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# Switzerland in the UK

3/09

## Glittering golden crown is back in Leicester Square

It was found languishing in the back of an antique shop in Solothurn, a gilded 150 year old sign that had once graced the facade of the second oldest hotel in Switzerland.

The Golden Crown was first seen by Londoners in 1977, as part of the mammoth display in the Swiss Centre, on Leicester Square, to celebrate the Queen's silver jubilee.

The Lord Mayor of Westminster, arriving to open the display, was so impressed by the crown he turned to the London director of the then Swiss National Tourist Office, who had brought it from Switzerland, and asked what was going to happen to it when the celebrations had finished.

Albert Kunz replied: "It will be going to our office in San Francisco to go on permanent display there."

The Lord Mayor was adamant: "It should remain here," he said. "If you can provide a 12m high oak pole we could display it permanently outside the Swiss Centre."

And a few days later Mr Kunz was told that the City of Westminster would indeed erect the pole and that from then on the Golden Crown would have a permanent place in the heart of London.

Fast forward 14 years. Members of Swiss societies were meeting



Going up: The refurbished crown is hoisted into its new position in Swiss Court

at the Swiss Embassy to discuss what might be done in the UK to mark the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation.

Albert Kunz thought of the oak pole and its Golden Crown and had another brainwave. What about using it as the base for a giant Wappenbaum, displaying shields of all the cantons in glorious colour?

Not only did the meeting think it was a great idea, but the Lord Mayor agreed to inaugurate it himself – and also got the City Council to change the name of

New Coventry Street, where the pole had been fixed, to Swiss Court – in honour of Switzerland.

Since then the Swiss Centre has been demolished, and there were fears that the Cantonal Tree and Golden Crown would also disappear.

Albert Kunz, now long retired, was determined that would not happen.

Thanks to the efforts of Switzerland Tourism, the official guardians of the Wappenbaum, it has been completely refurbished. The tarnished and badly damaged crown now looks as bright and sparkling as it must have been 150 years ago.

But there is a sad ending to this story.

One man who has been very much involved in its restoration, Max Ott, never lived to see it back as a major tourist attraction for visitors to Leicester Square. He died in May, at the age of 83.

In fact it was the very last job of a man who always said he would never retire. It was Max Ott who had found the best specialist craftsmen for the work, including an internationally known expert in the application of gold leaf.

• **SEE Max Ott: Perfection was always his watchword, Page 8.**



The celebrated Wappenbaum: A colourful reminder of the diversity of Switzerland, with two Swiss shields, 26 cantonal shields and two commemorative plaques

### The rail way to Switzerland



Leave St. Pancras at 9.02am any morning and you're on your way. Find out what time you reach your home station in Switzerland on Pages 4-5.

### Pipe sale at Swiss Church



Rev Nathalie is glad the £2.08 million revamp of the Swiss Church is nearly over. But she still has to meet the cost of its giant organ. See Page 3.

### Ambassador goes native



Swiss Ambassador Alexis Lautenberg joins up with fellow Ticinese when they gather in Cardiff for the annual FOSSUK weekend. Go to Page 8.



Switzerland in the UK has its own Internet site, continually bringing you up to the minute news of the latest events as well as major stories from the most recent issues and links to other interesting sites in both the UK and Switzerland. To access it go to: [www.swissreview.co.uk](http://www.swissreview.co.uk)

News about any forthcoming events that will be of interest to our readers should be emailed to: [editor@meakin.net](mailto:editor@meakin.net)



