

The influence that lingers on..

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The influence that lingers on..

SCHAUB was not the last of the Swiss nationals who represented England abroad. We have neglected those who served in Switzerland.

Until the dawn of the Romantic era at the end of the 18th century, when mountains became fashionable, it proved near impossible to persuade Englishmen to reside there. Yet England needed agents there as long as its relations with France were bad – which meant for most of the period between 1689 and 1815.

From Geneva they could gather information about France and see to it that Britain's subsidy troops in southern Europe were adequately paid and fed.

From Berne they could raise troops through signing agreements with the individual cantons

while trying to prevent France and Spain from doing likewise.

Similarly in the Grisons, where they also had to deny the Valtelline, then ruled by the Grisons, to the enemy while keeping it open for their own allies.

The Valtelline was the quickest and easiest route for soldiers marching between Italy and Germany, southern Europe and northern Europe. Yet the attitude of most Englishmen was typified

by William Norton, the British Minister in Berne between 1765 and 1783, who spent barely three and a half years actually in Switzerland throughout the whole period!

So it was that after 1689 and before 1792 Britain was represented in Switzerland by foreigners for two thirds of the time.

Most of these foreigners were French Protestants of good family who were able to avoid disputes with the authorities over their privileges and immunities.

It was precisely for fear of these, and the bad example they would set to the other Bernois, that Berne had refused to receive St Saphorin as the British Minister to them when it had been proposed in 1716.

In the Grisons where Peter von Salis-Soglio and his son, Jerome, represented England between 1740 and 1750, there were indeed few difficulties.

But, then, the Grisons had many reasons for not wanting to offend England whose support they very much needed in their dealings with the Austrians, who virtually surrounded them as rulers of Milan and what is now Vorarlberg.

Moreover, Peter von Salis had been sent to London by themselves in 1709 and still stood high in their esteem while his son, with his English wife, may have been regarded as scarcely a native.

It was different in Geneva where George III was represented, in theory as Elector of Hanover, by Jacques de Pictet-Thellusson between 1763 and 1767 and by his son Isaac

between 1772 and 1774.

That they were accepted at all by the authorities was due only to their surrender of certain of their diplomatic privileges, but the compromise did not work.

Jacques, in the spirit of an earlier generation, saw no reason to abstain from Genevan politics, allowed the opposition faction to meet in his house and even tried to get the British government to intervene on its behalf in the city.

This proved to be too much for the British Secretary of State, who had rather more important problems to contend with, and Jacques was summarily dismissed because he had "departed from that neutrality of Behaviour so strongly recommended" to him.

Isaac was more cautious when his time came but to no avail. He had his commission revoked after less than two years on the grounds that "it is by no means consistent with the King's dignity to keep a minister at Geneva or at any other state who is not admitted to every honour and privilege to which he is justly entitled."*

The British government could afford to take this position for times had changed. By the 1770s a proper British diplomatic service, with regular and reasonable pay, a certain career structure and an increasingly professional ethos was emerging.

It attracted enough well-trained, well-motivated and cap-

* *British Diplomatic Representatives 1689-1789* (ed. D.B. Horn) (1932), pp 149,150 quoting official instructions.

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By Peter M. Barber

able young native-born Britons to fill all the available foreign posts and to staff what was to become the Foreign Office in Whitehall.

There was no longer a need to make compromises with foreign governments, to circumvent the law of the land or to appoint any but Britons.

When Louis Braun, the Chargé d'Affaires in Berne after 1776, died in office on January 27, 1792 he was replaced by an Irish aristocrat, Lord Robert Fitzgerald.

This did not quite mean the end of the story, however, for though no more Swiss natives became fully accredited British diplomats, some still continued to

serve Britain as consuls, as did Armand Pictet in Geneva in the 1840s, or, particularly in wartime, as secret agents.

Nor did the Swiss influence entirely disappear from the diplomatic service itself, though modified by centuries of residence among and inter-marriage with the English.

Thus the Fane de Salis family, descendants of Peter von Salis-Soglio and his son Jerome, have regularly appeared in the British Diplomatic Lists, while descendants of the Mallet family of Geneva, in this century, have served as British ambassadors in posts as important as the Italian, Turkish and Spanish capitals.

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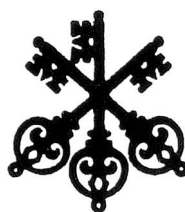
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