyment which seemed to prevail. I have since heard that many of the younger generation did not enjoy themselves. This is in stark contrast to the views of the older compatriots who relished the chance of spontaneous chats, the lack of formalities and the freedom to do as one pleased. Perhaps the verdict is typical of the outlook of the generations. The older people are still capable of enjoying themselves, just by being together, whereas the younger age-groups who have been brought up with all mod. con. need entertainment, dancing and other stimulating media to create enjoyment. Yet, it was they who were admitted at half price. I have no doubt that some of them even blamed the organisers for the thunderstorm which broke shortly before the boat returned to the Tower. Yet, I know there were youngsters who truly appreciated the efforts made for their enjoyment and who spent a happy evening aboard M.V. "Royal Sovereign". Generalisations are always dangerous, and it is an old saying that the art to please everybody has never yet been mastered by any man or woman. I for one enjoyed myself greatly, and as far as I am concerned, the eighty-seventh Fête Suisse was a success.

Mariann.

## SWISS RIFLE ASSOCIATION Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Rifle Association took place on Friday, 15th May, at the Glendower Hotel, Glendower Place, S.W.7, the headquarters of the Association. Owing to the proximity of the Whitsun holidays the attendance was somewhat smaller than on former occasions.

The Swiss Rifle Association is one of the Societies which does not make much noise in the Colony — all the noise is made at the shooting range at Bisley — but it consists of a happy band of men enthusiastically devoted to carrying on our national sport.

Mr. Alfred Schmid was in the Chair. After the minutes of the last General Meeting were read by Mr. F. Magnin, Honorary Secretary, the latter in the absence of the Treasurer, Mr. H. Straub, presented and explained the accounts, which showed a balance on the "right side". Both minutes and accounts were accepted.

The President gave a survey of the Association's activities during the last year, mentioning that by the end of 1963, the Swiss Rifle Association numbered two Honorary Members and seventy-four active members (1962: 83), the slight reduction was due to some members having left the country. Eight shooting practices were held at Bisley, and 6,130 (1962: 4,170) rounds of ammunition were used.

Mr. Schmid referred to the Federal Shooting Competition which was held in Zurich in July-August last year, and which a team of twelve members attended, obtaining an average of 34.00 points, being classed fourth out of twelve teams who took part in the special competition for Swiss Societies abroad. The Association won a laurel wreath with silver acorns, and a fine pewter jug as a prize. Four members of the team won distinctions.

The President remarked that the results obtained in Zurich were highly satisfactory and congratulated the members who had competed. He made mention of the fact that several members also won medals in the "Feld-schiessen" competition (which were later distributed).

Before closing his report, which was accepted, Mr. Schmid informed the Meeting that he had received a letter from the former Swiss Ambassador, Dr. Armin Daeniker, in which he referred to the pleasant memories of the Swiss Rifle Association, when *en poste* in London.

The Meeting then continued under the presidency *pro tem* of Mr. O. Grob, who announced the retirement of Mr. Alfred Schmid as President for reasons of age. (Mr. Schmid also underwent an operation recently). On behalf of the members he voiced deep regret at losing him, thanking him for the long and faithful services he had rendered for so many years. A proposal to elect the parting President an Honorary Member, with a seat on the committee, was accepted with acclamation. Mr. Schmid, visibly touched, thanked the members for the honour bestowed on him, an honour, he said, he greatly valued. He also expressed his gratitude to his former colleagues on the committee for the support they had always given him.

Mr. John C. Wetter, for many years occupying the office as Vice-President, was unanimously and with acclamation elected President of the Association. On taking the Chair, he thanked the members for having entrusted him with the leadership. He paid a warm tribute to his predecessor and thanked Mr. Grob for having so ably conducted the Meeting as President *pro tem*. Mr. Peter Fischer was elected Vice-President. Mr. Wetter announced that there were no other changes on the committee, which was re-elected *en bloc*. Mr. A. Stauffer was confirmed as Press-Reporter. Mr. Adolf Schmid proposed a vote of thanks to the former committee, which was accepted.

The President put the proposal to the Meeting, that Monsieur Beat de Fischer, the new Swiss Ambassador, be elected Honorary President of the Association, this was agreed to amidst applause. Various items were then discussed, such as shooting programmes, revolver shooting, and arrangements at Bisley, etc. Before closing the Meeting, Mr. J. C. Wetter gave an interesting *exposé* of his visit to the EXPO exhibition in Lausanne.

Close of the Meeting 7.50 p.m.

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The members then adjourned to the dining room for an excellent dinner, which did full honour to the well-known excellence of the *cuisine* of the Glendower Hotel. During dinner a number of Toasts were proposed and honoured.

A. STAUFFER,  
Press Reporter, S.R.A.

## SWISS ECONOMIC COUNCIL

A report of the Annual General Meeting and Dinner which was held at the Dorchester Hotel, on Tuesday, 16th June, will appear in our next issue.

## WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

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