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# *East-West Review*

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# East–West Review

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The Great Britain–Russia Society's aim is to advance the education of the public in particular but not exclusively in the following: the historical background, culture, the economic, political, social conditions and trends in the Russian Federation and its near neighbours. This is done through lectures and members' meetings and this journal, as well as by encouraging as wide a range of people as possible to become members.

Prospective member subscribers should send a cheque for £20 in favour of Great Britain–Russia Society to the Hon. Treasurer: by standing order, however, membership costs only £17.

**Back numbers** of *East–West Review* published from Spring 2014 onwards and offprints of most articles published in Volume 7 (2008) and later can be obtained from the Editor; contact details as above.

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Cover illustration:

Elena Marttila (1923 - ) *Self Portrait (facing death)*1942,  
Watercolour on paper.

An exhibition,

*Elena Marttila: Art and Endurance in the Siege of Leningrad*,  
will be displayed from 20<sup>th</sup> January to 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at the  
Old Library, Darwin College, Silver Street, Cambridge, CB3 9EU,  
opening times Fridays 2-6pm, Saturdays and Sundays 1-5pm.  
The exhibition will feature drawings, engravings on cardboard  
and lithographs conceived during the Siege of Leningrad.

See feature article on pages 48 to 51 of this issue  
of *East-West Review*.

Ksenia Afonina, co-author with Olga Kucherenko of the *East-West Review* article will curate the exhibition in conjunction  
with Libby Howie, an independent curator with a specialised  
knowledge of graphic art.  
[www.wartimeart.com](http://www.wartimeart.com)

## List of Contributors

**Ksenia Afonina** is an independent curator and researcher into the art of World War II.

**Tony Cash** spent 40 years in radio and TV production, including a spell broadcasting Russian language musical and cultural programmes to the Soviet Union. He was a founder Producer/Director of the South Bank Show and is, with Mike Gerrard, the author of *The Coder Special Archive: The untold story of naval national service men learning and using Russian during the Cold War*. He is currently pursuing a number of further media projects.

**John Dewey** has translated and published fiction by Irina Muravyova, Boris Yampolsky and, most recently, *The Sign and other stories* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, along with poetry by Pushkin (*The Bronze Horseman*) and Tyutchev (*Selected Poems*), and a biography of Tyutchev, *Mirror of the Soul*.

**Philip Hanson** is Emeritus Professor of the Political Economy of Russia and Eastern Europe at the University of Birmingham and an Associate Fellow of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House. He acts as an analyst or consultant for Oxford Analytica and several banks and companies. His books include *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy, 1945-1992*.

**Daryl Ann Hardman** (Russian translator and charity director) is the Secretary of WAaR (Wooden Architecture at Risk). She has been travelling to Russia and other former Soviet Union countries for 45 years. She has served on the board of several charities working in those countries. She first visited the Russian north in 2002 and has made numerous trips since.

**David M Holohan** was head of the Russian Section at the University of Surrey. He has written on and translated contemporary Russian literature, particularly that by Boris Mozhaev. He has also translated works by the French philosopher d'Holbach.

**Olga Kucherenko** is the author of *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941-45* (OUP, 2011) and *Soviet Street Children and the Second World War: Welfare and Social Control under Stalin* (Bloomsbury, 2016). She is currently working on Anglo-Soviet relations in the 1940s.

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**Ursula Wimble**. Biographical information on this remarkable lady is included in the first introductory paragraph opposite. More pictures of her are seen below.

**Tony Wolstenholme** Captain, RN (R'td), is a former Head of Naval Technical Intelligence in the Ministry of Defence.

*More pictures of Ursula Wimble; see opposite and above*



*Left: Ursula in Norway*



*Above: Later in life, Ursula (left) with her sister*

*Above: Holding the reins, Ursula reveals yet another accomplishment*

## Letters from Russia, August 1914 to April 1917

By Ursula Wimble

*Ursula Wimble (1884-1970) was from 1911 or 1912 to 1918 the English governess to the family of M K Brianchaninova, née Princess Gorchakova. During the time of these letters, which have much to say about both the First World War and the February 1917 Revolution, the family was mostly resident in St Petersburg/Petrograd, but would often stay at Gorchakov and Kudashev estates in Ukraine and a Brianchaninov estate in Pskov oblast. The children of the family were Sophie (variously 'Sophy') and Marie ('Mary') Kudashev, the children of their mother's marriage to Prince A A Kudashev, who died in 1901, and Tatiana Brianchaninova. In 1914 Sophie would have been 19, Marie 13 and Tatiana seven. The family left Russia for Norway at some point before the October 1917 Bolshevik coup and Ursula returned to Britain in 1918. Ursula, whose father was the Rev. Henry Wimble MA (Oxon.), headmaster of Paston Grammar School, North Walsham, Norfolk, subsequently worked in the Translation Section of the Air Ministry, rising to be its head, and in 1938 was awarded the MBE.*

*The letters have been transcribed by Brenda Deverson, Ursula Wimble's great-niece. Brenda did not know her great aunt well, but Sophie and Ursula maintained an ongoing friendship and after Sophie's marriage Ursula was a frequent house-guest. East-West Review is extremely grateful to Brenda for making this fascinating series of letters available to all with an interest in the period, the place and the people, also to Sophie's daughter, Kitty Hunter Blair (Stidworthy) for suggesting to Brenda that East-West Review might be interested in publishing the letters. Brenda and Kitty have both provided family photographs.*

