

News from the colony

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

COMPATRIOT APPOINTED TO BRITISH AIRWAYS BOARD

Mr. William Alphonse de Vigier, Chairman and founder of the Acrow Group of companies, was appointed last February as a member of the British Airways Board by Mr. Peter Walker, Minister for Trade and Industry. The appointment was effective immediately and runs until the end of 1975.

The British Airways Board, comprising 15 members from a wide cross-section of leaders of industry, now controls BOAC and BEA who together govern one of the world's biggest and most powerful airlines.

Mr. de Vigier, 61, came to England in 1936 from Switzerland where he still has strong ties and maintains his Swiss nationality. This is the first public appointment that Mr. de Vigier has accepted.

The Acrow Group which he has built up into a world-wide engineering concern capitalised at nearly £60 million in the UK alone and employing 10,000 people owes its growth and unequalled profitability to his abilities and enterprise. Mr. de Vigier came to England when he was only 24 with an idea that was to revolutionise the construction industry. His first company, Acrow (Engineers) Ltd, turned this idea into a reality. The idea was an adjustable steel prop which can be raised or lowered as desired by rotating a screw. It effected economies of labour, eliminated the need for timber supports and could be erected by unskilled labour. Since then, over 10 million props have been manufactured and exported all over the world.

The principal companies in the Acrow Group of which Mr. de Vigier is Chairman are:

Coles Cranes Ltd (truck-mounted and mobile cranes); Priestman Bros Ltd (crawler-mounted cranes and excavator earth moving equipment); Steels Engineering Installations Ltd (industrial flooring); Crane and Machinery Services Ltd (construction equipment dealers); Thos Storey (Engineers) Ltd (Bailey Bridges, Uniflote pontoons and air cushion platforms); Adamson & Hatchett Ltd (Metal fabrication for the petrochemical industries, process pumps, containers); E.H. Bentall & Co. Ltd (farm engineering equipment); Acrow (Automation) Ltd (storage and in-floor conveyor systems); Crawley Refrigerators Ltd (water coolers, chilled squash dispensers and refrigerator plant); Acrow Crane and Hoist Ltd (overhead travelling cranes and hoists, stacker cranes).

Mr. de Vigier is also Chairman of Acrow Engineers (Pty) Ltd, South Africa,

Acrow Australia Ltd and President of the Acrow Corporation of America and Acrow Canada Ltd.

His other overseas directorships include: Richmond Screw Anchor Co. of Canada; Acrow Peru S.A.; Acrow

Argentina S.A.; Acrow Rhodesia Ltd; Acrow-Carpenter Ltd, New Zealand; Acrow Engineers (Blantyre) Ltd, Malawi; Acrow India Ltd; Cementwerke Vigier A.G. Switzerland; Inland Steel (Pty) Ltd, South Africa.

ACTIVITIES IN THE NORTH

On Thursday, 22nd February, members of the Swiss Club, Manchester, and a few friends met at the Grand Hotel in Aytoun Street, Manchester, for their yearly double-meeting, which began, as by tradition, with the AGM of the Swiss Relief Society.

The President, Mr. E. Berner, welcomed those present and in particular our Consul General, Mr. Rolf Born. He thanked the Swiss Club Manchester for the use of attractive premises and Mr. Wuest and Dr. Bolliger, who had again persuaded Messrs Clayton Aniline Company to print our reports.

The President was happy to report that 1972 had proved again a favourable and interesting year from both the social and financial angle. Our Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer were able to enlarge on this statement. The latter appealed to members to join our Covenant-Scheme. This creates extra income to the Society without cost to the Subscribers.

Thanks were then expressed to all Members of the Committee for the hard work put into the proper and smooth running of our affairs. As the Hon. Secretary rightly put in his report: "... We have, as for the past, to rely on the Consul General and the Members for information of any genuine case of poverty of which they may become aware and contribute".

It was the general wish that the present Committee should serve for another term. A similar decision was taken regarding the Ladies Assisting Committee. As no more business had to be transacted, this very pleasant meeting was closed and everybody made for the bar for welcomed refreshments.

More people arrived. The time spent in enjoying conversation and the excellent cold buffet which had been organised for us by the Swiss Club Manchester seemed to pass very quickly. Promptly at 20.15, our President, Dr. H. R. Bolliger, invited us to retake our seats for the AGM of the Swiss Club Manchester.

