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# 90 YEARS S.M.S. IN LONDON

Fifteen years after the *Schweizerischer Kaufmännischer Verein* was founded in Lucerne, the London Section came into being. It was on 26th September, 1888 when a small group of 13 compatriots decided to form the Swiss Mercantile Society with the aim of advancing professional and linguistic education of its members. Barely a month later, the Society appealed for admission as a section of the S.K.V. in Switzerland.

From a report written a few years ago by Walter Burren, the Society's long-serving Secretary and Hon. Member, we learn that evening classes in English, Italian and Spanish figured in the earliest documents, and already in 1895, the Society obtained an assurance from the Swiss Government that it would receive a subsidy towards teachers' salaries for evening classes. These were the only educational activities the Society organised up to the First World War, since there were no restrictions on immigration, and young Swiss were able to work without permit. The war interrupted work, but in 1917/18, the S.M.S. saw an opportunity of restarting the work under its President Fred Stauffer, and evening classes were held in six different places. The Aliens Act of 1920 put a stop to free immigration,

and the S.M.S. began full-time courses in English and commercial subjects.

As a result of an appeal launched in England and Switzerland, a suite of six rooms was rented in Henrietta Street off the Strand. The school started in January, 1923, and by the summer 50 students were in attendance. Evening classes, too, began and have been a regular feature of college activities ever since.

The premises soon became inadequate. The Society was able to acquire the remainder of the lease of Swiss House, 34/35 Fitzroy Square, London W1. The two buildings had previously been occupied as a hostel for Swiss Girls since 1906. Alterations were soon completed, and on 11th December, 1926, the then Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, opened the College officially. Those were the days of men like G. E. De Brunner and A. C. Staehelin. The latter, with J. J. Boos, negotiated an agreement which made the Society limited by guarantee in 1931.

Swiss House has remained the home of the College, not without ups and downs, though. When war broke out in 1939, tuition had to cease, and the 200 students left. The College served as mobilisation centre for all Swiss called up for army service.

One of the buildings was temporarily given up, and the other first served as a reception centre for bombed-out Swiss — fortunately never used — and still housed the Swiss Benevolent Society until it moved to nearby Conway Street. Swiss House was badly bombed twice, and was hit by fire bombs, courageously put out by the unique caretaker Adolf Bossert.

When hostilities ceased in 1945, the Society faced the huge task of building up the College again. Preparatory work had been done, and it was possible to start with 50 students in April 1946, as soon as the most urgent repairs had been carried out. Eighteen months later, more repairs were completed, and the number could be increased to 125 young men, and later ladies, too, once the necessary toilet facilities were available. When the second building reverted to the Society, the shortage of accommodation was relieved, and soon the College blossomed in its full pre-war style.

The College has gone from strength to strength, with an annual intake of 500-700 students, a very high standard of tuition, capable British teaching staff and regular support from the Swiss authorities. A modern language laboratory has since been added to the amenities.



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In April 1972, the Society was able to acquire the freehold of the premises. This was possible thanks to financial assistance from the S.K.V., the Swiss Government and many firms and private donors.

And thus the day came when the S.M.S. had its very own premises, one of the few Swiss societies in Britain who are in this enviable position. They have been host to other Swiss organisations, and for many years they ran the Swiss Employment Department which was started in Queen Victoria Street in 1890 and went on to the early 'fifties.

Yet more was to be done. The two houses had to be rebuilt, extensive alterations, an extension at the back, modern heating and lighting systems, etc. were installed. In 1973, Golden Jubilee Year for the College, a Jubilee Fund was opened by the S.K.V. to cover the cost, and at the same time the difficult task of moving the College to temporary premises had to be faced. Three different homes had to be found as rebuilding took more than the eight months estimated, and four complicated removals had to be executed. Not one hour of tuition was lost, which is to the credit of the Principal, Mr. E. W. Makin, his staff and above all to Mr. W. Burren, who had returned to the College as Secretary some time after the war.

On 1st November, 1974, the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. A. Weitnauer, officially opened the newly completed building in the presence

of the Mayor of St. Pancras, the President of the Swiss National Bank who had launched the appeal in Switzerland, and many personalities from the S.K.V. and the Swiss community in London.

Thanks to a handsome donation by the *Bundesfeierspende*, the refurbishing of the College could be undertaken. And now the College, 55 years old, is well and truly established, its protected, harmonious Adams' front intact, and the inside up to modern standards and requirements.

The College, of course, is the reason why the Swiss Mercantile Society has a more valid *raison d'être* than any other Swiss organisation apart from the Churches, Benevolent Society and Welfare Office for Young People. Its history is intertwined with that of the College. It has always played an important part in the life of the London Swiss community. From the S.M.S. came many an initiative, and the Society has always been ready to support important schemes emanating from other societies or individuals, and it has had the good fortune that several of its presidents and other officers were outstanding personalities who have left their marks in the annals of the Colony. (Creation of Presidents' Assembly, now Federation of Swiss Societies, Study Council of Swiss problems (formerly Commission Economique Suisse, now Swiss Economic Council), Swiss Sports, Youth Centre, i.e. Swiss Hostel for Girls, Swiss Cultural

Forum (which unfortunately came to nothing), and others. It was thanks to the S.M.S. that the first National Day Celebration was organised by the Colony in 1939.

On Wednesday, 8th November, the Society celebrated its 90th anniversary with a Social Evening at the Swiss House canteen. The President, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, welcomed a handsome number of members, including Mr. J. H. Attinger who has 54 years of membership to his credit, Mrs. Richard Weist, widow of an active committee member, a former President, M. A. Jaccard, and Mrs. Mariann Meier, widow of one of the most outstanding presidents the S.M.S. has had, member in her own right as well as President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, London. The President also thanked Mr. and Mrs. W. Burren and the caretakers for the excellent buffet supper.

