



The Scotland-Russia Forum Newsletter

Issue 13 March 2006

www.scotlandrussiaforum.org scotrussforum@blueyonder.co.uk

Members are encouraged to provide feedback on the Forum Newsletter; to submit comments on, and provide proposals for, content and for the Forum's events programme; and to correspond on issues likely to be of interest to the membership. All such contributions will be welcome at the address below. Please also advise omissions and errors; these will be rectified where possible.

Forum Programme April - 2006

All talks: £2 SRF members, £4 non-members (including 'email only' subscribers), which includes light refreshments and the chance to meet speakers and each other informally. For details of all events contact 0131 662 9149 or scotrussforum@blueyonder.co.uk.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday 16 March. Lesley Chamberlain: Lenin and the Exile of the Philosophers

Joint Scotland-Russia Forum / French Institute event.

Lesley Chamberlain is a novelist and non-fiction writer with special interests in Russia and Germany. Her new book, *The Philosophy Steamer: Lenin and the Exile of the Intelligentsia* (Atlantic Books, February 2006), is the subject of her talk this month.

In autumn 1922 around seventy Russian professors, writers, journalists and other members of the intelligentsia were forcibly expelled from their homeland. Several of them, including Berdyaev, settled in Paris, where they helped to raise the intellectual and artistic profile of the Russian emigration before the war. Lesley Chamberlain will tell their story, including what happened to the Russians who became Soviet sympathisers and the handful who joined the Resistance.

6-8pm Institut Français d'Ecosse, 13 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 7TT

Copies of the book will be on sale. Please let us know if you would like to join the speaker for a meal afterwards – details from Jenny Carr 0131 662 9149.

Thursday 27 April: Averil King: The Russian Landscape Painter Isaak Levitan

Isaak Levitan (1860-1900) is famous in his homeland for his lyrical representations of the Russian countryside. Sometimes credited with introducing Impressionism into Russia, he was a great friend of Anton Chekhov. Sadly he and Chekhov quarrelled bitterly, the writer satirising him mercilessly in his story *The Grasshopper*. Averil King's talk will be illustrated with slides of Levitan's paintings and copies of her book, *Isaak Levitan - Lyrical landscape* (Philip Wilson, 2004), will be on sale.

7pm, English Speaking Union, 23 Atholl Crescent (Basement), Edinburgh

Monday 8 May, Clem Cecil - "Moscow Under Threat"

In May 2004, former Times correspondent Clem Cecil co-founded MAPS (the Moscow Architecture Preservation Society: <http://www.maps-moscow.com>) to counterbalance the mass demolitions in Moscow that have transformed the city since the fall of Communism. She devotes her time to campaigning and bringing western conservation values to Russia at a critical time for the country's heritage. Moscow's current building boom is threatening its fascinating and wonderful architectural heritage – over 1,000 buildings have been demolished over the last 5 years alone, some 300 of them

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listed. MAPS is presently campaigning for the house of the Constructivist architect Konstantin Melnikov. Clem will come to us hotfoot from the April “Heritage at Risk” conference in Moscow.

She will illustrate her talk with slides.

7pm, School of Architecture, 20 Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JZ.

All welcome. No charge for members of the School of Architecture, £2 SRF members and students, £4 others (inc glass of wine after the talk). Further information: 0131 667 2432

WHAT'S ON

Sharmanka Kinetic Circus on tour

Exhibition featuring a set of kinetic sculptures built by Eduard Bersudsky 2003-2005. Supported by the Scottish Arts Council. Callendar House, Falkirk, till May; Swanson Gallery, Thurso, 2 June-2 July; Museum and Art Gallery, Inverness, 14 July-6 August; The Iona Gallery, Kingussie, 18 August-11 September.

Jazz in the USSR

Day course run by the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow, on Saturday 11 March 2006, tutor William Newman. Cost £25. Details: phone 0141-330 1835, www.gla.ac.uk: 443/department/adult education/index. email: dace-query@educ.gla.ac.uk

Music and Dance – Perfect Partners?

