



The FORUM

The magazine of the Scotland-Russia Forum No. 37, Summer 2017

www.scotlandrussiaforum.org

1917 in Russia: as the summer wore on, the novelty wore off; the tension mounted, and then the explosion came...



In this issue:

The “July Days” and the Revolution—Pushkin House Russian Book Prize
Weird events —Sixth Moffat Russian Conference—Glasgow University’s Russian
Centenary —The View from Moscow City—Russian Foodie in the forest
and much more

The FORUM

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All opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and don't necessarily coincide with those of the committee or the editors.

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Due to circumstances beyond our control, this edition of the Forum has been published in September rather than, as intended, July.

Despite this, we hope that you will enjoy the new look, and that the material is to the taste of the Scotland-Russia Forum's membership.

Any comments and/or suggestions would be gratefully received.

Ian Mitchell

The cover picture is called "July Days", by Janet Treloar. She is a member of the Royal Watercolour Society, and her next exhibition will be at Wolfson College, Oxford, on the theme of the meeting of Anna Akhmatova and Isaiah Berlin in Leningrad in 1945.



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The SRF stand at the Language Show in Glasgow, March 2017.

Russian in schools

The early part of this year was largely devoted to our continuing efforts to encourage Scottish schools and pupils to consider learning Russian. (see page 11)

In January and February we took part in several **SCILT schools events (“Business Brunches”)**, talking to school students in Dundee, Inverness and Edinburgh about Russian. It was encouraging to receive the feedback from Plockton High School shown below after the Inverness event.

In March we had a stand (and associated language classes) at the **Language Show** in Glasgow (picture on p.1). I gave a **talk to the UK Russian Teachers Association** conference in London on the causes of, and possible solutions to, the poor showing of Russian in British schools. I also wrote a **letter to the Times** (published 3 March) on the same subject.

Events – talks and a film



Dairmid Gunn, March 2017

We organised four events in the first three months of the year, all very well attended. The first, **Dairmid Gunn talking about his interviews with Arctic Convoy veterans**, was repeated by the NLS in July.

The second, **Maxim Katz on the “non-systemic” Russian opposition**, was also repeated, this time by the Glasgow University Russian Speaking Society.



Margy Kinmonth, March 2017

The third, the new documentary film **“Revolution” at the Filmhouse** (Q&A with director Margy Kinmonth) was also a sell out. If you missed that you can buy the DVD from the **Foxtrot Films** website.

Finally, we had a very well-informed and interesting talk on the **current situation in Ukraine by former ambassador Robert Brinkley**.

Schools workshop in September – “Look East”

We are working with Glasgow University specialists in Russian, Polish, Czech and Hungarian on a workshop for teachers interested in including the languages and cultures of Eastern Europe in the curriculum. Applications from teachers and practising educationalists welcome. There will be more information on our website soon.

Ideas for future events are always welcome – let us know what you are interested in, and what you would be prepared to organise for us.

Jenny Carr
SRF chairperson
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June 2017

Plockton High at SCILT Business Brunch



Several pupils from Plockton High S3 French class had the opportunity to attend the SCILT Business Brunch to learn about the relevance of learning languages. The event was held at the Kingsmill Hotel in Inverness on 25 January 2017. In the marketplace, pupils were able to approach local businesses to learn how languages are important to them. Through the workshops, we discovered that working for the National Trust of Scotland and following a career in football both have a need for a second language. It was a very interesting day and everyone wanted to learn Russian by the end of it.

Here is some feedback from the pupils who attended the event:

'I learnt that languages can come in useful in any job out there. It was eye-opening.'
Martha Shillaker)

'It inspired me to continue with languages.'
(Amelia Whistance Holmes)

Niamh MacLennan, S3 pupil at Plockton High School

Сто лет назад... the “July Days”

The turning point of Russian history?

It would not be hard to argue that mid-summer 1917 was the most importantly pivotal short period in Russian history between the invasions of Napoleon and Hitler. The events which took place between June and August made possible the invasion of Lenin and his Bolsheviks in late October. The world is still recovering from the consequences of that invasion. In some ways Russia has yet to do so.

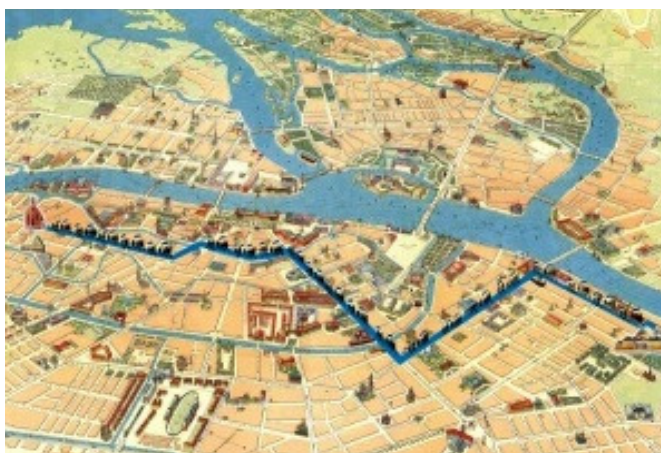
Curiously, though, the “July Days” as they are known, are not a widely studied episode and indeed, in the excellent history of “the long revolution” which is reviewed on page 10, they merit only three brief mentions (on pages 116, 122 and 145). Perhaps that is reasonable on a chronological/event-orientated view, but I would argue not so on an “impressionistic” view, if I may call it that.

Though nothing much of an obvious sort happened in July, this was the period in which the momentum of events shifted from reform to revolution. It was when Russia went from a potentially positive trajectory to one which was always going to end in violence. Though the outcome of that violence was not pre-ordained, the fact of it was hardly escapable after what happened in the feverish mid-summer months in Petrograd. Let me try to explain why.

Before “July”

After Tsar Nicholas had been persuaded to abdicate, in March, the Provisional Government was formed and Russians became citizens of their country, rather than subjects of the Emperor, for the first time ever. The Romanov regime died with hardly a whimper, and the new state was run by a government headed by Prince Lvov, a civilised aristocrat who could trace his ancestry back to Rurik, the ninth-century Viking. This was no revolution, or at least one only in the technical sense of the displacement of an unpopular, irresponsible and callow autocrat by a group of people publicly and privately pledged to running the country in the interests of its inhabitants.

The most significant aspect of that change was the intention to introduce the rule of law. The other main aim of government policy was to keep fighting the war in concert with Russia’s allies while organising a Constituent Assembly, to be elected by popular vote, that would meet later in the year to decide on a constitu-



The route of the march of the Estonian nationalists in April, from St. John’s (Lutheran) Church to the Tauride Palace where the Duma sat. Within a few days, the Provisional Government had passed the Estonian Autonomy Act, which was, along with similar changes in Ukraine, one of the foundational shifts which sent cracks right up through the Russian state structure and began the process of disintegration which the Bolsheviks were to exploit in October.

tion for the new republic.

Many of the more oppressive aspects of Tsardom were immediately abolished, though in some cases this was done far too hastily and disorder resulted. By far the most important example of this was the abolition of the means of maintaining discipline within the armed forces.

Despite the many mistakes of the Provisional Government, and the many objections lodged by the Petrograd Soviet, which acted as an informal but influential socialist “opposition” to the Lvov government, there was widespread public support for the idea of change. It is noteworthy that the London, City and Midland Bank (then the largest in the world) opened a branch in Petrograd in early 1917, as did the City Bank of New

York. Though their expectations were to be disappointed a year later, when the Bolsheviks nationalised all banks in Russia and repudiated the country’s foreign debt, the mood in the spring of 1917 was one of guarded optimism. Russian government bonds were still in demand internationally.

