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## Feature

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### Making the Most of the Trans-Siberian

By Andrew Jameson

This is a practical description, with advice, of one very satisfying itinerary for a Trans-Siberian journey undertaken by a group of three people in August 2009.

Regent Holidays organised a customised itinerary for us and were very helpful (see *feature article by Regent Holiday's Christina Gibbons on page 6*).

In planning your trip, I suggest that you avoid stopovers on Mondays as tourist sites are closed. Bear in mind that as you travel eastwards, each day lasts approximately 23 hours. Take the 2009 Lonely Planet guide and have fun looking for other books on Siberia on the Internet.

## Getting Started

The starting point for the Trans-Siberian Railway is Moscow and it's a good idea to acclimatise with a couple of days here. If you arrive at Moscow Sheremetevo-2, there's now an Airport Express train to Savelovsky or Belorussky Vokzal (station), both on the Metro, costing 250 roubles from the ticket office (290 roubles on the train). The best luggage combination is a holdall on wheels and a cabin baggage-sized rucksack – this is the maximum possible on the Metro, and the holdall with centre zip is easy for access under train seats.

We used the Hotel Vega in Moscow – excellent, if pricey. Part of the Izmailovo hotel complex by Izmailovsky Park and its markets, it's easily accessible by Metro with Partizanskaya station close by (known until recently as Izmailovsky Park).

## Moscow to Ekaterinburg

Russian railways are tremendously solid and impressive. Wayside stations are spic-and-span with lots of new buildings and fresh paint. Tourists will probably find themselves in premium class coaches: these are new with neatly designed compartments and extra features such as video. You may find that two meals per day are included in your ticket. Most passengers buy food and drinks, including decent beer, from traders at stops. Russian restaurant cars are of good quality but expensive, especially the foreign beers. Be aware that bio-toilets don't accept paper.

Our first train was from Kazansky Vokzal to Ekaterinburg. This is a secondary route,

doesn't pass any Golden Ring towns, the track is not so good and only joins the classic route just before Ekaterinburg. Instead, consider specifying your departure from Yaroslavsky Vokzal. In Ekaterinburg we used the services of the Ekaterinburg Guide Company and stayed at the cheap, centrally located Hotel Suite where I had an excellent 70<sup>th</sup> birthday meal at the Khitrovka Restaurant opposite. From the hotel we walked through a smart modern town to the Gorodskoy Prud (town pond). The Ipatyev House, in which the Romanovs were executed, was located in this area. Demolished by Yeltsin, the Church upon the Blood now rises in its place and is dedicated to the Romanov martyrs. In the afternoon we had a very sobering guided tour of the Romanov shrines in the forest and then to the Europe–Asia border (although the 'border' we were taken to was not the expected one with the obelisk).

## Ekaterinburg to Irkutsk

Our second train took two days to Irkutsk. This was an old train of familiar design and a bit scruffy. We were met at the station and taken to the Hotel Irkutsk, but our goal was a home-stay wooden chalet at Listvyanka on Lake Baikal, 70km from Irkutsk. Listvyanka is a curate's egg of traditional Siberian village and tourist scrum, some ridiculous monstrosities, little information, no organisation, boat trips, markets, Baikal seals doing tricks in a sealarium, the Baikal scientific museum, and an excellent open-air museum at Taltsy with native, Cossack and Russian houses. You can visit all of these by the Irkutsk minibus (*marshrutka*) at varying prices. For us, the best thing in Listvyanka was a concert in the Teatr Avtorskoy Pesni (Theatre of Song), a small, home-built theatre in the old village.

## Irkutsk to Ulan Ude

The third train took half a day from Irkutsk to Ulan Ude. This was a spectacular train ride over the hill and down to Baikal, along the shore and up Selenga River. The Hotel Geser was the best we stayed in and located in the centre close to the famous monster Lenin head. Next day we visited the

Ivolginsky Datsan Buddhist monastery (booklets at the entrance explain the rules of conduct), then to the Old Believer village, church and museum. Ulan Ude city museum covers the Huns, Siberian history and Buddhism.

## Ulan Ude to Khabarovsk

The fourth train from Ulan Ude to Khabarovsk winds around hills, alluvial gold mines, remote small towns, and crosses the Amur on a huge double-deck bridge. The attractive part of town is on the hills overlooking the Amur, where there's a ferry. There's also a local museum connected with Arsenyev, the author of *Dersu Uzala*. We stayed at the Hotel Intourist by the river, where we were told off by the administrator for not having had our migration cards stamped (we showed our train tickets and explained that we had only stayed two nights at each stop so had not been registered). There are plenty of places to eat – a Japanese restaurant on top of our hotel with great views, an excellent Ukrainian restaurant and modern cafes.

## Khabarovsk to Vladivostok

Our fifth and final train took us due south overnight to Vladivostok. This time our train was the almost empty Rossiya (train no 1/2), painted in the colours of the Russian national flag. We had a spectacular arrival on the waterfront in the dark early morning with the city lights blazing. We stayed in the Hotel Vladivostok, located close to the station with an excellent modern extension but substandard Soviet rooms. The town has seafront walks, a chaotic ferry station, trips to outer islands, a funicular, an Arsenyev museum and a fort with a one o'clock gun. Crowded, hilly and lots of traffic.

We flew back to Moscow from Vladivostok's smart, modern airport, located an hour's ride inland. An eight-hour flight, but it didn't seem long. After an overnight stay in the Hotel Vega again, we returned to England.

*Andrew Jameson will talk about his Trans-Siberian trip at the SCRSS on Friday 30 April at 7pm.*

## Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the Society's AGM will take place at 320, Brixton Road, London SW9 on Saturday 22 May at 10.30am. All nominations submitted for the Council, or motions, must be moved and seconded by SCRSS members only. Following the AGM a plaque to Sheila Marion Clarke will be unveiled in the library and Gerry Clarke will talk about his exhibition of paintings dedicated to her memory (see Next Events for details).

