

**A History of
The Association of British Members
of the
Swiss Alpine Club**

James Bogle

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INTRODUCTION

A history of a climbing club such as the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club ought not to be trivial. In the years in which it has been in existence members have made high endeavours and attained high achievement. As always in the mountains there is risk. Even an easy path over steep ground may mean danger. There have even been deaths in the mountains – mercifully few- and the memory of them is a salutary reminder of the seriousness with which the sport of mountaineering should be undertaken.

Yet we climb for pleasure, and rightly. As in any sport there is the pleasure of physically putting our bodies to the test. There is the pleasure of using skills to move over difficult territory of rock and snow and ice. There is the pleasure of achievement, of overcoming a demanding passage and of finally reaching the sought after summit. There is the pleasure of mountain scenery, of moving through a pristine landscape after a fall of snow and of finding the landscape spread out wonderfully on reaching the mountaintop. Geologists (and we have had some among our members) find fascination among the rocks they encounter and botanists (and many more) take delight in alpine flowers. There is the pleasure of companionship. One needs to be able to trust the person at the other end of the rope so that many of the friendships made on the hill have been lasting. From the start the Association was conceived as a social gathering so that there is the pleasure of conversation over good food and cheerful drink at the end of a climb. It is the author's hope that this history will convey both the seriousness and the pleasure of climbing.

I am grateful to Alasdair Andrews, Graham Daniels, Wendell Jones and Brooke Midgley for reading the text in whole or part and making valuable suggestions; any errors remain

my responsibility. I am also grateful to Richard Winter for undertaking the editorial work of preparing the text for the printer.

That this history can be produced is due to the generosity of John Byam-Grounds, a long-standing member, Vice-President and Honorary Member of the Association. John left a bequest to the Association. Part has been spent on new computer software and the balance is being applied to the production costs of this book. Wendell Jones, who knew John well, wrote a very sympathetic obituary published in the 2001 Journal. To that is here added an appreciation of John and the Alps and an account which he wrote of one of his typical good climbs, the Biancograt and Piz Palu.

James Bogle

JOHN BYAM-GROUNDS AND THE ALPS

John Byam-Grounds (1917-2000) started young as a climber. He inherited a love of the mountains from his grandfather, himself a climber. He took John to Zermatt at the age of nine and they made the traverse of the Mittaghorn in a blizzard.

At the age of fifteen he was taken to meet Guido Rey. Before he left Eton he wrote a full and graphic account of his first proper Alpine season when he was aged 16, including an ascent of the Matterhorn, which he made in 4 hours. There followed a run of a further four Alpine seasons until the 1939-45 war put a stop to climbing in the Alps for a number of years. By that time he had climbed the Matterhorn by two of its ridges, the Hoernli and the Zmutt. He had made some 22 excursions including the traverse of Monte Rosa – the Dufourspitze, Grenzsattel, Zumsteinspitze and Signalkuppe – and the other summits of Monte Rosa – Parrotspitze, Ludwigshoeh and Pyramide Vincent – as well as the Young Grat and the Dent Blanche.

John did not return to the Alps until 1955. From that time he completed another 19 seasons with a further 46 excursions. For some years he kept up a high standard with climbs such as the rarely climbed Furggen ridge of the Matterhorn and the Marinelli Couloir on Monte Rosa. Also climbed were the Taeschhorn by the Teufelsgrat, the Obergabelhorn by the south face, the Weisshorn by the Schalligrat and the Aiguilles Rouge d'Arolla. The centenary of the first climb of the Dent Blanche was marked by the erection of a new cross on the summit by the guides of Evolene. John represented the Association and the Alpine Club for this occasion. Latterly he and his family would join an ABMSAC meet and make some climbs with them. It was then customary to employ just one guide for several ropes. The guide led with

the first rope, while experienced climbers followed with a second or more ropes. John always led a rope in this event. It was his preferred custom to climb alone with a guide and he built up a strong relationship with some of them. 'It is the choice of guide, temperament as well as competence, which makes or mars an expedition. Without a common language an excursion becomes a chore, difficulties doubled, safety greatly diminished. For some the summit is all, the guide only the means of achieving it. "To climb with a friend is a pleasure; to climb alone is an education!" I would add "to climb with a guide can be both."'

John particularly liked climbing with members of the Perren family, especially Emil Perren. Some have had the image of a guide as a 'horny handed son of toil' venturing out from his chalet to earn some cash before the long winter sets in. John knew better. Emil Perren could speak and read German, French, Italian and English. He was perfectly capable of making intelligent conversation and he became a friend. Others did too.

John was a strong, fast and active climber and must have got to know the Alps, especially round Zermatt, as well as any Englishman of his generation. It must have been a heavy blow that at the age of fifty heart trouble prevented him from climbing any more. After some years he found he could walk high in the mountains, which he greatly enjoyed, and he became an expert in alpine flowers. He made a collection of saxifrages, which he gave to the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley. He joined the Association in 1937, was Vice President from 1966-1968 and was made an honorary member in 1987.

BIANCOGRAT 1964

J.S. Byam-Grounds

The Wendell Jones umbrella, tattered, furred and symbolic of carefree climbing of a bygone age, disappeared from view down the track to Morteratsch. Hammering near at hand indicated where Paul Psosi was hard at work on the guardian's new summer arbour. The terrace of the Boval hut overflowed with new arrivals, released at last from their weary ascent to feast their eyes in admiration on the fluted ridges of the Palu, glistening white with fresh snow.

The sound of carpentry, the cries of children and the barking of a small lost terrier floated back and forth, over and through my daydreams in a sheltered, grassy hollow.

Too soon the evening cold drove me back to the hut and an empty food bag. The tide of day-visitors had receded leaving a flotsam of bottles, paper bags and half-eaten food. Unexpectedly familiar faces appeared; Walter Kirstein's party late down from the Diavolezza. I explained my predicament. Generously they produced fruit, chocolate and the contents of luncheon bags, heaped on the wooden bench as on the begging dish of some itinerant monk. Paul and I would not go hungry!

Inside, the hut room reeked with acrid tobacco, food and humanity. I supped and turned in early.

At 2 a.m. Paul silently pulled the hut door to behind us. No star showed. In the dark silence the warm air was pleasant but menacing. We followed the narrow crest of the moraine by the precarious light of a single hand torch, and soon we were descending its steep crumbling flank, stumbling

and slipping over the loose rock and scree. The glacier here is dry, steep and much broken. Finding a route in the darkness was difficult and often the narrow beam of the torch disclosed the lip of some great crevasse, forcing us to retrace our steps for some alternative route. Always seeking a course as close as possible to the rocks of Piz Morteratsch, we reached the foot of a small glacier which hangs steeply down from the Fuorcla Priolusa. We bore to the right and made our way up steep neve and fallen ice blocks. Soon hard snow gave place to ice and angle dictated crampons. Somewhere above, rocks resounded with fallen water. The ice narrowed to a tongue, on all sides the torchlight disclosed steep slabs, wet and uninviting. We twisted and turned and retraced our steps to the glacier. Once more we twisted and turned up the glacier's edge until, for myself, almost all sense of direction was lost. In the pitch darkness we halted frequently, trying to estimate our position.

Once more the rocks on the right gave way to glacier and ice, appearing to form the base of the rock buttress that we sought. So far we had taken an hour and three quarters. The rocks were snow covered and steep, but climbing in crampons they presented no difficulty. Paul's torch flickered above on foot and handhold, each to be automatically reprojected, when sought for in the darkness below, by some trick of photographic memory.

The warmth was oppressive, and we divested anoraks and pullovers. Soon the rib steepened, falling sheer to the glacier invisible below. On our right, the dark indefinable gully of the hanging glacier.

Pitches became short and steep, and we put on a line for they were tricky and the holds often loose. The torch battery was spent and only a thin light began to penetrate the mist.

Snow began to fall, gently at first then whipped up by a cold wind. Soon it was snowing heavily. We followed the crest of the rib, clearing snow from the holds. The silence was broken only by the clink and scrape of our crampons on rock. Snow and mist enveloped everything. The rock rib gave on to a steep snow slope stretching upward into the mist. We plunged into it up to our knees. With a final flurry it stopped snowing. A series of small ice cliffs barred the way; we traversed to the left beneath them, seeking a bridge over their protective bergschrund. We crossed this beneath a steep ice wall, at the top of which an ice screw provided a welcome handhold and a belay while Paul set to work on the hard ice above.

Soon to the right appeared rocks, snow covered, uninviting; directly above was steep snow, soft, deep and equally unattractive. We debated briefly and decided on the snow. We floundered up it, gouging out a channel where it lay thigh deep and cutting steps beneath where it lay thinly and treacherously on the ice below.

At 7.30 a.m. we reached the crest of the ridge, where the new snow of the Biancograt abuts against the rocky buttress of the Fuorcla Priolusa. The ridge, corniced with fresh snow, curved away upward into the mist. A wind blew cold and sharp, so after a hasty snack we set off. The western side of the ridge was wind blown and clear of snow, so that, except where the crest was narrowest, we traversed to the right, nicking steps upward in rhythmic movement.

A diffused light penetrated the mist. For a few steps we were poised between sky and cloud. Suddenly, without warning we emerged into brilliant sunshine. Around our feet lay a sea of cloud. On our left the triple-crowned ridge of the Palu and to the right the great hogsback of the Roseg

emerged with dazzling whiteness. The cloud plain, wave upon wave, rolled away to the west until it lapped against the great eastern buttresses of Monte Rosa.

Ridge curve succeeded curve till, surmounting the Ovomaltine bulge, we reached snow-covered rocks. Beyond a gap in the ridge the final tower of the Bernina, much foreshortened, appeared deceptively steep and formidable. Clearing fresh snow from the rocks, however, the summit was quickly reached. It was ten o'clock.

Our first plan had been to descend the ridge again to the Tschierva hut. In its present condition this was clearly "not on". Across the Bellavista the Palu beckoned invitingly.

We lazed in the sun for half an hour exchanging pleasantries with some Italians from the Marco Rosa. At length, reluctantly, we set off down their route, following ridge crest, rocks and ridge crest until we could plunge into the final snow slopes to the Fuorcla Crast' Aguezza. Then began the long haul across the snow shelf of the Bellavista. An hour earlier an ice cliff had avalanched across the tracks of two climbers making for the Marco Rosa, and we picked our way circumspectly and swiftly through its scattered blocks.

The sun's heat poured down and the snow, sodden as rice pudding, made each step an effort. It was three p.m. before thankfully we reached the Fuorcla Bellavista; for Paul, who had done most of the work, it had been most exhausting. After a short respite we made our way up the easy but delightful rocks to the western summit of Palu. Snow melting on ice demanded crampons on the slippery slopes, whence followed the delightful and airy traverse of this well trodden ridge. At last we plunged down to the glacier,

following the broad tortuous track, knee deep in snow to the rocks of the Diavolezza. Reluctantly eschewing tea on the terrace, we raced up the ramp to catch the 5.30 cable car down to the valley and on to a family waiting patiently with transport at Pontresina.

in Great Britain' – rather rashly in view of the refusal of a section the year before. However the door was not slammed shut, as the President of the SAC suggested the formation of a local committee affiliated to an existing section. The Geneva Section was approached. The proposal of a local committee affiliated to the Geneva Section met with the approval of the President of that section, Henri Correvon, but the President of the SAC as a whole, Colonel Repond, had second thoughts, pointing out that this might well lead to the weakening of other sections and bad feeling. It was then suggested that a Union of all members of the SAC in Britain be formed. Eventually it was decided that there should be a British Association (not a section) of members of all and any sections of the SAC, and this met with satisfaction on the part of the Swiss. In due course the suggestion of a local committee attached to the Geneva Section was quietly dropped. Meanwhile Bruce was indefatigable. He told how he had written 186 letters and recruited 70 climbers to the SAC Geneva section. An inaugural meeting and dinner were planned for early December. The Climbers Club was supportive and undertook to place a notice in their journal but the Alpine Club was very cautious. A circular concerning the meeting and the dinner was sent to all members of the Club but no notice was put into the journal and the invitation to send a representative to the dinner was declined. However two founder members of the Alpine Club, Sir Alfred Wills and Robert Walters wrote with their good wishes. By this time the President of the SAC felt able to extend a warm welcome to the Association and to new British members of the Club. The inaugural meeting and dinner were held on 8th December 1909 at the Holborn Restaurant.

Clinton Dent, one of the few honorary members of the SAC and a former President of the Alpine Club, was appointed President of the Association. The Vice President was Dr.

O.K. Williamson and the Joint Secretaries J.A.B. Bruce and Gerald Steel. An invitation was sent to the Swiss Minister, M. Gaston Carlin, but on this occasion he declined. On later occasions he accepted. Professor Roget was present, representing the Geneva Section and acting as a delegate of the Central Committee of the SAC.

The association's first objects were to be:

- (a) To encourage British Alpinists to support the Swiss Alpine Club in all its work, by becoming members of a section of that body.
- (b) To collect funds and present to the S.A.C. a Club hut, and for such other purposes as the Association may from time to time determine.
- (c) To form a body able to present a collective opinion to the S.A.C. on any question of Alpine interest.
- (d) To promote among British members the sociability which is so conspicuous a feature of the Swiss sections, but from which we are necessarily debarred by living at a distance from the headquarters of our sections.

The second object, of presenting a Club hut, was in origin Bruce's idea. The third of these objects aroused some controversy, as it was felt that the Central Committee of the SAC might well not welcome expressions of opinion from a foreign body. There were members of the Alpine Club who were especially aware of this.

A dinner followed the meeting. There were about 130 present. The menu was:

Huitres au Citron
--
Consomme Deslignac
Crème Andalouse
--
Supreme de Turbot au Chablis
--
Blanchaille
--
Poulet Braise Stanley
--
Cote de Pre-sale Mazarin
Celeri au jus
--
Faisan Roti au Cresson
Salade
--
Jambon d'York au Champagne
--
Pouding Diplomate
--
Glace Panachee
Gauffrettes vanillees
--
Desserts
--
Café

All at a cost of 6s (30p), not including wines. The Association got its priorities right from the start!

The most distinguished mountaineer present at the occasion was Edward Whymper, by then 69 years of age, an honorary member of the SAC and later an honorary member of the Association. Also present was A.E.W. Mason, a Member of Parliament and novelist. He was later to become President of the Association. There were several speeches including one by Whymper. In proposing the toast to kindred societies he remembered particularly the SAC and its opposition to the railway planned up the Matterhorn – ‘an act of sacrilege’.

