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Feature

Vladimir Putin and His Policies

By David Lane

Vladimir Putin, with the support of President Yeltsin and the Russian economic oligarchs, arrived on the Russian political scene as appointed prime minister in August 1999 and jumped immediately onto the international stage when appointed acting president on 31 December 1999. For the first two years or so, as far as the West was concerned, his work was acceptable. Putin maintained and even developed the market economy. At home the power of the oligarchs, such as Berezovsky who had backed him, went unchallenged and Yeltsin was given immunity from prosecution. By the advent of his third term of presidency in 2012 Putin had reversed many of the major faults of the Yeltsin era.

Initially Putin was confronted with challenges on all sides: by the expansion of NATO into Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic; by NATO strikes against Serbia; by a growing Islamist secessionist threat in Chechnya and Dagestan; by the withholding of taxes by major companies and regional governments. Putin's position as president was undermined by business interest groups who influenced deputies to defeat his tax proposals.



President Vladimir Putin (courtesy of RIA Novosti)

The oligarchs, particularly Khodorkovsky, believed that the private sector could utilise Russia's massive energy resources, from which they profited, better than the state. Putin and his government believed otherwise. Consequently, Putin adopted a more confrontational policy against oligarchs who opposed him – "if it's business you

have chosen, stick to business” was his advice to the oligarchs. His statist policies had implications for foreign investment in the energy industry and he sought to change the terms of investment with the large foreign investors who had benefited disproportionately by contracts made under the Yeltsin regime. In international relations Putin, while trying to placate the West, saw the USA as a hegemonic threat not only to Russia but also to world peace in general.

Putin became a target of anger from the leaders of the West. The British media have depicted him as a “trilbyed gunman” (*The Economist*), and a master puppeteer controlling the strings not only in Russia but also of the supply of energy to the West. *The Observer* newspaper posed the question: “Is he the westward leaning ally of President Bush and Tony Blair, or someone whose real affection is for the bad old days of the Soviet Union?”¹ Putin reversed Yeltsin’s pro-Western policy and sought to give Russia the respect it deserved abroad, as well as to instil a feeling of confidence domestically. Internally he curbed the worst consequences of privatisation by transfers of income derived from Russia’s material wealth to the population. Putin’s popularity rose at home, though he was criticised abroad. He renationalised many of the energy companies: in 2003 state-owned companies accounted for only 12 per cent of oil production, a figure that rose to nearly 40 per cent by 2007, while in the gas sector state companies controlled 85 per cent of production.

What type of political and economic system has Putin introduced? He has pushed the economy in the direction of market state capitalism. This is an economic system legitimating private property and the market with significant state control. It is not state socialist. The state has two major forms of control: first, considerable ownership of property that gives the government significant revenue independent of taxes. Some economic surplus (profit) accrues directly to the state through state companies such as Gazprom. Secondly, power is secured through administrative control. The government is sufficiently powerful to direct

privately owned national companies to fulfil state objectives. This clearly gives problems to companies and their shareholders when the state intervenes to direct their resources to politically inspired (though legitimate) goals.

Putin’s handling of the closure of a factory in Pikalyovo illustrates this point. The enterprise laid off thousands of workers and could not pay bills to the local utilities companies, which turned off the supply, leaving the population with no hot water and heating. Putin ordered the owners to pay immediately arrears of salaries amounting to 41 million roubles. He is reported to have told the management: “You made thousands of people hostages to your ambition, incompetence and greed. It’s absolutely unacceptable!”² The Russian state can enforce what is euphemistically called in the West the ‘social responsibility of business’. Putin, however, is no socialist. At the beginning of his presidency he legalised the purchase of land. During the period of economic crisis, he could have extended the nationalisation of enterprises and further reduced the power of the oligarchs. But he preferred to keep within a private property market system and he successfully applied for membership of the World Trade Organisation in December 2011 – exposing Russia to the external constraints of the world economic system.

But Putin reversed the relationship under capitalism between business and the state. Under Western and Russian capitalism, there are two frameworks of power: in the West business has captured the state; in Russia, under a commanding president, it can be the other way around. This does not undermine capitalism – it may strengthen it through state support, contracts and subsidies.

Against this background, the Western media complain about the lack of modernisation, the mafia-like nature of society and state infringements of individual rights. The reason underpinning the political and economic malaise, they contend, is the presence of corruption and the focus is on the state and, of course, its leader. The

message is that if you can cure corruption, then progress can be made. My own view is that the causality is the other way around. Corruption is a consequence of the rapid, haphazard and spontaneous privatisation carried out in the Yeltsin period which influenced the mores of society. Corruption is much wider than state officials using public property for private interest; privatisation involved the seizure and fraudulent procurement of state property with no proper accountability and consequently led to the formation of a capitalist rentier class.³ This weakened the economy through the export of capital on a massive scale.

Western media give relatively little attention to the wealth and power of the new capitalist class. Consider Roman Abramovich. In 2012, he had a 'net-worth' of 13.4 billion dollars. He made his money initially through oil export and then bought into the oil and, later, the metals industry. He was appointed by Putin as governor of Chukotka autonomous okrug (in Siberia). His expenditure is lavish; he has the largest sea-going yacht in the world; the accumulated losses (2003–11) for Chelsea football club, which he owns, come to some \$1,000 million; just two players (Shevchenko and Torres) cost \$120 million. Consider his constituents in Chukotka who, in 2006, had an average income per person of \$976 (25,703 roubles) per annum, while 13 per cent of the population were below the official Russian minimum living income. The wealth of the business tycoons has increased during Putin's presidency and they may be considered an unrecognised support to his leadership.

But it is clear that Russia has not created a vibrant form of modern capitalism and the state, therefore, comes to perform a developmental role. As to future developments, critics point in two directions. First, as articulated by journals such as *The Economist* and neo-liberal commentators, is a stronger commitment to the free market and greater involvement in the world economy which would attract inward investment. The second direction advocated by national and leftist politicians is a move to

greater statism and more national autonomy. Statist China, rather than liberal America is the model and would involve a revival of the more paternalist policies of the state socialist period.

Footnotes

1. *The Observer*, 2 November 2003
2. Angus Roxburgh, *The Strongman*, London, 2012, p 276
3. A class of owners who seek super-profits from their investments, rather than utilising profits for further capital accumulation.

David Lane is an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences, Emeritus Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was previously Professor of Sociology at the University of Birmingham. He was Vice-Chairman of the SCR from 1972–79, having been an Executive Committee member from 1968–71. He is currently studying unemployment in Ukraine, Russia and China. His recent publications include: 'Elites and Classes in the Transformation of State Socialism', 2011; 'Rethinking the "Coloured Revolutions"', 2010 (with Stephen White); 'Elites and Identities in Post-Soviet Space', 2011; 'The European Union and World Politics', 2009 (with Andrew Gamble); and 'The Transformation of State Socialism: System Change, Capitalism or Something Else?', 2007. He can be contacted at the following address: Emmanuel College, Cambridge CB23AP.

Note: David Lane will lecture on *What Next for Russia?* at the SCRSS on Friday 12 April 7pm (see page 5).

SCRSS News

Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the SCRSS AGM will take place at 12.30pm on Saturday 18 May at the Society's premises. The meeting is open to SCRSS members only. The deadline for motions and nominations of members for election to the next Council is

Friday 26 April. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member. The agenda for the AGM will be available from early May.