## Anglo-Soviet Cultural Exchanges 1941–48

From 28 April to 9 May 2010 an SCRSS exhibition *Anglo-Soviet Cultural Exchanges 1941–48* will be displayed in leading museums and libraries of St Petersburg and on its city government website as part of the commemorations for the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defeat of Nazism in Europe. The exhibition comprises:

- Photographic material from the SCRSS Archive on joint British-Soviet cultural activities and exhibitions during WWII.
- A new CD version of the SCR Writers Group's 1946 LP recording on which leading British poets read their recent work. The original album was recorded as a tribute to the Soviet people, following the end of WWII, and presented to the Soviet Ambassador in February 1947. Those poets reading their own work include Walter de la Mare, TS Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender. Poems by three young British poets killed in WWII – Alun Lewis, Sidney Keyes and Frank Thompson – are read by David Peel.
- A visual presentation of the initiation, by the SCRSS, and history of the Soviet War Memorial in London. The

memorial to the Soviet war dead of 1941–45 was unveiled in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, next to the Imperial War Museum in Southwark, in May 1999.

## Russian Visa Applications

The procedure for applying for Russian visas in the UK changed in September 2009. The online application form is now considerably longer, with new questions on, among others, applicants' higher education, previous employers and foreign visits over the past 10 years. In addition, UK citizens can no longer apply directly to the Russian Embassy, but must use the services of a visa support agency. These agencies include:

VFS Global - Russian Visa Application Centre  
15 - 27 Gee Street, London EC1V 3RD  
16 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LH  
Email: [info.ruuk@vfshelpline.com](mailto:info.ruuk@vfshelpline.com)  
Web: <http://ru.vfsglobal.co.uk/index.aspx>  
*Visa application processing only*

Russia House  
Chapel Court, Borough High Street, London SE1 1HH  
Tel: 020 7403 9922  
Email: [russiahouse@btinternet.com](mailto:russiahouse@btinternet.com)  
Web: <http://www.therussiahouse.co.uk>  
*Visa support, visa application processing and a range of business travel services*

Contact the agencies or visit their websites for further information on visa application procedures and fees.

## Next Events

**Friday 12 February 7pm**

**Lecture: Illustrated Talk on the Life and Work of Sergei Paradjanov**

By Layla Alexander-Garrett. Layla is organiser of the Paradjanov Festival which runs from 22 February – 9 May 2010 in London and Bristol (see [www.paradjanov-festival.co.uk](http://www.paradjanov-festival.co.uk) for full details). Born in Georgia of Armenian parents, Sergei

Paradjanov (1924–90) was one of cinema's most daring, visionary and unique directors. He was hailed by contemporaries, including Fellini, Antonioni and Tarkovsky, to whose memory Paradjanov dedicated his last film *Ashik Kerib*. However, Paradjanov's troubled relationship with the Soviet regime meant he was banned from film-making for long periods and even imprisoned on trumped-up charges for several years. During these times he turned to painting, collage and writing – "My art saved me," as he said.

Layla Alexander-Garret has been involved with arts and culture since the mid-1970s, when she studied cinema at Stockholm University and subsequently worked at key cultural institutions, including the Swedish National Theatre and the Swedish Film Institute. She was Andrei Tarkovsky's interpreter on his last film *The Sacrifice* (1986), shot and produced in Sweden, and was an assistant to the legendary Russian theatre director Yuri Lubimov, both in Sweden and the UK. In her individual projects as a producer and organiser, Layla has always sought to preserve and present the legacy of Russian culture to the Western world. Her book on Tarkovsky, *The Collector of Dreams*, was published in Moscow by Astrel in 2009.

**Friday 26 February 7pm**

**Film: We from Kronstadt**

The film is based on Vishnevsky's play *An Optimistic Tragedy* about a Bolshevik defeat in the Civil War. The author collaborated with the director in producing the film. Directed by Yefim Dzigan, USSR, 1936. 80 mins, black/white, English sub-titles.

**Monday 22 March (TBC)**

**Event: St Petersburg Student Group – London Excursion**

SCRSS members are invited to join an SCRSS hosted student group from St Petersburg on a visit to the National Gallery, guided by art historian Christine Lindey, and followed by a boat trip to Greenwich. Telephone 020 7274 2282 nearer the date for details.

**Friday 26 March 6.30pm**

**Event: St Petersburg Student Group – Reception**

SCRSS members are invited to a reception at SCRSS premises for the SCRSS hosted student group from St Petersburg. The group will give a small performance.

**Wednesday April 7 – Thursday 8 April (10am – 4.15pm daily)**

**Event: 4<sup>th</sup> SCRSS Russian Language Seminar**

The SCRSS Russian Seminar 2009 is a two-day intensive programme of lectures in Russian on contemporary Russian society, culture and linguistics, given by two lecturers from St Petersburg University, Faculty of Russian Language. The seminar is aimed at teachers of Russian, final-year undergraduates, graduates or students of Russian who have a reasonable aural understanding of Russian and wish to improve it and keep abreast of the latest developments in Russia. Participants may book a place on either one or both days. Contact the SCRSS for an application form.

*Venue:* SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB

*Fees:* £50 (one day). £90 (both days)

*Application deadline:* 12 March 2010

*Payment deadline:* 27 March 2010

**Friday 9 April 6.30pm**

**Event: Russian Language Seminar Reception**

Reception at the SCRSS for members to meet the lecturers from the Russian language seminar (see above).

**Friday 30 April 7pm**

**Lecture: Travel on the Trans-Siberian Railway**

By Andrew Jameson. See *Andrew's feature article on page 1 of this issue.*

**Saturday 8 May 11am**

**Event: Russian Friends Exhibition Launch**

Opening of an exhibition of paintings by Gerry Clarke at the SCRSS premises. The exhibition is held in memory of Gerry's wife Sheila Marion Clarke, a former SCRSS volunteer librarian who died in May 2009,

and Nikolai Nikolayevich Renev. Until 30 May.

**Friday 14 May 7pm**

**Film: The Young Guard (Part One)**

Based on the novel by Fadayev, the film is about a partisan group of young boys and girls who fought the Nazis during the occupation of their small Donbas mining town in 1942–42. Directed by Sergei Gerasimov, USSR, 1947. 100 mins, black/white, English sub-titles.

