



In 1864, Queen Victoria engaged architect Konrad Kraus to build a palace in the Neo-Renaissance style as a city residence for her second daughter, Alice, who had married Ludwig IV of Hesse. Built on the site of the former Darmstadt botanical garden, the palace was later the home of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig, brother of Russian Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, and their correspondence does reference other sites portrayed by the artist Zehngraf within the 1896 Imperial Egg.



### Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, Russia

The Winter Palace was the official residence of Emperor Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. They were married in its Great Church on November 14/26, 1894.

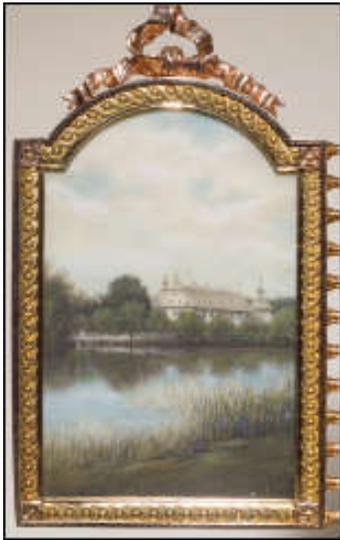
The miniature reflects the dull red [or 'cherry red'] color of the palace's facade as it looked at that time.



<http://www.angelfire.com/pa/ImperialRussian/blog/index.blog/1484149/the-changing-colour-of-the-winter-palace-during-the-18th-20th-centuries/>

“Built between 1754 and 1762 to plans by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, the Winter Palace was the Russian sovereigns’ winter residence in St. Petersburg. The original yellow ochre of the façade survived successive restorations to be replaced in the 1880s by cherry red, which in turn gave way after the Second World War to the green colour that it retains to this day.” (Ducamp, Emmanuel, *The Winter Palace: Saint Petersburg*, 1995, 26-27. This volume is a rare re-publication of original Hermitage Museum watercolors of exterior and historical interiors by masters of the genre like Edward Petrovich Hau). Today, it serves as the main building of the State Hermitage Museum.

From Nicky’s Diary, 31 December (1895): “We both slept wonderfully in our new home. The sun lit up my study most pleasantly as I was working in the morning. At 11 o’clock we went to church in the Anichkov; it was strange to feel like a guest there. After luncheon we went to our old rooms and collected the pictures, photographs and last things to take over to the Winter Palace. In the afternoon we sat at home and arranged everything.” (Maylunas & Mironenko, *A Lifelong Passion*, 1996, 133)

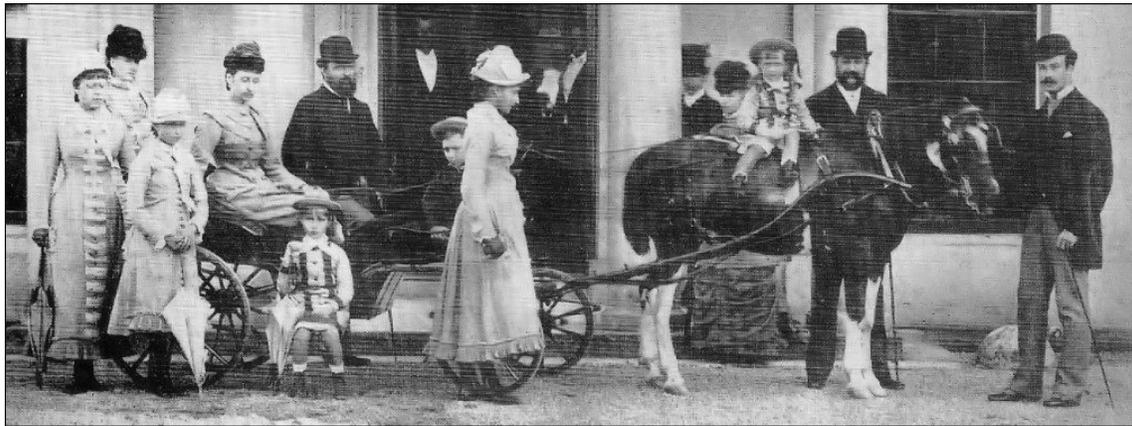


**Jagdschloss  
Kranichstein,  
Darmstadt, Germany**

Young Alix spent summer holidays at Kranichstein, a castle on the outskirts of Darmstadt. Once a hunting retreat for Hessian dukes, it became one of her family's summer residences after the Neues Palais was completed.



