

# Switzerland in the UK

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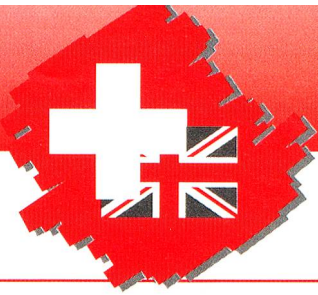
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# Switzerland in the UK

## Dr Hans Egli's 100th birthday

Dr Hans W Egli, doyen of the Swiss community in the UK and one of the most distinguished Swiss to have made his home here, celebrates his 100th birthday on March 17.

Readers who would like to congratulate him on having reach his centenary should write to him at 6a Rodborough Road, London NW11 8RY.

## Protesters halt Swiss trials in UK of disease free sugar beet

Plans by Swiss chemical giant Novatis to grow genetically modified crops in Britain have suffered a severe setback after protests by environmentalists.

Novatis and the world leader in GM food production, the American multinational Monsanto, had started the trials on two acres of land at Kirby Bedon near Norwich. But they decided to call a halt after a three week 'crop squat' by green activists.

The trials were of sugar beet that had been genetically modified to make it resistant to a weedkiller. They were being carried out in fields owned by the Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk, Sir Timothy Colman.

Environmentalists fear that GM crops could pass on their characteristics to wild plants and in so doing could create mutations that might devastate the countryside.

Commercial farming of GM crops has not yet been approved by the UK government.

## Dreifuss presidency finds favour in UK

The election of Ruth Dreifuss as Switzerland's first woman president has attracted much approval from commentators in Britain.

The Times noted that in ordinary circumstances the formal election of the Swiss president would not be the cause of much international interest, and would not even be the subject of enormous enthusiasm within the country itself. But the election of Ruth Dreifuss was different.

"As a woman and a Jew she is an extremely unusual figure in Swiss politics," wrote The Times leader-writer. "At home it is her gender that adds significance to her symbolic post. Her religion also affords Switzerland an additional opportunity to draw an overdue final line under controversies that have badly damaged her standing abroad."

It went on to say that while the Swiss were famed advocates of decentralisation and direct democracy, in one respect Switzerland ranked last among developed nations, only conceding votes to women at national level in 1971, while Appenzell Innerhoden resisted female franchise in local elections until 1990.

The Times added that the Dreifuss election was also a proud moment for Switzerland's small Jewish community.

It had been caught in the crossfire in the dispute between Swiss banks and those acting for concentration camp victims and their

families whose assets were improperly retained after the Second World War.

"Switzerland's complacent and insensitive attitude at the outset of this argument turned international opinion against her," said The Times, adding that the deal finally reached "remains vulnerable to assault from some Jewish critics who think it inadequate in scope and shape and also from a nationalist backlash in Switzerland."

While admitting that in her role of president Ruth Dreifuss would have little direct influence over this issue, "she can become a

powerful symbol of Switzerland's willingness to deal with its past.

● Mancunians have long boasted that "What Manchester thinks today the rest of the world thinks tomorrow."

So it is not surprising that members of Manchester Swiss Club point out that it was back in 1993 that they elected the first woman president in their nearly 150-year history.

Mariann Reutter filled the role for three years, and was followed by another woman president – Odette Scheiwiler.

## Charles leads the Brit invasion

Swiss ski resorts started the year by playing host to an impressive collection of international celebrities, with Prince Charles as usual attracting the largest number of paparazzi.

For his traditional week in Klosters he was accompanied by his son Prince Harry, for whom it was his fifth visit there. Each year he has added to his repertoire – from tobogganning to slalom and snowboarding.

The 50 photographers who followed him on his first day on the slopes were given an impeccable demonstration of snowblading, including a spectacular jump.

Meanwhile British football manager Roy Hodgson was in St Moritz, rubbing shoulders with the Grimaldi, Heineken, Furstenberg and Bismarck

families, not to mention Italian industrialist Gianni Agnelli, Greek shipper Niarchos and German publisher Burda.