**Saturday 22 May 10.30am**

**Event: SCRSS AGM**

Open to SCRSS members only.

**Friday 11 June 7pm**

**Film: The Young Guard (Part Two)**

See commentary for Part One above. 84 mins, black/white, English sub-titles.

**Monday 14 June 6.30pm**

**Event: Brest Fortress Exhibition Launch**

Lecture by Russell Porter to open a new exhibition from Belarus at SCRSS premises. 15–25 June, 11am–5pm, Monday to Friday; Saturday 19 June 11am–3pm.

*Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees for films and lectures: £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members). For all other events, see details above.*

## **Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News**

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### **Hurricanes over Russia**

In October 2009 the Friends of the Imperial War Museum Duxford invited SMTF trustee Air Commodore Philip Wilkinson to talk about the RAF Russia Association and introduce the Atoll Productions documentary *Hurricanes over Russia*. The film covers the pilots and support staff of RAF 151 Wing who were aboard the first British ships sent to the USSR in August 1941 to deliver

fighter aircraft for assisting in convoy protection. The DVD had its premiere at a SMTF-organised event in May 2006.

## **Remembrance Sunday Ceremony**

Around 100 people gathered at the Soviet War Memorial on 8 November to mark Remembrance Sunday. The Mayor of Southwark, Cllr Jeffrey Hook, was joined by local MP Simon Hughes, Russian Ambassador Yuri Fedotov, diplomats from most of the other CIS countries, and representatives from a number of other organisations. Former champion boxer Lloyd Honeyghan, a Free Citizen of Southwark (in which the Memorial is located), was a first-time participant. Arctic convoy veterans laid a wreath in memory of the 98 sailors lost on board HMS Goodall when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat on 29 April 1945. The vessel was serving on convoy protection duty in the Kola inlet in northern Russia and was the last Royal Navy ship to be sunk in the European theatre during WWII.

## **Holocaust Memorial Day: 27 January**

The latest ceremony was very well attended, helped by additional advanced publicity from the Imperial War Museum and references in *History Today* magazine and other media. It is apparent that this is becoming an increasingly significant Holocaust Memorial Day event in the London area and the SMTF hopes to build on this in the future. A service at Southwark Council's Holocaust Memorial Tree, led for the last time by Rev Alan Greenbat who is retiring, was followed by an Act of Remembrance at the nearby Soviet War Memorial. The Mayor of Southwark referred to the significance of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 27 January 1945 by soldiers of the Soviet Red Army. There were contributions from Simon Hughes MP and Yevgeny Yurkov on behalf of the Russian Embassy.

## Next Events

**Sunday 9 May 11am**

**Event: Victory Day**

This SMTF event at the Soviet War Memorial will mark the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in Europe. If you are not already on the SMTF mailing list and would like to receive information about this and future events, please send your contact details to: Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB. Email: [smtf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:smtf@hotmail.co.uk). Note: if you are organising any 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary events in the UK, please let the Hon Secretary know.

**Monday 10 May**

**Event: WWII Commemoration Gala Concert at Royal Albert Hall**

A spectacular line-up of Russian and British performers is promised for this concert organised by Ensemble Productions. For further information, visit [www.ensembleproductions.co.uk](http://www.ensembleproductions.co.uk).

*The Soviet War Memorial is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum), Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ.*

## Feature

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### Russia: A Country to Inspire

By Christina Gibbons

As the station clock ticks round to midnight at the Leningradsky Station in Moscow it is impossible not to have a sense of being part of an epic Russian novel. The hustle and bustle of the platform (ours made more interesting by the lively group of smart Russian sailors who are sharing our train to St Petersburg), the huffing and puffing of those mighty beasts eager to carry us off through the night, all adds to the sense of adventure one could never find at an airport.

Our carriage attendant is far too beautiful and well turned out for the job. She couldn't

be more removed from the stern babushka one has come to expect. Why is she not on the front cover of some glossy magazine? The compartment is clean and cosy with a wide range of snacks, including red caviar and fresh oranges. I think I am going to enjoy the journey and sleep well. Only the tatty carpet runner in the corridor is out of keeping with the rest of the decor. However, it soon becomes apparent that this is just to protect the pristine carpet during embarkation and is whisked away as if by magic as the train departs. With the rhythm of the wheels I slip easily into a deep slumber.

Considering Russian Railways are reported to be bankrupt (not unusual for rail companies), their trains are of a more than acceptable standard and their time keeping could teach us plenty. Weather, natural and man-made disasters, political and economic upheavals – through it all the trains run and on time.

I have been working for Regent Holidays for 24 years and as a company we have been sending groups and individuals to Russia for more than 30 years. As you can imagine, I have seen many changes since my first visit to Russia in 1973, but it is the surprising and the unexpected that keeps me enthralled with this vast country and eager to share my enthusiasm. Russia is never predictable, never boring, always challenging.

The Trans-Siberian from Moscow to Vladivostok remains the rail buff's ultimate goal. But for an even more unusual journey to truly impress, try the route from Moscow to Pyongyang, the capital of that most reclusive of countries, North Korea. For the entire week's journey you will be an add-on, passed from Russian to Chinese railways, shunted in and out of sidings like some embarrassing relation you have to take along with you and would rather keep out of sight. Just take a moment to reflect on how many miles, how many time zones and how many political divides you will cross. It will inspire you.

The most popular route, however, remains the Trans-Mongolian from Moscow to

Beijing. It follows the Trans-Siberian route as far as Irkutsk then branches off to the south of Lake Baikal before passing through Mongolia and onward past the Great Wall to Beijing. It is well worth breaking your journey at Lake Baikal and in Mongolia to really appreciate the vastness of the lake and the sparsely inhabited but massive country of Mongolia.



Vladivostok Railway Station

Whichever route you choose as a foreigner, you will have the choice of 2<sup>nd</sup>-class 4-berth compartments or 1<sup>st</sup>-class 2-berth compartments. Both are comfortable and cleaned regularly. The only major difference is the number of berths, so forget ideas of the Orient Express or private facilities. Almost any time of year is good to travel. Many love the romantic *Dr Zhivago* feel of the winter months. Personally, I prefer May, June or September for maximum daylight and balmy weather.

