

One more centenary in Zermatt

Autor(en): **Williams, Cicely**

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Die Englische Kirche in Zermatt feierte im vergangenen Sommer ihr hundert-jähriges Bestehen. – Eine Aufnahme aus dem Jahre 1900 dieser schlichten Kirche

Le centenaire de l'église anglicane de Zermatt a été célébré cet été. – Photo prise vers 1900

La chiesa inglese di Zermatt, divenuta centenaria quest'estate, in una fotografia del 1900 che ne mette in evidenza le semplici linee

The English Church at Zermatt celebrated its hundredth anniversary last summer. This photograph of the simple, unpretentious edifice was taken in 1900

ONE MORE CENTENARY IN ZERMATT

BY CICELY WILLIAMS

Zermatt, well-known and well-loved all the world over, had almost an *embarras de richesses* of famous occasions in the nineteenth century; slowly but surely the centenary celebrations arrive one by one in the twentieth.

This year there has been yet one more celebration; a smaller and more domestic event but one that is of importance to many people. On August 9 the English church of St. Peter, Zermatt, had served the English-speaking holiday community for one hundred years.

Had it not been for Alexander Seiler there might never have been an English church. The English gentleman of Victorian times liked to be surrounded by his accustomed comforts. There were requests for some form of Sunday worship. Alexander Seiler at once set aside salons in the Hotel Monte Rosa and the Hotel des Alpes and by 1858 services were being held there regularly.

It was not long before the salons were filled beyond capacity; it became obvious that an English church would soon be a necessity. The Colonial and Continental Church Society approached Alexander Seiler and Joseph Clementz of the Hotel Mont-Cervin.

Early in the summer of 1865 a Contribution Book was opened; the first donations came from Alexander Seiler and Joseph Clementz. A few weeks later the Matterhorn tragedy took place. It seemed as if it might be the death knell of mountaineering, Zermatt and the proposed English church, but enthusiasm for the Alps became greater than ever; Zermatt became established as the climbing centre *par excellence* and subscriptions poured in for the church. It was decided that the church should be built partly as a memorial to the victims of the accident.

In June 1869 the foundation stone was laid in the presence of a large number of British and American visitors; in 1870 the church was opened for the first time for regular use and a year later the church was dedicated by Bishop Edward Parry, Suffragan Bishop of Dover.

What a story the church could tell of those who have gathered there over the years! There were the great climbers of the early days. In the 1880s came the big Victorian families.

In 1894 Sir Winston Churchill arrived in a party led by Mr. L.S. Amery. At the turn of the century came Theodore Roosevelt, later President of the United States. The galaxy of great climbers continued until the outbreak of the First World War.

After this war things were never quite so easy again for the British. But congregations at the church kept up and there were still famous mountaineers to be seen.

Since 1948 the German-speaking Swiss Protestants meet at the church at 9.00 a.m. on Sundays; the French-speaking meet at 10 o'clock and the English follow at their accustomed hour of 11 o'clock.

In 1957 the centenary service of the Alpine Club took place at the church.

In 1965 came the magnificent celebrations of the centenary of the first ascent of the Matterhorn. One of the big events was a great open-air mass conducted on the festival square.

And now at last the wheel has turned full circle and St. Peter's, Zermatt, has celebrated its own centenary. A short history of the church has been published and is being sold to raise funds for the establishment of a chaplaincy centre to enable the church and its chaplains to give even wider service to the English-speaking community in the future than it has done in the past.

On August 9 the Bishop of Leicester conducted the centenary service. There were also some secular celebrations: Constant Cachin, the Director of the Tourist office, cooperated by providing fireworks. The celebrations were similar to those that took place a hundred years ago.

The building still looks almost as it did in 1870; and the little church, standing there below the Matterhorn is still and always will be the "parish church of the Alpine Club".