**Letter from Russia** [address illegible] 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914

My dear Mother,

I wonder whether you received my last two letters. One I sent off Aug 1<sup>st</sup>, but fear it might not have got through before the railways were cut off. The enthusiasm here for the war is enormous, the whole nation has risen as one man, forgetting all the strife & internal troubles. It's most extraordinary & fine to see. We still get letters from Petersburg & other parts of Russia, but I'm afraid it will be ages before you get this or before I hear from any of you. Letters now go to England via Turkey. Afterwards, they may go by Siberia or America, goodness only knows. Our men-servants have gone; the butler, who has typhoid, & the boy of 17. The chef is exempt from service; he can't see well. There were 50,000 Russians in Berlin when war between Germany & Russia was declared, & the way the Germans treated them was abominable. They made them pay 20/- to put in their luggage<sup>1</sup>. When they got near the frontier they put soldiers in the corridors of the trains & threatened to shoot anyone who dared to look out of the window. One wretched English girl had to take a Russian girl of seven to Wiesbaden. At the Russian-German frontier the Germans sent the English girl off into Germany, made the child remain alone at the frontier – and refused to re-admit the English woman. Fortunately a man noticed the kid & took her to her aunt in Libau<sup>2</sup>, which is being bombarded by the German fleet! Our French governess is crazy with joy that the French can honourably avenge themselves on the Germans. Her Father



*Ursula Wimble*

& four uncles were killed in the Franco-German War of 1870 & of course she was brought up to hate the whole nation. I never read anything like the Russian papers, cram full of deep national feeling. The Czar has made splendid speeches, went out on the balcony of the Winter Palace with the Czarina & spoke to his people. Thousands of them went down on their knees in the immense square when he addressed them. It must have been a fine sight. He is immensely popular for his present attitude. We get no English or French papers now of course, so I toil through three or four Russian ones daily. It takes me hours – words dealing with war & battleships are miles long somehow! We had a telegram from Sophie. They left the country estate & went to [...] As that part of Russia is near the Austrian frontier, it is unsafe.<sup>3</sup> Mr Brianchaninov is in Petersburg. He has not to take up arms unless things go badly for Russia, which they won't, we'll hope. They can raise ten million soldiers in a fortnight! The army learnt a great lesson in the Japanese war. [...] The Russians look on England & France with joy and affection for their help. Someone started a rumour here that England had refused to help Russia & France. The peasants were half distracted. Mrs B & I reassured them; they wept for joy. Poor Mrs B is half off her head with worry & anxiety, but I hope she'll keep well & everyone else. The nearest doctor has gone to the war, so we can get at no one. If we leave for Moscow or anywhere, I'll try to telegraph to you. At present one can't telegraph anywhere. Best love to you all. [...]

<sup>3</sup> The country estate mentioned would have been near the frontier not with Austria itself, but with the Austro-Hungarian Empire (probably Galicia, 'Austrian Poland', now divided between Ukraine and Poland).

<sup>1</sup> 20 shillings = £1, a lot of money in 1914.

<sup>2</sup> The German name for Liepāja, Latvia.

**Letter from Petrograd** 4/17 November 1914

Mr Brianchaninov has just told me a French man is going to England tonight '*en route pour la patrie*', brute, so I hurry to send a line which you must share with the family. He probably won't stamp it, but don't scream at that! A journalist, Long by name, was here on Sunday & had just returned from England, said everyone there is most optimistic & cheery. B attacked him on the subject of our fleet & got a nasty snub, as Long replied that the only people with any right to criticise the fleet are the English, & they trust it & keep quiet. [...] No matter what the fleet does it counts as nothing, one can shriek oneself hoarse. As for the army, it doesn't count & the French are just as horrible about it as the Russians. This French man, who is taking this letter (may he be a cad & read it) said at lunch yesterday: 'What are the English doing, not to send us a decent army & more men? They do nothing!' So Mrs Brianchaninov shouted at him & I asked what the French had been doing during the last 44 years. They've shouted & thirsted for revenge ever since 1870, & look at [them] even now, they sit round Rheims for weeks & shout that the British can't do all the work for them. You can imagine how sick one gets. England gave five submarines to Russia; they arrived



*A younger Ursula (right) with her sister*

through the [...] Sound & Baltic Sea. The Russians were quite pleased for a bit, and then said a few dreadnoughts would have been more acceptable. They are furiously jealous of us. Peggie Silcock & I sit & curse & say 'Why did England ever join in this affray!' Russia made a convention in order to prevent England backing out when she's smashed the fleet of Germany; now we'll have to pull Russia by the nose in order to prevent her making peace before the Germans are punished enough. Everyone here knows their national character very well & says, 'Oh yes, in a few years' time the Russians & Germans will be on good terms & probably intriguing against England, or joining together as allies to destroy her!' Can't you imagine our wrath? Last night B came in late to dinner, said to me, 'In high society here they are calling England a Shylock'. I blazed, thinking it was the same old story of a poor small army & inactive fleet. But no, this time it's because a few English merchants or armament firms have made Russia pay in gold at the rate of £12 for £10 of goods delivered here. So I asked what France, etc. do. 'Oh, the same thing', was the answer. Russia ditto – so where is the need of calling us Shylock! You'll think me a grumble cat perhaps to tell this, but I think you ought to know, so as not to be astonished if things go wrong after the war. Personally, I see quite plainly that if things go on from bad to worse as they do now, then Russia will be no place for the English to reside in. Don't imagine my people are nasty to me, not a bit of it, & they always listen to my

