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## Feature

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### **Gorky Park and the Challenges for Park Regeneration in Moscow** By Sally Prothero, LDA Design

Great cities have great parks. New York has Central Park, London has Hyde Park. The name Gorky Park is known across the world – it's synonymous with Moscow – and it can tell the story of Russia's history over the last 400 years. Its two distinct halves are the product of the two distinct time periods of its creation: one pre- and one post-1917 revolution. So why is this fascinating history not better known? With such potential you would imagine it to be one of those 'top ten places to visit' in the guidebooks, but sadly this still seems a long way off, despite recent efforts and cash injections to revitalise the park. LDA Design's experience of working on Gorky Park's revitalisation has led to further fascinating projects restoring some of Moscow's other great parks, but this has also led to some interesting

observations about attitudes towards spatial design in Russia.

Back at the end of 2012 LDA Design was delighted to learn that we'd won an international competition to undertake a conceptual masterplan to regenerate Moscow's most famous park. Our approach, which won us the commission, was a simple one: restore the surviving aspects of the park's historic fabric and create areas of newly designed park where, over time, the original remnants had been obliterated. Simple, but according to the Head of Kremlin Museums our approach was the only one to recognise the historic significance of the place and use the words 'heritage' and 'restoration', as well as new design, in our bid.



Aerial view of entrance to Gorky Park, Moscow, 2009  
(© Gorky Park Archive)

The southern half, the Neskuchny Gardens, originated as six private villa gardens. They were developed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries by Russian nobility and wealthy merchants as an outward display of taste and fashion in landscape design. The Trubetskoys' late seventeenth-century formal garden with clipped parterres sat alongside a dramatic 'wilderness' and gorge created from the natural topography.



Historical map showing the Neskuchny Gardens in Moscow, 1838–1852 (© Photo Archive of the Museum of Architecture, Moscow)

Adjacent were the Golitsyns' eighteenth-century French-style garden and Count Orlov's English-style rococo landscape. Prokofi Demidov established his garden as one of the first botanic gardens in Russia. Importantly, the form and structure of most of these landscapes still survive, despite being totally covered by trees in the post-war years.

The land to the north was marshy and contained one private estate and the Golitsyn Hospital on higher ground, but its use was mostly agricultural until the Communist state was founded. So while Neskuchny Gardens forms the southern part of Gorky Park and consists of a series of historic landscape designs, the northern half reflects twentieth-century Soviet and post-Soviet design.

In 1923 this site was chosen for the first great All-Russia Agricultural and Artisanal-Industrial Exhibition. This morale-boosting exhibition was planned to demonstrate not

only new machinery, production techniques and culture from the new Soviet states, but to celebrate the nation's new freedoms and new way of life. The architectural collection of pavilions "epitomised early forms of Soviet architecture"<sup>1</sup>, and later developed into modernism in the West.

Ivan Zholtovsky's exhibition ground was transformed into a public park in 1928 by Konstantin Melnikov. With the private estates of Neskuchny Gardens having passed into public ownership following the 1917 revolution, the two halves were united and named the Central Park of Culture and Leisure. In addition to retaining and enlarging the central pool, main axis and some of the pavilions, Melnikov's plan was to accommodate some more 'park-like' features. Two Lily of the Valley walks were commissioned by the first park manager, Betty Glan, who also proposed to turn the park into a 'mill of culture', organising theatre, sports and other activities. Visitors were encouraged by 'herders', a persuasive form of park ranger employed to encourage people to partake in the various cultural events or healthy pursuits on offer. In 1938 it was named Gorky Park to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the writer's birth.



Ivan Zholtovsky's Hexahedron pavilion, built for the 1923 exhibition, as seen in 2012 (© LDA Design)

Gorky Park's next major transition was in the 1930s with the addition of various ornamental park structures. After a brief stint by El Lissitzky, better known for his constructivist graphic design, AV Vlasov oversaw the most significant park

construction programme here until the 1950s. This was supplemented by an amazing array of ‘attractions’, including the famous parachute tower and first Ferris wheel in Russia. The park at this time must have been in its heyday, with a balance of high-quality horticulture, cultural activities and amusement park entertainment.



Ivan Shadr's Woman with an Oar sculpture and Parachute Tower, 1930s (© Photo Archive of the Museum of Architecture, Moscow)

Over the years the various design intentions, the physical fabric and ecological health of the park have suffered and its physical condition is now poor. The spatial definition of Neskuchny Gardens has been lost by post-war, mono-crop planting of maples. Landscapes designed in various styles, but all with a combination of open lawns, woodland, hedge planting and shrubberies, are now covered with similar-aged trees, creating an area of park with reduced visual, recreational and biodiversity value. Decades of illegal buildings, ad hoc structures and derelict historic buildings dominate the degraded landscape. Recent ‘hipster-fication’<sup>2</sup> provided the catalyst for change in the form of a new park

management team and financial support for revitalisation. While bringing in welcome additional funding and a reversal of the decline in several historic buildings, this has also brought more chaos to the landscape in the form of a plethora of temporary buildings and structures, making the spaces feel overcrowded and the underlying landscape cluttered. While some of the buildings have already been renovated, and the park is undoubtedly safer and more popular with the illegal business removed, the new park management realised that an overarching strategy was required to set a new and coordinated direction for the park.

