

The first of August celebration of the Swiss Club Manchester

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THE FIRST OF AUGUST CELEBRATION OF THE SWISS CLUB MANCHESTER.

“Are’nt we lucky”. This was the greeting on the morning of the first of August when we met on the bombed Piccadilly site in Manchester. After all the rain we had had the previous week a sunny morning welcomed the gathering of over fifty members of the Swiss colony prepared to celebrate our National Day with a motor-coach tour through North East Lancashire, a corner of the county all too little known amongst our compatriots.

Two very comfortable motor-coaches started off on time (10.30 a.m.), bearing our flag on the bonnet of the first coach. This part of our journey took us through the industrial towns of East Lancashire which owing to the bright sunshine looked less drab than usual. After leaving Blackburn the open countryside began to look more interesting as we were now traversing the hilly country of our county. Still on time we reached our first destination, the market town of Whalley and at the massive entrance gate of the historic Abbey we were greeted by the Canon, The Rev. C. J. Stranks and some of his voluntary helpers. Under their kind guidance we were taken over the ancient ruins of the Abbey and given a very full explanation of its history and of the recent excavations in the grounds. What a piece of old English history was unveiled before our eyes and what care is bestowed on this monument of the early church-life in this district. To do justice to the welcome and the kindness we received at Whalley Abbey it would be necessary to devote a whole chapter to this unique occasion.

At the end of our wanderings through the Abbey and well kept grounds the Canon invited us to take our picnic lunches on the lawn or the terrace overlooking the grounds and soon happy laughter indicated that our repast was in full swing.

But as we were getting ready to leave on the next stage of our journey we experienced a very pleasant surprise. The “Conference House”, which has been completely restored is used occasionally to house church choirs from the surrounding parishes for a short holiday. Such a choir happened to be in residence this weekend. Suddenly we observed a procession of some twenty choirboys coming down the steps of “Assheton House” in their magenta-coloured cassocks and lining up on the lawn in front of us. Next we heard their golden voices in two short cantatas. What else could we do but in reply to their songs sing an equal number of Swiss songs, even though the quality of our effort fell far short of that of the choirboys. After expressing our sincere thanks to Canon Stranks and his helpers and to our minstrels, we embarked once more on our coaches. By now however the countryside had lost the sunshine, ominous clouds gathered at the hilltops and it looked as if our luck would hold for the rest of our journey. After passing Clitheroe with its castle and Chatburn we made a short halt at the village of Downham, considered one of the nicest old-time villages in Lancashire, and then started the hillclimbing proper over the top of Pendle Hill. Now the rain had overtaken us, but not being able to damp our spirits, some mischievous sprite tried another trick. As we were mounting the steeper slopes of Pendle Hill we suddenly became aware that our second coach was not

following any more. It appears that the full load had been too heavy for it and so some of the passengers had to dismount until the stiffest gradient had been overcome. This happened twice with the result that some of the party got rather wet. However, at the small hamlet of Barley the coach got a fresh supply of water and from there the two coaches once more travelled together to Towneley Hall on the outskirts of Burnley, where we arrived one hour behind schedule.

As we drove into the park surrounding this beautiful example of an old English family seat whose earliest mention dates back to about 1200 we got another surprise, for there on the two towers were the Union Jack and by the side of it a large Swiss flag fluttered in the wind and the rain which had by now eased off somewhat.

Towneley Hall, purchased by the Burnley Corporation in 1902, with its surrounding 62 acres of parkland, is now an Art Gallery and Museum, the pride of the town of Burnley.

Here we were received by the Mayor of Burnley, Alderman J. Herbert and the Mayoress Mrs. Herbert, with a speech of welcome to which our Consul, Mr. Schneider, and our Vice-President, Mr. Lichtensteiger, replied with thanks for this friendly reception and apologies for our late arrival. A unique incident ended this part of the programme for at the invitation of the Mayor the assembly consisting of a large number of Burnley people besides our compatriots sang the National hymn both in English and in our National tongues.

We were then split up into smaller groups and each, led by a guide, was taken to tour the Hall — an history lesson which left a memorable impression on everyone. 700 years of English history concentrated in the life of the Towneley family, each generation leaving its imprint in the ancestral home. The outstanding period of the activity of the Towneleys is undoubtedly their part played during the civil wars in the 17th century. What was particularly interesting was to learn the close connection between Towneley Hall and Whalley Abbey during the time of the reformation. A pity, time did not allow us to browse still further into all there was to see in this magnificent monument of English History.