4 Illegible, but quite possibly Øresund.

attempts of justification about our army and fleet, but we get tons of diplomats, politicians & pro-Germans here to meals etc., so one hears all sides & the most startling fact is that one & all abuse poor England. At court, near the Emperor's side, all are pro-Germans. A German was in the censorship here; they have just pitched him out. Count Witte<sup>5</sup> & others are trying hard to get peace made now, but the Entente convention ties their hands. German influence is still the greatest here. They neither like nor trust the English & intrigues are rife everywhere to spoil the entente between the countries. The French here are abominable about us. The French Ambassador says we do nothing for them. The Belgian Minister says England is magnificent, so I welcome

him always with joy. An English officer, Major Campbell, lunched here recently. He was like a tonic, quiet & confident of victory, but he said he hoped the Emperor would stick to his promise to the Poles, or England would be vexed about it. Well she'll be vexed, I fear, for he gave no promise himself – the Grand Duke Nikolai<sup>6</sup> gave it & on those grounds they are already wriggling out of it. Kasso? The minister of Education has retracted the permission to the Poles to teach & speak their own language in schools – & since the last five days orders have been given to pull

down all signs, names of stations, etc. written in Polish in Russian Poland. There will be trouble there. Russian Poland is ruined, the people as destitute & hopeless as the Belgians. £25,000 was collected for them here, as well as warm clothes. I think a good deal of the money reached them, as a fairly honest man, Count Perorski went to Warsaw himself to see about it. But all are such thieves here. The Red Cross society pretends to have 500 beds at a given place, & really only has 100, pockets the rest of the money. Clothes & money for the poor soldiers at high prices. It's not universal of course, but very prevalent. If one gives things to an under officer for his regiment, the regiment gets them. If you send them through the Red X it doesn't. The military hospitals are a disgrace & in the battlefield hospitals disorder prevails. Three sisters of Mercy & a doctor for 1000 cases [a] day. The doctors refuse to attend to the common soldiers, arrange nursing classes instead & flirt around. This letter might be termed 'The truth about Russia' mightn't it? It's a relief to write it, & for goodness sake always give me as much information as you can as to our home hospitals, wounded, doctors etc. [...]

5 Presumably Count Sergei Yulyevich Witte, 1849-1915, an influential figure in the Tsar's court.

6 Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich Romanov of Russia (1856-1929). He was first cousin once removed of Tsar Nicholas II and Commander in Chief of the Russian armies on the main front in the first year of the war. On 21st August 1915, the Tsar himself took over as commander of the Russian armed forces, appointing the Grand Duke Commander in Chief and Viceroy in the Caucasus, where he remained until the February 1917 Revolution.

Write me often & give me all news you can. I don't get papers lately, ought to have the Chronicle daily but it doesn't get through – nor *The Times*. Get the *Daily Chronicle* if you can, it's the best Russian telegrams & Harold Williams' articles on the Russian campaign are as true as any journalism and censorship will allow. I saw him and his wife after his return from the battle of Warsaw. Everyone agrees that the Russian army is fine, men & officers on best of terms, but generalship rotten. They all the time insist on advancing one army corps against four or five German army corps & are then surprised that they get cut to bits – waste of life is simply appalling. The millions are there, seven million mobilised, but, prejudice apart, our British 500,000 have done far more work than all the rest. The Belgians and British for ever. [...] I am fearfully patriotic now & could chop off the nose of all these brutes. [...] Mme Novikoff<sup>7</sup> is out here, friend of Stead,<sup>8</sup> Gladstone, etc. I do a good bit of secretarial work for Brianchaninov, French, English and German. Perhaps I know too much of the inside workings of things for my own peace of mind. Serbia is in a terrible way, at the last gasp, and Russia won't /says she can't/ help. England has helped a certain amount I believe, but where does she not help. I must go and give the kids tea, so will shut up. Hope this reaches you, send on to Mother & Diddie unless you think it's too grumbly & full of ugly truths!! Love to you all & good luck to Tommy & Jack.

Your loving sister, Ursula

Can you send me once or twice the *Daily Graphic*. Mme Novikoff wants to see if it's as anti-Russian as it was.

### Petrograd 28<sup>th</sup> December 1914

My dear Miffs & all,

Another chance to get a letter through by messenger; Major Ferguson lunched here yesterday & said he's sending off tonight. He gave us lots of English news, seems satisfied with the way things are going on the French–Belgian front. Here they say Nicolai Nicolayevitch has taken over command there too as he's had enough of Joffre & French<sup>9</sup> & their slackness! & has ordered the troops to advance, hence the progress there. I suggested that Admiral [Nikolai] Essen, who is in command of the [Russian] Baltic Fleet, should be offered command of the English Fleet also. They took it quite seriously. There is no end to their idiocy. Fergusson says the new British gun is a wonder, nothing can touch it & that they are sending some out here soon as possible too.

<sup>7</sup> Olga Alekseevna Novikoff (c.1842-1925) was an expatriate Russian author, journalist and patriot.

<sup>8</sup> William Thomas Stead (1849–1912) was an English newspaper editor.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall Joseph Joffre, Commander in Chief of the French forces on the Western Front 1914-16; Field Marshal John French, 1st Earl of Ypres, Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force 1914-15, Commander in Chief Home Forces 1916-18.

