

Soft skills in hard times



Remembering the service of Great Romanian and British women



British Embassy
Bucharest



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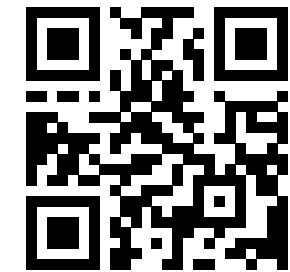
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Introductory message



This brochure is part of a project which the British Embassy in Bucharest is organising to mark the Centenary of the First World War.

Through this initiative we aim to highlight the stories of remarkable women from both Romania and the United Kingdom who, in a range of settings, in war and peace, and in very

different fields, have challenged perceptions of gender roles through great achievement.

We would like to thank Prof. Costel Coroban, who helped review the biographies, our project partners, the National Art Museum and New Europe College, as well as all those who have supported the project.

I hope readers will enjoy this brochure.

Paul Brummell
British Ambassador to Romania

Maria Rosetti (born Marie Grant; 1819–1893)

One hundred percent British and one thousand percent Romanian, Maria Rosetti was one of the most outstanding women of her generation, a pioneer in her own right. Although her actions predated WWI, she has remained an inspiration for women throughout the Great War and beyond.

She was an activist, journalist, philanthropist and, along with her Romanian husband, a revolutionary in the 1848 Wallachian Revolution.

After her family was allowed to return to the Romanian principalities subsequent to the failed 1848 Revolution, she supported the union of Wallachia and Moldavia, into one principality, under one ruler. The Small Union

of 1859 to which she contributed was the first step to a national project that was to be accomplished almost sixty years later by another British-born remarkable woman, Queen Marie of Romania.

She was a fervent contributor to her husband's publications. She started her own weekly magazine, focusing mainly on education and women's liberation. This makes Rosetti fully worthy of the title of Romania's first female journalist.

Her portrait is one of the most celebrated Romanian paintings. The painting, *Revolutionary Romania*, is reproduced in all history textbooks. Very few people know that the girl dressed in a Romanian folk

costume and painted by the Romanian-Jewish painter Daniel Rosenthal, is a British woman who had nothing but love and energy for her adopted country.



Revolutionary Romania, 1850
Oil on canvas, 78,5 x 63,5 cm
Signed and dated in bottom left corner with
C. Rosenthal. / Jeune Valaque / 1850
Inv. 275

The National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest
The Modern Romanian Art Gallery

Adela Xenopol (1861–1939)

Adela Xenopol was a Romanian writer, graduate of Sorbonne and Collège de France in Paris. She advocated for women's rights in various literary magazines, encouraging women's intellectual, political and legal emancipation.

She observed that in Romanian society 'regardless how average, a man's gender alone will take him far on his path, whereas a woman, be it a genius, can only attain teaching rights, but no higher than for secondary schools.'

Convinced that such situation could not continue, she filed a petition on behalf of the women in Iasi, which she submitted to the Parliament in 1914, asking for new

Constitutional provisions allowing intellectual women to vote.

Her literary debut was a series of poems published in 'Revista politica' magazine (1886) and continued with 'Versuri si istorisiri' editorial series (1888). She also published fiction, travel impressions and theatre, as well as two historical novels: 'Pe urma razboiului' (1913) and 'Uragan' (1922).

Adela Xenopol's photograph
Source: unidentified publisher



Sarmiza Bilcescu – Alimanisteanu (1867-1935)

Known as the first Romanian lawyer, Sarmiza Bilcescu Alimanisteanu was born with a special mission: to challenge perceptions in an era where gender differences were deeply rooted in society.

She was the first European woman to receive a bachelor degree from the University of Paris and the world's first woman to hold a PhD in law. She was always avant-garde, successfully transcending stereotypes, and proving that change lies ahead.

Her admission to the Romanian Bar Association determined the Belgian lawyer and liberal politician Louis Frank to depict the decision as 'a major innovation'.

What she longed for was to advance educational standards among women. For this reason she founded Societatea Domnisoarelor Romane (Romanian Ladies' Society).

