

† G. Wüthrich

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G. WÜTHRICH
M.I.E.E.

1879 — 1946.

As reported in our last issue, Mr. G. Wüthrich, M.I.E.E., General Manager of Oerlikon Ltd., in London, passed away on Monday, December 16th 1946, at the age of 67.

By the untimely death of Mr. Wüthrich, the Swiss Colony in Great Britain has suffered a grievous loss, and many will mourn the passing of a good friend.

The deceased was born in 1879 in Herzogenbuchsee (Ct. Berne), where his father occupied the post of station-master. At an early age he showed a keen interest in technical matters, and on leaving school he entered the "Technikum" in Burgdorf as a student, where in 1897 he took his engineer's degree. On completion of his studies, he entered into the service of the "Glockengiesserei Zollikofen" and later on in the "Lokomotiv- and Wagon-Reparatur remise" in Herzogenbuchsee.

In 1898, he obtained a post with the "Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon" with which concern he remained until his death (48 years). Right from the beginning of his appointment, he put heart and soul into his work, and his keenness and abilities soon came to the notice of his superiors.

As a young engineer, he was sent by the Management to Scotland, Austria, Sweden, France and Italy, where he gained the experience, which in later years helped him to gain the prominent position which he held so successfully for many years in this country.

In the early nineties Mr. Wüthrich was entrusted with the electrification of the Dietikon-Bremgarten Railway and the construction of the power station in Bremgarten. In between, he was serving in the Design Department, Works and Testing Laboratories of the "Ateliers de Construction, Oerlikon."

In the year 1899, the deceased came to this country, and was subsequently engaged in the reconstruction of slow speed vertical steam engines for driving Oerlikon Flywheel Generators in the Pigeon House Generating Station of the Dublin Corporation; this undertaking was later on taken over by the Electricity Board of Eire.

At the beginning of the century, Mr. Wüthrich was occupied in the installation and setting to work of plant in a number of Power and Converter stations in London.



At the end of 1903 he became Resident Engineer, and in 1907 was appointed Chief Engineer and Manager of the "Ingenieur Bureau" in London.

During the 1914-1918 World War, the London and North Western Railway (later the London Midland and Scottish Railway) contract for the electrification of the Euston-Watford Line comprising 76 Motor Coaches, 68 Trailers and 68 driving Trailers, including 304 driving motors of 250 H.P. each, as well as the necessary apparatus for control, braking, heating and lighting, and erection and putting into service, was carried out, quite the most important contract handled by Mr. Wüthrich; the personnel occupied on the job at times numbering about 200.

One of Mr. Wüthrich's proudest accomplishments was the planning of an Aluminium Works and its Hydro-electric Power Plant, for the Vigeland Aluminium Works in Norway.

In 1921, Oerlikon Ltd. was formed and Mr. Wüthrich became General Manager and Chief Engineer. Many orders were booked from Municipalities, Corporations, Collieries, Steelworks, Textile and Paper Factories, Pump makers, etc., and also for Electrolysers for Chemical Works, a Government Balloon factory, power plant for India, Burma, South America, Canada, etc.

Apart from his business activities, Mr. Wüthrich was an ardent Numismatist and Bibliophile, and many articles from his pen appeared from time to time in the "Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society."

Providence willed it that he remained a bachelor and thus he was able to devote all his spare time to his hobbies.

The writer was, some years ago, privileged to see his fine collection of MSS, Swiss coins and stained glass at his private residence, and over a bottle of "Schaffiser" he enthusiastically related to him the history of his treasures; they were his children to which he devoted all his love.

Mr. Wüthrich found time to take an active part in the affairs of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, of which he became an Associate Member in 1906, and a Member in 1911.

It is very singular how the fact of a man's death often seems to give people a truer idea of his character, whether for good or evil, than they have ever possessed while he was living and working amongst them, and in compiling these notes, the writer has realised that we have lost in him a truly remarkable man.

Another, and no less important chapter, was his work in the Swiss Colony in London. In 1917 he became a member of the City Swiss Club, and to this institution he remained faithful throughout his life, missing hardly any of the Meetings. On several occasions, he addressed the Members on various subjects.

When the London Group of the "Nouvelle Société Helvétique" was founded, some 30 years ago, he became at once, one of their most active members. With great zeal and unbounded enthusiasm he set to work to collect the necessary funds to maintain a permanent secretary. He was one of the most

ardent collaborators of Dr. A. Latt, at one time Secretary of this Society.

During the twenty-seven years of existence of the "Swiss Observer", Mr. Wüthrich was a faithful supporter of the Colony's official organ, and many a useful hint or tip was given, and gladly accepted, by the respective Editors.

