

FORGOTTEN BRITISH PLACES IN PETROGRAD/LENINGRAD

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The association of the British with St Petersburg goes back virtually to the first days of the city, but it was truly cemented when the city became in 1723 the empire's trading centre and thereafter the home of the British Factory. The British presence in St Petersburg is perhaps today most obviously commemorated in the relatively recently restored names of the English Embankment and the English Prospect and, with respect to specific buildings, in the English Church itself, House No. 56 on the English Embankment, which was originally acquired by the British community over 250 years ago, although sadly, it is now no longer a place of worship but a rather boring souvenir shop. The English shops which flourished at the end of the eighteenth century in various parts of the city and in particular the longest-lasting, the English Shop at the Admiralty end of Nevskij Prospekt, have long since disappeared, although British commercial interests are making a relatively strong comeback. The famous pre-October factories and industrial enterprises of Thornton and Baird were inevitably sovietized and their names lost, although the *Berdov most* recalls the factory's site and the saying "kak u Berda" possibly continues to have some resonance among the ever diminishing number of Petersburg *starožili*. There may be some in their number who still recall the location of the British Embassy which figured quite prominently in the events of the February and October Revolutions. Since 1863 the British government had rented from the Saltykov family most of House No. 4 on Palace Embankment by the Troitskij Bridge and the Field of Mars. It now forms, together with No. 2, known as the Beckoj House, the St Petersburg State Academy of Culture, but during the Second World War it housed a military hospital.

That seemingly irrelevant fact links it with a more famous building on Nevskij where a hospital was also established, but during the First World War. The Belosel'skij-Belozerskij Palace, situated by the Anichkov Bridge, is well-known to Petersburgers and foreign visitors alike, deceiving some into thinking that Shtakenshneider's Baroque revivalist reconstruction of 1846 is the genuine (Rastrelli) article. Up to the October Revolution it was widely known as the Sergeevskij Palace, since in 1884 it had come into the ownership of Grand Duke Sergej Aleksandrovich, the brother of Alexander III. After his murder, however, in 1905, his widow gave it to his nephew, the Grand Duke Dmitrij Pavlovich, and it was as the 'Dmitri Palace' that it became known to the British during the two years when it housed the Anglo-Russian Hospital. The palace is inevitably described in imperial Russian, Soviet and modern Russian guidebooks; its imperial owners even find a place in K.K. Rotikov's *Drugoj Peterburg*, but only in the most recent times has there been a mention of its brief existence as the Anglo-Russian Hospital. That this is so is due largely to the efforts of its English historian, who called his book, published in 1982, "the forgotten hospital".¹ The late Michael Harmer, whose father had served as a surgeon in the hospital, was ultimately successful in having a commemorative plaque unveiled in the palace in 1996, which has alerted a few Petersburg guides and authors to its erstwhile existence, while not preserving them from error.²

The Anglo-Russian Hospital, however, was itself preceded by another equally "forgotten" British hospital, about which a few words should be said at the outset to avoid possible confusion. The British in St Petersburg responded to news of the outbreak of war by embarking on a series of voluntary aid initiatives. The wife of the British ambassador, the formidable Lady Georgina Buchanan, immediately organized a so-called Feeding Point for many of the refugees flooding into Petrograd and this was followed by a Maternity Home. In September 1914 Lady Georgina was largely responsible for the opening of the British Colony Hospital for Wounded Russian Soldiers (some-

¹ Michael Harmer, *The Forgotten Hospital*, Chichester 1982.

² There is a paragraph in the essay by M. P. Tsel'iadt, "Dvorec Belosel'skikh-Belozerskikh" in *Dvorcy Nevskogo prospekta*, St Petersburg 2002, p. 243, where the hospital is called the "Anglo-russkij lazaret", and the photograph on p. 245 is not of Lady Buchanan but of Lady Sybil Grey. See also the recent useful guidebook entitled *Sankt-Peterburg na perekrestke kul'tur: Angliiskij maršrut*, compiled by N. Karetnikova, R. Pavlova and A. Smirnova, SPb. 2003, p. 114.

times also known as the King George V Hospital).³ The hospital was located in a wing of the large Pokrovskii Hospital on the Bol'shoi Prospekt on Vasil'evskii Island. Originally conceived as a convalescent home for officers, it soon admitted only other ranks. The patients marvelled at the chintz curtains, bright bedspreads, and crisp white linen and a degree of English comfort not to be found in other hospitals. The hospital continued its work until June 1917, when worsening conditions in the city led to its closure. At the beginning of January 1918 the Anglo-Russian Hospital in the Dmitrievskii Palace followed suit.

