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Switzerland in the UK

2/09

Should the Swiss make English their FIFTH official language?

A government funded organisation in Berne has sent shockwaves throughout the country by suggesting the time had come to start considering making English the fifth official language.

The proposal is made in a report compiled by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which spends Sfr. 500 million a year supporting research projects in a variety of disciplines – particularly those that can be developed on an international scale.

This is not the first time there has been talk of putting English on a par with German, French, Italian and Romansch, and it's not likely to find much general support outside the scientific community.

But the report could have an effect in government circles, where there is an obligation to treat all residents equally.

It says public administrations should learn to communicate better with all citizens, and a knowledge of English would help achieve this.

Of course, English is already used extensively by a number of public bodies.

It was back in 2002 that it was

decided that the Government's own website should be translated into English, and thousands of pages now appear in the language (see below).

All members of the Federal Council are fluent English-speakers, as are most senior officials.

In fact, Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin, when he was

Growth of the Swiss Abroad

More and more Swiss are now living outside Switzerland. The latest government statistics show the total has now reached 676,176.

Sixty per cent of them (405,393) live in countries of the European Union, and 28,438 have made their homes in the UK.

head of the Department of Finance, said the first thing he did every morning was read the Financial Times – in English.

It's the same story in many of the cantons, especially those with

a large number of English-speaking residents.

One outstanding example is Geneva, where many people working in international organisations never even bother to learn French.

According to Alberto Achermann, one of the authors of the report, this is understandable. "Imagine you are sent by your company to work in China," he says. "Do you think you will be able to speak Chinese after only three years?"

With so many patients only speaking English Geneva's cantonal hospital finds a working knowledge of the language is a necessity for medical personnel.

But head interpreter Patricia Hudelson said: "We often have to call in interpreters in other languages – especially Albanian."

However, not everyone agrees that the authorities should spend so much time catering for English-speakers.

National Councillor Didier Rerberat of Neuchâtel, said: "The day the Americans decide to send out tax demands in French I'd agree to doing the same here."

Another Carigiet book in the UK



The first book about Ursli, the little Grisons boy and his big bell, was such a success that a second story has now arrived. Read about it on Page 2.

A day with dogs




Alp horn player Frances Jones has been getting to know some British born Bernese mountain dogs. Find out what happened on Pages 4-5.

FOSSUK Weekend preview



Plans are now well advanced for this summer's FOSSUK Weekend in Cardiff. Check out the programme on Page 8.

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The Federal State

Switzerland is a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional nation shaped by the will of its people. It has been a federal State since 1848. Switzerland has a federal structure with three different political levels: the Confederation, the cantons and the communes.



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News about any forthcoming events that will be of interest to our readers should be emailed to: editor@meakin.net

CH+UK news in brief

■ Plans are under way to form a new Swiss club in the north of Wales. Honorary Swiss consul Ruth Thomas recently wrote to all Swiss registered with the consulate and was very pleased with the response.

The first meeting of the new club will take place in Caernarfon on Saturday, May 16.

Any reader interested in joining the club should contact Ruth at swissconsulate@swissinwales.org

■ Jeffrey Long, for 17 years President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK, has been named runner-up in this year's Times/Sternberg Active Life Award. The prestigious award goes to someone over 70 who "in the opinion of the public, has done most for society and for good causes in old age."

Says The Times: "The award celebrates older people who continue to contribute to the flavour of our lives - who regard ageing as something best left to wine, people who are not so much ageing as ripening."

Two years ago, at the age of 75, Jeffrey walked 1,000km from London to Lausanne to raise £5,000 for the Royal British Legion.

Another Carigiet book to delight children in the UK

The first book to be published in English with illustrations by renowned Grisons artist Alois Carigiet was such a success last year that a second is following hard on its heels.

In Switzerland, A Bell for Ursli is second only to Heidi in popularity with children.

That fact convinced Edinburgh publishers Floris Books to test it on the UK market - and it became a top seller.

Now a second book, Florina and the Wild Bird, has been launched and there is every expectation it will have similar success.

Laura Armstrong of Floris Books said the Ursli story had been hugely popular among people with a Swiss background or those with an interest in Swiss culture.

"Now a new generation of children with Swiss parents but who are able to read English will be able to enjoy this exciting story and Alois Carigiet's stunning illustrations," she said.

"It will also help them experience an important part of their Swiss heritage."

Basically the story is about little Florina who finds a tiny wild bird and takes it home to care for it. She makes food for it using her dolls' teaset and gives it a

special basket to sleep in. But when the bird grows up and wants to fly she has to decide whether to keep it or release it back into the mountains.

The book gives a snapshot of life in the Grisons, where Alois Carigiet was born in 1902 and where he eventually returned to spend the last 20 years of his life until he died in 1985.

