

# A PILGRIMAGE FROM THE BRITISH ISLES TO THE TSAR'S GOLGOTHA

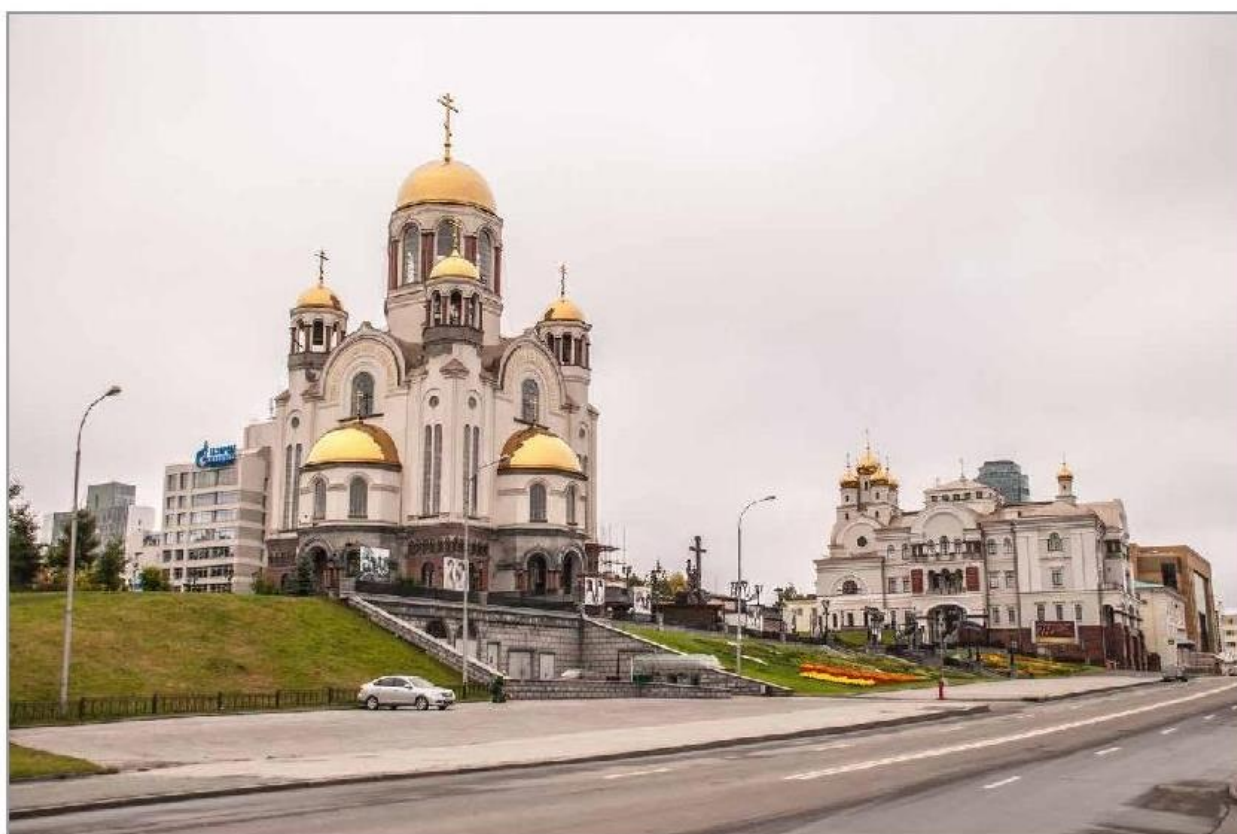
## 14th – 22nd of July 2018

*by Maria Harwood, Chairman of GDERS, UK  
(edited by J.M.Harwood and D.J.Gilchrist)*

In memory of the centenary of the martyrdom of the last Romanovs, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Romanov Society in the UK organised a pilgrimage to Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Alapaevsk and Tobolsk. This pilgrimage, which took place from 14th to 22nd July 2018, was a continuation of the commemorative events on the Isle of Wight, near the Palace of Queen Victoria (Osborne House), where the monument to the Russian Imperial Family and to the Grand Duchess Elizabeth was solemnly unveiled.

The pilgrimage started in Moscow in the recently built church of the New Martyrs of Russia at Sretensky Monastery, where part of our group prayed during the Vigil service on Saturday 14th July, before flying to Ekaterinburg next morning.