This was the first home of Alix's Parents, Grand Duke Louis IV and Princess Alice, second daughter of Queen Victoria: "Soon after Princess Alice's marriage, the Grand Duke, seeing that she felt somewhat cramped in the little house in Darmstadt, had taken her to see the old castle of **Kranichstein**, lying in the low, wooded hills a few miles to the north-east. The castle had not been lived in for almost a century, but she fell in love with its grey stone, its big rooms, its lake and the park around, preserved for the shooting of wild boar. She told the Grand Duke that she would love to spend the summers there, and he accordingly put in hand the necessary repairs and modernization ... Now, when Prince and Princess Louis returned from Osborne with their baby, **Kranichstein** was ready for them." (Duff, David, *Hessian Tapestry*, 1967, 105, and photograph below, 128)



Grand Duke Louis IV and the Grand Duchess with their family at Kranichstein, summer, 1878. Prince Ernest Louis is seated opposite to his mother, The Princesses are (left to right) Victoria, Alix, Elizabeth and Marie (on the pony)

"After his wife's death, the Grand Duke closed **Kranichstein** (now a museum), and it returned to the slumber from which Alice had awoken it fifteen years before." (*ibid.*, 182) "Winters were spent at Darmstadt, summers mostly at the castles of **Kranixhstein** (*sic*) or Seeheim. It is easy to picture the band of merry, high-spirited children romping in the suites of old-fashioned rooms at **Kranichstein**, racing in the park under the oaks, standing in deep admiration before the ancient winding staircase on

which the picture of a life-sized stag commemorated the spot where a real stag once sought refuge from a Landgrave of old days.” (Buxhoeveden, Baroness Sophie, *The Life and Tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna Empress of Russia*, 1928, 6-7)

Letter from Alix to Ernst Ludwig - St. Petersburg - Monday, 20 February/4 March 1895: “My darling Ernie dear, Many loving kisses & tender thanks to you both for your dear letters & the sweet little frame. Nicky was delighted with the pretty fish, & wishes me to thank you both for it many times. - ” “... Poor **Eckstorm** has died, I read in the papers. ... ” [Theodor Eckstorm was *Obergörster* (senior forester) at **Kranichstein**.] (Kleinpenning, Petra, H., Editor, *The Correspondence of the Empress Alexandra of Russia with Ernst Ludwig and Eleonore Grand Duke and Duchess of Hesse: 1878-1916*, 2010, 178-79)



**Schloss Wolfsgarten,  
near Darmstadt,  
Germany**

This villa was used as a hunting lodge and was visited by Alix on occasion during the summers of her youth. It was here she received instruction before her conversion to Russian Orthodoxy, a necessary requirement for a future empress of Russia.



Originally a hunting seat established in 1722 by Landgraf Ernst Ludwig of Hesse Darmstadt to pursue his passion for hunting with dogs, it was eventually abandoned in 1768. Restored and expanded by the grand ducal family in in the 1830s, by 1879 it was the favorite country retreat of the family of Grand Duke Ludwig IV. Ernst Ludwig and Alix were two of his seven children.

From Harrogate - Saturday, 21 May/2 June 1894 - Alix to Ernst Ludwig: “I am going to be good & do all Dr. Oliver says, so as to be as well as possible when I at last shall be home, at beloved **Wolfsgarten**, the dearest place on earth, & yet where I miss beloved Papa the most.” (Kleinpenning, 153-54)

Osborne House - 13/25 July 1894: Alix to Ernst Ludwig. Darling Ernie dear, “I am going to send you these lines by messenger. All alone I sit here & write, feeling low and unhappy, as I parted from beloved Nicky, Monday-night.... My comfort is, I am at last coming home - on the 31<sup>st</sup> on the *Victoria & Albert*, off we go - I am dying to see you & little Ducky [Victoria Melita] & dear old **Wolfsgarten**.” (*ibid.*, 156)

Alix to Nicky - 21 July - **Wolfsgarten**: “Seeing Ernie and Ducky together always makes me long too madly for you, my own precious Nicky dear. How much I shall think of you at Xenia’s wedding - that shrimp marrying before her elder brother - to bad really but our turn will come - and then - oh Nicky

sweet, then forever one - no separation, always yours and more even than now. You must come to us still here and sit here in my little house with me.” (Maylunas & Mironenko, 85)

Alix to Nicky - 27 July - **Wolfsgarten**: “You must come *here*; still life in the country is so different from the town life - we can be out all day in the woods without meeting anyone - can be quite to ourselves in God’s beautiful nature. We two alone under the magnificent trees, loving each other with all our hearts and feeling so utterly content!” (*ibid.*, 90)

Following Alix & Nicky’s idyll together in England: “The lovers had agreed to meet again in September at the Grand Ducal Castle of **Wolfsgarten** near Darmstadt, where Alix was to stay while completing her instruction in the Orthodox faith.” (Poliakoff, V., *The Tragic Bride*, 1927, 54-55)

Unfortunately, word came of the decline of his father’s health in the Crimea and the couple next met under the tragic circumstances of his father’s untimely death.