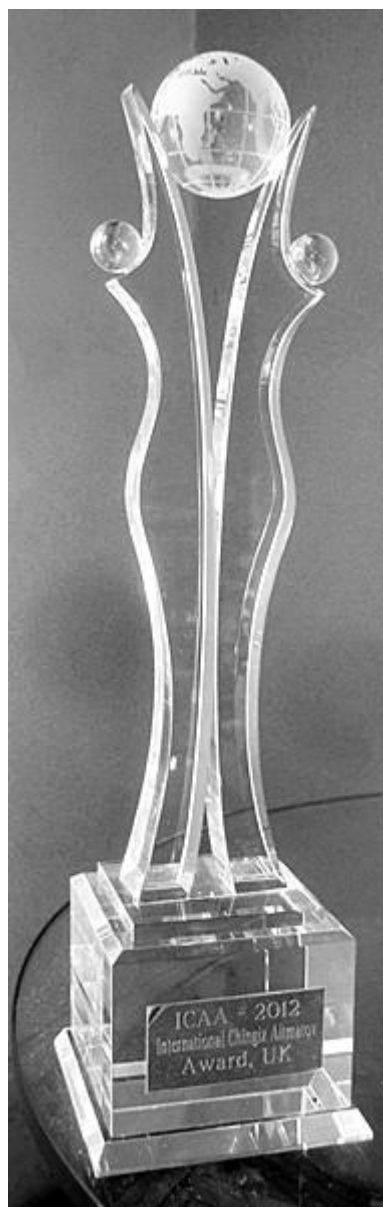
Aitmatov Academy Honours the SCRSS

The Society has received an *International Chingiz Aitmatov Award* for our collection of English translations of the works of Chingiz Aitmatov, the famous Soviet and Kyrgyz author. SCRSS Chairman John Riley accepted the award on behalf of the Society at a ceremony organised by the Aitmatov Academy at Senate House, University of London, on 12 December 2012. Hon Secretary Jean Turner gave a brief history of the Society's connections with Aitmatov and outlined the range of material held in the SCRSS library. Tributes were also paid to Professor James Riordan, former vice-president of the SCRSS, whose English translations of Aitmatov's works are highly acclaimed and for which he received an *International Chingiz Aitmatov Award* in 2011. Other award winners included Natalia Arinbasarova, lead actress in the Soviet screen versions of Aitmatov's *Jamilia* and *First Teacher*, Andrei Konchalovsky who directed *First Teacher*, Nursultan Nazarbaev for supporting the publication of Aitmatov's collected works in Kazakhstan, and the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre in London for its collection of Turkish translations of Aitmatov's work.

SCRSS President Unveils Lenin Commemorative Plaque in Bloomsbury

A blue plaque commemorating Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's time in Bloomsbury, London, was unveiled on 30 November 2012 at 36 Tavistock Place (formerly 21 Tavistock Place). The plaque reads: *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin – 1870–1924 – Founder of the USSR – Lived here in 1908*. The event, organised by the Marchmont Association, was attended by the Mayor of Camden,

Councillor Heather Johnson, in the company of a range of representatives of respected academic, literary and cultural organisations with links to Lenin. The plaque was unveiled by Professor Bill Bowring, SCRSS President. Lenin lodged in the first floor flat while studying at the Reading Room in the British Library. It is here that prepared material for *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, published the following year. Lenin tried three times to obtain a readers ticket, finally receiving one in the name of Vladimir Oulianoff on 22 May 1908. The full news article is available at www.marchmontassociation.org.uk/news-article.asp?ID=179.



The International Chingiz Aitmatov Award 2012, received by the SCRSS

SCRSS Information Digest

We welcome suggestions for future articles, reports or reviews. Please contact the Editor by email or post via the SCRSS. Note: unfortunately, we are not able to pay contributors for work published in the *SCRSS Information Digest*.

We are also keen to reduce our costs by increasing the number of paid advertisements and mailshots in the journal in each of our three issues per year. If you know of any organisations or individuals who might wish to take advantage of this service, please direct them to the flyer on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/Documents/SCRSSInfoDigest_mailshots-adverts.pdf. This lists our prices for 2013, publication dates and copy deadlines. Back issues of the journal are available in PDF format at www.scrss.org.uk/publications.htm.

Next Events

Saturday 23 February 2–5pm

Event: 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad Film Show

Hurricanes to Murmansk (50 minutes, 2011, Atoll Productions for the RAF Russia Association with the support of the RAF Historical Society). The film tells the story of a secret Anglo-Soviet air operation following the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941, told through interviews with veterans, unique archive footage and stills. At Stalin's request, in August 1941 Churchill sent an RAF Wing of Hurricane fighter aircraft, with pilots and ground crew, on the first Arctic convoy to Russia. They trained Russian pilots, gave fighter escort to Russian bombers and flew successful operations with them against the Nazis from their base near Murmansk. *Normandie-Niéman* (114 minutes, 1960, Mosfilm Studios and Alkan Film, FrancoLondonFilms, directed by Jean Dréville, Russian / French cast, English subtitles). The film recounts the combat activities of the pilots of the French Normandie-Niéman squadron who fought in the ranks of the Soviet Armed Forces against the Fascist invaders in 1941–45.

Note: Normal admission fees apply. Tea and coffee included.

1–18 March

Exhibition: Arts of Russian and Soviet Modernists from the SCRSS Archive

Our exhibition, shown at the SCRSS last year, will be on display at the University of Sheffield (venue TBC). SCRSS Council member and art historian Christine Lindey gives an opening talk on Monday 4 March.

Friday 8 March 7pm

Lecture: Andrew Jameson on *Working as a Volunteer Lecturer in Russia - A Guide*

Andrew Jameson is a former lecturer in Russian at Lancaster University, now a translator and researcher in Russian Studies. He has worked as a volunteer lecturer in Russia on many occasions and talks about his experiences, offering insights to other potential lecturers. The talk includes useful take-away materials, as well as a slideshow of Andrew's photographs of Moscow, Khabarovsk, Birobidzhan and the Victory Day fly-past. Note: see Andrew Jameson's report on page 16 of this issue.

Saturday 16 March, 11am–4pm

SCRSS Book and Souvenir Sale

Books in Russian and English on art, literature, history, music, poetry, Russian language teaching, etc, as well as beautiful Russian and Soviet souvenirs. All at reasonable prices! Refreshments available. Admission free.

Friday 22 March 7pm

Lecture: Dr Emily Lygo on *Bringing Soviet Culture to Britain: The SCR's Activities and Interests 1924–45*

Dr Emily Lygo is Lecturer in Russian at the University of Exeter. As part of her research into Anglo-Soviet cultural relations, she is currently researching the history of our Society, covering the two periods 1924–45 and 1945–91.

Friday 12 April 7pm

Lecture: David Lane on *What Next for Russia?*

David Lane is an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences, Emeritus Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge,

and was previously Professor of Sociology at the University of Birmingham. He is currently studying unemployment in Ukraine, Russia and China. Note: see David Lane's feature article 'Vladimir Putin and His Policies', including his full biographical details, on page 1 of this issue.

