

# Dr. Ernst M. Bircher

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# OBITUARY

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It is with deep regret that we announce the death on 9th October of Dr. Ernst M. Bircher, formerly of the Swiss Embassy in London. He was almost 84.

He was born in Zurich on 22nd October, 1895, a citizen of Kuettingen and Zurich. He followed in his father's footsteps and studied law at the universities of Zurich and Berne. He gained his doctorate in 1919 and qualified as a practising lawyer a few months later. For ten years he was established in London as consultant on Swiss law and then left for Canada where he spent seven years with various companies. At the beginning of 1937, he returned to London and joined an English firm of lawyers.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Dr. Bircher joined the Special Division of the then Swiss Legation in Duke Street. In 1946, he became a permanent member of the diplomatic staff at Montagu Place, and ten years later he was appointed Press and Cultural Counsellor, a position he held with great distinction. His vast knowledge of this country and its people made him an invaluable liaison officer. He helped greatly to strengthen the Swiss image, and Anglo-Swiss relations were very important to him. He also took a lively interest in the affairs of the Swiss community and actively supported several societies.

On 1st October, 1927, he married Miss Constance Nanton whom he had met at Pontresina. She was the daughter of Sir Augustus and Lady Nanton, Director of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and Chairman of the Hudson Bay Company in Canada. It was an extremely happy marriage, and it was a tragic day for Ernst Bircher and his four children when Constance died in 1952 after a long illness.

When he retired from his post, he remained in the service of the Confederation and was largely concerned with the rebuilding of the Embassy.

In 1967, he retired and decided to go back to Switzerland. At first, he regularly visited Britain and his family here. But during the last few years, his health no longer permitted him to leave the Ticino, nor indeed his house at Bissone above the Lake of Lugano. Few were the friends who visited him there, but whoever did, came away full of admiration for the staunch and uncomplaining manner with which Ernst Bircher bore his illness and his lonely life. He lived for the frequent visits of his children and his grandchildren (11 of them) and enjoyed the many treasures of his large library. His mind remained keen and alert to the last, and so did his interest in world events and advance of technology and science, in philosophy, in

mountaineering and many other matters.

Ernst Bircher died in his sleep in the night of 9th to 10th October after a bad fall. He was cremated in Lugano on 13th October, and his ashes were interred in the family grave in Kuesnacht.

Our deep sympathy goes to his family in their sad bereavement. He was an exceptional father and a most lovable grandfather. As a person, he had great determination. He could be frank and often outspoken, but his opinion or even criticism was based on thorough knowledge and tempered by kindness and great human understanding. He was well known in large circles here and in Switzerland, as well as in many places abroad. He was liked and admired by all who worked with him, and his wise counsel and clear judgement were greatly respected.

Those of us who were privileged to enjoy his friendship, have lost a trustworthy and faithful friend, and our loss is great indeed. But we say after Samuel Rogers: "*Him whom we loved so long and see no more, loved and still love – not dead – but gone before.*"

Mariann Meier

*Letters to the family should be sent to his eldest son's address: Paul Bircher, Globe Place, Hellingly near Hailsham, East Sussex.*

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