

Contents

2 nd Russian Film Festival	1
SCRSS News	3
SCRSS Library & Archive Reports	4
Art Reviews	6
Book Reviews	8
Along Russian Waterways	10
From the Russian Press	11
Listings	12

Feature

2nd Russian Film Festival in London: Two Views

John Riley writes:

In mid-September London's Apollo cinema hosted the second Russian Film Festival. Organised by Academia Rossica, it featured a selection of recent features and documentaries – many of which have won awards in Russian – as well as a programme of talks and presentations.

Among the guests was actor Mikhail Evlanov who said that Russian cinema, after a difficult period of readjustment to new market conditions, was still trying out various themes and styles in an attempt to rediscover itself. Certainly the festival gave the chance to see some very different films, from the quite traditional to the avant-garde.

It began with *Live and Remember*, Alexander Proshkin's adaptation of the novel by Valentin Rasputin, best known for

Farewell to Matyora. *Live and Remember* is similarly set in Siberia, this time during the war, and follows a deserter back to his home area. There's a constant feeling of the hardness of life, set against the beauty of the landscape, while everyone grapples with difficult moral questions.

Proshkin is very much in the tradition of Russian cinema but, as Evlanov said, other avenues are being explored. One was visible in another film in which he appeared – Igor Voloshin's *Nirvana*, the story of a group of baroque-looking St Petersburg punk drug addicts. Visually it was incredibly striking with its heavily made-up and extravagantly dressed cast, but it was odd to see these twentysomethings nostalgically bemoaning the passing of *perestroika* certainties. Yet the makers assured us that that's the outlook of many of their friends.

Another kind of nostalgia was visible in *Rock Monologue*, a documentary about the rock musician / producer Yuri Morozov. Though he died part way through filming, there are interviews with him, his wife, his friends and colleagues, and a wealth of archive footage and stills. Morozov's outspoken lyrics meant his music could not be officially sanctioned, though even as – or perhaps as? – an underground figure, he was immensely popular. Particularly amusing was the sight of him excoriating Bob Dylan for his honorary PhD and Paul McCartney for his knighthood: "That has nothing to do with music." Morozov's hero was Lennon but, however confrontational the lyrics, the music was actually quite conservative melodically, though the weird sounds that he concocted from his Heath Robinson set ups put them on a different level.

The alarmingly dystopian *Terra Nova* is set in 2013. The abolition of capital punishment has led to crippling overcrowded prisons. As an experiment, a group of the most psychopathic killers is sent to try to survive for three months on the distant archipelago. A kind of *Lord of the Flies* but with adult mass murderers, it is predictably violent: though there are adequate supplies, the men soon turn to cannibalism, picking off the weakest members of the group.

It's a bleak view of human nature, but it is disturbing in other ways as well. The coldly objective organisers of this inhuman experiment speak English and wear light blue helmets: surely the makers can't be implying that the liberalism of organisations such as the UN will lead to anarchy and that mass execution of prisoners is the only way forward? But then, the men are joined by American prisoners wearing orange Guantanamo-style jump suits. Perhaps 'solutions' imposed from outside Russia will never fit that country?

Certainly Western styles of cinema have sometimes proved useless to Russians but the irony is that this, perhaps the most expensive Russian film ever made and certainly the most violent, draws so much from Western culture in order to show the director's idea that Russia has "always lived by moral, divine law: legal laws, imposed by mankind will solve nothing". *Terra Nova* is the result of abandoning God.

John Riley is a writer, lecturer, broadcaster and curator, concentrating on film and music. He is also Chair of the SCRSS.

Charles Stewart writes:

For me the hit of the festival was the well chosen opening premiere of *Live to Remember*. Stunningly photographed, this is a moving story of love, heroism and endurance set in a remote Siberian village during the war. In a hostile natural environment, where women take on the heavy manual work of their absent men, a story of passion and the struggle for life unfolds. Having been on active service for

four years, a Russian soldier (Mikhail Evlanov) goes absent from his unit in the closing months of the war. He is drawn back to his native village and the physical proximity of his young wife (Darya Moroz). After initial contact, he goes into hiding and they continue their relationship in secret meetings, despite his pursuit by the authorities and small-minded, self-seeking villagers. Their fight for survival is set against the perils of the natural environment and village intrigue, and brings with it tragic consequences. Ultimately, it is a story of self-sacrifice enabling life to continue.