Crans-Montana has welcomed a new resident, Roger Moore, who has now left Gstaad and his near neighbours Blake Edwards and Julie Andrews.

Visitors to Villars have included David Coulthard and Phil Collins. And the slopes above Verbier have seen that celebrated ex-member of Britain's royal family, the Duchess of York, making her annual return to the resort where she used to be a chalet girl in the Eighties.

Then more than half the visitors were from the UK. Now they down to just 7 per cent, with Swiss skiers accounting for 57 per cent.



## Otto Hartmann dies at 69

The Swiss Club Edinburgh has sadly announced the passing of its founder, Otto Hartmann, at the age of 69.

*Club secretary Ursula Ross writes:* Otto and his wife Peggy came to Edinburgh in 1957. Together they established the Royal Mile Boutique in the heart of the old town. As well as selling a range of superb Scandinavian style furniture, furnishings and artefacts, it included a small café where one could relax and eat delicious cakes which reminded one of home.

He was a professional ahead of his time, an 'avant-garde' designer, creating interiors of distinction. He

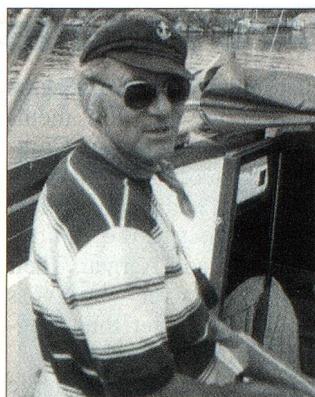
also delivered lectures on interior design at what is now Napier University.

In November 1960, along with another five Swiss living in Edinburgh, he founded the Swiss Club. First the Boutique, and later the Design Centre in Hanover Street, became the focal points of the club.

With his talent for story telling and keen sense of humour, both Otto (or Murdo as he was affectionately known) and Peggy always made us feel most welcome. We have many very fond memories of companionable evenings and club outings, full of laughter, music and song, led by Otto and his accordion.

In 1968 he was appointed Consul of Switzerland for Scotland. He carried out this office with great compassion for his compatriots. Whether it was translating the wedding ceremony for a pair of young 'runaways', giving support to a man facing charges in court, or an au pair in distress, it made no difference to him.

He dealt with problems brought before him with understanding and a keen interest in human nature, making each person feel at ease and cared for. Otto resigned from his post in 1980, enabling him and his wife to fulfil their dreams of



Otto Hartmann

extensive travel. They returned to Edinburgh periodically to visit their daughters and grand-children. But in recent years health problems prevented them from travelling. Giving up their residence in Spain, they eventually settled back in 'Auld Reekie'.

The much loved husband, father, grandfather and friend is greatly missed by all. We extend our sympathy and condolences to his family and friends.

## 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, Derek Meakin, at Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield SK10 4NP. Tel: 01625 855 000; fax: 01625 855 128.

His email address is: [dmeakin@europress.co.uk](mailto:dmeakin@europress.co.uk).

Enquiries regarding advertising should go to Jeffrey Long, 30 Finsbury Drive, Bradford BD2 1QA. Tel/fax: 01274 588 189.

● The 'Switzerland in the UK' supplement appears four times a year. The deadline for the next issue containing UK news, to be distributed in May, is March 19.

## Meeting point

A reader who has recently moved to mid Wales has asked to be put on our Register of readers who would like to make contact with other Swiss nationals living in their area. She is Barbara Jessop of Sharpthorne, Castle Caereinion, Powys SY21 9AL (email: [barbara@jessop.org.uk](mailto:barbara@jessop.org.uk)). She would like to meet any other Swiss living in the Shropshire/Wales border area with a view to organising the occasional get-together.

## FOSSUK to mark 50th birthday

This year sees the 50th anniversary of the foundation of FOSSUK – the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom. A number of events are being planned, starting at the beginning of the June.

The Unione Ticinese are planning a lecture for Fri-

day, June 4. The AGM of FOSSUK will take place the following day, followed by a dinner dance in the evening. There will be an excursion on the Sunday.

Further details from Rose-Marie Breitenstein on 0171 727 4113.