The Anglo-Russian Hospital had a much greater resonance than the British Colony Hospital, not least because it was established with the full support of the British government and with a fanfare of publicity in the *London Times*. In August 1915 a Committee was formed under the patronage of HM Queen Alexandra, aunt of Tsar Nicholas II, and under the Presidency of the Earl of Cromer. Its hundred-strong membership bristled with Lords and Lord Mayors, Field Marshalls and Members of Parliament, to say nothing of the Prime Minister and both Archbishops. The first list of subscribers to the appeal was headed by the King and Queen.

It has been suggested that a hospital was seen as a sort of compromise gesture for the military aid which the Russians requested but which the Allies were incapable of providing, but it was a proposal which struck a responsive chord in the British public, moved by accounts of the sufferings of the Russian armies during the great military disasters of the previous autumn. It is difficult to say with any certainty with whom the idea originated but its realization is most insistently and justly associated with the name of Lady Muriel Paget (1876-1938), who had already over the past decade shown her willingness to be involved in good causes and whose life hereafter was to be almost inextricably entwined with Russia and other Slavonic nations.⁴ Lady Muriel, who was the Honorary Organizing Secretary of the Executive Committee, decided that she would go to Russia to take charge of the administration of the hospital but at the last moment she

³ Meriel Buchanan, *The Dissolution of an Empire*, London 1932, pp. 112-113, 118-126. See also Janet St Clair, "The British Hospital Petrograd", *The Nursing Times* (18 September 1915). (Miss St Clair was a member of the nursing staff).

⁴ See Wilfrid Blunt, *Lady Muriel: Lady Muriel Paget, Her Husband, and Her Philanthropic Work in Central and Eastern Europe*, London 1962.

fell ill, and a temporary replacement had to be found. Lady Sybil Grey, daughter of Albert, Fourth Earl Grey, was chosen to lead the advance party to Petrograd in October and she was to prove a more than competent replacement until Lady Muriel's eventual arrival in April 1916.

It fell to Lady Sybil to begin the search for suitable accommodation for the hospital. The Stroganov Palace was rejected and it was only with some reluctance and no real alternatives that the Sergeevskii Palace was accepted. Considerable alterations to the first floor, the *piano nobile*, had to be undertaken before suitable space could be created for nearly two hundred beds, and the hospital was still not ready when the main unit of medical and nursing staff arrived in early November. It was only on 31 January 1916 that the hospital was at last officially opened by the Dowager Empress and a Union Jack fluttered proudly from the flagpole on the roof of the palace. A week earlier an early nineteenth-century silver-gilt icon of St Ouar had been presented to the hospital by a group of Russian well-wishers: it now stands in the Small Board Room of the British Red Cross Society in Grosvenor Crescent in London.⁵ The hospital's commandant, Dr Andrew Fleming, left a detailed description of the way the palace had been adapted for its new medical role:

The hospital, as completed, had accommodation for a hundred and eighty-eight beds, and these at a pinch could be increased to two hundred. The Concert Hall with the two large reception rooms all opening on each other, constituted the three main wards. These rooms large, light and lofty, with great windows going up to the ceiling, made ideal wards and gave accommodation for 150 beds without overcrowding. Opening out of them or in close proximity were a linen and duty room, bath room, lavatories, and a large dressing room with four tables and with hot and cold water laid on, where all the daily dressings were done, as is the custom on the Continent. Beyond the dressing room, and with an entrance opposite the main staircase, was the patients' dining room, and beyond this again three smaller wards which contained the balance of the beds. The operating theatre with adjoining anaesthetic and sterilising rooms, the X-ray department and the bacteriological laboratory were on the same floor but in an isolated part of the building. A large room beyond the laboratory was partitioned into three for two of the surgeons and the two dressers, who always slept on the premises. The offices were, perhaps, the worst feature of the whole building, being cramped and inconvenient. A part of the passage adjoining the chapel and between the theatre and the last small ward was set aside for the den-