The strategy for renewal of Gorky Park was approved in early 2013 by a panel consisting of respected representatives from Moscow's architectural and heritage world. It proposes a conceptual masterplan, as well as roadmap with costs, for its revitalisation. This is the conclusion of a six-month study of the park, starting with its history, a survey and analysis of its current condition, and an assessment of its significance against English Heritage and World Heritage Site criteria. The strategy sets out a blueprint to meet the needs of a twentieth-century audience, revealing its historic character and landscape structure in order to make it a place of great culture and nature once again. The intention is to explore and synthesise the rich, designed landscape themes and cultural heritage to achieve ‘Unity through Diversity’, the aim of its Soviet creators.



Proposed re-opening of Valley Walk Bridge (© LDA Design)

Unfortunately, the strategy doesn't seem to be materialising on the ground quite as intended, but maybe it is still early days. While some of the recommendations such as boundary restorations are taking place, new primary-coloured play areas and 'attractions' have been popping up in areas of historic significance. A series of riverside winter gardens or glasshouses, designed to provide areas of indoor landscape during the long winters, have been re-allocated for temporary buildings, retail and cafes. These so-called 'temporary' structures are erected in great numbers and at great speed in many of Moscow's parks – many in insensitive locations to the detriment of the landscape they inhabit.



Proposed treetop bridge-walk (© LDA Design)

'Temporary' buildings avoid the necessity for planning applications. However, filling the open spaces in parks with them as part of a regeneration drive appears to predominate over a willingness to design spaces and landscapes to be enjoyed in their own right – especially as they are seen as a way to supplement the park's budget. The concept of open space and why you need it in a public park seems obvious in the UK, but this view does not always appear to be shared by our Russian colleagues. At one meeting where the lack of usable space in a park was being discussed, a member of the park management staff asked what the point of space was, if it didn't have anything in it.

Park design and restoration bring very different challenges in Moscow, in comparison to similar projects in the UK. The drive to undertake projects quickly, due to political uncertainties, requires that planning applications are avoided. This means no excavations deeper than 450mm, therefore no landform changes, no tree removals and no changes to water bodies. While design of objects, buildings and structures is well executed, spatial design seems to be less readily embraced. The 'fill it full of amenities' school of thinking was a trend that many of our UK parks are only just recovering from. It is now more readily accepted in UK parks that open spaces for informal recreation are an integral and essential component, in a composition with water, trees and woodland, and that space forms the backbone of the design of these parks, providing the setting for all the activities they sustain.

However, it seems that Moscow's parks may be falling into this trend. It needs confidence to trust that a beautifully designed space can work on several levels – aesthetic, ecological and recreational – for so many different groups of people without being full of 'stuff'. If parks are designed like a well designed stage set, the people will make up the action – no props required!

*Sally Prothero, CMLI, MSc, FRSA is a Landscape Architect and Director at LDA Design. She specialises in urban park regeneration and new design, especially in the context of historic landscapes. Recent projects include London's Clissold Park and Victoria Park, as well as Gorky Park and Druzhba Park in northwest Moscow.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Allenova E, 'Temporary Structures in Gorky Park: From Melnikov to Ban', Moscow, 2012, Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture

<sup>2</sup> The park has recently become a 'hip' venue for trendy young Muscovites.



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*Kazakh Arts Academy presents*

# **The Week of Kazakh Literature in London**

**6-12 April 2014**

## **Program:**

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6 April 2014

Presentation of the book

***The Little Perl*** by Dulat Isabekov

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7-12 April 2014

Performance of the play

***The Transit Passenger*** by Dulat Isabekov

at the Giant Olive Theatre

42-44 Gaisford St, Kentish Town, London NW5 2ED

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## **Tickets:**

[info@aitmatov-academy.org.uk](mailto:info@aitmatov-academy.org.uk)

[info@kazakhartsacademy.org](mailto:info@kazakhartsacademy.org)

# **SCRSS News**

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## **Annual General Meeting**

Notice is hereby given that the SCRSS AGM will take place at 12.30pm on Saturday 17 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 25 April. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member. The Agenda for the AGM will be available from early May.

## **SCRSS Council**

Following his appointment as Library Project Manager (see below), John Riley stepped down as chair of the SCRSS in autumn 2013 and was replaced by EC member Fiona Wright. John remains on the Council. David Lane, a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, has agreed to be co-opted as a vice-president of the Society.