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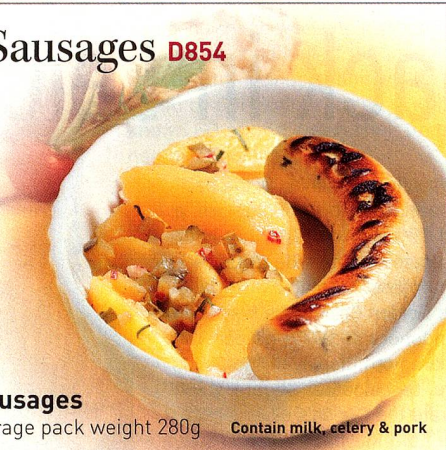
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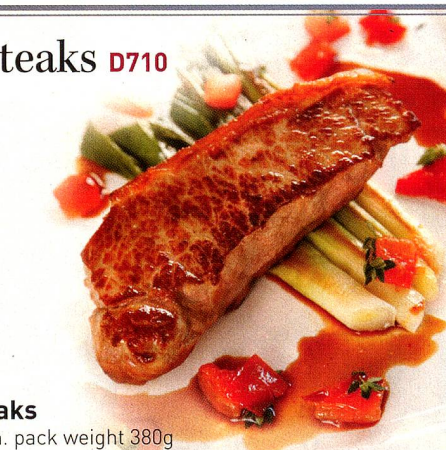
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# New organ is no longer a pipe dream for the Swiss church

The extensive Swiss community in London is being asked to help the West End's 154 year Swiss church achieve the last major part of its £2.2 million renovation project – the provision of a new organ.

In a novel appeal, the new minister, Nathalie Dürmüller, is asking well-wishers to sponsor one of the massive organ's 676 pipes.

The pipes are made from wood, spruce or tin and vary in length from a tiny 1.8cm to a giant 2.4 metres.

The smaller pipes cost £25, larger ones can be £50, £100 or £250, while the more visible principal display pipes cost £1,000.

The organ – illustrated right – is being constructed by one of Europe's best known organ builders, Späth Orgelbau in Rapperswill.

The firm's origins go back to 1742 – only 20 years before French speaking Swiss Protestants founded the Swiss church in London.

The transformation of the church, in Endell Street, has been in the hands of Basle architects, the aptly named Christ & Gantenbein.

Emanuel Christ and Christoph Gantenbein started their practice ten years ago immediately after graduating from the ETH in Zurich. Now with a staff of 34 they are building a reputation for fresh thinking in architectural design.

Currently they are working on the renovation and extension of the Swiss National Museum in Zurich.

The Swiss church in London, a Grade II listed building, is only their second overseas project.

It was last autumn that Rev Dürmüller first put out an appeal to the Swiss community to help finance the renovation project.

"A renovated church will benefit many people," she said. "The parish will enjoy the improved facilities. The Swiss community will receive attractive and centrally located spaces to meet and hold community and cultural events.

"London will be offered an attractive and acoustically excellent hall in the centre of the city, well suited for chamber music and choir concerts as well as choir and orchestra practice. In fact, architecturally it is a smaller version of the Wigmore Hall.

"Neighbourhood groups, choirs and small church groups will be able to rent space at very reasonable prices."

Nathalie Dürmüller is hoping



Inside the Swiss Church: A judicious use of glass partitions helps enlarge the main hall and provokes a subtle play of reflections, see-throughs and sharp shadows



Nathalie Dürmüller: 'This means more to me than just organising events'

that the church will be back in use this autumn and is planning to celebrate the reopening with a series of music and arts events.

"But for me to be a minister it means a lot more than organising events," she said.

"It means to care for people and create a space where they feel welcome and where they live a life that is meaningful.

"As the Swiss Church we aim to be such a place."



## How to contact the editor

Reports of Swiss society activities and coming events, and articles and correspondence for the 'Switzerland in the UK' section of the Swiss Review, should go to the editor:

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• The Swiss Review, with its 'Switzerland in the UK' supplement, is published four times a year – in February, April, August and October. The deadline for the next issue, to be published in October, is August 27.