Today many tourists visit his

native village of Trun to admire the Carigiet wall paintings on many of the buildings, and the local museum, which has a Carigiet room.

There's even an 8km "Ursli" trail that meanders through alpine meadows and along mountain streams. At 20 different points a page of the book is revealed, with the text in Romansch, German and English.



Summer's here at last and Florina, brother Ursli, their parents and their goats set off from their village to stay in their little hut high up in the mountain meadows

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Swiss Cultural Fund promises more visits to UK regions

Criticism that the government-sponsored Swiss Cultural Fund in Britain is too much London-biased and virtually ignores regional cities is confirmed in the fund's latest report.

But this situation, which has met with disapproval by a number of Swiss societies outside the capital, may be about to change.

The report highlights 46 different events that were held during 2008, of which 39 were in London.

There were two in Liverpool, and only one each in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester, Winchester and Birmingham.

Of the London events, 24 were part of the City of London Festival, with venues ranging from the steps of Paul's Cathedral to Liverpool Street station and Finsbury Circus gardens.

The report says 2008 has been "a busy and very successful year," and it adds:

"At the close of the second year of profound structural and programmatic changes to the Swiss Cultural Fund in Britain we believe we can now truly justify our claim

to be a nationwide fund, having sustained cultural projects and events not just in London but also in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham.

"We are proud to have reached this point and are committed to enhancing this geographically expanded engagement throughout the coming years.

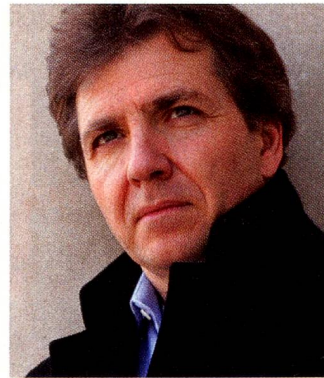
"We are careful to avoid the principle of indiscriminate all-round distribution and therefore limit our activities to a certain number each year.

"There is much more to be gained by focusing on a select of projects and seeing them through thoroughly. We believe we have successfully employed this strategy throughout the year."

The fund says it was established to act as a springboard for the careers of talented Swiss artists in the UK.

"Thanks to a new initiative," it says, "the fund now also supports high profile projects with established artistes and offers direct involvement to potential supporters and benefactors.

"In order to achieve these



Thierry Fischer: The acclaimed Swiss conductor in Wigmore Hall concert

goals the fund liaises with companies and individuals with an interest in Switzerland.

"At the same time it seeks supporters with whom it can establish privileged partnerships, working on specific projects and bespoke events in cooperation with cultural institutions in Switzerland and the UK."

Events so far this year have included a concert at the Wigmore Hall conducted by Thierry Fischer, the Swiss born conductor of the BBC's National Orchestra for Wales.

The London Barbican is currently featuring a season devoted to the work of the late Le Corbusier, the eminent architect who was born at La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1887.



How to contact the editor

Reports of Swiss society activities and coming events, and articles and correspondence for the 'Switzerland in the UK' section of the Swiss Review, should go to the editor:

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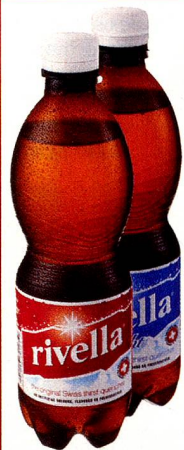
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My day with the Bernese mountain dogs

By UK Alphorn player Frances Jones

“We have recently been asked about the possibility of a main ring appearance at Crufts. We thought it would be nice to have the accompaniment of an Alpine horn to play us into the arena. Would this be something you would like to do?”

As a classical orchestral horn player, happily minding my own business with a circuit of orchestras, recitals and a keen (mostly) band of students to keep me busy, this was a rather unexpected request to appear among my emails one morning.

Admittedly I'm a dog owner, and I've occasionally even watched some of Crufts on TV but our Bella, though we love her to bits, is a rescued mongrel, and so was her predecessor, so I've never had any

contact with the clubs of individual breeds before.

I was about to be invited into the select world of the magnificent Bernese Mountain Dog and the even more rarified inner circle of carting by Wendy Murray of the Bernese Working Cart Group.

What an exciting new world has opened up for me!

Well, the Crufts date fell through in the end. But Wendy said that if I ever wanted to come along to a Bernese carting weekend, I'd be most welcome. She told me that the Bernese Mountain Dogs were a working breed, like their larger compatriots the St Bernards.

Whereas the St Bernard dogs were very strong and tenacious, and excellent rescue dogs in the mountains for sniffing out people trapped in avalanches, the Bernese were used for pulling carts, or the stretchers for injured people. Slightly smaller, they are more agile with a

better strength to weight ratio.