“Nicholas, who was not told the whole truth about the deadly nature of the illness of his father was torn between filial affection and a passionate desire to see Alix. The whole day [says he in his diary] the sense of duty, which compelled to accompany my parents to the Crimea fought with the violent desire to fly to darling Alix in **Wolfsgarten** ...” (*ibid.*)

### **Fortress Coburg (Veste Coburg), Germany**



This fortress overlooks the town of Coburg, where the dukes of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha resided from 1826 to 1918. Many of the crowned heads of Europe were among their relatives, including Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert. The marriage of their granddaughter Princess Victoria Melita to Alix’s brother, Grand Duke Ernest Ludwig of Hesse, which took place in Coburg, gave Tsarevich Nicholas (Victoria Melita’s cousin) the perfect opportunity to propose to his future bride.



The main construction of **Veste Coburg** took place in 1499 on the site of an older structure. Historically, it is the castle where Martin Luther sought refuge from persecution by both the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. It was also during his time here that Luther continued to translate the Bible into the German language. Along with Martin Luther, Albert of Saxe-Coburg had a connection to Coburg. Married to Queen Victoria, Albert was a **strong link to the Lutheran faith of Alexandra**

**Feodorovna** who, as Princess Alix of Hesse, struggled severely with the requirement that she change her faith to Orthodoxy in order to marry Nicholas, heir to the throne of Russia. Specific correspondence referencing Veste Coburg has not surfaced thus far in my research.

**West Park United Reformed Church, historically in St. Peter's Church, & Cathcart House, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England**



Shortly after her engagement to Nicholas, Alix traveled to Harrogate in May 1894 to receive treatment in the local mineral baths for sciatica (back pain). She took lodgings in Mrs. Christopher Allen's Cathcart House (pictured to the left of the church) under the name of Baroness Startenburg. During Alix's stay, Mrs. Allen gave birth to twins—a boy and girl. As noted in the *Harrogate Advertiser* in June 1894, "To Mr. and Mrs. Allen's delight, Her Grand Ducal Highness signified her desire to stand as Godmother for the twins." They were christened Nicholas Charles Bernard Hesse and Alix Beatrice Emma in St. Peter's Church. Alix gave a pair of gold cufflinks bearing her seal to little Nicholas and a gold enameled heart-shaped pendant adorned with a pearl to her namesake. These christening gifts are now on display in the Pump Room Museum.



<http://www.docbrown.info/docspics/westyorkshire/wypage04.htm>

In the general history of **Harrogate, Cathcart House** provided accommodation to various royals visiting for the Baths. It was Queen Victoria who arranged for her granddaughter, then Princess Alix of Hesse, to 'take a cure' at Harrogate. Alix wrote to various friends and family members during her stay. In a letter to her friend, Pollie Radcliffe, the Princess Alix wrote on June 14, 1894: "Darling Pollie, ... The twins which turned up the day before we arrived were christened yesterday & I was Godmother to both Nicholas and Alix. ... A loving kiss, Ever? your devoted friend Alix" (Wynn, Marion, "Princess Alix Was Always Extremely Homely - Visit to Harrogate, 1894", *Royalty Digest*, #122, August, 2001, 53, journal article attached at the end of this essay; another insight into Pollie's relationship with Alexandra is in Hazlett, Pat, "Alix and Pollie - A Lifelong Friendship", *Fabergé Research Newsletter*, Winter 14)

The future Empress also wrote letters both to her brother, Ernst Ludwig in Darmstadt, and her fiancé Nicholas Alexandrovich during her stay at Harrogate.

Saturday, 21 May/2 June 1894, to her brother: "My own darling Ernie dear, I must write to you at last myself. ... As yet the baths of course have had no effect, & my leg aches very much. ... I have taken seven bath, six days running, & now am stopping a few days, - he would like me to take 20 if possible, so our Walton dream must again fall to pieces; a great disappointment as Nicky was coming on purpose early, so as that we might spend eight quiet days there before Grandmama [Queen Victoria] returns from Balmoral". (Kleinpenning, 149)

Harrogate - May 25, 1894 - Alix to Nicky: "Good morning my own precious Boosy - my Birthday! 22! Oh, how I wish you were here, beloved Darling! And your glorious bracelet, you naughty monkey, how could you dare to give me such a magnificent thing - I feel quite shy and your telegram ..." (Wynn, 53)

Harrogate - Thursday, 26 May/7 June 1894 - Alix to Ernst Ludwig: "My own darling Ernie dear, A good kiss & blessing for your dear letter, which made me so happy, & for the photo of my darling Nicky, ... You were an angel to have had enlarged for me. It is an excellent one, & the expression so nice & natural. Really, darling, that beautiful parasol is much too good for me, you spoil me always with your presents. I took it out with me of course yesterday morning, but did not open it, it was so beautifully rolled up. No, it is too sweet & that splendid sapphire [sic] on the top, I feel I must hide it with my hand & not let anyone see it, & yet I am so proud of it, I want all to see it. ... Nicky gave me a magnificent bracelet in diamonds with a clasp of diamonds & two rubies, to be worn & a brooch too. ...