The “July Days”

What changed all this was Lenin’s journey on the “sealed train” from Switzerland to Russia in early April. By then Stalin had arrived in the capital from Achinsk in Siberia, and Trotsky was on his way from New York. The vultures were gathering. But at this stage the death of the Russian state was only a dream in the minds of the most obsessional Bolsheviks. The party had fewer

than 20,000 members, and it was opposed in its most violent plans by both the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. Between them, they commanded the allegiance of hundreds of thousands, and the general support of the mass of the Russian peasantry.

Bolshevik sympathisers were concentrated in the army and in the factories. But the army was dying on its feet, and many of the factories were closed due to strikes, lockouts, the debilitation of the workers due to hunger, disease and the general disruptions to the war economy caused by Tsarist over-mobilisation.

Sensing the mood of exhaustion at the centre, Lenin made a wild appeal on his arrival for an immediate insurrection. It evoked an unenthusiastic response. Anti-Bolsheviks overwhelmed the Bolsheviks. However, by July the mood had started to shift. Trotsky was in town, and Lenin had found his feet. Stalin was running *Pravda*. Not only that, the Provisional Government was in crisis, mainly due to disagreement on whether, and how, to continue fighting the Germans, a policy which was unpopular almost everywhere except in London, Paris and, since April, Washington.

In the first week of July (old style), there were resignations from the Provi-

sional Government and a spontaneous outbreak of public demonstrations, the most serious yet. Half a million soldiers, sailors and workers poured into the streets of Petrograd (with other demonstrations in major provincial cities) demanding: "All Power to the Soviets".

Once again, troops loyal to the government managed to regain control of the situation, at a cost of 700 casualties. This was the last time that was to happen. Prince Lvov resigned and was replaced by Alexander Kerensky, a socialist.

Kerensky was more in sympathy with the rapidly changing times than his predecessor, but still not quite close enough to hold the ring between all the chaotic forces seething around him. Supported by both Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, he took almost dictatorial power, ending any influence the Soviets had over the government.

Lenin was forced into exile, and the rest of the Bolshevik leadership had to go into hiding too. But they did not stop agitating. The situation in the capital was now polarised beyond hope of compromise.

After "July"

Despite the government's apparent victory, indiscipline in both the army and the factories continued to increase. Eventually, in August, Kerensky had to ask General Lavr Kornilov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, to intervene and send forces to restore order in the capital. Exceeding his authority, Kornilov set off in person and attempted to mount a putsch against a government in which neither he nor, increasingly, the population at large had any confidence.

Only the action of railway workers, who refused to allow his troops to move towards the capital, saved the day. But the result was disastrous. Kerensky became an actual dictator, ruling through a five-man "directory". At the same time, the White movement was born. No-one was strong enough to master the situation.

The Bolshevik agitation for bread, peace and land became increasingly attractive to the population at large. The situation was slipping out of control. Kerensky could have had Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin all arrested. Any one of those three would probably have done so in his position, and most likely have had them executed soon afterwards. But Kerensky, as he admitted in later life, was not quite ruthless enough to have acted so directly against the ideals for which he and so many others had made the revolution in the first place.

The indirect result was the October

coup d'état and the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks in January. The idea of a democratic constitution was dead, as was any hope of establishing the rule of law. Violence was

to be the main tool of control for a long time to come. That will be the subject of an article in the next FORUM.

Ian Mitchell

Looking back in optimism: extracts from Arthur Ransome's "letter to America", written in May 1918

"I send this pamphlet to America, because America supported the French Revolution, when England condemned it, and because now also America seems to me to look towards Russia with better will to understand, with less suspicion, without the easy cynicism that prepares the disaster at which it is afterwards ready to smile. Not that I think all this is due to some special virtue in America. I have no doubt that it is due to geographical and economic conditions. America is further from this bloody cockpit of Europe, for one thing. For another, even rich Americans, dependent for their full pockets on the continuance of the present capitalist system, can wholeheartedly admire the story of the Bolshevik adventure, and even wish for its success, without fearing any serious damage to the edifice in which they live, on which they feed, like parasites on cheese...

"From the point of view of the Russian Revolution, England seems to be a vast nightmare of blind folly, separated from the continent, indeed from the world, by the sea, and beyond that by the trenches and deprived, by some fairy godmother who was not invited to her christening, of the imagination to realize what is happening beyond. Shouting in daily telegrams across the wires from Russia I feel I am shouting at a drunken man asleep in the road in front of a steam roller...

"I love the real England, but I hate, more than I hate anything on earth (except cowardice in looking at the truth) the intellectual sloth, the gross mental indolence that prevents the English from making an effort of imagination and realizing how shameful will be their position in history when the tale of this last year in the biography of democracy comes to be written... Shameful, foolish and tragic

beyond tears, for the toll will be paid in English blood...

"At least half our worst mistakes have been due to the underestimation of some person or force outside England... The English look across Europe and see huge things, monstrous figures, and, to save themselves, and from respect for other little lazy minds, they leap for the easiest tawdry explanation, and say, 'Ah, yes, bogies made in Germany with candles inside turnip heads!' Then, having found their miserable little atheistical explanation, they din it into everybody, so that other people shall make the same mistakes and they have company in folly, and so be excused.

"In the end it becomes difficult for even honest-minded sturdy folk in England to look those bogies squarely in their turnip faces and to see that they are not bogies at all, but the real article, giants, whose movements in the mist are of greater import for the future of the world than anything else that is happening in our day."



Arthur Ransome was the *Manchester Guardian's* "man in Petrograd" at the time. He met his future wife, Evgeniya Shelepina (who was Trotsky's secretary), in the queue for potatoes at the Smolny. Later, they moved to the Lake District, where Ransome forgot politics and wrote *Swallows and Amazons*.

Pushkin House Russian Book Prize

The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russia, 1757-1888, Rosalind P. Blakesley, Yale University Press

When we launched the annual Pushkin House Russian non-fiction book prize five years ago, the world—and the state of Anglo-Russian relations—was very different. Changes elsewhere have made its aim more pertinent today than ever, and well reflected in the latest winner.

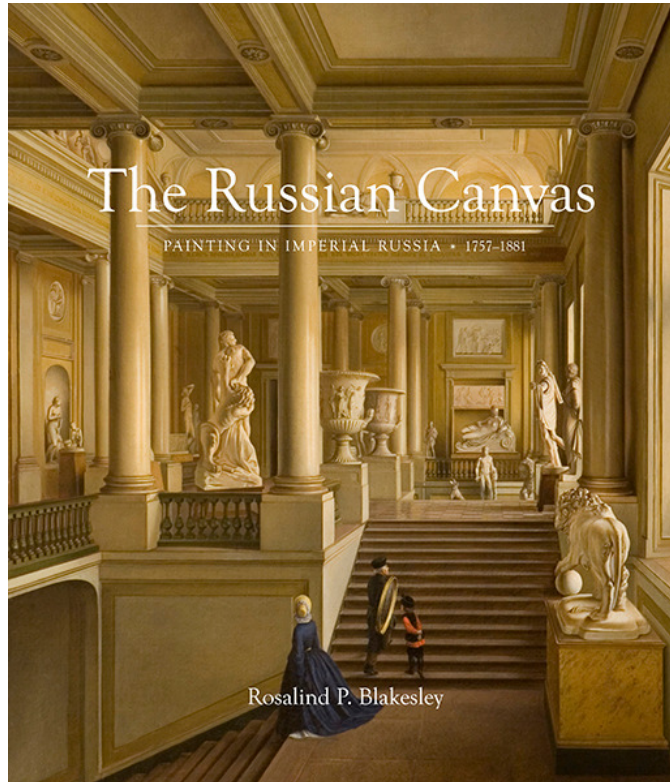
Like Pushkin House itself, founded more than half a century ago, the prize seeks to showcase, reward and even incentivise intelligent research and writing in English about the Russian-speaking world. It also seeks to encourage a mutual exchange of ideas. It does so through events at the House and by promotion online, media coverage, and the award of the Prize itself at a high-profile dinner.