One-day workshop on Tchaikovsky's ‘Sleeping Beauty’, to be given by Stuart Campbell (Music) and Agnes Ness (Dance). The workshop will trace the development of this classic from the original conception of Petipa and Tchaikovsky to more recent interpretations. It will be abundantly illustrated with excerpts from the music and video clips of the ballet. *Edinburgh University Office of Lifelong Learning, 11 Buccleugh Place. EH8 9LW. 0131 650 4400 or 662 07843*

Saturday 13 May 2006, 10am – 4pm

Friends of Chernobyls Children

An Edinburgh Branch has recently started up - for full information see www.focc.org.uk - which hopes to bring a group of children aged 7 - 12 to Edinburgh in September, 2006. They will stay with host families for four weeks a year, for five years. Contact details on the website.

NOTICES

Obituary of Gennady **Aygi**, the poet and anthologist, who died in February, written by Professor **Peter France**, who presented a highly valued talk to the Forum in April 2004 on Chuvash poetry and Aygi's anthology, which France translated:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,,1717470,00.html>

Groups to note:

<http://RUpoint.co.uk> is an active UK-wide online discussion group with Scotland-based correspondents.

<http://russian-scotland.com> is a similar active group based in Stirling.

(Both Russian language only)

<http://russianuk.com> is an offshoot of the magazine Courier, and has events listings in Russian and English.

Under development:

<http://russian-scotland.blogspot.com/>

In the next issue of this newsletter (June) – a review of the very successful Edinburgh University production of Mayakovsky's *Klop* directed by Yelena Gudkova this month.



- 1) L to R: zookeeper (Marsha Connor), old man (Gavin Bolus), nurse (Jill Bates), old lady (Maya Birdwood-Hedger), old man (David Crosbie), Prispkin (Sasha Lokhov),
 2) - all the cast taking a bow

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

The **Ukrainian Outreach Service** offers culturally appropriate help for older people from the Ukraine. It is part of Alzheimer Scotland (but clients do not necessarily suffer from dementia).

They would be very happy to hear from Russian and/or Ukrainian speakers in Edinburgh who are "willing to come to give us a hand at our Ukrainian Afternoons. These events are a type of social activity where we normally have an invited speaker from another organization to come to give us a talk on what their organisation is doing or offering for the elderly people.

So, if somebody would like to come to these afternoons, we would be more than happy to have some help. This would give the volunteers an opportunity to meet with our service users and to understand better what the Project is doing and if they would like to work with us in the future. "

If you can help please contact Elena Goodall (Ukrainian Outreach Worker) on 0131 446 3755, email easterneuropeanservices@alzscot.org

Orthodox Community of St Nicholas. Dunblane: Sundays at 11am (English, with some Slavonic). Contact: Fr Alexander Williams, Arranmhor, Laighill Loan, Dunblane, FK15 0BJ: 017876 822750, email rory.williams@clara.co.uk Please also contact Fr Williams for details of services at the University of Strathclyde Chaplaincy, in Glasgow.

Orthodox Community of St Andrew. Edinburgh: Saturdays – Vespers at 6.30pm; Sundays – Matins at 9am and Holy Liturgy at 10.30am. Also daily Matins at 7.30am and Vespers at 6.20pm. Chapel of St Andrew, 2 Meadow Lane, Edinburgh, EH8 9NR. Contact: Archimandrite John Maitland Moir, at the same address or phone, 0131 667 0372. Services elsewhere in Scotland: website: <http://www.edinburgh-orthodox.org.uk/>

OUTWITH SCOTLAND

FOURTEEN LITTLE RED HUTS

Andrey Platonov's *Fourteen Little Red Huts* (1932) is the first, greatest and least-known masterpiece of the theatre of the absurd. At one level it is an existential drama close in spirit to Beckett and Ionesco.

At another level, it is a response to the terror famine of the early 1930s. The play is seldom produced. This production is directed in Russian by Robert Chandler, co-translator of *The Return, Soul, Happy Moscow* and *The Foundation Pit*. The actors are students from Queen Mary College.