After the inauguration the Association set to fundraising with vigour in accordance with its second object. The original target was £500 and in January 1910 £90 had been raised. By February 1911 £375 had been raised, but the target had increased to £650. A suggestion that the Central Committee of the SAC should fund half of the expense of the hut was declined. By May, with guarantees of £10 from each of ten members of the Alpine Club, the figure of £650 was reached and £600 was paid over to the Central Committee. The Ski Club of Great Britain contributed over £45. Relationships with the Alpine Club became easier. The Association's half yearly meeting was held at the Club in June 1910 and the Club agreed to send a circular concerning subscriptions for the hut. Winter meetings were begun, with members showing Alpine slides.

Early in 1911 it became necessary to determine where the hut should be located. Four proposals were put forward.

- (1) the Kleine Allalinhorn near Saas Fee;
- (2) the Mittel Aletsch Glacier;
- (3) the Laquintal – Simplon District;
- (4) On the High Level route from the Otemma Glacier to Zermatt.

It did not take long for the Kleine Allalinhorn site, originally proposed by Dr. Dubi, of Bern, to be agreed by the ABMSAC committee. The Central Committee also agreed this site and the Geneva Section was asked to build the hut. On the proposal of the Central Committee it was proposed to call the hut the Britannia Hut.

Members took a lively interest in the plans for the hut. In a speech at the annual dinner in 1911 the President, Clinton Dent, said:

"I understand it is to be the largest and best hut in the Alps. The last new arrival in the family circle is always the finest that has ever been seen. The site, which you all know, has now been approved; the plans have been sent over to this country, and this document informs me that they have been approved, with one or two slight alterations. I am very proud of these slight alterations. This hut is to have the unique feature of four lavatory basins. The further alteration I ventured to suggest is also a unique feature. I suggested it might be worth considering whether some possible means, however slight, however unimportant, however unobtrusive and further for that matter ineffective, if ventilation could be introduced. That somewhat daring innovation is under consideration."

This was bold of Dent, for climbers know that voluntary ventilation and alpine huts are virtually contradictions in terms.

The inauguration of the new hut took place on 17th August 1912. Inevitably with building work there had been some delays in its preparation but by the day of the opening all was ready. Such was the pressure on accommodation in Saas Fee (it being still the ordinary holiday season) that

serious thought was given to postponing the opening for about ten days. In the event that step was not taken, fortunately, because in a wet summer season 17th August was a perfect day of bright sunshine with a pleasant breeze and a cloudless sky. Breakfast was served at 5 a.m. and a prompt start was made from the village at 6 a.m. No one had yet been allowed to stay in the hut. The long procession of over 200 guests, of whom nearly 100 were British, made its way towards the Fee glacier below the Mittaghorn, beneath the Egginer to the Egginerjoch, along the top of the moraine of the Kessjen glacier and up an easy and gradual snow slope to the hut itself. It stood at 3,031 m (9,945 ft). As the climbers reached it, they were greeted by a salvo from a cannon.

A banner, woven in silk, was carried up by Ursula Radford, the daughter of a member of the Association, G.H. Radford M.P. A midday meal, a 'cold collation', was supplied by the Geneva Section of the SAC and eaten en plein air. A bottle of Fendant or lemonade was included. The first person to get a meal was a young man by the name of Noel Odell. It was fortunate that the weather was propitious. After lunch came the formal opening. National anthems were first sung; then the Vice-president of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, Dr. O.K. Williamson, (the President, Clinton Dent, being unable to be present) formally handed over the keys to M. Meisser, representing the Central Committee of the Swiss Alpine Club, to signify the gift of the hut. M. Meisser, thanked the British members for their generosity. The Central Committee had decided to call the hut the Britannia Hut in recognition of the money collected by the British members of the S.A.C and now gifted to them. Next M. Meisser handed the keys to the Geneva section which had overseen the building work and which was to administer the hut in the future. The proceedings

concluded with the blessing of the hut by two clergy, the Revd. J Salwey, the British Chaplain at Saas Fee, and Pastor Carl Muller of Geneva. The Cure of Saas Fee was unable to be present. The hut consisted of a living and dining room with stove and washing up facilities; a sleeping room for the hut warden; and another for the guides. Upstairs there were several sleeping rooms; a ladies room, boasting a mirror; a washroom with water laid on; and a sitting room with books, writing materials and games. The hut was double-glazed. It could accommodate some 40 persons. The W.C. was some 60 paces from the hut; this elicited the comment that it 'might be improved'. All in all it was reckoned the soundest built and best-equipped hut in the Alps.

All made the descent back to Saas Fee in the afternoon after tea in the hut and forgathered for a banquet at the Hotel du Dom at 8 o'clock in the evening. There were many speeches including one by the Association Treasurer, Mr. C.E. King-Church, announcing that the final target of £800 had been met at the hut that afternoon. The day was drawn to a close with fireworks and singing.

Shortly after the inauguration of the hut the Association President, Clinton Dent, died, on 26th August 1912. A.E.W.Mason succeeded him. The activities of the Association began to fall into a pattern. An annual meeting and formal dinner was held in November or December and a half-yearly general meeting in June. Informal dinners were held on the fourth Wednesday of each month, followed by an 'At Home', at which lantern slides were shown. Ladies were not to be invited to the dinners, but might, and did, come to the 'At Home's. A Club Room was made available, attached to a restaurant in the Strand, where members could meet socially. This attracted a grant from the Geneva Section.

Curiously there is hardly any mention of climbing in the early records of the Association, other than in obituaries. An exception is a letter written to Bruce in April 1913 by Walter Larden staying at the Pen y Gwryd Hotel:

M.G. Bradley asked me to come here and be shown some British rock climbs. I was to be with friends at Criccieth, and was motor'd up by them on Friday. Sat. I went a round of Crib Goch, Crib Ddisgl, Snowdon and the Lliwedd summits alone (as no one else had come). Tremendous wind blowing me over. Yesterday the others were here and we had two pieces of climb on Tryfan, 5 on two joined ropes. I quite understand the fascination of this British climbing; for you get as much and as good rock-climbing as you want quite close at hand and undiluted by thousands of feet of grass and snow. You can, e.g., get a day full of the best parts of the Portjengrat (only much harder) without the journey to reach it.

It is obvious that Larden was familiar with Alpine climbing without being familiar with British climbing, which now seems an odd priority.

During the years from 1914 to 1918, and for a time after, the activities of the Association, like those of many similar organisations, were overshadowed by the war. Soon after war broke out it was decided not to have a formal dinner in the late autumn, though the informal dinners continued. There was huge sympathy for the Belgians in Britain and the committee of the Association made a contribution of 5 guineas to the Belgian Relief fund. Contributions continued to be invited from members for this fund and a substantial sum was raised. In a rather pathetic gesture, the King of the Belgians, Albert I, himself a mountaineer, was invited to become an honorary member. In the circumstances he

declined. Two further funds were begun – one for the relief of Swiss in England impoverished because of the war and one for Swiss guides, who had suffered greatly, presumably because they had been left without employment. Members were especially willing to contribute to this cause.

In February 1915 it was decided that the subscriptions of those on active service should be waived. The Association indulged in a little modest propaganda. A circular was issued to members which ran:

SPREADING TRUE INFORMATION ABOUT WAR IN SWITZERLAND

Pamphlets in French or German will be sent on application to the Hon. Treasurer. They should be sent to friends in Switzerland with a personal letter. We shall be glad to see any answers received.

There was considerable sympathy with Germany among the Swiss, not unnaturally, since the majority of the Swiss were German speaking. The committee noted that some very interesting replies had been received to the pamphlets and letters; unfortunately none are extant. But there was sympathy too for the British. A Dr. Seiler offered hospitality at Zermatt to wounded officers and soldiers. The War Office, however, would not permit officers and men of the British Army to go to foreign countries during the continuance of the war, so that the generous offer came to nothing. Nevertheless money was raised to enable the relatives and friends of wounded prisoners in Switzerland to visit them.

In 1917 women were invited to the June informal dinner (not the annual formal dinner). The equality of women was

taking a clear step forward, not least as a result of their work during the war. A library was started in the Club Room in the Strand and in due course a list of books published in the Year Book; there was also held an exhibition of Alpine pictures by C.G. Blampied. Understandably very few members went to Switzerland that year.

2. FROM THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the Year Book of 1918 there were photographs and obituaries of members who had been killed in the war and in that of 1919 there was a Roll of Honour of all members who had joined the Army or Navy, giving their names, rank and regiment. They numbered 158 in all of whom 30 had died. On June 25th 1919 a Complimentary Dinner was held to those members who had served in the War. The membership of the Association had fallen from 451 in 1914 to 408 in 1918. Feeling against the Germans was every bit as strong after the war had ended as it was during it. One member wrote suggesting that arrangements should be made to avoid meeting climbers of enemy nationality in the Swiss hotels. It was therefore decided that the Secretary should approach the tourist organisations with a view to retaining certain hotels in the Swiss climbing centres for climbers belonging to the Entente powers. Some members of the Association resigned, giving as their ground the anti-British feeling in the SAC. It is not clear whether this was well founded. At any rate Alpine climbing was resumed and a summer dinner was held at Saas Fee in August 1920 combined with a visit to the Britannia Hut. In 1921 on the anniversary of the inauguration of the hut, 17th August, a bronze memorial to those who fell in the Great War was unveiled there, the gift of the Geneva Section. The Geneva Section was represented by M. D'Arcis and the Association by Brigadier General C.G. Bruce.

At home the former pattern of activity was resumed, with an annual formal dinner in November or December, a half-yearly informal dinner in June and regular informal dinners on the fourth Wednesday of each month followed by a slide show. Ladies nights were increased from two a year

to three. A Northern dinner was mooted, but no one was found to arrange it. In 1921 a grant of £5- 5s was made to an expedition to Spitzbergen, in which N.E. Odell took part. He was a member of the Association and later Secretary of it. On his return he gave a slide show to members and their ladies. George Leigh Mallory, another member, had joined the 1921 reconnaissance expedition to Everest and was chosen for the 1922 expedition led by General Bruce, in which he reached 27,000 ft. Mallory was given honorary membership of the Geneva Section of the SAC in 1923. Bruce, Mallory and Odell all took part in the 1924 Everest expedition, in which Mallory and Andrew Irvine came close to reaching the summit, if they did not actually do so. They were lost on the mountain, Odell being the last person to see them alive. The committee of the Association sent Odell a telegram of congratulation on his climbing achievement on 23rd July.

1926 saw the beginning of a new SAC publication *Die Alpen/Les Alpes* which has continued into the twenty- first century as the definitive record of the activities of the SAC and which has been notable for some superb mountain photography. British members received it. In 1927 Stybarrow and Glencoyne Wood, by Ullswater, came on the market; the National Trust appealed for £3,000. The Committee voted to send £2-2s, which now seems a rather niggardly sum, especially in the light of the Association's subsequent long link with Ullswater. A happier step the next year was to make J.A.B. Bruce, who had been a Vice President since 1919, an honorary member, a richly deserved honour.

By 1927 the Geneva Section, which administered the Britannia Hut, had come to feel that it was necessary to make a substantial enlargement to the hut as well as other major works, and wrote to the Association to that effect. The hut

had become very popular and often became overcrowded. The proposals were:

- (1) enlargement;
- (2) the new part to be stone wood-lined for warmth;
- (3) modification of the old hut enlarging the dining room giving 86 places in the summer and 44 in the winter.

From the first the committee of the Association hoped to raise at least a large part of the money needed but the cost was heavy, estimated at approximately £1,470. The Central Committee of the SAC voted £320 but that still left £1,150 to raise and it soon became clear that that was more than could be found from the British members. In the event £800 was sent to the Central Committee; £650 had been donated and the balance was made up from the Association's accumulated funds. By early 1929 the repair, extension and re-conditioning of the hut had been almost carried through. The formal re-opening took place on 25th August that year. The Geneva President and M. D'Arcis represented the SAC and General Bruce the Association. Even after this fundraising continued and a donation of 1,000 francs was made as a contribution to the Betemps Hut and a further 400 francs to the Concordia Hut. A remarkable achievement was the climbing of all the Alpine four thousanders by a member, Eustace Thomas, the first Briton to do so, that was not to be repeated until 1981.

By 1929 the membership of the Association had reached 673. The activities of the Association widened during the 1930's. The informal dinners on the fourth Wednesday continued; it was found necessary however to remind members that morning dress should be worn. Informal discussions were arranged on particular topics such as 'Some lesser known climbing centres in Switzerland', 'The Engadine as a

climbing centre', and 'Climbing in Britain'. An important development was an Easter meet held at Dolgellau in 1931. This was the first climbing meet the Association had ever arranged. There had been dinners in the Swiss Alps in the summer season, but climbing activities had been left to individuals and their friends. The Dolgellau meet included the ascent of Cader Idris and 'the more venturesome spirits attacked the Milestone Buttress on Tryfan'. This does not suggest that the standard of climbing was very high. The Easter meet became a regular feature, either in Wales, the Lake District or Scotland at various venues. A series of annual joint evening meetings was arranged with the Ski Club of Great Britain at the Alpine Club, the first being on 'Skiing and Mountaineering'. Among the year's meetings was a lecture on Kamet given by Frank Smythe, himself a member. He had led a party to make a successful ascent of that mountain. Members began Sunday walks for training and the secretaries undertook to put people in touch with one another for that purpose.

The Depression hit the Association hard, 61 members did not renew their membership. It was difficult to get to Switzerland and those who did found the pound greatly depressed in value against the franc. Swiss guides and hoteliers had been used to the British being well off patrons, and still expected them to be; now, however, they were not. From that time the cost of SAC subscriptions, the cost of accommodation and the cost of guides in Switzerland have been recurring difficulties, even in stable times, though in one way or another overcome. Two who did get to Switzerland were H.B. Thompson and Frank Smythe, who put up a new route on the Bietschhorn. They made a traverse of the mountain from the Baltschieder hut by climbing the up two ribs on the east face, directly opposite the Jagihorn. The climbing was not easy. *'Each hold had to be cleared, and while I was*

balanced delicately for a time which seemed to me an age, Smythe, directly above me methodically shifted all the snow and the ice from the holds and dumped it on my neck and in my sleeves.' From the summit they descended to point 3712 (3703 on modern maps), when they met mist, snow and hail, and were forced to make a risky descent. Conditions worsened and they were obliged to use a compass to reach the Baltschieder hut at 8.30 p.m. This climb was a very considerable achievement. Thompson wrote it up and it was published in *Die Alpen*.