Each of the winners and shortlisted entries—picked by five distinguished and fiercely independent jurors who change every year—has fulfilled that goal. The books go beyond the headlines, the received wisdom and the simplistic stereotypes to explore the underlying richness and diversity of Russia.

This year's award went to the art historian, curator and academic Rosalind Blakesley for *The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russia, 1757-1881*. This is a beautifully illustrated, accessibly written and deeply researched book which throws a spotlight on a neglected period in art history.

It is a worthy addition to a list of winners: Douglas Smith for *Former People: the Final Days of the Russian Aristocracy*; Catherine Merridale for *Red Fortress: The Secret Heart of Russia's History*; Serhii Plokhii for *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union*; and Dominic Lieven for *Towards the Flame*.

As Prof Simon Franklin, chair of the jury, put it: "Rosalind Blakesley's *The Russian Canvas* is a magnificent achievement. It weaves a wonderfully subtle and compelling story of the emergence of a national school of Russian painting. In its range, depth and accessi-



bility it has no parallel in any language. Beautifully produced, with over 250 illustrations, it will surely remain not only the authoritative scholarly account of its subject for many years, but also a much-browsed presence on the shelves of anybody interested in the history of Russian art and culture."

"Polly" Blakesley (as she is known) began studying Russian and Italian at Cambridge University before switching to art history. She was fascinated by the neglect of the period before the *avant garde*. She decided to track the rise of professional artists in Russia from the mid-eighteenth century, and to consider them in a pan-European framework.

"My exhibition of Russian portraits at the National Portrait Gallery in 2016, and the recent exhibition of Russian art at the Royal Academy, both massively beat the target visitor numbers that had been set, demonstrating the wide critical and popular interest in Russian art," she said. "The success of these shows will hopefully provide a really solid foundation for more exciting Russian projects in the future."

Shortlisted works have been written and published by authors in Germany, Poland, the US and elsewhere, but there

has been a special focus on seeking to encourage books written in Russian to help promote a two-way exchange of ideas. So, for the second year, the judges awarded an additional prize to the best work in translation: *Memories* by Teffi. That followed last year's remarkable *Stalin* biography by Oleg Khlevniuk.

The other strong contenders on the diverse shortlist this year—which spanned history, ballet, art, reportage and memoir—were Daniel Beer's *The House of the Dead*, Anne Garrel's *Putin Country*, Simon Morrison's *Bolshoi Confidential*, and Simon Sebag Montefiore's *The Romanovs*.

The good news is that there is no shortage of relevant, high quality non-fiction

books published each year. Leading figures have also been delighted to become judges, including this year Anne Applebaum, Petr Aven, Prof Simon Franklin, Prof Dominic Lieven and Charlotte Marsden. Our dedicated funders—now Douglas and Stephanie-Ellis Smith and the Polonsky Foundation—are also fundamental the prize's success.

Offers of support are always welcome as we look to expand the prize still further in the future.

Andrew Jack

More details on Pushkin House and the book prize, including interviews with all shortlisted and winning authors, are available at www.pushkinhouse.org.uk

An interview with Prof. Blakesley, in which she describes her book, can be seen on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1pzcVBHvRA>

Andrew Jack is chairman emeritus of Pushkin House, and head of the Pushkin House Russian book prize advisory committee. He is a journalist at the *Financial Times* and was Moscow bureau chief in 2002-04.

Book shorts....

The Round Table Movement and the Fall of the "Second" British Empire
Andrea Bosco
Cambridge Scholars Publishing

This fascinating book deals with themes far beyond Scottish-Russian relations and history, though its main theme is highly relevant to the current state of Russian relations with the West. The Round Table Movement was started in response to the Boer War by members of "Milner's Kindergarten". Its objective was the unification of the English-speaking world in opposition to the Germanic one. Professor Bosco's argument is that this was one of the basic causes of the First World War. The author characterises this dichotomy, as the British versus the Bismarckian way. Trump versus Putin is a distant reflection of the same idea. I could expand on that, but here is not the place...

Directly relevant to Russian history, however, is the part of the book devoted to one of the underlying causes of the First World War, namely the bias of Alfred Milner and his Kindergarten—who progressively came to occupy the commanding heights of British foreign policy formation—in favour of Russia when they turned British policy against Germany in the period after the Boer War.

It had become clear to many during that war that Britain needed Continental allies if it were to be able to counter the German desire for imperial expansion. Teutonic friendship with President Kruger, and the supply of Mauser rifles to the Boer commandos, threatened control of the Rand and with it much of the world's gold supply. Since the City of London was, with the Royal Navy, the lynch-pin of Empire, that concern was not misplaced. The issue was whether it was right—to paraphrase George Canning—to call up the Tsar to redress the balance against the Kaiser.

Milner's hatred of Germany—the word does not seem too strong—was such that he was happy to signal to Russia indirectly that it could undertake Balkan adventures without any interference from Britain. Professor Bosco does not mention it, but it is worth bearing in mind that the "colonial rivalry" which Britain used to such good effect in the run-up to WWI was partly invented by the British at a time when Germany was

far less interested.

An additional consideration was that British tolerance of Russian assertiveness in the Balkans was understood to be on condition that the Great Game was at an end and that Russian expansion would not be directed towards India. The consequence was the emboldening of Serbia against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The consequences of that are well known, from the murder of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in July 1914 to the destruction of the Russian Empire in October 1917.

A secondary theme in this book has a Scottish connection. That is the fascinating story of Philip Kerr, later Lord Lothian, and his role in all of this. Professor Bosco has clearly visited Edinburgh many times, as he is the author of several specialist studies using the Kerr/Lothian papers which are deposited in the National Library.

Kerr was one of the most enthusiastic members of Milner's Kindergarten and was later, as one of Lloyd George's private secretaries, a British representative at the Paris Peace conference. Soon Kerr came to regret bitterly the part he had played in writing the "war guilt" clauses into the Treaty. He felt that Germany had been unfairly, and unwisely, treated by the Allied powers in victory, and spent much time after trying to undo the damage this had done.

He also saw that the British Empire was no longer able to guarantee the peace of the world unilaterally, or even in co-operation with France. He realised that only in concert with the United States could the world's oceans be policed and trade protected. He repudiated Milner and became an enthusiast for what we now call the Atlantic Alliance. In the 1930s, he was a prominent "appeaser", ending up as British Ambassador in Washington from September 1939 until his untimely death in December 1940.

Professor Bosco notes that Beatrice Webb thought Milner would have been one of the greatest men in history if he had tempered his many qualities with "God and a wife". Lothian had no wife either, but he did have a God and that was what killed him. He died after refusing medication in obedience to the Christian Scientist beliefs he had adopted due to his friendship with Lady Astor.

Ian Mitchell

The Russian Empire 1450-1801
Nancy Shields Kollman
Oxford University Press

The veteran American historian of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Russia, Nancy Shields Kollman, has published a general survey of the development of the Russian Empire from its origins up to 1801. It is, as you would expect, a carefully researched and accurately written treatment of the subject. It is to be recommended for all who wish to know facts, and have them arranged in an instructive way.

But there is a problem: the book has no real theme, unlike her other books—especially *By Honour Bound*—which argue that early modern Russia was a complex and less autocratic society than was generally thought until quite recently. This book is, I presume, directed at undergraduates who simply want to know what happened and when. It is written without any zest for the subject. It is not a book that the intelligent lay reader will want to pass the time with.

For all its qualities of accuracy, balance and modernity—perhaps even *because* of those qualities—this is history written for those to whom the Russian past is a *job*. There is no joy in the writing, no sense of *feel* for the subject. It reads more like a bureaucratic report than a let-me-take-you-by-the-hand excursion into the exotic and fascinating past of a country that is not like ours (however much so many modern historians seem to think it should be).

