

News from the colony

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VISIT TO A SWISS CHOCOLATE-MAKER IN LONDON

Comparing the goods on display in a British cake-shop with similar shops in Switzerland, France and Germany will bring the ready proof that *patisserie* is a continental art. A British cake shop will have a crude assortment of buns, tea cakes and pastries containing salted cream, while a continental shop of this kind will have a wide variety of tempting delicacies.

Most cake shops in Switzerland also combine the art of *confiserie*. They are therefore, *patisserie-confiseries*, and it would not be unfair to say that the Continent also holds the lead in that field. The British have confectioneries (which are not quite the same as *confiseries*) and hold their own as sweet-makers. Chocolates, when they are not industrially produced also belong to *confiserie* and therefore to a continental tradition. Chocolate shops are rare in London. They are to be found in the centre and the plush residential areas. It is no surprise that the most famous of them



should have been founded by continentals, such as *Floris, Charbonnel et Walker* and *Richoux*.

But a list of the leading chocolate shops of London would be incomplete without a mention of *Lessiter's* of Swiss Cottage. This well-established Mecca of

chocolate delicacies is owned and run by a 30-year-old Swiss, Mr. Peter Luder, who came in this country only nine years ago.

Lessiter's were founded in 1911 by a French family and at one time included several other shops — one of them in Baker Street. By 1956, the Swiss Cottage

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premises, which were the only ones still in existence, were sold to a German family. Mr. Luder came to work for these people in 1964 as a confiseur. Two years later, he bought a lease on the premises in association with two partners, one of them a Director of Sharaton. In 1968, Mr. Luder bought the shares in the business and acquired control of a shop that he has since expanded and developed. Last year, he adjoined a tobacco shop to the chocolates department. Lessiter's are now a spacious store opening up on Finchley Road only a hundred yards from John Barn's. To the left the customer has a large assortment of goodies, to the right, an equally varied choice of cigarettes, pipe tobaccos, pipes and lighters. Mr. Luder reckons that he has multiplied his turnover fourfold since taking over in 1968.

Lessiter's have several important outlets. Among Mr. Luder's most important accounts are Sharaton and Harrods. The latter buys marzipan figurines by the hundreds. Lessiter's also used to supply the Swiss Centre.

Still a bachelor (he claims to be too busy to consider anything else), Mr. Luder finds the rewards of his job in developing and perfecting his art, in producing finer chocolates every year. With a staff of 12, Lessiter's has limited scope for expansion in its Finchley Road premises. As soon as a specialised undertaking of this kind gets big, it loses in renown and in uniqueness to fall in self-defeating competition with the large manufacturers. Rather than engage in this avenue — many of London's chocolate makers have — Mr. Luder prefers concentrating on quality and in striving for the best. His perfectionist streak was acquired during a four-year apprenticeship at a confiserie in St. Gall called *Pfund*. He finds it very difficult to get British staff in his trade, and that is

why most of his staff are Swiss. The salesgirls at chocolate and tobacco counters are also Swiss. Mr. Luder claims that this is not an expression of Swiss chauvinism: He feels that Swiss girls have "a better approach" towards customers.

The basement of Lessiter's is where things happen. Mr. Luder showed me the "factory" downstairs. As we entered the room pervaded by powerful and heady chocolate fumes, we saw a large enrobing machine in full operation. A Swiss-British chef was stirring a warm melt of simmering chocolate cream, his hands wallowing in the luscious mixture. An appliance shaped the oozy molasses into bonbons which his assistants garnished with hazelnuts. A conveyor belt brought the tacky sweets into a series of ovens and other processes. Out they came at the other end as vintage Lessiter chocs. Mr. Luder pointed out the shiny surface lent to the chocolate by an appropriate tempering process was the hall-mark of the good chocolate maker. There was another bulky machine at the end of the room used for obtaining the right mixtures. The raw materials came from specialised chocolate firms, one British, another Belgian, in the form of large chocolate cakes. Mr. Luder explained that there were several hundred grades of chocolate. A highly sophisticated business indeed. Lessiter's also make fine marzipan which we had the opportunity to savour.