For a long time they have not been allowed to be used for work any more, but they love pulling carts and so the Bernese Carting Group keeps their skills alive and introduces their traditional heritage to the world at large.

It sounded like a good idea to see how the dogs would respond to the sound of the alphorn before such public (and televised) exposure in fact.

As when Wendy told me that there was a Bernese Working Weekend happening up at Wellington Country Park, close to where we live, we came home from our holiday a day early to see what it was all about.

I was invited to come and meet the pup at their Saturday evening

gathering, then if the dogs were happy about it, maybe I might play for the display on the Sunday.

What an amazing experience it was. What gorgeous dogs!

They all looked absolutely identical to me – all big, with the same markings, and soft and gentle and affectionate and beautiful!

I discovered that there isn't just one Bernese Mountain Dog Club: there are five regional groups in the UK, and that events like this happen up and down the country on many weekends every year.

There is generally an opportunity for Bernese owners to try their dogs in a cart harness for the first time and take them round a specially designed obstacle course.

I spoke to a number of owners who were delighted to discover that their dogs enjoyed pulling a cart when they had never done so before.

Having said hello to a couple of dozen dogs, I went a little way away, assembled my horn, and played a few notes. Some dogs near me instantly turned and looked intently at the source of the sound.

A pair pulling a cart nearby were intrigued, and they both cocked their heads to the right in one synchronised movement to listen to the sounds emerging.

Then they went on their way – just another harmless event that they accepted without any worry at all.



Bernese mountain dog meets alphorn – at Wellington Country Park near Reading



Bells tinkling, harnesses clinking, adorable dogs and magnificent costumes...it was magical!

All was looking good for the display on the Sunday afternoon.

I turned up – feeling slightly overdressed in my Swiss costume – to find some dogs harnessed to carts being taken round the obstacle course, others snoring, others pottering about as their owners did the same.

I talked to them all, dogs and owners, and then it was time to walk through a practice routine.

I stood in the middle of the ring playing 'How Much is that Doggie in the Window' and other sort-of relevant tunes.

Then they decided that they wouldn't parade like that but just do what felt right on arrival.

Soon Swiss outfits emerged from tents and caravans, carts were transformed with beautiful displays of flowers, flags, cheeses and milk churns, tinkling with cowbells, each spectacular.

It was a truly magnificent sight and sound. Some carts were pulled by one dog, some by two, and although I still couldn't work out one

Bernese from the next, I did begin to pick up that some were slightly sleeker, some had marginally more white between the eyes, some sported slightly longer caramel-coloured socks, and one was called Henry.

I walked into the centre of the arena with Wendy and after she had introduced the event to the crowds who had gathered to watch, she invited me to start playing.

As soon as I began, the bells started tinkling, the harnesses clinking, the parade entered the ring and I was slowly encircled with handlers, dogs and carts in the most gorgeous sight you ever saw.

I played a number of traditional Swiss alphorn melodies and the dogs were not distracted at all – they walked round their circle steadily and purposefully until, when all were arrived, they stopped in a line either side of Wendy and me.

It was a magical feeling, playing the instrument I love, the music that is so evocative of the Swiss mountains, and being surrounded by these adorable

dogs with a magnificent display of costumes and carts in attendance.

The dogs were then invited to show off their carting skills, all requirements if working in a crowded mountain village market, like stopping and staying still on command, reversing with their carts, going either gently or fast when requested to do so, and weaving carefully in a zig-zag through a line of volunteer children.

When the display was finished, the delighted children had each helped themselves to a lollipop out of one of the milk churns, and I was again invited to play some Swiss melodies while the dogs and tinkling carts were led away out of the display ring.

Lots of people commented on the beautiful sound of the alphorn and the magical experience of the whole display.

So look out next time Crufts is on, because you might just see Henry the Bernese Mountain Dog and his mates showing the world how the ancient Swiss tradition of carting used to be done.

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A profile of Candidates will be published on the FOSSUK website (www.swiss-societies.co.uk) after 26 April 2009.

Swiss hope to find gold in UK refuse heaps

Environmental experts from Switzerland will be in London in June with the expectation of making rich pickings from the UK's ever growing waste mountain.

Landfill sites are reaching their capacity and their cost is accelerating. Yet the British government is committed to reducing household waste by 30 per cent in the next six years.

The Swiss think they have the answer. With their strong environmental laws, cutting edge technologies for waste treatment and recycling have developed much earlier than in most other countries.

Swiss companies have been enviously eyeing the UK's waste mountain, now growing by more than 430 million tons a year.

With not enough waste-to-energy plants, the market for the latest technologies is immense.