I confess I cannot see the point in writing books like this one, except on a publish-or-perish basis, or for sale to university students who have to study or perish. It is noteworthy that the "Conclusion" is not that; it is just a summary. Overall, this book offers too much information and not enough insight. It illustrates what happens when academic publishing becomes a "target orientated" business. One sighs for the age when history was a vocation, not a career.

Professor Kollman notes in the preface that the research consisted mainly of massive reading interrupted by lively lunch-time discussions in the dining halls of Stanford University. Historians should work from sources, of course, but those sources should include the land and the people of the country they are writing about. History is a branch of the humanities; it is not a science.

Ian Mitchell

A Personal View

Brian Cox on TV: the Scotland-Russia connection

In April, BBC Scotland aired two hour-long documentaries entitled “Brian Cox’s Russia: Moscow” and ditto: St Petersburg. The theme was Scots who have had an impact on Russia. I would imagine most members of the Scotland-Russia Forum would wish to watch them as it is not often that the relationship between these two countries is explored in a lavish television production. Both films are well worth watching. They can presumably be found on the BBC iPlayer. I watched them on YouTube, before the production company, Hopscotch from Glasgow, had them taken down. I wrote asking why they did not want anyone to see them outside Britain and got no reply.

Everyone will have his or her own view of these films, and I do not propose to write a review. But one point raised by them seems worth commenting on, namely the confusion between “Russia” and “Moscow and St Petersburg”. You do not have to get very far outside Moscow—just a couple of miles in some places—to find yourself in a world where the televisual concept of “Russia” seems very far away.

I watched the films yesterday evening after having cycled out to the swimming pool at Planernaya from my home in Khimki. Behind the sports complex there, I free-wheeled for a while around the area behind the military hospital which adjoins it. Amongst the barking dogs and dilapidated motor-repair businesses (apparently), I saw a bearded, middle-aged Russian man trudging along with eyes downcast, carrying a grubby sack over his shoulder, Repin-style, into the hostel there.

For bleakness and the appearance of poverty, such places are exceeded only by the shipping containers in which so many of the Tadjik and other migrant workers live next to the construction sites where they are employed, usually on a semi-captive basis in that they have to surrender their passports to their employer, and are therefore liable for arrest

if caught off-site without their “dokumenty”.

After coming home but before dinner I had to edit a short text for a semi-governmental organisation which included a news paragraph announcing the fact that a business magazine, *Forbes*, has just calculated that Russia’s 200 richest people increased their collective wealth by \$100 billion over the last year due mainly to the strengthening of the rouble. The number of dollar billionaires in Russia went up from 77 to 96.

Russia is, by any standards, a country of contrasts, which is one of the reasons it is so fascinating. The contrast between wealth and poverty is only one of those, but it is relevant to the Brian Cox view since he holds himself out as a Dundee socialist, and the films are suffused with the “comradely” glow that vodka, ogurtsy (picked cucumbers) and black bread seem to stimulate in visiting “intelligenty”, especially those who normally live, as Mr Cox does, in a metropolitan centre like New York where comradeship is presumably “defitsitny”.

In my experience, Russians are no

more, or less, “comradely” than Scottish people, which is to say they have their sociable moments, often fuelled by drink, and they have their hard-headed side, usually informed by a cussed individualism that the Brian Coxes of this world so often admire in Russians but fail to see constituted the main enemy of real-life socialism in the USSR. Two of the Scots he so admires will serve to illustrate this point.

In the Moscow film, he devotes a long section to John Maclean, the Communist agitator of “Red Clydeside” fame who never actually went to Russia, but who admired Lenin to the point of obsession—though what impact he had on Russia was not made clear. (He featured on the cover of the previous issue of **The FORUM**.)

The other figure, who not only lived in Russia, but was born in St Petersburg,



was the remarkable Arthur Davidovich Macpherson. He was a wealthy timber merchant and stock-broker who was also a sports fanatic. He is today considered to have been the father of Russia football; he also organised the first international tennis tournament in Russia. In 1914, he became the first person ever to

be honoured by the Tsar for services to sport.

For his services to the Tsar he was arrested after the Revolution and thrown into a filthy jail where he died of typhus in 1919. His body was discovered only by accident since it was lying under 40 other corpses. At the end of the St Petersburg film, Comrade Cox drinks a toast to Macpherson amongst the litter of autumn leaves in the city's attractively untidy Lutheran cemetery. Slàinte mhath, tovarishsch!

John Maclean wrote admiringly of what he called "Celtic Communism", which he argued was an extension of clan consciousness. Arthur Macpherson died as a result of Russian Communism which was based on class consciousness.

Brian Cox brings the two countries together when he talks of the similarity between the Russian and the Celtic views of poetry. He may be right; I do not know enough about poetry to say. But I do know that not all Scots are Celts, just as not all Russians are, or ever were, Communists. Nonetheless, clan warfare was similar to communism in that it involved the endless spilling of blood.

Brian Cox's films are interesting as examples of the sentimentality of an outsider who admires the poetry but ignores the blood. I can highly recommend them, while at the same time saying I look forward to a more nuanced and less "metropolitan" view of this vast and varied country and its connection with the

smaller but equally varied country that also has St Andrew as its patron saint.

In particular, I would like an informed view of why so many Scots emigrated to Russia and did well here, when so few Russians emigrated to Scotland—especially as so many Russians profess such an extravagant love of Khailandz, zamki (castles), viski, Volter Skott and Nessi.

My impression is that Russians, like many others, prefer to admire Scotland from a distance. Is that another form of sentimentality: the image is wonderful but the reality quite another matter? Perhaps Hopscotch could find a Russian actor to make a film on that theme.

Ian Mitchell

Another Personal View

Brian Cox's history lesson: was Charles Cameron Scottish?

The Brian Cox programmes were not quite as bad as I had feared. They could have been sub-titled "an affectionate tribute", since Russia and Russians have clearly genuinely meant a lot to him in his life. But he is no analyst, let alone a historian.

The films begin with Cox standing on Palace Square in St Petersburg making the bald assertion that "It all started here." In the Eisenstein film, maybe. And what was "it", we are entitled to ask? The ruin of a great, if flawed, civilization? The start of a utopian dream? Or the beginning of a nightmare more costly in terms of human life than the Nazi-driven horrors 1939-45?

I gripped the arms of my chair at some glimpses into Cox's mindset. Did my old ears deceive me, or did he equate the Stalin show trials in the item about Fitzroy Maclean to the Nuremberg trials?

And why on earth did he think his Russian student actors in the late 1980's might find Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* "beyond them" when it deals precisely with the sort of witch-hunt their parents would have been all too familiar with?

A propos: Cox appeared to absolve Lenin of having instituted the reign of terror, putting the blame on Stalin for all that.

In the Brian Cox's Russia version of history, no one is held accountable, or to blame. Figures like John Maclean, the Communist anti-war agitator, was referred to by Cox and the Scottish writer, broadcaster and language activist, Billy Kay, in the same approving terms as the 19th-century Scottish portrait artist Christina Robertson, who featured in the St Petersburg film.

In that segment, we were given Cox the art historian. He criticised Robertson's treatment of her adult female subjects by saying they were "doll-like". That this might have been intentional was not discussed. Also, neither Cox nor his guide appeared to be aware that the parrot and the cherries in the portrait of two unnamed child subjects were a code for vanity and the passing of earthly delights. Perhaps she was too polite to mention that to him.

Elsewhere, Cox expressed his embarrassing (to his Russian interlocutors) admiration for Gorbachev, who is as un-

loved in Russia as he is esteemed in the West. We also had the predictable claim by Cox, during the segment about Robert Burns, that "it's the politics" that keeps people apart, the implication being that if left to ourselves we would all hold hands and sing Kumbaya or Katyusha.

Lastly, he made the conventional but unsubstantiated claim that Charles Cameron, Catherine the Great's favourite "Jacobite" architect, was a Scot. He was not; he was a London-born chancer who never set foot in Scotland but thought—quite correctly as it turned out—that to claim descent from Cameron of Lochiel would help him to get his foot in the door at Tsarskoe Selo.

