

Nuclear Matters & Politics

Edith Russell



Bow Street, 1961

Edith Russell, née Finch, was born in New York City in 1900. She married Bertrand Russell in 1952.

*Edith Russell compiled several timelines, probably to assist her husband in writing the third volume of his Autobiography, working from her own and Russell's diaries. The Autobiography seems to follow events highlighted by Edith, as reflected in some excerpts below. She and Russell had renewed their relationship in 1948, having first met at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, in the 1920s and intermittently thereafter. Bertie wrote to Edith on 31 January 1948 saying 'my next job is going to be an autobiography, if war with Russia holds off long enough'. In due course, Edith helped Bertie track down letters that assisted him in finishing the first volumes of his Autobiography. The correspondence grew more affectionate and Edith moved to London in December 1950. She and Bertie married in December 1952. The timeline headed 'Nuclear Matters & Politics' ends in April 1966, indicating when it was produced. **Landmark events were typed in red.** There follows a small selection from Edith's compilation (in **bold text**), to indicate the main developments concerning Russell's work during these years, supplemented by comments in italic text to give some context.*

May 8, 1951 – BR 'Living in an Atomic Age' on BBC Home Service

Russell's book, New Hopes for a Changing World, was based on these radio lectures. According to the book's blurb, probably drafted by Russell, it was 'concerned with methods of curing three kinds of conflict which have afflicted mankind. They are the conflicts of man with nature, with other men, and with himself ...'

Dec 4, 1952 – B speaks at Imperial War College. Sermon on the Mount

'For a few years I was asked to give a lecture at the Imperial Defence College in Belgrave Square. But the invitations stopped coming after the lecture in which I remarked that, knowing that they believed you could not be victorious in war without the help of religion, I had read the Sermon on the Mount, but, to my surprise, could find no mention of H-bombs in it.'

*Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p490-1
Routledge Classics edition, 2010*

April 8, 1954 – B does TV piece on J-bomb

'H-bomb' seems more likely. Russell first met Professor Joseph Rotblat during filming of the BBC's Panorama television programme, when Rotblat explained to him what he thought was the likely structure of the dirty bomb tested by the US at Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954. The explosion far exceeded US expectations, spreading radioactive fall-out across the Pacific Ocean, engulfing the Marshall Islands, and contaminating fishermen and catch on board the Lucky Dragon fishing boat sailing from Japan.

'The H-bomb ... fission-fusion-fission bomb. Russell had ascertained this from Joseph Rotblat's "interesting piece of detective work about the Bikini bomb".'

*Détente or Destruction, 1955-57,
The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell 29, Edited by Andrew G Bone*

Dec 23, 1954 – Man's Peril

'The implications of the H-Bomb' broadcast on BBC Radio

'Even then, in the relatively early days of the struggle against nuclear destruction, it seemed to me almost impossible to find a fresh way of putting what I had already, I felt, said in so many different ways. My first draft of the broadcast was an anaemic product, pulling all the punches. I threw it away at once, girded myself up and determined to say exactly how dreadful the prospect was unless measures were taken. The result was a distilled version of all that I had said theretofore. It was so tight packed that anything that I have since said on the subject can be found in it at least in essence.'

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p544-5

Feb 8, 1955 – **BR lunches with Nehru**

Feb 11, 1955 – **BR records introduction to Hiroshima film**

April 7, 1955 – **Send off Manifesto**

To Einstein (what became known as the ‘Russell-Einstein Manifesto’)
 ‘... As I assessed the response that my broadcast had achieved and considered what should be done next, I had realized that the point that I must concentrate upon was the need of co-operation among nations. It had occurred to me that it might be possible to formulate a statement that a number of very well-known and respected scientists of both capitalist and communist ideologies would be willing to sign calling for further joint action. Before taking any measures, however, I had written to Einstein to learn what he thought of such a plan. He had replied with enthusiasm, but had said that, because he was not well and could hardly keep up with present commitments, he himself could do nothing to help beyond sending me the names of various scientists who, he thought, would be sympathetic. He had begged me, nevertheless, to carry out my idea and to formulate the statement myself. This I had done, basing the statement upon my Christmas broadcast, “Man’s Peril”.’

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p546-7

April 11-18 **Rome with Parliamentary people & World Gov’t**

‘Among the first organisations to show a pronounced interest in my views were the World Parliamentarians and, more seriously perhaps, the Parliamentary World Government Association with whom I had many meetings. They were to hold joint meetings in Rome in April, 1955, at which they invited me to speak.’

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p546

April 18, 1955 – **Hear news of Einsteins’s death on way to Paris.**

Einstein’s letter signing the Manifesto received on arrival in Paris. It was one of his last public acts.