I may leave here on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, ... I want to go to Walton & meet Nicky there, who would be arriving that day at Gravesend in his Father's yacht, & wld. Go straight on to Walton. About four days we should be there and then go to Windsor. But Grandmama would be too disappointed if I did not remain with her till she goes to Osborne, about the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, but one cannot settle it yet quite. She is still upset I am going so far away, & grumbles at us in each letter, poor dear. - I must say I too dread the moment when I shall have to say goodbye to her, as who knows when we shall ever meet again - she is no longer young, poor darling Grandmama ... " [She last saw her grandmother at Balmoral in the autumn of 1896, when she and Nicky visited Queen Victoria there along with their nearly one year old daughter, Olga.] (Kleinpenning, 151-53)

A plaque at Cathcart House reads in part: "In 1911, a tea-party here was attended by Empress Marie of Russia; Queen Alexandra, former Empress of India; King Manuel of Spain; Prince Christopher of Greece; Princess Victoria and Grand Duchess George of Russia." Grand Duchess George, known within the family as 'Greek Minnie' was the wife of Grand Duke George Mikhailovich. In the summer of 1914, she and the couple's two daughters Nina and Xenia (who suffered with a respiratory illness) to take the 'bracing air' of **Harrogate**. They were prevented from returning home by the outbreak of World War I and her husband, along with his brother GD Nicholas Mikhailovich and their cousin GD Paul Alexandrovich, were executed by a Bolshevik firing squad in January 1919.



### Schloss Rosenau, Coburg, Germany

On April 20, 1894, shortly after the wedding of her brother, Grand Duke Ernest Ludwig of Hesse to Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg, Alix accepted Nicholas's proposal of marriage at Rosenau Palace. This palace also had special meaning for Alix's grandmother, Queen Victoria, whose late husband, Prince Albert of Saxe Coburg and Gotha, was born there.



Queen Victoria frequently occupied the castle with her husband. She was known to comment: "If I were not who I am, I would have my real home here." ([www.sgvcoburg.de](http://www.sgvcoburg.de)) In 1894, the queen's granddaughter, then Princess Alix of Hesse, and her fiancé the Tsesarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich visited the castle the day following their engagement, arriving romantically by pony cart.



### Windsor Castle, near London, England

Windsor Castle, set amid rolling hills west of London, was the residence of Alexandra's grandmother, Queen Victoria. In her youth, Alix was a frequent visitor to the ancient castle at Windsor. Alix and Nicholas visited Queen Victoria at Windsor in July 1894, and it was here Nicholas presented his formal engagement gifts to Alix. Tsar Alexander and Maria Feodorovna sent her an extravagant necklace of pearls, designed by Fabergé at a cost of a quarter of a million rubles.



During the reign of Queen Victoria, **Windsor Castle** was the principle palace of the British Monarchy. The queen spent the greater part of every year at the castle and hosted state visits as well as visits from her extensive family.

From Nicky's Diary, 1894 - June 23, Saturday: "The whole morning until lunch, we sat with dear Alix and I read to her. At 4 o'clock Victoria, Alix, Ludwig and myself drove in the Royal carriage and four to **Windsor**, which we reached in an hour. ... Dear Alix and I passed a wonderful evening together." (Poliakoff, 1927, 36)



**Alexander Palace,  
Tsarskoe Selo, Russia**

The Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo ("tsar's village") south of St. Petersburg became the preferred residence of Nicholas, Alexandra and their children. The west wing of this relatively small yellow and white palace offered them a quiet, safe haven from the complexities of life in St. Petersburg.



Built by Catherine the Great for her favored grandson the future Emperor Alexander I, the neo-classical palace was completed by Giacomo Quarenghi in 1796. The poignant importance of this residence to the last Imperial couple is reflected in their correspondence and diaries.

Nicky, Diary - 22 November, 1894: "At 3 o'clock Alix and I left for Tsarskoe. It had started to freeze when we arrived at the **Alexander Palace**, I am staying in my old rooms. It's inexpressibly wonderful to live here quietly, without seeing anyone - all day and night together!" (Maylunas & Mironenko, 115)

26 November: "Yesterday received a telegram from dear Mama saying that we can stay here one more day. My bliss is without bounds - it will be so sad to leave Tsarskoe, which has become such a dear place for us both; for the first time since our wedding we have been able to live truly soul-to-soul. [In Alix's hand] *Never did I believe there could be such utter happiness in this world, such a feeling of unity between two mortal beings. I love you - those three words have my life in them.*" (*ibid.*, 116)

## Balmoral Castle, Scotland



Balmoral was Queen Victoria's baronial style castle summer residence in the Scottish Highlands, Alix and her family made annual trips there during her childhood. It was her favorite among her grandmother's numerous homes. Usually visiting Balmoral during the shooting season, Nicholas and Alexandra visited in October 1896. Although the weather during one stay was rainy and cold, Alexandra wrote, "It has been such a very short stay and I leave dear, kind Grandmama with a heavy heart."