Cameron must have been almost as good an actor as Brian Cox. And he, too, clearly liked Russia as he stayed for thirty-two years. Brian Cox has notched up two so far. Just give him another thirty and he might have moved beyond likeable Lenin, misused Maclean and Cameron the Londoner who understood the uses of "Scottishness".

Liz Roberts

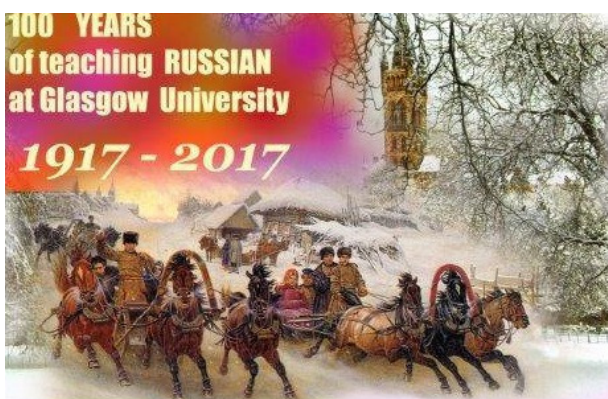
A hundred years of Russian at Glasgow University

A hundred years ago this autumn, revolution violently propelled Russia into a new era of its history. As the world reflects on its legacy, the University of Glasgow has cause to celebrate, for 2017 marks the centenary of its Russian department.

The 15th- 17th of September centenary celebrations were formally opened with speeches by the Principal Prof. Sir Anton Muscatelli, and the Consul General of Russia, Mr Andrey A Pritsepov. The Consul read an address from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr Sergey Lavrov, and both sides hailed the study of Russian at Glasgow as a key link in British-Russian friendship, scholarship and mutual understanding. Paying tribute to the “remarkable people” who devoted themselves to the development of Russian studies at Glasgow, Mr Pritsepov presented to the university a special collectors’ edition of the 16th century Illustrated Chronicles of the Russian Tsar, Ivan the Terrible. Prof. Muscatelli said that the university was “deeply honoured” with the gift, and went on to say that: “The celebrations mark the strong links between Russia and Scotland which are the foundation of Russian Studies at the University.”

Lyudmila Ulitskaya, one of Russia’s foremost Russian writers, was the first of many distinguished and prestigious speakers addressing the commemorative academic conference, “100 years of Russian Studies at the University of Glasgow- Teaching, Research, Memory.” Her lecture, entitled “From the Phenomenon of the “Serf-Artist” to Russian Avant-Garde: Interrelation between Power and the Artist in Russia” established an eloquent and thought provoking narrative linking their common status as the “marginals” of Russian society, their shared utopian ideals, and their vulnerability to manipulation for political ends. In taking questions, Ulitskaya talked about modern parallels, and the difficulties facing contemporary radical Russian artists.

Over the conference weekend, the audience listened to many interesting and illuminating talks on subjects ranging from Russian choral music (Russkaya



Capella’s Dr Stuart Campbell), to the changing nature of the Cyrillic alphabet (Dr Shamil Khairov), and most things in between. Other highlights included Tania Konn Roberts’ meticulous and fascinating research on the life of Hugh George Brennan, the University’s first lecturer in Russian studies, and Professor Dmitry Nikolaev of Tver State University (where Glasgow undergraduates spend their year abroad) presenting Dr Margaret Tejerizo a stunning goldwork embroidery.

The celebrations also featured several high profile events, including a formal reception in the Glasgow City Chambers, a chance to view selected highlights from Glasgow University Library’s renowned Slavonic collection, a show at the famous Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre, and a closing concert of Russian rock by the Glasgow based band Ignis.

Naturally, the weekend was an opportunity to share memories and anecdotes, and discuss the enduring friendship between Glasgow and Russia. Professor Tony Cross spoke of the enormous contribution of Professor Peter Henry in his time at Glasgow, and his founding role at the *Scottish Slavonic Review* (now known as *Slavonica*), whilst Professor Michael Kirkwood spoke entertainingly of his career at Glasgow. The writer Eugene Zamiatin’s relationship with Glasgow was discussed by Dr Margaret Tejerizo and the mysterious role of Alexander Werth was particularly interesting.

However, many chose to look forward, to the next 100 years of Russian at Glasgow. Dr John Dunn’s keynote speech on the ideal Russian curriculum, and the importance of producing well informed and culturally aware Russian

graduates was very well received, as was Martin De-whirst’s insights into the future of Russia and Russian studies on the world stage.

SRF’s Jenny Carr gave a somewhat sobering account of challenges facing the teaching of Russian in Scottish schools. In addition, Jenny also hosted a “Look East” schools workshop in tandem with Glasgow’s celebrations, which featured talks about Polish, Hungarian and

Czech as well as Russian. This was well attended by teachers from across Glasgow, and hopefully their enthusiasm is a sign of optimism.

The conference ended with a rousing final lecture by the Milan based translator, academic and literary agent Elena Koustioukovitch. Her address, entitled “Russian Studies as a Profession, Russian Studies as a Social Commitment,” addressed the importance (both historical and contemporary) of rigorous academic and literary independence, particularly in the current political situation. She spoke passionately of the bravery and struggles of Russian artists, journalists and academics and urged her audience to continue their work without deference to political pressure.

Special thanks must be given to Margaret Tejerizo, Andrea Gullotta and Shamil Khairov, whose dedication and hard work was key to the centenary’s success. Dr. Gullotta’s own research was a remarkable insight into the lives and literature of the Gulag, and his forthcoming book on the subject is highly anticipated. An extremely interesting virtual exhibition on the lives of the Gulag inmates, curated by Dr Gullotta, can be found on the Hunterian Gallery website.

Katrina Bell
Glasgow University student



Book shorts

Russia in Revolution: an Empire in Crisis, 1890-1928

S.A. Smith

Oxford University Press

Professor Stephen Smith has written what I would suggest is the most comprehensive yet balanced single volume account (455pp.) that has yet been published of what might be called the “long Revolution”. His period covers the last years of Alexander III’s reign, all of Nicholas II’s and Lenin’s and the years in which Stalin established his control over the Communist Party and the newly-formed USSR.

As he notes in the Introduction, his aim is to cater for “readers coming new to the subject”. Presumably OUP thought that many such readers might

have their curiosity aroused by the centenary of the Revolution. However, the surprising fact is that there has been hardly any celebration of 1917 in Russia, and little attention paid to it outside, as far as I can see. Still, the book has been written and it ought to stand for many years as the most useful way in to the subject.

Unfortunately, I must add to that comment the related fact that this is one of the most uninspiring texts about the revolution I have come across. It seems to me that the two aspects are related. If you want to know the facts: they are all here and judiciously deployed; if you want to understand the spirit of the thing, you need to look elsewhere.

Students and those who treat Russian history as a job will want to use this book, but general readers who wish to be enlightened, as opposed to informed, will be better off with a multitude of oth-

er titles, from Robert Bruce Lockhart’s stylish *Memoirs of a British Agent*, through George Katkov’s brilliantly clear and considered *Russia 1917: the February Revolution*, to John Reed’s smouldering masterpiece, which has misled Russophiles for nearly a century, *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

Of course, none of these books has the time-span, the balance or the comprehensiveness that Prof. Smith’s first-rate доклад (report) does. It is out of date insofar as it displays an essentially bureaucratic approach to history. That was the Soviet way. Russia has moved on, so that historians there rarely expect commercial success. In Britain, even if academic writers with tenure disdain the approach of the “telly dons”, their publishers are endlessly impatient to make more money.

Ian Mitchell

Weird Events. A personal view

In “SRF News” (p. 3) I have briefly outlined some of our attempts this year to inform and interest a wide spectrum of the public in the Russian language and aspects of Russian history, art and politics. Meanwhile, there were some weird events clouding, in my opinion, Russian-Scottish understanding.