## **SCRSS 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

This year the SCRSS celebrates the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation in July 1924. The year-long celebration was launched at the Society's premises on 7 December 2013 with over fifty members enjoying food, drink and library tours. The Hon Secretary welcomed the guests and expressed the hope that every SCRSS member would visit the building at least once during the year. The SCRSS will officially mark the anniversary at a special event on Saturday 5 July, while the summer issue of the *SCRSS Digest* will be devoted to key moments and people in the Society's history.

## **SCRSS Library Project**

In November 2013 we appointed John Riley as project manager for a one year, part-time project to review the SCRSS library

collections and develop a strategy for their future development. As part of the project, John will prepare a formal report and recommendations for the SCRSS Council, including an operational library plan for the current year. We hope that this work will facilitate future applications for external sponsorship to help secure the long-term future of the Society's unique holdings. This project has been funded by a member of SCRSS Council.

## **Aitmatov Awards**

The SCRSS was the first recipient of the newly created International Mukhtar Auezov Award for our collection of works by this prominent Kazakh writer. John Riley accepted the award on the Society's behalf at the International Chingiz Aitmatov Award (ICAA) ceremony in London on 12 December 2013. The event took place on the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aitmatov's birth and was organised by the Aitmatov Academy. The 2013 awards were made to a range of individuals and organisations promoting awareness of the culture of Central Asia, including Bolot Shamshiev who directed several films based on Aitmatov novels (*The White Steamship*, *Cranes Fly Early*, *Ascent of Mount Fuji* and *Love Echo*). Other awards went to Dr Shirin Akiner, Lecturer in Central Asian Studies at SOAS in London, Nick Rowan, publisher of *Open Central Asia* magazine, the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, and the Mukhtar Auezov Memorial House-Museum in Almaty. The SCRSS received an ICAA in 2012 for its collection of books by Chingiz Aitmatov. Visit [www.aitmatov-academy.org](http://www.aitmatov-academy.org) for coverage of the event, as well as a free download of the latest Aitmatov Academy journal.

## **SCRSS Russian History Seminar**

At the well-attended SCRSS Russian History Seminar in November, Professor Richard Overy and his colleague Dr Claire McCallum from Exeter University joined



Council members John Riley and Christine Lindey in exploring different aspects of the Cold War in art, film and history. Feedback from participants was, once again, very positive. This year's seminar will take place on Saturday 8 November. Register your interest now to receive information on booking once details are available.



Dr Claire McCallum of Exeter University speaking at the SCRSS Russian History Seminar, 2013

## Exhibition Success

The *Soviet Times: Russian Times* exhibition of photographs from the archives of RIA Novosti attracted a great deal of interest. The majority of exhibits were sold, raising valuable funds for the SCRSS.

## Membership Renewal

We enclose notices for all members whose membership renewal falls due in the period up to 30 April 2014 – prompt renewal is much appreciated. Contact the Society for a form if you wish to set up a standing order to pay your membership automatically each year. If you already have a standing order, please check that the amount you are paying is still correct. Current membership rates are:

*London & Home Counties:* Individual: £25.00 / Joint: £30.00 / Unwaged: £15.00  
*Other Areas of UK:* Individual: £15.00 / Joint: £17.00 / Unwaged: £10.00  
*Overseas:* Individual (Europe): £25.00 / Individual (Global): £30.00

*Affiliate Membership:* Commercial: £100.00 / Educational: £50.00 / Community, voluntary and charitable organisations: £35.00

We have expanded our range of benefits for members and affiliates for 2014 (see [www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm)). The SCRSS Council will continue to look at improving retention of existing members, as well as attracting new members. In the last few months a number of organisations have affiliated for the first time and the Society hopes that its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, combined with the UK–Russia Year of Culture, will generate further interest.

We welcome financial donations to fund our work and library collections. Please complete a Gift Aid declaration form (available at [www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm)) if you pay UK income tax.

## Email Addresses

The Society will continue to send out information and the *SCRSS Digest* by post, but members on our email distribution list also receive up-to-the-minute news, event details and special member-only offers. To join the email list (or confirm that you are on it), please email [ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk](mailto:ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk).

## Phyllis Kelly

We regret to announce the death of Phyllis Kelly on New Year's Day, 2014. A loyal friend of the SCRSS, Phyllis was Secretary of the Cumbria Friends of Russia and the Republics.

Phyllis was pre-deceased by her husband David Kelly, a trade unionist and veteran anti-war campaigner. I first met the couple on CND peace marches in Lancaster and, on one occasion, on an anti-Trident march in Barrow. Both were active in the British-Soviet Friendship Society (BSFS), founded by trade unionists in 1946 and with many branches around Britain. As history progressed and the Soviet Union dissolved, their local BSFS branch was renamed the Cumbria Friends of Russia and the

Republics. The trade union and leftist membership grew less, and cultural and humanitarian interests took over.

