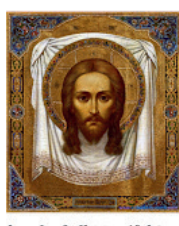


<https://gdelizabets-society.co.uk>

# Afternoon Tea With a Princess

A fundraising event under the patronage of Bishop Irenei  
of London and Western Europe, Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia



The church of All-Merciful Saviour,  
St Leonards-on-Sea

In the heart of picturesque Sandwich is the medieval St Mary's Church. Guests gathered there on Easter Saturday, 26th April 2025, to mark a double anniversary of Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna: 150th anniversary since her birth and 65 years since her repose in the Lord.

Organised by the Trustees of GDERS, the event offered a rich programme of talks, exhibitions, and conversations. **Dr Maria Harwood**, Chairman of the Society, introduced the important mission of this educational charity, which, since its founding in December 2015, has been working to deepen public understanding of the history of the Romanov Imperial family and its connection with the British Royal family, in the tragic context of 19th and 20th centuries. She highlighted the links between the civil history and church history when the multitude of the New Martyrs, many of them of Royal decent, were recognised as Saints of the Russian Orthodox Church (firstly Outside Russia, later by the whole Orthodox world).

Co-organiser of this event was the Orthodox parish of the All-Merciful Saviour in St Leonards-on-Sea, represented by its priest **Father Aleksandr Groves** and Reader John Harwood. The GDERS and this new parish have been working in collaboration for years and a big part of the donations went to support it.



**Holy Royal Martyrs:  
Empress Alexandra, Grand Duchess Elizabeth  
and Emperor Nicholas II**



**Princess Olga Romanoff speaking**



**Maria Harwood**

Tea with the Princess included not only refreshments and drinks but also a rich and meaningful conversation with our guest of honour Her Highness **Princess Olga Andreevna Romanoff**, a direct descendant of Emperor Alexander III. She shared personal reflections of her family's noble heritage and brought history vividly to life.

The conversation took the form of an informal dialogue between Olga and Maria Harwood, who showed selected photographs from Olga's family album and asked her questions that many were curious about: her parents, her childhood at Provender House in Kent, and of course, her memories of her grandmother, Grand Duchess Xenia.

Olga shared her recollections of her visit to Crimea and the Ai-Todor estate, which belonged to her grandfather, Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich. During her visit, she said, stories and photographs she had known since childhood — about the departure of her great-grandmother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna and her family from Crimea aboard the British cruiser *Marlborough* — suddenly came to life and became real. The trunks from that very ship, which her grandmother Xenia brought with her to Britain, are still kept by Olga to this day.

Church historian **John Harwood** spoke about GD Xenia's family life and her children — her daughter Irina and her eldest son, Andrei, were already married when Xenia settled with her younger sons at Frogmore Cottage, which had been offered to her by the British royal family. Xenia was a patroness of St Xenia's Sisterhood at the Cathedral in London and a deeply devout person.

John also shared his own memories of Xenia's funeral service, which took place in April 1960 at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in London. He also read an excerpt from the memoirs of Russian writer E. M. Almedingen, who described Xenia's role as patron of the *Xenievsky Institute for Noble Maidens* in St. Petersburg, which was established in 1894 to mark her marriage to the Grand Duke Alexander. These memoirs were published in The Times on April 26, 1960.

Guests also heard a talk by **Fr Aleksandr Groves** who spoke about his parish and its vision for the future. He showed a model of a new bigger church, which the community, with God's help, hopes to acquire soon. Fundraising events are vital for the realisation of these plans. People were generous donating specifically for this project.



**Father Aleksandr Groves**



**John Harwood**



**Philip Oostenbrink**



**Princess Olga and Lana Arkhi**

In the second part of the evening **Anna Scriven** (MA), a trustee of GDERS and organiser of this event, gave a moving and informative talk entitled *"Who Are They, the Sisters of Mercy?"* She honoured the work of both British and Russian nurses who served with compassion and bravery during the Crimean War (1853-1856), shining a light on their often-overlooked contributions.

(The Society held a conference in October 2022, dedicated to the 170th anniversary of the Crimean war. The proceedings are published in the N6 Society Magazine "Romanov History UK".)

A special highlight of the day was the exhibition *Imperial Estates in Crimea*, which captured the beauty and historical significance of the Romanovs' presence in the region. This theme was touched throughout the event.

Adding colour and creativity to the day were two guest speakers who talked of their own specialities. **Philip Oostenbrink**, Head Gardener of Walmer Castle and author of *The Jungle Garden*, shared his exciting work transforming the castle's historic dry moat into a thriving Jungle Garden. His dedication to preserving and revitalising English heritage gardens was much admired.

**Lana Arkhi**, celebrated artist and member of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors & Gravers, offered insight into her artistic path, including her 2017 award for Outstanding Sculptor's & Graver's Work. Guests had the pleasure of viewing and purchasing her delicate and expressive miniatures on display.

The afternoon was soothed by classical pieces played by the talented pianist **Svetlana Higgins**, whose performance added an elegant touch to the occasion.

This memorable event was not only a tribute to the Romanov family and their enduring story but also a celebration of history, art and community.



**Anna Scriven gives the flowers to the speakers**