

## THE REFUGEE



‘Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.’ (Leo Tolstoy)

In the glow of a pearlescent moon the imperial Russian city of St. Petersburg had the iridescent quality of mosaic glass. Sometimes, referred to as the ‘Venice of the North’ and the ‘City of White Nights,’ a myriad of opalescent canals criss-crossed the northern city, while through the centre, the glimmering River Neva flowed seamlessly towards the Baltic Sea. To those of a fanciful or romantic disposition, the moonlit boulevards appear as silver threads woven into an emperor’s robe, while the steeples and belltowers of the many cathedrals and churches are precious jewels that adorn it.

The inspirational creation of Tsar Peter the Great, St. Petersburg is a city of regal majesty, architectural grandeur, and of high culture. A city of theatres, museums, concert halls, cathedrals, palaces, parks, and plazas. A city where Rurikid aristocracy once strode the palazzos and boyars built grand houses, and where in their insulated palaces the gilded nobility of a dynasty blithely danced the last waltz of a fading empire before its collapse.

In 1917, as the funeral pyres of pyrrhic victories grew ever higher on the battlefields of Europe, over the city the benign lunar orb had been eclipsed and replaced by a tetrad of blood moons. Astrologers reached for their charts while the doomsayers consulted the prophecies. The alignments and symbolism were unambiguous, an impending catastrophe was about to befall an ancient lineage and wash the city and

Holy Mother Russian in a sea of blood, and a nation, a continent, and the world would never be the same after.

**In memory of Ella Morgan (nee Murgatroyd) may her memory never fade in the minds of her family.**



*Ella Murgatroyd*

The merchantman slipped its moorings and glided noiselessly towards the centre of the channel. With all lights aboard extinguished, the vessel had an eerie apparitional appearance as it headed slowly down the River Neva towards the Baltic Sea. On the quaysides, lights flickered erratically but none reached out into the river to spotlight the silhouette that stealthily passed by. Unconsciously, all aboard breathed silently lest the slightest sound roused the irrational curiosity of one of the rabid groups of insurrectionists now controlling the ancient streets of Tsar Peter the Great imperial capital. Among those unwittingly suppressing their breathing was 12-year-old Ella Murgatroyd. Along with her father James, her siblings Sidney and Margaret Ellen, and her stepmother Kate, she was leaving the city of her birth, the repository of her childhood memories, and the burial place of her mother Eleanor, for the very last time.

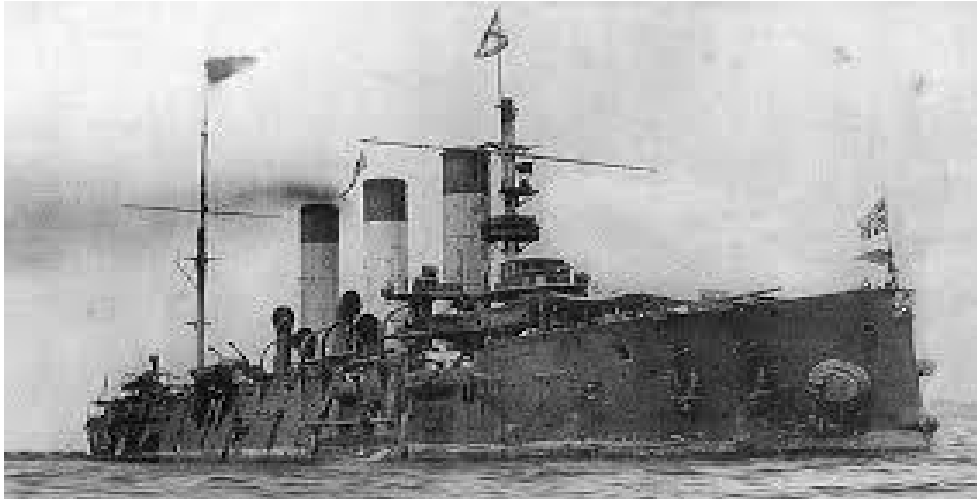
Ella Murgatroyd was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1905, in St. Petersburg, in the Russian Empire of Nicholas II, the youngest child of and James Murgatroyd and Eleanor Henrietta (nee Harding). Her father, James Murgatroyd, was born in Little Bolton in Lancashire on the 10th April 1872, and like his father Robert had trained as a mechanical engineer in the cotton mills that peppered the northern English county. It was Robert Murgatroyd who, induced by a challenge and the prospect of a better life, ventured forth into the northern climes of Russia to set-up and maintain the machinery for the burgeoning Russian textile industry. James inherited the role from his father and continued the family dynasty in the city.