In his opening words, he brought us the apologies of our honorary member, Prof. J. P. Inebnit, President of the Yorkshire Swiss Club, who owing to the illness of his wife, Lucille, was unable to be amongst us, and asked Mr. E. Berner to forward to him the greetings and good wishes of the Meeting.

Dr. Bolliger then thanked Mr. Rolf Born and his staff for the help so liberally

given to us and Mr. Peter Senn, the President-elect, for the work done on his behalf. He briefly reviewed his activities in Bern as our delegate to the Commission for the Swiss abroad". Speaking of the recent 50th Assembly in Bern, he dwelt at some length on the model of the Landsgemeinde constructed by the pupils of the local school of Hebden Bridge under the initiative of Prof. Inebnit. This display appeared in a shop window in the Kramgasse and attracted considerable attention. Now in the hands of Migros (Swiss supermarkets) this model is actually collecting money for Refugees through the incorporation of a special box activating the model-railway.

Our President concluded by thanking his Committee for all the work done during the past year. Mr. K. Messmer was then asked to take the chair for the elections of the new Committee, which now stands as follows:

Mr. P. Senn, President; Dr. A. V. Lang, Vice-President-elect; Mrs. M. Themans, Hon. Treasurer; Mr. H. Riesen, Hon. Secretary; Mr. R. Born, Committee Member; Mr. E. Berner, Public Relations Officer.

Taking over the "New Administration", Mr. Peter Senn couldn't help expressing his emotion. After so many years, he was able to follow in the footsteps of his father, still very much in our memory. Mr. Senn can rest assured of the wholehearted and sincere support of all the members and his many friends.

Mrs. Martha Themans, the Hon. Treasurer, gave us a brief report on the finances of our Club. In times of increasing costs and inflation, it was no mean achievement to produce such favourable results. Certainly with finances in her hands, nobody gets away with anything! Well done!

Looking at our future programme, members were again reminded that the Landsgemeinde, which takes place every year on the third Sunday of June in Hardcastle Craggs, Hebden Bridge, is not only the concern of our friends in Leeds and Bradford, but also of the Swiss in the Manchester area. Full support ought to be expected — not only financially but also by our physical presence. We owe this also to the authorities and people of Hebden Bridge, who for many years have extended to us their warm and sincere friendship. Mr. E. Berner, in his capacity as Vice-President of the Yorkshire Swiss Club has been requested to advertise for

the 1st August celebrations organised by the Swiss Club, Manchester. They will again be held at the Cotton Hotel in Knutsford and we hope that we may count on a good support from the Swiss beyond the Pennines.

E. Berner

Schweizerbund AGM

About twenty members of the Schweizerbund met for a friendly dinner at the Orpheus London Club, Eastcheap, London, on 9th February. This Dinner was held in the familiar dining room of these City premises, run by a compatriot, Mr. A. Gluck. We were treated to a regal meal for a minimum outlay. As usual, the atmosphere was extremely congenial: we were among old friends. Our President, Mr. Virgil Berti, regretted the absence of a number of faithful members prevented from coming by previous engagements or transport difficulties. He welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Reutlinger, of the Embassy, who had already assisted at one of the Club's previous gatherings at the Valcherra Restaurant, Richmond. These evenings usually wind up with a sing-song. Our Secretary, Mr. Jürg Schmid, had brought with him the traditional booklets but we were all carried away in conversation and tacitly opted against singing for this time. We also indulged in delightful gluttony as we nibbled on the delicious petits-fours supplied by Mr. Paul Gruhn, our Treasurer, whose father is a reputable pastry-cook.

Earlier, we were convened to the Annual General Meeting. This was held in another room of the Orpheus Club. Proceedings followed the normal AGM pattern. Mr. Schmid's Minutes were unanimously approved without comment. It was recalled that the previous AGM had concerned itself with the future of the Club and that it had been decided to continue its existence, if only for the enjoyable purpose of meeting from time to time. Commenting on the Treasurer's Report, which showed a deficit of £21.62 largely attributable to the purchase of a stock of small table flags, an indispensable decoration at Schweizerbund meetings, a member suggested that the small assets of the Club — an account of less than £200 at the Swiss Bank Corporation — should be invested so as to bring forth a small income which could conceivably pay for our bank charges. This idea was turned down as unrealisable. Another point emerging from the Income and Expenditure Account was that the Club had had to pay a Registration Fee of £2.50 under the Friendly Societies Act. As this was the first time that we had been "taxed", a member appropriately enough suggested that we de-register. The President pointed out that de-registration was a lengthy procedure requiring two general meetings and the endorsement of 75 per cent of members. So much effort was not worthwhile for an economy of £2.50. The President noted that the Club should nurse its reserve if there should still be

something left by 1979, Centenary Year of its creation. Despite these losses, the Meeting generously voted to support the Swiss Observer with a £5 Annual Donation. The Secretary pointed out that several subscriptions to the Club were still outstanding and that due payment would fill in the deficit. The

Schweizerbund has at present 29 paid-up members and a good dozen more on its cards. The Secretary promised that the latter would shortly be receiving reminders.

