

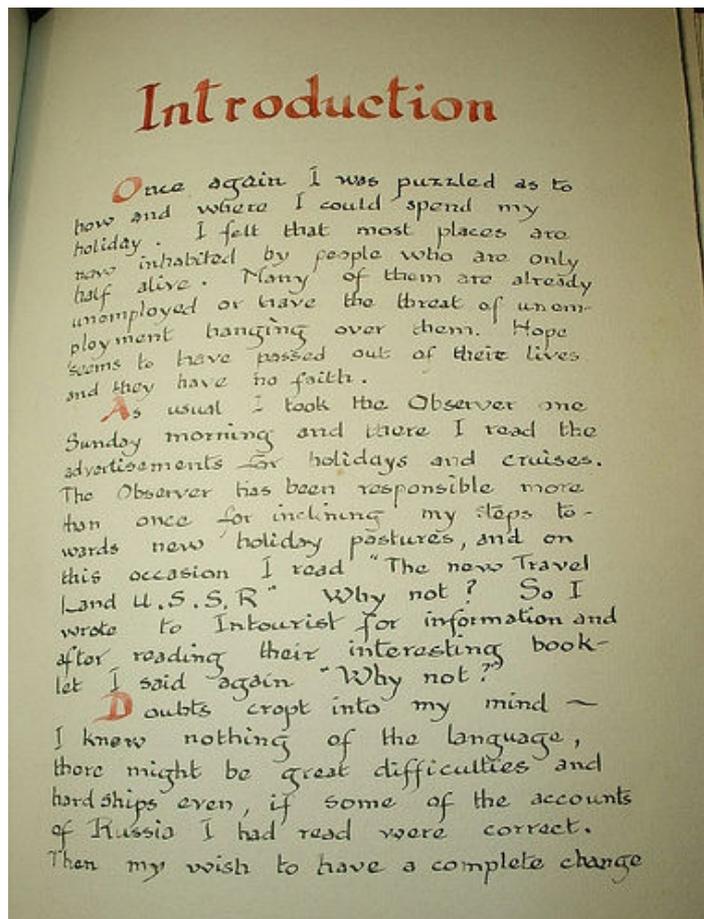
10. Diary 1935 A holiday in Russia [Joint project: 2 students ~ + related essays]

by Miss C. M. Gaskill (Billy)

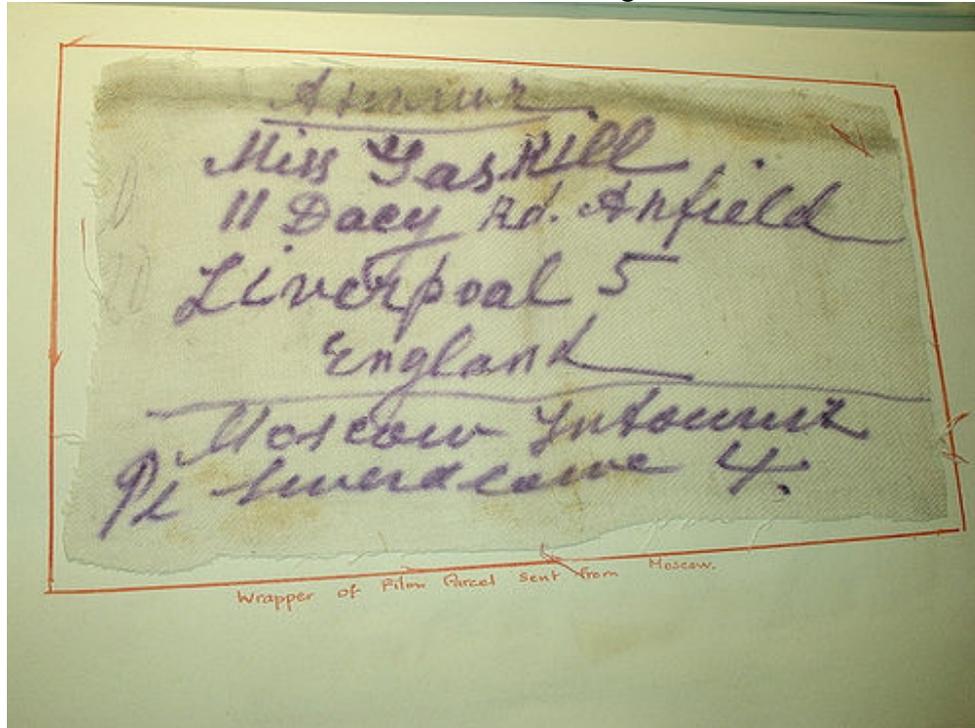
Miss Gaskill, (later Mrs Constance Sharps') journey consists of a trip via the Russian Vessel MV SMOLNY from London to Leningrad, then on to Moscow by train. Her time in Russia is divided between Leningrad and Moscow.

This is a handwritten, illustrated, leather-bound account in two volumes of one young lady's experiences on a cruise from London to the USSR and of her experiences there. Miss Gaskill appears to be in her thirties. This diary is unusual in that she is alone, her father waving her off at Lime Street station in Liverpool. She describes the journey and the company in some

detail, compares life in the USSR to life in Britain, describes the people she meets and looks in some detail at Russian culture and social organisation. In some ways, this account is more of a travelogue than a diary, as there are few dated entries, most sections being divided by chapter headings: *Life on Board, Art Galleries and Museums, Travel, Food and Drink, Cinemas, Theatre, Moscow, Lenin and the Revolution, Marriage and Divorce, Criminal Court, Religion, Shopping, Language, People*. As in her other travelogues, Miss Gaskill's account is accompanied by some stunning illustrations and paintings. The account is in two volumes, both measuring 20cm x 30cm. Volume one contains over 90 photos, 60 pictures/postcards, tickets, Leningrad & Moscow guides, Moscow Metro Guide, newspapers, 3 maps, Hotel Receipts, stamps etc. Volume 2 contains a hand-drawn map and 150 pages of handwritten text. At the rear are many exquisite illustrations both in watercolour and wood or linocut, each one signed by the author. The pages are made with a heavy weave



paper watermarked 'unbleached1934'. The combined weight of the two volumes is 3kg.