He then asked Mrs. Meier to talk about the past. And this she did, going back to her earliest association with the S.M.S. — a students' dance at the Princes Galleries in Piccadilly in 1933, and her marriage to Walter Meier in 1935, when she started doing work for the S.M.S., sewing curtains, fitting out a first-aid room, chairing the war-time Ladies' Group which organised concerts and entertainment at Swiss House. She talked of French, Italian and Russian evening classes they attended. She reminisced on her husband's presidency from 1947–1958, her visits to Switzerland to attend the Delegates'



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Meetings of the S.K.V. and the friendship which survived her husband's death in 1961. She recalled special occasions like when he was made an Hon. Member of the S.K.V. in 1956, and the 50th, 60th and 75th anniversaries of the S.M.S. And she finished with a quotation from the Jubilee Booklet 1938:

"Education and training have always gone hand in hand with friendship and a sense of community amongst members of the S.M.S. and

the College". An excellent record, of which the Swiss Mercantile Society may well be proud of.

The evening was a great success, and members now look forward to the centenary in 10 years' time, but more immediately to the Jubilee Dinner and Dance on Saturday, 3rd February 1979.

MM

(By courtesy of "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt", Zürich.)

## Birthdays and Anniversaries

First of all, we should like to apologise to Mr. and Mrs. Willy Renz, of 7 The Highway, Sutton, Surrey, that we are late in wishing them the best of health and continued happiness on their Golden Wedding. It took place on 30th July, but unfortunately nobody informed us of the happy event. Congratulations and our sincere apologies.

Mr. and Mrs. O. F. Boehringer will celebrate their 33rd wedding anniversary on 2nd February.

Mr. G. A. Schmid will have his 93rd birthday on 1st February, and Mrs. N. Burri will celebrate her birthday on 6th February. Mrs. H. Hanftwurcel will have hers on 17th of the month, the same day on which Mr. R. E. Maag will be 66. Mrs. E. Jamieson will be 79 on 20th February, and the former Swiss Ambassador in London, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, Berne, will have his birthday (87th) on 24th of the month.

Finally, Mr. F. Gerber will miss his 87th birthday, for he was born on 29th February, 1892.

Congratulations and best wishes to all these readers and to anyone else of whose birthdays and anniversaries we are not aware.

### J. W. BONJOUR 80

It is with great pleasure that we announce the 80th birthday on 23rd February of Mr. W. J. Bonjour, of 72 Shirley Avenue, Croydon, Surrey.

He was born at Blonays/Vevey where he attended a private school from the age of 5. When he was 10, he went to the *Collège Scientifique* at

Vevey for six years. After that, he spent four years at the commercial section of the *Oberer Realschule* in Basle.

After a two years' apprenticeship at a bank, combined with evening classes in commerce, commercial law and languages, Mr. Bonjour went to Orbe where he worked at the offices of Nestlé. On 1st April, 1920, he joined the staff of the Swiss Bank Corporation in London where he worked for six years in the Foreign Correspondence Department. In 1926, he was transferred to the Payments Department where he was second in charge. Mr. Bonjour was promoted to "fondé de pouvoirs" in charge of that department until he retired early in 1964.

In June 1924, he married Miss Louise Collet of Brests/Montreux. They celebrated their Golden Wedding on 10th June, 1974.

Mr. Bonjour was a member of the Swiss Club for a short time, and the City Swiss Club for 20 years. He is still a member of the Swiss Philatelic Society and the Swiss Mercantile Society, as well as a Council member of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*.

Since his retirement, his main hobby has been looking after the garden.

Nobody will believe that J. W. Bonjour has reached the rank of the octogenarians. All his friends hope that his good health and energy will continue and that he will not only enjoy a happy birthday, but many equally happy returns of it. MM

## SWITZERLAND IN BRITAIN'S CULTURAL LIFE

Till mid-February — British Library Galleries, British Museum — Exhibition of manuscripts, books and portraits to mark the bicentenary of the deaths of Voltaire and Rousseau.

Friday, 26th January, to Sunday 28th January — Musical Weekend at the White Hart Hotel, Lincoln: *Die Kammermusiker Zürich* play quintets by Beethoven, Brückner, Dvorák, Martinu, Mendelssohn and Mozart.

27th January to 17th February — Inverness Museum and Art Gallery — 3rd to 31st March — Billingham Art Gallery, Stockton-on-Tees — 9th April to 5th May — Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich — *Photography in Switzerland from 1840 until Today*.

Tuesday, 30th January — Bishops-gate Hall (opposite Liverpool Street Station), 1 p.m. — Recital by *Die Kammermusiker Zürich* (leader: Brenton Langbein).

Sunday, 4th February — Royal Festival Hall, 7.30 p.m. — *Charles Dutoit* conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra (Berlioz, Debussy, Lalo, Stravinsky).

Monday, 5th February — University of Manchester, 2 p.m. — Tuesday, 6th February — Swiss Embassy, 16 Montagu Place, W1, 6 p.m. (a limited number of free tickets available from the Cultural Counsellor) — Wednesday, 7th February — University of Bristol, 11 a.m. — Thursday, 8th February — University College, Cardiff, p.m. — Friday, 9th February — University of Nottingham, 12 noon — Monday, 12th February — University of Sheffield, evening — Wednesday, 14th February — University of Aberdeen, p.m. — Friday, 16th February — New

• Continued page 6



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