[...] When England declared war everyone here rejoiced & said 'of course the English fleet will be sent to protect Petersburg & our Baltic coasts'. They always repeat that we must go & give battle in the Kiel Canal, dear arm-chair sailors!! Things here go on muddle after muddle. Just now complaints come of lack of officers at the front, because they all have come home & stay for Xmas leave. Peggie's man, Schipoff, bust his leg weeks ago, has been cured ages, but shows no sign of going back to the front, & sits at home & abuses the English 'chocolate soldiers' to such an extent that she begins to gibber with hate and rage. I never saw such a wreck as that girl. She & Miss Howden will melt away one of these days. Miss Howden is with avowed pro-



*Ursula (right) with her mother*

Germans, the Girls, aged 29 & 23, rushed to her when the Scarborough bombardment<sup>10</sup> took place, awfully pleased, 'Miss Howden, the Germans are bombarding England & are doing splendidly. They've killed no end of people, splendid, isn't it lovely!!' 'Tact ain't it! Our concierge has gone back to the front. His regiment, the Strilka (?) was wiped out, all but 30 men, in the Soldau

disaster.<sup>11</sup> They've reformed it 400 strong again & he came to say goodbye. The footman wrote last, a month or more ago, he had had frostbite & goodness knows what, was starving & freezing in Galicia. They got green bread to eat occasionally! The feeding arrangements for this army are necessarily difficult owing to bad roads & lack of railways – but they might do better than they do. One corporal wrote to Peggie's maid, to whom he's engaged, saying, 'My poor men, nothing to eat for 4 days. We have money but there is nothing to buy. The land is a waste desert' – that is East Prussia. The Russians seem to get worse after reverse, they now say it doesn't matter if Warsaw is taken, that seems to mean that they will give it up. They have 3 million men on the E Prussian front, against one and a half million Germans, & it seems they don't understand how to deal with them at all. All their precious Grand Dukes sit at a safe distance from the front, bar Nicolai Nicolayevitch who is a good man & mystic. If he had not been in command they'd have had the Germans in Petersburg long ago. Soon after war broke out, the young Empress, who is pro-German, asked her husband to make peace. Nicky, as usual, wavered & would have done it probably. The old Empress came down like a ton of bricks

<sup>10</sup> The East coast towns of Scarborough, Hartlepool, West Hartlepool and Whitby were bombarded from the sea by the Imperial German Navy on 16th December 1914. There were 137 fatalities and 592 casualties, many of whom were civilians.

<sup>11</sup> Soldau was the German name for Działdowo, then in East Prussia, now in Poland, approximately equidistant between Warsaw and Gdansk. In late August 1914 Russia lost 110,000 men there, 20,000 killed or wounded and 90,000 taken prisoner. All artillery was lost. Two of the five corps engaged, the XIIIth and XVIth, were surrounded. Source: *An Ambassador's Memoirs*, Maurice Paléologue, Volume I, Chapter IV. <http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/memoir/FrAmbRus/pal1-04.htm>, accessed 14th November 2016.

on him & Nicolai Nicolayevitch said if he *did* make peace, he'd march on Petersburg himself with the Russian armies under his command!! All these stories about the changed Emperor & his bravery & his walking alone about Petersburg, are absolutely untrue. He skulks about surrounded by his German suite. He went to visit some wounded, escorted by Baron Fredericks, etc., etc. & the soldiers said, 'How kind he is, he takes the German officers who've been taken prisoners, around with him'. The little heir says 'I never know what to think about the war. When the Germans are beaten, Mamma cries & when the Russians are beaten Papa cries!' The German intrigues here are terrible, their chief object is to make a breach between Russia & England – they say our fleet is proved useless, our army no good, they have to fight our battles for us (& that with 48 army corps on the western front, fools!), that we are robbing them over the army contracts for them, that we are a selfish, calculating nation, that we've thrown the Belgian population into Holland<sup>12</sup> & do nothing for them. I can't tell you half the lies one meets & contradicts daily. Constantinople is a continual torment to them, goodness knows what will happen if we don't let them have it. Best way would be to make it a free town. [...] Kitchener's wisdom, in saying it would perhaps be a 3 year war, was better surely than the idiocy of these people, who promised the peasantry that all would be ended by Xmas, peace signed & all!!

WT Stead's friend Mme Novikoff, is here constantly. She is an interesting woman & has worked all her life for the entente between England & Russia. She lives in London, can't get back there now though. She's 73 & rather asthmatical, so goodness knows how she'll survive a Petersburg winter [...] I saw Harold Williams, recently, he's gone back to Warsaw again. His step-daughter, Sonia, is on one of the hospital trains & ... the boy is an ambulance man His adventures on the S...(?) were interesting. They were here a few days & are off again now. The unnecessary waste of life is appalling & the military hospitals here disgraceful. The private hospitals here are splendid, but we only get the slightly wounded, as we are so far from the front. Moscow has nearly a million wounded. They send fewer here as wounds heal so badly in this awful climate. [...]

*The Spectator*, *Nation* & all the reviews & *Punch* all come, also *Sphere* & *Illustrated London News*. I can't bear to look at the latter, awful pictures. We get a few *Echo de Paris* & *Temps* & *Illustration*, but there is no news in any of them.

The sun is shining today, first time for a couple of months, & there is plenty of snow. The Neva is not yet frozen over, it's extraordinarily late this year. It's usually

<sup>12</sup> Large numbers of Belgian refugees did indeed spend much of the war in Holland.

frozen up beginning of November. They say the shooting has changed the weather & that next summer will be laden with thunderstorms. [...] Please give my love to everyone, my home letters are usually idiotic, but one can say absolutely nothing as the censor is such a terror. The one in England doesn't seem to read your letters out to me, & they are simply stamped at the censors here, not opened, but of course don't ever comment on Russian politics when you write or I may find myself gently in prison. Did I ever tell you our butler is a secret service spy? Jolly ain't it?! He is a Pole. There are so many rules & regulations now we are in a siege state that one dare hardly breathe. I shall feel funny to be more or less free



*Russian troops in a First World War trench*

when I get home. Christmas Day was a nightmare. I was afraid the Germans would do something awful to England & was thankful not to see anything in the papers. One gets anxious. I can't bear to see these poor soldiers going off to the Front. They are so ill dressed & cared for & so reluctant to go.