Through her work she empowered many women in their fight for equality and opened new roads towards women's emancipation. She was a close friend of Queen Marie with whom she actively worked on social rights and opportunities for young women.

Driven by an immense love for the country she acted as a veritable social diplomat. A noble figure, Sarmiza Bilcescu Alimanisteanu grasped the essence of portraying a positive image of Romania abroad.

She engaged in a vivid correspondence with foreign affluent personalities, sending them Romanian folk costumes and paintings. Her work always reflected her devotion for the country she never ceased to cherish and promote. She remains an infallible inspiration to all women standing up for their rights.

Portrait of Sarmiza Bilcescu - Alimanasteanu
Romanian Academy Library, The Engravings Department
Bucharest



Marta Trancu – Rainer (1875–1950)

A scholarship graduate of Iasi Medicine University, Marta Trancu-Rainer was born in 1875 in Targu-Frumos. She met her future husband, Francisc I. Rainer (founder of the Romanian Anthropology Institute and whom she would marry in 1903) when she arrived in Bucharest to further her medicine studies.

Marta Trancu-Rainer was at the heart of the war relief efforts. In 1916, she was mobilised with the rank of Major and took over the management of Coltea Hospital Surgery Department.

Throughout the war, she would also oversee several other medical facilities in Bucharest, including a department of the campaign hospital housed in the Romanian Royal

Palace on Queen Marie's request. She continued to serve as personal doctor to the Queen's daughters.

For her contribution to saving lives during WWI she was awarded the 'Queen Marie Order' class I in February 1919 and continued to work as a surgeon and gynaecologist.



Photograph of Marta Trancu-Rainer
Courtesy of the 'Francisc I. Rainer' Anthropology Institute
Bucharest University

Queen Marie of Romania (1875-1938)

Born Princess Marie of Edinburgh, in Kent, Queen Marie became Romanian through her marriage in 1892 to Crown Prince Ferdinand of Romania, heir apparent of King Carol I. In October 1914 the old King died, leaving Marie and Ferdinand in the difficult position of dealing with the recent commencement of war. Ferdinand wanted to maintain Romania's neutrality, but Marie wanted Romania to join the Allies.

When Romania entered the war on the side of the Allies in 1916, Marie set up a hospital on the grounds of the Royal Palace. She served as a nurse in this, and other hospitals, all the way up to front line trenches and through the typhus epidemic. In the same year her youngest child died of typhoid and she turned

her grief towards the war effort. When in December 1917 Romania surrendered and a pro-German government was installed, Marie refused to flee for England and remained in Romania, enduring its bombing campaign. Queen Marie's actions during the war earned her the nicknames 'Mama ranitilor' (Mother of the Wounded) and 'Regina- soldat' (The Soldier-Queen).

A popular figure in Romania, it was said that she effectively ran the country during the war. Afterwards, she represented Romania's interests during the Versailles discussions, leading the delegation of Romanian statesmen in the negotiations.

Constantin Argetoianu, a former Romanian Prime Minister, in a rare display of praise wrote about her:

>> Whatever Queen Marie's errors before and after the war, the war remains her page, the page of which she may boast, the page that will seat her in history's place of honour. We find her in the trenches among the combatants, in forward positions; we find her in the hospitals and all the medical units; among the wounded, among the sick; we find her present wherever people met to try to do some good.

She knew no fear of bullets and bombs, just as she knew no fear or disgust at disease, or impatience with the often useless efforts provoked by her desire for something better. Queen Marie fulfilled her duty on all the multiple fronts of her activity, but above all in encouraging and raising the morale of those who lived around her and who had to decide, in the most tragic moments, the fate of the country and the people. (...) Queen Marie was the embodiment of the highest aspirations of the Romanian consciousness. <<

Queen Marie
Photo courtesy of the Romanian National Military Museum,
Franz Mandy Photographer Studio, about 1904-1907
A copy is on display in the British Residence in Bucharest



Princess Martha Bibescu (1886-1973)

Princess Martha Bibescu is one of the most fascinating personalities of the European royalty of the 20th century.