Russia had a thriving textile manufacturing industry, ranking fourth in the world for production after Britain, the USA and Germany. Much of its machinery was imported from Britain. Until they had developed their own local expertise, Russian mill-owners were dependent upon managers and engineers coming from Britain, and from the other western European countries who supplied machinery, to set up equipment, to supervise its use, and to train the Russian workers in the many different processes.

The Murgatroyd's had settled in their new home well, and lived a comfortable, and by standards of the average Russian citizen, an affluent lifestyle. Nevertheless, life was not without misfortune, Ella's mother had died of typhoid in 1908 in one of the many epidemics that habitually raged through the city. Despite this grievous loss, the family stayed on, and James Murgatroyd later married Kate, another ex-patriate British resident. Ella had happy memories of her life in the Tsar's capital, of boating on Lake Ladoga with family and friends, sleigh riding in the snow-covered countryside around St. Petersburg during the seemingly endless Russian winters, and of the lengthy Christmas celebrations that took-in both Western European Christian and Eastern Orthodox traditions. The periodic peasant uprisings and murmurings of discontent were far removed, or deliberately kept from her so as not to impact on her daily life. Ella spoke Russian as fluently as she spoke English, and in her habits, thoughts, and friendships, considered herself, with not uncommon ambivalence, as much Russian as she was English. So, St. Petersburg was home and there were no immediate intentions of leaving, that is until the war began and with it the cataclysm.

It had not gone well for the Imperial Russian Forces, numbers never made up for the professionalism of the German Army. Defeat and retreat followed defeat and retreat. Disillusionment, discontent, and disaffection fuelled by poor living conditions at home and ineptitude of the officer class at the front eroded morale, and increased the alienation between all societal classes and the autocracy. The powder keg of grievance only needed a spark to explode and there was no shortage of malevolent agent provocateurs ready to provide it, not least the Bolsheviks. The spark that finally ignited the powder keg of discontent flared on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1917 when

the Russian cruiser *Aurora*, manned by mutineers, fired a blank shot signalling the assault on the Tsar's winter palace and the Bolshevik revolution. From that moment, in a city overloaded with revolutionary fervour, the departure of the Murgatroyd family became an inevitability.



*Russian Cruiser Aurora*

So it was that in November 1917, the Murgatroyds boarded the neutral flagged steamer for the start of their journey into the unknown. The perilous nature of the voyage was left unsaid, or discussed in hushed tones amongst the adults as the Murgratroyds were not the only British family heading 'home.' At Nikolayevsky Bridge, the merchant steamer passed the *Aurora*, still anchored in the place where it had fired the shell to herald the Bolshevik usurpation of the Russian state. All eyes were fixed on its shadowy gun turrets. Would they turn towards the freighter? Few lights were seen aboard, and even fewer crew. The mutineers, having fired the starting pistol of revolution, seemed to have abandoned the ship for the anarchic mayhem of the streets of the city, or more likely its ale houses. The merchant ship steamed by without incident.





*Drunken Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg*

Into Neva Bay and the focus shifted to Kotlin Island and the formidable fortress of Kronstadt that guarded the port and city of St. Petersburg, now garrisoned by radicalised naval insurrectionists whose loyalties and motives were still unclear. With permission granted by the port authorities to sail, and a neutral non-combatant flag flying from its sternpost, passage through the southern channel into the international shipping lanes would, in normal times, have been routine, but these were abnormal times and protocol meant little. Would the huge searchlights mounted on the citadel's walls seek them out and a launch sent to investigate?