Best love to you all & a Happy New Year – please share this with Mother & Diddie & everyone.

Your loving sister, Ursula

### **Petrograd January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915**

My Dear Mother,

[...] I hope that you got the letter I sent about Xmas. [...] Your last letter to me was dated Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>, since then nothing. I could hang myself frequently – but haven't done so yet! Lombard cheered us all up very much, brought back a sane & cheery picture of England. Good old British Lion wakened up at last. I'm sick about conscription, but it's [of a] limited kind &, let's hope, only for the duration of the war. It's difficult to understand what it is from the Russian papers as they muddle up & translate wrongly. So I'm waiting till the English ones come. I got *The Times* & *Westminster* of Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> yesterday. That's not bad considering the post is quite upset & mad now [...]

Tonight we had two Serbs dining here, ungrateful brutes. They began to sing the everlasting song that England has done nothing for Serbia. However, they caught it this time – nicely!

[...] Sophie & I are still as busy as ever with our refugee work. Some of the people are so nice – & some so ungrateful & rude. One day a very well dressed youth came up & some helper said quite loudly: 'Oh here is a swagger person coming up.' The poor boy said in English, 'Yes, I may be well dressed, but I've not had anything to eat for three days'. He was a student from Riga & spoke several languages fluently. I hope they've found him work. Sometimes people come in & wander round the room, staring closely at each refugee's face. They are looking for their own lost relatives. We have a crèche for kids now. They will be kept until their parents

find them & if the parents are dead or mad, the children will be trained to some sort of work. It's a splendid work & there are depots all over Russia. All funds come from home – it's called the Great Britain to Poland Fund. For Xmas day we gave them an extra meal & each a present. The men tobacco, the women tea & sugar & the kids sweets & handkies. [...] This summer Mrs B intends to go to Norway. Their country place here is just behind the Russian rear-guard, so is impossible – all the furniture was taken away & hidden & all the valuables brought to Petrograd. When I know where we are to go, I will wire you the address. We may go early in April, or perhaps before. [...] If they go to the interior of Russia they'd be starved & may never get back to Petrograd, so it's better to go to Norway. Prices of things here are abominable: chickens 14/- each; no eggs to be had; bread a dirty grey colour & disgustingly nasty. Scarcely ever any meat, no fruit or vegetables fit to eat. The poor are living on mushrooms now, instead of meat. [...] Heaps of love to you & all at Parkholme & Jimmy.

Your loving daughter,  
Ursula

### St Petersburg October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1915

My Dear Mother,

I have a chance of sending this by courier today, so hurry to scrawl a line. Hope you've had all my cards & letters so far all right. I couldn't tell you about the end of our journey before. Near the Swedish frontier at Boden we met with the German lot of exchanged prisoners – awful – & at Torula we hit on the Russian ones who were waiting to go on to Petrograd. I never saw anything so horrible & distressing. The saddest of all I think was a huge young officer, about 6' 5" or more, minus his right arm and both eyes. He looked just like a sawdust stuffed doll, so blank & queer. We spoke to many of them, poor, poor things. I believe they'll get some sort of a pension, but there is little honesty here & probably someone will steal the funds. The B's had fled from their country estate 3 weeks before I came – the danger was that the Russian army would occupy it – so far they have only dug trenches & cut down forest there. The women [are] being mobilised for trenching. They have emptied the house of all furniture of course. Mr B has frightened them all into fits with tales of revolution etc., so I found them all looking ill & wretched, full of a plan to go & live in the wilds of Russia somewhere – or else in Norway. However they have calmed down now & are quite sensible. Life is awfully complicated here – everything so dear to begin with & then the merchants make 'corners' in everything. There is no sugar, no flour, no salt, no butter, no vegetables, no meat, all in turn. At the best of times one

can only buy a bit of each thing. The bread is awful; instead of being white it is a dirty grey. For us it's all right as we always get something, but the poor don't. It's such a shame, for Russia is full of wheat & everything under the sun – the merchants intrigue & the railway people don't give waggons. One is practically in a state of siege here – funny isn't it. Of course if things get worse we shall remove ourselves to Norway or Siberia, so don't imagine we are anything more than a little uncomfy & very sad at seeing so much poverty & distress & being unable to do anything to help. Now we have the Polish refugees. The British colony has got funds from England & has huge soup kitchens at Warsaw station.



*Wounded soldiers returning from the front*

Here we feed the people twice a day. Many of them are living in railway waggons & dare scarcely leave them to rush out & get their food – they are almost witless from their suffering & many starve & die. I give every other Sunday & every Monday from 4pm – have no more free time. One has to wear a cotton frock & pinafore & a white rag to cover one's hair. There are not nearly enough people to help

but I've so little spare time & the station is an hour away from here. There are thousands of the poor refugees at the Russian depots too. They stand in the street for days & nights, waiting for help. I never saw anything like the 'waitingness' of these people. They seem to be able to suffer everything imaginable, unimaginable & yet to get through & live. The lack of organisation in every department here is fearful. They have just got a new Minister of the Interior<sup>13</sup> & he promises reforms, but one never knows if he'll carry out his promises. Don't be alarmed if you hear or read of revolution here, we shall be all right, it's bound to come, from the state of things that exist. The sufferings of the army & the people are indescribable & with a proper Government & system all could be avoided. The upper classes are in revolt now against Rasputin, the 'monk' who leads the court. I can't say more about this, but am so afraid there may be exaggerated telegrams or things in the home papers. There have been great riots in Moscow over the dearness & lack of food already. Everybody decent sympathises with the people. You can't imagine how it saddens one to see them waiting hour after hour to buy a pound of sugar, or flour or whatever it may be. Miss Goodlet says she'll have to get a second servant to go each day & wait to buy things. The Goodlet boy is a prisoner & wounded in the leg – somewhere in Bohemia. He writes for food & money – they are in great trouble about him. I bought chocolate & soup to send him. They are hard up too, so I borrowed B's typewriter & am doing the [...] translating & all I can manage to for Mr Goodlet. They are always kindness itself to me, so I'm thankful to be able to