Marzipan is an important item as the Swiss Cottage, Hampstead, St. John's Wood and Golders Green areas have a strong continental population. There are many ex-Germans who have particularly fine taste-buds when it comes to Marzipan. To shape marzipan and chocolate into bambinis, rabbits, Simmenthal cows, ballet dancers and robins requires another kind of expertise related to statuary. *Fondants* are moulded into shape by starch matrices

and then coated with chocolate. Marzipan are shaped by yellow sulphur moulds whose negatives were carved by hand in plasticine or other soft material. Mr. Luder does some of this sculpture himself and keeps a collection of former "models" so as to produce something different for each new season.

In a cold room in which the ingredients of the wide range of Lessiter sweets were stacked to the ceiling were two large trays whose rich contents had been left to settle and mature. One of these trays contained a soft bed of chocolate truffle paste. The other was full to the brim with a light green cream representing the latest result of Mr. Luder's research and development! The recipe consisted of a spell-binding mix of white cream, chocolate cream and mint cream. Covered with a thin coating of chocolate and sugar, little spheres of this sensuous substance are sold upstairs as "mint creams". They have the freshness and silky texture of the pure butter one can get straight from the churn of a Swiss mountain dairy. These sweets melt in the mouth. Savouring them is like having a chip of the Old Alps between tongue and palate. The experience is unique!

Other good things come from Lessiter's: *Marrons glacés, liqueurs, griottes, rum pistache, walnut, pralinés, nougat, logs, walnut marzipan, rose cream, almond kronkant, toscas, kirschspätzelis* and a variety of cream chocolate, not to mention *giandujas*. These good things can be bought in complete boxes stamped with Lessiter's trade mark at reasonable prices. Admittedly, "tucking in" at Lessiter's is not a cheap pleasure. Mr. Luder finds that although the British tend to watch their purse when they buy sweets and are content with Cadbury's Milk Tray and Black Magic, they are prepared to pay extra for special occasions. Lessiter's therefore not only cater for the prosperous expatriate community of North London, but to a steadily growing British public.

Opening a classy cigarette and tobacco counter has given business a boost and Mr. Luder regrets that this was only done last year.

Moving into tobacco has opened up what was hitherto a rather secretive high-class shop intimidating the less prosperous window-shoppers. Now a person wishing only to buy ten "No.6" or a "Crunchie" can do so. This practically free entrance will give new customers an opportunity to witness the marvels displayed on the other side of the shop and eventually succumb to temptation. Lessiter's tobacco area was taken from a neighbouring cake-shop that also sold cigarettes but whose premises were used by the Swiss Cottage Sainsbury branch.

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This enabled Mr. Luder to inherit the goodwill and move into this new field with a ready market.

The tobacco shop probably has on its shelves all the cigarettes and brands of pipe-tobacco sold in the country. It also sells a variety of briar pipes, expensive lighters and rare pipes such as a Turkish meerschaum for £30. The tobacco business is booming and more buyers seem to come in nowadays to buy a packet of cigarettes than to buy "mint creams". Combining two entirely different forms of business was a wager inasmuch as it could have hurt Lessiter's image as a confiserie specialist. But this has not happened and instead paid of

handsomely.

Selling chocolates at Swiss Cottage requires the ability to satisfy two clientèles with occasionally conflicting tastes. The English for example, find *fondants* too sweet; Germans equate quality of chocolates with a plain outer appearance. The British like their chocolate easter figures hollow, the continentals are used to having them filled up. These and other conflicting tastes have to be taken into consideration in order to sell successfully in prosperous and metropolitan parts of town. But this is a marketing problem which Lessiter's have mastered for a long time and which will not stand in the way of its continued prosperity.

and works sprung up on the other side of the road. The Second World War halted expansion. The company was compelled to switch from meters to such items as fuses, armour piercing nose caps, oxygen flow regulators, indicators, economisers and ammunition counters.