Saturday 27–Sunday 28 April (date TBC)

Event: SCRSS Russian Language Seminar

Advance notice that our hugely popular two-day Russian-language seminar is back – and now run over a weekend (date TBC). Lecturers from St Petersburg University give talks in Russian on aspects of contemporary Russian language, culture and society. Full details will follow, once we have finalised the date. If you are interested in receiving details once available, please email the SCRSS or send a stamped addressed envelope.

Saturday 18 May 12.30pm

Event: SCRSS Annual General Meeting

The AGM is open to SCRSS members only.

Friday 7 June 7pm

Lecture: John Riley on *Beyond the Rite's Riot*

2013 marks the centenary of Stravinsky's seminal ballet *The Rite of Spring*, written for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, with choreography by Nijinsky and designs by Roerich. Though the Paris premiere famously descended into a riot, it quickly became a regular part of the repertoire. Since that night there have been around 150 different productions and countless performances as a concert work. Using film and music examples, John Riley tells the story of the composition and its premiere, and puts the work into the context of Stravinsky's career and of 20th-century music.

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees for films and lectures: £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members). Admission fees for other events: as indicated above.

Member Obituaries

Barbara Ellis (1922–2012)

Barbara Ellis joined the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (as the SCRSS was formerly known) in November 1963. Like many of her generation, the Soviet Union held an important place in her life as an ally of Britain, France and the USA in the victory over Nazism. Barbara and her husband Charles raised a loving family but did not forget the achievements of the Soviet Union, both pre- and post-WWII. They visited many times, travelling to Russia and many of the other republics of the USSR. They studied their history, literature and folk music, and gave this information in illustrated talks to many groups in this country.



Barbara described herself as “a permanent student of Russian” and attended all our Russian language seminars from their outset in 1969. This love of the Russian language led her to translation. She translated prose and poetry for many years for the English-language edition of the Soviet journal *Soviet Literature*, and was invited to the 7th International Conference of Translators of Soviet Literature in Moscow in 1987. But her particular interest was the

classics of Russian and Soviet poetry. She published some of her translations in a book *A Monument by No Man Created* which she sold to raise funds for our Society. In her last days in hospital, on being recited a short poem by Alexander Pushkin in Russian, she listened with her lips moving to the words and commented how beautiful it was. This is the poem in Russian and Barbara's translation from her book:

Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может
В душе моей угасла не совсем;
Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит;
Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.
Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,
То робостью, то ревностью томим;
Я вас любил так искренно, так нежно,
Как дай вам бог любимой быть другим.

I loved you once: a love, perhaps, at present
Within my soul not quite extinguished yet;
But let it be no more for you unpleasant;
I have no wish for you to be upset.
I loved you hopelessly, in silence, dearly,
The pangs of jealousy and shyness knew;
I loved you once so tenderly, sincerely,
May God grant you another's love so true.

The SCRSS was enriched by Barbara and her late husband Charles. Even after her husband's death and the onset of macular degeneration, Barbara continued to serve on the SCRSS Council and work in the library archive until her final collapse. This was typical of her commitment to our Society. We offer our deepest sympathy to her family and share in their sorrow.

Jean Turner, SCRSS Hon Secretary

Note: This is an amended version of the tribute paid by the SCRSS Hon Secretary at Barbara Ellis's funeral at Eltham Crematorium, London, on 18 September 2012.

Eileen Bradshaw (1920–2012)

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Eileen Bradshaw who served on the SCRSS Council from 1982–2007 and was our Treasurer from 1991–2001. Always

a generous supporter of all the Society's activities, Eileen contributed to its work at every level. Her many visits to the former Soviet Union with her husband Laurence gave her a great insight into its cultural life and creativity.



In later years she backed up her keen interest in art with extensive reading and visits to exhibitions; her well-informed, discerning views about art made discussions with her a pleasure. Her aesthetic sensibilities were evident in the colourful originality with which she furnished her small house in Essex: it was filled with books, hand-painted furniture, original paintings and sculpture.

Many of these artworks were by her late husband Laurence Bradshaw (1899–1978), a committed socialist artist best known for his monument to Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery. Eileen devoted much energy to preserving his legacy, not least by writing *As I Understand It*, a copiously illustrated account of his life and works. Always modest about her own creativity, this fluently written and well-researched manuscript will remain a memorial to her, as well as to him.

Christine Lindey, SCRSS Council member

Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

Remembrance Sunday, 11 November 2012

Over 100 people participated in the annual Remembrance Sunday event at the Soviet War Memorial. The Russian Ambassador, HE Alexander Yakovenko, spoke of the debt owed to those who "gave the world their last full measure of devotion" and the importance of not taking peace for granted. Local MP, the Rt Hon Simon Hughes, delivered an address that drew links between conflicts old and new. Stanley Ballard, on behalf of the Russian Convoy Club, expressed sincere thanks to the Russian Embassy for Russia's continued recognition of the veterans of the Arctic convoys. The Mayor of Southwark was once again accompanied by a delegation from Clichy, the borough's French 'twin'. For photos from the event and the Ambassador's remarks in full, visit the Russian Embassy website at <http://rusemb.org.uk/activity/121> and <http://rusemb.org.uk/article/178>.

British Medal for Arctic Convoy Veterans

In December 2012 it was announced that UK veterans of the Arctic Convoys would finally receive a medal for this particular campaign. The Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) congratulates the veterans on this significant award, following their persistent and lengthy campaign for this recognition. The SMTF also acknowledges the tremendous support received from members of the Russian Convoy Club, North Russia Club, RAF Russia Association and other Convoy veterans over the entire period since the project to erect the Soviet War Memorial in London began in the 1990s. Since the unveiling in May 1999, Convoy veterans have participated in every ceremony, including special events

connected with important visitors from Russia, such as President Putin's visit in 2003. It is clear that the campaign for a specific medal for the Arctic Convoy campaign has raised awareness generally about what Churchill described as "the worst journey in the world". Russian media coverage of the ceremonies at the Memorial has often centred around interviews with Convoy veterans. Within Russia, therefore, the story of this endeavour, which cost the lives of over 3,000 British personnel, is undoubtedly more widely known.

Ushakov Medal

In an Executive Order in April 2012, just before leaving office as president, Dmitry Medvedev awarded the Ushakov Medal to "foreign veterans [...] for their personal valour and courage during World War II while taking part in the northern convoys". The medal is named after the Russian admiral Fyodor Ushakov (1745–1817) who apparently never lost a battle. The award was first created in 1944 for bravery in naval operations in defence of the USSR and was retained by Russia after 1991.

Surviving veterans in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA have been allowed to accept the medal. However, in the UK, rules on the awarding of foreign decorations have so far prevented British veterans from doing so. There has been continuing widespread local and national media coverage regarding this impasse. A Parliamentary early day motion tabled in October and signed by MPs from all major political parties, urged the Government "swiftly to reconsider its decision to deny the opportunity for survivors to accept the Ushakov medal from the Russian government and be rightly commended for their services during the Second World War". BBC local TV in Norwich recently interviewed Philip Wilkinson, SMTF Trustee and Chair of the RAF Russia Association, on the subject. In the same programme, former UK Ambassador to Moscow Sir Tony Brenton expressed the hope that the matter could be resolved. Further information on

the awarding of the medal can be found on the Russian Embassy website at www.rusemb.org.uk.

