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Galya Clark,
Dr. (Modern History)
Norfolk, England

THE NORFOLK ARCHIVES AND THE RUSSIAN – BRITISH RELATIONS

The Protégé of the Russian Empress became English Navy Commander

Russian frigates were actively trading with Great Yarmouth

The Norfolk Archives (Norfolk Record Office) are hiding incredibly interesting evidence for the Russian – British relations throughout the centuries. A bunch of preserved letters of British navy officers from the beginning of 19 century, the time of the Napoleonic Wars, tell us emotionally about the Russian – English maritime relations.

An unsuspecting researcher opened one of the files for the relations with Russia in the Norfolk Record Office. The collection is small, but is hiding a palette of information. Private letters, diplomatic correspondence, a curl of young lady's hair, and yellowish newspaper' cuttings hide different "sea fairy tails'. In between is the story of the Russian youngster Victor. With surprise and admiration "Times" newspaper mentioned an interesting fact from the beginning of 19 century. "In the famous English institution, The Royal Naval Academy of Portsmouth which was implementing professional naval education for the best English young men from splendid naval families. Foreigners strictly had not been allowed in this centre of military navy education. With the exception – a young gentleman, protégé of the Russian Empress, the youngster orfan Victor Tolubeev. "As we understand, this young gentleman from Russia had a happy destiny to be under the protection of her Majesty the Empress of Russia", the newspaper was writing. The Empress those days was princess Louis from Baden – known as Elisaveta Alexeevna. The file with the letters of William Howes and cuttings from the old newspaper makes it clear that the

young Russian officer was operating on the Russian frigate “Mercury” (type “Urgent” 1815)[1]

According to the Times newspaper, twenty of the most wonderful horses were transported on- board the frigate, which was sailing usually from Russia to Denmark (Copenhagen) and Holland. Ten of them were present from the Russian Emperor Alexander the first, to the Netherlands’ Prince of Orange (Vilem). Another ten horses were a present for the Prince Regent of England – George IV. George IV was an extremely cultured and educated monarch, but at the same time his style of life had been very expensive, and this style had not been approved by his ministers. It is known that on 21st of February 1816 Vilem was married to the youngest sister of the Russian Emperor Alexander 1st – the Great Princess, Anna Pavlovna. The wedding had been in the Chapel of The Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and it had been arranged for good relations between emperor’s Russia and Netherlands.

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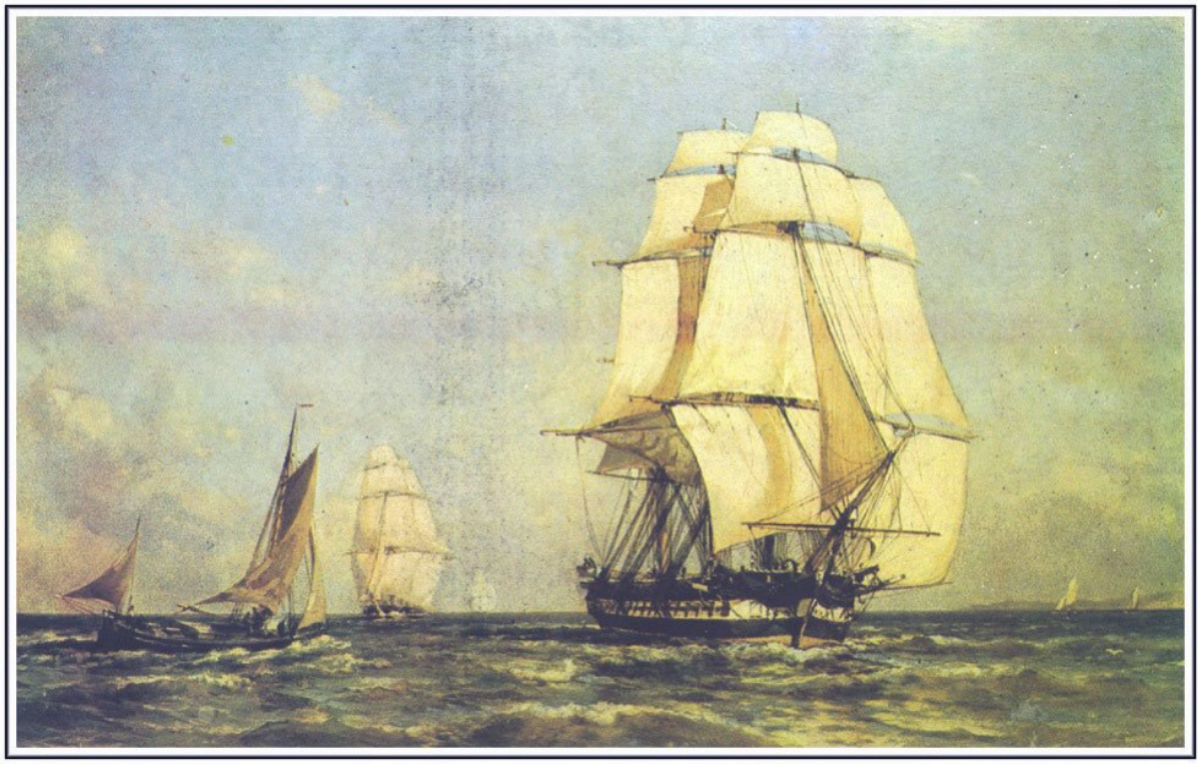
[1] You can see what the frigate looked like on a website of lovers of Russian historical vessels’. http://tsushima.su/forums/viewtopic.php?id=6203. In this site you could see their perplexity - of how they travelled from France to Russia/