The closing gala performance was *Yuri's Day*. Set in present-day Russia, stylistically it was quite a different film, but again one that engaged with the Russian experience of small community life. Like the 19th-century Slavophiles, the film underscores the human values of the *obshchina* (village community) in Russian national identity. The story brings a sophisticated international Russian opera star, Ksenia Rappaport (Lubov), to her native town of Youriev-Polsky – to show it to her unimpressed teenage son before leaving for Europe. When her son mysteriously disappears, she begins a frantic search in the face of bureaucratic indifference. Along the way she encounters 'the lower depths' of a former convict turned police detective and routine violence in a domestic relationship within a TB ward for prisoners. Her search is the beginning of a spiritual journey that, by heightening her maternal instinct through loss, leads her to sacrifice her life at the top to help those at the bottom of society. In her new life, she takes up residence in a simple wooden house with a woman who befriends her, becomes a cleaner at the hospital where she cares for prisoners in the TB ward, and joins the chorus of the church choir.

Academia Rossica is to be congratulated on the festival and the choice of films. Those I saw underlined the current re-assertion of Russian national identity in the post-Soviet world and the country's re-discovery of Russian history.

Charles Stewart is a member of the SCRSS Executive Committee.

SCRSS News

Report on the Hon Secretary's Visit to St Petersburg

Jean Turner, SCRSS Honorary Secretary, visited St Petersburg from 26 September – 3 October to discuss a proposed programme of co-operation for 2009 with Margarita Mudrak, Vice-Chair of the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation, and other colleagues and institutions.

In a busy week, the Secretary first visited the new offices of the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation. Located at 60 Liteyniy Prospect, the Association occupies one floor of the building, enjoying both modern office accommodation and a traditional 19th-century chandeliered and gracefully furnished ballroom for public meetings. President Natalia Eliseyeva met our Secretary with her usual warmth and hospitality, and assured her of the Association's continuing work in supporting friendship with the UK, as well as Germany, Japan, France and many other countries.

The following day, the Secretary gave a talk about the SCRSS to students and lecturers of the St Petersburg Electrotechnical University, at the invitation of Maria Kiseleva, Director of the International Relations Office, and Natalia Gavrik, lecturer. Speaking in English, she was impressed with the interest in the work of our Society and the English language ability displayed by the packed room. Among others, the question of Russian and British stereotypes was raised. It seems that peasoupers and bowler hats still persist in the Russian mind and snow and fur hats in the British one, but the universality of computers, DVDs and films has done much to dispel these misconceptions.

Following her talk, the Secretary visited Smolny, home of the St Petersburg Government, for a meeting with Igor Lonsky, Vice-Chairman of the Committee for

External Relations, and Olga Koralyova, Senior Officer. Proposals for a St Petersburg Festival of Language and Culture in London, Manchester and Scotland in March / April 2009, and a further SCRSS Russian Language Seminar in April 2009, were discussed and the support of the St Petersburg Government for both events secured.

On 1 October the Secretary visited the Mayakovsky Central State Public Library and the Gallitzine Library, both located on the Fontanka Embankment, to discuss their work and relations with the SCRSS Library. She also met with Natalia Metelitsa, Director of the St Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, and Natalia Golovko, Director of the St Petersburg Cultural Committee, to view an exhibition of early 20th-century theatre and costume design from the Lobanov-Rostovsky collection, and to discuss a proposal for an exhibition of art and literature connected with the 110th anniversary of the *Mir Iskusstva* group at the SCRSS in London in April 2009.

On her last day, the Secretary met Professor Evgeny Yurkov, Dean of the Philology Department of St Petersburg State University, MAPRYAL member and Director of the Russky Mir Foundation. He outlined the programme of a European Festival of Russian Language, funded by Russky Mir, that began in July 2008 and would continue until September 2009. He urged Russian language organisations in the UK to take part in a Russian essay competition as part of this festival, the winners of which would be invited to St Petersburg in September 2009. He also suggested that a master class in Russian language could be included in the London programme of the St Petersburg Festival of Russian Language and Culture. The Secretary was then introduced to Professor Sergei Bogdanov, Deacon of the Philology Department of St Petersburg State University, and other professors to discuss the development of Russian language studies in the UK.

The day ended with tea with members of the St Petersburg branch of the English Speaking Union at the offices of the

Association of International Co-operation, followed by a talk by the Secretary about the work of the SCRSS.