As Empress, Alexandra wrote to her former governess, Miss Margaret Hardcastle Jackson, her 'darling Madgie' from **Balmoral** Castle, October 3, 1896: "Dearest Madgie, - Just before leaving, I hasten to send you a few words of loving thanks for your dear letter. ... I hope *my* Harrogate and the beautiful Yorkshire air did you good! It has been such a very short stay and I leave dear kind Grandmama with a heavy heart. Who knows when we may meet again and where? We had a good passage from Denmark. Next Saturday morning, God grant, we shall be at dear Darmstadt. Goodbye, Darling, and God bless you. Yr. old P.Q. No. III, Alix" (Buxhoeveden, 73)

"In England the little Prince and Princesses of Hesse met crowds of cousins, including the children of the Prince and Princess of Wales (King Edward VII) and those of Princess Christian. With this merry band, they played about Windsor, wandered in the grounds at Balmoral and Osborne, visited pet little shops, favorite little shops, or are these pet shops and had their own special friends among the Queen's retainers. They went round to see these old friends every time they came over, and the visit to 'the merchants,' by which name a small shop between Abergeldie and Balmoral was known to them, was never missed.

The 'merchants' sold sweets, notepaper, and other small things, and the children would come back from their expedition, laden with wonderful purchases, to which the kindly 'merchants,' an old lady and her sister, would generally add a sweet something. The great delight of the young Princesses at being initiated by their old friend and her sister into the secrets of scone-baking was remembered all their lives, and the tales of these adventures, recounted in later days, filled the hearts of the Imperial Russian children with longing envy." (*ibid.*, 7-8; David Park Curry, *Fabergé: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, 1995, 60)



### **Anichkov Palace, St. Petersburg, Russia**

Anichkov Palace was the St. Petersburg residence of Tsar Alexander III and Empress Maria Feodorovna. After their marriage on November 14 (OS), 1894, Nicholas brought his new bride back to this childhood home. The newlyweds lived in a suite of six small rooms, an extension of the new tsar's bachelor quarters in this palace. Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna greeted them there with bread and salt, the traditional Russian welcome.



This palace is most directly associated with the coming to power of the Empress Elisabeth, and her lifelong companion, Alexey Razumovsky. In 1741, the Empress purchased the building on the northwest corner of Nevsky and the Fontanka. The **Anichkov Palace** is where the new Empress Alexandra spent her first winter in Russia. The palace takes its name from the Anichkov Most (Bridge), with its landmark sculptures: Pytor Klodt's 'Horse Tamers'.

“Sunday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1894, was a particularly trying day for Marie Feodorovna: her son the Emperor Nicholas II was married in state to Princess Alice, who had been received into the Orthodox Church under the name of Alexandra Feodorovna... The supreme ordeal for Marie Feodorovna was when she left in advance for the **Anitchkoff Palace** to await the arrival of the newly-married pair. According to Russian custom she wanted to meet them at the threshold to present the bread and salt.” (Poliakoff, V. *Mother Dear: The Empress Marie of Russia and Her Times*, 1926, 243)



### **Osborne House, Isle of Wight, England**

Young Alix was a frequent summer visitor to Osborne House, one of Queen Victoria's royal residences, overlooking the strait that separates the Isle of Wight from the mainland of England.

Nicholas visited Britain in the summer of 1894 and stayed with his fiancée and her grandmother at Osborne House in June of that year. (Lesley, 1976; Snowman, 1977).



Originally leased and then purchased from the Blachford family as a site for the construction of a seaside retreat for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, it was completed for their occupation in 1851.

Nicky's Diary, **Osborne**, 1894: "At the landing stage we got into carriages and drove straight to **Osborne**... I like the house and the situation very much. The view from the windows on the Sound and towards the other side is extraordinarily pretty. After lunch I made myself comfortable in the rooms downstairs; Alix is on the floor above. ... Then we went to the seashore here, like a child, I paddled about with naked feet. We returned in the pony carriage and dined at 9, but the evening dragged on until 11. Sat with Alix." (Poliakoff, 1927, 49-50)

8 July (1894): "Granny's life here is the same, transposed from Windsor - but not for us, as the sea is near. [In Alix's hand] *My own Boosy Boosy dear, never changing, always true. Have confidence and faith in your girly dear who loves more deeply and devotedly than she can ever say ...*" (Maylunas & Mironenko, 80)

10 July (1894): "Alix and I went by char-à-banc [originating in France, a horse or motorized vehicle with side benches for transport or sightseeing] to the shore, and sat on the sand looking at the waves. Our officers came to dinner, I presented them to Granny. Spent a last evening with my bride. [In Alix's hand] *Ever true and ever loving, faithful, pure and strong as death.*" [How true this was!] (*ibid.*, 80)

