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NOT ONLY TRAINS, BUT ALSO...



Worb SBB. The original buildings with the modern replacement at the far end.

ALL PHOTOS: *Christopher Lacey*

Christopher Lacey considers the loss of the small things that make Swiss railways interesting.

Members fortunate enough to have visited Switzerland in the last two years will have noticed that the rail industry appears to be introducing policies aimed at standardising the network, and these will have the affect of bringing changes that will effect the overall atmosphere and character of all Swiss railways. Several recent items in *Swiss Express* have described how traditional locomotive and carriage formations are being replaced by new long distance EMUs. Swiss commuters have already seen the introduction of common types of multiple-units, with the 52x series providing a much greater level of comfort and reliability. Staff uniforms have not been neglected either, with most SBB on-train staff now sporting a standard design of tie/cravat, as opposed to the variety of types seen in recent years.

But such standardisation policies extend far beyond the provision of new rolling stock and into many other areas of railway infrastructure with, for example the ongoing station rebuilding programme delivering a standard platform height, whilst improved subways equipped with both ramps and steps do much to encourage rail travel amongst all groups of society. However the process of standardisation will inevitably



claim some casualties, especially amongst those items considered non-standard, old fashioned or unusual. One early result has been the elimination of carriage information boards and their partial replacement by paper labels on a few selected services. This frequent and labour intensive practice has now all but disappeared from the everyday



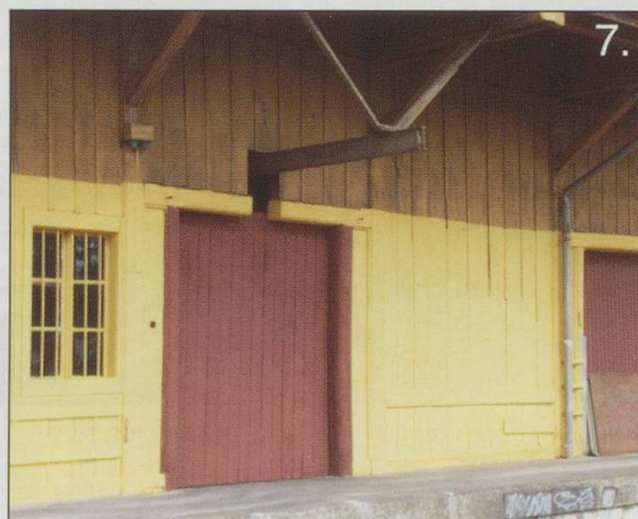
station scene, as have the racks that were used to store the metal routing boards. (Fig.1) A further loss has been the manually operated passenger information systems, these having been replaced by electronic versions. (Fig.2 & 3) All is not quite lost however, as some interesting features from the past still survive.

Before the widespread use of road vehicles carriage of freight to and from those stations serving isolated communities was a regular feature of railway life. Some items of freight will however be too bulky or heavy to be moved by manpower alone and some form of mechanical aid may have been provided to assist the station staff. Most obviously this would be in the form of a manually worked crane (that today would be electrically powered) and an excellent example of a traditional static jib crane can still be found on the line to Luzern from Gümligen at Worb SBB. (Fig.4) Gümligen itself possesses a redundant signal cabin, something else that is disappearing from the railway scene. (Fig.5) Worb SBB is a lightly used station, as the town is better served by the RBS at Worb Dorf, so its original buildings are now out of use being replaced by a basic shelter, a seat and a ubiquitous "Selecta" vending machine.

The crane at Worb SBB is a rare remaining example of the type of crane used where traffic flow was minimal and only basic movement of loads was required, as its range was limited to the jib's 180° radius. Movement of goods into the adjacent shed would still have had to be undertaken manually once the items were off the railway wagon. The only operating instructions with it are a plate noting its weight-bearing capacity (1200Kg). None of today's Health and Safety warnings! (Fig. 6) At busier locations where goods had to be regularly moved into or out of the shed the use of a girder-mounted hoist system was preferred. At Grenchen Süd the remains of such a system, with its load limit of 1500Kg stencilled on the beam, can still be seen. (Fig. 7) Freight is sadly no longer handled at

these locations although the SBB does still handle some wagon-load consignments. Recently the area around Worb SBB has attracted some light industry, but all freight movement in the area is now by road and this is the way the products of Worb's famous brewery, Egger AG, founded in 1863, are shipped-out. Although Grenchen too has numerous manufacturing establishments their products also go by road today.

There are probably many other locations around the network where other unusual, in today's world, railway features still survive in situ, and some possibly may still see some use. So, when visiting Switzerland, do not just take photographs of trains but capture images of these aspects of railway history before they are swept away on the tide of uniformity.



WHY SWITZERLAND?

My initial interest in Switzerland came through railway modelling. After successful layouts in 00-gauge (GWR) & early British N-gauge I thought continental models might display better running qualities and detail. In the early seventies I started a Swiss N-gauge layout and then joined the Swiss Model Group, that became part of the Swiss Railway Enthusiasts Society and then the SRS. This whetted my appetite for Switzerland so 1981 saw my family sail from Dover to Ostend, travelling on through Basel to Interlaken by train. Having missed out on a 1959 school trip to Austria this was my first trip abroad.

Switzerland did not just live up to my expectations - it exceeded them in every aspect! Gosh it had even more to offer than Yorkshire! We travelled extensively on our Swiss Pass, marvelling at the scenery, transport and all things Swiss. I was hooked and have returned to sample Switzerland's delights every year since.

In 1984 I built a small RhB H0m layout, using Bemo materials and, true to form, then visited the Graubünden finding out how inaccurate my model was. Finally I did learn, and did some research, before building Perrapswil! Now there always seems a pressing need to visit Switzerland to check up on something!

Dave Howsam – SRS Founder Member