Phyllis and David had strong connections with the Russian Embassy, in particular as David had worked in London for a long time on the newspaper *Soviet Weekly*. Embassy members loyally supported the society in many of its events and a representative of the Russian Consulate in Edinburgh, Konstantin Kirilin, was present at Phyllis's funeral.

The society's committee is holding a meeting on the afternoon of 16 February 2014 in Lancaster to discuss the future of the society, convened by Jenny Walmsley, Phyllis's successor as Secretary. Jenny, a Russian Studies specialist at Lancaster University Library, is contactable at [jenny.walmsley1@btoopenworld.com](mailto:jenny.walmsley1@btoopenworld.com).

*Andrew Jameson*

## Next Events

**Please note:** dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

For full details of all events listed below, see the separate SCRSS events programme included with your mailing or visit the SCRSS website at [www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm).

**Friday 21 February 7pm**

**Lecture: John Riley on *Alfred Schnittke in the Cinema and Concert Hall***

Standard admission fee

**Friday 21 March 7pm**

**Lecture: Dr Pat Simpson on *Tales from the 'Russian Room' at Down House, Kent***

Standard admission fee

**Saturday 12 April 6–9pm**

**Event: Yuri's Night – Marking the Anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's Spaceflight**

Admission fee TBC

**Saturday 26 – Sunday 27 April**

**Event: 7th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar**

Course fee: 1 day £50 members / £60 non-members; 2 days £90 members / £100 non-members

**Friday 2 May – Sunday 11 May**

**Exhibition: The Inauguration of the Russian Season, Part 2: The Jury (Villa Design Group)**

Admission free

**Saturday 17 May 12.30pm**

**Event: SCRSS Annual General Meeting**

**Friday 20 June 7pm**

**Lecture: Professor Bill Bowring on *Russia and the European Convention on Human Rights – Following the UK's Example?***

Standard admission fee

**Saturday 5 July**

**Event: Celebration of the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SCRSS**

Admission fee TBC

*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 special events: as indicated above.*

## Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

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### Remembrance Sunday 2013

The Mayor of Southwark, war veterans, diplomats, politicians and representatives of a wide range of organisations, including the SCRSS, gathered at the Soviet War Memorial for the annual Remembrance Sunday ceremony in November. Russian Ambassador Alexander Yakovenko referred to the creation of the United Nations as the basis of a universal collective security



system and subsequent attempts to secure a lasting peace. "It has been a consistent policy of new Russia to eliminate use of military force in world politics... We strongly believe that political, negotiated solutions have no realistic alternatives. This explains our position on the events in the Middle East, including the Syrian crisis. We need to pause our busy lives and take a moment to consider the horrifying cost of conflicts in the past and understand the very reason why we should work hard towards making the world a better place, free of the scourge of war." Further coverage can be found at london-se1.co.uk and rusemb.org.uk.

## Innocent Victims of War

In November 2013 the Hon Secretary laid a wreath on behalf of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) at the Innocent Victims of War memorial outside Westminster Abbey. The ceremony was organised by the Children-in-War Memorial Day Project. It is campaigning for 20 November, the anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to be adopted as a special day to bring the plight of children in war zones into the public domain and for the erection of a permanent memorial to such children in London.

## Imperial Visit

Grand Duchess Maria Vladimirovna, head of the Russian Imperial House, and her son Grand Duke Georgy Mikhailovich laid a wreath at the Soviet War Memorial in early December, at a special ceremony organised by the SMTF and the Russian Embassy. Grand Duchess Maria made a brief tour of the nearby Imperial War Museum, currently undergoing reconstruction work, where she made a presentation to its Director-General, Diane Lees.

## Holocaust Memorial Day

The SMTF is marking Holocaust Memorial Day as the *SCRSS Digest* goes to press. A report will appear in the next issue.

## Next Events

**Friday 9 May 11am**

### **Event: Victory Day Ceremony**

The SMTF will mark Victory Day 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 would like to be added to the list, please send your details to the Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or email: 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. The SMTF organises ceremonies at the Memorial on 27 January (Holocaust Memorial Day), 9 May (Victory Day) and Remembrance Sunday in November.*

## Feature

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### **Deciphering the Cultural Allusions in Spoken Russian**

By Olga Fedina

*Olga Fedina's What Every Russian Knows (And You Don't) is a guide to the top cultural references in spoken Russian that can leave British students of the language baffled. Focusing on twelve popular cultural phenomena – from Mikhail Zhvanetsky's comic monologues to Yuri Norstein's animation Hedgehog in the Mist – it combines personal memories, context, quotations and language notes.*

The idea of writing *What Every Russian Knows (And You Don't)* came to me when I was working as a Russian language teacher. Some of my students spoke very good Russian, as they had studied it at

university, but I noticed that they were missing the cultural background – cartoons, films, popular novels, TV series. These are things that it is hard to familiarise yourself with if you have not grown up in Russia.