Next Events

Thursday 9 May

Event: Victory Day Ceremony

Victory Day will be marked with an Act of Remembrance at the Soviet War Memorial. Full details will be sent out in March to the SMTF mailing list. If you are not already on the mailing list and would like to be, please send your details to the Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or email Ralph Gibson on smtf@hotmail.co.uk.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum).

The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund which organises ceremonies at the Memorial on 27 January (Holocaust Memorial Day), 9 May (Victory Day) and Remembrance Sunday in November every year. Events are listed on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm, while information on the memorial's history is available at www.scrss.org.uk/sovietmemorial.htm.

Feature

The New Russian FBI – President Putin's Bloodhound

By Bill Bowring

The fight against crime and, especially, corruption is a top priority for the Russian state. In the past two years Russia has taken steps to create its own FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation in the USA). This is

known as the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation and, since September 2010, it has been completely independent of its former parent, the Office of the General Prosecutor of the Russian Federation (the *Prokuratura*).

The history of the Investigative Committee, according to its website, is as follows. In 1990, the last year of the USSR, 90 per cent of criminal investigations were carried out by investigators of the Ministry of the Interior (the police) and 9.1 per cent by investigators of the *Prokuratura*. The remainder were carried out by the KGB.

Since 1960 (Khrushchev's thaw) there had been a campaign to detach investigation from the police and in April 1990 there was the first attempt to legislate for a separate Investigative Committee. In 1993 a draft law was presented to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, but the abrogation of the Supreme Soviet meant that the law was never enacted.

Only in June and July 2007, in President Putin's second term, was it possible to enact two new laws that effectively took away the investigative function from the *Prokuratura*.

However, this legislation created an 'Investigative Committee attached to the *Prokuratura*', headed by the First Deputy General Prosecutor of the Russian Federation, Aleksandr Bastrykin, whose investigators were still part of the *Prokuratura*. A complicating factor was that, despite the apparent subordination of the Investigative Committee to the *Prokuratura*, both the Chairman of the Investigative Committee and the General Prosecutor were appointed by the Federation Council (the upper house of parliament) on the nomination of the President, and thus had equal status.

Mr Bastrykin is one of President Putin's Leningrad protégés. He was born in 1953 and started work in the Soviet police. He was the senior member of the group in which Vladimir Putin studied law at Leningrad State University. They graduated together in 1975.

Mr Bastrykin made a brilliant career in the Leningrad State University Young Communist League (*Komsomol*). He then rose up through the ranks of the *Prokuratura*. The close relations he formed with President Putin at university have continued ever since. He worked in Leningrad / St Petersburg from 1975 to 2006, was an appointee and long-standing friend of Mr Putin, was close to Mr Putin's colleague Igor Sechin, and on 7 September 2007 was appointed by President Putin as Chairman of the new Investigative Committee 'attached to' the *Prokuratura*. Mr Bastrykin has the rank of Colonel-General of Justice.

The Investigative Committee immediately came into conflict with its 'parent', the *Prokuratura*, headed by Yuri Chaika, in a way that is probably only possible in Russia. In May 2008 Mr Bastrykin initiated a criminal case against the First Deputy General Prosecutor, Aleksandr Buksman (Mr Chaika's closest deputy and colleague). Mr Chaika countermanded Mr Bastrykin's order and relations between them became very bad indeed. The conflict was resolved only in the Supreme Court, which in March 2009 ruled that Mr Bastrykin must rigorously obey any order given by Mr Chaika. However, even though he lost in court, Mr Bastrykin soon achieved independence from the *Prokuratura*.

On 15 January 2011 a new law established the Committee as an independent agency outside the *Prokuratura*, with a view to 'raising the objectivity of investigation'. In fact, many commentators would say that investigation has been brought under closer control by the regime.

The conflict burst out again in spring 2011 when the Investigative Committee launched criminal investigations into a number of senior Moscow and Moscow oblast' prosecutors, accusing them of providing *krysha* (paid protection), for a massive underground illegal gambling business. One of the prosecutors named was Mr Chaika's son. Intense mass media interest in the conflict continued, and on 14 June 2012 Mr Bastrykin felt obliged to tell journalists that

there was no such conflict between him and Mr Chaika. However, the fact that both are appointed by the President and have clearly overlapping competences makes conflict inevitable.

Another major scandal broke in June 2012. This concerned alleged threats made by Mr Bastrykhin to a journalist of the critical and independent weekly newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, owned by Aleksandr Lebedev, a former KGB agent based for five years in London who also owns the London *Evening Standard* and *The Independent*. In an open letter published on 13 June in the newspaper and on its website, the Chief Editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, Dmitri Muratov, accused Mr Bastrykin of threatening the senior editor, Sergei Sokolov.

In an interview in *Izvestiya* on 14 June Mr Bastrykin denied the allegation. However, on the same day he met Mr Muratov and apologised.

On 27 September 2012 the well-known lawyer and opposition leader Aleksei Navalny, who has campaigned relentlessly against corruption in public life in Russia, lodged a formal request with the Investigative Committee for an investigation of Mr Bastrykin's role in the affair. The request was refused. Mr Navalny announced that he intended to appeal the refusal to court. So far as I know, his appeal has been refused.

Mr Bastrykin is now playing the leading role in the regime's reaction to Mr Navalny, whose renaming of Putin's United Russia party as the 'Party of Thieves and Rogues' (*Partiya Vorov i Zhulikov*) has entered the popular discourse. On 18 December 2012 it was announced on the Investigative Committee's website that Mr Navalny was to face yet another criminal investigation. Some commentators believe that this campaign is orchestrated by President Putin.

Interviewed on the independent radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, Mr Navalny was asked whether he now had to choose between prison and emigration. He answered: "Of

course, it will serve the interests of the regime much better if I am a political émigré, rather than a political prisoner. Because they will always be able to say – he fled. I do not intend to flee anywhere. Because I am absolutely innocent and I spit on what the investigators Markin, Bastrykin, Putin and ‘their own’ court have to say. I know that if all ordinary and normal people look at these documents and case materials, they will say that Navalny is innocent, naturally. And the opinions of those people are more valuable to me.”

Mr Bastrykin is now considered a rising star and one of the most influential officials in Russia today. Mr Chaika’s star is falling, although he still has powerful forces at his disposal. Mr Bastrykin is and has always been a loyal servant of President Putin.

Bill Bowring is a Professor of Law and Director of the LLM/MA in Human Rights at the School of Law, Birkbeck, University of London. His new book ‘Law, Rights and Ideology in Russia: Landmarks in the Destiny of a Great Power’ will be published by Routledge in 2013 (see www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415683463/ for details).

Feature

Stalin’s Personal Library

By Geoffrey Roberts

Joseph Stalin was a voracious reader. Mostly he read government and party documents. But central to his reading life were the books and journals in his voluminous library: by the time he died the library contained some 20,000 volumes.

After Stalin’s death in 1953 most of the books were dispersed, but about 5,000 titles were deposited in the library of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (now the Russian State Archive of Social-Political History – Russian acronym RGASPI), including circa

400 books, pamphlets and journals annotated personally by the Soviet dictator.