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## Are head teachers really necessary?

In the last issue of Swiss Review we told how members of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education had been on a fact finding visit to the cantons of Zurich and Aargau. Their aim: to discover why Swiss pupils did better than English children in maths.

One big surprise for the MPs came when they were told that Swiss schools didn't have head teachers.

They also found that education was the responsibility of the cantons, and that therefore it was not accurate to talk about 'the Swiss educational system.'

In their report afterwards the MPs said: "We were told several times during our visit that Switzerland has 26 educational systems, one for each canton. The role of the federal government is extremely weak."

They found that schools were much smaller than in England. The result was that there are more schools per head of population than in the UK, and that most children go to school on foot.

The classes are smaller, too. The class sizes of the ones they visited ranged from 18 to 22 pupils.

In marked contrast to many schools in the UK they found there was no noticeable security and that

*The schools visited by the MPs were: Schulhaus Oescherf (Zollikon), Schulhaus Grabenstrasse (Schlieren), Schulhaus Kirchweg (Aargau), Schulhaus Fahrweid (Fahrweid) and four in Zurich: Kindergarten Au Luchsgraben, Schulhaus Apfelbaum, Schulhaus Dölttschi and Kindergarten Dölttschi.*

access to all parts of the school was completely unfettered. They found they could go straight to the class they wanted to visit.

One of the main differences between the Zurich and English systems was that one teacher would remain with the same class for several years, teaching them a range of subjects, which helped to

### How British MPs joined the debate now raging among Swiss parents

reinforce a close relationship.

At one school they were told that one of the main reasons truancy was very rare in Swiss schools was that the children in each class 'lived with the teacher' for three years. If they didn't turn up for school the teacher would call their home.

"This relationship with the pupils and the home was a key part of the school ethos, of which the teachers were proud," said the MPs.

But it was the absence of head teachers that puzzled them most. They found that one reason why schools in

Zurich hadn't needed heads in the past was that schools were expected to do less.

"There is not the administrative workload created by national testing, or by Ofsted inspections. Things like school budgets and maintenance are dealt with by the local authority rather than the school.

"The prime task of the school has been to provide teaching in the classroom, where the individual teacher has great autonomy. In the words of one teacher: 'We are all head teachers in our own classroom'."

However, changes are now afoot in Zurich. The canton is piloting a new system of school

organisation that includes the introduction of a post similar to that of head teacher.

A proposal, they found, that was arousing much debate among both teachers and parents.

The MPs said at the conclusion of their visit: "The discussions we had with teachers and others made us think about possible alternative models of school organisation. It is always useful to be reminded that the way we have always done things is not automatically the only way to do them.

"And having to answer the question: 'What do head teachers do?' was of course highly stimulating."

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One of London's most picturesque pubs, the Red Lion in Mayfair, will see an invasion of middle-aged and elderly 'students' in May when members of the celebrated Zofingia Society arrive in the capital for what is now an annual get-together.

The society, founded in Zofingen in 1819, is Switzerland's oldest student fraternity. It is active today in eight of the nine Swiss universities and in the grammar schools of Aarau, Lucerne and St Gallen, as well as Zofingen itself.

With 400 active members and more than 3,000 'Old Zofingians', its ranks have included some of the most illustrious names from Swiss history as well as today's leaders in politics, culture, science and the economy.

Today more and more students spend a semester abroad, or after competing their studies decide to find work in a foreign city. For many London is a favourite destination.

So one Old Zofingian, Dr Paul Leutenegger, who shares his time between Zurich and Kingston-on-Thames, came up with the idea of creating a meeting place here, in the form of a permanent 'Stamm'. The Red Lion, just behind the Dorchester Hotel, proved an ideal location.

But if you have a 'Stamm' you need a 'Stammtisch', a carved table round which

## London pub becomes UK base for the oldest Swiss student fraternity

members can socialise. There is now one in the Red Lion, with Swiss flowers and a map carved by Claudia Girard of Neunkirch (SH). On the wall are pictures of Swiss universities and cities, the work of Dr Robert Develey, who is responsible for the lanterns at the annual Basle carnival.