Two members were included in the 1933 Everest Expedition. Hugh Ruttledge led it while Frank Smythe climbed as high as any member of the party. The expedition was however fated by the weather and so thwarted in its attempt on the summit. At home the committee were concerned about the number of accidents, especially fatal accidents, to climbers. Section Uto (Zurich) had brought out a handbook of alpinism, *Technik des Bergsteigens*, and it was resolved to translate it for the benefit of members; the English edition was given the title *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering*.

This English edition was a pocket book; it had sections for general hints on walking and climbing; rock climbing; ice and snow; winter climbing (ski mountaineering); route finding in the mountains; and the mark VIII prismatic compass. This last section was a British substitution describing a compass usually used by British climbers in place of a chapter dealing with a compass used by the Swiss. Otherwise the original text of the German edition was followed closely, while noting also a French translation. There were some valuable sketch illustrations. The instruction given was fairly elementary. It was recommended that there be three on a rope. And the principle was propounded that 'in general, once the rope is put on, only one member of the party moves while the

others safeguard him'. If this were followed regularly this must have meant dangerously slow movement for the Alps, as British climbers unfamiliar with the need for speed have found to their cost. The use of pitons is noted but 'it is generally considered that too frequent use of pitons is not sporting.' An advance copy of *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering* was available in January 1936 and a copy of the book was issued free to all members.

That year a letter of congratulation was sent to an honorary member, W.P. Haskett-Smith, on his second ascent of Napes Needle – at the age of 75! At the Easter meet in Borrowdale, a new venture was potholing. It does not seem to have caught on. A remarkable achievement was the ascent by N.E. Odell in company with H.W. Tilman of Nanda Devi, at 25,645 feet, 7816 m, and the highest mountain yet climbed. Tilman was renowned for his detachment, yet in their excitement at the summit they 'so far forgot themselves as to shake hands'. The Easter meet in 1937 was at Fort William and gullies on the North East face of Ben Nevis were tackled. As well as *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering* it was resolved to bring out a pocket book of SAC huts for the use of members. Its title was *A List and Short Guide to the Huts of the Swiss Alpine Club*. It would seem to have been comprehensive and as an addendum there were listed huts belonging to the Academic Alpine Clubs of Bale, Bern and Zurich and to the French Alpine Club in the Mont Blanc Group and to the Italian Alpine Club. For each hut there was given the height in metres and feet; the accommodation; information about a keeper; access; detailed location; and climbs. Thus the entry for the Britannia Hut read:

3031m 9945ft
acc. 84 Keeper in summer and spring (from February). 4½ hours from Saas Fee, or 5 hours from Saas Almagell. On

right bank of Kessjen glacier. Climbs: Egginer, Allalinhorn, Rimpfischhorn, Strahlhorn, Alphubel.

This booklet was published, unluckily, in 1939. It too was issued free to all members. In spite of the threat of war in that year M.N. Clarke managed to put up a new route, a traverse of the Burstspitzen, above Fafleralp.

The Second World War hit the activities of the Association even harder than the First. In 1939 monthly dinners were maintained, while the informal discussions and the ladies night were cancelled. By 1940 there could be no evening meetings and the monthly dinners were abandoned. On the fourth Wednesday of the month from April to August evening meetings were possible, but in the other months there had to be 'Club Lunches'. There was no annual dinner but a lunch instead. The hotel which housed the Club Room was requisitioned by the army, so that the library must move out, and the next hotel to house the Club Room was hit by a landmine, although fortunately there was not much damage to the Association's property. The Alpine Club generously offered accommodation for such meetings as there were. In due course the library and the Association's pictures found a safe home underground in Rotherham Main Colliery, thanks to the agency of a Sheffield member, Sir William Ellis. They were not to return to London until 1947. Things got so bad with clothes rationing that a pool was formed of unwanted climbing gear which members might offer and which other members could apply for. It goes without saying that travel to Switzerland was impossible and the climbing highlights in the war years were the short Easter meets, often enough battling against bad weather. By 1941 there were only two lunches, in January and October, and two evening meetings, in April and August. By 1943 the number of members at the lunch and Annual General Meeting was down to 10.

In a less bleak environment a fortunate member, D.T.F. Munsey, with two climbing friends, R.A. Hodgkin and L.W. Brown, made two honourable attempts on Mount Kenya. They twice tried to climb Nelion. On the first attempt, on June 24th 1941, with a rope of three, they did not move fast enough. There was, in addition considerable icing of the east face. The second attempt, on June 26th, with just Munsey and Hodgkin, was very nearly successful but at the top of the climb on the rise to the summit the rocks were covered with snow on top of ice, which defeated them. In the war years there were two innovations. One, of great significance, was the formation of the British Mountaineering Council, which included representatives from clubs throughout the country, meeting to discuss matters of common interest and concern. From the first, the Association was represented on the Council and indeed, by virtue of its size, its representatives carried some weight. The other innovation, a pleasant one, was the holding of a dinner on August 1st to commemorate the Swiss National Day. This was first kept in August 1945. The Swiss Minister was invited, together with certain other Swiss in London. The object was to make the occasion a distinctively Swiss affair.

3. FROM THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO THE OPENING OF THE GEORGE STARKEY HUT

The regular pattern of meetings was resumed on the 4th Wednesday of the month, excepting July, August and December, with informal dinners after. After the end of the war it was decided that Evening Dress should not be worn at the Annual Dinner. War is a great leveller.

By the end of the war the membership had fallen to 380. The list of the members serving in the armed forces numbered 50; 8 had been killed. 1946 was still a year of great austerity. It was decided that the cost of the clubroom could no longer be afforded. In spite of all the restrictions there were 74 new members. One fortunate member, David Pennant, joined a party of 13 for a trek in Sikkim. They went via Gangtok and reached the Sebu La at 17,000ft. They had magnificent views of Kanchenjunga and the mountains and the mountain flowers made the whole trek delightful. Austerity continued to prevail in 1947, nevertheless foreign travel became possible as the Government instituted a £75 travel allowance. It was decided to hold the first Alpine meet, a momentous event in the Association's history. The location was Arolla from July 23rd for a fortnight. 21 members came and they were blessed with perfect weather. So dry had the summer been that the author of the report suggested that Weisshorn should be rechristened the Schwarzhorn and Dent Blanche the Dent Noire, but the good weather allowed participants much activity. Their guide, Franz Biner, led 12 climbers to make the traverse of Mont Blanc de Cheilon. A number of other ascents were made, including the Dent Blanche. Mont Collon was climbed, which ascent elicited this description from Roy Crepin:

One section of the rock face by which the ascent was made was in sober fact just a very steep dusty rubble heap. It was a place where, as usual, parties lower down the mountain take a very poor view of the footwork of those climbing above them. But mild vituperation, even on a mountain, does little harm and in time, all the parties reached the summit.

The meet meant that the Swiss dinner could be held in Switzerland, actually on July 26th. The morning after the members of the meet were invited to aperitifs by the Committee of the Monte Rosa section who entertained the visitors with Valaisian part songs sung with great feeling. What the Swiss made of 'On Ilkla Moor baht'at' in response is not recorded. Obviously the meet was much enjoyed and a further meet was proposed for the next year.

The committee decided that guests, including ladies, would be welcome at the annual dinner in November that year, but members were again reminded to wear morning dress. The Association's climbing manual *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering* was no longer available as the balance of stocks had been taken over by the Army for use in Alpine warfare during the war. It was decided to update it with a translation of a more recent SAC manual *Bergsteigen*. This was a larger and fuller book than its predecessor and had sections on: general observations; equipment; quarters; food; general principles for walking in the mountains; rock climbing; snow and neve; ice; glaciers; technical aids to climbing; ski mountaineering; action in case of difficulty; and help in case of illness or accident. The English translation added an appendix, by K. Tarbuck, on British safety methods of rope management. It was much more comprehensive than *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering* although it clearly owed a debt to it. Vibrams had not yet become

available, but nylon rope was strongly recommended and Prusik loops were in use. The section on rock climbing included techniques for ridges, slabs, ledges, chimneys, laybacks, cracks and overhangs, all well illustrated. On pitons, the Swiss considered that they should only be used for climbs of exceptional difficulty, where they served to prevent an accident or where it was impractical to climb certain pitches without their aid. A translator's footnote adds 'The use of such methods is not recommended as they are at variance with British standards.' This difference, found in the previous publication, continued. This ABMSAC book formed a useful introductory climbing manual. It was in due course published on 15th May 1950 with the title *Mountaineering Handbook*. Sales were satisfactory and the book was welcomed. However a review in the Climbers' Club Journal was critical and implied that the techniques advocated were out of date. There are few records of climbing accidents in the annals of the Association, but there was a serious one at the meet on the Isle of Arran in the Spring of 1948 when a Vice-President, Col E.R. Culverwell, had a fall from the rock face near the summit of Chir Mhor. He was found unconscious and badly injured. It was necessary to effect a night rescue in very difficult terrain. However the injured man was brought down safely and made a good recovery and in due course became President of the Association.

A further Alpine meet was held in the summer of 1948, at Zinal. The weather was less good than in 1947, and only 15 members and friends came. However the climbs included Besso, Bieshorn, Diablons, Aiguille de la Lex, Pointe de Zinal and Rothorn de Zinal. The annual Swiss dinner was held on 24th July. In spite of smaller attendance and indifferent weather there was no question but that a summer meet in Swizerland should continue. At home the

Association flourished, with 190 new members, bringing the membership up to pre-war levels. The usual programme of lectures with slides continued and among them one on climbing in the USA given by Frank Solari – with coloured slides. He was always in the van of technological progress.

The 1949 summer meet was held in the Engadine, at Maloja. 31 members and friends took part. The guide, Franz Biner, was unfortunately injured early in the meet but in the event 20 expeditions were made on 18 different peaks in both the Bernina and Bregalia groups, among them Piz La Margna, Monte Rosso, Piz Rossi and Piz Casnil. The Spring meet the next year at Ballachulish offered some lively climbing. One party made a step-kicking climb on the face of Bidean nam Biam. Two traverses of Aonach Eagach were made, one free of snow and the other under snow. A participant in the latter wrote ‘the result was an Alpine climb of continued interest and not a little difficulty’. The following summer meet was at Vent in the Oetztal. Similaun was climbed and one party made the ascent of the Wildspitze by the ridge and face known as the Partschweg.

By the 1950’s the Association was becoming much less a social and dining club for climbers and much more an active climbing club. There was an annual Easter meet in the U.K. and a meet most years in the Alps. The Easter meets were gradually transformed from walking meets to climbing meets of a good standard. George Starkey had much to do with this. By the beginning of 1950 membership reached 758. A sign of a change in the times was that, even at the Annual Dinner, dinner jackets became optional. In 1952 the meet was held at Gaschurn, in the Silvretta Group. It was a very successful meet, with perfect weather, although only 21 members took part. 42 parties in all climbed 16 different peaks. 4 parties made the traverse of the Gross

Litzner and the Gross Seehorn. It was obviously a good meet, but only a tiny proportion of the membership was involved. The expense of a meet meant that many wished to climb independently. Back in London the committee proposed a new category of membership, retired members, comprising those who wished to continue as members of the Association even though they had ceased to be members of the Swiss Alpine Club. The committee arranged some informal meetings including Col. John Hunt, speaking on Mountaineering in the Middle East.

The 1952 meet was again in Austria, at Neustift, in the Stubaital. The Sonklarspitze was climbed and a traverse made of the Wilde Freiger. The 1953 Easter meet was at Fort William in brilliant winter weather. Gerald Steel gave this description of one ascent:

We had been told that Garbh Bheinn in Ardgour was a very fine mountain, although less than 3,000 feet high, and we were going to see for ourselves. For some two miles we walked up a secluded glen, and then found ourselves under the magnificent east face of the mountain. It was, of course, plastered with snow and ice, and we passed on to the pass at the head of the glen. From there the party struck straight up the face of the mountain over steep snow and some rock to the ridge which was followed to the summit. And what a summit! The Cairn is on the brink of the steepest part of the east face, and all Scotland seemed to be spread out for our delectation. At our feet was Loch Linnhe; straight before us Loch Leven led the eye straight to the heart of the Glencoe mountains, whilst left and right rose ridge upon ridge of snow-covered mountains dominated by Ben Nevis. And all this in brilliant sunshine.

There was no Alpine meet in 1953.

The Year Book which dealt with the events of 1953 also included this paragraph:

All British climbers must have been thrilled with tremendous pride when they read in the papers on the morning of Coronation Day that the British Expedition had reached the summit of Mount Everest. After thirty years of endeavour the victory has been won, and we must not forget the members of all the earlier expeditions, and among them Mallory and Irvine who gave their lives; nor should we forget Eric Shipton who discovered the new route, and without whose pioneering success might not have been achieved. The timing of the great news could not have been better – it was magnificent. We are proud to offer our heartfelt congratulations to our member, Sir John Hunt, and his gallant team on their splendid achievement.

There can be no doubt of the excitement and the pride which members of the ABMSAC will have felt over the climbing of Everest, especially in view of those Association members who played a distinguished part in the expeditions in the years up to and including 1953.

A meet was held in Switzerland, at Saas Fee, in 1954. There was a lot of climbing, including the Fletschhorn, the Jagihorn, the Portschengrat, the Mittaghorn, and the Allalinhorn. A guided party climbed to the Mischabel Hut and thence to the Nadelhorn. Though it was a good meet there were no further Alpine meets until the Jubilee meet in 1959.