There is no disguising the fact that the world recession has arrived in Russia. Cranes lay idle by grand projects for glass and steel 'business' centres. Refurbishment programmes have been mothballed. The bubble has burst and begrudgingly those bastions of capitalism, the 5\* 'businessman'

hotels, have had to reduce their stratospheric prices. For tourists this is an advantageous time to be in that iconic photo on Red Square in front of St Basil's candy-coloured domes or to lose yourself in St Petersburg's fairytale palaces and narrow, cobbled streets. Shame news of the economic downturn has not reached the Russian embassies who, in a tit-for-tat manner, still try to deter the potential visitor with their high visa fees and complicated forms.

Russia is changing at an almost frantic pace but is still fiercely proud of its rich heritage. With hotel prices tumbling, don't miss out on this opportunity to visit the world's largest and most intriguing country.

A 12-day trip on the Trans-Siberian from Moscow to Vladivostok with Regent Holidays costs from £1,150 per person. Contact: Regent Holidays, Tel: 0845 277 3317, Web: [www.regent-holidays.co.uk](http://www.regent-holidays.co.uk).

*Christina Gibbons is Operations Manager at Regent Holidays. She specialises in tours to Russia, the Trans-Siberian Railway, Belarus, China and Mongolia, and has been a frequent visitor to Russia since the 1970s. Regent Holidays celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010.*

## Report

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### European Festival of the Russian Language

As SCRSS Vice-Chair, I represented the Society in early October 2009 at the gala awards ceremony in St Petersburg to mark the end of the first European Festival of the Russian Language. This was the culmination of almost a year of competitions and events connected with Russian language and culture across Europe, in which the Society and its members also participated. Over 600 winners at national level – students of the language from school age to middle age – came to Russia's

second city for final contests in various categories, including essay writing, spoken language and singing. There were also seminars, workshops, exhibitions and cultural events to keep them busy. The many teachers of Russian accompanying competition winners took the opportunity to meet and talk to their counterparts from across the continent. All were agreed that it was a fantastic experience for the students and would certainly encourage the study of Russian in the countries represented.

The Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory hosted the awards event. It included tests of the finalists' knowledge and talent live on stage – from quiz questions and monologues created on the spot to performances of Russian songs. Awards were presented by the sponsors of the festival, including academic institutions and the Russkiy Mir Foundation. The event brought together a host of organisations connected with the promotion and study of Russian language and culture, and was a great opportunity to talk about the SCRSS and its work. I also met with our friends at the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation – this has led directly to the forthcoming SCRSS exhibition to be displayed in the city as part of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII (see report under SCRSS News on page 3).

*Ralph Gibson*

## **Book Reviews**

### **The Retreat: Hitler's First Defeat By Michael Jones (John Murray, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-7195-6952-4, Hbk, 352pp, £20.00)**

Michael Jones's book describes the German assault upon Moscow in October 1941 and their retreat following the Soviet offensive. It consists of a series of incidents, concentrating mainly on the German experience, using diary entries from the

time, memoirs and interviews with veterans. The book pays little attention to the Soviet side. Is it reasonable to do this?

There are criticisms of German behaviour in the book, sometimes severe. But in portraying events mainly from the German standpoint, with accounts given largely without comment, there is a very real danger of mitigating and even creating sympathy for a morally malign force that was intent upon enslavement and annihilation. This is particularly noticeable in the section describing Christmas 1941.

Moreover, if incidents are recounted without comment, they can be given undue weight. For example, Michael Jones presents incidents of friendly relations between Russian and German forces. But for the Soviet people, this was a fight to the death – in the name of life.

Furthermore, present-day recollections are bound to be affected by the passage of time and by current world opinion.

A truthful presentation of these events must involve very extensive reference to the Soviet side, acknowledging the great heroism and patriotic spirit that inspired the Soviet people. There is little reference to this in Michael Jones's book and where there is, the portrayal is reluctant and inadequate. For example, page 93 describes the resolve of Red Army units "to keep fighting where they stood" and refers to the slogan "Moscow is behind us!" But this section is brief and underplayed, with the suggestion that Soviet forces took this position because they had no alternative.

There is one incident in the book (page 106) where a young girl offers a soldier a piece of her bread, saying: "Take the bread, soldier. Do not let the Germans into Moscow!" If only there had been more such incidents in this book.

Soviet material presents a very different view. The Soviet people were 'as one' in the defence of their homeland. Soviet forces enjoyed extensive support in their rear from the city of Moscow and also from partisan



units in the enemy's rear. Moscow citizens worked tirelessly at building defences and manufacturing armaments. They formed volunteer divisions serving in the Red Army. Partisan detachments were established and battled courageously in difficult combat conditions and despite cruel reprisals. The Soviet frontline forces knew this and fought to the last breath, to the last drop of blood.

*The Battle of Moscow* (pamphlet by Vladimir Yeliseyev, Sergei Mikhalev and Sergei Korobkov, Novosti, 1991) recounts: "On December 27, 1941 Private Yakov Paderin [...] covered the slit of an enemy pillbox with his body in order to enable his company to advance. On October 8, 1941 Captain Alexei Rogov [...] plunged his burning plane into a group of enemy troops and vehicles at a crossing over the River Ugra near Yukhonov."

Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (partisan name 'Tanya') was an 18-year-old partisan from Moscow executed by the Germans in December 1941. *Tanya: The Story of a Heroic Russian Partisan* (P Lidov, FLPH, Moscow 1942) includes a letter from the Northwestern Front to Zoya's mother: "It is night time now, dark and lowering. We are five commanders of the Red Army. We are sitting in a dugout. The fighting has quietened down long ago, with dawn it will begin anew. We should have liked to sleep, but it is impossible to sleep. We read your speech to us young men of the Red Army. We have never read anything so moving, so heart-felt. On the highways of the war [...we have seen many terrible sights]. Yet never throughout the entire war have tears appeared in our eyes. Yet today your speech wrung tears from our stony eyes. We wiped them away. Wiped them away and swore: 'We shall never forget Tanya and never forgive the Germans for her. Her holy figure draws us, fires us, calls and leads us to battle.'"

