

Grand Duchess George of Russia

Photo credit : Photographer unknown

In 2014, plaque 72 was put in place on Wetherby Road to Her Royal and Imperial Highness Marie Georgievna Romanova, known as the **Grand Duchess George of Russia**.



She was the daughter of King George 1 of Greece and his Queen Olga, the Grand Duchess Olga Constantinova of Russia, first cousin to the Tsar, Nicholas II. She married in 1900 Grand Duke George of Russia on the island of Corfu, but the couple settled in St Petersburg. Sadly, she never adapted to life in Russia, became estranged from her husband and increasingly spent time abroad, including visiting the then world-renowned spa town of Harrogate, partly for the delicate health of her daughters Nina and Xenia. This was on the recommendation of the Tsarina Alexandra, who had visited Harrogate in 1894.

Grand Duchess George was in Harrogate at the outbreak of the First World War and decided to stay, devoting herself to helping wounded and sick service men. She founded hospitals and convalescent homes, including Tewit Well, Heatherdene, St George's and St Nicholas, not only providing the funds but also nursing patients herself, having trained as a Red Cross nurse. In all, through the war and immediate post-war year, her hospitals treated nearly 1,200 casualties. The memorial cross adjacent to the plaque was given by her to the town in 1921 to commemorate patients who died of their wounds. Her later life was lived in considerably reduced financial circumstances as a result of the Revolution in Russia, which also claimed the life of her husband, who was shot by the Bolsheviks in 1919. She returned to Greece and remarried but was forced into exile in Italy from 1924 to 1940, when her pro-British views led to her being forced to return to Greece, where she died later that year.

Acknowledgements: Malcolm Neesam included a portrait of Grand Duchess George in his *A-Z of Harrogate: People – Places – History*, published by Amberley in 2019.

Author: Paul Jennings March 2021