Principally, but not exclusively, these are:

- The Russian government’s failure to support the promotion of its language and culture, as evidenced at Language Show Scotland in March, and other such events, where Russian was the only language not represented by a national organisation.
- The Scottish partner of Russkiy Mir ran a recent discussion of Russian propaganda, criticising another prominent organ of Russian “soft power”, Sputnik.

The SRF has twice attempted to promote Russian at the major language show in Scotland since it first came to Glasgow last year. In 2016 we were promised a donation from Rossotrudnichestvo but it never materialised. Meanwhile the Edinburgh University Russkiy Mir Centre (mission: “to promote Russian language and literature around the world”, Putin, 2007) refused to support us at all while the other two Russian departments of Scottish universities both found students and staff keen to volunteer.

In 2017 we sought no help but, as before, ran a small stand paid for out of our own funds (see also p. 3). All around us were stands run by nationally funded cultural organisations large and small, from the Confucius Institute to the Edinburgh Polish Consulate—even Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Why is Russia different?

My second “weird event” was “Loaded Words”, a discussion of Russian propaganda run by the Edinburgh University Dashkova Centre in the Scottish Parliament on 9 May. There was no mention of the organiser’s ambiguous position as one of only two remaining UK Russian Centres sponsored by Russkiy Mir, one of Russia’s main government-organised non

-governmental organisations (GONGOs) for promoting its foreign policy abroad. The other centre is at Durham University. Two former Russkiy Mir Centres (at Oxford University and London’s Pushkin House) have closed down recently, but Edinburgh shows no sign of doing so. The Dashkova Centre claims to be academically and politically independent, citing grant money from other sources, and events like “Loaded Words” might seem to bear that out—but for the lack of transparency on their links with Russkiy Mir. The amount of funding is not visible in the university’s accounts, and there is little information about the partnership on the Centre’s website.

If there is no transparency, how do we know whether or not the University of Edinburgh is influenced by Russkiy Mir? Especially when we know that in 2012 they awarded a prestigious honorary doctorate to Vyacheslav Nikonov, leader and chief ideologue of Russkiy Mir.

The discussion in May was sponsored by the current Cross-Party Group on Russia at Holyrood. It is unfortunate that we have not yet seen a report on the meeting, as the Parliamentary regulations stipulate. Why not? The only report was in *The Herald* (11 May), citing discussion of Sputnik’s switch from support for Scottish independence to support for Brexit as evidence of its mission to confuse.

On the evidence, Sputnik is not alone in being confusing; the CPG and the Dashkova have done a pretty good job too. The loser in all this is of course the general public. A proper report of the discussion by the undoubtedly expert panel would be of great interest to those (like me) who were unable to attend.

Is it naive to wish that the Russian authorities and their proxies would get on with doing what they say they are interested in, namely promoting long understanding of Russia? Then Russkiy Mir could compete with the Institut Français, and Sputnik would inform us of events in Russia—and life would be simpler, and more interesting.

Note: this is my personal view and not the view of the SRF. If members and other readers would like to send comments on the issues raised please don’t hesitate to do so.

Jenny Carr

Sixth Moffat Russian Conference

“The Russian Phoenix: art and literature in the era of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions”

Art and literature in Russia 1905-1917 can hardly be considered in isolation from the era. Social unrest, crackdowns alternating with compromise—nothing seemed to be able to prevent the eventual collapse of a regime and, it could justly be claimed, a whole civilisation.

At our 6th Moffat Russian Conference (MRC), to be held at the Moffat House Hotel on 20-22 October 2017, historians, including military historian Mungo Melvin, author of *Sevastopol's Wars*, and Dmitri Bak, Director of the State Museum of Literature, will expertly set the scene. The conference will then turn to the artists and writers active during this tumultuous period. We will not pass over in silence the grisly fate not only of most of the gifted writers and artists involved, but also of their audiences and patrons—see Douglas Smith's *Former People*.

In 1917, literate, well-educated, liberal sympathisers with the need for reform were soon proclaimed enemies of the people. Most were shot, sent to the gulag or exiled.

Those eager, mostly young, forerunners of “Momentum” didn't know what was going to hit them—literally. Country houses were burned down, but not before the mob had emptied the cellar. Vandalism and drunkenness on an epic scale were the order of the day, followed by the crackdown on creativity. These were the unlooked-for consequences of those stunning posters calling for the overthrow of everything. The sanitised “Revolution” exhibition at London's Royal Academy (ended April 17) did not try to record what horribly destructive forces these bright, clever images unleashed. The baby was well and truly thrown out with the bathwater.

At our conference, we will be talking and learning more about the preternaturally talented poet and artist, Vladimir Mayakovsky. Born in 1893, he died at home in disputed circumstances from a gunshot wound or wounds in April 1930.

He was honoured after his death by Stalin, possibly because he, like Stalin, was Georgian, at least in the sense that he was born in Kutaisi. In fact, Mayakovsky was Cossack on his father's side and Ukrainian on his mother's. He spoke Georgian at school. His funeral attracted crowds rivalled only by those for Lenin and Stalin himself. Did he shoot himself, or was he shot? The jury is still out. (Though the Russian biographical writer, Arkady Vaksberg, does not think he was murdered.)

Mayakovsky's poetry and experimental film-making, satirical theatre, propaganda posters and slogans were so

not match Mayakovsky's gun—the Briks were sent abroad again.

Another way of dealing with the aftermath of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia is to take the history into the realms of magic realism and satire, as does Vladimir Sharov, one of our eagerly-anticipated contemporary novelist guests at MRC 2017. In his 1993 novel *Before and During*, the narrator is based, as befits the novel's larger theme, in a mental hospital, where he is being treated for amnesia. Excess is piled on excess in the best, shocking tradition of Swift. Sharov occasionally runs out of steam, but at its best his narrative is an imaginative tour de force.

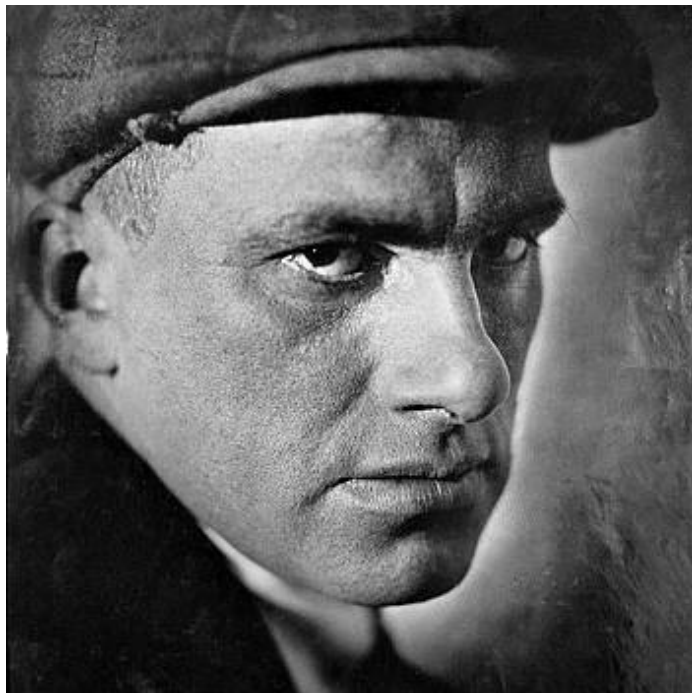
He imagines a Madame de Stael, the epitome of the romantic era of the French Revolution and Napoleon, reincarnated repeatedly and copulating with innumerable lovers, a frenzied progress that emulates the madness of the revolution and which culminates in her giving birth to Joseph Stalin whom in due course she makes her lover. You have been warned!

Moffat Russian Conferences, this year 20-22 October, take place in historic Moffat House, built 1761-2 to a design by John Adam for the Earl of Linlithgow. He needed to be in Moffat as Trustee in lunacy for his cousin, the locally-based Earl of Annandale.