<sup>13</sup> Alexei Khvostov (1872-1918), Russian Minister of Interior October 1915 to March 1916.

do something for them now. Sophy is busy at her hospital again. There are more wounded than ever, I think. I saw a procession of 10 men the other day, all leg-less. Everything is gigantic here & one feels such a wretch not to do more to help. However, all my free minutes are taken either for the refugees or hospital or something 'war-like', so I'm not quite idle from that point of view. They appreciate England a trifle more than they did, out here, but are mad with us that Bulgaria is on the wrong side. Some think the allies already beaten – but others are not so silly. [...]

I'm in a fearful hurry as I've a lesson to give now. Letters seem to come through all right – I've heard several times from Florence & got her sock instructions – now I wait for you to tell me how much to do from heel to beginning of toe – you should see the collection of legs I've done! There is no end I want to tell you, but I've forgotten the rest. Be quite happy about me. I may get a trifle thinner from want of food, but don't intend to select my lamp post whereon to be hanged by the revolutionaries. B has already chosen his & his wife has buried her most magnificent jewels somewhere in the garden, I believe. [...]

Must fly. Please send this to Diddie. Heaps of love to you all. Hope all are well & getting on all right,  
Yours U

### Petrograd December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1915

My Dear Mother,

Another chance to send a letter through, as usual I scurry to write no end in a few minutes. I suppose you got the last I sent through the French courier boy, as Diddie says you sent her a letter to read. I've had nothing from you for ages & only get *John Bull* & Diddie's cards regularly. [...] I write you a card & letter each alternate week. [...] If [...] did go against us, we should have to leave here quickly. Our plan is to go to the Crimea or to Siberia. You may rest assured we'd go somewhere or other out of the Hun's way! I have never got properly unpacked as the house is in a half packed up state, & from one week to another we never know what may happen. B gets fits of panic – one time it's revolution; another Sweden; another, we get no bread & meat or sugar or something for a few days & he sees us all a future row of ghastly skeletons. Why, no one knows, for there is always something to eat!! His wife has ceased to pay attention to him & I think she heartily wishes he'd go to the front, but his 'soul is too modern for warfare' poor dear! I think after the war he'll feel a great regret that he took no active part. Journalism & talking is futile now.<sup>14</sup> The cold is terrible this winter – some days one can't breathe. The frost & a cold wind do for me entirely. Now we have

<sup>14</sup> Aleksandr Nikolaevich Brianchaninov, 1874-1970, edited *Novoe Zveno*.

a lot of snow & are using sledges. We have just got rid of a coachman. He went queer in his head & ill-treated the horses & had a mania for trying to put me under every tram & military motor that passed us. We had some narrow squeaks, it was most exciting, I can tell you. It's very difficult to get new servants – only the aged & unfit remain. We have a consumptive cook, porter & butler, an epileptic yard man, an aged coachman & a new one I've not yet seen, but I guess he's no chicken. So we go on. Last night for the first time for weeks, I went to a concert with everyone. It was a Scriabin concert, *Le Divin Poème* & *Prometheus*, magnificently given by the Moscow orchestra under Koussevitzky. [...]



Women from the Putilov factory demonstrate against food shortages and more, Petrograd, 8th March 1917 (N.S.)

There's so much to say & I'm so cold I can't think. We have no wood & live in coats. The regulations here are enough to drive one mad really – everything is arranged to make life as uncomfortable as possible.

Sophy & I go every Monday to work at the refugees' soup kitchen. We get about 600 a day. All kinds, Letts, Poles, Russians, Jews – some are so rude & ungrateful & others the reverse.

One feels sorry for all. There is one dear old man, sort of apple-cheeked, white haired old person in a sheepskin outfit who is so quaint & polite. Most of the Poles want to kiss one's hands & feet as a token of thanks etc. Can imagine we English don't appreciate their ways – we give them a bowl of soup & black bread. No end of children come & many able-bodied men who don't want to work. One man came who spoke fluent American English. He had been in America, had earned money & invested in houses in Korun – of course is ruined. The wicked treachery that gave up that town – the man has been sent to penal servitude. Every Saturday, Lady Georgina goes to give out clothes to the refugees. [...] I pity the people who wear the things Sophy & I make. Prince Gorchakov has been awfully kind in giving money & clothes & material for them. Prince Michael, the anti-English son, came home recently. He shouted immediately he got into the house, at Mary, about the English, so I fled to my room until he went away. The Serbian minister was here at the time & Prince Michael could find nothing more tactful than to bellow at [the rest of this letter is missing]

### Petrograd March 18<sup>th</sup> 1917

My dear Mother,

I hope you have a fine day for your birthday & that you will have had a wire from Mrs Gosset to say we are all right here. Topsy was to send one off yesterday from the Central PO which is near her & miles from me!