In Ekaterinburg we were met by a representative from the Church of All the Saints of Russia, the “Church on the Blood”, our guide Natalia, who conveyed greetings to us from the dean of the church, Father Maxim. Our spiritual leader was Archpriest Andrew Phillips of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, the rector of St. John of Shanghai church in Colchester, a well-known church historian. In May 2018, he had established a new Orthodox community in Kent, dedicated to the Holy Royal Martyrs of Russia. To venerate the “Tsar’s Golgotha” in Ekaterinburg was his long-time dream.







We arrived just one and half days before the central event of the Ekaterinburg commemorative programme – the Liturgy at the Church on the Blood (built on the site of the Ipatiev House where the Imperial Family were imprisoned and executed by Bolsheviks.), to the mineshaft called Ganina Yama (Gania's Pit) where some remains of the Martyrs were found. Now it is inside the monastery of the Holy Royal Passion-Bearers. More than 100,000 people were expected to take part in the 23 km cross procession, all through the night.

We had planned to visit the monastery in advance in order to see it and pray there quietly.

Finally we went to see the Monastery at Ganina Yama, where we came face to face with the great Russian tragedy and with the holiness generated by the tragedy. We passed slowly and with prayer through all the seven churches of the monastery (in accordance with the number of members of the family of the last Emperor), and finished our path at the Memorial Cross on the place where the first finding of the remains of the martyred family took place. We spoke about the recognition of the remains as a result of the recent examination. Someone mentioned that only on Friday the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, under the chairmanship of Patriarch Kirill, pronounced the remains as authentic. Then we heard the voice of a cleric, from the covered gallery around the mine: "You are not right. There is a member of the Synod with us". It was Metropolitan Mark of Ryazan who blessed us and gave us a clear answer to our question: the Synod will be waiting for the last results of the examination, but there is enough evidence of the authenticity of the remains. The decision on the matter has not yet been published.



In the morning the monastery of the Royal Passion-Bearers looked very quiet and prayerful, as if waiting to meet the huge crowds of pilgrims during the night and at the dawn of the coming day – the day of the centenary of the Royal Martyrdom. Our group was also preparing for the night Liturgy, for Holy Communion and for the 23 kilometer walk, which, as we later learned, was to be headed for the first time by Patriarch Kirill. Not all of us were able to endure the complete walk, but hundreds of believers from all of Russia and elsewhere completed it from the beginning to the end. Among the most determined were Father Andrew and other Englishmen who were inspired by deep love for the Tsar’s Family and who felt affinity with the Russian people. Our guide Natalia was struck by their endurance and dedication, and in turn, the English pilgrims were impressed by the spiritual strength of a number of physically weak-looking Russian women. In the early morning the singing of the Jesus Prayer, which came as from one mouth from the multitude of pilgrims, was surprisingly merged with the birds’ song. The experience of unity in prayer of those who were in an endless flow along the forest roads could not have been more inspiring.

One of our pilgrims (David Gilchrist) had been sent to Russia in the 1980s to bring encouragement and aid to families where the husband or father was in the camps for his Christian faith. So much has changed since then! He said, ”It was amazing to see something of the Resurrection of Holy Russia – it was as if Aslan had returned to Narnia after the defeat of the White Witch ...”



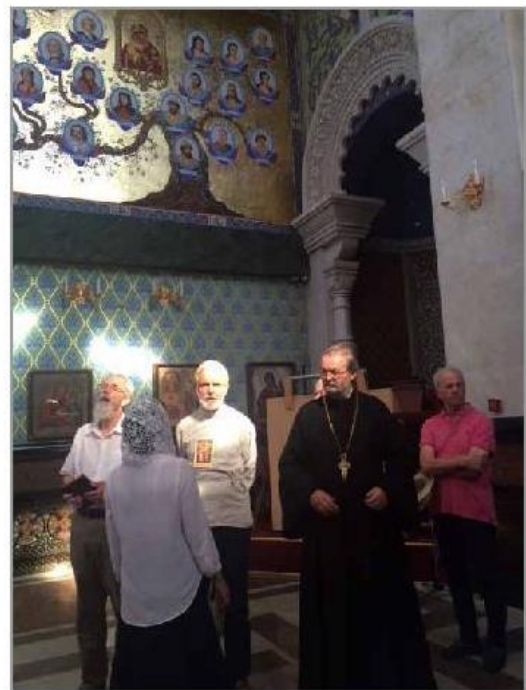






On the afternoon of July 17th we visited the Church on the Blood. We were impressed and touched by the beauty of the altar built above the basement of the Ipatiev house, where the bloody killings happened.\* Father Maxim told us that this most important part of the church was built by the same benefactors who helped us with the creation of the Romanov Memorial on the Isle of Wight. It came to us as a wonderful discovery that by the Will of God the Church on the Blood and our Cross in England were so significantly connected! We hope that the Monument, blessed by Bishop Irenei in the presence of the Queen's representative and of Romanov descendants, in front of Holy Relics of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, will also become a long-lasting symbol of repentance and compassion for the people of the British Isles.