By now it was time to adjourn to the restaurant which the Corporation had built in the grounds overlooking the front of the Hall and its gardens. Here some friendly hands decorated the glassfronted room very tastefully. All the lights were covered with Swiss lampions and on the tables were tiny candlelit vases, decorated with the coat of arms of every canton. And behind the top table the flag of our club reminded us, if this was necessary, that we were for the time being “at home”. Soon the clatter of knives and forks and the noise of merry talk gave an indication of how much the “high Tea” was enjoyed and done justice to. A special mention is deserved for the smooth and rapid service by the smiling staff of the restaurant.

Tea over, we now started the official act of the day, the remembrance of the first of August. As our President, Mr. H. Berner was absent abroad on holiday, our Vice-President, Mr. Max Lichtensteiger, took the chair for the occasion. After expressing his pleasure at the number of our Compatriots present

he first of all read two telegrammes, one from President and Mrs. Berner, sent from Alassio, and one from our late President and Mrs. Cottet, at present at Lenzerheide, both wishing us a happy day and sending greetings. These were received with great acclamation by the gathering.

The Chairman then asked Miss Angela Dotti, representing our friends from "ännet dem Gotthard" to read in Italian the MESSAGGIO DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA CONFEDERAZIONE AGLI SWIZZERI ALL'ESTERO IN OCCASIONE DELLA FESTA DEL PRIMO AGOSTO. This was followed by the "ACT OF 1291", read in French by Mr. Monney, and then followed an address in English by our Chairman, Mr. Lichtensteiger. In this he reminded us of the origin of our Confederation and its subsequent struggles for the right of existence and liberty. He also stressed the point that we could rest on the laurels of our forefathers, but that it was our duty to further the interests of our homeland. So that at least three of our National Languages would be represented, our Consul, Mr. Schneider, then addressed us in "Schwizerdütsch". He pointed out that besides our duty to our Country we also had duties towards the Country of our hosts where we always enjoyed such a friendly welcome, as shown to-day by our reception both at Whalley Abbey and at Burnley and that we should strive to be worthy of the friendship between our two Nations.

How much the various messages and speeches were appreciated was shown by the very hearty applause after each speaker. The proceedings were brought to a close by singing the Swiss Hymn "Trittst im Morgenrot daher".

After all this our journey home had to be faced which took us in pouring rain back to Manchester, but the spirit of the travellers was anything but damped. Singing most of the way in our coaches, the party arrived back at our starting point exactly on time without any incident, thanks to the splendid driving of our motor-men.

And so with many thanks to the organisers for a happy First of August we said "Au revoir".

E. K.

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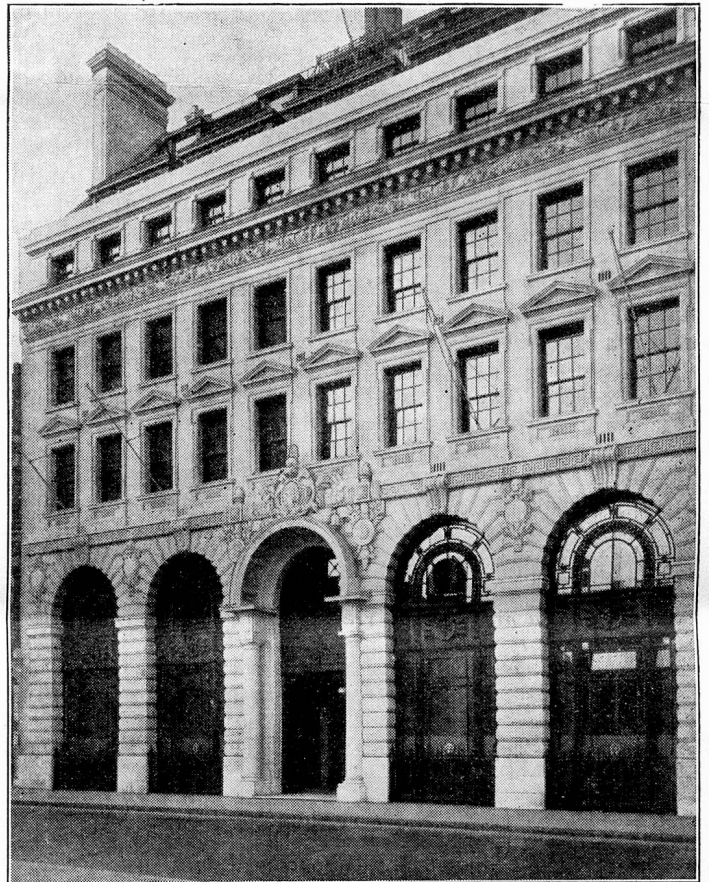


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