⁵ M. Harmer, *Forgotten Hospital*, p. 69 (reproductions on pp. 70-71).

tist and his outfit. On the ground floor to the right of the main entrance was the dispensary, and in the basement were the kitchens where also provision was made for a carpenter's shop and a store room for soiled linen.⁶

Over the beds were plaques commemorating the names of individual donors or, more often, individual British towns and cities who had provided the money.⁷ The beds endowed by HM the Queen and by the city of Newcastle-on-Tyne feature in a series of twelve views of the hospital which were produced for sale at the astonishing Anglo-Russian Exhibition which was organized at the Grafton galleries in May 1917 by the indefatigable Lady Muriel as part of the sustained British fund-raising on behalf of the hospital.⁸ The postcards show also the wards, the hospital staff, the wounded in the wards and in the dining room.⁹

After a slow start, the number of casualties arriving at the hospital grew inexorably to near constant capacity, despite the fact that the Hospital admitted only the most seriously wounded. The British staff nevertheless felt that their presence was much more needed at the front, but it was only after Lady Muriel's arrival that the long-hoped-for field hospital was realized. On 26 May the mobile field hospital (*lazaret*) of 100 beds and the casualty clearing station (*peredovoj otryad*) were blessed in an impressive ceremony attended by members of the imperial family and departed for Volynia a few days later.¹⁰ In Petrograd the Anglo-Russian Hospital continued its work, although the situation changed considerably for the worse with the revolutio-

⁶ Andrew M. Fleming and Geoffrey Jefferson, *The Work of the Anglo-Russian Hospital (from September, 1915, to June, 1917)*, London 1917, p. 9. See also Stephen Paget, *A Short Account of the Anglo-Russian Hospital Petrograd*, London 1917.

⁷ Lady Paget, visiting Leningrad in 1926, was delighted to find that "the shields, the gifts of various towns which had presented beds during the war, had also been preserved" (Lady Muriel Paget, "Some Pictures of Soviet Russia. V: Hospitals and Clinics", *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1927). Are they still preserved somewhere in the city?

⁸ A 123-page catalogue, *Russian Exhibition, Descriptive of the Industries, Art, Literature, and Customs of Russia* (London 1917), listing hundreds of exhibits in seven sections, was produced; there were accompanying concerts of Russian music plays by Chekhov and Tolstoi, a series of lectures, and a Russian restaurant.

⁹ *The Anglo-Russian Hospitals with the Russian Army. A Series of Twelve Views Reproduced in Photogravure* (London 1917).

¹⁰ On the work of the field hospital, see W. Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, pp. 70-100; M. Harmer, *Forgotten Hospital*, pp. 77-99.

nary upheaval and chaos that 1917 brought. The wounded now admitted were civilians as well as soldiers, caught in the street fighting which was often observed by members of the Hospital's staff from the windows of the palace.¹¹ The Hospital itself was attacked on the evening of 25 March, following claims that a machine gun was mounted on the roof. The notorious Army Order No 1, issued on 14 March 1917, was seen as a contributing factor in the subsequent disruption in the discipline, smooth running and administration of the hospital and its closure seemed inevitable. The Chairman of the Hospital committee in London, Lord Cheylesmore, might write as late as 28 November 1917 that "the question of the withdrawal of the Hospital, under the conditions now prevailing in Russia, has been seriously considered by the Committee, but they have been advised that it should remain for the present as a practical demonstration of our desire to help our Ally",¹² but on 18 January 1918, the new commandant of the Hospital evacuated his staff from Petrograd into Finland.

Lady Muriel was not in Petrograd at that time; she had left the city on 3 November, four days before the outbreak of the October Revolution, to rejoin the field hospital which she had visited several times previously and which had by then moved to Odessa. She finally reached England at the end of May after a most improbable journey that took her by train from Odessa to Kiev, Moscow, and through Siberia. This was not, however, her farewell to Russia, far from it. Russia, in its new guise as the Soviet Union, and Petrograd, soon to be renamed as Leningrad, were to loom large in the remaining two decades of her life. It is Lady Muriel's 'forgotten' activity in Leningrad between 1926 and 1938 that connects the 'half-forgotten' Anglo-Russian Hospital with the two other 'forgotten' British places still to be highlighted in this paper.