Natalia, our guide, then took us to the Patriarchal Metochion beside the Church on the Blood, where we visited the Museum of the Holy Royal Family. We saw a wonderful array of photographs and pictures, with important documents, and objects which had belonged to the martyrs. We were also able to see the room where the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church had met the previous week.







The next day – July 18th, was the day of memory of the great saint and patron of our Society, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, and we planned to go to Alapaevsk. In the “Napolnaya” School (School in the Fields), where St Elizabeth, St Barbara and other Romanovs were imprisoned, we met the director of the museum, who showed us all the most valuable and interesting exhibits. The museum had been created by the efforts of several charities under the leadership of the Elizabeth and Sergius Fund, and we were most impressed by it.

Two years ago I visited this place, where at that time lessons for young children were continuing. A small memorial museum was arranged inside the room where Elizabeth Feodorovna stayed. On the day of our visit a small iconostasis was installed, before which a Moleben was served. Many knelt, some cried. There was a feeling of the presence of the Grand Duchess and other Romanovs. We were all students and children in this class, being taught to forgive and to love our enemies. Nowadays, in the professionally equipped museum, this sense of presence was gone but there is a solid base for educational work. The museum tells a lot of interesting and instructive stories about those who spent their last days there: the Constantinovich Princes, Prince Vladimir Paley and others. It contained lots of photographs and details of all those who were murdered, together with a number of their personal possessions which were saved. We saw examples of Grand Duchess Elizabeth’s art work, and a copy of the large memorial cross that she had erected at the place of her husband’s murder in Moscow. Behind the school is a new church recently dedicated to St Elizabeth.







We were now approaching the Alapaevsk Monastery, the place of the death of the best representatives of the House of Romanov. Father Leonid, the Dean of the monastery, was waiting for us there. We met as old friends, as I had met him two years ago, and during these two years Father Leonid showed great interest in the activities of our Society. He supported us with his prayers encouraging us not to give up when we were passing through trials.

Father Leonid was there when the monastery was founded. He remembers those days when the first little chapel was built next to the Sinyachikha mine, where the Alapaevsk prisoners met their martyrdom. At that time the small white church could accommodate all the inhabitants of the monastery. Later it served as an altar space for open-air services, with thousands of pilgrims standing outside. This year, the Patriarch blessed a new and majestic temple, which is also sited in the immediate vicinity of the former mine. Now the mines at Ganina Yama and Alapaevsk have turned into spherical hollows, overgrown with soft grass. They are decorated with flowers and are surrounded by incredibly slender and high pines and birches. It is difficult to resist comparing them with columns that are leading to the celestial vault. They are in themselves holy temples.







Back in Ekaterinburg we also visited the New-Tikhvin convent (dedicated to the miraculous Tichvin ikon of the Mother of God). It impressed us with the beauty of its main church, dedicated to St. Alexander Nevsky, in honour of Emperor Alexander I, who helped to establish the convent. The nuns from this convent used to bring food to the captives in the Ipatiev house. This was their last obedience, in which they expressed their love and gratitude to the House of Romanov, the Emperors and Grand Dukes, who from the convent's foundation were its benefactors.



And now the time came for our departure by train from Ekaterinburg to Tobolsk. For us, who visited the places of martyrdom of the Royal family, it was as we were going to move from death to life, back in time to relatively light and joyful days, not devoid of hope that the chalice of suffering would be removed.

The centre of Tobolsk, where we stayed, seemed to us, in contrast with Ekaterinburg, like a picture from a fairy tale. In front of us we had the beautiful setting of the seventeenth century Kremlin, the St Sofia cathedral, and Red (meaning beautiful) Square. This was a traditional arrangement for an ancient Russian capital city – the capital of Siberia in our case. Unusual was the presence of a “prison castle” in the central square, as a sign of the special purpose of Siberia as a place of punishment and detention. It was not by chance that the Imperial Family was sent here.



A local priest whom we ran into at St Sofia, Father Alexander, showed us typical Siberian openness and hospitality and gave us several hours of his time. He was an iconographer and a connoisseur of local history and church architecture. A better guide was difficult to imagine! We had been worried that no one would meet us in Tobolsk! We climbed the bell tower and admired the view as well as beautiful examples of ancient and new bells.