July 9, 1955 – Press conference to launch Russell-Einstein Manifesto in Court Room, Caxton Hall, London (See Spokesman 85)

‘...I knew the editor of The Observer slightly and believed him to be liberal and sympathetic. He proved at that time to be both. He called in colleagues to discuss the matter. They agreed that something more was needed than merely publishing the fact that the manifesto had been written and signed

by a number of eminent scientists of varying ideologies. They suggested that a press conference should be held at which I should read the document and answer questions about it. They did far more than this. They offered to arrange and finance the conference with the proviso that it not become, until later, public knowledge that they had done so. It was decided finally that the conference should take place on July 9th (1955). A room was engaged in Caxton Hall a week before. Invitations were sent to all the editors of all the journals and to the representatives of foreign journals as well as to the BBC and representatives of foreign radio and TV in London. This invitation was merely to a conference at which something important of world-wide interest was to be published. The response was heartening and the room had to be changed to the largest in the Hall.'

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p548

[July 1957 – As anticipated in the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, the first conference of scientists was held at Pugwash, Nova Scotia, birthplace of the industrialist Cyrus Eaton, who sponsored the meeting. Twenty-two scientists attended from Australia, Canada, Japan, the Soviet Union, United Kingdom and United States.]

Dec 11, 1957 at 5.15 – BR to see Kingsley Martin, Kennan, Priestley & Blackett

'During the autumn, George Kennan had been giving the Reith Lectures over the BBC and saying some excellent things drawn with acumen from his wide and first-hand knowledge of American and Russian policies. Early in December a group of us met with Kingsley Martin at his invitation to talk things over. As far as I remember it was at this meeting that the first glimmerings flickered of what was to become the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.'

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p575

Dec 18, 1957 – Meeting at Bart's of scientists

Jan 16, 1958 – Private meeting at 2 Amen Court Canon Collins, Mrs Duff

'A meeting of the sponsors of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests was held at the house of Canon John Collins in Amen Court and the CND was formally started early in January, 1958. The officers were to be: Canon Collins, the Chairman; Mrs Peggy Duff, the Secretary; and myself, the President.'

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p576

Feb 17, 1958 – Central Hall, Westminster, Public meeting Abolish Nuclear Tests

'The CND was publicly launched at a large meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster, on February 17, 1958. So many people attended this meeting that there had to be overflow meetings. It seems now to many people as if the CND has been part of the national scene from the beginning of time, and it has lost its lustre and energy through familiarity. But in its early days its information and reasoning were not only sincere but were fresh and commanded considerable attention among a variety of individuals and circles important to the nation. And the first meeting went off with great éclat and success.'

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p576

Mar 6, 1958 – Rotblat records BR's speech for Pugwash [which held its second conference in Lac-Beauport, Quebec, 31 March to 11 April]

Mar 12, 1958 – Secretary from Moscow Embassy with letter from Khrushchev

Sept 19-23, 1958 – Vienna Pugwash Congress

'At the meeting of the Austrian Academy of Sciences on the morning of September 20th the Vienna Declaration was promulgated. It was a statement that had been accepted with only one abstention by all the members of the conference at Kitzbühel and it forms, as Professor Rotblat has said, the credo of the Pugwash movement.'

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell p557

Sept 14, 1959 – CND Trafalgar Square recording

Sept 20, 1959 – Trafalgar Sq. CND meeting

Sept 24, 1959 – Rotblat & meeting of scientists

Dec 14, 1959 – See On the Beach film

Dec 18, 1959 – Pugwash Council

Dec 20, 1959 – Pugwash meeting

Feb 13, 1960 – French Embassy about French bomb test

[The French Government announced in the summer of 1959 that the first French Atom Bomb would be exploded in the Sahara desert. Many African countries protested about the danger from nuclear fall-out. Africans were also angry at this further manifestation of French colonialism, which made Algeria the testing ground for the symbol of French national prestige ... In a last minute challenge to the French authorities, an international team left Accra, capital of Ghana, in December with the aim of travelling 2,100 miles to the test site ... At dawn on 13 February the French Bomb was exploded at Reggan (Algeria).’ The Sahara Protest Team, April Carter, 1972]

Feb 15, 1960 – Central Hall CND meeting**May 16, 1960 – Summit Meeting crashed in Paris. U2 precedes it****June 21-23, 1960 – Pugwash****July 28, 1960 – Schoenman to dinner & night & lunch next day****Sept 14, 1960 – Edith to US Consul to change countries****Sept 24, 1960 – Trafalgar Square speech****Sept 25, 1960 – David Astor, Scott & Schoenman to tea****Sept 29, 1960 – Evening Standard publishes Committee of 100 letters****Oct 3, 1960 – Collins, Goss, Howard morn & eve. Same on Oct 4 in eve same on 5 & 6 at 4****Oct 22, 1960 – Committee of 100, Friends House, Euston****Nov 5, 1960 – CND Executive mtg – fuss by telephone. Withdraw Observer article****Dec 14, 1960 – Kingsway Hall Press Conference Committee of 100****Feb 18, 1961 – Committee of 100 demonstration Whitehall – 20,000 in Square, 5-6,000 sit down**

Apr 3, 1961 – Trafalgar Square end of Aldermaston March Ralph [Schoenman] arrested

Apr 15, 1961 – Birmingham YCND meeting (BR shingles)

