



Scotland Russia

No. 33 Autumn 2015

REVIEW

Foraging for mushrooms in Tomsk

How to Organise a Demo in Moscow
A Russian chapel in a Scottish Castle
Learning to Make Bread in Russia
Memories of Alexander Men
Autumn Books
Baba Yaga

Scotland *The Bread*

<http://www.buzzbnk.org/ScotlandTheBread>



About the project

With the help of farming and academic partners, we've begun work to develop more nutrient-dense and digestible grains to improve Scotland's bread. Our first crop of heritage Scottish wheats showed some interesting mineral and trace element concentrations. Although crop 2014 hasn't yet been tested due to lack of funds, we've got plots growing on three organic farms again this year and, all being well, will have enough grain to begin making bread on a modest scale.

A key feature of *Scotland The Bread* is that research and practice go hand in hand. As we define and develop better grains, we will put them in people's hands – as seed or as flour – and spread the skills required to enable communities to nourish themselves. Feedback from growers, bakers and eaters is important in making this a genuinely participatory research project that helps to build food sovereignty in this part of the world.

So we have a **two-stage plan**:

STAGE 1

On June 17th we went live with our crowdfunding bid to raise £6,000 to kick start *Scotland The Bread*. To help local communities bring better bread within everyone's reach, we're supporting six groups to grow their own healthy loaves, from the soil to the slice. We'll do this by

- providing seed from three Scottish heritage wheat varieties we've identified that look promising and supporting each group through a year of growing, milling and baking.
- providing small-scale portable equipment to sow and then to thresh, clean and mill the home-grown grains.

We will also host a Knowledge Exchange for experts, farmers, scientists, public health nutritionists and community growers, to compare notes, share grains and steer future research.

When we reach £6,000, the A Team Challenge* will match it with a £6,000 loan to *Scotland The Bread*, so we'll be able to do twice as much with every pound pledged.

STAGE 2

Once we've raised these starter funds, we'll be in a position to launch *Scotland The Bread* as a **Community Benefit Society** whose non-profit status reflects its complete commitment to the public good. We very much hope that you'll become supporters or active members and help us raise the larger funds required to make a real difference.

How you can help

This is the link to the Buzzbnk page where money can be pledged to *Scotland The Bread* (with some tasty rewards).

<http://www.buzzbnk.org/ScotlandTheBread>

Please share the link as widely as possible. We'll be sending out a newsletter soon and we'll be tweeting and so on under various headings over the next few weeks. I hope you don't feel too bombarded!

With very best wishes

Andrew



The screenshot shows the Buzzbnk crowdfunding page for 'Scotland The Bread by Bread Matters Ltd'. The page features a video player showing hands holding bread, a progress bar indicating £6,880 raised of an £8,000 target, and a 'Support Us' button. The page also includes navigation links, a search bar, and social media icons.

* This project is supported by the A-Team Challenge, a collaboration between Buzzbnk and Funding Enlightened Agriculture.

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Editorial

There is a tinge of autumnal sadness to this issue of 'Review'. A great Russian, a remarkable cultural ambassador and a good friend of Scotland, died on July 9th: Ekaterina Genieva. She will be sadly missed by her many friends worldwide. Her obituary is on page 10. Ekaterina – Katya as she was known to all – worked closely during his lifetime with her parish priest, the spiritual guide and theologian of the Russian Orthodox church Fr Alexander Men whose death is also remembered in this issue on page 11: 'There is no automatic evolutionary progress; individuals have to take responsibility for their part in the battle between good and evil in the world'. Solace can be found for losses such as these in the reminder that nature is constantly renewing herself in seasonal richness such as the mushroom harvest described on page 6 and we are reminded of the importance of good bread, Andrew Whitley's life's work, described on page 4. Close ties between



our country and Russia are highlighted in Vicky Jardine-Paterson's piece about her friend Helen Molchanov's Russian chapel in a Scottish castle on page 9. Enjoy!