Alix to Ernst Ludwig. **Osborne House** - 13/25 July 1894: "Darling Ernie dear, I am going to send you these lines by messenger. All alone I sit here & write, feeling low and unhappy, as I parted from beloved Nicky, Monday-night. ... My comfort is, I am at last coming home - on the 31<sup>st</sup> on the *Victoria & Albert*, off we go - I am dying to see you & little Ducky [Victoria Melita] & dear old Wolfsgarten. [P.S.] I feel more Rainy than Sunny without my sweet Nicky." (Kleinpenning, 156)

# "PRINCESS ALIX WAS ALWAYS EXTREMELY HOMELY" VISIT TO HARROGATE, 1894

by  
Marion Wynn

Towards the end of May 1894, Harrogate heard a rumour of great interest and excitement. Her Grand Ducal Highness, Princess Alix of Hesse, newly betrothed to the Tsarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich of Russia, was coming to Harrogate to secure the benefits of the baths and waters.<sup>1</sup> After the engagement in Coburg, Nicholas returned to Russia and Alix followed her grandmother, Queen Victoria, to Windsor. At the Queen's invitation, the Bishop of Ripon, Dr. Boyd-Carpenter, also came to Windsor to talk to Alix about the affinities between the Anglican and Orthodox Churches,<sup>2</sup> in preparation for her conversion to Orthodoxy. It was during this stay that Alix fell victim to a painful attack of sciatica, and Queen Victoria sent her to have treatment at Harrogate.<sup>3</sup> This was also a good period for her to start learning Russian, and have a rest from all the excitement over her engagement.

As companions, Alix took her niece Princess Alice of Battenberg, and Mademoiselle Catherine Schneider, her sister Ella's reader, to help with Russian lessons. To avoid publicity, Alix assumed the name of Baroness Starckenberg, and took rooms in a local boarding house.<sup>4</sup> The ruse, however, did not work, as almost immediately upon their arrival an enterprising autograph hunter called at their lodgings (at Mrs C. Allen's, Catheart House, Prospect Place), and asked the Princess to sign her name.<sup>5</sup>

Mrs Allen's lodging house had been taken for the royal guest and her suite, in the usual way by Mr Batley the local house agent. No one in the household realised who their guests were, until their arrival and the general excitement of the press and reporters. Mrs Allen herself was "confined to bed" on their arrival, and Alix's secretary, Baroness Fabrice, enquired anxiously of the landlady, afraid of infection. Mr Allen dryly remarked "that he did not know, as his wife had just presented him with twins". Alix was delighted, and expressed the desire to see the happy mother and her twins, and took the whole episode as a sign of good luck.

Alix stayed at Catheart House for almost a month, and during that time Mr and Mrs Allen got to know her very well. Their main impression was that the Princess was extremely homely and always displayed a kindly spirit. She was always tripping and singing about the house,

like a happy English girl just home from school. "Now popping into her bedroom and alarming the servant by helping her to make the bed; then startling Mrs Allen by tapping at the kitchen door, with a pretty "May I come in", dandling the lucky twins, or standing with her back to the fire, like a Yorkshire man,

whilst she chatted as to the cooking preparations, or held lengthy discussions along with Baroness Fabrice as to the best way of dressing and training children. In these cases the Princess always stoutly defended the English style, and indeed nearly everything English, whilst the Baroness held more for the German. Many a time they would say they had "never lived in a house before", as they inquired into details of household management, or were questioned as to their wishes. The Princess particularly desired everyone to treat her as an ordinary woman".<sup>6</sup> Alix had her first sulphur bath on the 23rd May; "I had my first sulphur bath this morning, it did not smell lovely, and made my silver bracelet, which I never take off quite black, but that one can clean with the powder one uses for cleaning up one's silver things". (Letter to



Princess Alix in 1894

Nicky, 10th May 1894 O.S.) Miss Shoemith was Alix's bath attendant during the whole time she was at Harrogate, and she thought the princess was "far nicer to deal with than the generality of ladies who visit the Baths - so affable and

unassuming, nothing stiff or formal about her, but still one could see that she had a good deal of character, and a strong will of her own.<sup>9</sup>

Alix's routine of the day, was to go for her bath at twelve o'clock (this changed to five o'clock, when crowds started to gather at midday). She took a chair to the Baths - Mr Thomas Rochford was the chair-man most used by Alix, he had worked at Harrogate with his pedal chair, for many years.<sup>9</sup> Alix usually returned in a cab, to prevent her getting a chill. She never allowed anything to interfere with her baths, even visiting them on the day she left. She did not have an ailment, except a little rheumatism and stiffness in her knees, for which she had a special application applied. She tried both the Sulphur Bath and the Special Needle Bath, invented by Mr Burkinshaw. Dr Oliver was her medical attendant, one of the court physicians, and he advised her on which baths to take.

Miss Shoemith always made sure the dressing room was as comfortable as possible, and arranged for fresh flowers each day. Councillor Wilson, a local chemist, sent her a selection of toilet requisites, including "Harrogate Bouquet", which always pleased Alix.

