

The London Library's Märit and Hans Rausing Russian Collections

'Truly remarkable'...rare and fascinating books some of which are not to be found in the British Library or anywhere else in Britain'. (Sir Isaiah Berlin)

Founded in 1841 by Thomas Carlyle, The London Library in elegant St James's Square is the UK's leading literary institution. It was built to provide "the Metropolis of Great Britain with a Library from which books are taken out to be read at home". Carlyle's original vision remains the Library's primary purpose: to provide generations of readers and researchers with the riches of a national reference library for use in their own homes or workplaces.

The London Library primarily houses books in the Arts and Humanities dating from the 16th century to the latest publications in print and electronic form. Throughout its history the Library has upheld the belief that books are never entirely superseded: almost nothing, therefore, has been discarded from the collection and books are never rejected merely because they are old, idiosyncratic or momentarily unfashionable. As a result, this unrivalled collection now exceeds 1 million volumes, 97% of which is housed on 15 miles of fully browsable bookshelves, 98% available for loan.

The foreign languages are served with books in over 50 languages, with particular riches in French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. Represented in The London Library's notable 130,000 foreign language titles are 13,500 books and 50 periodicals and journals in the Russian language. Particular strengths lie in Literature, History, Topography, Art, Biography, Bibliography and Fiction. Since 2006, the Russian Collections have been named in honour of Märit and Hans Rausing, whose generous benefaction to the library is helping to ensure that these uniquely accessible collections remain available for future use.

A fascinating insight into literary life at the turn of the twentieth century and the role of the Library in cultural refuge is seen in the growth of the collections by eminent early 20th century London Library Librarian Charles Hagberg Wright. Hagberg Wright, Librarian from 1894 to 1940, received much of his early education in Russia and maintained a lifelong devotion to the country and its great writers – Tolstoy and Gorky were his close friends. One of the permanent memorials to Sir Charles's Russian interests is the Library's comprehensive collection of Russian literature, notable for its many famously banned works by Tolstoy published in Geneva between 1886 and 1917. It is Hagberg Wright's foresight in recognizing the significance of Tolstoy's output that has shaped the unique collections available today. Sir Isaiah Berlin recognized this visionary acquisition, assessing the Library's Russian collections as 'truly remarkable', containing 'among other, better-known works, a number of rare and fascinating books some of which are not to be found in the British Library or anywhere else in Britain'.

The Library also holds a unique set of Socialist Revolutionary Party pamphlets printed in clandestine conditions, focusing on the 1905 Russian revolution and the establishment of the First Duma. Another notable rare piece is a manuscript of Sergey Esenin's dramatic poem *Pugachov*, acquired by Hagberg Wright in Berlin, available for Library members to view on request.

Representing a collecting policy that ensures the Library's collections are 'contemporary' in every age, highlights of the Russian Literature collections include works from the Golden Age of the Russian literature, matched by an equally comprehensive collection of Silver Age poetry – Blok, Esenin, Briusov, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Severianin and Gumilev, sit alongside notable Symbolists – Andreev, Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Sologub and Ivanov. 20th century Soviet works and the latest contemporary fiction include titles by Vladimir Sorokin and Eduard Limonov, and mainstream novelists such as Boris Akunin and Lyudmila Ulitskaya.

Outside of the Library's Russian Literature collections is a treasure trove of travel writing, anthropology and archaeology, early works from the 18th century, and later volumes of specialist research published by the various institutes and societies of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. Journals such as *Russian Review*, *Slavic Review* and *Rossica* make up the wealth of Russian language publications available at The London Library, which notably retained runs of a number of art history, literary and historical periodicals published in Russia before the Revolution – *Apollon* from 1909-1917; *Blagoviest* from 1890-1894 and *Kievskaja Starina* from 1882-1887.

The unique political history of Russia is covered by large collections of political and social historical and biographical works and essays. These themes run through the collections of Topography and Biography. Of the many shelfmarks pertaining to wider Russian history, highlights to explore range from the Tsars – from H. Nicholas I, Emp. of Russia, to H. Caucasus, H. Baltic Provinces, or H. The Russo-Turkish War. In addition, R. Religion & Philosophy of Religion include works by eminent philosophers P.A. Florenskii, Vladimir Solov'ev and N. Berdiaev.

The Library's Art collection holds an extensive collections of books in both Russian and English on Russian art, further revealing the vast scope of this invaluable, ever-growing resource in the heart of the nation's capital – from Christian art, Russian and Byzantine architecture and iconography, to decorative art, silver work, sculpture, manuscripts and illuminations and photography. A comprehensive selection of reference resources, including dictionaries covering all varieties and uses of the Russian language complete the rich offer of reference tools available to Library members. Covering the numerous languages that include Armenian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian, dictionaries and reference volumes from 1903 to the present day further affirm this unique and significant literary resource.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The London Library was founded in 1841 by Thomas Carlyle. Today it houses a unique collection of over 1 million books on 15 miles of open access shelving for members to freely browse and borrow. Membership of the Library is open to all and benefits include extremely generous loan periods, no fines, postal loans for the UK and Europe, late openings three evenings a week, four attractive reading rooms and free Wi-Fi throughout the building. To become a member of the historic London Library and gain access to the Russian collections visit www.londonlibrary.co.uk.

Membership of the Library is open to all, there are reduced rates for young people and a trust fund exists to support potential members who do not have the means to meet the subscription cost. The Library currently serves 8,000 personal and institutional members including over 200 arts and media organisations and a range of public library authorities who rely upon the collections to supplement their own holdings and so meet the reading and research need of people across the country. The Library's founding principles remain a blueprint for providing the most direct and liberal access to knowledge. For those who may not be able to visit the

Library in person, there is a postal loans service which will dispatch books and periodical volumes to readers anywhere within Europe.

The Library holds remarkably extensive collections in History and Biography, and a fascinating range of works on Topography, travel and exploration. The Literature and Fiction sections include a huge range of novels, poetry, plays, essays, literary criticism and causeries. The Art Room houses a substantial collection on the visual arts and architecture - a collection which is growing at a rate of 68 feet of extra book-shelf a year. Also among the Library's treasures is a wealth of scientific material for the specialist and the general reader, as well as fine coverage of the history of science, the social sciences and philosophy.

Over successive generations, the Library's membership has included many of the most important writers, opinion-formers and academics of the day, alongside general readers with a keen interest in literature and learning. The Library's position at the centre of the intellectual life of the nation is reflected in the roll-call of past and present members. They count among their number Charles Dickens (who carried out extensive research for his novels using the Library's resources), George Eliot, Charles Darwin, Arthur Conan Doyle, Virginia Woolf, Winston Churchill, and Agatha Christie, 4 Poets Laureate and 9 Nobel prize-winners. Current members include hundreds of prominent writers, academics, social commentators, journalists and influential figures in all walks of public life – Sebastian Faulks, Jeremy Paxman, Antonia Fraser, among many others. The Library's current President is Sir Tom Stoppard; past Presidents include Tennyson and T.S. Eliot.

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