Elizabeth Roberts
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Baba Yaga

Primary school-aged children entered these colourful pictures for a competition 'Find out about Russia' www.findoutaboutrussia.co.uk



Doors Russia has Opened for Me

by Andrew Whitley, bread maker – www.breadmatters.com

The familiar proverb хлеб – всему голова ('it all begins with bread') should hang symbolically above most of the doors that Russia has opened for me. The association was neither planned nor predictable, but bread has always been there, sometimes like an eerily portentous off-stage sound in a Chekhov play, sometimes as a very practical means of subsistence. The 'doors' that come to mind open into seemingly disparate experiences, each with some connection to bread and to my growing understanding of the importance of what it is made from, how it is made and how equitably it is shared and enjoyed.

The first close encounter was not propitious. In 1967 I was one of six students of Russian at Sussex University eagerly seeking conversational practice and contact with 'real Russians'. We drove a minibus to Moscow, Kiev and Odessa and camped for a month in the country. Misunderstanding the currency exchange rate, we had barely enough money to eat and survived on rye bread and cucumbers. The unfamiliar sour bread was, at first, off-putting. But dependence duly blossomed, in my case at least, into a kind of affection. On return to a well-provided Western life, I never quite forgot how bread could keep body and soul together.

That duality was a prominent feature of my exposure to Russian literature, whose often agonised response to modernity seemed the perfect starting point for a young person's search for meaning in the late 1960s. During a year at Moscow University (MGU), the previous summer's bread dalliance became a nourishing love-affair and my dissertation reflected an oscillating attraction to two literary heroes: the spiritual searcher, Christian pacifist and wishful admirer of peasant communitarian authenticity Lev Tolstoy and the humane but unsentimental observer of human frailty, practical scientist driven by secular moral purpose, and proto-ecologist Anton Chekhov. When later I broadcast wheat and rye on Cumbrian fields, scythed grass and planted trees, the Russian inspiration was palpable (even if my implementation veered between the amateurish and the delusional).

MGU in the late '60s opened my eyes to Cold War politics, of course, but more significantly introduced me to creative



responses to censorship and repression whose intellectual provenance was at least partly pre-Revolutionary. My knowledge of Russian language was enriched by the satirical 'underground' songs of Vladimir Vysotsky and Aleksandr Galich, as was my appreciation of personal and civic courage in the face of timeless Russian demons. In Ну вот исчезла дрожь в руках ('Now the tremor in my hands has gone...') Vysotsky scales snowy peaks to find himself and his true path, as well as freedom from fear of the abyss, which in his case included an all-too-typical struggle with alcoholism. The beauty of the pristine natural world can be unforgiving, but, like language, it must be preserved from corruption: я свято верю в чистоту снегов и слов ('I passionately believe in the integrity of snows and words').

The BBC Russian Service, where I spent three years in the early 1970s, gave me the opportunity to broadcast, I hope with due

respect for the integrity of language, to a Soviet audience starved of independent information. My first attempts at making rye bread elicited quite unjustified appreciation from colleagues at occasional office celebrations; but, of course, those humble loaves bore meanings that transcended the nutritional. The sweet-sour aroma of black bread transported exiles at the speed of radio waves to a homeland where truth – and especially the testimony of the millions suppressed in the great terror – struggled to be heard. We broadcast

Solzhenitsyn's Arkhipelag Gulag and interviews with Andrei Sakharov, Valery Chalidze and other activists. And we tried to demonstrate our integrity by airing truths inconvenient to the West, in my case concerning pollution, resource depletion and the corruption within monopoly capitalism.

Perhaps I took the message too seriously, but, in the spirit of those 19th-century

writers who wrestled with the dilemma of how a (privileged) man might live a good life, I left London to grow food and... become a baker. Russia, professionally at least, was history. And then, fourteen years, four children, five acres and many loaves later, I went back. In the Kostroma OVIR (visa office) my papers were stamped by a smiling official who... handed me a recipe for bread. I'd been following perestroika with interest, but such customer service was so individual as to be seriously worrying – until it transpired that my host's response to quite hostile questioning at OVIR about the purpose of my visit, i.e. that I was a baker interested in Russian bread, had turned suspicion to friendly interest. The instinctive Russian hospitality that the Soviet system could never completely smother, was unleashed, in this case, by talk of bread. The Russian for 'hospitality' is, of course, хлеб-соль ('bread-salt').