The parlous state of central and eastern Europe following the end of the First World War was to engage Lady Muriel's prodigious energy, passion, philanthropy, and organizing abilities to the full. The relief work she organized in the Crimea, in Slovakia, in the Baltic States,

¹¹ In this context note Stephen Paget's postscript to his account: "I was so unlucky as to leave Petrograd a week before the Revolution. In those amazing days of the Revolution, it is good to know that the Anglo-Russian Hospital took in some of the wounded from the street-fighting" (S. Paget, *Short Account*, p. 15).

¹² *The Work of the Anglo-Russian Hospital*, p. 4.

and in Rumania can only form a backdrop, however, to what became the dominant concern of her last years – the relief of British citizens marooned in Soviet Russia. The dissolution of the British community following the October Revolution is a story still to be told, although there are accounts of the fates of individual families returning to Britain that serve to some extent as templates.¹³ There was, however, a considerable number of unfortunates who could not or would not leave Russia; they were to become the object of what has been called “the last, the most modest, yet perhaps the most remarkable of all her humanitarian projects”.¹⁴ She was not, however, the first to be aware of the problem – and it would be remiss not to mention here the great courage and resourcefulness that was shown by the former matron of Lady Georgina Buchanan’s British Colony Hospital, Violet Froom. Mrs Froom’s efforts in the years immediately following the Revolution on behalf of some of the “well over as thousand English people in Petrograd alone, many of them ill, old and destitute, with nobody to care for them” (and her generally remarkable story) was later told by Lady Buchanan’s daughter, Muriel.¹⁵ She struggled on until May 1923, when Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations hit a new low and she was obliged to leave Petrograd for the last time. It was about this time that Lady Muriel’s attention was first directed to the plight of her remaining fellow-countrymen in Petrograd.

On 3 March 1924 Thomas Preston, the British Official Agent in what was now become Leningrad within weeks of Lenin’s death, wrote to Lady Muriel, drawing her attention to “quite a number of British subjects here who are in the most deplorable plight” and proposing that a home should be opened “for ten or more confirmed invalids” and daily dinners supplied for a further twenty.¹⁶ His plea fell

¹³ Three such accounts, published at different periods, are: *The Memoirs of James Whishaw* (London 1935); Herbert Swann, *Home on the Neva: A Life of a British Family in Tsarist St Petersburg - and after the Revolution* (London 1968); *In the Mind’s Eye: The Memoirs of Dame Elizabeth Hill*, ed. Jean Stafford Smith (Lewes 1999).

¹⁴ W. Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, p. 217.

¹⁵ M. Buchanan, “The Story of an Englishwoman”, in her *Victorian Gallery*, London 1956, pp. 103-145.

¹⁶ Leeds Russian Archive, University of Leeds, Ms. 1405, Paget Collection, Distressed British Subjects in Russia Box (The extremely rich Paget collection is sorted into boxes without, as yet, folio numbers). Preston, who had been British Vice-Consul in Ekaterinburg between 1913 and 1919, was the author of the very interesting memoirs *Before the Curtain* (London 1950).

on fertile ground and Lady Muriel embraced the cause with her customary zeal. In 1926 she visited Leningrad and wrote movingly for *The Daily Telegraph* of the fifty or so "families of British nationality who are living in terrible conditions".¹⁷ A British Subjects in Russia Relief Fund was set up at this time, but it was only in 1930, subsequent to a further visit by Lady Muriel after a four-year gap, when the Fund was transformed into an Association, that the real work of effective on-the-spot aid began. Lady Muriel embarked on seven years of frequent visits to Leningrad (sometimes three times in a year) to see her British charges, who were now widely referred to as the D.B.S. (Distressed British Subjects).¹⁸ She also initiated a ceaseless fundraising and publicity campaign in the English press: there is in the D.B.S. archive a fascinating book of press cuttings which is evidence of the success she had in keeping the D.B.S. in the public eye. In the same archive there is a detailed document, consisting of extracts from the Committee minutes over the same period, which graphically follows the triumphs and disasters encountered by Lady Muriel and her team in Leningrad and identifies further 'forgotten' British places.