The next year a small party, Frank and Babs Solari and Hamish McArthur and his wife, made an expedition to a

part of the Himalaya very little visited, the Lahul Himalaya. Their aim was to visit an unexplored area and to climb a mountain of 20,000 ft. They assembled at Manali and crossed the Rhotang Pass to follow the Chandra River. 'By now we were really among the mountains and our camp at Shigri was surrounded by unclimbed peaks of over 20,000 ft. I have seldom been in a more spectacular place.' An unnamed peak, height 20,430 ft, was climbed. By coincidence a much younger member, Michael Holton, was also in the Lahul Himalaya with the RAF Himalayan Expedition. Seven virgin peaks were climbed. The talks at informal meetings were outstanding: Hamish McArthur on *The Lahul Himalaya*; Walter Kirstein on *The Valais from East to West*; and Sir John Hunt on *Everest*. In 1957 a young sapper officer, Michael Benner, who was a member of the Association, was killed with a fellow climber in a tragic fall. Benner was an audacious young man and his solo climb of the Zugspitze had been recorded in the Year Book two years before. He took a party of soldiers to the Austrian Alps for a holiday period and they made several climbs, including the Gross Venediger. Descending from the Klein Glockner the snow ridge steepened abruptly:

Here Michael, having unroped, went ahead to reconnoitre. It appears that owing to a misunderstanding he was followed by Sapper Phillips, who almost immediately slipped and started to fall on the southern face. Though the angle is appallingly steep Michael, without a moments hesitation, sprang from his steps and was able to grasp the sliding man. With his axe plunged in the snow he succeeded for a few seconds in stopping them both from falling but their combined weight in the bad snow conditions caused by the storm was too much. The axe loosened, then came out, and, still resolutely holding on and still trying vainly to stop their fall, Michael went down with his companion over the

precipice of snow and rocks to fall nearly 2,000 feet on to the glacier.

Courage and self-sacrifice also deserve to be recorded in these annals. Michael Benner was posthumously awarded the George Cross.

Honorary membership of the Association was conferred on two distinguished Swiss Alpinists – Herman Geiger, of Swiss Air Rescue, and Dr. Albert Eggler, the leader of the Swiss Expedition which made the first ascent of Lhotse and the second ascent of Everest in 1954. In London a representative of the Swiss Embassy was invited to sit on the Association's committee and the advice provided proved very helpful. Also the Swiss National Tourist Office took over a substantial part of the administration of the Association, a gesture greatly appreciated. Two members, A.A. Galloway and Donald Clarke travelled to Saltdal in northern Norway to climb Store Kjostind in the Lyngen region. They also made a first ascent.

Events for the Jubilee continued throughout 1959, culminating in the August meet at Saas Fee. It was an excellent season for climbing; sixteen different ascents were made by one or more ropes, including the Weissmies, the Nadelhorn, the Jungfrau and the Matterhorn by the Furggen Ridge. The jubilee was commemorated with a formal dinner on August 8th. The President of the Central Committee, Dr. Calonder, and other officers of the Swiss Alpine Club were present and the President of the Association, George Starkey, was presented with a pewter platter commemorating the jubilee of the A.B.M.S.A.C. 25 British members and friends shared in the dinner. In keeping with what had become a traditional concern, the Association in its turn made a gift of 2,600 Swiss francs towards the furnishing of one of the

dormitories of the Britannia Hut.

The Association had its first lady alpinist speaker when Mrs. Nea Morin spoke about the expedition to Ama Dablam. The talk was reckoned extremely moving. It so happens that the menu for that Ladies Night Dinner (held in the Connaught Rooms) survives:

Saumon Fume d'Ecosse

Crème de Volaille aux Asperges

Filet Steak Grillee
Broccoli aux Beure
Pommes Croquettes

Cassata Denise
Peches Glace Cheri
Petit Fours

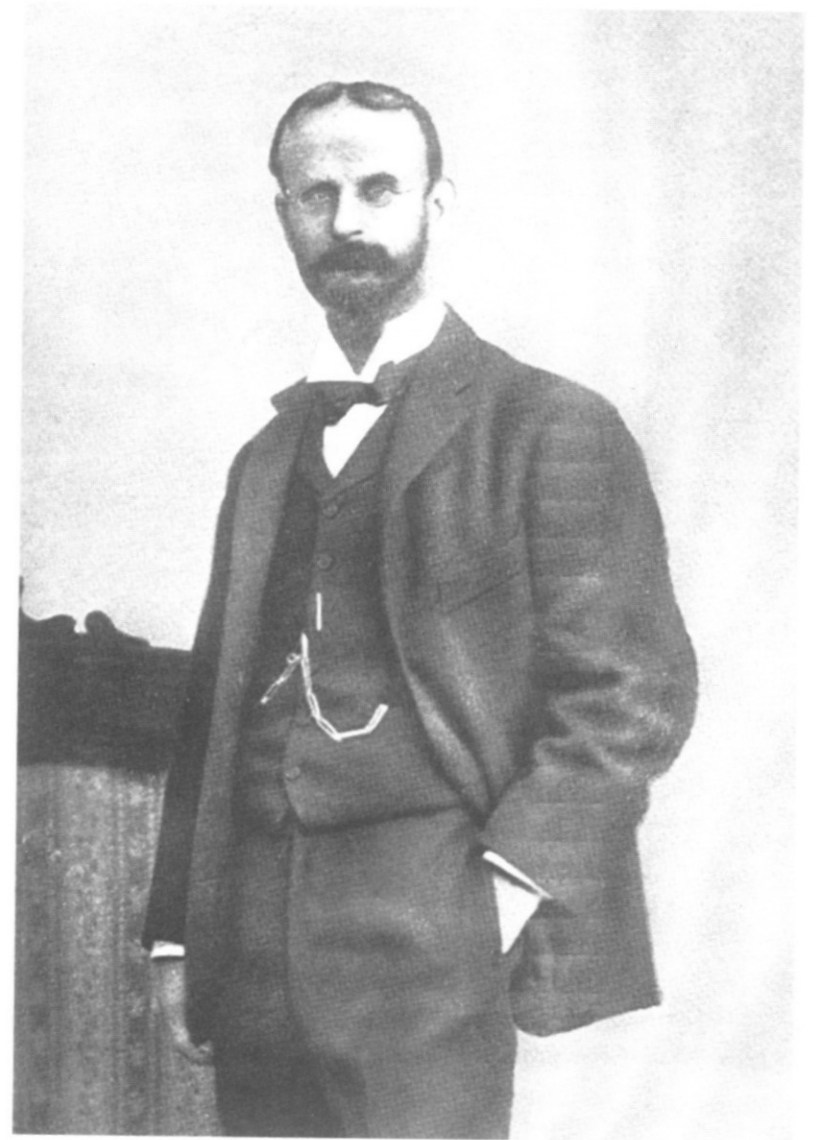
Café

It was not such a banquet as the opening dinner in 1909, but members will have enjoyed a good meal.

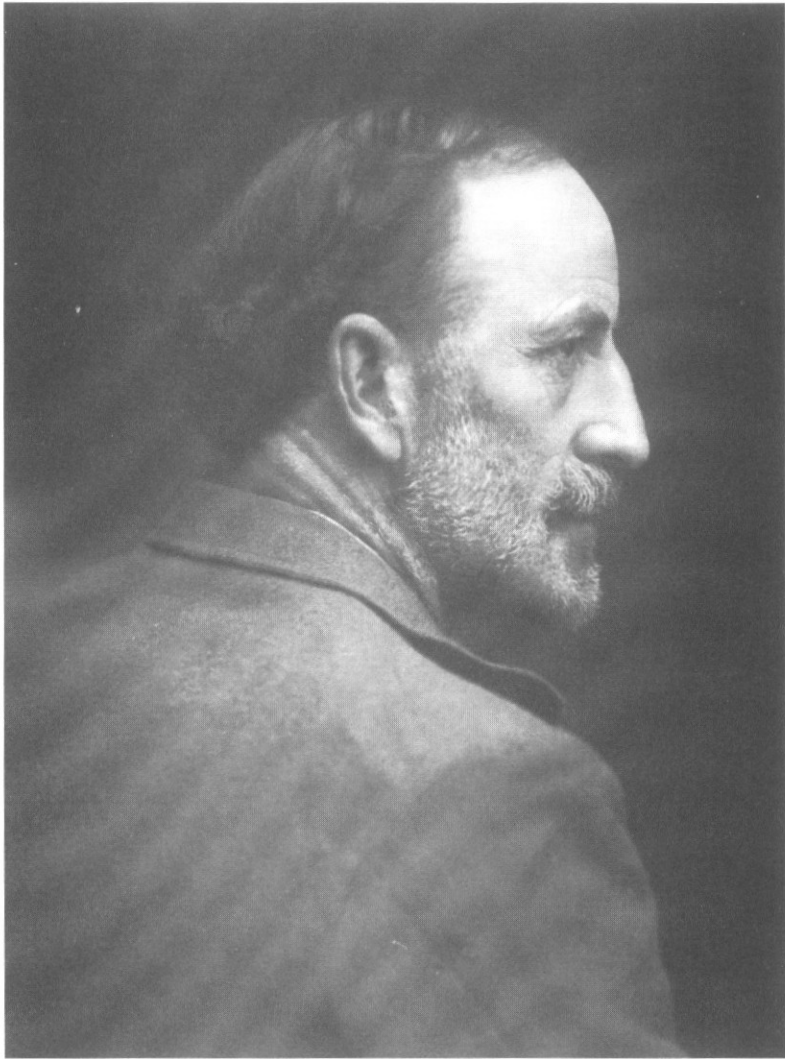
The 1961 meet was at Kandersteg. The Jungfrau, the Monch and the Eiger were all climbed. F.E. Smith made a traverse of the Matterhorn by the Zmutt and the Italian ridges and returned to Zermatt the same day over the Furgg Grat. C. J.W. Simpson and the Revd. F.L. Jenkins made the traverse of the Piz Bernina by the Ostgrat and the Spallagrat and later climbed the same peak by the Biancograt. During the summer a party of 6 Cambridge mountaineers led by an ABMSAC member, R.E.Langford, spent two months on Baffin Island in an area south east of the Penny Icecap.



John Byam-Grounds with his grandfather at the start of his alpine career
Photo: Wm. Bellows



James A. B. Bruce



Clinton Dent



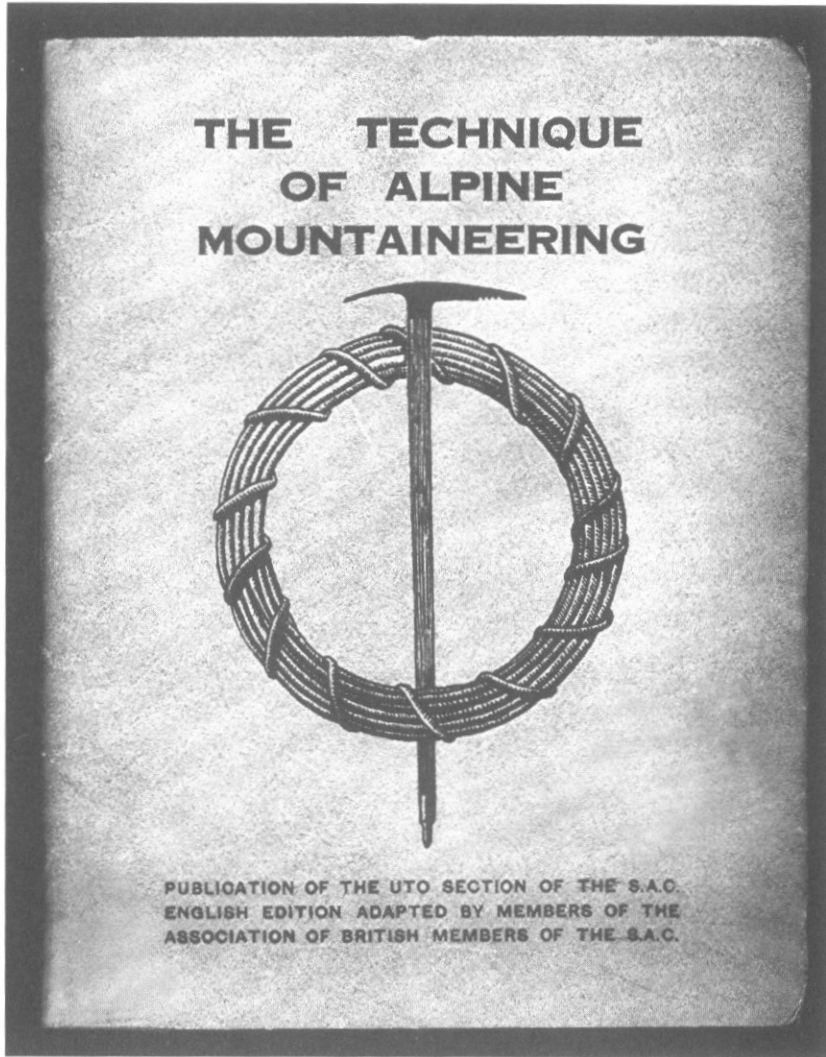
The First Britannia Hut



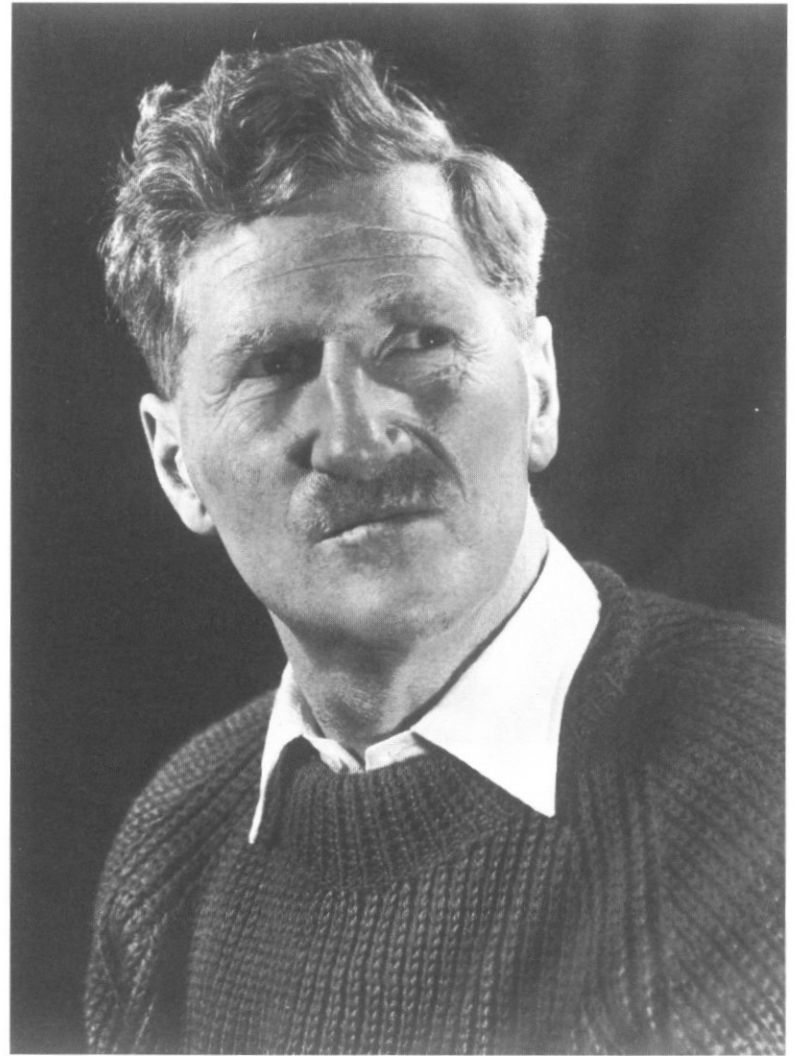
Ursula Radford Carrying the Association Banner