During her cure, her sister Princess Louis of Battenberg, spent a couple of days with her. They all patronised the cycle chairs, including Princess Alice. "We had great fun going about in tricycle bath chairs, worked by a man sitting behind us. We used to urge them to race each other".<sup>10</sup>

The crowds often bothered her, and there was inevitably a small crowd always gathered around the site of Cathcart House. "So determined were some people that they brought a luncheon basket, and sat upon the Stray until they were satisfied with the sight of her Ducal Highness".<sup>11</sup> Writing to Nicky on 26th May, she mentions her treatment and the crowds - "13th May (O.S.) Then I had my head washed, which takes an hour, as one's hair will never dry. Shall I cut it off and appear like you? Eh? Would that not look imposing? Of course it is in all the papers that I am here, and all the trades people send epistles and beg of one to order things, even a piano and tea were offered. The rude people stand at the corner

and stare; I shall stick my tongue out at them another time. Now my beloved Child, I must say goodbye. Ever your own true, loving and devoted girly, Alix. Many loving kisses".<sup>12</sup> More heartache on the publicity and crowds was expressed in her letter to Nicky on 29th May: "16 May (O.S.) Harrogate. My own deeply beloved Nicky. What can I say to express my joy and gratitude, for receiving three dear long letters in one day. The people are obvious here, now that they have found me out. They stand in a mass to see me drive out and tho' I

now get in at the backyard, they watch the door and then stream to see me and follow too. One obvious woman, who comes quite close too, and stares, I thought perhaps it might be the mad correspondent (wife) of yours, you remember the letter at Coburg you showed me? Then when I go into a shop to buy flowers, girls stand and stare in at the window. The Chemist told Madeline that he had sent in a petition that a policeman should stand near the house to keep people off, as he saw how they stared. Most kind but it makes no difference. "That's her," one said behind me. If I were not in the bathchair I should not mind. When Gretchen was in a shop this morning, a little girl came in and the man asked her whether she had seen me. She said yes only once as I had my carriage in the courtyard, as I did not seem to like being looked at. I wish the others would remark it too and keep away and not stare with opera glasses through their windows. It is too



Cathcart House, Prospect Place

unpleasant!"<sup>13</sup>

However, her appearance and wish to be treated as an ordinary woman won much admiration and respect. The Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack reported "Surely no Princess with such a high destiny ever lived so unostentatiously. Being a fine, robust, young lady, fair, rosy, and blue-eyed, standing full five feet nine inches high, with an air of brightness and firmness, and yet simplicity as to dress, habits, food, etc. she seemed peculiarly adapted to win admiration and respect and wear a crown in a land like Russia. Talking of food, the Princess lived well, but liked the plainest (being fond of good old Yorkshire pudding, by the

way). Breakfast soon after nine, out for a run or a bath from eleven to one; then back to her rooms, was the morning routine. The attendants dined at one o'clock. The Princess dined at two - off the same joints - Mr Allen says.<sup>14</sup> What would Mr Allen have thought, if he had seen Alix's letter to Nicky dated 30th May referring to some of the meals she had eaten at the boarding house. "17th May (O.S.) Good morning my sweet Child. I dreamed of you (I cannot spell this morning) Pfu! Our breakfast was quite good this morning, but our supper last night so dry, we nearly all choked. Alix."<sup>15</sup>

Alix had her 22nd birthday during her visit to Harrogate. According to Armstrong's Almanack, Nicky sent her a large picture of himself, and a bulky billet-doux. "Here we may remark that from certain things which transpired at Catheart House, there is reason to think that this is not merely a marriage of policy, but a genuine love match".<sup>16</sup>

On 25th May (O.S.) Alix wrote to Nicky thanking him for his present:

"Good morning my own precious Boysy - my Birthday! 22! Oh, how I wish you were here, beloved Darling! And your glorious bracelet, you naughty monkey, how could you dare to give me such a magnificent thing - I feel quite shy and your telegram. You do spoil one. I must flee to my water, and Goodbye. We have been arranging flowers all the morning, which some kind angel has sent me. More tonight."<sup>17</sup>

Alix's sister, Princess Louise, was still with her, for her birthday, and the actual day being sunny; they went for a long drive together.

