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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SWISS RAILWAYS SOCIETY

The Swiss Railways Society will shortly celebrate its 20th birthday. Joint President Alan Pike tells the story so far from a perspective of having been deeply involved for many years in its development. It is well respected, successful and has the largest membership of any non modelling Society or Group devoted to Railways outside of the UK.

The Society reaches its 20th anniversary in November this year. Three people, Roy Dungalison, John Price and Tim Stannard speculated that it might be possible to form a Society to encourage interest in Swiss railways and duly formed The Swiss Railway Enthusiast Society (sic) with Roy Dungalison as Chairman, Tim Stannard as Vice-Chairman and Secretary and John Price as Treasurer a post he held until March 1982. Sadly, John was unable to appreciate the benefits of the Society for long because he died in January 1984.

A small advertisement was put in the railway press early in 1981 inviting people to an inaugural meeting in the Oak Room of Kingsway Hall (a notable building now demolished) on 8 April 1981. A large attendance was not expected but, in the event, it was standing room only with over 80 people crammed in the room. The Society was well and truly launched and rapidly a much expanded committee was formed. A matching Swiss Model Railway Society was formed but it soon became incorporated in the main body.

From the outset, both the Swiss Tourist Office in London and the Swiss Federal Railways were supportive and so it has continued with other offices of what is now Switzerland Tourism and many of the other Swiss railways providing valuable information. This has fostered mutual respect which must be almost unique in the history of amateur railway groups studying the systems of another country. It is a trust and respect which takes a long time to establish but which can quickly be lost by thoughtless words or actions by the Society or its members.

Initially, meetings were held only in London but it was not long before members were linked through The Swiss Railway News in the first edition of which in the Spring of 1981 it was proclaimed that it was proposed to publish it four times a year, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Of course, funds would not run to a printed edition and PCs were not available. It was typed and copies were run off on a Gestetner. By the time the second issue of the SRN was issued there was much to

report. The Editor, Roy again, announced that as at 18 June 1981, there were 128 members.

The big news was that a very senior member of Sulzers in Switzerland, Mr. A.E.Hauser-Gubser, had agreed to become the President which proved to be the beginning of a long, and certainly for the membership, a most rewarding relationship. After Mr. Hauser-Gubser retired from full time work with Sulzers, he remained a member of the Board. His many commissions took him abroad for lengthy periods. He took his relaxation in his usual energetic way by buying a small Spanish vineyard - and house of course - and developing it. However, one can only do so much and he resigned in 1997 because he felt that he was unable to contribute sufficiently to the Society. Also, because of his work, he was unable to join us in Britain but a number of members had the pleasure of meeting him and will recall the work he did behind the scenes. His authoritative, and sometimes amusing, articles in The Swiss Railway News and its successor, Swiss Express, are pieces to be treasured and we are most grateful for all he has done for the Society and for continuing to contribute as can be seen in this edition.

One of the first Membership Secretaries was Dave Howsam who handled the growing task until 1991 when Les Heath, a man of many parts, took over before handing the office to Brian Hemming in 1994 who developed it until, in 1996, Dave again took on this important management task.

The Editorial in the Summer 1981 issue of the SRN announced that it was hoped to form branches in Stafford, Newcastle, Manchester and Bristol. From the 1st September there would be a branch in London managed by its own officers. So it was that Alan Ramage, the Fixtures and Membership officer, embarked on the task which has seen the establishment of branches in Britain and, subsequently, through the efforts of successive membership secretaries, organisations in the U.S.A. and Australasia. as well as recruiting individual members in many parts of the world.

It is necessary to go back to the beginning to follow the development of the Society outside London. Stafford was the first meeting place on 22 September 1981. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gather sufficient local support to maintain a branch despite the best efforts of Henry Venables who became notable, especially in Switzerland, as Henry the hat because of his Trilby style hat covered with railway pins which was recently pensioned off. Manchester followed on 22 October 1981 and this branch rapidly grew and flourished. Among other things, a well produced news-sheet was provided to local members. The successful formation of other branches was slower; in alphabetical order, Bristol and Bath; Cumbria; East Midlands; North East England; Scotland ; Wessex group; West Midlands group and West of England. It is likely that the Society has grown to the size it is today because it attracts a wide variety of people who are not necessarily technically minded but just enjoy travelling on the excellent Swiss transport system..