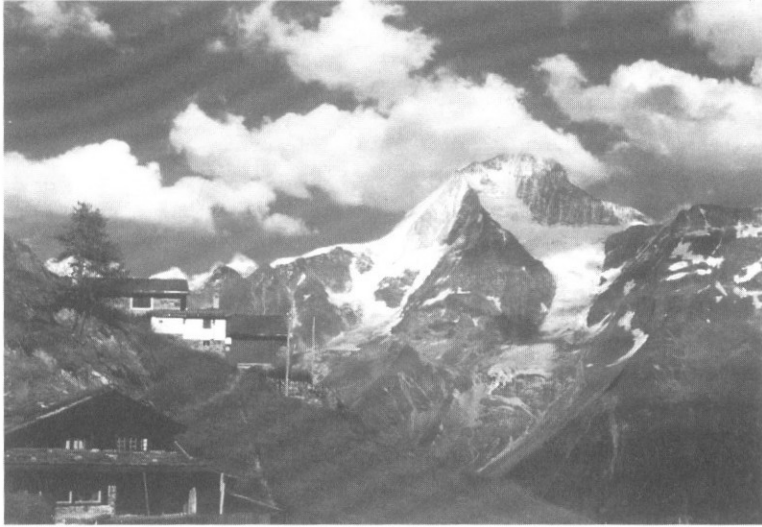
The Rededication of the Enlarged Britannia Hut



The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering



Sir John Hunt (later Lord Hunt of Llanfairwaterdine)



Bietschorn



Annapurna Summit from the North West
Copyright Henry Day



The George Starkey Hut



The opening of the George Starkey Hut
by the Bishop of Leicester



The Ascent of the Allalin Pass at the 75th
Anniversary of the Association



Mass at the Britannia Hut



The English Church at Zermatt
Copyright Vivienne Hoeks



Tour of Monte Rosa

During the course of the expedition the Cumberland Peninsula was crossed on foot from Broughton Island to Pangnirtung. In addition to geological and glaciological research five virgin peaks were climbed including Mount Fleming and Mount Battle. The party attempted Mount Asgard but were turned back by bad weather 450 feet below the summit.

Chris Bonington gave two talks to the Association in 1962, one on the Central Pillar of Freney and one at the Ladies Night Dinner on the 1961 Nuptse Expedition. Though he has never been a member, he has always been kindly disposed towards the Association. The same year he received a letter of congratulation from the committee of the Association on climbing the North Wall of the Eiger. A member, R.J. Corbett, made a fine climb on the west face of the Aiguille du Dru. Wendell Jones, Wynne Jeudwine and Donald Clarke made a series of climbs on Mount Olympus. In his account of the expedition Wendell Jones demonstrated the benefits of a classical education.

Though technically easy by its tourist routes, Mytikas [the main summit] was an impressive summit, falling steeply twelve hundred feet to the scree on its western flank, where we looked down to a desolate amphitheatre, saucer shaped beneath the crags of Skolion, Skala, Mytikas and Stefani. Stefani, or more impressively The Throne of the Gods, we agreed to be the finest of the tops; it is only a scramble, but at one point the scrambler is forced out on to a steep rake on the 600 ft east face; alternatively he may venture on to outward-sloping holds above the even more forbidding west wall. In either case a steady head is required.

Climbing in Greece in August proved thirsty work.

In retrospect was it worth it? Two members of the party passed six days in travelling and four in carrying heavy loads – against a mere six at the hut – by Alpine standards an unreasonable balance in favour of the grind. But the humour proved a counterpoise to its discomfort. And once in Greece the good nature and often childlike charm of the inhabitants conquered all.

There was no meet in 1962 but the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Britannia Hut was commemorated in August. As had become customary on such occasions the Association made a present for the upkeep of the hut, this time new furnishings for the common room. Membership of the Association remained strong at 717 at the end of the year. 1962 saw the retirement of an editor of the Journal for 33 years, Marshall Clarke. He was given honorary membership.

There was a meet in 1963 at Zinal. It was, though, wet. Some climbing was done, but nothing spectacular. J.O. Talbot, on the other hand, who had regularly put up routes on Alpine rock to a very high standard, this year successfully climbed the North Face of the Eiger. He reckoned it 'a magnificent climb'. He also climbed the north faces of the Piz Badile and the Moench followed by a first ascent of the North East Pillar of the Wetterhorn. Dougal Haston, another ABMSAC member, made several ascents in the Dolomites, including three first British ascents. With Rusty Baillie he then climbed the north face of the Aiguille du Plan and the north face of the Eiger. These men were in the front rank of climbers in their time. A party led by Peter Ledebor did more climbing in hot and thirsty conditions, this time in the High Atlas. He, with Wendell Jones and Donald Clarke

climbed Toubkal, Aougdal, Afella, Ras n'Ouanonkrim, Timesguida n'Ouanonkrim, Tadat and the north face of Tazahart.

The pattern of Alpine meets every other year was altered to a meet every year in 1964 and a meet was held at Sils Maria. Walter Kirstein dubbed the climb of the Biancograt and the Piz Palu in one day made by John Byam-Grounds the 'star tour' of the meet. A trip in the other direction to the usual was represented by a party of Swiss coming to Cornwall to climb on the Cornish cliffs. They enjoyed it!

The centenary of the first climbing of the Matterhorn was the subject of a great celebration. In London an exhibition was mounted by the Alpine Club, the Swiss National Tourist Office and the ABMSAC at the Tea Centre in the Haymarket. A considerable number of items of historical interest, relics, pictures and alpine equipment connected with Edward Whymper were assembled. Whymper's daughter, Mrs W.E.M. Blandy, opened the exhibition in the presence of the Swiss Ambassador and in all about 8,000 people came to see it, so that it was reckoned quite successful. Zermatt made a huge splash with a week of celebrations from 10th-17th July. Two Vice-Presidents, Frank Solari and J.G. Broadbent, the Joint Hon. Secretary, Peter Ledebøer, and a senior member, Alfred Gregory, represented the Association. There were also contingents from the Alpine and Ladies Alpine Clubs. The British were pleased to be constantly made aware of the affection and respect in which they were held by virtue of the personalities and achievements of their forebears. These British clubs held their own celebratory dinner, and then a full programme of events led up to the climax of the week, a mass ascent to the Hornli. But sadly the weather changed and there was snow, so that any ascent was impossible. The week concluded with a memorial Mass, more oratory and a

ceremonial lunch.

The Association held its own summer meet later at Grindelwald. The participants were scattered over four or five hotels, which is not the most satisfactory arrangement, and the weather was consistently bad. However a participant (with rose coloured spectacles?) commented that it was a success socially.

1966 was a quiet year. Congratulations went to Sir John Hunt on being raised to the peerage; to Chris Bonington on climbing the Eiger direct; and to Professor Noel Odell on 50 years of membership. The meet was at Arolla. A party climbed the Aiguilles Rouges D'Arolla and another made the traverse and circumnavigation of the Ruinette, a minor epic. Peter Ledebøer joined a very rewarding expedition to eastern Turkey where a virgin peak was climbed.

In the winter of the next year David Todd and James Gardner made an epic winter ascent of the Hornli ridge of the Matterhorn, taking 2 ½ days and two bivouacs on the ascent and descent. The meet in the Lotschental was memorable. The first big expedition was to the Jungfrau. After crossing the Grosser Aletschfirn a night was spent at the Concordia Hut. It was not fine enough the next morning to tackle the mountain, but promising enough to move on to the Jungfrauoch, over the Concordia Platz to the Jungfrau firn. A large moulin crossed the route. Helpfully some one had left a plank to cross it; however the overlap on the ice at each end was little more than one inch! All crossed safely and the night was spent at the Jungfrauoch. In spite of poor weather in the early morning the summit of the Jungfrau was reached. It was followed by a long trudge back to Fafleralp, reached by moonlight.

The other big expedition was the Bietschhorn. The Bietschhorn is a big mountain; it is a long mountain; it is a committing mountain; it has great and continuing exposure with knife-edge ridges that must in places be taken 'à cheval'. The party numbered eleven – in retrospect clearly too many. The party set off from the Bietschhorn Hut at 2 a.m. and reached the foot of the west ridge as the dawn was breaking at 4.30 a.m., when there was a break for a snack – the only one for the whole of the rest of the climb. It took until 3.30 p.m. to reach the summit and immediately begin the descent of the north ridge. The north ridge consisted of snow ridges interspersed with loose rock. One climber was already showing signs of difficulty; that was Vincent Cohen, the President of the Association that year and a very experienced climber. At 9.30 p.m. sunset came with the party still on the ridge. And it took another hour before a 90m abseil could be arranged over the bergschrund and on to the glacier. By this time the sick man was near collapse. The main party returned to the hut while the guide, the doctor and the invalid moved to the Bietschgletscher and the strongest of the rest ran down to the valley to summon a rescue helicopter. Vincent Cohen soon recovered and it was found that he was showing the first effects of a muscular disease. Had the weather not remained entirely fine, however, the party might well have been in serious peril. One who did the climb wrote 'It turned out to be long, and much harder than it looked. So far as the writer can judge, it was a much greater test of endurance, in equal conditions, than, for example, the Hornli ridge of the Matterhorn or even the South West ridge of the Dent Blanche. The difficult stretches seem longer, the exposure much more continuous, and the descent down the upper portion of the north ridge more dangerous than anything normally encountered on those two climbs.'

Under the Presidential guidance of Vincent Cohen, with the support of Peter Ledebor, the Association broadened its activities in the British Isles. So for 1969 weekend meets were proposed for Edale in February; for Bettws y Coed in April; for the Three Peaks in May; for North Wales in July; and for Langdale in October. Scotland was evidently felt to be too distant for a weekend. That was rectified with an Easter meet at Killin the next year. Further afield E.C.L. Jarvis trekked by Thyangboche and Pheriche to climb the small peak of Kala Patar (18,200ft). Further still was a rock ascent by David Todd in Antarctica, Pinnacle Buttress on the Roman Four Promontory 'perhaps the first serious rock climbing ascent to be made in Antarctica'. G.R.E. Brooke climbed Herthubreith, Iceland's highest mountain. And an ABMSAC party led by Hamish Brown climbed in the Atlas. The 1968 meet at Obergurgl seemed a bit tame by comparison, especially as the weather was variable, but the Weisskugel was climbed.

The next year's Alpine meet at Kandersteg was enjoyed (they almost always were) even though not much was achieved because of much snow. The Balmhorn was climbed. A member, Lindsay Griffin, climbed the Aiguille Noir de Peuterey. Walter Kirstein, in his beloved Engadine, took the Biancograt in his stride at the age of 73! A number of developments were to strengthen the life of the Association. It was agreed that a Northern Dinner should be held and a date was fixed for the first such occasion on Saturday 14th February 1970, the arrangements being left in the hands of Walter Unsworth. The committee was persuaded to overcome their previous reluctance and take steps for the production of an Association tie. A pleasing design was approved and by January 1970 168 had been sold. Then at the instigation of Bill Comstive discussions were begun about the possibility of an Association hut in

the Lake District.

These discussions were taken forward and some costings made. The membership was sounded both with regard to the idea in general and with regard to finance. Of the 200 replies 90% were in favour. Soundings were also made over the possibility of a loan from the Department of the Environment and an architect was engaged to draw up plans for an extension. In the event the site considered was lost, but the idea of a hut was clearly one to be taken up if possible.

The outstanding climb of this year was the second ascent of Annapurna by two Army Officer members, Henry Day and Gerry Owens. The previous year they had together made the fourth ascent of Tirich Mir (25,263 ft.) and Henry Day also made the first ascent of Little Tirich (20,869 ft.) Annapurna presented severe and unavoidable dangers from avalanches, but the summit was reached and descent made without harm.

The Alpine meet was at Trient. The Paradiso was climbed and so was the Aiguille d'Argentiere. Two participants tried camping. The SAC published a new Hut List, this time in English as well as French and German – not solely for the benefit of ABMSAC members, nevertheless of convenient use by them. A greater move towards informality was the substitution of a cheese and wine party instead of an informal dinner. For this first such occasion the Swiss National Tourist Office contributed most generously both cheese and wine. Congratulations this year went to two members, to Quintin Hogg, given a life peerage as Lord Hailsham, and appointed Lord Chancellor and to Jack Longland on his knighthood.

The 1971 meet at Taesch was thwarted, from a climbing point of view, by thunderstorms and fresh snow and the best ascent was the *Rimpfischhorn*. Non climbers just sheltered during the storms and enjoyed the sunny intervals, of which there were plenty. This year saw two notable climbs, John Fairley's ascent of the East Face of the Dent du Requin by the Renaudie Route and Walter Kirstein's ascent of the North Ridge of the Piz Badile at the age of 75.

Early in 1972 various authorities were canvassed with regard to a climbing hut. The Carlisle Diocesan Board of Finance had suggested the Parish Rooms in Patterdale. A preliminary inspection was made and it was felt that they would form a most desirable hut. An architect, Alec Wells, was appointed and gave a favourable survey, subject to relatively minor matters being seen to. Planning permission was applied for. By September outline planning permission had been granted.