Our Secretary's main impression of her St Petersburg visit was of youth and energy in a city refurbished by private developers. The city has avoided the horrors of inappropriate skyscrapers in the centre but allows massive new housing schemes in the suburbs, one of which, the Baltic Pearl, is funded by Chinese investment and flies the Chinese and Russian flags. This is definitely a city with a confident future.

Events

Friday 7 November 7pm

The Soviet Union's Contribution to the Defeat of Japanese Militarism
Speaker: Keith Bennett.

Friday 21 November 7pm

Film: Cossacks Beyond the Danube

Gulak-Artemovsky's light-hearted opera, performed by the Ukrainian State Opera and Ballet.

15 – 16 April 2009

Event: 3rd SCRSS Russian Seminar

Our popular two-day intensive seminar returns in 2009 with lectures in Russian on contemporary Russian linguistics, society and culture, given by lecturers from St Petersburg University. Further details available from the end of this year, but note the dates in your diary now!

SCRSS Library & Archive Reports

Children's Literature Collection

During the Soviet period literature for children gradually began to assume its own identity, distinct from and independent of the adult genre. Many talented writers, illustrators and translators of the time contributed to the creation of high-quality

works reflecting both current aesthetic trends and new developments in society.

The SCRSS is lucky to have within its library a unique collection encompassing the very best of Russian children's literature from the early 20th century through to the present day (a recent addition, for example, is the ubiquitous Harry Potter!), with a particular focus on the Soviet period. It is not only among the best in the country, but much of it is also open access. Here one can discover literature from leading figures of the genre, alongside magazines, ABCs and school textbooks in Russian, English and the languages of the former republics of the USSR. Journals and reference material are available to provide a context for research.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that there is something here for everyone. The Lending Library has an extensive collection of children's readers, including favourite classics from folklore such as *Masha and the Bear*, *The House Tower*, *Goose-Swans* and *The Turnip*, as well as works by Pushkin and Piotr Ershov's *The Little-Humpbacked Horse*. All of these can be borrowed and enjoyed by today's children, while their parents will no doubt also rediscover particular favourites from their own childhood.

Students of the Russian language may want to take a look at some of the children's poetry in order to luxuriate in the lively rhymes and rich textures of sound and rhythm that are so typical of the genre, not to mention brushing up on their vocabulary for birds and animals! Kornei Chukovsky and Samuil Marshak wrote relatively accessible and short poems. Marshak's translations of English nursery rhymes, for example, display such linguistic dexterity that they have become originals in their own right.

Children's literature has always sought to educate as much as to entertain. It was particularly pertinent in the Soviet Union that children should understand something of the society in which they were living, as they were considered to have an important role to play in building socialism. Much of the

literature from this period therefore reflects this changing world. Common themes among the books in the SCRSS collection include machinery, technology and industrial production – the Volga and Dniepr River projects feature in both factual and imaginative works.



Illustration by N Kochergin to Pyotr Ershov's *The Little Hump-Backed Horse* (SCRSS Library)

So-called 'positive heroes' provided children with suitable role models and include real-life figures, such as Lenin, and fictional characters, such as Mikhalkov's 'Uncle Steeple' – a friendly police officer who looked out for all children.

Works for children are often distinguished by their rich illustrations, with the best examples reflecting a successful relationship between author and illustrator. Marshak enjoyed an extremely fruitful collaboration with Vladimir Lebedev. Lebedev's illustrations reflect the bold lines and vibrant primary colours typical of artistic innovation during the 1920s and 1930s – *Morozhenoye* (Ice Cream) is a striking example. Other works of particular interest in the SCRSS collection are editions of Pushkin's fairytales with illustrations by Bilibin based on Art Nouveau motifs, Mikhail Tsekhanovsky's illustrations to Marshak's work *Pochta* (Mail) and Yuri Annenkov's attractive line drawings in Chukovsky's *Moidodyr* (Wash 'Em Clean).

While much of the SCRSS collection is open access, some rare and more valuable works are kept in the archive collection. Particularly striking are a 1937 edition of *Gusi-Lebedi* (Goose-Swans), attractively illustrated by Yuri Vasnetsov and K Kuznetsov, and a 1946 edition of Evgeny Charushin's *Shutki* which, unusually for Soviet children's literature, is both written and illustrated by the same person.