In 1930 it was finally conceded that there was little chance of repatriating many of the remaining British subjects and that it was necessary to build a home for some of them. Initially, rapid progress was made: the Soviet authorities agreed to give a large piece of land, rent-free at Tsarskoe, then Detskoe, Selo, for the building and a British architect was commissioned to produce plans for the wooden building to be erected. Professor Patrick Abercrombie's plans for what was called "a hostel or almshouse", showing an impressive ensemble of buildings around a courtyard, were duly published but never realized.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lady Muriel Paget, "Some Pictures of Soviet Russia. V- Hospitals and Clinic", *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1927.

¹⁸ Reader Bullard, who became British Consul-General in Leningrad in July 1931, said there were few DBS in Moscow but (over-)estimated that there were some 144 in Leningrad (*Inside Stalin's Russia: The Diaries of Reader Bullard 1930-1934*, edited by Julian and Margaret Bullard, Charlbury 2000), pp. 7, 14.

¹⁹ "British Hostel near Leningrad: Professor Abercrombie's Proposed Design", *The Architects' Journal*, 18 March 1931, pp. 408-411. "In appearance, the intention is to avoid the Colonial look which timber buildings easily acquire, and to aim at a somewhat unusual combination of Russian Byzantine architecture with a tinge of Early Victorianism" (*ibidem*, p. 409).

For reasons which are not at all clear from the Minutes, there was to be a change in both site and style of projected building. On 12 June it was simply reported that "the proposed site at Sosnovka was ideal" and soon a new more modest building, henceforth known as the 'datcha', was being discussed.²⁰ The two-acre site was not too far from Murino (another forgotten 'British place' from pre-Revolutionary days described by me in a recent paper):²¹ nothing of course remains of the dacha, which is to the south of the large wooded park (park Sosnovka) and is now overbuilt by modern housing blocks.²² The original intention was to import a sectional building from England, but by October Lady Muriel reported that "after long negotiations she signed a Contract, in which Torgsin [the official agency for trade with foreigners - AC] agreed to be entirely responsible for the building of a ten roomed house, with glassed-in verandah, cellar etc. on the site already agreed upon, for 7,500 Roubles - about £780".²³ Completion was promised for early 1932, but the optimism was misplaced and only in the Minutes for 22 June 1934 do we read that "the Datcha is now habitable & Miss Ferrell has arrived there to convalesce".²⁴

It was during the long months when completion of the dacha was seemingly endlessly postponed that there appeared in the Minutes the first mention of my third 'forgotten British place' in Leningrad. Between 1930 and 1932, Lady Muriel had been given office space in the the British Consulate, which was then housed in House No 26, Flat 16 (adjacent to the present House of Books) on Prospekt 25 Oktjabrja, the former Nevskij Prospekt, but this was patently inadequate for the welfare activities of her Association. At the beginning of May 1932 Lady Muriel reported that she had taken a large flat in the centre of Leningrad on a yearly contract and that she hoped it would become

²⁰ Ms 1405, Distressed British Subjects Box, Extracts from Minutes of Meetings, f. 5.

²¹ "English Prospects on the Vyborg Side of St Petersburg in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", a paper delivered at the conference 450 Years of Anglo-Russian Relations held at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, on 30 August 2003 and due to appear in a future issue of *Rossica*.

²² E. L. Aleksandrova, *Ostrov Rus v Litorinovom more. Istoričeskoe prošloje severnykh okrestnostej Sankt-Peterburga*, St Petersburg 2000, pp. 139-140; *Sankt-Peterburg Petrograd Leningrad: enciklopedičeskij spravočnik*, Moscow 1992, p. 587.