The summer meet was at a very attractive spot, Pontresina. As often, the weather was not settled, nevertheless a good deal was achieved. The 'Nose' of the Cambrena made a good ice ascent; a party climbed the Campo di Corno by the SE ridge; and a party made the traverse of the Piz Palu to the Marco e Rosa hut, the ascent of the Bernina and descent in a snowstorm. In more distant climes Gordon Gadsby had a month's climbing in Arctic Norway and Mike Baker made a solo ascent of Kilimanjaro.

Work went forward for the obtaining of Patterdale Parish Room (formerly the Church School) as a Club Hut. An application for funding was made to the Sports Council. It was envisaged that an appeal for funds would be made to members as long-term loans or bequests. Even so costings made it appear that there would be a shortfall and the

suggestion was made that the possibility of a joint venture with another Club be looked into.

Saas Almagell was the locale for the summer meet and there was a week's fine weather and a week's wet weather. Three ropes traversed the Weissmies and later the Allalinhorn from the Britannia Hut. Back at home after very many years the Ladies night dinner was dropped in favour of a cheese and wine party.

By March 1974 the architect's plans showed the layout of the hut with a large common room, a drying room, a kitchen and male and female toilets. Upstairs there were male and female sleeping areas. There was adequate car parking space. The appeal for the hut had then raised £4,246 in donations or loans, rather less than the £5,000 hoped for, but seemingly enough for the project to go forward, given the overwhelming support of those who responded to the appeal. With great generosity Maurice Bennett gave £1,000. In addition the Central Committee of the SAC generously gave a contribution of the order of £2,500. However there was no financial latitude. It was therefore with pleasure and relief that a proposal from the Tuesday Climbing Club to share the hut was received. The Tuesday Climbing Club was an active though small Club with approximately 60 members and had been looking for a hut for some time. They had collected a total hut fund of about £1,500 and were very interested in joining the Association in order to run a combined venture. This came to fruition and has proved a valuable usage of the property. Members of both clubs were to serve on its Management Committee. A limited liability company was set up for the management of the financial affairs of the hut and two of the directors were members of the Tuesday Climbing Club. A 28-year lease of the property was negotiated with the Church Commissioners.

The Northern Dinner Meet, by now an annual event, was held at Glenridding, led for the first of many times by Brooke Midgley. There were two Alpine meets in the summer, a pattern that was to be repeated. A camping meet was held at Arolla. Three climbers made the ascent of the long south ridge of the Dent Blanche. The hotel-based meet was at Meiringen. It proved too low in altitude and too remote from the huts from the point of view of serious mountaineering, nevertheless expeditions were enjoyed. Further afield Keith Hindell climbed in British Columbia. The climbing was enjoyable and not particularly difficult in a little visited area. On the social side in London informal dinners were discontinued for lack of support and the cheese and wine party became a much enjoyed buffet party, thanks to Paddy and Mary Boulter.

By the time of the Northern Dinner Meet in February 1975 the hut was already 'on view'. Much work, both professional and voluntary, had been put in to bring it to completion.

But it was not until 4th October that a great crowd gathered for the formal opening by the Bishop of Leicester. It had been decided to name the hut 'The George Starkey Hut' to commemorate a much revered member who had been tireless in his activities for the Association over many years and who had recently died while walking in the hills. Climbers from clubs all over Britain were present, as were Herr Hektor Meier from SAC Zurich and M. Rene Serex, of the Swiss Embassy, London. The President, Maurice Bennett, paid tribute to all those both in the Association and the Tuesday Climbing Club who had worked to help convert the building. He also thanked Frank Schweitzer and Peter Ledeboer who had organised the project.

Maurice Bennett was an outstanding member of the

Association. From 1960 to 1970 he was a very active Secretary (jointly with Peter Ledebor 1963-1970), Vice-President 1971-1973 and President 1975-1977. He threw his weight behind the acquisition of the hut. He was exceptionally kindly, especially to new members, and he must have made many feel from the start that they belonged in the Association. He was made an Honorary Member in 1984. Another outstanding member was Peter Ledebor. He gave of himself unsparingly for the benefit of the Association. He was Secretary from 1963-1972; the first Chairman of the Hut Management Committee 1974-1977 (having been very committed to the acquisition of the hut); Vice-President 1978 and 1979; and President for an unusual four year term 1981-1984, the extra year being in order that with his linguistic gifts he might preside at the 75th Anniversary of the Association in Saas Fee. As Social Secretary he organised a series of talks in London, which were enjoyed by many. He repeatedly, and successfully, raised funds for the refurbishment of the Britannia Hut. He was made an Honorary Member in 1999.

Also in 1975 steps were taken to introduce a new category of membership –that of associate or affiliate member. The qualifications suggested were that applicants should

- (a) be men or women over the age of 18;
- (b) have a genuine love of the hills;
- (c) be proposed by an ordinary member of the Association and seconded by an ordinary or an associate member;
- (d) attend at least one climbing meet of the Association before election;
- (e) be approved by the Committee.

As well as the possibility of men who were not members of the SAC joining the Association there was the possibility of

women becoming members too - a long overdue measure given the part they played in the activities of the Association. This proved a very worthwhile reform.

The summer meet was at Saas Fee. Exchange rate difficulties dictated a chalet-based meet, which was led by Harry Archer. A team led by Valda Archer excellently undertook catering. This arrangement was a great success. Over the three weeks of the meet many good climbs were made including the SW ridge of the Fletschhorn and the Stecknadelhorn-Nadelhorn-Ulrichhorn traverse, both by John Edwards, John Brooks and R. Floyd. Among the year's other climbs were Jim Gregson's ascent of the North-East Face of the Lenzspitze; the ascent of Monte della Disgrazia by Gordon Gadsby, Stuart Bramwell and Ken Bryan; and the ascent of both Mount Olympus (USA) and Mount Olympus (Greece) by Frank Solari. His comment was, "Very different, but both enjoyable". Paddy Boulter notched up 27 summits with a plastered leg!

4. FROM THE OPENING OF THE GEORGE STARKEY HUT TO THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The first year of the hut was a greater success, both in numbers and finance, than had been anticipated. One thing that had not been set right by the time of the opening was a smoking chimney – difficult to cure. But thanks to the expertise of Brooke Midgley the problem was solved with the fireplace in Lakeland slate resited.

In 1976 the Alpine meet was again chalet based, Harry Archer again taking on the organisation. The chalets were at Fischbiel, in the Loetschental. During the four week stay the weather was unsettled. Walkers fared well, climbers less so. Nevertheless E. and D. Wagstaff climbed the Bietschhorn in less than the standard time.

Peter Cliff, Dave Penlington and two friends made a ski-mountaineering expedition in the Kulu area in the Punjab Himalaya. The party set their sights on the descent from Deo Tibba (20, 000 ft). This proved to be both unskiable in its upper slopes and beyond the strength of the party. However they were able to make a descent from 16,300 ft, which Peter Cliff described. 'In the morning we started this really magnificent ski descent. The glacier was mostly easy-angled with a few steeper bits, giving excellent and varied ski-ing. All around were massive icefalls and rock cliffs, and magnificent views. As far as I know we were the first to make the descent on skis, and we savoured every minute of it.'

1977 saw another chalet based meet – this time at Kandersteg. Variable weather and a shorter stay meant that climbing was somewhat restricted, though the Balmhorn and the Jungfrau

fell to David Wooley and Peter Mines and the traverse of the Wildstrubel to Alasdair Andrews, John Dempster and Roger James. Colin Armstrong and Mike Scarr made the Goppenstein –Loetschenpass in record time.

In the Himalayas Hamish Brown penetrated the Nanda Devi Sanctuary *“surely one of the most dramatic ‘treks’ of the world and leading to a genuine remoteness and a skyline of famous mountains”*.

The Association Meets Programme for 1978 showed no fewer than eighteen meets, thirteen at Patterdale and five at other locations in the U.K. (only one in Scotland). This is a measure of the extent to which the Association had become a climbing club for Britain, with a policy of having the Patterdale hut as its base. Alpine meets, however, continued to count for much in the life of the Association. A party of thirty gathered at Zermatt in August for a combined hotel and camping meet, which was reckoned a happy arrangement, but the weather was extremely poor and little serious climbing could be done. A tragic loss was that of John and Freda Kemsley. For a number of years John had organised a Yorkshire meet. In the summer of 1978 John injured his foot while on the Dent d’Herens. While he and Freda were waiting for a helicopter a storm came in and tragedy ensued.

There were two signs of the times. One was that numbers at the annual dinners in London were markedly decreasing, and it was mooted that a location other than London might elicit greater support. The other was that, for the first time, a lady was present at the Annual General Meeting. History does not relate who she was.

John Byam-Grounds made a welcome offer. He had a

property at Llanrwst, in the Conwy Valley, which had an annexe, Fron Cottage, which he was happy for members of the Association to use. The cottage consisted of a sitting room and two bedrooms. This would provide the Association with a base in Snowdonia as well as in the Lake District, albeit on a much smaller scale.

The Alpine meet in 1979 at Courmayeur had better weather than that at Zermatt the previous year, though still somewhat unsettled. The Geant, the Tour Ronde, the Aiguille de Rochfort and the Grandes Jorasses were all climbed, as was Mont Blanc itself, in very bad weather. A large party made the ascent of the Gran Paradiso. Several energetic young members were a very welcome accession to the meet. Les Swindin, climbing with his wife, Barbara, Geoff Causey, John Oaks and two friends, had a particularly good season, climbing the Finsteraarhorn, making the traverse of the Gross Fiescherhorn and climbing the Moench. Crossing the Rhone valley they climbed the Taeschhorn and the Dom. Les and John then climbed the N.E. face of Lyskamm. A celebration dinner at Randa was fully merited!

In 1980 for the first time there was female representation on the Association’s committee, Betty Freeman. The Swiss Women’s Alpine Club had merged with the all male Swiss Alpine Club so that women were now eligible as ordinary members of the SAC and consequently of the Association. The Committee was told that members were making very little use of Fron Cottage so it was agreed that the Association should not continue to have exclusive use of the property.

There were two Alpine meets this year. The camping meet was at Grindelwald and parties climbed the Jungfrau, the Eiger, the Moench and the Fiescherhorn, among other

routes. From this time a camping meet as well as a hotel-based meet became a regular fixture. The hotel-based meet at the pleasant little village of Bivio near the Julier Pass was predominantly a party of senior citizens. The most ambitious excursions were the ascent of the Chapuetschin and the traverse of the Morterasch.

John Whyte assembled a small party, John Edwards, John Brooks and John Allan, for an expedition to the Dudh Khosi region with the intention of climbing Mera, 21,700 ft. A party made that ascent and a party also climbed a virgin peak of 19,700 ft. 'What views they were. A ridge some 18 miles long averaging 20,000 ft. with unnamed and unclimbed tops every half-mile. A cluster of fine 21,000 ft. peaks to the north embraced by the two arms of the Hinku Glacier and the 22,000 ft. Kantega to the west standing proudly above it all whose only vulnerable point lay up an icefall approaching the scale of that leading to Everest's Western Cwm.

As a bonus they found and photographed some clear animal prints in the snow. Were they Yeti?

1981 saw the completion of all the Swiss four thousanders by Will McLewin, the first British climber to have done so since Eustace Thomas in 1929. Many of McLewin's ascents were made solo or with one 'determined' friend. Of his achievement McLewin wrote:

A frequent metaphor associated with climbing is that of conquest. I was asked recently what I would do now that I have conquered all those peaks. But the question misunderstands the situation because I have no sense of having conquered anything. What I am conscious of is that I have achieved a sort of communion with earth which is

much more worthwhile and which is more durable and continuing than having beaten something.

McLewin's climbs formed the basis of an excellent book – *In Monte Viso's Horizon*.

The camping meet was at Atermersen, between Randa and Taesch. The hotel-based meet was in Arolla. Both meets had good climbing.

In July of 1982 five climbers, including Belinda Baldwin, made an exploratory trek up the Miyar Nullah to a little known pass, the Kangla Jot, at a height of 17,500 ft. The altitude caused them problems but the group crossed the pass between the Himalayas and Zanskar successfully. This year's camping meet was based at Argentiere, to become a favourite spot, and among the peaks tackled were M. Blanc du Tacul, the Aiguille du Midi and the Argentiere. More than one party climbed the Forbes Arete on the Chardonnet. The hotel based meet was at Kandersteg. Most of the major local peaks were climbed.

Gillian and Peter Bull climbed Mt Kenya to Pt Lenana, 16,355 ft. and had a white Christmas even on the Equator. Elizabeth Parry and two friends followed the Lamayuru trek through Zanskar for 24 days. In a fascinating journey they crossed a pass at 16,200 ft. before descending to Lamaruyu. The camping meet was at Silvaplana and the best routes were the North Ridge of Piz Gluschaint, the Biancograt on Piz Bernina and the Piz Roseg by the Middlemoregrat. The Hotel meet was at Bivio. Several ropes climbed Piz Palu in good conditions. The area round Bivio is delightfully floriferous. Substantial beds of *Eritricium Nanum* (King of the Alps) were seen on the Fallerfurka.

The 75th Anniversary of the Association was celebrated in grand style. The place had to be Saas Fee and the time August, in fact the 21st – 26th August 1984. The attendance easily surpassed the estimate of 75; 126 members came to Saas Fee to celebrate. To strike an authentic note participants were asked to wear Edwardian dress. Ladies were to wear a long woollen skirt, a twill blouse with a woollen jacket, woollen stockings, a hat (some of these were splendidly decorative) and black mountaineering boots. Gentlemen had to wear a woollen jacket and long woollen trousers or plus-fours, plain colour cotton shirt and tie, long woollen socks, grey, black or brown, and old black mountaineering boots. The Swiss army provided hemp ropes and old-fashioned ice axes. The effect was remarkable. The first event on the programme was a service at the English Church in Zermatt. The more energetic – a party of 48 climbers – ascended to the Britannia Hut the night before and after a 4.00 a.m. start crossed the Allalin Pass to reach Zermatt in time for the service. The less energetic were transported from Saas Fee to Zermatt by special bus and train. The service was conducted by the Bishop of Dunwich, who preached. Wednesday and Thursday were left free. On Friday a very large party donned their 1909 climbing clothes and assembled in the Britannia Hut in the evening for a supper, the same menu as was served on 17th August 1912, the day of the opening of the hut. In point of fact on that day the ABMSAC members had descended after the opening to Saas Fee, where they had enjoyed a banquet, thus they had the better of those who stayed in the hut where the food was nourishing but plain. For the 75th anniversary musical entertainment in the hut went on into the early hours, so it was not surprising that only a few succeeded in rising for a 3.00 a.m. start and climbed the Allalinhorn. There was a grand perambulation to the Mittelallalin to meet the descending climbers. The morning's events included the building of a 'steinmannli',

a cairn containing a variety of commemorative objects.