As someone who moved country (from Russia to Britain), I had also experienced being at sea with cultural references. Once at a party in London somebody said that I reminded him of the Olive Oyl character from the Popeye cartoons. Popeye was unknown in Russia, so everyone knew what he was talking about except me. This is when I thought: “How useful it would be to get a book about the cartoons, old films, comedians, etc, that have left an important trace in British popular culture...”

*What Every Russian Knows (And You Don't)* consists of twelve chapters. It covers three films, one writer, one singer-songwriter, two animated cartoons, a novel, two stand-up comedians, a fairy tale and a TV series. I wanted a variety of forms and I also wanted to include those phenomena that still resonate with people today.

There is, of course, an element of personal bias in my choices and some Russians may not agree with them. I am not claiming that this is the best material that Soviet popular culture ever produced, but I think it is particularly representative of the Russian character and will help foreigners to understand Russia better. I tried to analyse why these particular subjects still resonate so strongly and I concluded that each of them captures a certain facet of the Russian character, as well as helping people, in their own way, to deal with the reality around them.

My original intended readership was Russian language students, so after each chapter I have included language notes with famous quotes from the particular film, book, cartoon or comedian. Many of these are now everyday expressions in Russian. However, I have also tried to make the book appealing and accessible to people who are interested in Russia, but do not speak the language.

I initially thought that writing this book would take about four months, but it was eventually published over three years later. Writing in my spare time and not having a deadline made me veer off, explore subjects indirectly, read memoirs, re-watch old films, read interviews with actors, directors, writers and cartoonists. Each chapter was written and then re-written. All this took time. Of course, this is not *everything* every Russian knows. Nor would it be true to say that all Russians know all the facts included in the book. Some things that I found out while researching the book are not widely known in Russia either. For example, the big discussion in the press in the late 1920s on the role of satire in Soviet literature, which in some ways determined how this genre developed later in the USSR. Or the tongue-in-cheek attitude of the actor Alexei Batalov to the ‘practically perfect’ Gosha, the character he played in the film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (*Москва слезам не верит*).

I hope the book will help anyone interested in Russia understand why the three-hour-long 1975 film *The Irony of Fate* (*Ирония судьбы, или С лёгким паром!*) is still shown on Russian TV every New Year's Eve. Why people continue to quote Ilf and Petrov's 1928 novel *The Twelve Chairs* (*Двенадцать стульев*) and why its protagonist Ostap Bender became immortalised. Why comedian Mikhail Zhvanetsky is still so loved and looked up to. Who Yemelya the Simpleton is, and why he is usually depicted on top of a stove or with a pike he has just caught in his hand in the icy river.

British readers may also be amused by the chapter on the Russian *Sherlock Holmes* TV series, with its faithful efforts at representing an idealised but somehow *Russian* Victorian England.

I have realised that part of writing this book was about recreating my world. When you first move country there can be a tendency to disconnect from your past in order to immerse yourself in your new culture. But there comes a point when you feel like looking back and recreating your world

through the prism of your changed self and your experience. The experience of growing up in the Soviet Union is still conditioning my and older generations' outlook. Nostalgia is a very human thing, and people grow nostalgic about a bygone world where the sun was warmer, the grass greener, and there were fewer choices and decisions to be made.

Since the book came out I have been contacted by Russophiles from many different countries. US National Public Radio interviewed me, as did *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, while the American poet John Gracen Brown sent me his book of poetry and his poem about Russia. Perhaps most gratifying of all, someone wrote to say that reading my book was like sitting with a Russian friend by a samovar and exchanging stories. I'm trying to throw some more wood onto the fire and keep the tea and the conversation going.

*What Every Russian Knows (And You Don't)* is available as a paperback (Anaconda Editions Ltd, ISBN 9781901990126, 132pp) or e-book. Visit the website: [www.whateveryrussianknows.com](http://www.whateveryrussianknows.com).

## Feature

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### Crisis Year in Russian Ballet

By Tony Devereux

The shocking news in January 2013 of an acid attack on the Bolshoi Ballet's Artistic Director, Sergei Filin, was followed by the arrest of Pavel Dmitrichenko, a star dancer famous in the role of Ivan the Terrible. It could only happen in Russia!

Uproar followed. The Bolshoi went into denial. An open letter to Putin, signed by three hundred members, demanded an independent inquiry. Dmitrichenko was innocent!

Denying guilt, Dmitrichenko claimed Filin had misappropriated budgets, molested

young ballerinas, and slept with wives. The spotlight swung onto Nikolai Tsiskaridze, the top male dancer, who showed no sympathy and even cast doubt on the reality of the attack.



Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow (© RIA Novosti)

Tsiskaridze was already known as a troublemaker – denounced by General Director Anatoly Iksanov as “the source of much unpleasantness” – but he had a powerful following. The previous November twelve supporters had sent an open letter to Putin demanding that he replace Iksanov.

Reprimanded for press statements disparaging the company, Tsiskaridze lost a legal battle and his Bolshoi contracts were discontinued. Despite picketing by his supporters outside the theatre, his future became a question mark.

Filin had gone into hospital in Germany. He emerged for the first time to attend the Bolshoi's London season in August. He had about 10 per cent vision in his left eye, but little in his right. Nevertheless he resumed work.

Tsiskaridze's exit was soon followed by Iksanov's. Vladimir Urin was appointed General Director. The principal conductor went, Filin was reputedly offered a year to recover his health and his personal assistant dismissed.

The scene switched to St Petersburg. In October Minister for Culture Vladimir Medinsky appeared at the Vaganova Academy, arguably the most venerable teaching establishment in the world of ballet, to announce the resignation – enforced – of its rector, Vera Dorofeyeva. In her place he appointed Tsiskaridze.

Another uproar followed and another letter to Putin, describing the intervention as an impermissible, if not criminal, decision. The Ministry branded it a forgery, appealing for confirmation to the Vaganova's press representative. She didn't oblige.

Dorofeyeva alleged collusion between Gergiev, the famous conductor and director of the Mariinsky Theatre, and Tsiskaridze. It emerged that Gergiev had written to Putin suggesting a National Artistic Council, combining the Vaganova with the Mariinsky and two other institutions, under himself (naturally). The president's response of "not currently appropriate" spread relief in artistic circles.

Dmitrichenko's trial in November brought him a six year sentence with severe regime. His accomplice, who actually threw the acid, got ten years with special regime.

2013 ended with resignations of two key people at the Vaganova and a vote pending on Tsiskaridze's continued tenure. At the Bolshoi, Urin announced a special council to draft a new work contract by February and determine distribution of the president's annual grant to creative staff of 375 million roubles (£7 million). *Izvestiya* anonymously quoted: "We don't want the situation under Filin repeated."

Fortunately for Russian ballet, the crisis in these two pre-eminent institutions has not extended elsewhere.

*Tony Devereux has written many articles on Russian ballet history for The Dancing Times. He is assisting their coverage of current events.*

## **Book Reviews**

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**The Coder Special Archive**  
**By Tony Cash & Mike Gerrard**  
**(Hodgson Press, 2012, ISBN: 978-1-906164-25-6, Pbk, 437 pp, illus, timeline, glossary, reading list, index, £12.99)**

The military language schools for Russian (and other East European languages) set up in the Cold War period have hugely contributed to the knowledge and love of Russian culture in the UK, and provided qualified staff for Russian departments all over the country.

What was the original purpose of these schools? They evolved as the Cold War evolved. Initially it was to provide a reserve of qualified interrogators for Russian prisoners of war. Many students spent their two years of national service taking Russian to Civil Service interpretership level (where is that exam now?). Later courses led to 'active service', being trained for a year and posted to various military listening stations around the Soviet Union. This reviewer attended the school at Tangmere and was posted to Berlin, where I watched the building of the Berlin Wall at first hand: construction started the day after my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

The title *Coder Special* is actually the name used in the Navy for a signals intelligence operator. In contrast to Elliott and Shukman's *Secret Classrooms* (2003) and Leslie Woodhead's *My Life as a Spy* (2005), which deal with the Army and RAF, this book is about sigint in the Navy. It differs in its larger size and wealth of anecdotal detail, mixed in with the history of the time, and follows people's careers up to the present, including their subsequent dealings with

Russia. It resembles in some ways an encyclopaedia of all those (often well known) who undertook this work. Occasionally sigint operators were used in provocative operations against the East. These were first revealed in the notorious *Isis* incident. An article printed in this Oxford University magazine in February 1958 described Western provocation of the East in critical terms, and two undergraduates were tried and sentenced for it (full details, including reproduction of the offending article, appear on pages 209–219).

Speaking as a sigint operator, the curious fact is that our closest colleagues were the sigint operators of the Warsaw Pact on the other side. From time to time the radio traffic would include half-humorous messages to us, the ‘listeners’. *Coder Special* mentions this too. In fact, we were neither intruders nor spies – we were an essential part of a gigantic theatrical show played out by both sides to each other. It is incredible to me now that no one saw it for what it was – something resembling two stags locking antlers and roaring at each other, unable to change the political rhetoric that no one believed in. It was also at huge cost in arms and manpower – in Russia’s case depriving its people of the means for normal life. Maybe the West contributed to Russia’s downfall by our insistence on confrontation and our bankrupt philosophy of deterrence (actually a suicide pact), which led to Russia’s military economy, exhaustion and eventual breakdown. Just why was everyone involved in this process in Britain sworn to such deathly secrecy? Was it to avoid common sense creeping in and spoiling everything?