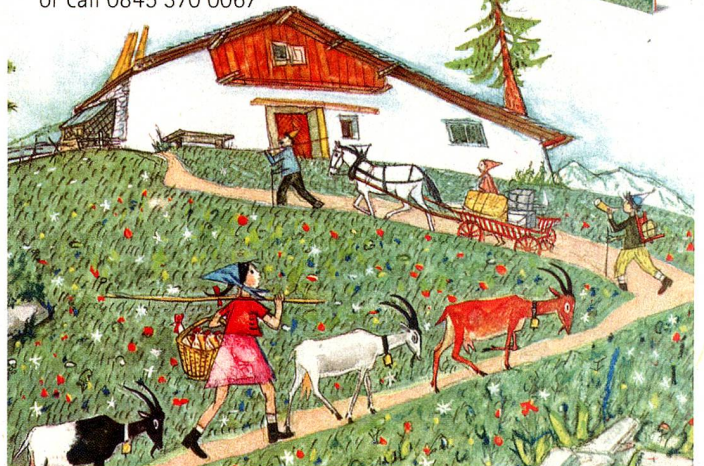
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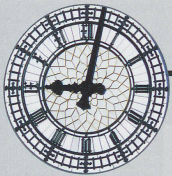
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**New tracks now being laid to make journeys even quicker**

SNCF, the French railway operator, has ordered work on laying lengths of new track to be speeded up, meaning journeys on the line from Paris to Basle and Zurich will be much quicker. At present the standard route goes via Strasbourg. When the new link is completed, in 2011, the Geneva route, involves a new link between Bourg-en-Bresse and Bellegarde, which will be in use before the end of this year. Both new sections of track are shown with dashed lines in our map.

After years of losing millions of pounds worth of business to airlines like SWISS and easyJet, the railways of Britain, France and Switzerland are going on the offensive.

Their latest move is to offer direct fares from St Pancras to seven Swiss towns and cities - Basle, Berne, Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Vallorbe and Zurich - thus eliminating the need to buy separate tickets for the different sections of the route.

Later this is expected to be expanded to 12 more destinations to which direct tickets will be available: Aigle, Brigue, Chur, Landquart, Leuk, Martigny, Montreux, Sargans, Sierre, Sion, Visp and Zermatt.

The return fares from the UK to the five main stations in Switzerland served by the TGV

direct from Paris are: Geneva and Basle under £100, Lausanne and Berne under £110 and Zurich under £130. And no hidden extras like taxes and baggage charges, check-in queues or lengthy waits for departure.

Eurostar's director of communications, Simon Montague, said: "We are always looking at ways to facilitate greener travel throughout Europe on high-speed trains."

"It is great news that our passengers can now book their tickets to Switzerland with the convenience and good value of connecting fares."

And he added: "Travelling by rail to Switzerland is a much greener and seamless alternative to flying. Enjoy the

beautiful scenery and relax while speeding through the French and Swiss countryside - from meadows to mountains, from quaint villages to cities, the view from the train window is sheer entertainment!"

**Return fares to Switzerland start at under £100 - and no extras**



**How long does it take from the TGV terminus in Zurich to reach the main skiing resorts?**

The 2010 winter sports season is expected to see a lot more skiers from the UK travelling by train to the resorts - despite the efforts of airlines to woo them with cheap flights.

Those going to the popular resorts in the Grisons will be the ones with the furthest to travel. But even they can be tucked up snugly in bed well before midnight.