Well, we've had an exciting & lovely week, & feel like boiled rags now all the fighting is over. You can't imagine the rejoicing to feel the rotten old regime is at an end & now Russia has a chance to strike out & make progress. The rows

began a week ago last Thursday, shops smashed & trams smashed. By Sunday the troops were called out to fight the people in the streets. Monday, I gave my lessons near here & couldn't get home as the police were firing on us & on our house from all the roofs around. The first moment under Machine Gun fire is unpleasant, but after a minute one only feels a faint curiosity as to whether one will get hit, [a] sort of sporting feeling I suppose. I got home at 7.30pm on Monday to find the household in hysterics & swore roundly at them all. Sophy kept her head well. Mrs B was in bed with a high fever & Mary terrified out of her wits. Tuesday – fighting all over the city, most of the troops went over to the people & only the police & their machine gun firing was dangerous. Tuesday afternoon I walked to the Foreign Office with Princess Alexander Gorchakov, widow of the brother killed last year – she had to get there to see about her sister. The FO is opposite the Winter Palace & has the Admiralty one side & the War Office the other, in the middle a huge open square. Unwittingly, we got into the storming of the Admiralty by the people – a great sight – & then the police up on the roofs firing like blazes – I'll never forget that afternoon – Princess Alexander stayed at the FO, but I took refuge in the War Office yard with some soldiers until the firing quietened down a bit, then tried to get home & fell into the taking of the Preobrazhensky barracks & more machine guns. Lots of people were killed & wounded but I got off free! Born to be ended otherwise than by gun fire evidently! I picked up a friendly soldier who was going my road, & he walked home most of the way with me. He was awfully nice & very thankful that his country was at last getting rid of the German influences in the interior. I got home Tuesday about five o'clock & at six the troops searched our house. Altogether they searched it five times because somewhere near the police were hidden & firing on the people & they couldn't find them. It was a trifle alarming the first time, for about 20 soldiers came, left sentries at the outer gates & doors & the rest came up & stood with revolvers & guns at our heads whilst more of them searched for police & arms. Needless to say they found no police & only got B's revolver & sword. Just as they were going away, the police began firing heavily on our house & wounded a lot of people in the street. Of course the crowd swarmed in here & we had to bandage & patch several up & 'phone for ambulances. The firing went on for 2 hours & then armoured motors came up & started counter firing. Lord, the row they made! The people were terrified & took refuge in the ballroom which looks on the garden, but they began firing there too! Well, in the end we sent them out through the back ways & settled down to peace. Then another search party turned up, some of them drunk, & gave us a very bad



*The former family home in Ulitsa Bolshaya Monetnaya, St Petersburg, photographed in 1959*

time. They dragged Nurse down to the cellar & threatened to kill her if she didn't give them wine. Afterwards we found out that they were not real soldiers, but thieves dressed in stolen uniforms. There are lots about as the people opened all the prisons. At the fortress of Peter & Paul they liberated political prisoners who had been shut in dark cells since Nicholas began his awful reign. They could not bear the light & had to have handkerchiefs over their eyes, poor broken things. All the politicals in Siberia & England are recalled, including Prince Kropotkin. It's so funny to have liberty of speech, conscience, religion & press. The people look so different. I never saw people or troops behave better, awfully dignified & helpful – hardly lost their heads at all & on the whole, considering what a huge Revolution it is, it's been very bloodless. Most of the killed were killed by those secret police brutes, and a few officers who refused to join the people were killed by their men. On Friday, Sophie & I walked to the Duma & on our way saw a crowd, which had just caught a policeman and his gun. They wanted to kill him

but the Cossacks rode at them & rescued the man & took him off to the barracks. Our house is guarded at present, as one is not quite sure about the thieves & hooligans & murderers who were set free. They have caught & shot a lot already. The people burnt down the Law Courts, so now they are temporarily to be held opposite our house at the Lyceum, one of the largest military schools here. It is near the Fortress &, as all the members of the late government & other beauties are sent up there, this is the handiest place for the Law Courts to be. I'm so awfully glad not to have missed the Revolution, it's been grand! & I even enjoyed the firing once I got accustomed to it. We know now where all the English machine guns had disappeared to – the police had them by instructions from Protopopov, the Minister of the Interior – brute!<sup>15</sup> The Emperor, late Emperor I should say, has behaved fairly well – as a man, we are sorry for him but thank God he is no longer in command here. As for her – she deserves hanging – but suppose she'll be allowed to go on living, bad woman that she is.

All this revolution was supposed to have come off just a year ago, but the people were not strong enough then. We were all prepared for it then & I wrote Diddie to tell her not to let you be alarmed whatever you heard. For months past we have known we were living on the edge of a volcano & hardly expected to get through. But the people have behaved justly & not lost their heads against the aristocracy as in the French Revolution. It's a fine Nation, & if only the new Government is strong enough they ought to hurry up with the war, finish that well & get on with home reforms.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Protopopov (1866–1918), Russian Minister of the Interior September 1916 to March 1917.

We are not sure if it's to be a Republic or what as yet – only know that Nicholas has abdicated himself & Alexis, & given the throne to his brother Michael who has refused & given it to the people. I suppose they'll all land up in Denmark for the present & England & Paris in the future. It's so funny everyone is wholeheartedly revolutionary; the doings of the late Empress have so revolted everyone.

21<sup>st</sup> [March 1917]

Haven't had time to finish this before. I went to the Goodlet's on Sunday & heard about Bryan's doings. He is only 14 & is a boy scout & as such was called out for first-aid & to keep order. He has had a splendid time. He is going to write an account for BP's paper<sup>16</sup> at home. I'm to type it for him so you must get it. I'll let you know when we send it off, or will send you a typed copy if I can. Things are quiet again & the men back at work. Friday, the funeral of the victims takes place, 2700 of them – it's few, really. The Baltic Fleet was terrible – they killed 250 of their officers because they didn't know what the row was about in Petrograd. I knew several of the officers killed – it's so sad.