²³ Ms 1405, Minutes, f. 6.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 10.

the focus of the Association's activities.²⁵ It would, moreover, provide a much-needed room for her permanent representative, Miss Dorothea Daunt (d. 1975), a Quaker who had taken part in the Famine Relief Mission to South Russia in 1922-25 and who proved an exceptional and resourceful woman during the three years (1931-34) she spent in Leningrad.²⁶ Lady Muriel described the flat as

so spacious that, had it not been Swedish property, it would have been scheduled by the Government to house 150 people. I cannot get over our amazing good fortune. Living in comfort makes the whole difference to Miss Daunt, and to myself when I am in Leningrad. We can never be too grateful to the Swedish Consul for all the trouble he has taken to have it completely done up. The luxuries include a frigidaire, a Bechstein grand in good condition, comfortable sofas, armchairs and other furniture, and electric light. We also have use of the garage.²⁷

The grand house of the Swedish Embassy was No 64 on the English Embankment, a few doors away from the English Church, closed since the expulsion of the Rev. B.S. Lombard in 1918. Sometimes known as the house of Sof'ja Lindes, an extremely rich former owner, it had become the Swedish Embassy early in the twentieth century and after the Revolution housed the Swedish Consulate: on its pediment, the Swedish coat-of-arms, designed by the Petersburg architect A. A. Grubbe, are still to be seen.²⁸ The flat, however, was No. 3 on the second floor of the building in the courtyard, 36 Krasnaja ulica (Galernaja). It was to become the new heart of the British community, which was but a pale shadow and parody of what it had been at the height of its influence but as never before in need of moral and material support.

The flat was a social and welfare centre, a lunching club, a medical centre. By the end of 1933 regular weekly visits from a doctor (in fact, two Dr Bells, man and wife and British subjects) and a dentist (Russian) were organized; there was a dispensary, stocked with drugs brought in from England and Finland; a so-called working guild was

²⁵ Ibidem, f. 7.

²⁶ Bullard much enjoyed the company of Miss Daunt but said of Lady Paget that "she is a kind steam-roller, but I prefer not to be in her track" (*Inside Stalin's Russia*, p. 16; and see Index).

²⁷ Quoted in W. Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, p. 255.

²⁸ T. A. Solov'eva, *K pričalam Angliiskoj naberežnoj*, Spb. 1998, pp. 69-72; information in letter from Sergej Gorbatenko, KGIOP, St Petersburg, 9 March 2002.

formed, the members of which, both D.B.S.s and visitors, held sewing parties, made and repaired clothes. Lady Muriel, aided by a secretary and a book-keeper, distributed food parcels and rations (*paiki*) and lent an untiringly sympathetic ear to the tales of woe and need: on one occasion she noted that "I interviewed 35 of our people for 5 minutes each the day before leaving, almost everyone of whom presented difficult problems. None of these or the remaining 40 living in Leningrad who have Russian relations dare go to the British Consulate so that our organisation is the only means they have of obtaining assistance and communicating with the Consul".²⁹ On New Year's Day 1936 a huge party was given for some eighty-seven D.B.S.s: Christmas trees were decorated, useful presents of clothing were distributed, games were played and abundant food provided. On this occasion as on so many others, Lady Muriel was the inspiration, the true life and soul of the party.

Meanwhile at Sosnovka things were also on the up and up after the initial disappointment with building delays. The appointment in early 1934 of Mrs Fanny Morley (1872-1947), a trained nurse, as matron proved crucial.³⁰ She was to be Sosnovka's Mrs Froom. Mrs Morley, habitually dressed in her uniform of grey faced with blue, designed and also worn by Lady Muriel herself during her visits, brought order and discipline and great humanity to the running of the dacha. "She never makes any fuss; every instruction carried out to the letter; great loyalty and devotion to duty, and nothing ever too much trouble".³¹ The number of permanent residents grew from the original four to over ten, as well as Mrs Morley's daughter with her two children. Most of them had little or no English and Lady Paget reported in the summer of 1937 that "everyone has to talk English at meals, Mr Healey's fine being that anyone who breaks the rule has to take the pig [called 'Prince' and recently rescued from a circus! - A.C.] three times round the garden".³² In October 1936, one of the London

²⁹ Ms 1405, memorandum, dated 8 April 1935.

³⁰ Mrs Morley, who had worked at Newnham College, Cambridge, for a number of years travelled out to Russia to be near to her daughter May, the wife of a Russian nobleman, Baron Arkadij Tizengauzen, who had been sent to the gulag in 1928 and was posthumously rehabilitated in 1989. See the documents in the Morley Family Papers, Leeds Russian Archive, Ms 782/127-56.

