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# The Swiss Observer

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE SWISS COLONY IN THE U.K.

Founded in 1919 by Paul F. Boehringer

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# BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

On 1st March, *Mr. F. G. Sommer*,  
of 3 The Chestnuts, 66 Harestone Valley  
Road, Caterham, Surrey, will have his  
85th birthday.

On 9th March, *Mr. René Marchand*,  
of 16 Hochrain, 2500 Bienne, Switzer-  
land, will also celebrate his 85th birthday.

We wish both these old and faithful  
readers the best of health and many more  
years of happy retirement.

The following readers, too, are  
celebrating birthdays in the near future:

Mr. E. Hardmeier will be 89 on 3rd  
March, and Mr. L. Meier will have his  
88th birthday on 5th March. Mrs. L.  
Gradmann will be 79 on the 8th of the  
month. Dr. H. W. Egli will be 78 and Mr.  
R. Chappuis 81 on 17th March. Mr.  
H. Vonwiller will have his 83rd birthday  
on the 20th of the month, and Mr.  
Albert Ferber will be 66 on the 29th.  
Mr. R. Senn will celebrate his 66th birth-  
day on 30th March.

Many happy returns of birthdays  
and anniversaries to all concerned, in-  
cluding readers of whose birthdays we are  
not aware.

## PAUL BESSIRE, 80

On 20th March, Mr. Paul Bessire, of  
28 Cumberland Road, SW13, will reach  
the grand age of 80, in very good health  
and spirits, we are glad to report.

Paul Bessire, one of six children,  
was born in Bienne, where he went to  
school and later to the *Ecole de Com-  
merce*. He came to this country 62 years  
ago, and some three years later he started  
his own business here and it has devel-  
oped into a firm of general export and  
import of some standing. The supply of  
mica to the Continent was one of his  
successful lines. In the war he was com-  
pletely bombed out and had to start all  
over again. He did this with courage and  
enterprise and worked up a fine business  
in industrial diamond tools and exports  
of electrical accessories. He is still active  
in his company.

Right from the early days in Great  
Britain, Paul Bessire took a lively interest  
in the Swiss Church and in the mid-  
thirties, as a member of the Consistoire,  
he was in charge of renovating the Foyer  
Suisse in Bedford Place, an offshoot of  
the Swiss Church. Many of our com-  
patriots in London will recall that the  
Foyer, too, was bombed in the war. He  
became a member of the City Swiss Club  
in 1920, he is now an Honorary Member.  
He is a member of the Swiss Mercantile  
Society and supports the Swiss Rifle  
Association. He joined the Nouvelle  
Société Helvétique, of whose Council he  
was a valued member for many years.

At a City Swiss Club event in the  
early twenties he met Antoinette Schup-  
bach of the Neuchâtel branch of the old  
Emmental family, whose father was  
General Manager of the Crédit Lyonnais  
in London and later President of the City  
Swiss Club. They were married in London  
in 1930. They have two married daughters  
and four grandchildren.

# On the front page

*Cross-country ski-ing will certainly  
give you a hearty appetite as the  
two people on the front cover have  
found out. A bowl of good soup  
will see them through until the next  
meal. Story and more pictures on  
pages 14 and 15. Photo by courtesy  
of SNTD.*

For Information, Advice or Help  
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## ARE YOU A YOUNG SWISS?

Do you know the biggest Swiss  
happening in town? The SWISS  
YOUTH CLUB, 48 GREAT PETER  
STREET, LONDON S.W. 1.

Every Sunday from 4 p.m. on-  
wards the Swiss Youth Club under the  
auspices of the Swiss Churches in  
London is staging a "get-together"  
with a variety of happenings. From  
4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. "do-it-yourself"  
entertainment followed by an ecu-  
menical Church service for those who  
wish to participate.

At 7.30 p.m. a communal dinner  
party opens a night of dancing and  
talking (In Schwizerdütsch). Refresh-  
ments are served at the bar by Club  
members.