The Ship

Life on board the Smolny was very informal from the Captain downwards. The crew wore no uniform and dressed in mufti so that it was difficult to distinguish crew from passengers. The Captain, a middle-aged man with close cropped hair which he often covered with a dirty black beret was about fifty years old and he told us he had been a Captain under the Czar. He smoked a very curved pipe and spoke English quite well. He had worked for Communism in this country and had suffered imprisonment. He had been deported and was now not allowed to land on English soil. He never wore a collar and the pockets of his old jacket bulged with what, I do not know. He was a friendly chap and allowed passengers to wander all over the ship - we often spent some time on the bridge with him. He explained that the Sovlongflot - Soviet Merchant fleet - was formed in 1923 and was very poorly equipped. Vessels had been bought from other countries



Life on Board

Having experienced life on board several English vessels it was interesting to compare it with that on board a Soviet ship. On the former it was the thing to play games from morning till evening, with a swim in the pool to cool oneself occasionally. For the evening one then changes into evening dress and either dances, or sits about idly chatting. Occasionally horse racing takes place. The ladies vie one with another as to who can wear the most expensive and sumptuous gowns, and never like to appear on two successive evenings in the same robe. It is seldom that any discussion of interest takes place, and the literature that is read is of the 'Charles Garbage' variety

Lenin & the Revolution

Although Lenin has been dead for more than ten years his name is on everyone's lips, and his personality is still as vital a force as ever. It is no wonder that the Russians think so much of him - he, no doubt, is one of the greatest men who has ever lived.

This man spent his life working for the realization of socialism. He was the son of an inspector of schools. His brother lost his life early in his career for taking part in revolutionary work. It is said that Lenin was expelled from school through this, but later he became a barrister.

He was tolerant, and led a simple self disciplined life but was

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The Theatre

News of the wonderful experiments in the Russian theatre has reached this country from time to time and made me wish very much to see the great theatres and actors of U.S.S.R. When I learned that during June July & August the principal theatres are closed and that only small summer theatres in the Parks of Culture and Rest are open I was extremely disappointed.

However I could not visit Russia at any other time of the year so I had to put up with this disappointment and see the interiors of the great theatres only.

The Russian people naturally fond of drama now have every opportunity for developing this art. There are over forty theatres in Moscow and troops of players visit the remote villages of Siberia and help to produce plays and perform themselves.

The Soviet audience is of a very different type from that of the Czarist regime. The new audience is more exacting and does not want a frivolous entertainment. The people look upon the theatre as an artistic force for re-education. The actor is a link in the chain of construction.



to him in time. Great was his relief when he was told that we were only spectators!

Criminal Court

Another interesting point of Soviet life is the Court of Justice. Here devoid of all ceremonial trappings and childish play acting, the judge and assistants by the case brought before them.

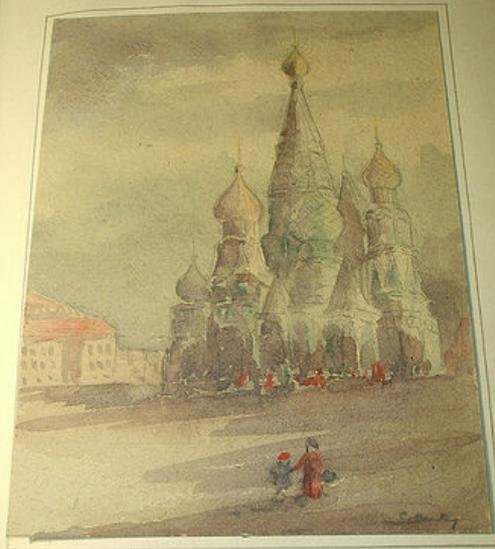
I visited one of the district courts in Moscow where an electrical worker who had previously been a peasant had been brought up for selling watches at a profit in the market. This type of offence is known as speculation and is very severely dealt with in a Communist state.

The room set aside for the trial was not large and held about a hundred people. The walls were painted white and were quite bare save for a small portrait of Lenin. At one end there was a rectangular table behind which there were three chairs, a centre one for the judge and those at the side for the assistants. At the end of the table there was an-

other for the reporter. A desk in front of the table was used by the Council. Rows of wooden forms not unlike church pews were provided for the spectators. On this occasion the judge was a woman. She was dressed in a dark blue suit and white blouse. Her hair was bobbed and she wore no hat. She looked about forty years old. A man and woman, her assistants sat beside her. The Council was a tall intellectual looking man who wore an embroidered linen blouse.

The prisoner was questioned and two witnesses were called. During the trial a young woman with a very loud voice was holding a conversation with her neighbour. The judge ordered her to be quiet but the talking and giggling continued. Then the judge said "Tourist leave the Court" and out she had to go. Although the judge was a quiet and unpretentious woman she could enforce her authority when necessary.

The prisoner contradicted himself in his answers to Council's questions. But Council maintained that there did not seem to be enough evidence to prove his offence. He made a few more remarks and then the judge and her assistants retired to another room to discuss the evidence. When



St Basil's Cathedral

1917