7.00 pm, 22 & 23 March, Arts Theatre, Arts Building, Queen Mary College, Mile End Road, London – £4 (students £2.50): tickets at door

GB RUSSIA SOCIETY**“RUSSIA’S MONETARY POLICY – ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC REFORMS”
PROFESSOR BRIGITTE GRANVILLE**

Brigitte Granville is Professor of International Economics and Economic Policy at Queen Mary College, University of London. Has been Director of the International Economics Programme at Chatham House & Vice President for Russia with investment bankers J.P. Morgan. Was a consultant advisor to the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation & the Central Bank of Uzbekistan.

March 15, University of London Union, Malet St .London WC1E 7HY 6.30 for 7.00 p.m.

**“RUSSIA’S FLIGHT PATH: TOWARDS INTEGRATION OR SEPARATION,
MODERNISATION OR STAGNATION, PROSPERITY FOR ALL OR WEALTH FOR THE
FEW?”**

SIR RODERIC LYNE K.B.E. C.M.G.

A penetrating analysis by Britain’s top expert on the spot, who is also an honorary vice president of the Society.

Thursday 30 March, Swedenborg Hall, 20/21 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2TH 6.30 for 7.00 p.m.

Entrance to the Hall is via Barter St. There will be a complimentary wine reception from 6.30 until 7.00 p.m. VERY GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY ‘THE RUSSIA HOUSE’.

**“THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY NOVEL”
PROFESSOR EMERITUS RICHARD FREEBORN D.Litt**

Richard Freeborn (MA & D.Phil Oxford, and D.Litt London) was Professor of Russian Literature at the School of Slavonic & East European Studies in the Federal University of London from 1964 until his retirement in 1988. Author of books on Turgenev, the rise of the Russian novel and the Russian revolutionary novel as well as other works.

Monday 10 April, University of London Union, Malet St WC1E 7HY at 6.30 for 7.00 p.m.(Room 3E)

**H.E. THE AMBASSADOR OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION MR. YURY VIKTOROVICH
FEDOTOV**

In the Chair: The Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind K.C.M.G. Q.C. M.P.
(Britain’s Foreign Secretary 1995-1997)

His Excellency the Ambassador, continuing a tradition of cooperation, will brief members of the Society on the current political and economic situation in the Russian Federation, as well as the latest developments in bilateral relations. After his address the Ambassador will reply to questions.

This meeting is free of charge. Restricted to the All Party Parliamentary Committee for Russia, and to paid-up Society members and their Guests. Priority booking for Members only until January 31st.

There after, subject to availability, bookings will be allocated to Members’ Guests.

Thursday 27 April 2006, at 6.30 p.m. Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House, Bridge St, Westminster. This talk starts earlier, at 6.30 p.m. Please be seated by 6.15 p.m.

110 seats only. Book early to avoid disappointment.

PUSHKIN CLUB PROGRAMME – 2006

(7.30 pm at 72 Queensborough Terrace London W2 unless otherwise stated.)

David Brummell: The Life and Work of Fyodor Tyutchev. With readings of his poetry in Russian and English. *21 March*

Antony Wood et al. Pushkin's THE GYPSIES A rehearsed reading of Antony Wood's new translation, with an introductory talk. The translator spotlights the novelty of Pushkin's first mature narrative poem, with passages read in the original by Alla Gelich, and demonstrates its quasi-dramatic nature in a reading with four voices of whom two are professional actors. *.4 April.*

Stanley Mitchell on Chagall's Illustrations to Gogol's 'Dead Souls', as Essay in the Grotesque.
With slides. *ULU (The University of London Union) 25 April, University of London Union, Malet St.*

Sasha Dugdale on Contemporary Russian Theatre.

Between 1995 and 2000, Sasha Dugdale lived and worked in Russia. In 1999 she initiated the Russian Theatre New Writing Project with the Royal Court, London, and currently works as a translator and consultant. Four of her translations have been staged. 'Plasticine' by Vassily Sigarev won the Evening Standard Award for most promising playwright. *9 May*

The Campaign Against Psychiatric Abuse. USSR, 1970s and Beyond?