That is how they were and that is how they felt. We should never forget these immortal truths. But sadly, these truths are missing from Michael Jones's book.

*Michael Stephens*

## **Moscow Heritage at Crisis Point, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition** **Edited by Anna Bronovitskaya, Clementine Cecil, Edmund Harris (Moscow Architecture Preservation Society & SAVE Europe's Heritage, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-905978-59-8, 302pp)**

The first edition of this publication appeared in May 2007 to intense interest, both in Russia and internationally. It highlighted the dangers that existed for many Moscow buildings of different historical periods due to unsympathetic developers and restorers.

The book encouraged Moscomnaslediye (Moscow Heritage Committee) to publish its register of listed buildings and to prosecute owners for unsanctioned alterations to them. As in Britain, listing does not necessarily save buildings: sometimes it leads to prolonged inaction until funds become available or to deliberate damage to support demolition.

The new edition examines some of the successes and failures resulting from the initial exposure.

The text (in English and Russian) is accompanied by full colour illustrations. Authoritative Russian and Western conservationists give their assessment of the architectural value of threatened buildings from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Happily, this includes not only the avant-garde Constructivist period, which led the world, but also an appreciation of Stalin-period housing and high-rises, Khrushchev-era modernist residential and public buildings, and some post-Soviet successes.

For good or bad, the Russian Orthodox Church has taken over the restoration or re-erection of some of its churches. The over rapid building of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, whose vast golden dome overshadows the Kremlin skyline, is criticised for the use of unsuitable materials.

Its height – totally out of keeping with the original design – is due to its being raised over an underground car park. Underground car parks are favoured by developers because of increased traffic and limited street space, but the authors point out that this endangers adjacent listed buildings.

Nataliya Dushkina contributes a profound article on the theory of conservation. She poses authenticity (the preservation of historic buildings on their original site using original materials) against the practice of insensitive reconstruction with unsuitable materials – or worse, the demolition of the building and erection of a copy on the site to suit the needs of the developer.

The Moscow skyline has changed considerably since Soviet days with high-rise apartment and office buildings springing up on brown sites. These often conflict in scale and appearance with surrounding buildings and dwarf historic sites.

Comparison is made with the Soviet period's destruction of parts of old Moscow but the City Plan represented a collective, social order in which the placing of the now iconic Stalin 'wedding cakes' is given high praise. Post-Soviet development has no such formality and to quote Berthold Lubetkin (at an SCR architectural seminar held in Bath in 1989): "I am dead against pluralism, it is second cousin to opportunism. Pluralism means a diversity of expressions and if art is a reflection of social conditions then this is precisely the reflection of disorder."

A new section on St Petersburg states that the plan to build the notorious Gazprom skyscraper has drawn a threat from UNESCO to remove the city from its list of World Heritage Sites if construction goes ahead.

It is encouraging that international organisations such as MAPS, founded among others by the late Dr Catherine Cooke (former Vice-Chair of the SCRSS), Russian grass roots and official organisations are making efforts to protect landmark buildings under threat and to stop urban vandalism by market forces.

*The book is available from SAVE Europe's Heritage for a donation of £18.00 + £2.50 p&p. Contact: SAVE, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ, Tel: 020 7253 3500, Email: office@savebritainsheritage.org*

*Jean Turner*

## **Three Men on the Metro** **By Andy Croft, WN Herbert & Paul Summers (Five Leaves Publications, 2009, ISBN: 978-1-905512-84-3, Pbk, 121pp, £7.99)**

This is a poetry book in English like no other: a mixture of a pastiche of the Russian (Soviet) love for Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* and the largely true fantasy that the (older parts) of the permanently amazing Moscow Metro are an abiding symbol of the Soviet dream with its steel and stained glass, rich symbolic decoration, statuary and allegory. It is a world in which one can lose oneself and this is what our authors have done, literally.

One side of the book is irreverent, humorous. For example, the legend that the Circle Line was built where Stalin's cup left circles on the plans left for him to approve. *Three Men on the Metro* includes literary parodies on classical and contemporary writers. Here is Byron (whom Pushkin translated) and TS Eliot. There are parodies not only of Akhmatova and Pasternak (who are more or less familiar to the English reader), of Yesenin and Mandelstam (who also wrote about the underground), but also of the whole galaxy of authors who have appeared on the Russian literary horizon during our epoch – Elena Schvarts and even Sergey Lukyanenko.

Our trinity of authors appeared in Moscow without a dog, but remembering Jerome K Jerome's heroes, found dogs on the way as they examined the stations of the underground. A stick's throw away from Mayakovskaya station is the museum of Mikhail Bulgakov, author of *The Master and Margarita* and *The Heart of a Dog*. In the book there are also two poems devoted to

the pig-iron sculptures at Revolution Square station, where the dogs have had their genitals removed so as not to confuse teenagers who just have to touch everything for luck. And at Taganskaya station with its cosmonauts, there is a poem about the first space dog Laika. Not forgetting the legendary Malchik, who lived at Mendeleevskaya; both Fazil Iskander and Bella Akmadulina, who lived in the neighbourhood, gave money for his monument, recently unveiled at the station.

Mayakovskaya with its modernist steel pillars bids fair to be Muscovites' favourite station; it has undergone long restoration and is now restored. Here mosaics represent the Soviet sky rising and then declining, becoming in this book a symbol of the turning world. Here is even Orpheus stuck on the escalator. What significance should we attach to the fact that the word for the underground is derived from the Greek *metera*, meaning womb? The world of Stalin's underground, for our Englishmen, appears also as a world of underground Freudian consciousness. Not without reason is one of the epigraphs to the book taken from Dostoevsky's classic *Notes from the Underground*: "Long live the underground!"

