

Simon Romanovich Woronzow, 3rd Count Woronzow

Born in Russia 1744 Died in St Marylebone 21st June 1832 and then buried in the parish church

Not far from St John's Wood underground station there is a street of fine houses, called Woronzow Road with a big plaque at one end of it. Under the portrait of a refined looking eighteenth century gentleman we find the following:

“The road was named after Count Simon Woronzow Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 1784 to 1806”.

Woronzow lived in St Marylebone and on his death in 1832 left a bequest to the poor of the parish. The money was used to build the St Marylebone Almshouses.



Though the road was named after the ambassador in 1843 the Russians took longer to erect a memorial to him:

Plaque unveiled 26 November 2002 by H. E. Grigori Karasin [Russian Ambassador to the UK] and the Mayor of Camden, Councillor Judy Pattison.

Gift of Peter the Great Company of St Petersburg to the citizens of Camden.

Count Semyon Vorontsov came from a distinguished Russian family who had been involved in Russian politics and government for at least a couple of generations. His brother, Alexander, was ambassador in London from 1762 to 1764 and lived in Clifford Street, as at that time there was no permanent ambassadorial residence.

Vorontsov was merely 21 at the time of his appointment, which he owed partly to his uncle, Mikhail Vorontsov, the Grand Chancellor and partly to the fact that his sister, Elizabeth, was Peter III's mistress.

On his return to Russia he was created a senator and the President of the Board of Trade but he lost Catherine II's favour and was retired, to return to state office in 1802 when Alexander I appointed him Imperial Chancellor.

The Vorontsovs were supporters of Russian alliance with Britain and fervent opponents of Napoleon.

Their other sister, Ekaterina, whose married name was Dashkova, was a close friend of Catherine II's and is sometimes referred to as Catherine the Little. Dashkova was by her friend's side throughout the day of her coup in 1762 though her actual role has been disputed both by Catherine and by her various favourites, the Orlovs and, especially, Prince Potemkin whose enmity towards the Vorontsovs prevented the family's advancement.

Dashkova, though consistently loyal to the Empress, found it prudent to go on an extended European journey in 1768. Unlike many educated Russians she had a strong partiality for Britain over France and spent time in various parts of it, including two years in Edinburgh, where her son was educated. Some sort of reconciliation between her and Potemkin was arranged when her son became the prince's adjutant and Dashkova herself returned to St Petersburg to become the Director of the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1782 and the first President of the Russian Academy in 1784 where she initiated the 6-volume dictionary of the Russian language and even wrote part of it. Her subsequent relationship with the Empress remained stormy though not unfriendly but she was much hated (as were all Catherine's favourites) by the Emperor Paul.

Semyon himself resigned from the elite guards regiment in 1773 because of his dislike of Potemkin, by now a Lieutenant-General, who then ensured his "exile" to London, where he became ambassador in 1784 and remained in the post with brief interruption until 1806, staying in London even after his retirement.

By this time the Russian ambassador had a permanent residence in 36 Harley Street, acquired by the Russian Treasury in 1779 for £6,000 and, it seems, a separate embassy was also functioning at 32 Welbeck Street, which also had a Russian chapel. The staff of the embassy consisted of 6 people, one Counsellor, 2 Titular Counsellors, 1 translator and two students or actuaries, which makes one wonder whether the concept of interns had not been started by the Russian diplomatic service. There were constant arguments about payment. Under Peter, Secretaries had been paid 300 roubles and this was increased under Elizabeth to 400 – 600 roubles, with Catherine keeping to that rate till 1790s when it was increased to 2,500 roubles for Secretary and 1,000 roubles for other employees. (In 1773 the exchange was 4.5 roubles to £1.)

The ambassador also had a country house, though this was rented, in Richmond and various Russian visitors to London, such as the great Russian historian Nikolai Karamzin, described staying there as well as visiting the Harley Street residence. Another man who stayed at the Richmond house was Vasily Malinovsky (1765 – 1814) who had been appointed to the embassy, astonishingly enough, because of his good knowledge of English and who imbibed many English political ideas while here. In the Richmond house he wrote the first part of his book, *Thoughts on War and Peace*, eventually published in Russia in 1802.

Vorontsov managed to build up a large network of political and social friends and allies. He cultivated journalists and his social skills came in very useful in 1791 when he was instrumental in preventing Pitt from arming a naval squadron to compel Russia to return the Ochakov fortress to Turkey. Vorontsov was close to Fox and the Whigs and, with the help of his Chargé d'Affaires and interpreter, Vasili Lizakevich, rallied support in the City, as ever, not much in favour of a war with Russia. Realizing that even his own people were divided on the subject, Pitt backed down in the House of Commons and Vorontsov could proudly explain that:

"Ink and paper proved mightier than Prussian steel and British gunpowder."

To be fair, the fact that the navy was not in favour of the proposed expedition helped.