Joint event with INDEX ON CENSORSHIP. Commentary and discussion.

Richard McKane (Chair), Judith Vidal-Hall (Index on Censorship),

Helen Bamber (The Helen Bamber Foundation for Victims of Torture),

Michael Molnar (Freud Museum), Dr Maria Volkhanskaya (formerly Leningrad. Cambridge),

Dr Max Gammon (former chair, CAPA) and special guests.

6 June

WHAT'S NOT ON

Moscow flights to capital axed as service from Russia unloved

Direct flights between Edinburgh and Russia have been axed from this summer's timetable. The first link between Edinburgh and Moscow was launched two years ago. The service, although reasonably successful, has since failed to attract enough interest among Russian tourists.

City leader Donald Anderson said: "I regret that flights to Moscow will not be resuming this summer, though I understand there are commercial reasons behind the decision. However, given the overall growth in transport from Edinburgh, it can only be a matter of time before this service is reinstated."

REPORT OF SCOTLAND-RUSSIA FORUM MEMBER VISITS RUSSIAN STATE PARLIAMENT



Carl's father-in-law. Sergei, Rodina researcher Sergei Pikhtin and the author, Carl Thomson

On Thursday the 29th December 2005, Scotland-Russia Forum members Carl Thomson, a postgraduate in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Glasgow, and his wife Maria visited the Russian State Parliament, or *Duma*, as guests of their local Russian MP Andrei Savelyev and his Parliamentary Assistant Sergei Pikhtin.

Andrei Savelyev is a member of the nationalist *Rodina*, or 'Motherland' Party, and Sergei Pikhtin is not only his assistant but one of the chief ideologues and thinkers behind the *Rodina* philosophy.

Unlike the British House of Commons, the Russian Parliament is not open to tourists or visitors. Access is given only to MPs, who are called 'deputies', Government officials, their staff and guests and journalists. Foreigners are rarely allowed access for any purpose. Indeed, given January's spying scandal, when British Embassy staff were found to have been gathering confidential files and storing

them in a hollowed out rock, it is unlikely any British person will be given access to the *Duma* any time soon.

Unfortunately, the *Duma* building itself is unimpressive. Situated in a sombre, austere grey 1930s building directly opposite Manezh Square, just a stone's throw away from the Kremlin, the *Duma* is housed in the same building that held the Soviet Council of Labour and Defence, and later *Gosplan*, the Soviet State Planning Commission. Inside, its linoleum floor, 1980s style interior decoration and tacky furniture conjure up images of a regional, under-funded public administration office from Soviet times, not the national Parliament of the world's geographically largest country.

Sadly, the debating chamber was closed, so we were unable to see inside. This is perhaps the most famous image of the *Duma* and a stark contrast to the rather poorly corridors and committee rooms in the rest of the building. With its large its large tricolour, modern furnishings, electronic voting and circular seating plan, the chamber is completely different from the more familiar green leather seats, logical seating plan and centuries-old archaic tradition of Westminster, and even from the insipid style of the rest of the building.

HOW IS THE DUMA ELECTED?

The Russian Parliament sits for four-year terms. The last election was in December 2003, and the next one will be in December 2007. There are 500 seats in the *Duma*. 225 are elected on a first-past-the-post basis, as in the Westminster Parliament. The other 225 are elected through party lists, as for the European Parliamentary Elections. Parties that fail to gain 5% of the vote are ineligible for seats through the party list.

There are four parties represented in the Russian Parliament. The largest party is United Russia, the party which supports President Vladimir Putin. Out of 500 seats in the *Duma*, United Russia holds 222 and controls the most important committees in Parliament. It is effectively the "party of power". The second largest party in the *Duma* is the Communist Party and the third largest is Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. The final group represented in the *Duma* is the *Rodina*, or 'Motherland' Party. This is the group our host, Andrei Savelyev, belongs to. It is economically left wing but strongly nationalist and anti-immigration.