Sliding £ hits Swiss exports to the UK

The dramatic drop in the value of franc over the last few months is beginning to cause a serious decline in the volume of UK imports from Switzerland.

UK residents – both British and Swiss – who have holiday homes are also being badly hit.

Utility bills paid from the UK, as well as communal, cantonal and federal taxes, are now costing them 37.5 per cent more than they did a year ago.

And the tourist industry, despite seeing a record number of visitors over the winter season thanks to unexpected prolonged snowfalls, is now bracing itself for a sharp decline in the number of holidaymakers from the UK.

But it is on the trade front that the declining pound is starting to have the greatest effect.

In January, the latest month for which figures are available, the value of exports from Switzerland to the UK dropped 13.9 per cent to 681 million francs.

Imports from the UK showed an even bigger fall of 20.6 per cent to 372 million francs.

Swiss watch exports have been particularly hard hit, and there has been a decline in Swiss cheeses and other dairy products.

But some Swiss companies are meeting the challenge by fighting back. There were double the number of companies featured in the Swiss pavilion at the recent International Food & Drink exhibition in London, determined to emphasise the uniqueness of Swiss products that, while not cheap, still represent excellent value.

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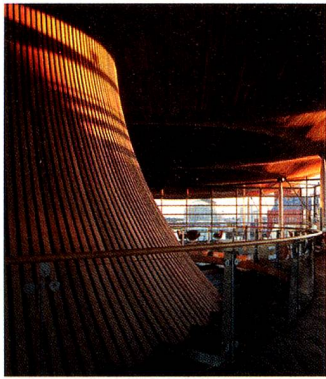


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Inside the Senedd, the ultra-modern home of the Welsh Assembly

The Welsh plan a warm welcome for FOSSUK weekend

This summer the FOSSUK annual general meeting will be in Wales – the first time it has been held in the Principality.

And the Swiss in Wales, led by honorary Swiss consul Ruth Thomas, are determined to make the most of this opportunity to show their compatriots in other parts of the country something of the delights of this particular corner of the UK.

The three day event starts on Friday, June 19, with a concert in the St David's Hall, in the heart

of Cardiff, given by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC Chorus under their principal conductor, the Geneva-born Thierry Fischer.

The AGM will be the following day at the Cardiff Mansion House, the official residence of the Lord Mayor of Cardiff, and will include elections for delegates to represent Swiss in the UK on the Council of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, and for committee members of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK.

In the afternoon there will be tours of some of Cardiff's landmarks, including Cardiff Castle and the National Museum of Wales.

There will be a second concert that evening at St Peter's, the oldest surviving Catholic church in Cardiff which houses the only Swiss made Spath Orgelbau organ in the UK.

It will feature a choir from the Ticino, the Vos da Locarno – a special treat for Swiss Ambassador Alexis Lautenberg who himself comes from the Ticino and who will be spending the weekend in Cardiff.

In the second half of the concert the Ticinese choir will be joined by Côr Godre'r Garth, a well known 60 strong Welsh choir from nearby Pontypridd.

A highlight for Sunday will be a visit to the Senedd, the home of the National Assembly for Wales.

Overlooking Cardiff Bay, this inspiring building has won many awards for its distinctive architectural style and use of sustainable materials.

There will be a special tour of the building for the Locarno choir, conducted by an Italian-speaking guide.

Other events on the Sunday afternoon will include cruises across Cardiff Bay.

Lucerne all abuzz with the bees from Bournemouth

They say their new and distinctive yellow and black costumes are to highlight a worrying decline in the world's honey bee population. But whatever the reason they created quite a buzz when some rather noisy Bournemouth bees flew over to Lucerne to take part in the city's Fasnacht carnival.

For centuries groups of drummers have been parading through the streets of Swiss towns and villages to frighten away the Spirits of Winter.

But it was not until just after the Second World War, with the Swiss recovering from years of austerity, that the people of Lucerne first woke up to the discordant sounds of Guggenmusik.


When Lucerne twinned with Bournemouth, a band from the seaside town was invited to take part in the 1986 Fasnacht. It was something of a culture shock for its members to hear

Guggenmusik for the first time.

But it was to be another 12 years before Bournemouth became the first UK town to have its own Guggenmusik band – Gugge 2000.

In 2002 they became the first band from outside Switzerland to be invited to take part in the Lucerne carnival. And this year, in their new "beez" costumes, they were back again, for six hectic days of raucous music-making, starting at 5am on Day 1 busking through the streets, then giving impromptu concerts in the squares of the old town, and taking a prominent part in the Carnival itself.

Said the band's founder, Dave Brewer: "Our aim is to provide enjoyment and lots of fun for our members and audiences – and to help spread this fantastic musical style throughout the UK."




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