

# Swiss Rifle Association

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# THE GLORIOUS DAYS OF THE SWISS RIFLE ASSOCIATION

The first door on the right as you enter the Norfolk Court Hotel serves as an office, a reception, a lounge and a luggage depository. It is in this cosy room that I paid a surprise visit to Mr. Adolf Schmid, manager of the Norfolk Court, as he was surrounded by members of his family, including one of his two karate-practising daughters and his young son Peter. Mr. Adolf Schmid, who will be 85 on February 1st, is one of the oldest members of the Swiss Colony. He is certainly the oldest active person in Swiss circles, and one of the founders of the 50-year-old Swiss Rifle Association. When I had been supplied with a glass of vintage *schnapps* and a plateful of Swiss pastries, I fired away with my first question.

— *Mr. Schmid, as a doyen of the Swiss Rifle Association, I'm sure you have many reminiscences which may be of interest to the Swiss Observer's readers. For example, were the Rifle Association's week-end gatherings the same in your time as they are now?*

— We had our own range on a wide field at Hendon near the *Welsh Harp* and the greyhound racing track. We used to come on Saturday afternoons and shoot and have fun up to Monday morning!

*What about sleep and food?*

— We used to sleep in the barn in which the hay gathered from the field was stowed for sheep. Haystacks were good enough for sleep. When the shooting was over, we played jass all night. We had cervelas, military *spatz*, wine in plenty. The bottle of Neuchatel used to cost 2/6. Bartholdi brought us *real sauerkraut*.

— *Did the range actually belong to the Swiss Rifle Association?*

— No, it belonged to Westford Richeley's Rifle Club. We had an option to buy the freehold in the late thirties for £300. This land would be worth £3 million today.

*Why wasn't it bought?*

— Well, you know the Swiss. Very careful with their money. Members

weren't prepared to stake so high. Then the war came and we had to stop shooting there.

— *Why?*

— You don't imagine the British Government welcoming a bunch of aliens playing with guns and ammunition in the middle of the blitz on Sunday afternoons, do you? Besides, many of our members were called back to Switzerland and our membership was strongly reduced.

— *Were your shooting-sessions different from what they are now?*

ran beyond our field and we had to improvise security arrangements with paper bags. We also had to protect ourselves with a hefty insurance. There was a vast rubbish dump bordering the field and sometimes the pall of smoke which rose from it forced us to interrupt our shooting.

— *If I remember rightly, the 1st August was celebrated by the Colony with the Swiss Rifle Association.*

— Our 1st August celebrations used to gather between 1,500 and 2,000 people before the war! We had 100- and 300-yard targets, pistol shooting, clay pigeon shooting, coconut shy —



*Typical scene at Bisley. Mr. Adolf Schmid in foreground*

*(Picture by Father Bossard)*

— We had a greater turn-up, although the overall membership, which was about 120, was not much greater than it is today. For the hundred-metre target we had automatic metal targets specially brought over from Switzerland. They were made up of iron rings connected by wires to the scorer. They were lifted and replaced mechanically without the need for markers. The system was quick and no time was wasted. For the longer ranges we had red-coated markers. The targets didn't slide down underground as they do now and the markers had to take cover while we fired. The score and orders were transmitted by whistles. I showed you the badges which the markers used to wear at the last AGM. I tried then, but without success, to get them re-introduced for the benefit of newcomers. A railway

everything. It was a real fair. There were fortune-tellers and gypsies. A man used to walk in a top hat and offer a prize to whoever knocked it down. A huge marquee was erected under which hundreds of people could dance. All this disappeared after the war!

— *Was this the main Swiss function in London?*

— Yes. You must remember that the Swiss Rifle Association was, and still is, the only genuinely and deeply Swiss association in the country. We Swiss all have to learn to shoot to defend our country. Shooting lies at the heart of our way of life. This is why I am pained to see the diminishing atten-

dance at our summer shooting sessions. We need new blood! We need *young* people! I'm thinking of lads like Armin Loetscher. I don't know what we would do without him. The Embassy should set the example. I remember the days when Paravicini, Colonel Koch and other Legation people never missed a week-end at the range. I remember when Colonel Frei brought his crack marksmen-friends from Ohnsingen and how we thrashed them! Even not so long ago we had Ambassador Daeniker and Colonel Frei. We don't see the Embassy as much anymore. Marksmanship is our *national* sport and the Swiss Rifle Association has always been the central society (leaving out the City Swiss Club, which is an entirely different outfit, of which I am also a member), and we should keep it going and find new young people.