The fortress loomed into sight, dark, brooding, and all-seeing, A light suddenly illuminated the starboard side of the vessel and for several blinding minutes followed its progress. Aboard ship, tension mounted, lungs heaved, nerves jangled, muscles tightened, and minds raced. Would the ship be forced back into port and then what? The ship slowed and headed towards the outer roads. The shore light turned away. Sighs, gulps, exhalations, muffled words as the angst and tensions of the moment dissolved. Another danger had been averted.

The Norwegian captain, an old sea salt of Viking mentality, seemed unphased by the situation. He and his ship had traded lucratively up and down the Baltic throughout the war and this was just another voyage for which he and his crew would be handsomely paid. Superstitiously, he always poured a glass of akvavit into the sea to assuage the old pagan sea gods. They seemed appreciative of his offering for up until now no ill-fortune had befallen his ship. The British passengers wondered if the German U-boat commanders who prowled the waters offshore would be as equally as placated by a token glass of hard liquor and let the ship pass. The flag of neutrality fluttering from the stern pole was but a fig leaf of protection when the ship was seen leaving an enemy port. But what were the instructions given to the 'itchy-fingered' U-boat commanders lining up to release their torpedoes? Hold fire and wait developments in Russia? The German government had assisted the return to Russia of the Bolshevik insurrectionist Lenin and his cabal to foment trouble in the dissolving Russian Empire. But the war continued. The imponderables and uncertainties remained, and the gauntlet still to be run.

A starless night sky and a biting cold easterly wind greeted the steamship as it entered the Gulf of Finland. The Captain's intention, so he imperturbably declared, was to hug the Finnish coast and then seek the relative safety of neutral Swedish waters before entering the Kattegat and Skagerrak and on to Oslo. But nowhere guaranteed safety and sleep was not possible until they were at least tight to the Swedish coastline. Lifejackets remained fastened more to boost confidence and moral than for practical purposes as survival time in the dark freezing Baltic waters would be minutes.

The ship pitched and rolled, and even in the gloom boisterous white-crested waves could be seen hurrying along the sides. Never had a ship more look-outs as all eyes scanned the encircling waters for the tell-tale streaks of a running torpedo, nor had there ever been as many ears to impossibly listen for unusual sounds beneath the howling winds. Time was a reluctant traveller aboard the ship. The unending minutes turned into unremitting hours. Suddenly, the mate appeared in the passenger area and pointed at a halo of light off the starboard bow. 'Helsinki,' he said cheerily. The sight lifted spirits. Finland, although nominally part of the Russian empire, had maintained a neutral stance so that for the most of the war it was considered a non-combatant by German navy and its coastal trade was left unmolested.

Several more hours of nervous anxiety passed before the ship finally arrived off the Swedish coast and the tenuous safety of neutral waters. The torpedo run had still to be completed but only misadventure and misfortune could now sabotage their onward passage to Oslo and the end of a voyage where, at the outset, the odds were heavily stacked against a successful conclusion. The Captain's obeisance to the mighty Norse sea gods appeared to have worked.

The Murgatroyd family finally arrive safely back in England but all their belongings and possessions were lost or stolen in transit, or appropriated by the 'authorities.' Effectively destitute they had to rely on the goodwill and support of their extended family to help rebuild their lives. Their life in Russia was never forgotten and remained forever in their memories as the *best of times and the worst of times*.

Ella Murgatroyd married Harold Morgan on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1925 in Birmingham at Holly Lane Presbyterian Church, Erdington. They spent most of their lives in Wales. Ella died on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1997 at Crick Nursing Home in Monmouthshire, Wales, aged 92.

