

Swiss Rifle Association

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Paul Bessire has many interests; he has played a lot of tennis and golf and indulged in riding, and in his younger days enjoyed winning ski-ing prizes. He is a very keen gardener and loves carpentry.

One of Paul's great qualities is loyalty, and he is also a very modest man. I had great difficulty in getting his agreement that his birthday should get a special mention. But his many friends will want to wish him an enjoyable birthday and many happy returns. Good health and happiness together with his wife and family for many more years to come.

MM

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The 1977 Bisley meetings will be held on: 24th April, 8th May, 22nd May, 5th June, 19th June, 4th September, 18th September and 2nd October.

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

HOW THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF BRITAIN HELPED DEVELOPMENTS IN ANCIENT SWITZERLAND

IN his delightful recent after-dinner speech to the Anglo-Swiss Society the Geneva historian, Prof. Denis van Berchem, cast some interesting new light on the first stirrings of "modernisation" of life in very ancient times in the region of the lower Valais and the Lake of Geneva, thanks to the expansion of the Roman imperial power culminating in the conquest of Britain. We are privileged to offer our readers a slightly shortened version of his talk as follows.

My theme for tonight, Prof. van Berchem said, is related to the Roman conquest of Britain in the year 43 after Christ, originally planned by the Emperor Caligula but achieved only two years after his death under his successor Claudius. How this well-known event affected the destiny of Switzerland is well worth exploring. Speaking of Switzerland at that time is, of course, a glaring anachronism as that name did not come into use before the Middle Ages or even more recently.

But I cannot find a more suitable word to designate a territory which in Roman time was divided between several provinces and inhabited by various nationalities: the Helvetians on the actual Swiss plateau, the Rhetians in the Eastern regions and a mosaic of small tribes of Celtic, Ligurian or Illyrian stock in the Alpine valleys.

The Helvetians had been defeated by Caesar, but not immediately incorporated in the newly-created province of Gaul. They found themselves annexed

under Augustus as a result of the conquest of Rhetia and of the whole of the Alps. Their territory had not the extent we find later. West Switzerland with the town of Avenches belonged to the Seguari still established on both sides of the Jura.

Very little is known of the Helvetians in the half-century corresponding to the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. We have not a single inscription to throw any light on their social or political condition. Apart from a few places occupied by Roman forces we find no traces of imported wares. The townships were still built in wood and the material reflects Celtic civilisation.

Everything changes only with the accession of Claudius to the government of the Empire. Numerous inscriptions bear testimony of the rapid Romanisation, if not of the whole population, at least of the local aristocracy. New roads marked by milestones connect towns rebuilt in stone. Why all this change at that time? I may say with confidence

that it was the result of the opening of a new road over the Col du Grand St. Bernard, connecting through the valley of Aosta and the basin of the lake of Geneva Northern Italy with the Rhine Valley, North Gaul and the shores of the English Channel.

The Roman road builders were actually in no hurry to open up the Alpine passes. Caesar was apparently content using other longer routes for his repeated journeys and Augustus opened some Rhetic passes, such as the Brenner, east of present-day Switzerland, and in the west he had a road built over the Petit St. Bernard leading to Lyon. But the Grand St. Bernard, though used for centuries by traders, was at that time still completely neglected. Thus the Helvetians remained at a dead end and poorly developing until the new road over the Grand St. Bernard was opened to traffic at the very beginning of the reign of Claudius. There followed important territorial and political changes affecting the population of the areas concerned. The road was, of course, not built to please the Helvetians. It had to serve imperial needs, not least as the shortest way from Italy to Britain.

No doubt the opening of the campaign in Britain brought great anima-

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