Although Landis & Gyr Ltd. are closely linked with the mother company in Zug, they have only one Swiss on their executive staff. He is Mr. Alfred Peter, 51, a former ETH physics student, who is Works Manager. There are a handful of young Swiss working for short spells as trainees or technicians.

As Works Manager, Mr. Peter is responsible for organising the planning production. He is the brain behind the shop floor. Although the firm has its Labour Relations Officer, Mr. Peter has to deal with labour relations as well and he is in constant touch with staff on matters relating to production. Every alteration on the shop floor, amendment to procedure, new process, etc. will inevitably have to be argued out with the shop stewards, who, true to British tradition, will usually try to negotiate their amenity to change against rises or other advantages. Thus the whole process of rationalisation is achieved with patience, good will and lengthy bargaining. Mr. Peter accepts this with plenty of good humour as a reality of British industrial life and stresses that it is possible to maintain excellent industrial relations within the framework. The main union is the AUEW (Hugh Scanlon) and Mr. Peter admits that the Acton firm has to work as a close shop for convenience. He claims that British workers are as good as any others if they are given a proper incentive to work.

Right now, Mr. Peter's main concern is to modernise the layout of some of the production plants. The present disposal of machine and conveyance facilities are far from optimal and result in considerable loss of time and efficiency. This problem will probably be solved with the new plant the company is planning to erect on a nearby sports site of its own. These plans have however not yet been finalised.

Landis & Gyr's expansion and success in Britain is due to its founder and first director, Mr. L.R. Lester. The fact that the British subsidiary is the outcome of a marriage of mixed nationalities, Swiss and English, hardly shows at the management level. The only Swiss aspects are the accounting system which is adapted to the system used in the whole group, and a modern method of controlling work in progress devised by the Zurich firm *Syma*. The system, which is not in use anywhere else in Britain, keeps a central control room constantly informed of the state of the innumerable

LANDIS & GYR

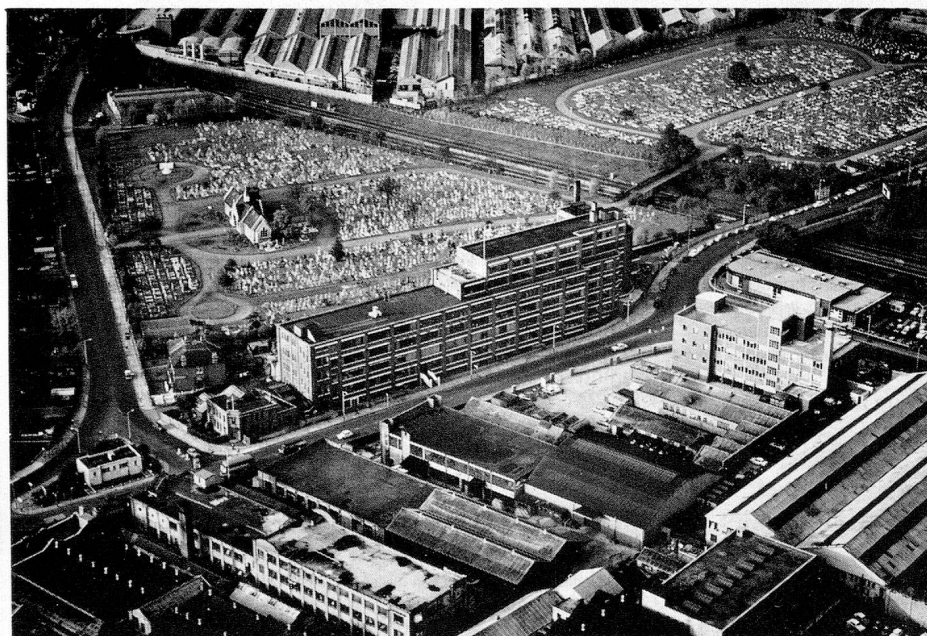
A SWISS LEADER IN THE BRITISH ELECTRICAL INDUSTRY

Landis & Gyr Ltd. of North Acton is the largest Swiss factory in London. It is also the oldest subsidiary of the group of companies bearing the same name and whose main plant dominates the peaceful city of Zug. Landis & Gyr, a group established in several countries of Europe with an annual turnover of about £100 million and 15,000 employees, set foot in Britain in 1912, only seven years after its foundation.