Conference sessions take place in an elegant function room seating 100. All participation is simultaneously translated from Russian to English or vice versa, as needed. Sessions are chaired by experts and discussants are often seated on the platform which makes for lively debate. Audience participation is encouraged, and timing is flexible within limits for meal times and coffee breaks.

For further information see: www.moffatbookevents.co.uk, or mail: info@moffatrussianconferences.com

Liz Roberts



effective, they did him out of a job. There is no room for the awkward squad in a totalitarian state. Mayakovsky would have mellowed with age, one thinks. Was it really all about shouting and wearing garish clothes, making a splash, cutting a dash? Or was it really, as friends said after his death, about his need to love and be loved?

Mayakovsky's dark muse, Lily Brik, seems to have schemed to prevent him from joining Tatyana Yakovleva, the woman he had fallen in love with in Paris. Mayakovsky was entrapped in a system partly, as he must have known, of his own making. Whether he shot himself, or was shot—two shots were heard by neighbours, a bullet was found that did

The view from Moscow City

For the majority of people in the western world Russia, having briefly dallied with democracy during the 1990s, has reverted to its familiar role as the world's villain. It is a role many are quite comfortable with, especially those who grew up in the Cold War and who cheered Connery's Scottish-accented James Bond defeating the bad Russians—or a villain with a bad russki accent was usually enough—to save the world. And here we are again today. Ever since the surprising US presidential election result, Russia has again resumed the villain's role.

But, are the people in the Kremlin, aka Putin's cronies, really preoccupied with destroying America and the West? Is that what they spend their day planning and thinking about? I will stop short of saying that is total nonsense, but the actual evidence points to much more mundane preoccupations such as those which preoccupy most governments in the world; how to improve the economy and stay popular.

Given the limited space available, let me paint the big picture in terms of Putin's Russia.

When Vladimir Putin first assumed the presidency on New Year's Day 2000, he inherited a country in which the majority of people were poor and had little hope for the future. It was a country that was rife with organised crime and where the so-called oligarchs had taken advantage of a weak government to acquire the major state assets very cheaply. Russia back then was also irrelevant on the global stage.

Putin certainly got lucky with oil wealth as, almost from the day he became leader, Russian oil production and the export price of crude started to rise. During Putin's first two terms the country earned around \$2 trillion from exporting hydrocarbons, and that allowed for a complete transformation of the economy and people's lifestyles. But it was not just the rising oil wealth; a different leader might have wasted that money and built a bigger and scarier North Korea. Putin changed the country and dealt with, for example, criminal gangs while restoring law and order to Russian cities and villages. He gave people hope and pride in their country

and that, as much as anything else, is why his approval rating is so high today.

The fact that the economy was almost in auto-drive in that period also meant he could focus much more on geopolitics. He could address the grievance about the way the country was treated by the Western powers since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Moscow thought it had a deal that would

recognise Russia's areas of legitimate interest and, especially, in the regions near its borders. The bombing of Belgrade and the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders put paid to that illusion. Hence Putin's preoccupation with what he sees as the renegeing of the deal, something which he spelled out in great detail at the Munich Security Council meeting in February 2007. The fact that this speech was largely ignored in the west only served to prove his point.

But today the priorities inside the Kremlin have changed. The geopolitical objectives have, arguably, been achieved. But the credits from having transformed the economy and people's lifestyles are starting to run out. If Putin is to see out his next, and final, term as president with the popularity he has enjoyed and clearly craves, he has to get the economy back on track towards 3-5 percent annual growth. His election slogan could well be that which allowed Bill Clinton defeat George Bush Snr in 1993. His "It's the Economy Stupid" mantra was a more powerful message to voters than Bush senior's recent Gulf War success.

Vladimir Putin has arguably stayed



too long as president; he could have retired triumphant in May 2008. Today he is almost stuck with the job as, to preserve the legacy he wants, he will have to change the economy once more over the next six years. Geopolitics is more of a distraction these days, but a distraction at least partly of the Kremlin's own making. It would be foolish to try and predict what happens in that arena next, but the Kremlin's actions and responses will have to be much more tempered because of the economic impact. That's different from what we had before.

Having given a general overview of my position on Russia generally, I will in future columns discuss the economy and its wider implications for Russian-Western relations in more detail.

Chris Weafer

Chris Weafer is the founder and senior partner of Macro-Advisory, Moscow's premier financial consultancy firm.

He can be contacted through www.macro-advisory.com

Tasting the forest

Taste the forest, the green fields, and the spring flowers. Summer in Russia is lush and abundant. After a nine-month period of grey and cold we gear up for three months of long anticipated sunshine, heat, and of course a cornucopia of gifts from our gardens.

Yet, this year summer isn't knocking on our doors. Instead of tasting the rainbow we've got Junember. Snow, rain, chill, winds and storms. A lot of people who have dachas are nervous their gardens won't produce any crops. But thankfully the first edible plants broke through the soil and have appeared at the local markets. They are ramsons, or wild garlic, sorrel, stinging nettles, juicy green onions and chives. Together with a prominent Moscow chef, Andrey Ryvkin, I will share some amazingly delicious recipes using some of these green delights.

As a Muscovite, despite having grown up and spent a lot of time in the US, I'm quite in tune with my childhood memories of the Russian countryside, spending summers at my dacha, digging in the dirt, picking fruits and berries which went straight from the

"To put it bluntly, the primary goal back then was not to starve to death. Basically, during Soviet times people's connection to nature, and through nature a connection to food gathering, was destroyed."

bush into my mouth. Forget the fashionable farm-to-table idea, it was farm-to-mouth. With my friends, we'd crawl into the greenhouse, which smelled like sweet pine, and bite into the succulent tomatoes hanging right there on the vine. Pulling carrots was a special game: who'd pick the largest and sweetest carrot? Foraging in the forest for seasonal treasures with my grandfather was a whole other universe.

As a child I was scared going into the dark unmanicured woods. What if a monster is hiding among those pines? But fear was quickly replaced by a feeling of excitement. I'd turn into a gambler, looking for mushrooms like porcini, girolles (chanterelles), honey mushrooms and *trompette de la morte*. You name it, my grandfather knew it. He even picked some species of the fly ag-

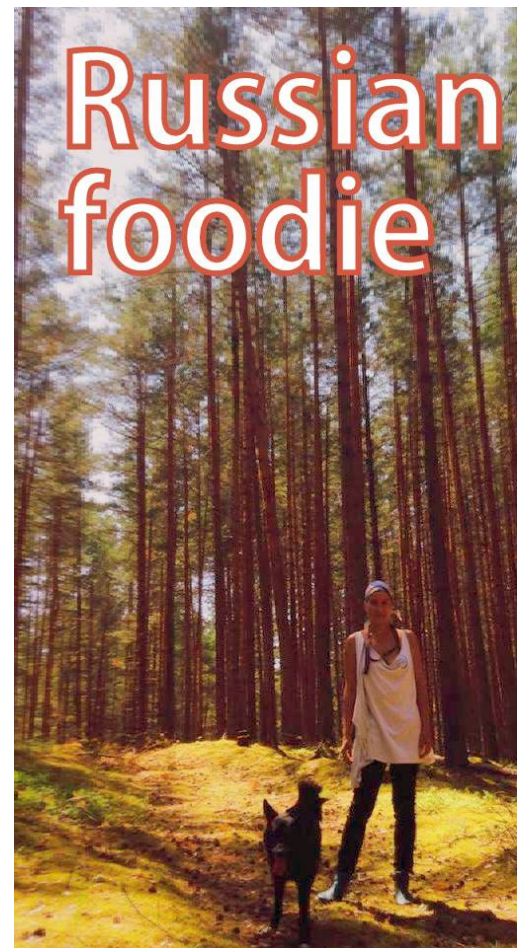
aric that is highly prized, uber-expensive and extremely delicious and rare. He was a master and he passed on those skills and secrets to me.

