

Swiss Abbeys

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of up to 6,000 francs tax-free. The two parties finally want to raise an extra 20 million francs from corporation tax.

With the Zurich-Winterthur area, Basle is Switzerland's most important industrial conurbation and attracts thousands of workers from Alsace and Bad-Wurtenberg. In fact, Basle is the economic hub of a wide area embracing its Swiss hinterland, Alsace, Franche Comte and Bad-Wurtenberg. This area is known as the *Regio Basiliensis*. The fact

that three countries are involved in its future has resulted in the opening of high-level talks in Paris on certain problems shared by all the parties concerned. Foremost among these problems are the development of the international airport of Basle-Mulhouse, and navigation of the Rhine.

The Rhine has played games to Swiss fluvial navigation last year. The Port of Basle registered a 3.4 per cent decline in its traffic in 1972 because of its

abnormally low water levels interrupted traffic. Tonnage registered both ways totalled just under eight million tons. Basle would like to see the Rhine dredged between Strasbourg and Saint Goar, and is willing to contribute to the operation. The Rhine's growing pollution is also a problem which the three countries will have to tackle together, and to which more tri-partite talks shall be devoted.



SWISS ABBEYS

We continue our series on Swiss abbeys and convents begun in our last issue with a description, this time of the Mariastein Monastery.

The village and monastery of Mariastein are built high above a cliff overlooking a deep gorge along which runs the winding road from Metzertland to Flub, in the Jura mountains of Solothurn.

The celebrated pilgrimage of Mariastein ends at a church perched high on the edges of abrupt rocks. It has been magnificently restored. From one of the side altars, a flight of steps takes you to passages hewn into the rock and leading to several chapels. The walls and altars are adorned with innumerable ex-votos.

The monastery of Mariastein was founded on 9th October 1645, by Fintan, Priest of the Benedictine Abbey of Beinwil, also in Canton, Solothurn. This community had been founded under the patronage of the counts of Thierstein in 1085. Later, the abbey fell under the patronage of the State of Solothurn, which in 1645 authorised Father Fintan to transfer his community to the isolated reaches of Mariastein.

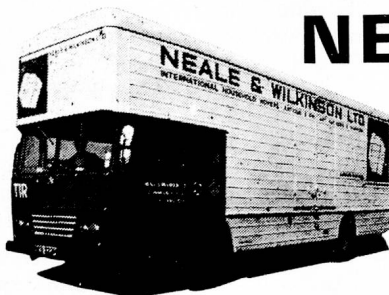
The abbatial church there was consecrated on 31st October 1666 in honour of Saint-Vincent. The splendid high altar is a gift from Louis XIV, the French monarch.

This monastery was closed down by the French armies which invaded Switzer-

land in 1792. The State of Solothurn obtained its establishment in 1804 and was secularised in 1874. The greater part of its monks then went to Delle, and later to Durenberg in Austria. A few remained at Mariastein to officiate for the pilgrims which still visit the monastery every year. Thirteen abbots, mitred and crosiered, have since managed the monastery.

For centuries people have venerated a celebrated Statue of the Virgin in the underground church. Mariastein is considered as one of the greatest pilgrimage of Central Europe. More than 60,000 pilgrims visit the sanctuary every year. Princes, prelates and many celebrities are among them. Hotels have been erected in the vicinity to accommodate this flood of pilgrims.

Before its secularisation, Mariastein was a high centre of learning. Its renowned college has since been replaced by a secondary school.



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