It is impossible for me here to provide you with more than a snapshot of what this special collection holds as its breadth and scope is simply stunning, but perhaps it will be enough to inspire you to seek out this hidden gem for yourselves.

By Jill Cunningham (SCRSS Council)

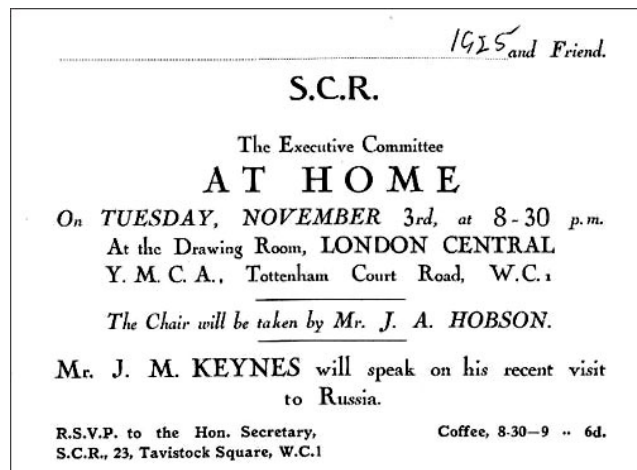
SCRSS Archive: The First Decade

Working through the SCRSS Archive is a never-ending and fascinating revelation of the activities of the Society in its earliest years. The development of the Society in its first decade, from activities and special sections to changes of premises, is chronicled in documents and artefacts in the archive.

After Britain's recognition of the USSR on 2 February 1924, a group of artists and intellectuals, British and Soviet, realised how little knowledge of each other they had. A resolution for the foundation of a society to promote such knowledge was put forward by the English liberal economist JA Hobson and a provisional committee set up. The inauguration of a formally constituted society, known as The Society for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (SCR), took place on 9 July 1924 in the presence of 120 individuals, including many eminent public and cultural figures. They elected Professor LT Hobhouse as the first president, who was succeeded on his retirement in 1926 by Professor Lascelles Abercrombie.

The SCR's office was established at 23 Tavistock Square, London, and the opening

function was held at Kensington Palace Mansion Hotel on 28 November 1924. On 12 December 1924 Huntly Carter, the author and theatre critic, gave the Society's first public lecture – a lantern lecture at Chelsea Town Hall on the *Original and Varied Work of the Russian Play Producers*.



SCR 'At Home' invitation to hear JM Keynes speak on his recent visit to Russia, 1925 (SCRSS Archive)

A highly successful exhibition, *Russia of Today in Posters and Books*, was arranged by the SCR at Teplay House in London in May 1925 and transferred to Cambridge the following February.

In December 1925 Hugh Walpole chaired a literary evening. By then the Society had separate science, literary and theatre, education, economics and social life sections, the latter incorporating a Co-op group. These sections held regular meetings, while members also gave lectures to other organisations. Visits to and from the USSR were organised and these visitors also spoke about their impressions of the new Soviet Union.

On 21 April 1926 Basil Dean, Director of St Martins Theatre, gave a lecture on *The Moscow Theatres* at the small Kingsway Hall. In March 1928 a lecture / recital on *New Vocal Music of Soviet Russia* was given by the eminent composer Rutland Boughton in the Drawing Room of the Central YMCA in London.

By the early 1930s, as well as regular talks and films in the various sections, there were social events – at homes, conversations,

social evenings, garden fetes and parties, and soirées. In 1931 Dr Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, chaired an Anglo-Soviet garden party in Kensington. The first *Weekend Summer School* took place in June 1932 in Digswell Park, Welwyn, and this was to become a regular event.

In the early days books and journals were being donated and collected and by 1926 numbered 1400 volumes. In 1934 a Clubroom and Library were founded as a memorial to E Frank Wise CB who had given influential and dedicated service to the Society and died that year. His field of interest had been trade, in particular the Co-operative movement, and he had travelled widely in the USSR, acquiring information and giving help and advice.

Current work on this section of the SCRSS Archive started with a collection of black and white photographs, many of which bore no names, places or dates. Unfortunately, very few photographs of the first decade are to be found here, but this lack of images is compensated by a rich collection of invitation cards, tickets, flyers and other documentation, which we are currently digitising. Our ongoing research to put dates – and even years in some cases – to events leads to greater understanding and appreciation of the considerable toil and enthusiasm by those first pioneers of mutual knowledge between Britain and the USSR.