A great deal of Stalin’s reading focused on the Marxist classics, especially the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. But his interests were catholic as well as communist, encompassing Russian and Georgian literature, ancient history, military theory, philosophy, political economy, science, art and architecture.

Stalin’s engagement with books began at an early age. As a child he read the classics of Georgian literature, especially its romantic poetry. By age 15 he had published several poems in a Georgian nationalist newspaper. When Stalin was sent to study in a seminary in Tbilisi in 1894 his interests broadened to take in Russian and European literature and he was caught reading forbidden Western books by authors such as Victor Hugo and William Thackeray.

By the time Stalin was expelled from the seminary in 1899 he had become involved in Marxist discussion groups. Stalin’s point of contact with these groups was a radical bookshop in Tbilisi frequented by young intellectuals and seminarians. As a young revolutionary Stalin devoured the classics of Marxism, especially the writings of the new Russian master of the genre, Vladimir Lenin. But he continued to read widely, especially during his periodic bouts of imprisonment and exile. The Tsarist regime was oppressive and authoritarian but it did not deny those it repressed the right to read. Among the authors read by Stalin during his years as an underground revolutionary were Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Schiller, Heine and Balzac.

Because of his peripatetic lifestyle Stalin could not begin to amass a personal library until after the Russian revolutionary events of 1917–21. Then, like other Bolshevik leaders, Stalin was given an apartment in the Kremlin. He began to collect books systematically, intending to build a substantial and diverse collection, biased towards Marxist concerns but not restricted to them.

In the 1920s Stalin's book reading was concentrated on the writings of his rivals in the struggle for the succession to Lenin (who died in 1924) – Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin. Another preoccupation was the history of revolutionary movements in other countries. In the 1930s Stalin's attention switched to the burgeoning new genre of Soviet literature – the post-revolutionary writings of authors such as Maxim Gorky, Alexander Fadeev, Aleksei Tolstoy, Ilya Ehrenburg, Isaac Babel and Mikhail Sholokhov.

Stalin became interested in military affairs during the Russian civil war and he collected and read the works of the foremost German, French, Russian and Soviet strategic theorists. Not surprisingly, this interest became paramount during the Great Patriotic War. Stalin was particularly interested in the experience of his Tsarist predecessors as Supreme Commander, especially Alexander Suvorov, the 18th-century Tsarist general and strategist, and Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, who defeated Napoleon's Grand Armée in 1812. Stalin read several accounts of their lives and portraits of these two Russian hero generals adorned his office in the Kremlin. Other aspects of Russian history continued to fascinate Stalin, too, not least the comparisons between his rule and that of Tsars Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. Stalin was also very interested in the history of the Roman Empire, one of his favourite authors being Robert Vipper.

After the war Stalin devoted considerable time to reading about science, linguistics, philosophy and political economy, and in the last years of his life he made a number of notable interventions in debates about genetics, socialist economics and linguistic theory. The most notorious of these interventions was Stalin's support for Trofim Lysenko who argued that genetic inheritance could be influenced by environmental controls. In private, however, Stalin ridiculed the view that every science had a 'class character', writing on a report by Lysenko: "Ha-ha-ha... And mathematics? And Darwinism?"

As this episode shows, Stalin was a highly active reader. He kept different coloured pencils close to hand and extensively annotated many of his books. Passages that caught his eye – for negative as well as positive reasons – he underlined. "Ha-ha!", "gibberish!", "nonsense!", "rubbish!", "fool!", "scumbag!", "scoundrel!" and "piss off!" were among his more colourful marginalia.

Stalin was a staunch orthodox Marxist who would brook no public criticism of Marx and Lenin but he was more sceptical about Engels, especially in private. His copy of Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is full of "ha-ha", "not very convincing", "so what?" and other such remarks. When Engels wrote that peaceful revolution was possible in France and America, Stalin noted in the margin: "Can we 'imagine' that? No, that is not true." Stalin also expressed private doubt about some of Lenin's concepts in *State and Revolution*, especially the idea that the state would wither away under socialism.

Stalin's ire was reserved for his enemies. A particular target was the German Social Democrat Karl Kautsky. In Kautsky's *The Proletarian Revolution and its Programme* Stalin wrote that "only he can mix up the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of a clique". When Kautsky wrote that a revolution in Austria-Hungary would mean the Germanisation of the Czech nation, Stalin commented: "Rubbish! Revolutionary explosions do not kill but awaken nations, arouse them to life."

Another target was Trotsky. When his arch enemy suggested the revolutionary wave might shift from Europe to Asia he wrote in Trotsky's *Tasks in the East*: "Fool! With the existence of the Soviet Union the centre [of world revolution] cannot be in the East."

It is evident, too, that Stalin's oft-repeated claim that the Soviet Union was besieged by internal and external enemies was a deeply held belief. In his copy of Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* Stalin wrote that an unlimited dictatorship was necessary in Soviet Russia because "attempts at

restoration [of capitalism] are inevitable", both by the capitalist states and remnants of the Russian petty-bourgeoisie. In a book on Russian history he underlined a remark attributed to Genghis Khan: "The death of the defeated is necessary for the peace of mind of the victors."

That Stalin was also interested in how Ivan the Terrible wielded power is shown by his many underlinings of a 1944 work on the Tsar by Alexei Tolstoy, especially passages about the need to eliminate the "princes and boyars" who were the "enemies of the state." Equally telling was Stalin's response to a 1948 pamphlet by Annebell Bucar called *The Truth About American Diplomats*. Bucar, an Information Officer in the US embassy in Moscow, was a defector who later became one of the mainstays of the Soviet radio station that beamed propaganda at the United States. In the pamphlet Bucar denounced her former colleagues as spies: "The American diplomatic service is in its totality an intelligence organisation", a sentence underlined by Stalin, who also took note of the names of those she claimed were spies.

The annotated books in RGASPI, together with other information about his library, provide a window on Stalin's inner life as a reader. Books mattered to Stalin: he was a great believer in the power of words. The books in Stalin's personal library provide vital clues to the power that words exercised over him and what it was that motivated his thought and action.

Professor Geoffrey Roberts is Head of the School of History at University College Cork, Ireland.

His book 'Stalin's Library: An Intimate History of a Dictator and His Books' will be published by Yale University Press. His previous publications include 'Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953' (2006), 'Stalin's General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov' (2012) and 'Molotov: Stalin's Cold Warrior' (2012).

Feature

A Soviet Design for Life: the Catherine Cooke Collection of 20th-century Russian Architecture and Design

By Mel Bach

The renowned Soviet architecture specialist Dr Catherine Cooke was a great friend of the SCRSS. Her untimely death in 2004 robbed those who knew her of a powerhouse of support and initiative, but her will ensured that she would continue to offer inspiration and advice – through the bequest of her amazing collection to Cambridge University Library (UL). The UL's exhibition centre, open to the public, is currently showcasing some of the wonders of the Catherine Cooke collection.

Catherine's collection started in earnest during her doctorate, which she wrote on Soviet town planning. Finding it difficult to access specialist material held in the Soviet Union, she started to buy any which came onto the market. Having started the collection by necessity, she continued it with passion and interest. It was a great challenge when the collection came to the UL under my predecessor, Ray Scrivens; unlike other academic collections, Catherine's was full not only of academic books and journals, but also examples of the designs that fascinated her – from posters and postcards to banknotes and cigarette packets.