Mass, said by the Vicar General of Sion at which the Bishop of St. Albans preached followed this. A presentation of a picture of the Lake District by Sydney Prentice, an Association member and President of the Ambleside Art society, was made by Peter Ledebor, on behalf of the Association, to Andre Roch, the President of the Geneva Section. The picture was to be hung in the Hut. Mention must be made of a climber who was present at the opening of the Britannia Hut, Professor Noel Odell. He was also present 72 years later at the age of 93. The celebrations were rounded off on the Sunday with a banquet at the Hotel Glacier. The menu included 'Roast Lion' - an unusual delicacy. It should of course have been Roast Loin - of Veal. The meal was much enjoyed. In his speech at the banquet Peter Ledebor read words from the first President of the Association, Clinton Dent, on the occasion of the opening of the first Britannia Hut, 'The hut appears to be well and truly built and to stand on a solid foundation. And so, I hope, does the good feeling between the English speaking and all other members of the SAC.' All reckoned the week's programme an excellent celebration.

In the autumn there was a 'Unique Historical Exhibition of Pictures, Books and Documents' at the Alpine Club. The Swiss Ambassador, M. Pictet, opened the exhibition. The books included early travellers in Switzerland, natural history, dragons, guidebooks, books with coloured plates, literary associations, children's books and club journals. The paintings and drawings included work by Ruskin and by Whymper among others. In addition there were a number of prints. There were *fuehrerbucher* of several guides. There were some documents, including a vivid note from Whymper on his descent from the Matterhorn asking for

aid in searching for the dead. For some time male members of the Association had had a handsome tie with the SAC crest to show their membership; now the female members were offered an Association headscarf similarly adorned with the SAC crest.

5. FROM THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION TO THE PRESENT TIME

Since 1985 the activities of the Association have gradually fallen into a regular pattern. Outdoor meets in Britain have included winter meets in Scotland, which Alasdair Andrews has often led. Regularly there has been a meet at Glenridding, on Ullswater, at the beginning of February. Since 1997 this has been combined with the Annual General Meeting and the Annual Dinner. Attendances at London meetings, including the Annual General Meeting, had been declining markedly while the Northern Dinner remained very popular. There has generally been a maintenance meet for the hut at Easter and a meet at Rhyd Ddu in North Wales in the late spring. The base there is the hut of the Oread Club, Tan yr Wyddfa, with which club the Association has a reciprocal arrangement. There has often been a summer family meet as well as other meets in various locations. The season has been rounded off with an Alpine Reunion Meet at the George Starkey Hut in the autumn. For some years there were also pleasant walks for Southern members in the countryside not far from London.

Alpine meets have been held every year, with one exception. Harry Archer arranged and led a meet at Fischbiel in 1985. There was much fresh snow. The Balmhorn was the best peak climbed. The next year Arolla was the centre for a very successful meet in which 80 climbers made 130 ascents. Some fifty ABMSAC members were present at the Bahnhof Hotel in Zermatt when a plaque was unveiled to the memory of the guide and hotelier Bernard Biner. He was always very friendly disposed to the British and many members have been indebted to him, as have those who have stayed at the Bahnhof. Harry Archer, as President of the Association, and Lord Hunt paid tributes. One may well

bemoan the transformation of Zermatt from what it once was, a friendly village. The Library came under scrutiny. It was decided to sell most of the books, retaining the best 100, including some valuable ones. They continued to be housed with the Alpine Club Library. The sale raised some £6,000.

Champex was the venue for the 1987 meet. The biggest expedition was an attempt on Mont Blanc. The climb was abandoned only 200m from the summit owing to dangerously strong winds. This was followed by a meet at Saas Fee, where the best climb was the traverse of the Alphubel, the Nadelhorn and the Ulrichshorn. Mike Pinney and Marion Elmes on the camping meet climbed 10 4,000m peaks in a single expedition, a very considerable achievement. John Whyte as President attended the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the SAC in April 1988. This took place in the Station Buffet room at Olten, where the original meeting to form the SAC was held. More distant peaks also called. John Chapman joined a party to climb Chulu East (19,000 ft), in the Himalayas, which they did successfully. He wrote;

For all their grandeur there is something curiously companionable about these hills. I can see them now, coloured every hue and shade from the dark green, almost black, of the pines on the north-facing slopes of the Annapurnas below the pale blues of the shaded icy flanks; through the browns and ochres of the dried grass and the blue-greens of the ground juniper on our side of the valley. Even the bare rock and the moraines have endless subtle shades of red and brown and blue. In my mind's eye the whole is bathed in a crystal clear light under which every detail stands out and seems hardly more than an arm's length away. It gives me a sense of well being and of one-ness with the whole of creation when nothing seems impossible.

The 1989 meet was held at Klosters, but apart from the Chilbiritzenspitz, climbed by Mark and Heather Eddowes, there does not seem to be any record of what was achieved. What there is a record of, and very rightly, is the first continuous traverse of the Swiss 4000m peaks by Paul Mackrill. He made the traverse of every peak from Piz Bernina to the Grand Combin and travelled entirely on foot. This was a great achievement. In London the Alpine Club, whose guests the Association regularly had been, sold their premises in South Audley Street, Mayfair. The Association found other venues for its London meetings and the Library was in due course housed in the Alpine Club's new premises.

Morgenrot, at Zermatt is remembered very fondly by all who were there in 1990 and 1992. It was set on the hillside overlooking Zermatt and proved a first rate grandstand for the fireworks on the Swiss National Day. The Zermatt meets were especially successful. The 125th anniversary of the climbing of the Matterhorn was celebrated in Zermatt. The graves of the victims of the accident after the first ascent were refurbished and rededicated with funds partly from the ABMSAC and the AC.

John Chapman returned to the Himalayas leading a party of twelve, of whom eight were ABMSAC members, on a trek to climb Randung Go (19455 ft) and the Trashi Labta Pass (18,881 ft). It was one of the more difficult treks, but the climbs were made successfully and in addition to the peak and the pass Yalung was climbed. A 'veteran' party led by Ashley Greenwood (78) and including Stanley Thomas (76), Rosemary Greenwood and Jane Gamble undertook a similar trek. Their aim also was to climb Randung Go. However they were misdirected and climbed an unnamed peak at 18,809 ft. They reckoned it was a more interesting

peak than Randung Go appeared to be. The meet in 1991 was at Arolla. An enjoyable ascent of the Tsa is recorded.

1993 saw a meet at Fischbiel with the camping meet at Grindelwald. The camping meet had a good season. A party from the Eigernordwand Campsite made an eight day outing – Jungfrau, Monch and down to Konkordia, Grunegghorn and Gross Grunhorn, Grunhornlucke to the Finsteraarhorn Hut, Finsteraarhorn and Fiescherhorn traverse to Obermonchjoch, Jungfrauoch and back down. Camping meets, shared with the Alpine Club and the Climbers Club have been a regular fixture thanks to the willingness of Mike Pinney to arrange them. There were two excursions further afield. One venue for a meet was Crete, which a party of members and guests visited in the spring of 1993. Mount Gingilos was climbed and so was Mount Ida, the highest mountain in the island. Apart from walking and climbing the island was enjoyed for its own sake. John Chapman was again in Nepal leading a trek in the Kanchenjunga region with five participants. The terrain was quite difficult, nonetheless the trek was rewarding. This was the first of several such treks.

The 1994 meet was at Saas Fee, the last in a long series to be arranged by Harry Archer. The Association owes him a great debt, not only for serving as Vice-President in 1984 and President 1985-1987 and for acting as Chairman of ABMSAC Ltd., the separate company responsible for the Patterdale hut, but chiefly for a long series of summer Alpine meets organised by him with up to 80 participants splendidly catered for and with a care always for safe climbing. He was given richly deserved Honorary Membership. Brooke Midgley, who has arranged an even longer series of Northern Dinners at the Glenridding Hotel, Patterdale, and who served as Vice President 1986-1988

and President 1997-2000 also received a much merited Honorary Membership. The dinners have been popular and much enjoyed and are now the Association's annual dinners. In 1994 the Central Committee of the SAC decided that members of the Alpine Club might have concessionary rates in SAC huts. It is hard to estimate what effect this has had on the Association, but it might be expected that those who would formerly have joined in order to get reductions in hut fees, if they are already members of the Alpine Club, would not feel it worthwhile to do so. Ten years on from the sale of Library books the situation was reviewed. The remaining books got minimal use and were valued at over £10,000. The committee agreed that they should also be sold when money was needed.

Alasdair Andrews has largely taken over the arrangements of summer meets, generally hotel based. This is much appreciated. His first, in 1995 was at Kranjska Gora in Slovenia. It was an active and enjoyable meet. Wendell Jones organised a walking party in the Pyrenees and in three subsequent years in Austria - fine walking in high terrain. The Val d'Aosta in 1997 offered the worst weather for years. Nevertheless climbers were out every day and one 4,000 m peak was ascended.

By 1997 there were ten Britons who had climbed all the Alpine 4,000 m peaks. Six of them were members of the ABMSAC, Eustace Thomas (1929), Will McLewin (1981), Les Swindin (1985), Peter Fleming (1986), John Mercer (1990) and David Penlington (1997), McLewin, Fleming and Penlington guideless. This is a remarkable achievement, both individually and corporately, belying any suggestion that the Association is not a club for serious climbers. The Britannia Hut again needed updating. £10,000 was raised in Britain for this work, largely through the efforts of Peter

Ledeboer. He, together with Brooke Midgley as President, and his wife, Arline, was present at the reopening of the hut in June 1997.

The Val d'Aosta was the meet venue again in 1998 but there were so few that the meet had to be cancelled. Peter and Dominic Goodwin ventured to Ecuador, where they climbed Chimborazo which, it will be remembered, is the peak farthest from the centre of the earth.

The English Church in Zermatt, St. Peter's, was found to need extensive refurbishment. Over £60,000 was spent and there was held a service of Thanksgiving and Dedication just after Christmas 1998. The result was 'truly splendid'.

The Association's ninetieth anniversary was celebrated on the meet at Saas Grund in 1999. The company assembled to dine at the Hotel Adler. In spite of poor weather some quite good climbing was done.

Beforehand there had been a very successful walk in following the Tour of Monte Rosa. There had been a long tradition of such approach marches dating back to the time of the protagonist, Paul French. One purpose has been to get fit for the main meet but another has been to enjoy the high level walk for its own sake.

At Pontresina the next year owing to much snow little was done on the higher peaks. The year after, at Madonna di Campiglio, was little better. The snow level was low. David Penlington climbed Presenella. The walk in was the Dolomite High Tour.

A meet at two fairly close locations, Lanslebourg and Pralognan, was tried in 2002 and reckoned a success. The

first week's weather was poor. Undeterred John Edwards and David Watts scaled the Grand Bec. A further two centre meet, at Mayrhofen and Obergurgl, was tried in 2003. As well as organising the hotel based meets Alasdair Andrews arranged walking meets for the Tour des Muverans and the Trient Valley. These were instantly popular.

There were very protracted negotiations over the future of the George Starkey Hut. Eventually a 14-year lease running from 1/10/2002 was agreed with the Diocese of Carlisle. This gave the Association a measure of security for the future.

The Association has changed over the years. It began as a social and dining club for gentlemen climbers, members of the Swiss Alpine Club. Its aims were boosting the membership of the SAC in Britain and raising funds for the building of a new SAC hut – both aims were successful. The first meet was not held until Easter 1931 at Dolgellau. This became an annual fixture alternating between Wales, the Lakes and Scotland. They were modest in their undertakings in the early years but gradually became more demanding. A pocket book, *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering*, published shortly before the Second World War, bears witness to interest in the Alps. After the Second World War the Association became much more an active climbing club. The first Alpine meet was held in 1947. The venue was Arolla and it was a great success. Alpine meets gradually became annual fixtures much appreciated both for the climbing, generally guided, and as social gatherings. Membership was large; in 1950, 758. Only a very small minority of such a large membership can have taken part in the Association's gatherings and affairs and it must be assumed that many joined for the priority and reductions at SAC huts. The leasing of the Patterdale Church Rooms together with the

Tuesday Climbing Club marked another chapter in the life of the Association. The hut was soon much used and the centre of gravity of the Association gradually moved away from London to the North of England. By 1978 there were 18 meets, 13 of them at Patterdale. Scottish meets became much more numerous. Women came to play their full part in the affairs of the Association being first admitted as affiliate members and a little later as full members - an overdue change. Overseas travel became greatly easier and climbs were undertaken further afield than the Alps. In 1991 there took place the first Association Himalayan trek with the successful climbing of Randung Go.

Today the Association is a club for active climbers and hill walkers and there are meets in a wide variety of locations, generally including two or three in the Alps each year. The total membership is about 250, of which a little less than half are members of the SAC, the remainder being affiliate members or retired members. The Association has its own hut in Patterdale, leased from Patterdale Church Council. The social side is not neglected; the annual dinner is well supported; there are meetings in London and the meets themselves are convivial.

On to the Centenary!

SOME DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

James A.B. Bruce 1859-1930

Bruce was one of two first secretaries of the Association, and by far the more active of the two. In effect he was its founder and his tireless correspondence and refusal to be deterred by rebuffs brought it into being quickly and successfully. He also played a big part in its initial goals, especially raising a subscription for a new hut in Switzerland. But he did not rest on his laurels once the Association was in being and he acted as Secretary 1909-1912 and Treasurer 1912-1928 as well as being Vice-President 1919-1930. On his relinquishing the treasurership he was made an Honorary Member of the Association, a richly deserved honour. By profession Bruce was a barrister and at one time much involved in Liberal politics.

Little is known of Bruce as a mountaineer. An ascent of Mt Blanc is on record. After the 1914-18 war, by which time he was 60, he continued to make visits to the Alps for the easier ascents for as long as he could. He never lost his desire to introduce young climbers to the Swiss mountains, nor to forward friendship among climbers especially across the boundaries between Britain and Switzerland.