The first tour of Switzerland was organised by Roy Dungalison and took place in August 1981. This, and another organised the following year by Alan Ramage, was greatly appreciated by participants but neither was a financial success, indeed, the dangers of losses falling on the fragile funds of the Society led to the decision not to run Society tours. It appeared that Society members preferred to make their own arrangements possibly because of the great diversity of rail and general transport on offer in Switzerland and the relative ease of getting around the country. This lack of interest in organised tours was confirmed by the failure of a series of tours offered by a Swiss based travel company for the 150th anniversary to get off the ground apart from one which gathered together about a dozen people For similar financial reasons, it was decided neither to organise model railway exhibitions nor to accept invitations to represent the Society with a stand at shows unless it was considered that no net loss would be suffered by the Society. It is this prudent attitude to finance which has enabled the Society to set and hold for many years low membership fees. The members

owe a debt of gratitude to the Treasurers who have guided the management team, the late John Price, Giles Baker, Neil Wheelwright and Bill Bird (both of whom doubled as Membership Secretary for a while), Peter Over, Willie McKnight and, currently, Ian Athey.

Let us return to the story of information dissemination. The Society offered quality information to its members through its journal *Swiss Express* but originally known as "The Swiss Railway News", established by Roy Dungalison and edited by Tony Smith from the Spring 1982 issue until the second issue of volume II in 1984. This publication established the most valuable link of all between members and enhanced its standing with authorities in Switzerland.

A competition was launched in its pages in the Spring of 1982 to design a suitable insignia for the Society. Several designs were submitted but the management committee sought a design which was simple, represented all Swiss railways and incorporated the Helvetic cross if possible. Ultimately the design was developed in committee and is based on an actual drawing of a rack rail and pinion wheel, the wheel encircling the Helvetic cross.

The reasoning was that private railways are members of an association which includes rack railways and the Federal Railways have the Brünig. The design was submitted informally to the Swiss National Tourist Office which, in UK terms, was a quango. It was referred to Bern and as there was no objection the design was adopted, pins being offered for sale in 1984.

Ties followed in 1987, then shirts, sweat shirts and pullovers. Sales of these items by our Sales and Exhibition officers form not only a useful source of revenue but also advertise the Society. The design first appeared on the cover of the *Swiss Express* in March 1993 during Cyril Freezer's time in the Editor's chair.

Back to 1984 when a number of changes took place. It was decided that the name of the Society should be The Swiss Railways Society which strengthened its image as a serious body. Alan Ramage had been appointed Secretary in 1983 but he also took on the role of Editor and set about seeking a printer who could pro-

Membership has grown as follows:-

Year	Total	New	Year Let.
1980	3		A
1981	178		B
1882	200	70N	C
1983		80N	D
1984		50N	E
85&86	346	136N	F
1987	390	72N	G
1988	490	150N	H
1989	617	170N	J
1990	659	117N	K
No separate figures available for 1991-4			
1995	936	129N	Q
1996	940		R
1997	1033	145N	S
First 1000th paying subscription			
1998	1021	88N	T
1999	1047	98N	U

It is interesting to note that half of those who were members at the end of 1989 are still members in May 2000. We still have 54 members who joined in 1981 and 71 of those who joined in 1988.

Figures by Dave Howsam



Taken from the Spring 1983 edition of Swiss Railway News, the forerunner to Swiss Express, from left to right Alan Pike, former committee member John Stein and the indefatigable Dave Howsam. Have a look at the last edition to see that Dave hasn't aged at all in the past 18 years.

Original photo: Ron Prattley. Scanned from a photocopy hence the slightly dodgy reproduction

duce a professional style magazine at a reasonable price. He introduced the name Swiss Express which was also the contemporaneous name of the trains operating the first air-conditioned Mk.III stock in Switzerland. Just as importantly, he introduced a house style of cover which, with a few modifications and modernised appearance is so familiar to members and others today. Unfortunately, Alan resigned in 1987. As a full time railwayman, the task was difficult enough but he also became ill which led to his decision.

The post of Editor is usually one of the most difficult ones to fill and it was fortunate that in early 1988, Malcolm Hardy-Randall was able to step in. He was the first Editor of the high tech age being early in the field with sophisticated computer equipment. Following a very serious car accident, he found that he was unable to continue to edit the magazine. It was perhaps fitting that the last edition he produced was March 1990 which had colour for the first time, pictures front and back and two in the centre pages. The purpose of the colour issue was to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Society. Colour printing was even more expensive than it is today and some requests to introduce it had been received from the membership. At the subsequent AGM, the view of the members was canvassed. One member

summed up the general feeling succinctly. Information was wanted in English. Illustrations in colour were available, if required, in the magazines produced on the continent. Colour printing is now much easier and cheaper and, with the consent of the management committee, our present Editor, David Stevenson, is bringing the Society journal into the colour age.