The Red Lion's lanterns and the coats of arms have been made in St Gallen with the help of the OZ president there, Dr U Wildhaber.

The inauguration was last May, when 150 people came to London from all over Switzerland and many parts of Europe.

Welcoming them were Dr Leutenegger and another OZ resident in London, Dr Martin Frischknecht. Guests included Professor Blankart from Berlin, Oscar Uhler from Nice and Wilfried Groote from Monaco.

Among the many visitors from Switzerland were Edouard Chollet from the Yvorne vineyards, and ETHZ engineer Jean-Noel Chapuis from Vevey, who next August will be presiding over his own great wine cellar to host visitors to the Fête des Vignerons.

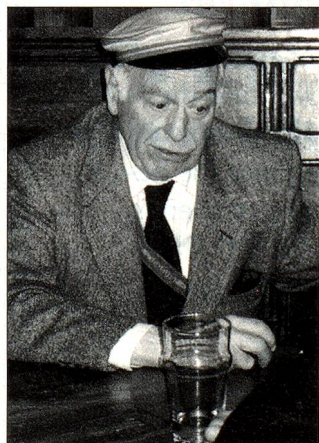
The three day programme for this year's event includes visits to Cambridge University, the London Stock Exchange, the Institute of Directors and the Royal Institute of British Architects.

In the meantime Old Zofingians have turned the Red Lion into a home from home, meeting there every month and enjoying the hospitality of landlords Greg and Pauline Peck.

Paul Leutenegger notes with glee another of the pub's distinctive features: a copy of the day's Financial Times displayed at eye level in the gents' toilet.



The man who turned his dream of a London 'Stamm' into reality: Dr Paul Leutenegger (right) with Westminster City councillor Robert Davis, a former lord mayor of the city.



This Old Zofingian enjoying a pint in the Red Lion is the son of the founder of Ovaltine

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give you a unique  
opportunity to meet with  
like-minded people.

### **OUR BACKGROUND**

Our origins date back to the European turmoil of the First World War, when the New Helvetic Society was formed to strengthen the bonds of friendship between expatriate Swiss and the host country.

Today, we are the main society in the UK which represents every region of Switzerland, irrespective of culture and language.

### **OUR ROLE**

While we remain firmly committed to preserving our national heritage, we are equally keen to promote Switzerland as an innovative and multi-cultural nation - one that successfully combines traditional values with modern vision.

Our principal aims are to:

- Create a greater understanding of issues affecting the Swiss here and at home.
- Encourage harmony within the Swiss community
- Promote friendly relations between the Swiss and their friends in the UK.

Above all, we are a society built on friendship. So, while there is a serious side to our meetings, we always make sure there is plenty of opportunity for members and their guests to meet old friends and make new ones.

### **HOW YOU CAN JOIN US**

With such a wide range of activities and events, we are sure you will find the New Helvetic Society both stimulating and enjoyable - the perfect way to experience the best of Switzerland in the company of friends.

Please write to:

The Membership Secretary  
New Helvetic Society (SR)  
Box 41  
145 Seymour Place  
London W1H 5TL



## 'Read the book and make a friend'

This is the autobiography of a distinguished composer, musician and lecturer who is also Scottish, British – and Swiss. He is a member of the Association Suisse des Musiciens, but it would take more than half a page to cite all his achievements, distinctions, hon doctorships and memberships.

Sir David Lumsden, principal of the Royal Academy of Music in London, in an appreciative foreword, predicted that to read the book was to acquire a friend. Having read *Musical Chairs*\*, I could not agree more.

Robin Orr was born in Aberdeenshire on June 2, 1909, the son of a skilled craftsman who even built an organ for their home.

He describes his childhood and school years with great perspicacity. At public school he decided that his career would be devoted to music, and started studying

at the Royal College of Music when he was barely 17. He worked hard and in 1929 competed successfully for an organ scholarship at Pembroke College, Cambridge. That was where his relationship with Cambridge began and where, many

years later, he was appointed professor of music. As a composer he faced difficulties like many other young musicians. Short of money, he became a music master in Somerset, and later in Yorkshire. His first success as a composer came when Sir John Barbirolli gave the first performance of his *Three Songs of Innocence*.