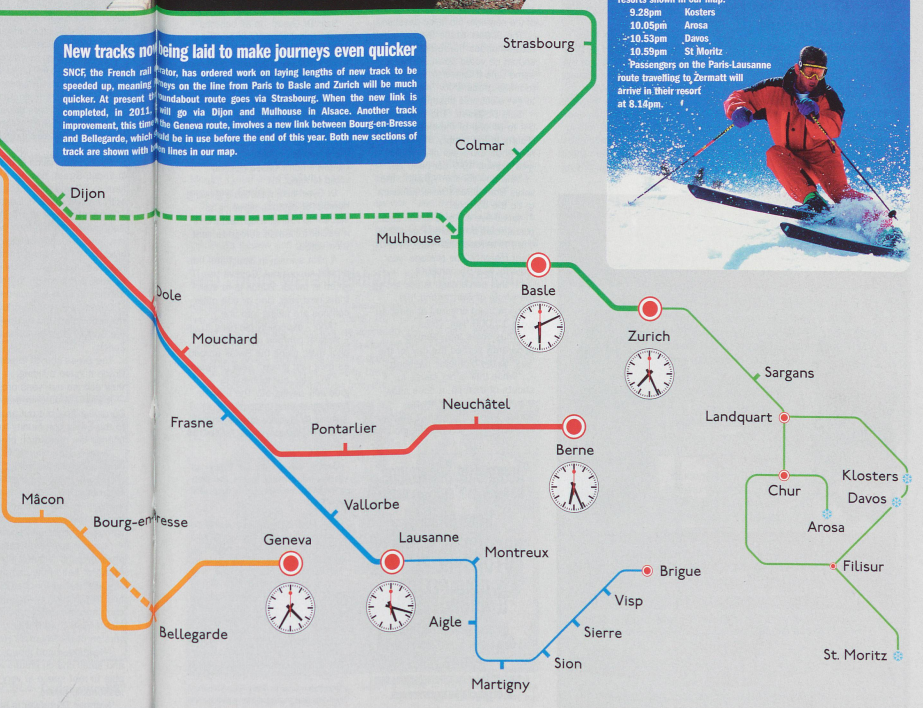
Taking a train from St Pancras shortly after 9am, and changing in Paris and Zurich, this table shows their time of arrival in four of the resorts shown in our map:

9.28pm	Klostertal
10.05pm	Arosa
10.53pm	Davos
10.55pm	St Moritz

Passengers on the Paris-Lausanne route travelling to Zermatt will arrive in their resort at 8.14pm.



# The railways fight back!



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# UK Swiss told they can have a major influence



The FOSSUK committee in action: (left to right) Erika Farwell, Joe Broggini, Margrit Lyster, Freddie Wyser and Regula Marsh-Hilfiker

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# Why YOUR vote counts

The voice of Swiss living overseas is finally being heard through the ballot box.

That was the message from Berne delivered in Cardiff by Dr Remo Gysin, vice president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

He gave the FOSSUK AGM dramatic examples of how the votes of Swiss living overseas can and are now playing a decisive role in the outcome of national referenda.

Dr Gysin, himself a former national councillor, analysed the surprising

result of the May referendum, called to prevent the introduction of the new-style biometric passports.

The Council of the Swiss Abroad recommended the referendum should be voted down. At the same time it called for measures to make it easier for Swiss abroad to get electronic passports.

Said Dr Gysin: "The vote turned out to be one of the closest results in the history of federal referenda: 50.1 per cent voted 'yes' versus 49.9 per cent 'no.'

"And now for the highlight: the votes from abroad were sufficient to tip the balance.

"In all five cantons which count postal votes from abroad separately, citizens abroad said 'yes', by a clear majority. The average 'yes' majority was 65 percent.

"If this percentage is applied to the whole of Switzerland, the Swiss abroad ensured at least an extra 12,000 'yes' votes.

"Thus votes from abroad apparently carried the day for the 'yes' to the biometric passport.

"While this is not cause for shouts of triumph, it does show that the influence of voters abroad is not negligible." He also referred to an earlier referendum,

on the freedom of movement between Switzerland and the EU.

Said Dr Gysin: "In all cantons which record votes from abroad separately, the proportion of 'yes' votes stood at 70 per cent or higher. This was five to ten percentage points above the respective intra-cantonal results.

"And, in the Canton of Appenzell-Innerrhoden, our citizens abroad voted clearly in favour of the proposal, whereas the canton's home-based citizens voted to reject it."

Dr Gysin also reported a growing number of cantons agreeing to electronic voting, which will make it easier for Swiss abroad to cast their votes.

A pilot system in Neuchâtel has proved successful. Geneva has voted in favour. Zurich is to start trials next year. One by one other cantons are falling into line.

"And – especially pleasing to us – several cantons are planning pilot trials using the Swiss abroad as their test group," said Dr Gysin.

"You see, our lobbying is gradually paying off. The train is finally gathering speed!"

