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THE SWISS RAILWAYS SOCIETY

A brief history
by Dave Howsam

In this, our tenth year, it may be of interest to some members, in particular those who have joined in the last few years, to reminisce on the beginnings of the Society.

The Society was formed as the *Swiss Railway Enthusiasts Society* by Messrs Roy Dunglinson, Tim Stannard and John Price. Sadly, John Price passed away in January 1984 but Roy Dunglinson is our Vice President and Tim Stannard is still an active member, having the coveted membership numbers of A1 and A3 respectively. By February 1981 the membership had increased by 33% and stood at no less than four! A programme of meetings was published and the first, held on 8th April 1981 was so well attended (about 80 people) that thirty people had to be turned away. Membership rocketed to 128 in June and was almost 180 by the end of the year, twenty of these coming from the *Swiss Railway Modelling Group* which had been formed some two years earlier than the parent society(!) and merged with the *SRES* in 1981.

1981 saw three notable firsts, the first issue of *Swiss Railway News*, the First Annual Dinner, held at the *Swiss Centre* and the first Society tour of Switzerland. Harry Venables began the first Branch meeting outside London, this was held at Stafford, whilst the Manchester branch was also formed. All in all, it was a very hectic and productive year.

1982 saw the formation of the Bristol Branch. The first AGM was held in March and a second tour of Switzerland took place in the autumn. Membership now stood at over 200 and records showed about 70 new members.

In 1983 the AGM was held in Manchester on Saturday whilst subscriptions became renewable on 1st January. Two tours were held, the highlight occurred when the organiser, Alan Ramage, was left behind at one station as the train departed. About 80 new members joined the society and an excellent film show was held in Birmingham to bring members together.

1984 saw the last appearance of *Swiss Railway News*, having run to thirteen well received, if irregular issues. A lively AGM in London saw the Society become the *Swiss Railways Society*. A convention was held in Manchester and *SRS* members were wined and dined by Jo and Arthur Crane in the evening. New memberships fell off slightly, there being only 50 this year.

Alan Ramage produced the first issue of the new magazine, *Swiss Express* in 1985, this did a good deal for the Society's image. The AGM began to take on its present form of a meeting within a meeting followed by a dinner.

The AGM moved north of the Border for the first time in 1986 and our present Secretary was appointed as Mr Ramage concentrated on the production of *Swiss Express*, publication of which was moved forward to create the resent quarterly distribution, March, June, September and December. *Filisur* appeared at *IMREX* to further boost the society's standing. '85 and '86 saw 136 new members and by the end of the year the membership total was 346.

The 1987 AGM in York saw our first American visitor, Gary Hartman. The Society tie at last saw the light of day with a new Society logo. *Swiss Express* became a victim of its own success - it was late - and the last two issues of the year were photocopies compiled by the

Chairman and Secretary. A further 72 members joined making a grand total of 390, not 250 as stated in the March issue.

Malcolm Harvey-Randall took over the flagship of the Society, *Swiss Express*, having served the SRS well as the proprietor of Swiss Trains. An attempt was made to put members more in touch with local SRS members and co-ordinators agreed to form groups in Cumbria, Sussex, Your, Australia, USA, East Midlands and Birmingham. The AGM went west - well, to Bristol whilst David Yule presented *Disentis/Muster* at IMREX. 1988 saw 150 new members making the total 490 by the end of the year.

Swiss Express continued to improve under Malcolm's search for perfection and despite the considerable personal difficulties encountered following his road accident the previous year. This was the year of the Americas, as we almost reached 100 overseas members, two thirds joining in '89 with 80% of overseas members coming from North America thanks to a lot of hard work by Gary Hartman who again visited the AGM, this time at Manchester. Recruitment at IMREX, where Mike Poleglaze flew the Swiss flag, helped to give us our largest ever influx of new members, 170, and we bypassed the 500s to end the year with 617 members. Of these over 200 are allocated at the London Branch, 60 to Manchester, 35 to Scotland, 24 to the East Midlands and 19 to the North East. What of 1990? The AGM in London produced one of the most meaningful discussions since 1984 and was attended by no less than three overseas members. Membership in mid April stood at 568, due to an anticipated poorer renewal rate than the previous year but with new members, before IMREX, showing an increase from this time in 1988. *Swiss Express* has a new Editor and I wish Cyril all good fortune with the enterprise. The Society is re-introducing a Swiss tour in July under the guidance of the Chairman.

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