He wrote more than 50 works including, when he was nearly 80, a commission

by the BBC for his *Sinfonietta Helvetica*, to mark the Switzerland's 800th anniversary 1991. By then he was a citizen of Zurich. In 1972 he was made a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours, and this was followed by many more

honourable distinctions. In 1976 he became a member of the Welsh Arts Council and director of the Welsh National Opera. In Cambridge, during a university lectureship, he got to know many famous personalities, including Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears who commissioned four romantic songs. His reputation as a composer grew ever more. Lecture tours took him to the USA and many other

countries, but Scotland, Cambridge and Switzerland never lost his affection.

His second wife is Swiss – Doris Winny-Meyer, art historian and resident in Britain since 1946. No doubt she was largely responsible for fostering his love of Switzerland. And it was in Klosters that he finished his autobiography, describing the early morning scene through the eyes of an artist: "I shall soon be making the large pot of tea, with which we pass the first hour of the day, and all is well."

Yes, Robin, I have made a friend. Your life story is written in a most arresting style, a marvellous tapestry of words, weaving in and out personal experiences, ancient truths, comic tales and sensitive insight.

Happy 90th birthday, and many equally happy returns.

\* *Musical Chairs* is published by Thames Publishing, 14 Barlby Road, London W10 6AR. Price £12.50 plus £1.50 p&p.

### MARIANN MEIER

reviews the autobiography of Robin Orr

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## Celebrations continue for Ticinese

This year's activities to mark the founding of the London based Unione Ticinese are now well under way.

*Luoghi ticinesi del passato a Londra* – a walking tour devised and guided by Peter Barber – will take place over the weekend of May 15-16.

It starts on the Saturday in the East End of London, where the first Ticinese restaurants were established, and progresses westwards, towards the area where some of the most famous stood until 30 or 40 years ago.

The following day there will be a visit to Kensal Green cemetery to see the graves and monuments of well known families of pioneering Ticinese restaurateurs.

Details can be obtained from Christiane Barber, 16 Tivoli Road, London N8 8RE.

## COMING EVENTS

**Yorkshire Swiss Club:** Dinner at Ruby's, Whitehall Road, Wyke, Bradford (*April 10*); Walk with Joe Maiden, followed by buffet, Golden Acre Park, Adel, Leeds (*May 7*); National Day lunch, The Swiss Connection, Hebden Bridge (*August 1*).

**Aberdeen Swiss Club:** Fondue and games (*March 20*); Walk (*June 12*); First of August celebration (*July 31*). Details from Susanna Weir (01224 586 018).

**Midlands Swiss Society:** AGM and lunch, Aylesbury House Hotel, Hockley Heath (*April 25*); Wine and cheese at the Roberts, Lichfield (*May 22*); Dinner at Café Rouge, Stratford on Avon (*June 19*). Details from Glynn Roberts on 01543 250 737.

**Torbay Swiss Club:** AGM and cheese tasting, Oddfellow Hall (*March 17*); Skittles evening, Blagdon Inn

(*April 21*); Coffee morning, Oddfellows Hall (*May 6, June 3*); Visit to National Marina Aquarium (*May 19*); Wildlife Trust talk, Oddfellow Hall (*June 16*); Visit to Shaldon Zoo (*July 21*). Details from Max Singer on 01803 842 355.

**Swiss Club Tyne Tees:** Club meeting, Three Tuns Hotel (New Elvet), Durham (*March 27, April 24*); AGM (venue not decided) (*May 16*); Barbecue at Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield (*June 20*). Details from Nelly Scott-Niederberger on 0191 519 0956.

**Manchester Swiss Club:** AGM, Wilmslow Parish Hall (*April 15*). Details from Mariann Reutter on 01260 273 681.

*Secretaries of Swiss societies are asked to write to the editor before March 19 with details of events planned to take place after May 14.*

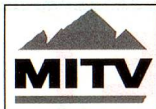
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