Don't be alarmed if you suddenly read that we have another revolution – a counter one from the reactionary party. It's expected but here it's usually the unexpected that happens. I swear I won't shove myself under machine guns again. Poor Topsy was fired at by a drunken workman, but did a hop & sprint out of the way. She saw worse horrors than I did even, but we intend to forget that part of the programme. What brilliant successes Baghdad & Peronne<sup>17</sup> & so on. Our star is going up here at last. They'll understand & respect the English in the end. [...]

I sent a prepaid wire to Diddie to say all well, & to have news of all of you. Letters won't turn up at present, as everything is so upset. [...]

I can't help grinning when you say in your letter stay here, it's 'safer'. Lord, if you'd only seen me on the Palace Plain with bullets whizzing around last Tuesday!!! Anyway we are glad it's over, the past few months' tensions have been simply terrible – always one felt one went out & might never get home alive. Now all is well & even if there are slight troubles you needn't bother. [...]

Please share this, I'm awfully busy helping B with his writing.

Best love to you all & take care of yourselves, your loving Daughter, Ursula

**Petrograd April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1917**

My dear Mother,

It's blue moons since I heard from you. Your last was dated Feb 15 & I got it in the middle of the Revolution – but I heard from Diddie, written Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, & she gave me good news of you. [...]

I ought to write to Peggie but have no time. B is simply up to the eyes in writing & I am typing & correcting proofs till my head spins. All is going on quietly & well here, people are gradually settling down to ordinary life again. I think all danger of massacre of aristocrats is now over. It was touch & go, same as with separate peace, but the Government is strong & has a second Lloyd George in the person of Kerensky, Minister of Justice. He is a Labour member & very fine, has worked like a horse – so has Guchkov, minister of marine & army. I saw him 2 days ago & must remember the conversation to tell you. It was extraordinarily interesting, all the inside history of the last 2 months. I hope no one at home is pitying the Empress – she's the worst



*Sophie, Mrs Brianchaninov and Ursula in Norway*

bad egg ever hatched. Nicholas II was weak & indifferent & badly to blame, but he wasn't an active traitor as she was. It's said the government wants to ship them all off to England, for the documentary proofs against her are such that if the people could get her they'd tear her to bits. To think she's partly English – disgusting. You must not imagine I'm exaggerating or repeating rumours, we *know* here – at home no one can faintly guess what we've lived through since about Xmas. It's so funny now they have liberty of speech & press. Of course, the Huns take advantage, & print goodness knows what lies & the pacifists also, but in general the papers are so pleased to say what they like that it is quite comic. The police are replaced by militia & there is more order in the streets than before. The majority of the police have been sent to the front now. Don't imagine police in our sense. The police system here was outrageous. A body of rascals who had to be bribed at every turn, no more like our polite & helpful police than I'm like a rhinoceros! It's a good job they've not followed the French revolution as regards religious matters – they are such a mystic people that would be impossible.

We still have deep snow here but it's thawing [...]. Mary is much better & has gone to school again, but has to be very careful not to catch cold. She is horrified at the idea that she may lose her title & money, it's quite too comic! Sophie is preparing to become a housemaid in England, asks me to find her a job. She will make a very good & clean maid. It may come to their having to earn their own living if money & land are all confiscated by the people. I hope they won't be though, for the girls' sakes.

Best love, your loving daughter Ursula. □

16 Robert Baden-Powell, 1st Baron Baden-Powell, founder and first Chief Scout of The Boy Scouts Association and founder of the Girl Guides.

17 Presumably Péronne in the Somme department of Picardie, France.



# Great Britain–Russia Society

## Summary of Guest Speakers: New Year 2017

*White Russian Refugees in Constantinople 1918-23*

Edward Charlton-Jones

Thursday 19th January 2017, 6.30pm for 7.00pm

*The Life of Boris Pasternak: A drama documentary film presented by the producer*

Nicholas Kullmann

Monday 30th January 2017, 6.15pm for 6.30pm

*Russia and the Revolutions of 1917*

Professor Peter Waldron

Thursday 16th February 2017, 6.30pm for 7.00pm

*The Soviet Economy 1917-1991: What have we learned about its past? Might it have a future?*

Professor Emeritus Mark Harrison

Thursday 2nd February 2017, 6.30pm for 7.00pm

*Russia's Place in the Structure of the World Economy and Trade Past and Present*

Dr Michael Borshchevsky

Wednesday 15th March 2017, 6.30pm for 7.00pm

*Russians in London from Tudor Times up to the Present Day*

Natasha Dissanayake

Monday 27th March 2017, 6.15pm for 6.30pm

*Reminiscences of a Cold War Kremlinologist*

Martin Nicholson

Wednesday 12th April 2017, 6.30pm for 7.00pm

*The Russian Revolution: Did it need to happen and what does it tell us about today's Russia?*

Sir Anthony Brenton KCMG

Thursday 27th April 2017, 6.30pm for 7.00pm

All talks are at Pushkin House, 5a Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2TA  
Please note the two variations above on the usual start time for our Talks of 6.30pm for 7.00pm

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## Great Britain-Russia Society Traditional Russian Old New Year Party

*at the Civil Service Club, 13-15 Great Scotland Yard, SW1A 2HJ*

*on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2017, 6:30pm for 7:00pm*

There will be a three course à la carte menu &

live Russian music

£25 per person

inclusive of half a bottle of house wine *or* mineral water and soft drinks

For all talks and for the Russian Old New Year Party, visit our website for more information  
and to book places for yourself and your guests

[www.gbrussia.org](http://www.gbrussia.org)