She was a writer, informal politician and diplomat, one of the first free-mason women of Romania, socialite and, above all, the hostess of the Mogosoia Palace, the residence she turned into one of the most sought out salons of Bucharest and Europe.

During WWI, her Palace became the place where one could gather intelligence and exercise influence. During Romania's neutrality, the salon became the meeting place for all sides. Her intelligence, personality and charm granted her a huge personal impact: for example, she was at the

same time the confidante of Wilhelm of Germany and admired by Major Christopher Thomson (who was the British Military Attaché, sent to lobby for Romania's siding with the Allies.)

During WWI, the Princess ran a hospital in Bucharest. While most of the economic and political elite fled to Iasi (including the Royal Court), Princess Bibescu chose to stay in Bucharest. She took care of the wounded, helped to set free several Romanian prisoners, assisted the poor and kept the Royal Court in briefed on the situation.

Lord Thomson of Cardington said about her that 'being beautiful, smart and rich, all in one person, is an unforgivable sin.' She was

friends with everybody who was anybody in Europe at the time, from Marcel Proust and Rilke to de Gaulle, Winston Churchill, and the Rothschilds.

She fled to Paris when the Soviets took power and dedicated her life to writing. The L'Académie Française awarded her with the Grand Prix for literature. In 1955, she was appointed a member of the Belgian Academy of French Language and Literature.

In 1962, she is awarded the Légion d'Honneur. Charles de Gaulle is known saying about her: 'you do personify Europe to me.'

Princess Marthe Bibesco
by Ida Kar, vintage bromide print, late 1950s
11 5/8 in. x 9 5/8 in. (294 mm x 244 mm) image size
Purchased, 1999 Photographs Collection NPG x132412
National Portrait Gallery



Elena Caragiani Stoienescu (1887–1929)

Born on the 13th May 1887, Elena Caragiani Stoienescu was Romania's first female aircraft pilot. She was awarded her international pilot licence by the International Aeronautical Federation in France in 1914.

Caragiani Stoienescu started training in Romania where she registered with the 'Air League' pilot school run by Prince George Valentin Bibescu. After her request for an official permit was declined, she pursued her training in France.

After the start of WW1, she volunteered to serve either as a military or ambulance pilot. She registered as a nurse with the Romanian Red Cross and served in hospitals in Bucharest and her home town.

Both prior to and following the war, she travelled extensively through South America, and the US as a journalist for French newspapers.

Caragiani Stoienescu paved the way for a series of Romanian women such as Smaranda Braescu, the first Romanian parachutist and also for Romania's female air ambulance division in WWII. This service (which also included Virginia Thomas, a British national) was the only one of its kind in the world at the time, received much praise and became known as the 'White Escadrille'.

Photocopy of Elena Caragiani Stoienescu's official license, France 1914
Originally published in the 1980
'Amazoanele cerului' (Sky Amazons) book
by V. Firoiu, Albatros Publishing House,
Bucharest



Elisa Leonida Zamfirescu (1887–1973)

Born in Galati, Leonida Zamfirescu made herself remarkable as world's first female engineer and first female member of the General Association of Romanian Engineers (AGIR). Faced with rejection from the Bucharest School of Roads and Bridges, she never lost confidence in her abilities, becoming the first female graduate from the Berli Technical Royal Academy in 1912.

Upon finishing her studies, she returned to Romania and joined the Geological Institute. A well acquainted personality, especially in the study of minerals, Leonida Zamfirescu contributed extensively to scientific development. She devoted all her efforts and life to research, but also to teaching and mentoring future specialists. As soon as war

broke out, Zamfirescu entered the Red Cross where she played an active role leading various hospitals across the country. Later, she was decorated for her extensive involvement during the wartime.

Zamfirescu carried out impressive diplomatic activity as President of the Peace Committee within the Geological Institute, standing firmly against nuclear weapons. While in London, she addressed Lancaster House delivering a powerful speech in favour of disarmament. Her message was conveyed to the United Nations.



