

Октябрьская революция

(October Revolution)

The 1917 Revolution & Barnet's Russian Heritage

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We tend to see Barnet before the 1950s as being an English monoculture, and that migration from Eastern Europe, including Poles, Russians, and others, have only lived here since the end of communism in Europe in the 1990s. So an essay on Barnet's part in the story of the Russian Revolution of November 1917 (October 1917 in the old Russian Calendar) may seem a little strange and out of place. However by the 1920s the southern parts of The London Borough of Barnet, most of all Golders Green, contained a number of Russian residents.

The earliest Russians settled in Golders Green before the Great War. The best known is the dancer Anna Pavlova, who lived in Ivy House in North End Road between 1912 and her death in 1931. Pavlova (whose address could be described as

Hampstead), was an exception. Most were Russians Jews who had escaped the infamous Tsarist Pogroms of the 1880s. They settled in the East End and Soho, and by the 1900s had done well enough to move from Bethnal Green and Soho to what was, from 1907 to 1923, the end of the underground line and a healthier part of London. Interesting as they are, their children considered themselves more English than Russian and identified with a cosmopolitan diaspora of which Russia was only a part. For example, when the area received many Jewish refugees from the Nazi persecution of the 1930s, Golders Green library found that it did not have enough German language stock to meet demand (the Chief Librarian noting in 1936 that German had replaced French in demand for foreign language books almost overnight.) Bruno Meyer, whose family had been in Russia for more than 300 years before he came to Golders Green in 1910, stepped forward with a donation of 300 German books from his own library.



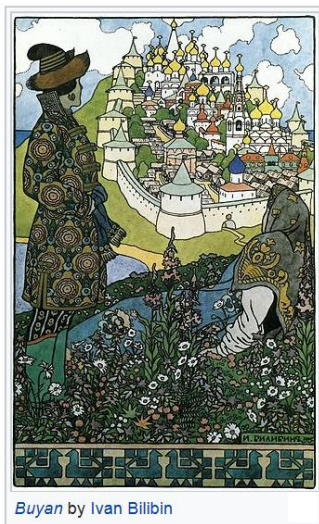
Russian Officer 1916

In 1917, one hundred years ago, the Russian people threw off the tyranny of the Tsarist regime and over a year of revolution and upheaval ended up with the tyranny of the communist Bolshevik Government. With its "European" feel, Golders Green was more comfortable to these new refugees escaping from the Bolshevik Russia than other parts of London. Adverts began to appear in the Hendon and Finchley Times: "Young Educated Russian Lady [Golders Green] wishes to share accommodation with an English Lady" or "Wanted [Hendon] by Russian couple 2 or 3 unfurnished rooms". As "aliens" they were expect to register themselves with the local police station. If they failed to register a change of address with Golders Green police, they ended up in court. Sergy Bobroski, a smartly

dressed officer of the Russian Imperial Army living in Temple Fortune, appeared in his uniform in front of the magistrate at Hendon Court. He may well have been part of the Russian Expeditionary Army in France, as the judge only fined him only £1 when he could have fined him up to £100. Ironically, the Bolsheviks had an embassy house in the Hampstead Garden Suburb in Bigwood Road. In September 1918, at a time when the Russians had made peace with the Germans but Britain was still at war, armed police raided the address and the Bolshevik ambassador, Maxim Litvinoff, was taken off to Brixton gaol along with two of his aids. Later, the NKVD (precursor to the KGB) had a training manual in the 1930s for its spies which recommended that the bandstand in Hendon Park was a good location for secret meetings, because foreigners did not attract quite so much attention in Hendon.



Later, these Russian residents became part of the local life. In 1923 Miss Minna Tomchinsky played violin at a Temple Fortune wedding, and an erstwhile prima donna of Moscow's ballet Mlle. Nicolaeva performing for a local audience at the Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute. The Count and Countess Vladimir Kleinmichel lived in Woodstock Avenue in to the 1950s. During World War II Hendon Times reported that one of the victims of the bombing of Eagle Lodge during the Blitz had been a "Russian Princess." (The double headed eagle motif on Eagle Lodge may in itself have been a reference to the double headed eagle of the Russian Tsar.)



Possibly the most interesting Russian resident was Mikhail Vladimirovitch Braikevitch of Woodstock Avenue. He had been an important engineer in the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, was the mayor of Odessa before the war, and had been a member of the interim government, who ran Russia between February 1917 and the October Revolution. Remarkable as all these things are, it was his art collection which was most important. Having settled in England, he started to collect works of art smuggled out of Russia from fellow refugees - both in London and Paris - and amassed one of the best collections of Russian art outside of Russia itself. On his death in 1940, he left the collection to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford but we can imagine an ordinary house in Golders Green with some of the greatest works of Russian art on the walls.