The horses were offloaded in the ports of Helvoet in Holland and Portsmouth in England. The frigate "Mercury" had continued it's way to Le Havre, where it had been loaded with the art pictures which the Russia Emperor had bought from the Malmaison' Gallery. The frigate "Mercury" had continued its way to Le Havre, where these art pictures, which the Russian Emperor bought, had been loaded. This incredible collection of wonderful fine art, sculptures and decorative art, had been collected in the castle Malmaison for Empress Josephine, Napoleon' wife, who had been a patron, connoisseur and collector of fine art. The whole collection was exhibited at the Winter Palace, St. Petersburg – in the Hermitage. How the paintings got there from Paris, is an enigma for the art historians[2].

What are the French paintings doing in The Hermitage?

After the first abdication of Napoleon in the spring of 1814, Josephine was rewarded with visits of a few leaders of the allies such as the Prussian king and Tzar Alexander First. The connection with the Russian royals was the longest and strongest. Alexander had visited her family home and supported her a lot. One of the masterpieces of the Hermitage Rooms is Gonzaga Cameo, which is a double portrait of the Emperor and his wife. It is believed that Josephine gave it to the Tzar at a special Ball in his honour, weeks before she died.

In august 1815 Alexander agreed to the exclusive purchase of thirty eight of the best paintings belonging to Josephine. Four marble statues from the most famous Europe sculptor of his time – Antonio Canova, had been include in the total price, a bit under 1 million Francs. This amount had helped the children of Josephine – Eugene and Hortense to pay off, at least a part of the huge debts, which they had inherited from their mother.

The secret removal of the pictures from Malmaison castle to the Russian Embassy in Paris had happened between late August and early September of 1815, despite the fact that Malmaison had been under British command and at the same time the Prussians made a noise for return of the ownership of the pictures of Cassel. In the early 1816 all of the thirty eight pictures and three

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[2] Here you could see more for the Malmaison collection and to see the perplexity of the art historians how the pictures travelled from France to Russia
http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/archive/hermitagerooms/malmaison/index.shtml

from the four statues were presented in a special hall of the Emperor's Hermitage under the name "The Malmaison Collection". This name showed the respect of Alexander for the taste of Josephine, and from other hand it was a stroke against the scandalous confiscations of art from Napoleon.

Thus the documents found at the Norwich Record Office replied to the question of how those pictures and sculptures went to St. Petersburg – They were loaded in the Russian frigate "Mercury", in which sailed Victor Tolubeev. "The Times" reports that with the same frigate, Prince de Broley, who had been serving in the Russian Army, returned to Russia.

Being a Russian navy officer in 1815 young Victor Tolubeev became an English navy officer after studying at the prestigious Royal Academy in Portsmouth. There is a touching chestnut girl's curl, in the document' file, connect with the life of our hero Victor Tolubeev, wrapped in a humble paper. Maybe it was in a locket, years ago. The inscription in English over the paper says "Miss Tolubeev". Who is Miss Tolubeev – his sister or other relative, for now this is a mystery.