But perhaps the most useful work for the Swiss community in Great Britain was rendered by him as a Member of the "Council for the Study of Swiss Problems" and we are indebted to the Hon. Secretary of this institution for the following notes.

"Mr. G. Wüthrich was already a Member of the Commission Economique founded by Monsieur Henri Martin, at the time Commercial Attaché at the Swiss Legation, just after the last war. When it was suggested that this Commission should be revived but under a somewhat different form Mr. Wüthrich immediately supported the idea and sided — as always — with the younger Group.

"When the *Council for the Study of Swiss Problems* was formed in March 1943 Mr. Wüthrich became its first Vice-President. He took always a great interest in all questions which were dealt by the Executive Committee of the Council such as the proposed Swiss Centre, the 1st of August celebration, Employment matters as well as all those dealing with the Education of young Swiss. It was, however, in the work of his own Engineering Section — of which he was Chairman — that he displayed his greatest activity. During the war years several of the large Swiss industrial firms were very active; all sorts of difficulties existed, however, as far as Anglo-Swiss Trade was concerned and Mr. Wüthrich used all his energy, all his many important connections also in a never ceasing endeavour to maintain a flow of trade. All this he did with very great dignity, remaining true to the sound Swiss traditions of his firm. In him, therefore, his colleagues of the Engineering Section found not only a very capable Chairman, always willing to help, but a real Leader who guided them at a time when it was not always easy to take decisions. He managed to bring together men who were competitors, to create confidence and trust amongst them and to induce them to forget their individual interests to put those of Switzerland first. Together they worked and Professor Paul Keller more than once paid tribute to their labours and the help he had received from Mr. Wüthrich. All those who worked with him know how very conscientious he was, how accurate his informations were, the great sense of duty he always exercised. His files were rich sources of concrete informations. It is no wonder that the various Reports he made about the work of his Section were highly appreciated not only by our Legation but by the "Vorort" and our Economic Department in Berne where they were always sent."

Mr. Wüthrich was a Swiss "Vom echten Schrot und Korn," his love for his country was deeply rooted in him, and manifested itself throughout his life. Through the long and successful years of his activity in this country, he became a great friend

of England, and on more than one occasion, he told the writer that he would like to end his days in this great Metropolis of which he was a great admirer.

The deceased nourished a life-long affection for the town of Berne and its historical and cultural tradition. He was in the real sense of the word a "Bärner", during his many visits to our home country he never missed an opportunity to pay a visit, to what he called his "first love." He had many of the characteristics of a Bernese, he did not suffer fools gladly, and he could, at times, be very outspoken and his language at such times, was not always soft and cooing as a dove; if at times rather blunt, or harsh, he never bore any malice to any one who was not of the same opinion. Many a dispute was settled with a handshake.

The funeral took place on Friday, December 20th, 1946, at Golders Green Crematorium; a large number of friends, colleagues and business associates attended the impressive service at which Pasteur Pradervand and Pfarrer Blum from the Eglise Suisse and the Schweizerkirche officiated.

His only remaining sister, Mme Kobler-Wüthrich, and a cousin, Mr. H. Müller, were present, the latter also representing the firm of Worthington-Simpson Ltd., Engineers, in Newark and London.

Mr. Burgess of the Oerlikon Ltd., Mr. Wüthrich's collaborator and friend for the last 32 years, paid a moving tribute, on behalf of the Board of Directors of Oerlikon Ltd., staff, and himself to the departed, enumerating the great services he had rendered, ending his oration with the following words: "I had come to regard Mr. Wüthrich with deep admiration for his qualities as a leader and a fighter. A man of strong opinions and convictions, he was always willing to listen to the views of others even when they differed from his own, and this admiration, affection and esteem was felt by all those who worked with him. A really great man in the widest sense of the word.

I can assure you his departure from this life is a serious blow to us, and a loss we shall mourn for many a day.

I shall always remember with pleasure the fact that I have enjoyed his friendship for many years, and his passing leaves a gap which cannot be filled, but life has been richer by knowing him and he leaves many pleasant memories."

Monsieur E. v. Graffenried, Counsellor of the Swiss Legation, as representative of the Swiss Minister, who was unavoidably prevented from attending, also paid a sincere tribute to the late Mr. Wüthrich, and speaking on behalf of the Chairman of the Swiss Council in London, mentioned the great work rendered to this institution. —

His task was accomplished and the long day done, death came with friendly care and our friend has now entered the valley of the shadow of death, the sleep that no pain shall wake. The parting is bitter to endure, but the memory of Gottlieb Wüthrich will remain with all those who have been privileged to know him.

Rest in Peace, dear Friend.

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