Now that I'm back I wanted to see if things had changed, if people still are connected to nature as we were in my family, and whether the globalized food trend had swallowed the capital. Having returned to my dacha I had bitter-sweet feelings seeing that some people are growing a lawn instead of berries and veggies, presumably thinking they are more European that way. But many still grow their own food, simply because they are dependent on it.

Andrey Ryvkin, a Moscow-based chef with an academic approach to food, is also a true "urban entrepreneur". He was one of the first people to introduce the notion of a farm-to-table bistro, quick delicious meals using seasonal local ingredients, for the insatiable and gluttonous Muscovite elite.

Andrey says Russia is very slowly rebuilding its culinary food culture. "Our principal difference from, say, Scotland or England is that our connection with nature has been lost. The tradition of foraging from the forests or fields, or getting food from the local farmers, doesn't exist on the same level as it did before. This is mainly because our history in the twentieth century was very different from that in the western world. To put it bluntly, the primary goal back then was not to starve to death. Basically, during Soviet times people's connection to nature, and through nature a connection to food gathering, was destroyed. We don't know what to cook, how to cook, and the worst part is that the class of people that grew produce on a very small local level is now practically nonexistent. Of course, there are some enthusiasts who are doing it, but it is nothing when we compare the situation nationwide. So, our main goal is to re-establish these connections."

Andrey has been at the forefront of putting these building blocks into the foundation of a new culture of food in Russia. He says that small steps are being taken to change the situation. For example, recently he has built a greenhouse together with



farmers of Nikola Lenivets, a large area in the Kaluga region taken over by architects and artists over twenty years ago. But Andrey says that, good idea though it may be, it's more of a promotional trick, because it doesn't sustain his bistro. I must agree with the chef: local farming is a blurry story in Russia.

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Recently I've gone to one of my favorite gourmet shopping centers in the city. Danilovsky farmers' market is bursting with food from all over Russia and the CIS. But the produce that is sold in this almost luxurious space, owned by the international restaurant group, Ginza Project, is mainly selected from big companies. So it is not exactly farm-to-table. But it is still a small step in the right direction. There are some local producers there as well as an array of small eateries that support the locavore culture.





Newly renovated, this posh space has opened up over a dozen food stands, where creative contemporary chefs offer everything from a quick bite to a full-blown meal. Most of them try to use the ingredients that are sold right there at the market: first tomatoes and greens, freshly baked bread, oysters, Far Eastern shrimps, locally-raised steaks, homemade pies and Kamchatka crab.

As a foodie I'm hardly surprised these days, but my attention was caught by a very green soup offered at Andrey's food stand (that was what inspired me to meet with him for this interview). I must say, the flavors were so fresh and unusual, I was smitten. Turned out it was made from ramsons and stinging nettles. When I met with Andrey, I of course picked his brain and got some inspiration for my own creations using these first spring greens. I decided to focus on sorrel and ramsons.

There are endless varieties of meals one can create using those two versatile plants. Ramsons are wild garlic plants that in Russia are called "cheremsha" (черемша). Sweet, garlicky, mild in flavor, they transform spring meals. Unfortunately their season is short, but in Russia people have learnt to grow them, and pickling them is a popular way to preserve the plant for the winter.

One of the best ways to prepare them is to cook the whole plant over a fire, on a grill, or simply in your oven drizzled with olive oil. Once the ramsons have wilted and started to turn color, take them off the heat, put them on a serving dish and pour a mixture of balsamic vinegar, honey and olive oil over the greens. They can be eaten immediately, or the whole thing can be put in a jar, making sure the dressing covers the ramsons. This will preserve them for up to a month, or even longer. Preserving will also flavor the dressing a bit and will make a wonderful appetizer when guests suddenly show up at your door.

Now, I'm going to share a recipe that my guests and I have fallen in love with. A true gem. *Ramson soup with chechil cheese*. (see box right and picture above)

Another wonderful thing you can do with ramsons and sorrel is to make pes-

to. There are endless combinations of how you can go about doing this sauce. But there isn't a wrong one. Take wild garlic, sorrel, which in Russia we call "shavel" (шавель), olive oil, pine nuts, and salt. Either mash them with mortar and pestle or put them through a food processor. You can add a few leaves of basil if you are missing the flavor, but the sorrel will add an astringent touch reminiscent of spring fields.

Ramsons used instead of garlic will add a mild sweetness and a taste of the forest. I serve it over locally made burrata, bought in a nearby shop for only 150 roubles, and Azerbaijan tomatoes, and garnished with greens and mustard flowers grown on my window sill—flavorful and so fresh.

When preparing these or any other spring dishes, don't forget about new potatoes. Just wash them and do whatever your heart desires. Boil, grill, bake, fry. I boil mine, then fry them up and add Far Eastern shrimps. What a treat! Add some ramsons to that and it will take the dish to a new level.

Enjoy the spring delights. I'm off to my dacha to plant some seedlings, check out what the forest has to offer at this time of year and, of course, feed our locavore mosquitos.

Nastya Fedorova

Ramson soup with chechil cheese

For this you will need:

- Beef or chicken stock
- Tbsp butter (more makes it delicious)
- Two large bunches of ramsons
- Salt
- Pepper
- Chechil cheese or any other string cheese, like smoked or plain mozzarella

For this you will need a really good stock. I made a hearty one from two pounds of beef and loads of celery, garlic, carrots, and onions. I simmered a large loaded pot for the whole day, sometimes adding water if it was reducing too much. After I strained the stock I simmered it again for several hours, this time throwing in a bunch of ramsons in. The longer you simmer it, the more flavor you'll get.

Take out the greens. Put butter in a sauteing pan over medium heat and add the other bunch of ramsons. Let them bubble and wilt in the butter. Then add your stock to the pan (use a larger pan, so you can fit about five to six ladles of liquid in it). Reduce it for about ten to fifteen minutes, depending on how much liquid you have in there. Purée the mixture. You can strain it, but I left mine as it is, loving the tiny bits of ramsons in it.

The soup won't be thick, rather a silky thin texture with loads of flavor. Throw in some cheese. I used Armenian brine string cheese called chechil, but you can replace that with smoked mozzarella or any string cheese. You can add a quarter to half a teaspoon of pesto. But the soup is so mouthwatering, it is just as good without it.



The Spirit of Russia Tartan

From the Middle Ages multitudes of Scots have flocked to Russia, the largest country history has known, and some of them became the most famous names of the Scottish Diaspora. Literally hundreds of Scots became distinguished in the history, industrial development and culture of Russia. Between 1650 and 1700 alone there were fifteen Generals in the Russian army, two of whom rose to become Field Marshals. And it was a Fifer, Admiral Samuel Greig, who reformed Russia's Baltic Fleet and became known as the father of the modern Russian Navy.

An envious English observer noted in 1805 that, 'to come from the north side of the Tweed is the best recommendation a man can bring to St. Petersburg'. A substantial Scottish element also lived in Moscow, Kronshadt, Archangel and Riga, and had missions in the Crimea, Astrakhan, Orenburg and Seleginsk.

A deep affinity seems to exist between Scots and Russians in terms of national character: what one writer described as 'the fiery imagination, incisive intellect, tough stoicism and gentle affection' applies equally to the nature of Scots and Russians. This may be understandable since both peoples live in a northern environment with a difficult climate, both have exerted a tremendous influence over large areas of the globe, and both societies have a strong sense of kinship. Experts agree that few nations make better warriors than the Scots and Russians. Perhaps this closeness of character can account for the tremendous popularity of Ossian, Burns, Scott and Stevenson in Russia, and explain why Scots settled there in such great numbers and felt so much at home.

The colours of the Spirit of Russia tartan are taken from the white, blue and red of the flag of the Russian Federation.

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