The collection was an obvious choice for an exhibition. Once the exhibition opening date was confirmed as July 2012, I started the long process of getting to know the collection, which had been catalogued long before my arrival in 2010, by handling individually almost every one of its thousands of items.

It's a wonderful academic and visual collection, predominantly made up of Soviet-era Russian material on architecture and

design. I was keen to try to put on an exhibition that would be interesting to all kinds of visitors but also representative of the collection. After months of ideas and changes of mind, I eventually decided to focus on Soviet life, looking at particular themes through examples of design, with architecture featuring in every section.

The themes can largely be divided into two groups: the day-to-day (education, work, consumption, sport, transport) and rather wider themes (faith, monuments, fantasy). The final case focuses on Catherine and her collection.

The first exhibit the visitor sees as they come into the room is Viktor Koretsky's 1947 poster *Plan pretvorim v zhizn'*! (We'll Turn the Plan into Reality!). It shows an inspired young architect looking towards the future, a blueprint behind him and next to the construction of the building its details. The other poster on display is a 1925 brightly coloured depiction of a workers' march, emphasising the drive to spread the ideals of the revolution to the countryside. This, for me, is the exhibit that means the most. The artist is only identified by initials but after much work and more luck, I managed to identify him as Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin, a book illustrator who died in the GULag in 1943. His now elderly son, whom I reached through his grandson (found by luck under an unrelated name on an Internet forum), confirmed that the poster was his father's work. In his own small archive he held an extraordinary watercolour sketch for it, a printout of which sits alongside the poster. What made the connection with the family so important was that they had never seen the finished poster.

Among the 80-odd exhibits shown in the other nine cases, the most surprising for visitors to the venerated UL are probably the examples of Brezhnev-era packaging – cigarette, perfume, coffee and soup packets among them! Other surprises include a 3-D book from 1934 showing the correct way to use two cannon guns.

The last example I'll mention is the rare 1951 set *Vysotnye zdaniya v Moskve* (High-

Rise Buildings in Moscow). It contains portfolios for each of the famous so-called 'Seven Sisters', the huge buildings that dominate the Moscow skyline. These portfolios contain all manner of plans – floor, landscape and decorative. What readers might not know is that there were originally to be eight buildings; the Zariad'ye building, which would have stood by the Kremlin, was started but never completed. The exhibition shows examples of the different plans, as well as the accompanying book – open to show the projected skyline with all eight buildings, with even these giants towered over by the gigantic Palace of the Soviets (the greatest building of the Soviet period never to be completed).

The exhibition runs until the **6 April 2013**. Details of opening hours and location can be found at www.lib.cam.ac.uk/exhibitions. UL readers can also consult the Catherine Cooke Collection – please contact me at slavonic@lib.cam.ac.uk for further information.

Mel Bach, Cambridge University Library, is curator of the exhibition 'A Soviet Design for Life: the Catherine Cooke Collection of 20th-century Russian Architecture and Design'.

Feature

Whither Lenfilm?

By John Riley

Lenfilm was the Soviet Union's 'second' studio after Mosfilm, often as independently minded as the city itself. The site, on Kamenoostrovsky, was long associated with cinema – a funfair here in 1896 brought the first film screenings to the country. It became a production base in 1918, kaleidoscoping through a dizzying variety of names until it became Lenfilm in 1934.

It launched around 1,500 films, from *Chapayev* and *The Maxim Trilogy*, through *Hamlet* and *King Lear* to the wildly popular *Sherlock Holmes* adaptations.

But it had a difficult time after *perestroika*. A steady if slow rate of productions, along with a series of international prizes, may have hidden the problems and Lenfilm recently approached the very edge of survival.

In 2003 the studio leased its rights to a television station, but it was a catastrophic decision. Not only did it lose the income, but ten years later the improved facilities are again relatively outdated and many demoralised members of staff have gone to the better-paying Mosfilm or left the industry altogether. Then there's piracy: some legitimate-looking DVD labels seem to have been sailing more than close to the wind for several years.

So, Lenfilm has changed from being an Ealing to being a Pinewood – from a studio with an identity to a facility renting out its space, props and costumes (at least the ones that haven't been stolen). 'Superfluous' studio spaces were transformed into unrelated businesses, including tennis courts and supermarkets, simply to maintain income.

Recently there have been various recovery plans. Putin and the City of Petersburg proposed 25 per cent state ownership with the remainder held by Sistema, a conglomerate whose interests range far beyond the media. The studio would also move from its prime central St Petersburg location, freeing up the site for Sistema's new business park.

Film-makers, suspecting a land-grab (the studio was ludicrously under-valued) and fearing that its new incarnation would find no room for anything except the most blatantly commercial films, counter-proposed a loan of 2 billion roubles (£40 million) to be repaid over ten years from ongoing productions and the reversion of its all-important rights. Ironically, the plan is fronted by Sokurov who, while the studio struggled, had *Faust* funded through Putin's direct intervention. An open letter to Putin was signed by many of the important 'artistic' film-makers, including both Alexei Ghermans (father and son), Konstantin Lopushansky and Alexei Uchitel.

Then a third plan emerged, backed by the St Petersburg Public Council, but the frustrated and enraged filmmakers cut short a meeting with the Minister and declined to discuss it publicly.

Meanwhile, some felt attention was being (intentionally?) diverted by a series of glory-chasing film festivals that simply competed against each other without generating – or supporting – any new productions.

Lenfilm CEO Vladimir Shaydakov issued a stream of would-be soothing words, promising positive developments, though this wore thin after several months. He said he hoped to see Lenfilm 100 per cent state-owned, staying on its current site and retaining its artistic independence, though Putin's enthusiasm for Mikhalkov's historically revisionist *Burnt by the Sun* sequels raise doubts. There would be improvements to the studio space, as well as a training centre, hotel facilities for visiting crews and a café.

That last feature might seem obvious: clearly the studio needs some sort of restaurant but here there's an extra resonance. The Lenfilm café (along with the underground rock club Café Saigon) were long-standing hang-outs of Soviet *intelligentsy* where they could speak more frankly among colleagues. But will that be a priority for hard-pressed film-makers? Or the visiting crews that seem to be a large part of the plan but who will have no interest in the studio beyond its ability to provide the necessary facilities? Shaydakov has used this to tap into Soviet nostalgia, bemoaning the state of education, but turning it on its head by implying that after the passing of the good old days of a cultured elite, modern audiences demand something that 'art-house' film-makers cannot supply.

Still, Lenfilm is functioning: Sokurov regularly works there, and recent productions include Alexei Gherman Snr's long-gestating Strugatsky adaptation *It's Hard to Be a God* and Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad*. But these are occasional lights in the eerily deserted and increasingly shabby studio.

There have been developments but they remain as unclear as ever. A new website shows that the studio has recaptured the expired rights, which will help supplement its income from productions. But there are few clues or announcements beyond that. It seems that for the minute Lenfilm has escaped extinction, but its longer term fate...?

John Riley is a film historian, lecturer and writer. He is also SCRSS Chairman. His books include 'Dmitri Shostakovich: A Life in Film' (IB Tauris).

Reports

Working as a Volunteer Lecturer in Russia

By Andrew Jameson

This report summarises the main elements of a successful lecturing visit to Russia, based on nine years' experience.