BIRTHS within the District of the British Consulate at <i>S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg,</i>							
Columns ...	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
No.	When and Where Born.	Name.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description and Residence of Informant.
187	<i>July 27 August 9 1905. S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg.</i>	<i>Ella</i>	<i>F<sup>em</sup></i>	<i>James Murgatroyd</i>	<i>Eleanor Henrietta Harding</i>	<i>Engineer</i>	<i>J<sup>s</sup>. James Murgatroyd Father, Engineer Sampson Quay, 19, S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg.</i>

I, *Arthur W. Woodhouse*, British Consul  
Entry of the Birth of *Ella Murgatroyd*  
kept at this Consulate.

at *S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg* do hereby certify, That this  
No. *187* in the Reg.  
Witness my Hand and Seal, this *5/18<sup>th</sup>* day of *Feb.*

*W. Woodhouse*  
H.B.M. Consul.

District of the British Consulate at <i>S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg, Russia.</i>						
3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Consular Officer.
<i>F<sup>em</sup></i>	<i>James Murgatroyd</i>	<i>Eleanor Henrietta Harding</i>	<i>Engineer</i>	<i>J<sup>s</sup>. James Murgatroyd Father, Engineer Sampson Quay, 19, S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg.</i>	<i>February 5/18, 1911.</i>	<i>A. W. Woodhouse H.B.M. Consul</i>

British Consul  
*Woodhouse*

at *S<sup>t</sup>. Petersburg* do hereby certify, That this is a true Copy of the  
No. *187* in the Register Book of Births  
Witness my Hand and Seal, this *5/18<sup>th</sup>* day of *February* 19 *11.*

*W. Woodhouse*  
H.B.M. Consul.

[Insert Notes, &c.,  
which appear in the  
original Register  
in this margin.]



Eleanor Henrietta Murgatroyd.

(Margaret Ellen (with doll)  
Sydney James  
Ella.

children of Eleanor & James



Edgar Ward  
Souther





*Ella Murgatroyd*

## The Russian Revolution and the appropriation of Government by the Bolsheviks.



When on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1917, Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate, a darkness descended on the world's largest nation. What began as a protest against an unnecessary war, monarchy, autocracy, poverty, and social inequality, turned into a nightmarish blood lust that few of the revolutionary banner carrying idealists could ever have envisioned. It was a myth that the Bolsheviks, few of whom were actually Russian Christians, acted on behalf of the oppressed peoples of the Russian Empire. But it was the Bolsheviks who usurped power and filled the vacuum left by the departing Czar. The populist revolution that became murderous tyranny is best illustrated in the story of the Kronstadt sailors.

The Kronstadt rebellion was a 1921 insurrection of Soviet sailors, soldiers, and civilians against the Bolshevik government. Kronstadt was a garrison port located on Kotlin Island in the Gulf of Finland. It defended the city of St. Petersburg (temporarily named Petrograd for the war) against an enemy seaborne attack as it was the base for the Russian Baltic Fleet. For sixteen days in March 1921, rebels in Kronstadt's naval fortress rose in opposition to the Bolshevik government they had helped to consolidate. The sailors, had once been described by Lev Davidovich Bronstein (aka Leon Trotsky) as 'the pride and glory of the revolution,' having fought alongside the soldiers of the Red Army in the Russian Civil War.

Disappointed in the direction of the Bolshevik government, the rebels demanded a series of reforms: reduction in Bolshevik power, newly elected soviet councils, economic freedom for peasants and workers, dissolution of the bureaucratic

government organs created during the civil war, and the restoration of civil rights for the working class, and an end to the 'Red Terror' and the policy of War Communism.

Convinced of the popularity of their reforms, the Kronstadt sailors waited in vain for the support of the population in the rest of the country and rejected aid from elsewhere. Although the council of officers advocated a more aggressive strategy, the rebels maintained a passive attitude as they waited optimistically and naively for the government to make the first step in sensible negotiations. It was a miscalculation of faith and trust, the newly installed despotic Bolshevik regime had no intention of relinquishing their misappropriated power and took an uncompromising stance, it presented an ultimatum to the dissidents demanding their unconditional surrender and immediately launched a series of attacks against the island.