³¹ W. Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, p. 271.

³² Ms. 1405, Distressed British Subjects Box, Report of Lady Paget, dated 13 July 1937.

newspapers, *The Daily Sketch*, published a full page of photographs of life at Sosnovka, showing residents on the sunlit verandah and at table, and several of Lady Muriel herself, including one where she sits by a veritable cornucopia of fruit and vegetables gathered from the garden.³³ The garden was one of the success stories: from the unpromising sandy soil, heavily manured and watered with the help of a hired Russian gardener, they were able to grow a wide array of potatoes, onions, carrots, spinach, turnips, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, as well as apples and pears; they kept chickens for eggs. The intention was to make both Sosnovka and the flat self-sufficient and they even received enquiries from Torgsin about selling their excess produce.

Although life in Leningrad was desperately hard and there were numerous frustrations, difficulties, and palpably increasing tension, life at Sosnovka could not but seem an oasis of peace, a little English island where order and reason, decency and rituals were carefully preserved. Even modest idylls, however, come to an end and already in late 1937 Lady Muriel was facing the possibility of withdrawing from Leningrad and setting up a small colony in the Russian-speaking part of Estonia. She paid what was to be her last visit to Russia in October 1937; on 16 June 1938 she died in England, having suffered from cancer for over eight years.³⁴ In the intervening months the Soviet authorities had decided for reasons of national defence and security to close Leningrad to all foreigners. The British Consulate was closed on 15 March and moved to Moscow; the Swedish Consulate, which occupied the first floor of No 36 Krasnaja, followed suit on 15 May. The Association was allowed to continue to occupy the flat until the end of June and it was left to Mrs Morley to supervise the shutting down of both the flat and Sosnovka and the evacuation of members of her ailing flock to Estonia. Lady Muriel bombarded her with letters, detailing what to do with the furniture, the linen, the motor vehicles,³⁵ but it was Mrs Morley who bore all the responsibility “with a sang-

³³ “Home for Needy Britons in Russia: Woman Who Works for their Comfort in a Forest Glade”, *Daily Sketch*, 12 October 1936, p. 12.

³⁴ A moving obituary was written by Robert Byron for *The Times* (21 June 1938); it is reproduced in W. Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, pp. 289-91.

³⁵ See the letter of 29 April 1938, Morley Family Papers, Ms 782/38.

froid that was truly remarkable”.³⁶ There is a wonderful photograph of Mrs Morley, standing with her interpreter Rose Healey in front of the house and holding a Union Jack, with the handwritten caption ‘The last Britishers in Leningrad June 1938, leaving Sosnovka’.³⁷

The most detailed description of Lady Muriel’s work and of life at the flat on Krasnaja ulica and the dacha at Sosnovska was published soon after her death in a book dedicated to her memory by Una Pope-Hennessy.³⁸ Visitors from Britain who might help, with finance or publicity, the work of the Paget Mission had been actively encouraged (Lady Muriel entertained H. G. Wells to lunch in 1936, for instance); and Dame Una and her husband had been among the last to have stayed in the flat. What had been the ‘secret city’ for the novelist Hugh Walpole soon became the ‘closed city’ for Dame Una and the British. Fortunately, the concluding words of her book in which she expressed the view that the Paget Mission’s “expulsion from Leningrad means the severance of the last of the many friendly English ties that have linked London and Petersburg together through centuries”³⁹ were not in the course of time to prove correct.⁴⁰

³⁶ The words of the British Consul, Mr Macrae, who came from Moscow to help her final departure from Leningrad on 22 June 1938 (Ms 782/40).

³⁷ Ms 782/105.

³⁸ Una Pope-Hennessy, *The Closed City: Impressions of a Visit to Leningrad*, London 1938, pp. 41-64.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

⁴⁰ I avail myself of this opportunity to express my gratitude to Mr R. D. Davies, keeper of the Leeds Russian Archive in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, for his help during my work on the Paget and related collections and whose exhibition catalogue *Home from Home: The Last Years of the British Community in Russia* (Leeds 1988) first alerted me to the rich resources of the archive.