*Andrew Jameson*

**The Capitalist Transformation of State Socialism**  
**By David Lane (Routledge, 2014, ISBN: 978-0-415-85510-5, Hbk, £95.00)**

David Lane is a leading expert in his field of sociological research in the former Soviet

Union and has visited nearly all of the formerly state socialist countries, including China.

He starts his comprehensive examination of the effects of the dismantling of the state socialist system in the Soviet Union with an analysis of the forces that felt restricted by socialism, such as ambitious party leaders, the intelligentsia and entrepreneurs who had taken advantage of *perestroika* to feather their own nest.

Gorbachev’s blind dismantling of the centrally controlled economy and the leading role of the Communist Party without a counter plan in place then infected the other Eastern European socialist states. Their populations had been most subject to the lure of consumerism and a US-promoted vision of freedom and democracy. They voluntarily welcomed capitalism and rejected socialism. The reformists, as he calls them, were amply supported by the West, both financially and politically.

Lane goes into great detail as to the effects of the transformation from state socialism to capitalism in the various countries in Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia, and compares the results with the old EU countries, the US and China.

The new member states of the EU, such as Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and the Baltic States, whose populations envisaged a rapid rise to the economic and living conditions of the West, experienced instead a massive invasion of foreign capital, the privatisation of industry and agriculture, high unemployment and a collapse of welfare provisions.

Russia’s President Yeltsin crushed the state socialist structure at the bidding of foreign capital and encouraged the rise of oligarchs, while the country collapsed into anarchy. Lane focuses on the way in which Vladimir Putin has dealt with this since he became president. Putin has gradually restored control over the economy and forced the oligarchs to pay their taxes and operate within a state system that Lane classifies as national state capitalism. He has raised

Russia's standing in world affairs almost to that of the USSR.

The core of this book is formed of well-illustrated sociological research into the views of Eastern Europeans and Russians on the success or otherwise of this transformation process, much carried out by Professor Lane himself with the support of the British Academy.

This research shows that an initial growth of GDP in these countries due to foreign investment was not matched by human development. There has been a vast increase in mortality, especially among men, deterioration in health services and a rise of poverty, unemployment and stress. Perhaps the most popular aspects of the transformation are political pluralism and freedom of movement, although neither alters the economic situation.

Comparisons with the previous socialist states show very little improvement in living standards. Social inequality has created resentment against a prosperous elite class. The most dissatisfied countries are Hungary and Ukraine.

By comparison, Belarus has retained its living standards and socialist structure, while China has experienced a steady rise in both GDP and human development since 1991.

The attraction of Anglo-American neo-liberalism has diminished since the bank crises of 2008 and many are looking for another model, which is not necessarily socialism. The market socialism of China and the hybrid economies of Russia and the Central Asian states, which have withstood economic reliance on the West, are more appealing now.

Lane's final chapters examine future possibilities for the reversal of neo-liberalism in all these countries. He looks to see if a Keynesian model of controlled capitalism with welfare investment would work. However, in most cases he does not see this as a possibility because the new EU member states are too small and lack the

resources to break away from their current partnership.

Russia and Central Asia are rich in resources but lack industrial and consumer development. Their societies are controlled by powerful elites and contain some of the elements of a state socialist structure but none of those of an established bourgeois society required by social democracy.

Lane defines China as a successful state-capitalist system with the possibility of the ruling Communist Party adjusting its economy towards equalising society and investing more in welfare and internal consumerism. He does not see it yet as socialist.

David Lane deserves our gratitude for producing an immensely readable book that touches on the future of the world we live in.

**Note:** This book is available in the SCRSS library for one month's loan.

*Jean Turner*

**Devil's Acre: A Russian Novel**  
**By Jonathan Bastable (Therefore Publishing Ltd, 2013, ISBN: 978-0-9576835-1-8, Pbk, 336pp)**

The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour looms up by the river in central Moscow, opposite the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts on Volkhonka and close to the Kremlin. It's fake – a kitsch copy built in 1997 by ex-Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

The cathedral is notorious for Pussy Riot's protest in 2012, but the history of the original building is of far more interest. It forms the basis of this intelligent and enjoyable novel set in Moscow.

Commissioned in 1812 by Tsar Alexander I to commemorate Russia's defeat of Napoleon, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour took some seventy years to complete. The author of the first project, Karl Vitberg, spent ten years planning the foundations on Sparrow Hills before falling



into spectacular disgrace on the accession of Nicholas I in 1825. His successor Konstantin Thon moved the site to Chertolye (the Devil's Acre of the title), demolishing a monastery to make room. After initial setbacks, then decades of construction and decoration, the cathedral was finally consecrated in 1882 in the reign of Alexander II (Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* had been composed for the event). Within thirty-five years everything had changed. The cathedral survived the revolution of 1917 but was demolished in 1931 to make way for an immense Palace of Soviets, designed by Boris Iofan. However, with the Nazi invasion in 1941, the war's aftermath and then Stalin's death, the project was finally shelved and the site converted into the world's largest open-air swimming pool.