Landis & Gyr is one of the leading world manufacturers of electricity metres. It has diversified into a wide range of electronic equipment such as polyphase metres, impulse counters, specialist metres and a variety of

appliances used in ticket dispensers, machine controls, automatic scoring devices, bingo machines, billing and telephone equipment. Many of these products are manufactured at the Acton and Scottish plants of the group, which employ some 900 workers (in London) and attain a turnover of about £7 million. Other devices are imported from the other factories of the group and marketed in this country.

The first Landis & Gyr factory in Britain was built at Hampton Hill. The actual premises in Acton, just off the road to Oxford, were begun in 1926. The main factory block on Victoria Road was successively extended and other buildings



View of Landis & Gyr West London factory, showing main manufacturing block above and the Administrative Block to the right of road crossing. The plant opposite the manufacturing block also belongs to Landis & Gyr.

jobs being performed at any one time. The information is sent from the workshop by telephone and recorded with a special display equipped with various indicators. A woman, who doesn't appear to be highly qualified, alters the markings and position of a job card when they are called from the floor. The *Symatic* system enables management to have an instant bird's eye view of the state of production.

The hundreds of components entering the firm's range of meters and devices are produced at Acton. This means that the company relies to a small extent on outside work, and brings a high added-value to its products. The volume of production and individual job lots is determined by a computer in Zug following quarterly meetings forecasting production two years in advance. The decisions of these meetings are updated monthly and every month an official takes the plane to Zug to get production schedule optimized by a computer at Headquarters.

The Swiss ties of the company are perhaps more visible on the shop floor. At least half the machines appeared to be Swiss. We saw Swiss optical equipment, Petermann screw-cutting lathes, Schaublin lathes, Nestal injection moulding machines. The Acton plant has plenty of heavy and costly capital equipment. A Product Development Department furthermore adapts group production to British electric standards.

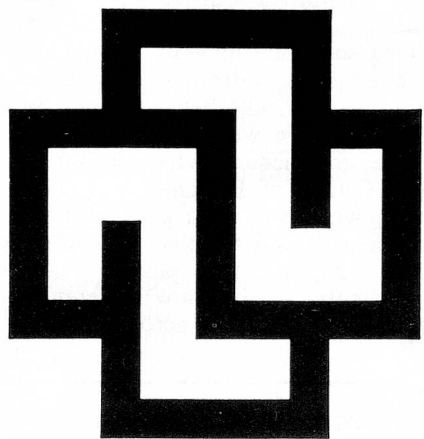
Landis & Gyr Ltd. have made a loss



Entrance to Landis & Gyr Administrative Block

during its last financial year because of the falling value of the pound, which has increased the cost of imports and the

price freeze. Fortunately, they can rely on the backing of a powerful group when circumstances of this kind arise. The



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British subsidiary is set for a bright future as attested by the recent extension of the Administrative Block and present plans for new investments. It presently controls 20 per cent of the British meter market in a tight competition with three other firms – General Electric, Ferranti and Sangavo – and is the first British exporter in this field thanks to its strong position in Commonwealth markets. It is gratifying to know that a Swiss firm is helping Britain's balance of payments problems and defending Britain's technological reputation abroad.

(Continued from Page 8).

members of the Federal Government in Berne.