Firstly, remember that you are dealing with the English Department and that you are wanted for your English language and knowledge of English culture. Talk to a good English friend and ask: how clear and fluent is my English? Think: how qualified am I to lecture on aspects of English language and English life? Russian culture is more oral than ours and students expect a professional lecture. A slower delivery is appreciated by student listeners.

The starting point for your visit will almost certainly be through a personal contact. One possibility is at an academic conference in the UK or in a third country. Another is through a town-twinning contact (you may be surprised how many associations still have twin towns in Russia). A third way may be through a charity contact, such as the SCRSS, Manchester-St Petersburg Friendship Society, BEARR or Kitezh. Talk to your contact and make a proposal.

The next step is to show the Russian side what you have to offer. In my case I have built up a collection of lectures on English language and life, and I can send details to potential hosts in English departments. I have a background in linguistics, so feel at ease talking about aspects of English language.

If an English Department agrees to host you, you'll need to visit during term time – from October to mid-December or from mid-February to mid-May. The university administration will send you an official invitation for use when applying for a visa, although this may take a month to process. As residence rules for foreigners have been restricted, you will probably be invited for one month maximum.

You will need to pay your own air fare, but should be provided with a room at no cost. You are likely to be met at the airport, taken to the hostel and settled in by your hosts. Some departments may offer a contract and payment, others may treat you as a guest. The best deal I had was at RGGU in Moscow, near Belorussky Station. I was paid nothing but had a de-luxe room on campus and gave six major lectures in three weeks. Computers and internet were available for use in the departmental office, the print unit copied my handouts for free, and I was always welcome in the staff room for tea, nibbles and chat.

Andrew Jameson will give an illustrated talk on 'Working as a Volunteer Lecturer in Russia' at the SCRSS on Friday 8 March 7pm (see page 5 for details). You can email him with any queries about volunteer lecturing on a.jameson2@dsl.pipex.com.

Cataloguing the Dennis Ogden Bequest in the SCRSS Library

By Laurence Wright

Dennis Ogden was a journalist, lecturer on Soviet history and trade relations, and former head of the Russian Department in the Faculty of Modern Languages at the University of Westminster. He worked in the

Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s as a translator and correspondent on the *Daily Worker*.

As soon as I began cataloguing the material Dennis left to the SCRSS, it became clear that large sections were already well organised. On this basis it seemed right that, where possible, I should use the categories Dennis had already created. A substantial part of the bequest is taken up by the newspaper articles and book reviews he wrote on myriad topics from economics to politics, culture and history. This creates a fascinating lens through which to view the USSR from the 1950s through to its collapse. Aside from adding in stray documents and correcting a few issues of ordering, the documents are as Dennis left them, collated by form and in chronological order.

Alongside his own work, Dennis collected items according to his personal interests, research aims and for use in his job at Westminster University. Cataloguing this material was more difficult, as it contained work from numerous authors and in various forms. Largely using Dennis' scheme, I attempted to collate items under categories such as 'Gorbachev' and '*Perestroika*'. This process was hindered by overlapping themes, as well as my lack of knowledge of Russian. This element of the collection may require further work at a later date but, nonetheless, it provides a fascinating insight into Dennis' work and interests. His handwritten and typed lecture notes were already ordered in ring binders and so have been left as found.

Working through the bequest, it became clear that a focus of his academic research was Georgia and the national question in the early 1920s. This work appears to have led to a book *National Communism in Georgia: 1921–1923*, published in 1978, and an article entitled 'Britain and Soviet Georgia, 1921–22' in the *Journal of Contemporary History* (April 1988, Vol 23, No 2). I sought to collate all the notes, correspondence, drafts and copies of this work in one area to make it more accessible. In my opinion at least, this

section seems the most valuable, especially to anyone with research interests in 1920s Georgia. I found his correspondence and research on this particularly interesting, but as a history student I must admit to some bias in this department!

In conclusion, I hope that the Dennis Ogden Bequest can now be accessed more readily and provide a source of valuable information to researchers.

Laurence Wright catalogued the Dennis Ogden Bequest as an SCRSS volunteer in August 2012. He is currently studying history at the University of Liverpool.

Reviews

Russian Film Festival, London

The Russian Film Festival, now in its sixth year, has established itself in London's cinematic landscape, regularly showing recent award-winning titles and offering both countries' producers a chance to network. Though some of the films are occasionally screened thereafter, all too often the festival, whose events frequently sell out, is the only opportunity to see them on the big screen.

This year's festival, running as usual in early November, opened particularly controversially. While Boris Khlebnikov won numerous awards as co-director of the post-Tarkovskian meditative road movie *Koktebel*, his latest film *Till Night Do Us Part* (*Poka noch' ne razluchit*) stays in Moscow's well-known bohemian haunt, the Pushkin restaurant. Over the course of a single evening we flit from table to table, eavesdropping on plots, arguments, affairs – the weft and weave of life – while the lives of a couple of the waiters spin out of control and lead, ultimately, to chaos. Ingeniously structured, it doesn't betray its almost no budget: each of the plethora of star cameos is only a few minutes, so they were only on set for a short time and many agreed to be paid out of the profits.

In the post-film Q&A some Russians were disturbed by the image it gives of the country: drunken loutishness, petty criminality and general immorality. But Academia Rossica director Svetlana Adjoubei and festival programme director Andrei Plakhov countered that a mature country should be able to laugh at itself and that such an approach is particularly appropriate in England, which is world-renowned for its self-deprecating humour. Most people in the audience seemed won over by the argument.

Social satire was a feature of one of the festival's other highlights, Mikhail Segal's *Short Stories (Rasskazy)*, a four-chapter portmanteau comedy about an author, hinting at the power that literature once had, though taking an ambivalent view of it.

At the other end of the scale was Vasili Sigarev's *Living (Zhit')*, which grimly interweaves several apparently disparate stories of random brutality, insanity, hopelessness and death, making for a difficult watch. Nevertheless, with faith at its heart, the ending could be seen as redemptive – along with spirituality and 'the soul', an issue that comes up repeatedly in the films and interviews.

Pavel Lungin's *Conductor (Dirizhyor)* treads some of the same ground as the recent *The Concert* and perhaps even Fellini's *Orchestral Rehearsal*. But the idea of the orchestra as a microcosm of society is slightly stale and the film lacks the energy of his famous *Taxi Blues*, the political tensions of *The Tsar* or the concentrated spirituality of *The Island*.

Actress, writer, producer and director Renata Litvinova is a powerful figure in the industry, with a string of popular and critically acclaimed credits. Her breakthrough came with *Land of the Deaf*, which gave a gratifyingly different twist to the Moscow mafioso genre. *Rita's Last Tale (Poslednyaya skazka Rity)* is a surreal fairy tale that not only has an enchanting story, but is quite ravishingly photographed by Anastasia Zhukova.

Animation has always been a strong suit in Eastern European cinema and two programmes showed a wide range for both adults and children.

Finally, director Andrei Konchalovsky's 75th birthday was celebrated with three films: *Runaway Train* (1985), the best of his American films; *House of Fools (Dom durakov)*, 2002, set in a Chechen mental hospital; and *The Nutcracker (Shchelkunchik i krysinyi korol)*, 2010. It was perhaps a slightly odd selection, not least because the non-Russian one is the best and it didn't include any of the films he made before his sojourn in the USA.

