

Bernese Onions - Without Tears - for Manchester Children's Hospital

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BERNESE ONIONS — WITHOUT TEARS — FOR MANCHESTER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

By Derek Meakin.

Fifty furry teddy bears and a consignment of onion-shaped marzipan sweets have been presented to child patients at the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital in Pendlebury to mark the traditional Bernese onion market.

It was an impressive occasion, attended by the Mayor of Swinton and Pendlebury, Councillor Laurence Livesey, as well as Swiss Government representatives and officials of the Swiss National Tourist Office and Swissair.



"Do you mind if we help ourselves?" ask the customers. But the assistant doesn't answer. She's only a doll.

The handing-over ceremony took place in one of the wards of the hospital. Children from other wards crowded in to listen to the story of Berne and its famous bears told to them by the SNTO's publicity officer, Mr. Albert Kunz.

Said the Mayor: "This is the happiest and most memorable event in my year of office".

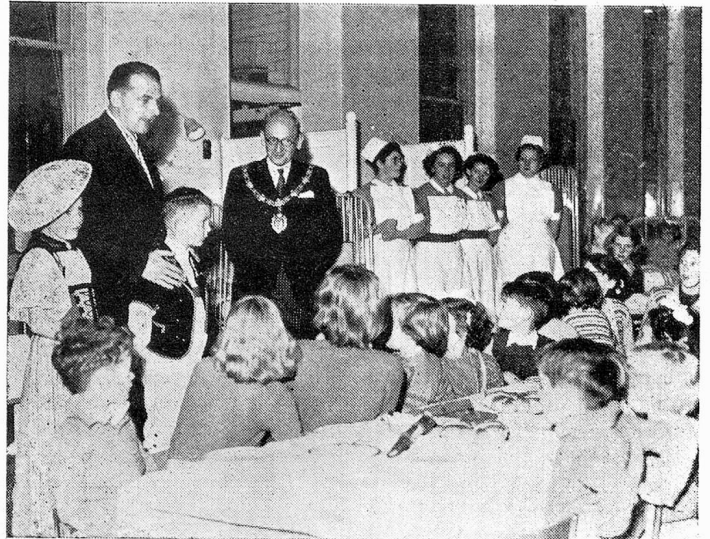
Particular target for the dozens of press photographers who were present were two children wearing the traditional costume of Berne. One was eight-year-old Victor Voegeli, son of Mr. T. Voegeli, Chancellor at the Swiss Consulate in Manchester. The other was another eight-year-old — Christine Payne. She is an English girl, but no stranger to Switzerland. Her father is Ronnie Payne, longest-serving member of Swissair's Manchester staff.

And Swissair had a paternal interest in the party. It was on one of their planes that the bears and the sweets — there were 40 lbs of them — had travelled from Switzerland to Manchester.

The two children had the pleasant task of handing over the presents, which had been provided by the Mayor of Berne, to the excited patients.

There were other gifts, too. Mr. Kunz presented to the Mayor, the hospital matron and a Manchester University professor copies of a lavishly-illustrated book about Switzerland's beautiful capital.

Before they went to the hospital the bears and the strings of marzipan onions were on display to the Manchester public in the windows of Kendal Milne's store in Deansgate and the Manchester branch of Poly Tours.



"... and that's how the bears came to Berne". Enthralled children listen to Albert Kunz' real-life fairy tale.

The onion market, which the children were able to celebrate in such a happy fashion, is one of the most colourful events in the Bernese calendar. In days gone by it was a market purely and simply, an occasion when the housewives were able to buy their winter stocks of onions and garlic. To-day it is far more than that — a popular festival that, because it is dedicated to King Onion, must surely be unique in the world.

It is on the Monday that the market opens, but there has been much activity during the weekend with the onion farmers from Wistlach, Müntscheimer and the Bernese lowlands rolling into the city with their aromatic products.



Now the children take charge of the well-stocked onion stall — under the eagle eye of their ward sister.