By Barbara Ellis (SCRSS Council) and John Cunningham (SCRSS Assistant Librarian)

Art Reviews

Cold War Modern – Design 1945–1970: Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The contemplation of a tea service or a radio set is unlikely to elicit the same depth of emotional or intellectual response as that of a painting or sculpture. So, in design exhibitions more depends on the narratives

created by the curators' selection, juxtaposition and interpretation of objects.

The ambition and range of this exhibition is huge. It explores modernist design in the Cold War decades on both sides of the political divide in Europe, as well as in the USA and the USSR, within the context of fine art and film. Its artefacts range from Stalinist town planning to Cardin frocks, from Picasso ceramics to the Messerschmitt micro-car.

This massive topic is organised chronologically under seven themes through which the cultural arena of the Cold War is explored. The era is defined as one that promised 'both utopia and catastrophe' and the response of artists and designers to this dual vision forms a strong framework to the themes.

The first section, *Anxiety and Hope in the Aftermath of War*, explores the stylistic opposition of the two power blocks. The Stalinist classicism of a reconstruction scheme for East Berlin is contrasted with West Berlin's modernist housing schemes by Corbusier and Gropius.

The adaptation of wartime technologies to peacetime purposes is shown in works such as Eames' plywood furniture. A model of *The Destroyed City*, 1947, Zadkine's anguished monument for Rotterdam, evokes both hope and despair while Varèse's spooky sound track to Corbusier's experimental film *Poème Électronique* evokes Cold War anxieties.

This film is part of the second section which explores the ways in which art and design "were conscripted for propaganda" by both sides. We learn of America's financing of West Germany's influential Ulm School of Design and of Britain's international competition for a *Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner*.

The maquette of Reg Butler's winning entry for this is bizarrely juxtaposed with a model of Vuchetich's *Soviet Victory Monument* in Berlin, despite its subject matter being unrelated thematically to Butler's work. As

the exhibition's theme is modernism, there is understandably no room for discussion of the ideological debates about non-modernist and modernist socialist realism. However, the inclusion of a few non-modernist socialist realist works divorced from this context merely reinforces existing prejudices against it.

The true heart of this exhibition lies in the next five sections which deal with various aspects of late 1950s and 1960s modernism. Starting with the Khrushchev Thaw, it introduces us to the modernist designs of the Soviet block. We see works like the elegant biomorphic forms of the coffee service by the Polish designer Tomaszewski, the child-centred designs for the Modernist Pioneer Palace in the Lenin Hills, Moscow, and surrealist free-form glass work from Czechoslovakia.

Crisis and Fear explores the effects of the missile crisis on art and design via works such as Adams' set designs for Kubrick's film *Doctor Strangelove*, 1964, and radio and television sets whose design evoke themes of surveillance and spies.

The influence of the space race forms the basis of the fifth and arguably most stunning section. Fashions inspired by space suits are shown alongside the real thing worn by astronauts and cosmonauts; the peaceful harnessing of technology is seen in futuristic designs for telecommunications towers, including models of London's Post Office Tower and Moscow's Ostankino Tower. One of the most thrilling architectural designs here is the model and drawings for Hubáček's combination of a telecommunications tower and hotel in Liberec, Czechoslovakia, 1968–73, appearing to hover effortlessly above its base like a spaceship and still a functioning hotel.

A small section exploring the posters and films engendered by the direct action revolutions of the late 1960s leads us to the finale – *The Last Surge of Utopian Thinking*. Here we see intriguing speculations on alternatives to consumerist living and the beginnings of ecological awareness, such

as the Slovak art group VAL's Heliopolis, 1966–7, which imagined building an entire city delicately poised on top of the Tatra mountains to prevent human interference with the beauties of nature.

The exhibition is open-minded in its attitude to the Soviet block; indeed it is driven by a passion for post-Stalinist modernism. However, the differing ideological outlooks and historical circumstances of the two blocks are insufficiently explored.

A virtually unscathed USA should not be directly compared with a USSR so horrifyingly scarred – psychological, emotionally and materially – by the war, without explanation of this difference.

The Soviet block's design and production for durability stemmed from Marxist ideology: providing for need rather than profit, as opposed to capitalism's relentless drive for marketable novelty. Moreover, a concern with a desirable domestic environment enshrines bourgeois values. Communism is subtly undermined or presented as passé, while the hegemony of capitalism is implied by its not being defined.