Despite valiant resistance stretching over weeks, the garrison was eventually overwhelmed. Of the 15,000 men defending the fortress, some were killed in fighting while others escaped to Finland. Those taken prisoner were shown no mercy. Handed over to the Cheka (the Bolshevik security police) they were shot in batches over the ensuing months.

An eye witness to events at Kronstadt, Alexander Berkman, wrote of its fall and with it an epitaph of the Russian Revolution.

"Kronstadt has fallen today. Thousands of sailors and workers lie dead in its streets. Summary execution of prisoners and hostages continues. Grey are the passing days. One by one the embers of hope have died out. Terror and despotism have crushed the life born in October. The slogans of the Revolution are forsworn, its ideals stifled in the blood of the people. The breath of yesterday is dooming millions to death; the shadow of today hangs like a black pall over the country. Dictatorship is trampling the masses under foot. The Revolution is dead; its spirit cries in the wilderness."

### **The British role in the Russian Textile Industry**



*English Quay (Angliskaya) St. Petersburg circa 1900*

Russia in the 19th century was an autocratic state ruled by the Romanov dynasty. In the 18th century both Peter and Catherine the Great had used the state as a means of promoting industrial development, with textiles as a key lever. However, much of the textile production remained small scale with spinning and weaving mostly done by hand, using serf labour.

Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881) was keen to industrialise parts of his vast empire and state support for a Russian textile industry was seen as a means to force an industrial revolution. To a certain extent, his strategy worked and despite the political upheavals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Russia's textile industry grew to become the fourth biggest in the world. And it was largely down to the expertise it imported from Lancashire that it achieved this prominence.

During the second half of the 19th century British engineering firms helped to equip Russia's emerging cotton industry. But it wasn't just machinery that Britain exported – it was also people. Russia developed what became known as 'technology transfer' using British engineering and British engineers to equip and run the growing number of cotton mills in Russia.

British firms, primarily Lancashire-based, developed strong links with the Russian cotton industry. This involved much more than shipping out steam engines and boilers to power the mills. Expertise was in short supply and Bolton firms such as Hicks Hargreaves, John Musgraves & Sons, and Dobson and Barlow sent out skilled engineers to manage and maintain the plants some of whom stayed on after their contracts had expired marrying into Russian families and becoming adopted Russians. *Ivanovo*, about 100 miles north-east of Moscow, became known as 'the



Manchester of Russia' and developed as a major cotton manufacturing centre. Scores of Bolton families, with many fellow Lancastrians from Oldham, Accrington and Rochdale, went out to Russia. Initially, they set up their own social clubs and lived the ex-patriate lifestyle but over time integrated into the Russian communities.

Lancashire cotton men can also take the credit for introducing football into Russia. The first competitive and regular football games in Russia started in the textile town of *Orekhovo-Zuevo*, about 50 miles east of Moscow, an area that saw a huge boom in textile production in the 1840s. At first, the Englishmen played amongst themselves but soon the Russians were invited, and soon after that Russian football leagues were formed. Chorley-born Harry Charnock who was managing director at the Nikolskoye Textile Factory near *Orekhovo-Zuevo* became vice-president of the Moscow Football League and a Russian citizen.

The connections between the Russian textile industry and Lancashire came to an abrupt end after the revolution, though by then the industry was well established. However, some English people had put down deep roots in Russia and remained after 1917 upheaval.

**Footnote.** On 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, a massive fire destroyed the historic Nevskaya Manufaktura building on Oktyabrskaya Embankment in St. Petersburg. The iconic building dated back to 1870 and was built to house the manufacturing plant of English merchant James Thornton whose company produced woollen fabrics, flannelette blankets, ladies' shawls, and other textiles. Products that were in great demand in both the Russian and international market, and which brought the owner great wealth. By the end of the 19th century, the Thornton Wool Products Association was one of the largest textile enterprises in Russia. The factory had its own gas plant and repair shop. In 1918, after the fall of Romanov dynasty and ensuing change of government, the company was nationalised and the British company's involvement ceased.