Rodina was set up with the tacit approval of the Kremlin in 2003 in order to siphon votes away from the Communists. However, it is now an anti-Government party. *Rodina*'s co-leader, Dmitri Rogozin, went on hunger strike, alongside Andrei Savelyev and three other deputies to protest at reforms of the social benefit system.

One of the highlights of the tour was seeing Sergei Glazyev's office. This is where the hunger strike took place and where the *Rodina* deputies barricaded themselves for a week. The office was large and ornate, with lavish furnishings and an impressively proportioned tri-colour. The only oddity was, beside a modern flat-screen computer, a row of four pulse-tone plastic telephones that would have been outdated in the eighties.

Our host had encouraged us to take as many photographs as we wanted. However, when we asked to make a picture of Glazyev's office the mood turned cold and we were curtly refused. There were a number of other *Rodina* members there and it was clear our presence as foreigners was causing them some discomfort.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WESTMINSTER AND RUSSIA

There are a number of intriguing differences between the Russian electoral system and our own at Westminster. Russian voters have an additional choice on their ballot paper: 'against all candidates'. If this option scores the highest number of votes in a constituency, as has happened on numerous occasions, a by-election must be held and all the candidates who stood previously are barred from

putting their names forward again. An election must also be re-held if turnout is below 50%, with the previous candidates again being ineligible to stand. This applies to Presidential elections as well as Parliamentary elections.

However, there are also many flaws in the Russian parliamentary system. Parties are weak and often exist only on paper. Few people become involved in political life and, apart from the Union of Right Forces, no Russian party has survived a change of leader. The system of proportional representation means relatively unknown people are elected to the *Duma* on the strength of a leader's popularity.

The fact that deputies are given immunity from prosecution has led to many corrupt businessmen becoming involved in politics in a bid to be elected to Parliament and avoid charges against them. Unlike in the British House of Commons, voting is done by computer and the way in which a particular deputy voted is kept secret. This tempts bribery and dishonesty.

Due to the bellicosity of earlier Parliaments, which were dominated by the Communists and other nationalist parties, and the compliance of the current one towards the President, the *Duma* is not held in respect. Turnout for elections is low and there are allegations that it is inflated to prevent the 'against all candidates' option from de-legitimising large numbers of contests. The lack of respect Parliament is held in contributes to a large number of brawls and fistfights in the chamber. Indeed, our host, Andrei Savelyev, was on the receiving end of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's fists after a spat in Parliament over the latter's Jewish origins.

MEETING VASILLY SHANDYBIN

As we were leaving the *Duma*, we encountered former Communist deputy and current *Rodina* member Vasily Shandybin. Shandybin is known for his unreformed Communist sympathies and has cast doubt on whether Stalin's gulags were a reality. He is also virulently and violently anti-semitic and anti-Western.

When my father-in-law introduced me to him, Shandybin glared at me with barely concealed contempt. I held my hand out for him to shake, but he swatted it away before roaring accusations of spying at us.

He was only calmed down by our host who reassured him that I was a guest of his, that everything was fine and that we were definitely not spies. I tried to joke that, if I were to be spying, I would have chosen something a bit less conspicuous than blue jeans and a sweatshirt to wear in the Russian Parliament. At this he smiled a little and shook my hand. But as we walked away, he turned to his colleague and whispered, "are you *sure* they're not spies from England?"

Goodness knows what he would have made of the British Embassy's lamentable attempts at *real* spying just a few weeks later. Storing confidential documents inside a hollowed-out rock may have been more Johnny English than James Bond, but I doubt Vasily Shandybin will be welcoming us back to the *Duma* anytime soon.

Carl Thomson has an MPhil in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Glasgow. He is a former researcher to Rt. Hon Theresa May MP and was the Conservative Party's Candidate for Glasgow East at the 2005 General Election.