However, the exhibition does consider the ambiguities faced by artists and designers. It will open the wider public to the very existence of important art and design behind the Iron Curtain, and its focus on European countries is a welcome and much needed alternative to the stereotypical US / SU polarity. It introduces fascinating themes and surprises us with many rare and wonderful artifacts. Based on pioneering, scholarly research, it manages to also entertain, educate and enthrall.

By Christine Lindey

This review first appeared in the Morning Star on 7 October 2008.

The exhibition runs until 11 January 2009. Entrance fee: £9, concessions £7–£5.

Book Reviews

Bloomsbury Ballerina: Lydia Lopokhova, Imperial Dancer and Mrs John Maynard Keynes
By Judith Mackrell (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008, £25.00)

This book has a double interest for SCRSS members. Lydia Lopokhova was eminent among the dancers who brought Russian ballet to the West, while John Maynard Keynes, world-famous economist, was a founder supporter of our Society. The biography is of Lydia rather than Maynard, but the two were bound so tightly in so many ways, including through the artistic Bloomsbury set, that they are inseparable.

It is an intense love story, surprisingly so since Keynes was homosexual. The book explores Lydia's competition with his same-sex partners. The authoress, whose intensive research is admirable, provides abundant detail, perhaps too suggestively for every reader. But she would have disappointed many if she had been more censorious.

Lydia came from Russian peasant stock, but thanks to the St Petersburg ballet school she and most of her siblings rose high in the world of dance. Her ballet-master brother Fyodor stepped into Petipa's shoes after the Revolution, although he later fell out of favour, together with Shostakovich.

Lydia went to Paris with Diaghilev in 1910, then on to America with another impresario. There she rejoined Diaghilev during the Great War and returned with his company to Europe, achieving particular success in London. Eventually she became godmother to British ballet, supporting the Camargo Society and Sadlers Wells.

Lydia captivated the public. She was short and well suited for soubrette roles. Personality was her trump card, both on and off the stage. She had "a quality of inspired mischief", as Arnold Haskell put it, and could get away with anything. The book is rich

with Lydia stories. In society her excruciating conversational sallies should have been fatal. On the stage in *Les Sylphides* she once reached under her costume, sensing impending disaster, removed her undergarment and sent it sailing into the wings.

She and Keynes came together in the early 1920s against the backdrop of two vivid Russian impacts – artistic sensation and revolutionary upheaval. Doubtless it was the danger that revolution posed to cultural links that led Keynes to join other leading thinkers, such as HG Wells and Bernard Shaw, in founding the SCR in 1924. In 1925 he and Lydia married, and he exploited a semi-official visit to take her back, after 15 years, to her homeland. Despite interest in the Soviet experiment, Keynes had no illusions about communism, though for the sake of his wife's family he moderated his public stance.

Keynes was both a workaholic and a chronic heart sufferer. In the Second World War his position imposed a heavy burden, leading Britain's negotiations with the US over Lend-Lease, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Meanwhile, the writing on the wall became insistent and only Lydia's unceasing care kept him alive.

Nevertheless, he also organised the wartime CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) which under his aegis later became the Arts Council of Great Britain. He helped bring Sadlers Wells Ballet to Covent Garden, where it reopened the Royal Opera House with *Sleeping Beauty* in February 1946. Keynes was to receive the King and Queen at this performance but Lydia had to deputise. Two months later he was dead. She survived him by 35 years, continuing joint interests, such as the Cambridge Arts Theatre, which they had founded.

Keynes had become a baron and the subtitle might have read 'Lady Keynes'. The book is a good read, a pity the reproductions are so poor.

By Tony Devereux

The Russian Language in Britain: A Historical Study of Learners and Teachers

By James Muckle (Bramcote Press, ISBN 978-1-900405-15-7, Hbk, xii + 275pp, illus, large bibliography, index, £25.00)

Don't be fooled by the title – this is a campaigning book. It starts mildly with an academic study of who knew Russian in English history and contains some gems, such as Queen Elizabeth I having her ambassador kneel beside her while she puzzles out Russian letters in the Tsar's charter to the Russia Company by reference to her knowledge of Greek. Connoisseurs of the Russian character will love the master-servant dialogue from Ludolf's *Russian Grammar*, published in Oxford in 1696.

