

Swiss church

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TELL YOUR SWISS FRIENDS TO SUPPORT THE COLONY'S PAPER

THE SWISS CHURCH.

By Denis Rigden.

(The following article appeared in the "British Weekly" on October 7th, which we publish by courtesy of the Editor.)

The Swiss are an unobtrusive people living happily among their mountains, making for us delectable things like watches. In Britain they are as unobtrusive as they are in their own country. There are, it is believed, about 8,000 Swiss people in London. Many of them are business men belonging to Swiss firms; others are in the catering trade.

The Swiss Reformed Church in London is, as one might expect it to be, in a sidestreet. Coming down Endell Street (the street which links Shaftesbury Avenue with Long Acre) it is easy to pass the Church without noticing it.

The Church is divided into two sections: a French-speaking congregation, established in 1762, and a German-speaking congregation, formed in 1924. The church has one consistory (church session) which governs both congregations but has two ministers, each of which has an assistant. The Rev. Claude Reverdin is minister of the French-speaking congregation and is assisted by the Rev. F. Kubler. Assisted by the Rev. K. Furthmueller, the Rev. Hans Spoerri is minister of the German-speaking congregation.

Like all the foreign churches in Britain, the Swiss Church has members scattered all over the country. There are probably about 1,500 French-speaking families in Britain and between 600 and 700 German-speaking families. Most of the Italian-speaking Swiss belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Swiss Reformed Church has a hundred-long list of girls and a much smaller list of young men who come to Britain for about a year to learn English. Most of these visitors take jobs here, many of them as domestic helps.

Because the Swiss Reformed community is so dispersed the minister are not able to visit all the members very often. Members of the church, led by a responsible layman have been formed into groups in the provinces and in the suburbs and meet regularly for Bible-study and discussion. The French-speaking congregation has six such groups in the London area.

The Endell Street Church is where the French-speaking congregation worships every Sunday morning and on two Sunday evenings each month. The German-speakers hold services in the Oak Room, at Kingsway Hall, every Sunday morning. They hold services in the Endell Street Church on the Sunday evenings that the French-speakers are not there.

Both sections of the church have many social activities for their members and take a leading part in the life of the Swiss colony. The Church's youth work is particularly strong. The French-speakers have a

girls' club that meets on Thursdays. Both sections of the Swiss Church are keen on taking their young people on conducted tours, introducing them to Britain. Today, the French-speaking girls are visiting a bell foundry. Their programme for the autumn and winter includes a visit to Battersea Power Station and another to Bible House.

M. Reverdin says that Swiss young people in Britain are often lonely. For that reason, many of them, who in Switzerland take no interest in organized religion, visit the Church in London, take part in its social activities and, away from home, get their first contact with Christianity.

A Swiss community has been in Britain since early in the 18th century. There were enough Swiss in London in 1745 for the colony to raise a 500-strong battalion for their compatriots.

The Church was founded in 1762. Many Swiss refugees were in Britain at the time. Napoleon having occupied Switzerland. The church building in Endell Street was built in 1854.

The German-speaking congregation used to worship in the Church of St. Anne and St. Agnes, Gresham Street, until it was blitzed in 1941. The congregation then moved to Kingsway Hall, the headquarters of the West London Methodist Mission.

All the foreign Reformed Churches in Britain (Dutch, Hungarian, French, Polish and Swiss) have been covered by this series of articles. Next week's article will be about the Latvian Baptist Fellowship in Britain. Although it holds services, it is not a fully-constituted church; its members usually attend services in British churches.

It should be remembered that the Reformed churches, although best known and probably best understood by British church people, are not the only foreign non-Roman churches here. There are in Britain the Lutheran churches of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia (with about 10 pastors), Norway, Poland (with a bishop and several pastors) and Sweden. The Greek Orthodox Church in Britain, headed by Archbishop Athenagoras, has a cathedral in London, St. Sophia's. In addition there are in Britain the Estonian, Latvian, Polish, Rumanian, Serbian, Armenian, Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches.

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