Any annual festival concentrating on a particular country is prey to the quality of films in that year. The Russian Film Festival is fortunate in that, although the industry certainly faces funding difficulties, quality films are being made. But more than that, the festival is able to give them valuable context with visiting film-makers and various other events.

John Riley

Russian Magic Tales

Edited by Robert Chandler, translated by R & E Chandler, Sibelan Forrester, Anna Gunin & Olga Meerson (Penguin, 2012, ISBN: 978-0-141-44223-5, Pbk, 466pp, £9.99)

With the anniversary of the Grimm Brothers' collection of folktales, interest in other folktale traditions has grown and here we have a volume devoted to the Russian tradition. The Russian case is particularly interesting in that the original raw folktale tradition survived in the countryside into the Soviet period, while the recording and study of Russian folk literature began in the 1850s (1830s in the case of folk song). Because of the wide geographical distribution of communities, a very wide spectrum of creation emerged. However, despite the diversity and the huge volume of folk material, certain common genres can be distinguished.

In the West we are really quite ignorant of, and uninterested in, literary genres, much less folklore genres. Unconsciously, we disregard folk literature as childish, unsophisticated and primitive. And yet there are treasures to be found. The Oxford *Russian Folk Literature* reader identifies five incredibly powerful genres: folktales, lyrical song (descended from ancient ritual chants and possibly court praise songs), *byliny* (the Slav version of the Homeric epic), historical song (starting from the time of the Tatar yoke) and spiritual song (songs of pilgrims and also beggars). All were recited from memory and put us Westerners to shame – we who can barely remember one verse of our own national anthem.

Russian magic tales, as Robert Chandler explains in his excellent introduction, are a sub-genre of folktales. They contain relics of ancient rituals and, frequently, elements of pre-Christian animism, where nature is alive and appeals are made to the sun and the wind. Humans figure in the stories but change into animals and back, or are cut to pieces and magically revived. Birds, fish and other creatures help humans in their quests. One part of the tradition seems not to have been preserved so well – the scatological and sexually explicit. Storytellers observed a strict etiquette: those tales were for males and never related during religious holidays. In general, however, we have a wide variety of brilliantly creative stories that are refreshingly different from our Western traditions.

The book is divided into sections. First we have two tales as re-told by Pushkin, followed by a selection from the first great collections of Afanasiev and Khudyakov. Next come tales from the pre-October 1917 period, then selections from two authors, Teffi and Bazhov. Soviet folklorists have made a great contribution and the next selection is derived from their work. Finally, we have a selection from Platonov, a strange, gaunt, angular writer in whom Chandler specialises. The book finishes with an article by Sibelan Forrester, an American feminist, on *Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East*. The translations are impeccable

and modern. The volume is equipped with a bibliography and notes.

Andrew Jameson

Listings

Art

A Soviet Design for Life: The Catherine Cooke Collection of 20th-Century Russian Architecture and Design

University Library, University of Cambridge,
Web: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/slavonic/exhibitions/cooke.html

Continues until 6 April 2013. See feature article on page 13.

Events

Rise of the Russian Avant-Garde

Stonehill House, Abingdon, OX14,

Tel: 07793 240 867, Web: www.stonehillhouse.co.uk

Rosamund Bartlett (translator, author, biographer of Tolstoy and Chekhov) gives a series of talks at Stonehill House. No prior knowledge needed – all welcome. Day rate: £40, including refreshments and buffet lunch.

Talk 3: Saturday 2 March 11am–5pm: *Modernist St Petersburg*. Talks include: Diaghilev and 'The World of Art', The Mariinsky, The Bohemians, 'The Tower'.

Talk 4: Saturday 9 March 11am–5pm: *1913: Annus Mirabilis*. Talks on Stravinsky, Roerich and 'The Rite of Spring', Malevich, 'Victory over the Sun'.

Sutton Russian Circle

Friends Meeting House, 10 Cedar Road, Sutton, Surrey SM2 5DA, Contact: Bob Dommett (Chairman), Tel: 01403 256593

Friday 15 February 7pm: Film: *The Bridges of St Petersburg*; Illustrated Lecture: *A Tale of Two Cities: Moscow and St Petersburg* –

Their Historical Buildings under Threat (Clem Cecil)

Friday 15 March 7pm: Film: *Tour of Vologda, An Old City in Northern Russia*; Illustrated Lecture: *Eugene Onegin* (Paul Marsh)

Thursday 18 April 7.30pm: *Special 21st Candlelit Russian Dinner* at Sylvio's Casa Nostra Restaurant

Friday 17 May 7pm: Illustrated Lecture: *From Stalingrad to Berlin* (Michael Jones)

Friday 21 June 7pm: *Russian Chamber Music and Songs* (Oliver Davies and friends); *Russian Summer Party*

Music

Grand Opera of Belarus, UK Tour

Web: www.OperaAndBallet.com

First ever UK tour, January to March 2013, presenting Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and *La Bohème*. Founded in 1933 as the National Opera and Ballet Theatre, the theatre is one of the three theatres in the former Soviet Union to receive the status 'Bolshoi' in 1940 and the title 'Academic' in 1964.

10 February: Shrewsbury, Theatre Severn

12–13 February: Billingham, Forum Theatre

14 February: Harrogate, Royal Hall

15–16 February: Lowestoft, Marina Theatre

17 February: Blackburn, King George's Hall

20 February: Basildon, Town Gate Theatre

22 February: Hastings, White Rock Theatre

23 February: Worthing, Pavilion Theatre

24 February: Clacton-on-Sea, Princess Theatre

26 February: Rhyl, Pavilion Theatre

27 February: Stockport, The Plaza

28 February, 1 March: Halifax, Victoria Theatre

2–3 March: Swindon, Wyvern Theatre

4 March: Chesterfield, Winding Wheel

6 March: Yeovil, Octagon Theatre

7 March: Dorking Halls

8 March: Stafford, Gatehouse Theatre

10 March: Buxton Opera House

11–12 March: Darlington, Civic Theatre

14–15 March: Newcastle, Mill & Tyne Theatre

16 March: Carlisle, Sands Centre

Russian Language

Russian Language Courses in St Petersburg

Russlang, Contact: Irene Slatter, 29 Somali Road, London NW2 3RN, Tel / Fax: 020 7435 4696

January–September 2013. Russlang offers courses in St Petersburg ranging from one to thirteen weeks at beginners, intermediate or advanced level. Fees include accommodation in Russian families, two meals per day and twenty-two tuition sessions per week (each session lasts 45 minutes). Students receive a certificate from the St Petersburg Institute of Education. All teachers are qualified to teach Russian language to foreigners.

Websites

Russian Art and Culture

www.russianartandculture.com

Online reviews, articles and news on Russian art, related exhibitions and interesting events in the UK.

The SCRSS cannot accept responsibility for incorrect information or unsatisfactory products. Always check with the organisation concerned before sending money. Reviews and articles are the opinions of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the SCRSS.

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Printed and published by:

SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB

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Email: ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk

Website: www.scrss.org.uk

Registered Charity No 1104012

Editor: Diana Turner