The "Times" newspaper claimed that the Russian ambassador sent a letter to Sir G. Grey (Grey is one of the management of the navy Academy). The ambassador said in the letter that he is received orders from the Russian Empress to give presents to captain Loring, governor of the Royal navy college in Portsmouth and to professor Inman, a leading professor in the Academy. They both received from the Empress diamond rings and 100 guineas each and for Mr. Skelton, a secretary of the college, a golden box for 50 guineas and 30 guineas in cash. Those presents express the gratitude of the Russian Empress for the care for her young protégé Tolubeev. Victor starts to implement the newly acquired knowledge on board of the Empress' frigate "Active" – as midshipman. This rank according to the Academy' meant that two years had passed after his completion of the Navy Academy. This frigate "Active" had been sailing in the Mediterranean.

For the Victor's life in England there is not a lot of information. He died young, in his sleep, probably from a serious disease. This happened in England on 19 of January 1823. His friend H. Howes is informed of Victor's death from another of Victor's friend – Mr. Smirhoff. Howes is obviously in very friendly, or maybe even relative relations with Victor Tolubeev, because in a letter to his sister Howes named Victor "poor boy". We lost our Victor, writes Howes and continues "The death of Victor is horrible shock, for Mr. Smirnoff, also for young ladies who are shocked". Here we finish our story for Victor Tolubeev,

who under the wing of the Russian Empress as a foreigner, studied without exception in the most prestigious navy academy in the world.

In the Norfolk Record Office there are documents of the Port Commission in Great Yarmouth, which witnessed the mutual Russia-English Trade, which flourished for a few centuries, most especially with the port of St. Petersburg. Especially interesting are the lead seals, exhibits of the "Tide and time museum" in Great Yarmouth. Those seals accompanied the consignments from St. Petersburg to Great Yarmouth. They are evidence that they passed through customs, and also for quality control. Some of the seals are found by a metal seeker in the area of Great Yarmouth. There are four seals in the museum with the name of the port, date and name of the Russian customs officer in quality control. The earliest seal is dated 1792 but you can't read the name of the port. The name of the officer is Vastil Istin. Probably the correct name is Vasil Istin. On a seal from 1794 the officer Cramtsov checked the goods from St. Peterburg. From the same port the officer Shirkov allow the goods to travel to England with a seal from 1820. On the fourth seal there are not details except the name of the goods – Baltic white flour. There is a description for the seal from 1792 "a seal, one of the four lead discs, with a hole in the middle to allow the ropes to come thru it". There is an impression from the both sides of it - SPB / IMRG / 1792, which possibly are the initials of St. Peterburg. The English experts from the museum think, that not only white flour from Baltics but bales of Russian crude flax and linen were the other goods transported.

Probably the Russians ships had also transported back herring. Among the sources there are data for trade with marinated herring from Great Yarmouth to St. Peterburg[3]. 3.

Before the First World War the existence and development of the port Great Yarmouth had been depending in huge scale form the fishing industry. The bigger part from the fish had been exported to Russia. The exported fish for Russia had been well packed in a barrels with layers of salt. It is interesting to know that the Russian peasants had loved not only the herring. They had also been drinking the salty marinade because they were suffering from a lack of salt. The tax over the salt in Russia had been too high.

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[3] "Great Yarmouth History" http://greatyarmouthhistory.com/Revised%20History/Chapter%2012,%20Fishing%20and%20the%20Floods,%20p463-494.html /

The Russia buyers tasted the herring opening random barrel and eat on spot directly from the fish. Nobody worried about the hygiene.

The trade between Soviet Russia and England

Other connections, which can be seen in the museum "Tide and Time" are art paintings of Russian ships from 20's and 30s years of 20th century, during the time of Soviet Russia. The goods on the ships are not known. Only mentioned on one of the paintings is that the cargo ship "Oxta" from Leningrad /ex St. Petersburg/ is loaded with wooden sleepers, probably for the railways. Similar to this Russian ship, a Norwegian, Estonian and even Greek ships were in Yarmouth and were loaded with timbers from the Russian towns Arhangelsk, Soroka and Leningrad, but again, no data for the goods, transported in this way back – from England to Soviet Russia.

In Norfolk Record Office there is data, not only for trade, but for a military relationship with Russia in those years. In the Great Yarmouth' church "St. Nickolas" there are buried 6 Russian sailors. Before their deaths, they had been patients in the navy hospital of Great Yarmouth. This case is connected with the history of 84 Russian and 15 English soldiers, participating in the army, they came back from the English – Russian Invasion of Holland. The history of the buried sailors will be a topic of future research of the author.

Resources

1. The file for Russian-English relations /Howes' letters/ in Norfolk Record Office: **NRO Y/D 24/1-6.**
2. The seals and pictures in "Time and Tide" museum in Great Yarmouth.

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