

More about the Fischer diaries

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MORE ABOUT THE FISCHER DIARIES.

In July this year we published a short appreciation of the Diaries of Johann Conrad Fischer (1773-1854) and an outline of the circumstances in which they were written. Our interest in these diaries revived when the MSS., normally housed in the Museum zu Allerheiligen in Schaffhausen, were exhibited in South Kensington this summer. The MSS. are written in a neat, cursive hand, their Gothic script unexpectedly clear and legible, the outcome of an orderly mind.

To anyone not familiar with or only mildly interested in metallurgical processes and alloys, in mechanical science, mathematical formulas and the technicalities and economics of steel production, the diaries will prove arduous and heavy reading, since much of their contents is concerned with matters of this kind. But from it all emerges a remarkable personality endowed with a brilliant intellect, a shrewd, analytical mind and an astounding vitality, a man whose energy was boundless and who possessed a capacity for sustained effort that we, of a lesser breed, can but envy.

Fischer was the descendant of long line of artisans and craftsmen, which can be traced back to the sixteenth century. He was, considering his status, extremely well educated. At an early age, he had been instructed in Latin and Greek and the humanities, had learned French and English and became initiated in the mathematical sciences.

His long life was one of uninterrupted activity. He founded and managed the Steel works which are

still flourishing, he travelled extensively — his diaries are the records of his many journeys abroad — he served his country as a State Councillor and Officer of Artillery, he befriended and corresponded with industrialists and scientists all over the world, hobnobbed with Royalty, (he was honoured by a personal visit of Czar Alexander I), took a keen interest in politics and yet found time for writing poetry. Of his metallurgical inventions we are not qualified to speak; they were undoubtedly of great value.

What sort of a man was he? A diary like Pepys's which was not intended for publication can, with its delightful self-revealing indiscretions, be the key to a man's personality. But Fischer did write for publication and the human factor remains discreetly hidden. We should, however, judge him to have been of a kindly disposition, but determined and strong-willed and not one to suffer fools gladly, devoted to his family and to his country, a gentleman by instinct and training, typical of the Swiss 19th century bourgeois middle class.

He was certainly a credit to his native town and an ancestor the Fischer family can be justly proud of.

J.J.F.S.

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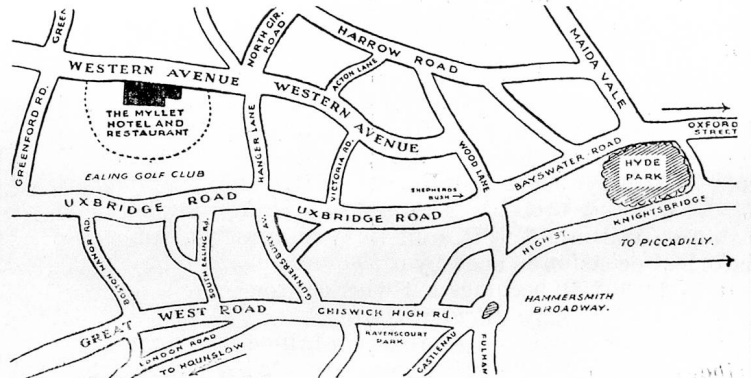
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