Family photo dating from 1898
From left to right: Maria, Alexandrina, Natalia,
Elisa Leonida - Zamfirescu (upper part) Matilda and
Anastase (middle row), Gheorghe, Dimitrie, Paul, Adela.
(lower row) Photo courtesy of the V.A. Urechia
Library and Galati Museum.

Portrait of Elisa Leonida-Zamfirescu
Photo courtesy of the National Geology Museum,
Bucharest, Romania



Vera Atkins (1908–2000)

Vera Atkins was a key personality in the Special Operations Executive (SOE). As head of the French Section during World War II, she fascinated everyone with her courage, loyalty and sharp mind. Born Vera Maria Rosenberg in Bucharest, she moved to England in 1933. There, she adopted her English mother's maiden name.

Atkins recruited and trained many young British Intelligence officers sent to the French front to resist Hitler's invasion. Known as a discreet person, she remained a very influential figure within SOE.

Ian Fleming, himself a spy and author of the James Bond novels stated that 'In the real world of spies, Vera Atkins was the boss.'

She played an essential role in wartime France by contributing to the stopping of the Nazi expansion in Europe. Despite her stern professional conduct, she always cared for her agents, while rescuing hundreds of war prisoners and children.

She never enjoyed being in the spotlight and retired in 1947 to a village near London. For her remarkable activity, she was decorated with the George Cross. Francois Mitterand awarded her the Légion d'honneur. Only after her death, the book 'Spymistress. The life of Vera Atkins, the greatest female secret of World War II' was published by William Stevenson, introducing to the world the memory of this heroic woman.



Vera Atkins WAAF Squadron Officer F Section head SOE
1941-1945. Records of Special Operations Executive.
The National Archives Library Reference HS 9/59/2

Monica Lovinescu (1923-2008)

Monica Lovinescu was a Romanian journalist, dissident, writer, and literary critic. Born after WWI (1923), she was not spared the horrors of war, living through and surviving WWII and the Cold War.

The daughter of one of the most prominent literary critics of Romania, Eugen Lovinescu, Monica Lovinescu was one of the most brilliant female intellectuals of inter-war Romania, frequently publishing prose and theater reviews. The deterioration of the political situation in Soviet-occupied and Communist-ruled Romania led her to flee for France in 1947, on a French government-sponsored scholarship. In 1948 she applied for political asylum.

Her entire existence was marked by the failure to reunite with her mother, who died in one of the extermination prisons in the Romanian Gulags.

Under constant pressure from the Romanian Secret Police, she refused to cooperate: neither in exchange for her mother's life and freedom, nor when she was the object of an assassination attempt in 1977 in Paris.

Instead, she fought the war almost alone, with only her mind and her already famous voice, in a radio studio. She became the voice of the Romanian exile and dedicated her entire life fighting totalitarianism, through her work for Radio Free Europe.

Her weekly show on the current affairs behind the Iron Curtain was one of the most popular, giving a voice and hope to the powerless citizens of the Eastern Bloc.

She is often referred to as the voice of the voiceless and the lucid conscience of the 20th century.



Monica Lovinescu
Photograph reproduced with the approval
of Humanitas Publishing House Bucharest

Herta Ayrton (1854–1923)

Hertha Ayrton was an established scientist prior to the First World War. Between 1883 – 1923 she registered 26 intellectual patents, eight of which related to propulsion of air.

In the early years of the twentieth century, whilst caring for her ailing husband, also a scientist, she spent a lot of time observing and analysing the relationship between air, sand and waves. One application of this work came shortly afterwards during World War I when chemical weapons were used on the Western Front.

In 1915, Ayrton designed a simple hand-held flapper, to push poisonous gases out of the trenches. Although it only worked in conditions of low winds and with a very

specific technique.

By 1917, she had created a mechanical device for use in high wind conditions. She determinedly promoted these devices to a highly resistant War Office, a disagreement that was expressed in the media. Ultimately, the War Office issued over 100,000 'Ayrton Fans' to soldiers on the Western Front.