BOOK REVIEW

Boris Akunin – The Death of Achilles

This is the fourth of Akunin's books about the 19th century detective, Erast Fandorin (and the third to have been read by your reviewer in recent months). The original Russian dates from 1998 but Andrew Bromfield's excellent translation came out only last year. Here Fandorin has returned to Moscow

from 6 years in Japan, with a Japanese servant and a knowledge of Oriental martial arts. This is the Moscow of the early 1880s, Alexander II, the “reforming Tsar” has been assassinated, and his successor having turned his back on any semblance of “European-style” reforms, has restated the old principles of autocracy and Orthodoxy and in the innermost circles of power a new Russian nationalism prevails. But Moscow has changed in the six years since our hero has been away – a kind of cowboy capitalism reigns, some people have got rich, the city is booming, there are young men on the make and beautiful women available, but there is also an underbelly of crime and corruption. Within 24 hours of his arrival in Moscow, Fandorin is plunged into an investigation of a high-level murder, when the popular General Sobolev is found dead in a room in one of the city’s smartest hotels. Very soon dark rumours begin to surface about Sobolev’s political ambitions and the existence of a plot to stage a military coup and install Sobolev as a Napoleon figure, committed to reasserting Russia’s power, at home and abroad. Fandorin’s task is both to find the murderer and to unravel the conspiracy. As one has already been led to expect from earlier novels, he eventually succeeds with a series of spectacular encounters in which he demonstrates his almost supernatural powers and uncanny ability to survive attacks which would have wiped out most ordinary mortals.

Just over halfway through, the novel takes an apparently incongruous turn by introducing the character of Achimas Welde, born into a primitive Christian sect, originating in Moravia, who are forced to move, via Prussia to the Caucasus, an area still gripped by inter-tribal and anti-government uprisings (this section goes back some 40 years in time). A series of horrendous misfortunes forces the young Achimas gradually to abandon his faith and his belief in non-violence. Like Fandorin he discovers an incredible capacity for outwitting his enemies and he becomes a successful, wealthy and utterly ruthless international “contract killer”, called upon by powerful individuals to carry out seemingly impossible tasks. The reader will eventually realise that Achimas is to come face to face with Fandorin, to resolve the enigma of Sobolev’s killing and the two predictably end up in a titanic struggle with good narrowly triumphing over evil.

This is a formula which has served Akunin well, but it has to be said that it is its very formulaic nature that leaves the reader somehow unsatisfied at the end. This is a pity, for there is much in his writing to admire – seemingly meticulous historical research, a strong sense of place, a well-developed sense of literary parody (there are long descriptive digressions reminiscent of Gogol and a section delving obsessively into the mind of a gambler, which might well have come from Dostoevsky’s story of that name). Akunin is interesting, too, on the advance of technology in the last quarter of the 19th century and its effect on detection and forensic science – the telephone, for instance, has made its appearance in the city and transcripts of telephone conversations are used for the first time in collecting criminal evidence. There is also, obviously, the question of the extent to which the author is attempting to draw parallels with the Moscow of today – or more accurately, given the time lapse since the original publication – the Moscow of the late Yeltsin period and indeed whether his own political and philosophical sympathies lie with the neo-Slavophiles of today. .

Cleverly plotted, stylishly written (though tending towards an excessive amount of violence), “Achilles” ultimately disappointed this reviewer because its characters failed to come alive. Our hearts should be in our mouths, as our hero once again finds himself in a terrible corner, apparently at the mercy of his almost supernatural opponent. But somehow your reviewer ended up not believing in either Fandorin or Achimas and not caring much who won.

Mike Falchikov

Nostalgia, 89 High Street Glasgow G1 1NB, phone No1415525578. The shop is open daily from 11.00 to 7.00 pm, except Sunday, when it is open from 12.00 to 6.00 pm.

Many members enjoyed catering by 'Nostalgia' at the Christmas event, or have purchased products at the shop in Glasgow or when it sets up at the Ukrainian Club in Edinburgh on the occasional Sunday. The shop itself has a good range of authentic Russian and Polish products such as pelmeni, sausages, fish and bottled vegetables. Its only disadvantage for most people would be its slightly inconvenient location – the High St in Glasgow is more of a thoroughfare than a shopping street. However, it is close enough to the centre of town, train and bus transport. Recommended.