• **Read Dr Gysin's speech in full:**  
[www.swissreview.co.uk/story350](http://www.swissreview.co.uk/story350)

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on legislation back home

# Cardiff becomes 'an outpost of Switzerland'

The Welsh were warned that their No 1 city was about to become "an outpost of Switzerland" for the weekend with a conference of Swiss societies being held in the country's capital.

The report in the South Wales Echo was not far wrong. Forty delegates from Swiss clubs and their guests in the UK gathered for the annual general meeting of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK. And Welsh Swiss, led by honorary consul Ruth Thomas-Lehmann, were determined to ensure they all had an enjoyable time.

The three day event started with a concert given by the BBC Welsh Orchestra under its Swiss conductor, Thierry Fischer.

Then it was down to business with the election of four delegates for a four year term to represent UK Swiss on the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

Two candidates, proposed by UK Swiss clubs, were re-elected: Margrit Lyster and FOSSUK president Freddie Wyser.

But in a new development, they are being joined by two delegates voted by ballot among readers of the Swiss Review and others: Dr

Yves Guisan and Alain Meyer.

Dr Guisan, a Vaudois socialist and a former national councillor, has been closely involved in communal, cantonal and national politics for the last 20 years, and has been a leading figure in the Swiss medical world. Last year he was also appointed honorary Swiss consul in Gibraltar.

Financier Alain Meyer, from Immensee, went to St Gallen University and then the University of Applied Science in Lucerne, where he won a marketing and finance degree. For the last three years he has been working in asset management with Goldman Sachs in London.

Among the speakers at the AGM was Dr Rudolf Wyder, the director of the OSA, who said the organisation was incensed at the government's decision to cut the subsidy for the *Swiss Review*, meaning there were now only four issues a year instead of six, and said that the explanation given that the reduction could be implemented without loss of service "was simply untrue."

• See Margrit Lyster's full report on the FOSSUK weekend at: [www.swissreview.co.uk/story 349](http://www.swissreview.co.uk/story/349)

## Two choirs were highlight of the weekend

Highlight of the FOSSUK weekend was a truly memorable concert given by two choirs – Welsh singers Côr Godre'r Garth and Vos de Locarno, a 40 strong choir from the Ticino singing abroad for the first time, writes Margrit Lyster. Each choir sang six of their favourites, full of emotion and humour.

It was a deeply moving but uplifting experience, difficult to put into words.

The concert was made possible by the generosity of the South Wales Swiss Society, plus a contribution from the Unione Ticinese.



Swiss Ambassador Alexis Lautenberg, himself a native of the Ticino, meets the Swiss-Italian choir from Locarno  
Pictures by Ursula Jost

## Joe Brogginì steps down after 28 years serving the Swiss community in the UK



A leading figure in the Swiss community in the UK for many years, retired architect Giuseppe Brogginì – known to everyone as Joe – has stepped down as a UK delegate to the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

At the same time he has given up his seat on the nine-member executive of the OSA, the decision making body of the Swiss Abroad, which he joined 26 years ago.

Joe, a Ticinese from Losone, went to school in Locarno and then moved to Zurich to study architecture. After graduating he came to London to study urban design, and then read regional sciences at Reading University. Later, for 15 years he was architect-planner with the then Greater London Council.

He has lived in the capital since 1967 and married Alison, who he calls "a genuine Londoner". They have two grown up daughters, Lara and Sasha.

He told *Swiss Review*: "When in 1981 I was elected by FOSSUK I would never have anticipated serving the interests and expectations of my compatriots in Britain for as long as 28 years.

"I would simply like to say that it was an honour and indeed a great privilege to work in perfect harmony alongside such distinguished past and present OSA presidents and past and present members of the executive."

• See the full story at: [www.swissreview.co.uk/story/347](http://www.swissreview.co.uk/story/347)



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# Peter Jacomelli: Last of the great Ticinese restaurateurs

**The death of Peter Jacomelli, at the age of 91, marked the end of an era for the Swiss in London. Here his long life is recalled by his great friend, Peter Barber:**

Peter Jacomelli was the last of the Swiss-Italian Ticinese restaurateurs in a tradition stretching back to 1847 when Carlo Gatti opened a café in Hungerford Market on the site of Charing Cross station.