*Andrew Jameson (with acknowledgements to tribrodyagi.blogspot.com)*

## **The Forsaken. From the Great Depression to the Gulags: Hope and Betrayal in Stalin's Russia**

**By Tim Tzouliadis (Little, Brown, 2008, ISBN: 978 0 316 72724 2, Hbk, 472 pp, £20.00)**

Tim Tzouliadis, in exploring the potentially fascinating subject of American emigration to the Soviet Union, has ended up producing a curiously old-fashioned and unsatisfactory book – one not dissimilar in style to the much older work of Robert Conquest, or Ann Applebaum's more recent *Gulag*. Part of the problem lies with the source base that Tzouliadis uses: though his publishers

praise the 'rigorous' effort behind this 'colossal achievement', vanishingly little work appears to have been done in the Russian archives. Part of the problem, however, also lies in the writing style, and Tzouliadis's persistent deafness to more recent research which would grant his work much greater nuance. What we have instead is a reheated compilation of Cold War-era historiography, memoirs (Thomas Sgovio, unsurprisingly, features prominently), newspaper reports, and American embassy briefings, prone to speculation and occasionally grotesque inaccuracy.

The subject matter that Tzouliadis is dealing with in the book is little known – namely, how thousands of American workers, disillusioned by the Wall Street Crash, fled in droves to find work in the Soviet Union, and how thereafter many of them disappeared into the 1937–38 purges and Second World War. The narrative line, however, is weakened by Tzouliadis's uncertainty as to what he wants to focus on – Soviet-American relations at the bilateral governmental level, the personal stories of those Americans who disappeared, or the history of the Soviet Union itself during this period. Consequently, his treatment of the Soviet-American bilateral relationship, for example, never rises above a grim caricature of reality, in which arguably the greatest political administration in twentieth-century American history is tarred as simultaneously naive, hopelessly corrupt, and infiltrated.

Following an interpretation of events increasingly popular in Republican circles which despise the 'liberal establishment' in recent years, Tzouliadis spares no effort to tar almost every member of Roosevelt's New Deal administration as Soviet stooges or naive cretins. Figures such as Walter Durranty, FDR himself, Sumner Welles, Harry Hopkins, Ambassador Harriman, and Vice President Henry Wallace are persistently ridiculed and mocked, with Roosevelt damned for always possessing the ability to 'hide the truth, if need be, even from himself' (p. 244), even as the unsubstantiated slur is also levelled that

Stalin both held Roosevelt in contempt and in some way deliberately overstrained him to accelerate his eventual demise (p. 247). Ambassador Harriman, meanwhile, is apparently to be despised for 'sitting in a comfortable armchair beside a roaring fire' in the American Embassy in Moscow (p. 236), while newspaper reports from 1949 are also dredged up to imply that Sumner Welles's apparent suicide bid was linked to Soviet blackmail attempts (pp. 284–85). Similarly, McCarthy-era sources and the unreliable testimony of Oleg Gordievsky are recycled to repeat the old canard that Harry Hopkins was a diehard Soviet agent (pp. 285–86). Nowhere is the context of the global war against fascism being coordinated at this time given serious treatment, nor is the more recent historiography by the likes of Geoffrey Roberts, pointing to genuine Soviet desire to maintain the wartime Grand Alliance in the postwar era, given any airing.

Tzouliadis is similarly tone-deaf towards more informed historiography on events in the Soviet Union itself. The death of Kirov in 1934 is treated Robert Conquest-style as a Stalinist conspiracy, despite the persistent failure to turn up any conclusive evidence – as if the exhaustive work of J. Arch Getty on the subject of the pace and shape of the purges, which Tzouliadis in fact cites, had never been written (p.78). Tzouliadis is perhaps unsurprisingly therefore also totally unable to exercise any judgement or analysis on the scale or nature of the purges, citing without challenge contemporary claims that 'seven thousand' people were being arrested *every day* in 1934 (p. 79), and dully recycling the wartime conversation where Stalin supposedly acknowledged that collectivization cost the lives of 10 million people (pp. 244–45). The Ukrainian famine is likewise treated by Tzouliadis in a curiously old-fashioned manner as a deliberate genocide, despite an abundance of evidence and careful research in more recent years by the likes of Stephen Wheatcroft and IE Zelenin reaching almost the polar opposite conclusion – even as these latter scholars also never deny the catastrophic loss of life involved (in Ukraine,

closer in reality to 3.5 million than the 5 million cited on p. 329 by Tzouliadis).

Tzouliadis's agenda to blacken both the Roosevelt administration and that of Soviet communism (the latter would scarcely seem necessary, but the author seizes every opportunity to both muddy the statistics and tar Lenin as the model for Stalin's eventual massive crimes) is regrettable, not least because his book in fact works best as a story about everyday individuals. The life stories of Thomas Sgovio and Victor Herman, two of the 'ordinary' Americans at the centre of this hurricane of events, would make a fascinating book in their own right, and this book truly comes alive only through their experiences. By both ambitiously overstretching in scope, and simultaneously failing to integrate the more nuanced data and studies produced since 1991, Tzouliadis has therefore unfortunately ended up producing a curiously uneven and unsound work.

*Alex Marshall, University of Glasgow*

This review first appeared in 'War in History' (2009 16 [4]). It is reproduced with the permission of the author and Sage Journals.

## Film & Theatre Reviews

### **The Grain Store Royal Shakespeare Company, RSC Revolutions Season, Stratford-on-Avon, September –October 2009**

One evening three years ago I told my Ukrainian father-in-law, Mykola, about the book I was writing on the siege of Leningrad. "My mother was a *blokadnitsa*," he replied. "But my father Petro, he suffered even worse. He lived through the famine of 1933. His parents and all seven brothers and sisters starved to death. Left alone at the age of 10, he survived by begging at railway stations."

This was the first time Mykola had spoken about his family's experience. My husband knew that Petro had been imprisoned in a German concentration camp during WWII. "At least they fed us," was all he had said, without bitterness. But he never spoke of the *holodomor*. Since that evening I have been haunted by Petro's story. I could understand his not wanting to speak about the famine, but Mykola had never told his own family about his father's experience. He first broke his silence to me, an outsider.