In April of that year Pitt despatched William Fawkener as a secret emissary to St Petersburg but both he and the envoy, Charles Whitworth, had a difficult time with the Empress who preferred to deal with Robert Adair, Fox's secret emissary who had been recommended by Vorontsov but whose mission could well be interpreted as being near-treasonous.

As countries changed sides during the prolonged war, Vorontsov signed a trading convention between Russia and Britain as well as an alliance against revolutionary France despite which Russia and Britain found themselves at war some years and as allies in others in the space of two decades. In 1800, for example only

the priest of the Russian Embassy Church, Jakov Smirnov, was in residence as a chargé d'affaires, as the two countries were nominally at war.

Vorontsov remained ambassador for some of Paul's reign, was dismissed when Paul drew closer to France, had his estates confiscated as he refused to return and was reappointed by Alexander I. In 1806 he retired but remained in England till his death in 1832. Letters from him in the Lilly Library Manuscript Collection are addressed from Harley Street, Welbeck Street, Berners Street as well as Richmond and Southampton.

Both Vorontsov's children were brought up in England and his son, Mikhail (1782 – 1856), who went back to Russia to a glittering military and political career, becoming Viceroy of New Russia and the Caucasus, a prince and a field-marshal, was usually described as “a dry phlegmatic milord”. Curiously enough, he married Elisabeth (Lise) Branicka, the daughter of Potemkin's favourite niece and reported mistress, Sashenka Branicka. Mikhail Vorontsov was also one of the many important men in Russia to be cuckolded by the great poet and ladies' man, Alexander Pushkin, quite possibly the real father of one of the Vorontsov daughters.

Semyon's daughter, Catherine (1784 – 1856), stayed in England and became the second wife of George Herbert, 11th Earl of Pembroke, with whom she had six children, including a son, Sidney, who became the Secretary at War during the Crimean War. His mother and uncle died in 1856 but there is no record of their feelings on such a curious turn of affairs.

Vorontsov died in Mansfield Street, leaving in his will £500 to the poor of St Marylebone parish, which was used to build the Almshouses in St John's Wood Terrace in 1836 (they were rebuilt at the same address in 1965 and are still used for sheltered housing). He was buried in the Pembroke vault in the crypt of St Marylebone Church. The entrance to the crypt was bricked up in 1853 but in 1980 a decision was taken to reuse it. In 1983 all the bodies were removed to Brookwood cemetery as the crypt was turned into a healing centre. The memorial in the cemetery records the date of the removal but not the individual names, which are listed in the parish office of St Marylebone. The Russian topographical historian, Sergei Romanyuk, waxes indignant in his book Russian London about the Pembroke family not removing Vorontsov's remains before the removal to Brookwood.

Simon Romanovich Woronzow, 3rd Count Woronzow, born in Russia 1744 and died in St Marylebone 21st June 1832. Woronzow was buried in the parish church in 1832. In 1983 his remains were disinterred from the Crypt of the parish church in 1983 and reburied in the St Marylebone plot at Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey. A five meter Portland stone cross now marks the place of his burial.



The Memorial Cross, 1983, at Brookwood Cemetery, designed by Sean Lander, Church Architect, of Welch and Lander, Upper Berkeley Street. It was executed in Portland stone to suggest the metropolitan connection. The lettering is by Caroline Webb.



*The 3rd Count Woronzow, by Sir Thomas Lawrence, c.1805-6
The Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia*



*Prince Michael Woronzow
Portrait by George Dawe 1825*

The third count was succeeded by his son, **Prince Michael Woronzow, 4th Count Woronzow**, “Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov”, born 19th May 1782, St. Petersburg, fought for Russians in Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow 1812 to 1813, recovered Napoleon’s despatch case as a trophy (now in Wilton House). In 1815 he was appointed commander of the Russian forces in Wellington’s allied army and became governor-general of Novorossia (New Russia) and Bessarabia in 1823. Michael set up his court at Odessa, and built Vorontsov’s Palace, there (1827-30). He built Vorontsov’s Palace (sometimes called Alupka Palace), Alupka, near Yalta, Crimea, Ukraine between 1828 and 1846. In 1844 Michael was appointed governor-general (viceroy) of the Caucasus and the following year was elevated to rank of Prince by Nicholas I, Tsar of Russia. Michael’s nephew Sidney Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Lea was British Secretary of State for War 1845-46 and again 1852-55, during the Crimean War 1853-56, when Britain was allied with France *against* Russia. Prince Woronzow died on 6th Nov 1856 in Odessa aged 74 and is buried in Odessa Cathedral.



Alupka Palace, Alupka, near Yalta, Crimea, Ukraine

Simon’s daughter Catherine Woronzow, Ekaterina Semenovna Vorontsova, was born on 24th October 1783 in St. Petersburg, and married George Augustus Herbert, 11th Earl of Pembroke, on 25th Jan 1808 in the Greek Chapel, St Marylebone. Catherine is buried in the crypt of St Mary and St Nicholas, Wilton.