In 1900 there were no less than nine Ticinese café-restaurants on Oxford Street alone.

Peter Jacomelli was born in Wimbledon in 1917 where his parents, Aldo Jacomelli and Adelaide née Genoni, ran the Station Restaurant.

Peter was equally fluent in English and the local Swiss-Italian dialect, having been educated for several years in Semione in the Ticino.

He served with the London Irish Regiment during the Second World War in the Middle East, North Africa and Italy. His war service came to an end with his capture at Monte Cassino and he spent

the last year as a prisoner of war in Germany.

After the war Peter and his siblings turned the family restaurant in Richmond into perhaps the best and certainly one of the most loved restaurants in the area. But failure to find a successor in the next generation led to its closure in 1987.

Most of Peter's scarce leisure time was devoted to the Unione Ticinese, which had originally been founded as a benevolent society for Ticinese waiters in London by Carlo Gatti's nephew, Stefano Gatti, in 1874 and which in February, the month of Peter's death, celebrated its 135th anniversary.

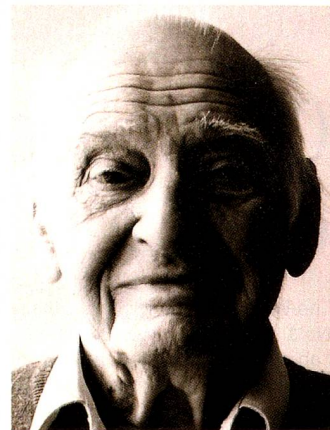
Peter was the society's dominating personality for over 50 years and had met Rocco Gatti, Stefano Gatti's nephew.

A member since the early 1930s, Peter joined the committee in 1949 and was twice its president. He was down to earth and up-to-date, energetic, tolerant, humorous, selfless and modest. He was

created a socio benemerito in 1975.

The most loyal of friends, he remained vigorous to the end and at 90 he was still busy preparing his inimitable risotto at the Unione Ticinese's annual June barbecue.

• **The full report can be seen at [www.swissreview.co.uk/story/339](http://www.swissreview.co.uk/story/339)**



**Peter Jacomelli: End of an era**

## Max Ott: Perfection was always his watchword

A well known member of the Swiss community in London, Max Ott has died at the age of 83.

Although he spent his entire life in the UK, a country he fondly loved, he always regarded Switzerland as his real homeland.

His parents came from Lenzburg, in the middle of canton Aargau and as a young boy he spent all his holiday with relatives there and kept in touch with them and many other Swiss friends all his life.

Max grew up in the little Sussex village of Spithurst and went to school in nearby Lewes.

His first job was as an apprentice with a top London furniture maker but when war came he was conscripted as a 'Bevan boy' and sent to work down the pits in Northumberland.

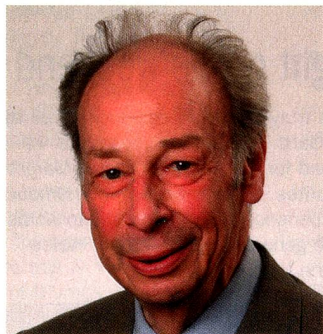
After the war he decided to become his own boss and set up his own woodworking company, Max E Ott Ltd, which he turned into a thriving business.

From then on he worked a 12 hour day, a practice he continued right up to his death, and won an enviable reputation for perfection in everything he did.

For relaxation he became a member of the Swiss Accordion Group, which for many years gave concerts all over the UK.

The opening of the Swiss Centre in 1965 gave him a new opportunity to display his skills. He was involved in the interior planning and built many of the building's offices and shops.

Just before he died he took on the responsibility for seeing that the iconic Wappenbaum and Gold Crown were fully restored to become an important feature of the Leicester Square renovation.



**Max Ott: Worked a 12 hour day**

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