Looking forward to seeing you!  
Committee of the Swiss Youth  
Club.

Paul Bessire has many interests; he has played a lot of tennis and golf and indulged in riding, and in his younger days enjoyed winning ski-ing prizes. He is a very keen gardener and loves carpentry.

One of Paul's great qualities is loyalty, and he is also a very modest man. I had great difficulty in getting his agreement that his birthday should get a special mention. But his many friends will want to wish him an enjoyable birthday and many happy returns. Good health and happiness together with his wife and family for many more years to come.

MM

## Swiss Rifle Association

The 1977 Bisley meetings will be held on: 24th April, 8th May, 22nd May, 5th June, 19th June, 4th September, 18th September and 2nd October.

Further details and applications for membership to: The Hon. Secretary, 58 Dickens Rise, Chigwell, Essex.

## NEWS FROM THE COLONY

# HOW THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF BRITAIN HELPED DEVELOPMENTS IN ANCIENT SWITZERLAND

IN his delightful recent after-dinner speech to the Anglo-Swiss Society the Geneva historian, Prof. Denis van Berchem, cast some interesting new light on the first stirrings of "modernisation" of life in very ancient times in the region of the lower Valais and the Lake of Geneva, thanks to the expansion of the Roman imperial power culminating in the conquest of Britain. We are privileged to offer our readers a slightly shortened version of his talk as follows.

My theme for tonight, Prof. van Berchem said, is related to the Roman conquest of Britain in the year 43 after Christ, originally planned by the Emperor Caligula but achieved only two years after his death under his successor Claudius. How this well-known event affected the destiny of Switzerland is well worth exploring. Speaking of Switzerland at that time is, of course, a glaring anachronism as that name did not come into use before the Middle Ages or even more recently.

But I cannot find a more suitable word to designate a territory which in Roman time was divided between several provinces and inhabited by various nationalities: the Helvetians on the actual Swiss plateau, the Rhetians in the Eastern regions and a mosaic of small tribes of Celtic, Ligurian or Illyrian stock in the Alpine valleys.

The Helvetians had been defeated by Caesar, but not immediately incorporated in the newly-created province of Gaul. They found themselves annexed

under Augustus as a result of the conquest of Rhetia and of the whole of the Alps. Their territory had not the extent we find later. West Switzerland with the town of Avenches belonged to the Seguari still established on both sides of the Jura.

Very little is known of the Helvetians in the half-century corresponding to the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. We have not a single inscription to throw any light on their social or political condition. Apart from a few places occupied by Roman forces we find no traces of imported wares. The townships were still built in wood and the material reflects Celtic civilisation.

Everything changes only with the accession of Claudius to the government of the Empire. Numerous inscriptions bear testimony of the rapid Romanisation, if not of the whole population, at least of the local aristocracy. New roads marked by milestones connect towns rebuilt in stone. Why all this change at that time? I may say with confidence

that it was the result of the opening of a new road over the Col du Grand St. Bernard, connecting through the valley of Aosta and the basin of the lake of Geneva Northern Italy with the Rhine Valley, North Gaul and the shores of the English Channel.

The Roman road builders were actually in no hurry to open up the Alpine passes. Caesar was apparently content using other longer routes for his repeated journeys and Augustus opened some Rhetic passes, such as the Brenner, east of present-day Switzerland, and in the west he had a road built over the Petit St. Bernard leading to Lyon. But the Grand St. Bernard, though used for centuries by traders, was at that time still completely neglected. Thus the Helvetians remained at a dead end and poorly developing until the new road over the Grand St. Bernard was opened to traffic at the very beginning of the reign of Claudius. There followed important territorial and political changes affecting the population of the areas concerned. The road was, of course, not built to please the Helvetians. It had to serve imperial needs, not least as the shortest way from Italy to Britain.

No doubt the opening of the campaign in Britain brought great anima-

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