Photo courtesy of the Jewish Women's Archive
Source: 'Hertha Ayrton, 1854-1923, a Memoir',
by Evelyn Sharp, Published by Edward Arnold (1926)



Beatrice Webb (1858–1943)

Beatrice Potter Webb, best known as a co-founder of London School of Economics and New Statesman political magazine, was an English economist and social researcher. Her pioneering political and intellectual work laid ground for what later became the welfare state.

Beatrice Webb started out as a social worker in the Victorian slums of London and gradually came to align herself with the labour movement.

Self-taught since an early age, she took an interest in economy and politics, which she shared with her husband Sydney Webb.

Beatrice Webb is known to have made a

number of contributions to political and economic theory of the co-operative movement.

She is quoted to have said: 'If I had been a man, self-respect, family pressure and the public opinion of my class would have pushed me into a money-making profession; as a mere woman, I could carve out a career of disinterested research'.

Beatrice Webb
by unknown photographer
albumen print on card, early 1870s
4 5/8 in. x 3 3/4 in. (118 mm x 95 mm) image size
Purchased, 2007
Primary Collection, NPG P1292(6)
National Portrait Gallery



Elsie Inglis (1864-1917)

Elsie Inglis was an established doctor prior to WWI. On the outbreak of war she approached the War Office to propose the set up of female staffed medical units on the Western Front. In response to her suggestion she was told to 'go home and sit still'. However, when the offer was made directly to the French and Serbian governments it was gratefully accepted.

Inglis travelled to France and by 1915 the first unit was set up at Royaumont Abbey, containing 200 beds. Inglis was also active in organising fourteen medical units to be sent to Serbia, Salonika, Romania, Malta and Corsica and Russia. The hospitals that she established were solely staffed by women. They were called the Scottish Women's Hospital (although not all of the women who

served in them were Scottish). As well as raising thousands of pounds for this cause, Inglis served overseas, travelling to Serbia, Russia and Romania before returning in 1917 suffering from cancer.

In 1916 she became the first woman to be awarded the Serbian Order of the White Eagle (V class).

Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum
Catalogue number Q 68949A



Edith Cavell (1865-1915)

Edith Cavell was the daughter of a Norfolk vicar. Brought up to believe in serving others, she trained as nurse before moving to Belgium in 1907 to start a nursing college.

When the war broke out, she was visiting her mother in England, but she returned to Belgium promptly to work. During the German occupation of Brussels, she hid Allied soldiers in the hospital and assisted with their escape to the Netherlands, which was a neutral territory.

In August 1915, she was arrested by the German authorities and charged with treason on the charge of 'conducting soldiers to the enemy'. A court martial found guilty and sentenced her to execution, which was carried

out on 12 October 1915. She had helped over 200 allied soldiers escape occupied Belgium.

Cavell is the best known woman of the First World War, with streets, schools, medical facilities and memorials around the world dedicated to her. Her execution was widely condemned. Her most famous words, said the day before she died were 'Patriotism is not enough. I must have no bitterness nor hatred for anyone.'



Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum
Catalogue number Q 15064B

Katharine Marjory Stewart-Murray, Duchess of Atholl, DBE (1874-1960)

Born in 1874 in Scotland, and nicknamed 'Kitty' by family and close friends, Katharine was an alumna of the Royal College of Music.

In 1924, she became the third woman to be elected to the House of Commons, on behalf of the Scottish Unionist Party, and was nominated by the then Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin for a junior parliamentary position on educational issues.

Prior to her career as a Kinross and West Perthshire MP, the Duchess of Atholl had been involved with work on the Scottish Highlands and Islands Medical Service Committee, which laid out the foundations for national level healthcare system in Scotland. She became

Dame Commander of Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 1918.

Katharine Atholl was known for her critical stance against the totalitarian regimes that had started to spread across Europe.