Clinton Dent 1850-1912

Dent was the first President of the Association. Though not the first person approached by Bruce for this post, Dent made an extremely good president. He commanded widespread respect, both professionally as a surgeon and also in the climbing world. He was a good speaker, well read, witty and humorous. He had been President of the Alpine Club from 1887-89.

Dent's work was Chief Surgeon to the Metropolitan Police. It was a demanding post, but he was thought of highly. As a climber Dent started young, with the Matterhorn and the Schreckhorn before he was 21. He made a number of first ascents, including the Aiguille de Dru. Dent was in the Caucasus with Douglas Freshfield and Hermann Wooley making visits in 1886, 1888, 1889 and 1895. They made first ascents of Gestola, 15,932ft and Tsiteli 13,930 ft and explored the range.

Dent propounded the theory that distress from mountain sickness resulted from lack of oxygen; that it could be relieved by acclimatization; that acclimatization required time, and therefore could not be achieved in a rapid climb. Even in the 1890's he stated his belief that Everest could be climbed. He was a pioneer of winter Alpinism and also of guideless climbing.

Dent wrote the volume on *Mountaineering* for the Badminton Library. He was an expert photographer and encouraged exhibitions of mountain photography and art. He was a man of integrity who inspired confidence. His influence in getting the Association off to a good start was considerable. The sadness was that he only served the Association from 1909-1912 when an illness unexpectedly proved mortal.

Edward Whymper 1840-1911

Whymper is world famous as the first man to ascend the Matterhorn. The tragic accident on the descent only served to make his name more widely known.

He had grown up in the business of book illustration, at which he was skilled. He was commissioned by William Longman, the President of the Alpine Club, to make illustrations of the mountains of the Dauphine for the edition of Peaks, Passes and Glaciers for 1860. The commission turned Whymper into an alpinist. In 1861 he returned to the Alps to climb M. Pelvoux. Over the next four years he made a series of brilliant climbs on peaks and passes, including the Pointe des Ecrins, the West Peak of the Grande Jorasses and the Aiguille Verte. Whymper told his story of these years, and of the race for the Matterhorn, in *Scrambles amongst the Alps*, 1871, surely amongst the most read of all mountaineering books.

In 1880 he climbed in South America, making the ascent of Chimborazo and six other mountains between 15,000 and 20,000 ft. He spent a night at the top of the volcano Cotopaxi. Whymper was not the easiest of men but once his interest was aroused (and he had many interests) he was responsive. That Whymper should have supported the nascent Association and been willing to speak at its inaugural dinner counted for much. The Association is proud that its membership still includes one of Whymper's family.

Alfred Edward Woodley Mason 1865-1948

Mason must be the most colourful president that the Association has had. He was a President of the Oxford Union and on graduating joined a theatrical company. But he discovered that acting was not for him and turned to writing novels, in which he was successful. *The Four Feathers* was a best seller. He travelled widely, including a journey to India, making use of his travels for his writing. He stood as a Liberal for the Coventry seat and was elected a Member of Parliament in 1906; he did not however stand again at the next election. During the First World War he worked for Naval Intelligence and had some daring undertakings. His output as a novelist continued for the rest of his life.

Mason was introduced to the Lake District while still an undergraduate and had been in the Alps and climbed the Wetterhorn by the age of 26. He became a dedicated Alpinist, making 36 ascents including the Grands Charmoz and the Aiguille d'Argentiere. He climbed Mont Blanc by five different routes including the Brenva Arete solo in 16 hours down to Chamonix. He made use of his climbing experience and of that climb in particular in his mountaineering thriller, *Running Water*.

Mason was President of the Association from 1913-1922. He was a man who loved adventure for its own sake.

Charles Granville Bruce 1866-1939

Bruce was set on a military career from his early days and he was commissioned in the Oxford Light Infantry. He soon opted for the Indian Army and joined the 5th Gurkha Rifles. He developed a strong affinity to the Gurkhas and learnt Gurkhali. He trained his men in mountain warfare and he would often take two of the strongest on an exploratory expedition so that he became familiar with a great part of the Himalaya. During the 1914-18 war his regiment was drafted to Egypt and then to Gallipoli, where he was severely wounded. He recovered and returned to India in 1916 as a Brigadier-General. Illness however put paid to his army career. He remained in India, and was able to continue mountaineering.

His initiation into that pursuit had been with Conway's expedition in the Karakoram. He reached the Baltoro glacier and was one of the party which climbed 'Pioneer Peak'. He was with Mummery and his party for the initial stages of the attempt on Nanga Parbat but then had to return to his unit. The expedition ended in the loss of life; Bruce had thought that they were over extending themselves. Another expedition with Longstaff and Mummery went to Nanda Devi. Although they did not climb the mountain, or even penetrate the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, much valuable exploratory work was done which gave a picture of the area as a whole.

In 1922 Bruce was called upon by the Everest Committee to lead a party to climb Everest itself. He was an obvious choice—entirely familiar with the organisation of Himalayan expeditions; closer to the people of the area than any other European; and with a distinguished record of Himalayan climbing. He proved flexible without losing control. A

height of 27,300ft was reached, 2,000 ft higher than any previous climb. Bruce was again chosen to lead in 1924, but on the march he developed malaria and had to turn back.

Bruce was President of the Alpine Club from 1923-26 and President of the Association from 1927-30. He did not stand on rank even though he was a Brigadier General. He was always good company.

George Leigh Mallory 1887-1924

Mallory was a Cambridge man, where he read history. On graduation he was offered a post as a schoolmaster at Charterhouse, which he held until he joined the army in 1916. He served on the Western Front, in the artillery, but after some months an old injury caused him to be invalided home. He was not out of the war, however, as, after further training, he returned to France until the Armistice. On demobilisation he returned to Charterhouse.

Mallory had his first two Alpine seasons while still a schoolboy. As an undergraduate he joined several parties at Pen-y-Pass led by Geoffrey Winthrop Young, as well as extending his knowledge of the Alps, where he put up new routes. He became discontented with teaching and resigned his post at Charterhouse. His idealism found its expression in support for the Union of the League of Nations, which he wished to work for. When the invitation came to join the 1921 expedition to Everest, he accepted. He played a valuable part in exploring the Rongbuk and West Rongbuk Glaciers and the route to the North Col of Everest. He was the first man to look at the Western Cwm. After much exploratory work the party no longer had the strength to mount a summit attempt, even should the weather have allowed it.

Mallory was an obvious choice for the 1922 expedition and was included in the first summit attempt, which reached 26,800 ft. On the descent, above the North Col, a climber slipped and dragged two others off the ridge. Mallory, in the lead, held them on his axe with all his weight and stopped their fall. On a further attempt an avalanche carried away seven sherpas to their deaths and the expedition was brought to an end.

Though he himself prevaricated somewhat, he was an immediate choice for the expedition of 1924. On the mountain bad weather greatly held the climb back and eventually the first attempt was made by Somervell and Norton, Norton reaching some 800-900 ft below the summit before having to turn back. Mallory and Irvine made the second attempt, but were lost on the mountain. Mallory's body was found 300ft below the north ridge in 1999. It remains a disputed question whether he and Irvine reached the summit.

Sir Arnold Lunn 1888-1974

Arnold Lunn was the son of Sir Henry Lunn, a pioneer of the travel business. Arnold thus grew up in an international atmosphere and he developed an especial affection for Switzerland and the Swiss.

As a young man he was a great ski mountaineer and made the first ski ascents of the Eiger and the Dom. He founded several clubs, the Oxford University Mountaineering Club, the Ski Club of Great Britain, the Alpine Ski Club and later the Kandahar Club. He was also a founder member of the Association, the last survivor. He had a very considerable influence on skiing as a sport, and obtained Olympic recognition for the modern slalom race and for downhill racing.

Lunn was not afraid to be controversial and wrote books on religion and politics as well as skiing and mountaineering. But he never sought to make enemies and such was his sincerity and integrity that instead he made friends.

Noel Ewart Odell 1890-1987

Odell trained in geology, and never lost his interest in that subject all his life. In the First World War he served with the Royal Engineers. After the war he worked for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in London and in Persia. He next worked in Canada, then at Harvard, as a lecturer in Geology. From there he moved to Cambridge, which was his base for the rest of his life, though in the Second World War he served in India with the Bengal Sappers and Miners.

At an early age Odell went to the Lake District and after returning from the war extended his scope with climbs in Wales and Scotland. He soon had an Alpine season, climbing the Grepon. He went to Spitzbergen and came back with a reputation for stamina as well as climbing skill. He was chosen for the 1924 Everest Expedition. He was slow to acclimatise, so that he was not considered for a summit attempt. However once he was acclimatised his achievement was remarkable. He spent eleven nights at 23,000 ft or above and twice made the ascent to about 27,000 ft. It was he who was the last person to see Mallory and Irvine alive.

Odell could not manage to join the 1933 Everest Expedition and in 1936 was thought too old. He joined a party to climb Nanda Devi, which he did with H.W. Tilman. At 25,645 ft this was the highest mountain yet ascended and was to remain so until the French climbed Annapurna in 1950. Odell joined the 1938 Everest Expedition but did not climb high. He never lost his worldwide interests as a climber. Even at the age of 93 he attended the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Association and, with some mechanical assistance, made his way up to the Britannia hut.

Frank Smythe 1900-1949

Smythe began work as an electrical engineer and joined the RAF on a short service commission from which he was invalided out. He made mountains and mountaineering his profession. He climbed both in summer and winter and made winter and early spring ski tours. He had successful climbs in the Alps, including the north east face of Mt. Blanc, the traverse of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey, with a guideless descent in a snowstorm, and a guideless ascent of the Aiguille du Plan. In 1930 he was invited to join an expedition to Kanchenjunga and in 1931 he organised his own expedition to climb Kamet (25447 ft). He was a good leader; he planned well and then was flexible. The expedition was remarkably successful; five out of six of the climbing party reached the summit. Smythe joined the 1933 Everest expedition and made an attempt on the summit alone, his companion, Shipton, being too exhausted to proceed. But the snow was too dangerous and Smythe had to turn back. He was a member of the expedition of 1936, thwarted by an early monsoon, and again that of 1938, when again snow conditions were impossible. During the 1939-45 war Smythe joined the army to train troops in snow and mountain warfare in Scotland and the Rockies and saw service with them in Italy.

Smythe was a prolific author and illustrated his books with his own very fine photographs. He had a strong sense of the beauty of the mountains, their snows, their peaks, their valleys and their flowers, and was able to convey the inspiration he found from them to others.

Quintin Hogg (Baron Hailsham of St. Marylebone) 1907-2001

Quintin Hogg was born into a political family, his father, Viscount Hailsham of Hailsham, twice serving as Lord Chancellor. Hogg became a barrister in 1938 and served in the Rifle Brigade during the 1939-1945 war. After the war he resumed his legal practice and became a Q.C. in 1953.

Already in 1938 he had entered the House of Commons and he remained there until he succeeded to the peerage in 1950. As Viscount Hailsham he served successively as First Lord of the Admiralty, Minister of Education, Lord President of the Council and Lord Privy Seal. In 1963 he disclaimed his peerage in order to stand as leader of the Conservative Party, but was not appointed. In 1970 he was appointed Lord Chancellor and took the title Baron Hailsham of St. Marylebone. He served as Lord Chancellor until 1974 and again from 1979 to 1987.

Hogg joined the Association in 1937. He had already made extensive climbs in the Alps including, in the Mont Blanc area, the Charmoz, the Dent de Geant, the Aiguilles du Requin, Plan and Midi, the Aiguille and Dome de Gouter, the latter guideless; in the Valais the Dufourspitze, the Allalinhorn and the Rimpfischhorn; and in the Oberland the Aletschhorn and the Gross Grunhorn. He was a keen hill walker, although latterly his movement was impaired. He was created a Knight of the Garter in 1988.

John Hunt (Baron Hunt of Llanfair Waterdine) 1910-1998

John Hunt's father was an officer in the Indian Army who was killed in the early days of the First World War. John Hunt determined on an army career like his father and trained at Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the King's Royal Rifle Corps and went with them to India in 1931. He learnt Urdu and some Bengali in addition to his fluent French and German. He volunteered for secondment to the Indian Police. He said he learnt what was going on by squatting in the bazaar wearing a lungi and a skullcap. Returning to Britain in 1940 he was appointed chief instructor at the Commando Mountain and Snow Warfare School at Braemar. He saw active service in Italy and after the cessation of hostilities his regiment was sent to Greece to restore law and order. There followed staff appointments and after Everest he was appointed Brigadier and Assistant Commandant at the Staff College, Camberley. In 1956 he decided to retire from the Army to become Director of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. In 1966 he was created a Life Peer, later sitting with the Social Democrats. He was greatly involved in public life, serving on committees on policing in Northern Ireland, relief measures after the Biafran war and on the royal commission on the press. He was President of the Council for National Parks, the Council for Volunteers Overseas and the National Association of Probation Officers. His greatest honour was to be appointed a Knight of the Garter in 1979.

As a schoolboy Hunt had been taken to Switzerland where he would go for long walks and scrambles. At 14 he made a guided ascent of Piz Palu. He was later to show he was made of sterner stuff with guideless ascents of the Chamonix Aiguilles. He never lost his love for the Alps. In

retirement he made the Tour du Mont Blanc together with his wife, Peter Ledebor and John Whyte and took pleasure in pointing out his climbs of decades before. His regiment's move to India opened up the possibility of climbing in the Himalaya, which he took. With a service party he joined in a bold attempt on Saltoro Kangri in the Karakoram in 1935. In the autumn of 1937 he, his wife and Reginald Cooke formed a small expedition to reconnoitre the eastern side of Kanchenjunga spending over a month on the Zemu glacier, climbing the South West summit of Nepal Peak and making the third ascent of the Zemu La.

Of what Hunt did for the ascent of Everest it is superfluous to write. Suffice it to quote one of the Everest team:

It was to the leader of the expedition, Colonel John Hunt, that the greatest credit was due. Even though he had climbed to 27,350ft in support of the two assaults, it was his battle-hardened powers of leadership and skilful planning that were the hallmarks of success.

When he died, 45 years later, Lord Longford was moved to write, *'In my eyes, Lord Hunt was the greatest Englishman of his time.'*