— *How did the Swiss Rifle Association get started?*

— It was founded thanks to the initiative of O. E. Boehringer, the founder of the Swiss Observer, and G. E. De Brunner. Boehringer did splendid work for the Colony throughout his life. I don't remember exactly how it all began. I've got plenty of Swiss Rifle Association files tucked away upstairs, and I could find them for you if you are interested. But right now, you've caught me unprepared. I know that it took steps which were very little short of an Act of Parliament to get the authorisation of creating a Swiss Rifle Association. It wasn't a legal sin to start a foreign rifle association in those days, and we're still the only authorised foreign rifle association in this country.

Our conversation was resumed in a neighbouring pub. Mr. Schmid reminisced on old memories—the 7th Anniversary Dinner at the First Avenue Hotel, the Union Helvetia Club, the pre-war Gastronomic exhibitions at Olympia; and on old friends—G. E. De Brunner, O. E. Boehringer, G. Brunschweiler, H. Senn, A. Bon, Alfred and Arnold Schmid and many others, until closing time put a temporary stop to his fascinating account.

(PMB)

### CHRISTMAS TIME IN MANCHESTER

It speaks well for the strength and continuity of a Club when year after year socials and functions alternate and follow each other in an orderly and consecutive manner, and although some of them may seem to be almost a carbon copy of a previous event, they are always well supported and enjoyed by members and friends alike; proof enough how our community is anxious to maintain and strengthen the close and friendly contacts with each other,

an effort both necessary and worthwhile. How much more so, when we grown-ups can look forward to a Christmas Party where we are the guests (the paying guests) of the young and very young, who are always accompanied by their proud fathers and worrying mothers, and perhaps by some family friends and au-pair girls.

As in the past we once again assembled in the Midland Hotel, Manchester, to be welcomed by our President and Mrs. Simon with their young family. We were also honoured by the presence of our Consul and Madame Born, and by our Vice-Consul Mr. Zellweger who will soon be leaving us to take up his new post in Italy. We then took seats in the "Rotunda" around nicely decorated tables, the youngsters outnumbering us quite considerably. For the next hour we more than did justice to the rich array of sandwiches, jellies, cakes, trifles, ice-creams and other such delights, helped along by cups of tea "ad voluntakus". Here once again the elderly were encouraged and stimulated by the example of the children. After our President had given us his official welcome, crackers were handed around, resulting in sporadic and seemingly never-ending bangs of varying intensity according to the skill or luck of those who handled them. This is a game always very much appreciated on such occasions.

Looking around I thought that it would not have done any harm if a few more of the older generation could have been with us to join in this care-free and innocent merry-making, so necessary in time of stress and worry. Let us hope that some of them will keep a place in their agenda for next year. This would perhaps give a wider scope to such an occasion, extending friendship and fellowship to the older members, who are getting on in years and like to be remembered.

Soon the time arrived when everyone armed with his individual chair started off on the long "trek" towards the small ballroom which has witnessed so many functions and parties of our Club. There a lovely Christmas Tree awaited us in all its shining glory, a spectrum of colours, its brilliance reflecting in the young and fresh eyes of the children. One youngster courageously installed himself at the piano, accompanied by his own brand of somewhat unorthodox and very personal music, the many Christmas carols which we always like to sing or to hear, such as "Stille Nacht" or "O Tannenbaum", and many, many others. All this must have dispelled any apprehension left within the minds of the children, and their impatience and expectation arising from the abundance of parcels of different shapes and sizes, laid out under the tree awaiting the arrival of Father Christmas.

And then . . . "bang! bang! . . . and there he was. Father Christmas himself with his traditional attire of red and white, his flowing white beard

(looking even whiter than usual), and his heavy footwear so well suited to withstand the inclemencies of the season, to provide him with some protection on his wanderings. It was wonderful to see how even the very young stood up for him, regaling him and ourselves with their singing, their declamations, some just whispering and even silently appealing to him, knowing or hoping that he would understand them, which surely enough he did as only Father Christmas can do. Everyone as well as the young listeners received his gifts of sweets and fruits accompanied by some word of encouragement. We felt sorry and sad when the time came for him to leave us, to continue on his never-ending and arduous journey. It was goodbye coupled with the hope that we shall meet him again next year.

Then followed the sharing of the Christmas presents, led by our President and his wife, assisted by some ladies of the Committee. As in the past a great responsibility and worry, but as usual they acquitted themselves very well. Our thanks go to them and all the supporters for the gifts provided by many members and friends. The youngsters had the floor all to themselves by now and all the time to enjoy their presents, just a foretaste of what was expected in a few days time when Christmas Day was upon us.

Too soon the afternoon came to an end, everyone—young and old alike—having had a happy and enjoyable time. As our party gradually dispersed regretful goodbye's could be heard here and there, all of us glad at heart to have been there and firmly resolved to meet again next year to contribute in every possible way to ensure the continued success of such a festive get-together.

(E. Berner)



## WELFARE OFFICE

for

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