The President and Committee were re-elected by acclamation.

P.M.B

Dear Sir,

Particularly after a friendly report of our "Escalade" reunion appeared a few weeks ago and as you yourself are a member (or should I say a former member?) of the *Cercle Genevois de Londres*, I was more than normally sorry to see that you ignored us completely in your article concerning activities of the Swiss Community in the United Kingdom in your special edition of 26th January.

We are a small and a loosely knit organisation, meeting for social purposes, often only once a year, but we wish to be stronger and a lack of publicity when the ideal opportunity occurs, gives us no help and little encouragement. I hesitate to classify ourselves with the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, but the *Cercle Genevois* was in fact formed in the United Kingdom before the larger Society extended its activities over here.

I am proud to be the only Briton (or should I say half-cast) to be invited to the meetings of the Swiss Organisations in the United Kingdom but I am saddened that the *Cercle Genevois*, now nearing its sixtieth year, should be ignored in your article, prior to the words "finally there is the Anglo-Swiss Society".

We may be small and weak and we may meet infrequently but we have existed for over half a century and the less publicity we receive the less I can do to keep our small organisation alive. I write as the *ad hoc* President, Secretary and Treasurer who is in fact the last remaining member of a properly constituted Committee and who is eager for support and help from your journal, and in particular from those Genevese living in the London area which read the articles which you publish.

Yours faithfully,

Michael Metford-Sewell (London)

Dear Mr. Béguin,

As one of the few Swiss journalists who were in London during World War 2, I remember the affair of the "London calling Switzerland" broadcasts which you mention in your 9th February issue very vividly.

They were certainly started with the full knowledge and connivance of the authorities of the then Swiss Legation. The Minister of Information at the time, then Mr. — later Lord — Brendan Bracken was extremely disappointed, not to say furious, when they were stopped after a number of protests from Mr. Pilet-Golaz through diplomatic channels. He made no secret of his disappointment in a long conversation with me, which anyway showed deep mistrust of the then Head of

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the Federal Political Department, Marcel Pilet-Golaz.

By the way: the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office and subsequently Chief Diplomatic Advisor to H.M. Government was Sir Robert (not Roger) Vansittart, who later became Lord Vansittart. He was intensely anti-German and was demoted by Mr. Chamberlain to the above-mentioned advisory position because he was in the way of the then Prime Minister's appeasement policy. As Chief Diplomatic Advisor he was, as he told me himself, not once asked for advice. The appointment was just an elegant way of getting rid of him.

Yours sincerely,

Gottfried Keller (*Küsnacht*)

MR. H. O. ERNST

We have received the following reminiscences by a reader on Mr. Henry Ernst, who died last month.

The passing of Mr. Henry Ernst leaves a big gap in the lives of his many English friends. He had been here so long: for some of us he was the personification of Switzerland in London.

In the mid-twenties, as a schoolgirl of fourteen, I stood outside the office of the Swiss Federal Railways in Lower Regent Street rattling my lunch money in my blazer pocket, wondering whether it would buy some of the tempting booklets and brochures displayed in the window. I tiptoed inside and had the good fortune of meeting Mr. Ernst: not only were the brochures free but I could have as many as I liked as often as I liked. That was the beginning: I was forever in the office and when the time came for my first trip to Switzerland it was Mr. Ernst who arranged it — and he continued to do so every year until he retired. When the war came he was a friend indeed. Swiss newspapers and magazines came my way when no one else could get them. Little bits of news from the beloved Alps were handed on and treasured during the weary months of the Blitz. For me, Mr. Ernst was nearly as important as Sir Winston Churchill in keeping up my spirits in the darkest days.

His crowning act of kindness and friendship came in the 1950s when he and his wife came to Canterbury Cathedral to represent Switzerland at the service at which my husband was consecrated Bishop of Leicester.

I could go on for pages and so could many others. We have lost someone very special, who is irreplaceable.

Mrs. R. R. Williams