However, Muckle refers to the 18th century as "a great advantage squandered by the British" and we quickly realise that the history of relations between our countries, and of mutual understanding through language, has been something of a roller coaster ride through history, rather than a progress informed by intelligent policy or debate.

While English belief in Russian barbarism prevented progress in the 18th century, the 19th was blighted by the growing awareness of political conflict and terrorism in Russia. To take an extreme example, the shock experienced by the translator Constance Garnett when she found she had befriended a murderer, Sergei Stepniak, was palpable. We owe the founding of the British Special Branch to these political refugees.

The discovery of Russian literature by Garnett and the Bloomsbury set was linked to a 'Russian boom' at the turn of the century which continued through the First World War. The Russian revolutions brought this to an abrupt halt and rekindled British governmental paranoia, while dividing English society. Muckle castigates British blindness to the need for language and knowledge of Russia, which, to be sure, did not bring about this situation, but certainly

rendered Britain incapable of dealing with it in an intelligent manner.

In this connection, the Society for Cultural Relations (SCR) is singled out as a major force for reason in two passages of his book. The first describes its activities in teaching Russian (p 84–5), and the second, in a footnote which fills half a page (p 106), explicitly defends the SCR against the accusations levelled at it, lists the many famous names associated with it, praises it for resisting Soviet manipulation and for keeping open channels of communication. It would have been nice if Muckle had stressed that the SCR(SS) is still very much alive in 2008, but one can't have everything.

A lot of the information in this book is for specialists, with many intriguing and appealing stories about people who studied Russian and their fates, about the ridiculous secrecy of military language courses and their contribution to Russian studies in Britain (and thank God for them), about the mindless unplanned growth of Russian in the 1960s, and the idiocies of the Atkinson Report which brought about the inevitable slaughter of departments from 1979, something this reviewer experienced personally.

The reader will ask – have things now improved, have official policies now reached a balance? Chapter Nine (pp 223–246) goes into these questions in exhaustive detail. As far as higher education goes, things may have reached stability – around 20 universities (see www.basees.org.uk/ahr.shtml#where) produce circa 500 graduates with knowledge of Russian per year. As regards schools, the position is patchy, but state schools, language colleges and the private sector all make their contribution. Meanwhile, Russian overtures to the West and aspirations for Russia to take its place as a superpower among equals, have been rebuffed by the British and American nuclear defence establishments who see their power threatened by a possible outbreak of peace and good relations. Plus ça change?

By Andrew Jameson

Feature

Along Russian Waterways

By Tony Devereux

My wife and I recently fulfilled a long-standing ambition – a cruise on Russia's waterways from St Petersburg to Moscow. We often visited the USSR in the 1980s and at last felt it was time to return. The impact was powerful, not only with fresh aspects revealed from the water but with huge changes over 20 years.

We joined the *Maxim Litvinov* in St Petersburg, a larger vessel than on West European rivers. Firstly, we re-visited St Petersburg's familiar attractions. The centre is – as always – magnificent, although continuing restoration and maintenance mean buildings like the Hermitage are often shrouded. Here the Tsar's private theatre is now open to the public; we saw *Giselle*. The Peter and Paul Fortress commemorates the last Tsar and his family alongside their predecessors, amid highly ornate surroundings.

We were struck by how much better dressed and happier looking Russians are today, especially young women and children. Peterhof, Peter the Great's palace with its fabulous fountains, was thronged with carefree people and bridal parties on a sunny Saturday afternoon. Later, it was the same on Moscow's Sparrow Hills.

Outside the centre St Petersburg retains Soviet drabness, a contrast with Moscow, which has cast off the past more thoroughly. Both cities have extensive road works and traffic is generally heavy.

Leaving St Petersburg, the *Litvinov* glided between riverbanks thick with forest. Occasionally there were luxurious private dwellings, but nothing to compare with the build-up we saw later along the Moscow Canal. It was the time of the White Nights and sunsets were spectacular. Our first stop was Mandrogi, a village dedicated to Russian culture, symbolising the intense

resurgence of traditional Russian arts and crafts.

Reaching Lake Onega, we visited Kizhi Island, a prehistoric pagan site now famous for its onion-domed wooden churches. This is in the far north, but further south the banks of the Volga are studded with gold, silver, green and blue domes, symbolising the equally intense resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church. Elsewhere on our journey superbly conserved convents, monasteries and churches at Yaroslavl, Kostroma and Uglich told the same story. Formerly they had been repressed, forbidden even to ring bells.