In 1931, she published 'The Conscription of a People', an extensive 200-page detailed analysis and criticism of the Soviet Union's collectivisation process, work camps and secret police activity. After the publication of Hitler's Mein Kampf in 1935, she warned about the looming threat to peace in Europe, noting that 'Never can a modern statesman have made so startlingly clear to his reader his ambitions.'

She is reported to have travelled in 1938 to Romania to offer support to Satu Mare Romanian Women Association's efforts. She resigned as an MP in 1938.

Katharine Marjory Stewart-Murray
(née Ramsey), Duchess of Atholl

by Keystone Press Agency Ltd
bromide press print, 19 July 1940
9 5/8 in. x 7 5/8 in. (245 mm x 193 mm) image size
Transferred from Evening Standard Library, 1983
Photographs Collection, NPG x184155
National Portrait Gallery



Dorothy Lawrence (1896–1964)

Dorothy Lawrence of Middlesex was an English reporter best known for her ingenious means of gaining access to the war zone. When WWI broke, no British newspaper allowed her to work as a correspondent, claiming it would be too dangerous for a woman.

Knowing that the closest way of getting to cover the war was from the inside, she decided to take up a male identity and enrol in the army. With help from some British male friends, she changed her appearance and succeeded in getting assigned to work within the trenches by the front line. Fearing her quickly deteriorating health, she later turned herself in, but was nevertheless interrogated as a spy.

The authorities detained her in a French convent until she agreed to swear an affidavit promising not to tell the public how she had fooled the military authorities.

On her return to England she settled in Canonbury, Islington, where she published an account of her experiences, 'Sapper Dorothy Lawrence: The Only English Woman Soldier, in 1919'.



Dorothy Lawrence - portraits in civilian and military dress, around 1910-1919
Dorothy Lawrence (1919), Sapper Dorothy Lawrence: the only English woman soldier, Late Royal Engineers 51st Division 179th Tunnelling Company BEF, London: Lane. Google books/ Wikimedia Commons

Clare Hollingworth (born 1911)

The first war correspondent to report the outbreak of World War II was British journalist Clare Hollingworth. She was the first female correspondent to be recognised by her male peers as an expert commentator on the strategic and political background of the various conflicts that she covered.

A strong interest in European politics and battlefields prompted her to pursue and excel in a defence journalism career. She worked for the Guardian and Daily Telegraph, being the first woman ever accredited as a newspaper's defence correspondent.

She also took up humanitarian work by helping distribute aid to the Jewish and left-wing refugees fleeing the Sudetenland

ahead of the Nazi takeover. After the War, Clare Hollingworth covered Middle East, the Algerian war for independence, and the Vietnam war.

Clare Hollingworth
by Jorge ('J.S.') Lewinski
bromide print, February 1966
16 1/4 in. x 12 3/4 in. (414 mm x 324 mm)
Purchased, 2004
Primary Collection, NPG P1048
National Portrait Gallery



Dame Anne Warburton (1927–4 June 2015)

Born in 1927, Dame Anne Warburton was the first British female ambassador. She was appointed Ambassador to Denmark from 1976 to 1983, a ground-breaking move at the time.

Dame Warburton was also Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva between 1983 and 1985, before retiring from the diplomatic service.

After retiring, Dame Warburton spent the next few decades advocating for women's rights, as president of Lucy Cavendish College at Cambridge University, and then on the board of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

She was appointed Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1965, Companion to the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG) in

1977 and Dame Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1979. She died in June 2015 at the age of 87.

In September 2015, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office renamed one of its historical rooms used to commemorate her achievements in British diplomacy. Dame Anne Warburton paved the way for today's female British Ambassadors – out of 200 ambassadorial posts, the FCO is aiming for at least 50 to be female appointments by the end of 2015.



Dame Anne Warburton
Photo courtesy of
the Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Historians Archive

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The list below provides a selection of public sources consulted for the biographies included in this brochure.

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Useful resources on WWI historical references

- Imperial War Museum: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/>
- UK National Archives: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>
- National Portrait Gallery: <http://www.npg.org.uk/>



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