Apr 29, 1961 – Parliament Square Sit-down without us

Sept 4, 1961 – Police Sergeant with summons to Bow Street on September 12

**Sept 12, 1961 – Bow St at 10.30 15 min for lunch at 43
B to Brixton — E to Holloway in Black Marias**

Sept 17, 1961 – Great Trafalgar Square meeting of Committee of 100 not in prison

Sept 18, 1961 – Return to 43 Hasker Street Press & radio & TV

Dec 9, 1961 – Committee of 100 demonstration without us

Feb 12, 1962 – Secrets Act Trial begins at Old Bailey

Feb 20, 1962 – Verdict. Jury out 4½ hours. To Cannon St police station

Feb 25, 1962 – Trafalgar Square meeting (blizzard?)

Mar 8, 1962 – BR speaks to Dockers

Apr 21, 1962 – Message about ships to Christmas Island. Press release

May, 1962 – 90th birthday festivities

**Aug 8, 1962 – Bob Swan & Stan Allegranza to tea from Everyman III
Visit boat next day**

Aug 21 & 22, 1962 – Pugwash

Aug 29, 1962 – London Committee of 100 members. Not enough signed for 9th September demonstration

Sept 3, 1962 – Pugwash, Russell Hotel, standing ovation (except Hailsham)

Sept 9, 1962 – **No Committee of 100 demo**

Oct 23, 1962 – **Cuban crisis building up**

Oct 24, 1962 – **News of Khrushchev’s letter to BR Press & television**

Oct 28, 1962 – **Crisis seems over but Press & TV**

Nov 10, 1962 – **Meeting in Plas Penrhyn field. BR, Indian, Clough speak. Fund “Thank you Bert” // “We’re still unhurt”**

Nov 12, 1962 – **See Lionel Rogosin film, *Good Times, Wonderful Times***

Jan 7, 1963 – **Writing *Unarmed Victory***

Apr 17, 1963 – **Manolis Glezos & Greek MP Gregory Lambrakis & Mrs Ambatielos to tea**

July 6, 1963 – **Trafalgar Square meeting about Greek Royal visit**

July 9, 1963 – **Drive to Buckingham Palace with letter about Greek Queen**

Sept 29, 1963 – **Press Conference to announce Foundations**

In October 1963, the Russell Foundation opened its office in Shavers Place, off Haymarket in central London, occupying space unused by the Iraqi Students Society.

Oct 27, 1963 – **Art sale for Foundation at Woburn**

[Nov 23, 1963 – President Kennedy assassinated]

On 29 January 1964, the Constitution of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation was adopted. It stated that:

‘The Foundation is established to promote world peace and international disarmament; to persuade nations effectively to abandon warfare as an

instrument of policy; and to develop, organise and manage international resistance to the threat of nuclear war.'

Feb 17, 1964 – **Jewish-Soviet appeal released**

Apr 28, 1964 – **Manchester meeting at Free Trade Hall**

June 12, 1964 – **Mark Lane to tea**

June 22, 1964 – **Russian with letter from Khrushchev**

July 25, 1964 – **Russians with message from Khrushchev**

Aug 6, 1964 – **Vietnam crisis**

Sept 7, 1964 – **Portmadoc cinema to see Dr Strangelove**

[October 14, 1964 Khrushchev removed]

Nov 21, 1964 – **Chris Farley to Hanoi**

Feb 6, 1965 – **Iraqi Prisoners Conference opened by BR**

Feb 16, 1965 – **Labour Government speech at LSE**

Feb 19, 1965 – **Peter Sellers to tea**

Feb 24, 1965 – **James Baldwin to tea**

May 5, 1965 – **Chris Farley & Ken Coates to tea**

Oct 4, 1965 – **Ralph & Robin Blackburn**

Oct 14, 1965 – **Mahatma Gandhi Hall 7.30 YCND BR's 2nd Labour Party speech tears up card**

Nov 13, 1965 – **Chinese Attache to tea**

Nov 22, 1965 – **Emile de Antonio, Mark Lane & Ralph, film people & on 23, 25, 27**

Nov 25, 1965 – **to Plas Penrhyn with film people**

10 November 1966 The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation Ltd was incorporated.

13 November 1966, London, BR convenes Vietnam International War Crimes Tribunal.

2-10 May 1967 First session of Vietnam Tribunal held in Stockholm, Sweden

20 November – 1 December 1967 Second session of Tribunal held in Roskilde, Denmark

This selection prepared by Tony Simpson

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Wholly Communion

The First International Poetry Incarnation happened at London's Albert Hall on 11 June 1965. The Russells didn't attend, as far as we know, but others from the Foundation were there. Peter Whitehead filmed the event, and his 33 minute documentary conveys some of the spontaneity of the occasion. He produced a book of the film, also called *Wholly Communion*, from which we reproduce facsimile Adrian Mitchell's 'To Whom It May Concern', which some know as 'Tell me lies about Vietnam'. Lawrence Ferlinghetti reads on the book's cover (see over).