This is the most amazing change in Russia visible to the tourist. In Moscow the Church of Christ the Saviour's great golden dome gleams again close to the Kremlin. Originally erected to commemorate victory over Napoleon, it was blown up in 1931, but has now been rebuilt with no cost spared. The Russian Orthodox Church's centre at Zagorsk, north-west of Moscow, has had its respect and splendour restored, along with its ancient name of the Troitsky-Sergeyevsky Monastery.

The record is not all one-sided. At Kirillov we were entertained in the House of Culture, built in 1918 and a praiseworthy revolutionary response to the peasantry's needs. Some need remains, however; as in many places remote from Moscow, shops are dreary – apart from one bright exception, Bee Line, the mobile phone centre.

In Moscow the river terminal is a rare example of 1930s Soviet architecture – a classic survival doubtless awaiting reconstruction. Moscow itself is the world's most expensive city. Admittedly, an ice cream in the flower park by the river terminal cost no more than here, but coffees at Domodedovo Airport before our return flight were £5.00 each.

Tony Devereux is ballet critic for The Dancing Times, specialising in classical Russian ballet.

From the Russian Press

Boris Yefimov, Soviet Cartoonist (1900–2008)

Izvestiya was one of many newspapers to run extensive obituaries on the celebrated cartoonist Boris Yefimov, who died aged 108 on 1 October 2008 ('Chelovek dvukh stoletiy', 1.10.08, www.izvestia.ru).

The recipient of many Soviet and Russian awards, including Hero of Socialist Labour (1990) and the Stalin Prize (1950 and 1951), Yefimov had worked for publications such as *Pravda*, *Krokodil* and, in particular, *Izvestiya*. He had been the chief editor of *Agitplakat* since 1966, was a member of the Russian Academy of Arts and had had his works published in many albums.



'An unexpected change of programme' – cartoon by Boris Yefimov, 1943 (SCRSS Library)

Born in Kiev in 1900, his life had been framed by the course of 20th-century history. He had only been at Kiev University for a week in autumn 1917 when all educational institutions collapsed. A self-taught artist, by 1918 his sketches had appeared in the Kiev-based military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* and thereafter his work was published in the

Soviet press with enviable regularity over a period of 60 years.

Political satire had been afforded particular importance in the USSR, but even the most famous artists and writers could not guarantee their own safety during the purges. Following the execution of his brother, a leading journalist, Boris Yefimov had been convinced he was next in line. His name had certainly been on a list of 'enemies of the people', but legend had it that he had been left at liberty on Stalin's personal orders. Stalin had been passionate about Yefimov's work, from time to time interfering in the creative process and making corrections to Yefimov's cartoons in his own hand.

Yefimov had come into his own during the war years, when his powers of satire were used to maximum effect. He had attacked Hitler and his allies without restraint, using crude but effective humour.

All Soviet history, both domestic and foreign policy, was chronicled in Yefimov's work – in satirical form. Today his cartoons were treated as historical documents, but ones far more expressive, and requiring less commentary, than extracts from Politburo minutes or newspaper editorials.

His work had never lost its popularity, even after he had retired from his artistic career to concentrate on academic work. He had continued to organise regular, well attended exhibitions.

Zurab Tsereteli, president of the Russian Academy of Arts, had made the following statement on the death of Boris Yefimov: "We have lost a great artist. Together with the Kukryniksy brothers, he created graphic images that helped fight fascism. No one before had thought that art could participate in real life in that way or that you could wage war on a piece of paper. [...] Yefimov's cartoons were a real weapon [...]."

Summarised and translated by Diana Turner

Listings

Russian Language

Modern Languages Evening Programme – Russian

University of Westminster, London,
www.wmin.ac.uk/learn-russian-in-london

Russian Language Evening Classes

Civil Service Recreation Centre, 1 Chadwick Street, London SW1P 2EP. Contact: Charles Stewart, Mobile: 07835 455996, Email: charles0207@yahoo.co.uk

Classes started in September, but can be joined from 4/6 November for the half term up to 9 /11 December. Tuesdays 5.30pm–7pm: beginners, 7pm–9pm: intermediates. Thursdays 5.30pm–7pm: post-beginners; 7pm–9pm: advanced. Cost: beginners and post-beginners £50; intermediates and advanced £65 (pay cheque/cash on night).

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