To fill these three vacancies some 12–15 names of possible candidates have already been mentioned and are, indeed, being canvassed. Who the three new Federal Councillors might be is, as yet,

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quite impossible to say. But in spite of this uncertainty and in spite of the large number of "papabili", it can be said with certainty that the power structure between the four governing parties will not undergo any changes. This power structure which provides for two Liberal-Democrats, two Social-Democrats, two Christian-Democrats and one People's Party Representative to share the highest responsibility has its writ running from 1971 to the end of 1975 and is, consequently, today exactly in its halftime. The three retiring Federal Councillors belong to the Christian-Democrat Party (Mr. Roger Bonvin), the Liberal-Democrat Party (Mr. Nello Celio) and the Social-Democrat Party (Mr. Hans Peter Tschudi). This means that each one of these three parties will, without any doubt, nominate its own new candidate for the election on 5th December.

With near certainty it can also be said that the three regions Romandie (French speaking Switzerland), Ticino (Italian speaking Switzerland) and Deutsche Schweiz (German speaking Switzerland) will once again insist on being represented in the Federal Government in Berne. This system and the famous formula of 2: 2: 2: 1 are of a certain rigidity and are sometimes complained of as impediments against the choice of the best men. They have, however, on the whole, served the country well enough and are anyway the price of Federalism as such.

In view of all this the race, for which many starters have already been unofficially named, will be taking place *inside* the three named parties, and not in rivalry between them. For the first time, incidentally, the name of a lady is being mentioned – a lady who has been one of the first ones to be elected to become a member of the Federal Parliament in Berne. She is Madame Girardin from Geneva. With the appearance of her name amongst the candidates the question "Is Switzerland ripe for a female Federal Councillor?" has cropped up and is being discussed in the press.

Is Switzerland ripe for a female Federal Councillor? It is to be hoped so. Equally it is to be hoped that the three parties will not simply present one name each as their final choice to the United Federal Assembly. For if this were to be the case, the two chambers of the Federal Parliament could, on 5th December, do no more than become the rubber stamps which sanction what three political parties have decided beforehand. But if each of the three parties had the political courage to submit at least two names, then the election of 5th December would not only become a real one, but one which could be quite fascinating. At any rate, the race for three seats in the Federal Executive in Berne is on. And it takes place in a somewhat uneasy kind of atmosphere, with everybody agreeing that the inflation has to be fought, but nobody as yet really knowing how to beat it.

MANCHESTER

For Friday, 28th September, 1973, the *Swiss Club, Manchester*, had arranged a new type of social come-together which took the form of a "Disco-Dance". For a modest fee and thanks to the cordial hospitality of the Clayton Aniline Co. Ltd., at Clayton, near Manchester, we could assemble in their very lovely new canteen. Dr. A. V. Lang and his charming lady acted as hosts and made us very quickly welcome, everybody sitting down to enjoy the splendid selection of a free buffet. Cold or warm drinks also being available, everything contributed towards a warm and happy atmosphere.

Although the invitations stated that no-one was too old to attend, nevertheless it turned out to be an evening for the young, as it was meant to be, and of what I heard afterwards, the aim of the organisers was fully achieved, our young friends expressing the hope for an early repetition of the event. It was on this happy note that the evening came to its close around midnight, to be remembered as most enjoyable and successful affair.

E.B.

LEEDS

Our friends from the Yorkshire Swiss Club inaugurated the Winter Season with a special meeting at the Leeds Council of Social Service, St. Mark's House in Leeds. The President, back from the Ausland-Schweizer-Tagung in St. Gallen, was able to give a short but comprehensive talk about it and his general impressions. Slides taken in St. Gallen and the Appenzeller-Land could not be shown because of the strike situation at the Kodak works.

It turned out to be a specially happy and lively evening and besides doing some useful work we could taste the exquisite refreshment provided by our ladies, drinks being offered by our President. We were specially pleased to make the acquaintance of the Swiss Vice-Consul of Bergamo, Italy, and his wife, who were on a prolonged visit to England. It was felt that they were both very happy to sample northern hospitality – somehow different from what they are used to across the Alps.

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