And this, I believe, is symptomatic. The silence within my husband's family was part of the silence that surrounded the famine of 1932–33 and continued until the fall of Soviet power. At the time of the famine, the Soviet government imposed a news blackout. Walter Duranty, the influential *New York Times* Moscow correspondent, denied the fact of starvation. The British government was aware of the famine but blocked publicity and backed the USSR's refusal of aid. They were afraid of alienating Stalin and certainly did not want their electorate to know the true price of the bread on their tables. As a result, few people in the West are aware of the severity of the famine of 1932–33 which killed between seven and 10 million in Ukraine and southern parts of the USSR.

This makes *The Grain Store* all the more welcome. The RSC commissioned the play from the Ukrainian writer Natalya Vorozhbit, who herself lost 10 aunts and uncles in the famine.

The play opens with a middle-aged woman suspended on a swing above the darkened stage. She recites a prayer for her family. The lights come on over a Ukrainian village in 1929 where Party officials have come to 'educate' the peasants, to encourage them to join the collective farm. While this scheme exploits local resentments, a love affair develops between Mokrina, the daughter of a so-called kulak and Arsei, a party activist. As the years unfold (the play ends in 1933), the terror intensifies, grain is seized and stored in the former village church. There it rots while the villagers starve. Arsei defies Party officials to save Mokrina from death.

*The Grain Store's* poignancy is intensified by music – the peasants sing mournful Ukrainian folksongs; the activists exhortatory Russian marching tunes. The play would have been even more powerful had some scenes been shortened, particularly the tragi-comic dance in Act II, when the activists force starving peasants to rehearse a welcome for Walter Duranty. He never turns up, so the dancers go hungry.

In the epilogue, Mokrina's daughter returns, descending on her swing to repeat her prayers. This time she is seated between the silent presences of her father and mother. As Mokrina recites the names of her dead aunts and uncles, I found myself crying. She could be Mykola, I realised; she could be one of millions of Ukrainians, Russians, Caucasians and Central Asians alive today.

The RSC's artistic director Michael Boyd, who also directed *The Grain Store*, said: "It just wouldn't have been put on in Moscow; it is too much of a touchy political issue." In her interview on the BBC's *Today* programme, Vorozhbit agreed. She did not want her play to be politicised by having it staged in her homeland.

This strikes me as a great pity. It is time for this subject to be openly addressed. As with the siege of Leningrad, survivors of the *holodomor* and their descendants have a unique story to tell from which we and future generations need to learn. *The Grain Store* deserves to be staged in Russia and Ukraine, as well as in Britain.

*Caroline Walton*

## **The Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival, 4–8 November 2009**

This increasingly well-known annual event had a Russian focus this year, screening several new films – some directed and produced by Russian filmmakers, others simply filmed in Russia. All were interesting, enabling a glimpse into modern Russian life and documentary film-making.

*Until the Next Resurrection* was one of eight films nominated for the Special Jury Award. Directed by Oleg Morozov, who died soon after completing this beautifully shot film, it shows the lives of a number of Kaliningrad residents struggling on the margins of society. The film's producer, Alexander Slavin, introduced the film in Sheffield, speaking with obvious love and respect for Morozov's feat in capturing on film the chaotic and sad lives of his subjects. These include an alcoholic who had spent 25 years in prison, two young female heroin addicts, an incongruous couple of a middle-aged, paunchy man with a young, attractive girl (possibly a prostitute), who seem fond of each other though not in love. Talking after the somewhat sombre film, Slavin told me that Morozov had spent 10 years filming these people. The intimacy Morozov had achieved with his subjects was impressive. The girl and her middle-aged lover appear totally naked in several scenes, yet their manner is completely natural without eroticism or exhibitionism. So intimate is the shooting, you feel as if you are there in the room with them.

*Tsirk*, a short film directed by David Rounsfell Cairns, looks at the state of circus art in today's Russia. Through the words of the circus teachers at the State School for Circus and Variety Arts in Moscow, we learn that state funding is now practically non-existent, a fact they all bemoan as they remember the 'good old days' when circus was a prestigious and well-funded art form. The young up-and-coming clown featured in the film, Alexei, is an engaging young man who gives the film a forward-looking, not merely nostalgic, feel.

*Pink Taxi* is also by a non-Russian director, Uli Gaulke, from Germany. It gives us a glimpse into the lives of three drivers of Moscow's 22 pink taxis 'driven for women by women'. We listen to their chats with their female passengers, frequently revealing intimate details of their love lives, their desires and aspirations. None of the women taxi-drivers have loving men in their lives, though they have each known love and long to find it again. The friendship between the three women seems based on little more

than similar yearnings for love, boosted by vodka drinking. A sad, rather bleak film.

Igor Mayboroda directed an interesting, but over long, behind-the-scenes look at the making of Andrei Tarkovsky's celebrated 1979 film *Stalker*. Sensitively shot on film, *Rerberg and Tarkovsky: the Reverse Side of Stalker* tells the story of the well-known cameraman Georgi Rerberg, Tarkovsky's original choice to shoot *Stalker* who was dismissed partway through filming and left off the film's credits. The film interviews Rerberg and other cameramen and crew members who worked on *Stalker*. They tell of the huge difficulties and personal conflicts behind the scenes. It seems that Tarkovsky himself did not have a very clear idea of what he wanted and began filming before having a screenplay to work with. Tarkovsky's wife, Larissa, is portrayed as an interfering, controlling person whose impact on *Stalker* was anything but beneficial. The backbiting and continual conflicts during the long process of shooting *Stalker* are revealed in many interviews. In the end, this fascinating documentary shows how a creative process can flourish even under the most difficult of circumstances. Mayboroda had worked on his documentary for 10 years, stumping up his own money as Gosteleradio provided only part of the finance. A labour of love, indeed, and a fitting tribute to Rerberg.

Kate Clark

## **Leningrad Directed by Alexander Buravsky, Kobura Productions**

To mark the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Leningrad, Cine Lumiere screened the British premiere of Alexander Buravsky's *Leningrad* on 27 January 2009. The film has been released in Russia. It will appear on DVD in the UK in February, but is not due for general release here.