Whilst at Harrogate, Alix visited Ripley, Pannal, Hampsthwaite, Knaresborough, Plompton and Harlow Moor always using a cycle chair. Other visits in the town were to Christ Church, the Baptist Church, St Peter's and the Congregational Church, St Mary's Presbyterian Church and Pannal Church. The visit to St Peter's Church, which was next door to Catheart House, was for the christening of her landlady's twins. Alix had asked if she could be their Godmother - much to the surprise and delight of Mr and Mrs Allen. The second godmother was Baroness Fabrice, and the godfathers were the Mayor, Mr C Fortune, JP and the

butcher, Mr John Robinson. The Rev A Cope administered the ceremony and Alix presented the baby boy, named Nicholas Charles Bernard Hesse (after her fiancée Nicky and her own name of Hesse), and Baroness Fabrice presented the baby girl named Alix Beatrice Emma (after Alix herself).<sup>18</sup> The Armstrong Harrogate Almanack reported the christening as "... a strange never-to-be-forgotten scene - The future Empress of the mighty Empire of Russia, standing as surety before God for a Plumber's baby (Mr Allen was a Master

Plumber by trade),<sup>19</sup> along with the Mayor of Harrogate and a local butcher. Surely never knelt such a diverse party before in that Church, or any other Church. Surely no lady ever lived so high and stooped so low. In a word, it was a crowning act of condescension on the part of Her Grand Ducal Highness, Princess Alix of Hesse".<sup>20</sup>

The Christening presents included a pair of gold sleeve links, to bear the Princess's crest, for the boy, and a small gold enamelled heart-shaped necklet, with pearl in centre, for the girl. Both these gifts were from Alix. Baroness Fabrice gave a fine gold chain to wear with the necklet, the Mayor a silver rattle to each of the babies, and Mr Robinson gave a silver jug and spoon. The Allen Grandparents gave each child a silver napkin ring and Mr Baxter of Northallerton presented the boy with a gold watch.<sup>21</sup>

On the 14th June, Alix wrote to her friend Polly Radcliffe. She wrote the letter up in the moors in her bath chair, describing the

view and telling her about the christening the day before. She ends the letter with the dates she is considering leaving Harrogate for Walton-on-Thames, where she will be meeting up again with her fiancé, Nicholas.

Harrogate  
up on the Marlow Moors  
in a bath chair

June 14, 1894

"Darling Pollic.

I am staying up here and hasten to use the occasion to send you a few lines of love and tender thanks for your dear birthday letter which touched me deeply and gave me much pleasure. It is really the first warm day again though a strong wind is blowing up here. The view is lovely. A blue haze over the distant hills and a delicious breeze. Little Louise



Alix



*The Royal Baths, Harrogate*

Battenberg is with me. I had begged Victoria to spare her for eight days and really she looks better since she is here and taking one of the waters. It makes such a difference having a child in the room.

The twins which turned up the day before we arrived were christened yesterday and I was Godmother to both Nicholas and Alix. Of course there was a crowd when we went to church though we tried to keep it secret.

The people are a nuisance staring at one so. One feels such a fool. I bathe daily and take my water.

What a disappointment you cannot come to England this year. It would have been such fun if we had met. I am leaving on the 19th or 20th for Walton when you can guess who is coming. After about three days we go then again to Windsor probably till the Queen goes to Osborne. A loving kiss

Ever your devoted friend

Alix<sup>17</sup>

Alix left Harrogate on Friday June 19th, on the 12 o'clock train. Before she left, she gave Miss Shoesmith a signed photo of herself, together with the chairmen she had used. She thanked the Mayor and officials of the town for all their help in making her visit so pleasurable, and finally she gave photos of both herself and Nicky to Mr and Mrs Allen, hoping they would be kept until the twins were grown up, so that they could see who they had been named after - the Tsar and Tsarina of Russia!

#### NOTES

1. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
2. E M Almedingen "The Empress Alexandra" (Hutchinson, London 1961) p.26.
3. Harrogate. A Spa town in the parish of Knaresborough, long celebrated for its Chalybeate and Sulphurous waters. The first spring was discovered in 1771 by Captain William Slingsby (The Old Spa), followed by another Chalybeate spring half a mile to the South West (The Tewitt Well). A new spring was discovered in 1783 in the garden of the Crescent Inn, and in 1819 two more springs were discovered. (Langdale's Topographical Dictionary of Yorkshire, 1882).
4. Greg King "Empress Alexandra" (Atlantic International Pub. 1990) p.62.
5. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
6. Interview with Mr and Mrs Allen after Alix's visit (Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack 1895).
7. Andrei Maylunas and Sergi Mitronenko "A Lifelong Passion" (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London 1996) p.62.
8. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
9. "ditto" 1931.
10. David Quill "Hessian Tapestry" (Frederick Muller Ltd. 1967) p.226.
11. Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
12. "A Lifelong Passion" p.67.
13. "ditto" p.68.
14. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
15. "A Lifelong Passion" p.68.
16. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
17. "A Lifelong Passion" p.70.
18. In 1918 Alix Allen married Lieut. William Hamilton of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, at St. Peter's Church. The local paper showed a wedding picture on the steps of Calveat House.
19. Birth Certificate of Alix Beatrice Emma Allen, dated 11 June, 1894.
20. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
21. "Armstrong's Harrogate Almanack" 1895.
22. Margit Ejelman "Louise Mountbatten: Queen of Sweden" (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London 1968) p.75.