This fascinating architectural history is one of three interwoven strands in the novel, which moves back and forth from the nineteenth century to the Soviet period and the present.

The second strand is a thriller set in 1982–83, the period during which Brezhnev died. Moscow State University (MGU) journalism student Vadim is intrigued by a chance remark about the lost cathedral, not least when he finds Thon vilified in works by his contemporaries Alexander Herzen and VV Stasov. He sets out to uncover the truth, unaware that the cathedral is now a taboo subject. Helped by Rachel, an American postgraduate student with whom he has an affair, Vadim pursues a bibliographical trail in the Lenin Library, discovers a skeleton in his family's cupboard, and attracts the unwanted attention of the Komsomol and KGB.

Narrator inventions form the third strand. The narrator comments on, and occasionally apologises for, his characters and the plot. He explains that his book is "about raising things up and knocking them down. Ideologies, idols, churches, reputations, truths, untruths, statues, fictions, hopes, loves, lives." He also says: "History, they say, repeats itself. But in Russia history does not so much repeat

itself as anticipate itself." Thon's demolition of the original monastery in Chertolye anticipates the demolition of his own cathedral by Stalin. Yeltsin's bulldozing of the Ipatiev House in Yekaterinburg, in which the Romanovs were executed, anticipates his assault on the White House in Moscow 1993 as president. There are also interesting digressions on Russian history and politics, translation and being a foreign correspondent (Bastable reported from the USSR for *The Sunday Times* and *The Scotsman*).



Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow  
(© RIA Novosti)

This is a novel about big issues – Russia, architecture, poetry, language, history and politics. As a thriller, it avoids the usual Cold War clichés and Vadim's comparatively mild fate hints at the Gorbachev changes to come. Bastable displays a genuine affection for, and understanding of, Russia. His descriptions of social life in 1983 Moscow are authentic – from *beriozka* shops to Beatle-obsessed hippies. I should know – I was studying in Moscow in 1983 courtesy of a ten-month SCRSS Russian language scholarship (albeit at the Pushkin Institute, not MGU). It's a shame that I never swam in that open-air swimming pool...

*Diana Turner*

**The Spectre of Alexander Wolf**  
**By Gaito Gazdanov (translated by**  
**Bryan Karetnyk, Pushkin Press,**  
**2013, ISBN: 978-1-782270-08-9,**  
**£12.00)**

Born in St Petersburg in 1903 to Ossetian parents, Gaito Gazdanov joined the Whites in the Civil War, before settling in Paris. He worked in factories or as a taxi driver while studying and when money ran out spent time on the streets. His 1930 novel *An Evening with Claire* began his career as a writer of essays, short stories and novels, many of which draw so heavily on his own experience that they border on the autobiographical. He joined the Résistance during the war and in 1953 moved to Munich to work for Radio Liberty. His work appeared in émigré journals but it was only in the 1990s that it began to be published in Russia.

Dating from 1947–48, *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf* (Призрак Александра Вольфа) bisects a career that ran from 1930 to 1971. It is a ‘metaphysical thriller’, a page-turning crime drama interleaved with philosophical musings: Nabokovian, Dostoyevskian and Poe-etic.

It begins compellingly: “Of all my memories, of all life’s innumerable sensations, the most onerous was that of the single murder I had committed.” Though his killing of another Civil War soldier was un-witnessed, the protagonist’s guilt is re-stirred when he reads a fictional account of a murder that uncannily reflects his own. This leads him to embark on an existential journey to find the mysterious author, Alexander Wolf. As shape-shifting as Bulgakov’s Satan, the ‘facts’ about him are contradictory and the hero has difficulty in imagining what he is looking for.

The hero speaks to various people who know the mysterious writer and is surprised that this author of beautifully modulated English is actually Russian but has foregone his mother tongue for the profitability and ubiquity of English. From then on there are

thoughts on guilt, free will and even on the process of writing itself.

Though the impetus for Nabokov’s decision to write in English may have been different, there is an interesting parallel with the mysterious Wolf. When *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf* was translated into French, critics compared it to Camus but, wedded to the Russian language, Gazdanov depended on translations of his pellucid and melodious prose, and the greatest fame eluded him.

*The Spectre of Alexander Wolf* isn’t a big book – a couple of gulps would finish it, but the flavour will remain much longer and you’re bound to come back for seconds.

Pushkin Press’s very pocket-sized paperback edition is transparently translated by Bryan Karetnyk and the book is a delight in itself, clearly laid out on good heavy paper.

*John Riley*

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