



Wally Zuber: Part 1 - Café Suisse is born



Walter Traugott Zuber was a well-known resident of Ventnor for the best part of 60 years, particularly remembered by townsfolk as the proprietor of the popular Café Suisse in Spring Hill, until his retirement in 1964.

Surprisingly, there are very few photographs of either Wally or of the Café Suisse – but this picture shows the corner of Spring Hill and the High Street during the demolition of buildings to make what is now the Central Car Park, and the wide frontage of the Café Suisse can be seen at the start of Spring Hill, next door to what is now the launderette.



Walter (or Wally as he was known), was born in 1899 in Aarau, Switzerland and remained proud of his Swiss nationality throughout his life. He was apprenticed as a sugar confectioner and pastry-cook before joining the Swiss army, and then came to England in 1922, firstly to London and then to Woking in Surrey, where he met Emma Anna Bissegger, also from Switzerland. Married in 1924, they moved to Ventnor the following year, staying at the Wellington Hotel in Belgrave Road. They bought the Victory Cafe at the bottom of Spring Hill and, on July 11th, 1925 re-opened it as the Café Suisse.

CAFÉ SUISSE		
<small>(W. ZUBER, Proprietor)</small>		
HIGH STREET, VENTNOR.		
High-Class Confectioners and Pastrycooks.		
<i>Luncheons.</i>	<i>Teas.</i>	<i>Ices.</i>
Continental Pastries.	Home-made Chocolates.	
On Parle Français.	Man Spricht Deutsch.	

Walter was an undoubted master of his profession and the Café Suisse soon became one of the finest patisseries and confectionery businesses the Island had ever seen and the most popular rendezvous for coffee and refreshments. His delicious home-made chocolates became a firm favourite and even his bread rolls were the talk of the town! He always sought to promote Anglo-Swiss relations and to develop the links with the town and the tourist trade - as here, in 1930, advertising to visitors that both French and German are spoken in the cafe.

With business booming at the Café Suisse, the Zubers opened The Continental Cafe on the Esplanade in May 1935, and they also bought The Grove in Grove Road, just below Ventnor Station, and made this their home until May 1981.

During the second world war, Walter played his part for his adopted country by serving as an ARP warden in the Spring Hill area of Ventnor, and in October 1943 he bought 54 acres of the Puckaster Estate in St. Lawrence and formed 'The Undercliff Produce Company' to grow tomatoes, potatoes and lettuces as part of the war effort. Other notable growers in the area were Uffa Fox, the famous Cowes yachtsman and boat-builder, and Mr H. Ayres of Inglewood. The sheltered position of the land was ideal for growing vegetables, and in the first season, nearly fifty tons of tomatoes were picked semi-ripe, and sent to the mainland by the handful of men, women and schoolchildren working there.

Next week: The second part of Wally Zuber's story, describing the post war years and The Continental Cafe

Colin Beavis, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](http://www.ventnorhistory.com) using records and photographs from the Society Collection.