

Queen Victoria's Bicentennial Celebration, East Cowes, Isle of Wight, 2019

The Grand Duchess Elizabeth Romanov Society was invited to the Isle of Wight to take part in the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the births of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The festivities started on the 23d May at the Romanov Monument in East Cowes which was visited by the HRH Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, accompanied by Lord-Lieutenant of the Isle of Wight, Susie Sheldon.

Before the ceremony of the unveiling of the Bicentennial Bench, next to the Romanov monument, His Royal Highness was greeted by the Mayor of East Cowes Jane Rann and other distinguished people of the Isle of Wight.



The chairman of the Society Dr Maria Harwood, Father Stephen Platt, John Harwood, David Gilchrist and other trustees were presented to the Duke who was very interested in the monument and asked several questions.



One of them was why we have chosen this particular place for the monument. The chairman answered that the trustees were thinking about other places (like Windsor Great Park) but decided to accept the offer from East Cowes, near to Osborne where the Hessian grandchildren of The Queen Victoria - among them Alix and Ella - used to spend so much time, and which Tsar Nicholas visited three times and with all his family in 1909. The Duke also asked whether Romanov descendants have seen the monument and we informed him that Prince Rostislav Romanoff, the great grandnephew of the Tsar unveiled it last July. It was a surprise to HRH to find out that the granite Cross arrived at the Isle of Wight from India and the Bronze relief from Russia (all designed by Russian Sculptor Elena Bezborodova)



We spoke about the terrible killing of the Romanovs and their glorification in Russia as Holy Royal Martyrs. “What a tragedy!”, His Royal Highness repeated few times and asked how we marked the centenary in Russia. We told him that the Society organised the pilgrimage to Ekaterinburg where our trustees and members took part in the night service and procession together with the 100,000 people from Russia and other countries. Duke of Kent noted that his brother Prince Michael went to St Petersburg where the Romanov descendants took part in the memorial events, visiting Romanov tombs in the St Paul and St Peter Fortress. Prince Edward, Duke of Kent is a descendant of the Emperor Alexander II from his mother, Princess Marina, who was Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich’s granddaughter.

Our book of the proceedings of the Romanov conference in Windsor with the picture of the Romanov Memorial on the cover was presented to the Duke, who was very happy to see clearly and closely the faces on the bronze relief. The sun at that very moment was coming from the back of the cross.



<https://www.countypress.co.uk/news/17660891.duke-of-kent-visits-east-cowes-for-bicentennial-celebrations-marking-the-births-of-queen-victoria-and-prince-albert/#gallery2>

The Duke of Kent laid flowers on the Romanov memorial, the bouquet brought from Barton Manor by its owners and presented to the Duke by their little daughter Lotte Haig-Thomas, 10.



<https://onthewight.com/watch-hrh-prince-edward-duke-of-kent-unveils-bicentennial-bench-in-east-cowes/>

After that a granite Memorial Bench, dedicated to the 200th anniversary of Queen Victoria, was solemnly unveiled. The event was recorded in the golden inscription over the bench, marking this special occasion and the Duke of Kent's involvement.



The elegant bench matched perfectly the granite Cross.

The Duke, the Lord-Lieutenant of the Isle of Wight and other dignitaries then proceeded to Osborne House to initiate the Victoria and Albert exhibition there.

The Orthodox Service (Moleben) dedicated to the Holy Royal Martyrs and to the Holy Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth was served in front of the monument by Father Stephen Platt from the church of St Nicholas in Oxford. Members of the Society were assisting him by singing and reading. Some people from the local community were present, and watched and listened with interest.



<https://onthewight.com/watch-hrh-prince-edward-duke-of-kent-unveils-bicentennial-bench-in-east-cowes/>

They joined us later for the concluding photo. The service was filmed professionally by Robert Lipscombe. (Thank you very much!)

In the morning 24th May, the actual Birthday of the Queen Victoria, we were invited by the curator of the Osborn House Michael Hunter to attend the new exhibition, which focused on the gifts which the Queen and her Consort exchanged on their birthdays.



Of special interest for us was the statue of little Princess Alice. We were pleased to see another treasure, a gift of Princess Alix to Queen Victoria, a watercolour of flowers hanging next to her bed.



The Victoria's bedroom has been left untouched since the day of her death in 1901.



The weather was glorious on both days and we enjoyed our walk through the park to the Victorian beach with its original bathing machines. An elegant arched grotto was recently restored here.



Was this the place where Nicholas and Alexandra liked to spend time during their visit to Osborne in July 1894, after their engagement? The picture described in Nicholas's diary couldn't be more vividly imagined as at this very spot: *"Alix and I went by chair-a-banc to the shore, and sat on the sand looking at the waves"*.

In the evening of the same day the Society was represented during the civic reception at the Town Hall and the opening of another exhibition celebrating the Royal Family's links with the Isle of Wight.



Dress code was from the Victorian 19th century, enthusiastically supported by all people present, specially by the young Royal couple, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert themselves. Among the other

guests was the Mayor of Coburg Dr Brigitte Weber who invited us to visit her town, a place with strong Romanov links.



The wedding of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse with Princess Victoria Melita took place there in April 1894 and on the same occasion the Tsarevich proposed marriage to the young sister of Ernst, Alix.

The New Victoria Town Trail was opened on 24 May 2019. It highlights the famous Victorians who visited East Cowes during the 63 years of the Queen Victoria's reign. One of the 22 stone markers is dedicated to Tsarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich (later Tsar Nicholas II) who visited the island in 1894.



On the 25th May we took part in planting a tree near the Monument and the memorial bench. The Mayor of East Cowes Jane Rann and our old friends Cllr Karl Love and the organiser of the events David Hill, were there and we presented them with our new book. We expressed our gratitude to them for inviting us to the celebrations.



The last visit was to Quarr Abbey, near Ryde, to present a copy of our book to Abbot Xavier who the year before helped accommodating the choir from St Elizabeth Convent in Minsk.



He kindly showed us parts of the monastery not normally seen by visitors, including the original Quarr House which has a number of connections with the British Royal Family and was visited by the Tsarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich in 1894. We sang the Magnification to the Holy Royal Martyrs and this was our spiritual conclusion to the pilgrimage.

Report by Maria Harwood, John Harwood, Alexander Kapustin and Yulia Chisholm

The Grand Duchess Elizabeth Romanov Society

29th of May, 2019

United Kingdom