They unload in the Waisenhausplatz and the onions and garlic, as well as baskets of celery and nuts, are left in the open unguarded. This is nothing unusual for Switzerland, for no-one would dream of helping himself in the dead of night.

It takes some time for the market to really come to life, but by the afternoon things really get under way. Fathers leave their offices and workshops to jostle with the crowds and buy a few strings of onions to take home — a solemn duty which no self-respecting Bernese husband would ever fail to undertake.

But their wives — as wives the whole world over — realise full well that when it comes to shopping they can never count on their husbands to get everything they need. So off to market they go themselves, to fill their baskets with as many onions as they can possibly carry.

Even members of the Swiss Parliament, fresh from their important deliberations, can be seen touring the stalls on onion market day.

The whole of Berne takes on the carnival air. In the Bundesplatz there is an autumn fair, and side-shows and amusements are lined up on the Schützenmatte. Such are the crowds in the Spitalgasse that the police have to form a human chain along the middle of the street to keep the traffic flowing.

There may be no carnival costumes, but with the

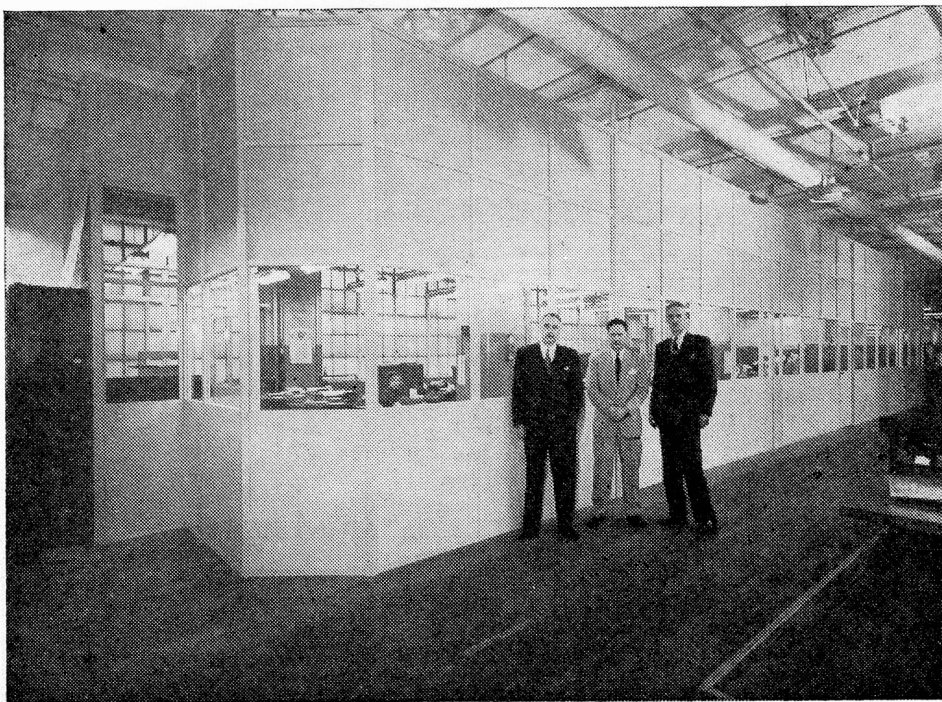
high spirits of the young people and plenty of bags of confetti there is plenty of merry making in the streets of Berne.

The restaurants of course have their own part to play. On the menu: sausage and onion, slices of onion cake, and plenty of onion salad.



The onions may not be real. And neither are the Bernese bears. But who could wish for nicer presents than these?

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Mr. R. E. Balcer, Representative in the Rolstore and Partition Division of our associate company, Acrow (Canada) Ltd., is seen here with two executives of the Northern Electric Co. Ltd., of Canada inspecting an installation of ACROW MOVABLE STEEL PARTITIONS which we recently completed for their company in Montreal.

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