A further publication to commemorate the 10th anniversary was Swiss Railways - a decade of development 1980 to 1989 written by the President, Alfred Hauser-Gubser. This was issued free of charge to members and was considered a great success. Additional copies have sold steadily at exhibitions since. The only other separate publication so far is A History of the Swiss Federal Railways by Giles Della Gana, an early member of the Society and one of the longest serving members of the management committee. This too was issued free of charge to members and was well received.

Dave Howsam wrote an excellent history of the first ten years of the Society on pages 7 and 8 of the June 1990 issue of Swiss Express. It ranges widely and members who have a copy of that issue are recommended to read it in conjunction with this piece.

Cyril Freezer took over the Editors chair in June 1990. Cyril had been the Editor of the Railway Modeller

and immediately sought to stamp his imprint on the magazine. This he did to some significant effect on content and design. He made it clear that he did not wish to serve too long in the post but it was not until 1995 that he was able to escape, the mantle being taken up by Les Heath who had numerous contacts in Switzerland on whom to draw for information. The March 1997 issue had colour front and back to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Swiss railways. The duration of the celebrations and their scope must have been unparalleled for such events. Numerous members visited Switzerland, some more than once. However, the attempt to organise visits was a failure as previously mentioned. Les tendered his resignation at short notice in the March 1999 edition and Malcolm Hardy-Randall stepped into the breach to produce the June 1999 edition enabling the present Editor, David Stevenson to move into the seat. David has already made an impact trying new ideas in presentation and content.

Model railways have featured from time to time, John Jesson's Nit pickers guide series and the annual reports on the Nürnberg show being notable examples.

For several years, members have been able to obtain Eisenbahn Amateur, the journal of the Schweizer Verband Eisenbahn Amateur (SVEA) at a very favourable price. This came about following two years negotiation by Alan Pike with the management of this central body to which a large proportion of the railway clubs in Switzerland are affiliated. Affiliation is through the approval of the Annual General Meeting and requires a presentation by the body wishing to join. The Swiss Railways Society was unique in that it was the only non-Swiss society allowed to affiliate until a French society was admitted under similar terms two years ago. The finances for the Eisenbahn Amateur are kept entirely separate from those of the main Society to ensure that no loss should fall upon members not enrolled in the scheme. John Stokes administers the scheme in association with Alan Pike. The Treasurer keeps a watching brief.

Probably the most thankless task is that of the Secretary. This is a key post and requires a great deal of time and effort. Some experience of diplomacy would also be an asset!. The Society has been fortunate in having a succession of such people all of whom have played an important part in the smooth operation of the Society. Tim Stannard doubled up as Vice-Chairman and Secretary until the end of 1981 when Mike Grimshaw took over. Alan Ramage served from 1983 to 1986 when John Jesson began a long period of office lasting until 1992 when he was succeeded by Peter

Dransfield, a professional Secretary in his business career who added this task to the many secretaryships in his portfolio. He resigned in February 1998, his place being taken by the present Secretary, Brian Hemming who had earlier served as Membership Secretary. Many people, too numerous to mention by name here have served faithfully on the management committee contributing their valuable time, advice and experience for the benefit of the membership. Of the more visible ones in recent years, Steve Horobin has quietly and efficiently run the Sales side and Andy Nelson has set a standard for efficiency in exhibition stand operation which would be hard to beat.

A great deal of the measure of the success of the Society must surely lie in the efforts of branch organisers and their assistants who attract significant numbers of people, often regulars, to local meetings with a varied series of programmes. These branches are financially self supporting as are the organisations outside Britain. To all these people, the membership as a whole owes a debt of thanks.

The job which ought to be the easiest is that of Chairman (or must we use the wooden title of Chair?). Technically, the task is to keep order and see that debate is structured but those who have done the job in voluntary societies will know that it is far easier to do so in the business world!. The first Chairman was Roy Dungleison who was succeeded in 1983 by Alan Pike on the elevation of Roy to Vice-President. Alan served until 1994 when he decided to retire from the post. John Jesson, a past Secretary, was then elected and Alan joined Roy as a Vice-President. John resigned in 1998 and there was an inter-regnum for a year when meetings of the management Committee were chaired by a Vice-President until Paul Russenberger, was elected.

It had not been possible to persuade a Swiss member to accept the Presidency of the Society because of various commitments to his duties and the AGM in 1998 took the unusual step of appointing both Roy Dungleison and Alan Pike as joint Presidents to fill the vacancy.

In conclusion, it is worth reminding members that all the management committee, branch organisers and their assistants are unpaid volunteers giving much valuable time for the benefit of members as a whole so, if they wish to comment about the way the organisation is run, it is more helpful and effective to be constructive than purely condemnatory.