A British woman journalist finds herself trapped in the siege. She is taken in by a Russian policewoman, while her British newsman boyfriend tries to rescue her. The

siege detail is painstaking and authentic. An opera diva asks whether a meat pasty is “human?” The NKVD waste their time searching for spies and ‘enemies of the people’. The starving hack the flesh from a still-living horse. The opening battle scene left me stunned with admiration (once again) for the heroism the Leningraders showed in the defence of their city. However, the film is marred by too many plotlines and an absurd central story. I found myself quite indifferent to the fate of ‘Kate’ and her ‘Mr Parker.’

I welcome the attempt to bring the siege to a Western audience, yet this film fails because the director tries to give a Western audience what he imagines we want to see. We are presented with unconvincing (and poorly acted) ‘Westerners’, as though the siege itself were not story enough.

*Caroline Walton*

## **From the Russian Press**

### **Reviewing the Economy**

*Trud-7* published the results of an investigation into the reality of inflation for ordinary consumers (‘Nastoyashchaya inflyatsiya’, p.4, 14.1.2010). The official Russian statistics body, Rosstat, claimed that consumer prices had risen by only 0.3 – 1.6% in 2009 and food products by no more than 6%. In fact, these averaged figures bore little relation to real prices in shops. Throughout 2009 *Trud-7* had monitored the price of the ingredients of an *Olivier* salad (Russia’s favourite): potatoes, meat, eggs, carrots, fresh and pickled cucumbers, mayonnaise and green peas. Each month it had checked the prices in a particular branch of one of Russia’s leading supermarket chains. The results had been striking: in contrast to the official inflation rate of 8.9%, the overall cost of the *Olivier* ingredients rose by 30.4% over the year. Potato prices increased three fold from 23.5 to 69.9 roubles per kilo (*50 roubles : £1.00*), eggs by 50%, green peas by 35%, fresh

cucumbers by almost 33%, beef by 4% and mayonnaise by 2.8%. Only carrots and pickled cucumbers fell in price – by 25%.

*Komsomol'skaya Pravda* published its price forecast for the coming year (‘Tseny v 2010 godu’, p. 6, No. 2-T, 14–21 January 2010). The agriculture minister and producers reassured consumers that food price increases would be minimal in 2010: the local harvest had been good and Russia had managed to reduce expensive food imports in 2009, in particular grain, poultry, fish, butter, milk and cream. Nonetheless, the country was still reliant on imported sugar, pork, beef, fruit and vegetables. The outlook was less rosy for those who smoke and drank. From 1 January a minimum price of 89 roubles per half-litre of vodka would be introduced to squeeze out illicit production. Duty would rise three fold on beer and by 5 – 7% on spirits and wine. A packet of cigarettes would increase by 6 roubles on average. As for transport, the price of inter-city train tickets was expected to increase by 10% and suburban train tickets by 12%. In Moscow the cost of metro, bus, trolleybus and tram rides had already risen by 20%. Utility bills would also rise steeply – on average by 26% in Moscow and 18% nationwide. In the capital the price of hot water would increase by over 25%, gas by 20% and electricity by 14.5%, while service charges in public-sector housing would rise by 20%. Estate agents and construction firms were cautiously predicting an increase in house prices and demand, but most economists felt that little improvement was likely before the summer – unless mortgage interest rates fell.

*Argumenty i Fakty* interviewed Arkady Dvorkovich, an adviser to the Russian president, on expected economic trends in 2010 (‘O bogatstve, tsenakh, fulbole i detyakh’, p. 12, No. 1, 2010). He was cautiously upbeat about the economy, predicting that production would grow, salaries increase a little and unemployment stabilise if not fall. He expected lower price rises than in 2009, with the exception of the increase in duty on tobacco and alcohol. Mortgage interest rates were likely to return to pre-crisis levels (10 – 11% for standard

housing). Down payments would remain at 20 – 30%, but the government was hoping to introduce mortgage insurance in 2010 to enable banks to reduce this figure within 12 months. Mortgage support programmes at regional and federal level, including the provision of subsidised down payments, would be made available to certain categories of family (for example, those moving to a village for work). On the vexed question of utility charge increases, the government's intention was to promote energy saving by linking utility rates to consumption, while providing subsidies to those who most needed them.

*Summarised and translated by Diana Turner*

## Listings

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### Art

#### Chambers Art Gallery

23 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HL.

12 February–12 March: *Shashoua Collection of Russian and Ukrainian Paintings*. Monday–Friday 10am–6pm, Saturdays by appointment.

### History

#### Michael Jones on WWII

Michael Jones was adviser to a new documentary on the Battle of Stalingrad to be broadcast on the *Russia Today* TV channel in February 2010. He is also a consultant on the RIA-Novosti History Project, in association with Radio Moscow and *Izvestiya*. His latest publications are:

*The Retreat: Hitler's First Defeat*  
First publication: November 2009  
John Murray, Hbk, 352pp, ISBN: 978-0-7195-6952-4, £20.00.

*Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed*  
New paperback edition: January 2010  
Pen & Sword Military, Pbk, 304 pp, ISBN: 978-1848842014, £14.99.

*Leningrad: State of Siege*  
Paperback edition: May 2009

John Murray, Pbk, 352 pages, ISBN: 978-0719569425, £9.99.

## Lectures

### Sutton Russian Circle

Friends Meeting House, 10 Cedar Rd, Sutton SM2 5DA

19 March 6.50pm: Concert of Russian Classical Music. 9 April 6.50pm: *1813–1815: Tsar Alexander I and Prussian Marshal Blucher. Their Major Part in Napoleon's Downfall* by Bob Dommett. 14 May 6.50pm: *Great Russian Ballerinas* by Natasha Dissanayake. 18 June 6.50pm: *Russian Necropolis Abroad* by Julia and Keld Smedegaard.

## Russian Language

### Study in Russia

For information on Russian language courses at Voronezh State University, contact: Andrey Polunin, 60 Armii 11 – 8, 394053 Voronezh, Russia. Mobile: 0079202271010, Fax: 0074732661527, Web: [www.edurussian.com](http://www.edurussian.com), Email: [info@edurussian.com](mailto:info@edurussian.com).

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