The doors were open again. I learned how to make sourdough bread from a 100-ton-a-day industrial bakery and an old country-woman with a печка, fulfilling a student dream by sleeping atop the massive stove (much to her amusement and the displeasure of her cats). Later in the 1990s I helped a Moscow business establish something akin to my own (former) Village Bakery in historic Mstyora. That particular door should have been labelled 'enter at your own risk' as I was cheated by erstwhile trusted friends who seemed suddenly to be hardened and corrupted by – as we used to say – their 'relationship to the means of production'.

But doors keep opening, even in these difficult times. Thanks to the Vavilov Institute of Plant Husbandry (VIR) in St. Petersburg, I have growing in my small farm in the Borders two varieties of wheat, bred originally by Patrick Shirreff in East Lothian in the 1860s. The Scotland The Bread project wants to see this country feed itself with nutritious home-grown grain and is testing historic varieties for resilience and nutrient density. The Shirreff wheats would have been lost forever had they not been preserved through the Leningrad blockade by scientists, some of whom died of starvation rather than eat the seeds in their charge. I hope we can honour their courage and humanity by leaving to our children soils, seeds and words that are fertile, uncontaminated and accessible to everyone, as of right.



Mushrooms a la Russe

By Helen Molchanoff

Ingredients:

- 200g small button mushrooms
- Juice of half a lemon
- 1 tsp of coriander seeds
- 1 tsp of peppercorns, cracked
- A large pinch of salt
- 3 tbsp good olive oil
- 3 tbsp water
- 2 peeled and chopped tomatoes

Preparation:

Shake off/rub clean the mushrooms

Put the mushrooms into a bowl and sprinkle with the lemon juice and shake gently, and set aside

Put all the other ingredients into a pan and bring to the boil, simmer for a couple of minutes

Add the mushrooms and any juice in the bottom of the bowl

Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for five minutes

Take out the mushrooms and set aside back in bowl

Boil the liquid, uncovered until it's reduced by half, then pour it over the cooked mushrooms, stirring gently to mix, leave to cool

If you like you can sprinkle a teaspoonful of finely chopped parsley over the mushrooms, or a mixture of parsley and fresh coriander. It adds a little something, and looks pretty.

Mushroom picking in Tomsk

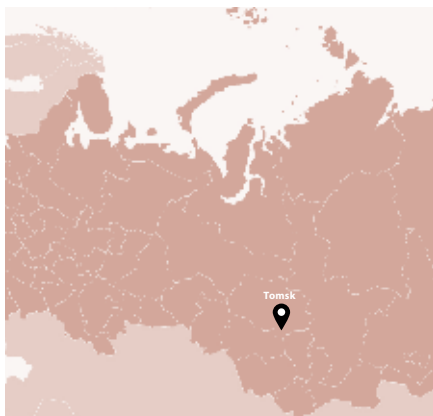
by Mietek Grycuk

Almost a rite of passage in Russia and much of Eastern Europe collecting wild mushrooms is fun, good exercise, an entertaining and addictive way to enjoy the countryside. Most areas that contain pine or silver birch trees, better still a combination of both should provide some results. Depending on weather conditions any time from mid-July to late October is suitable although this can be reduced if the autumn is too dry, wet or cold, or early frosts appear.

However there is no need to return empty handed, at that time of year raspberries, brambles and blueberries are generally available in the same location. After a few seasons walking the same locality you will be able to discern the most suitable spots and also areas that can be disregarded thus increasing your basket within the time available.

Some years ago I would literally have the whole forest areas to myself but now many recent migrants from Eastern Europe as well as an increasing number of Scottish collectors provide some competition. Accounting for this pressure, Thursday or Friday of each week is a good time before the 'weekenders' appear; early morning gives the feeling of clean fresh air and a time advantage on any day. One week between picking is more than enough for a fresh crop to emerge. The harvest can be cooked, dried or pickled following various recipes.

Now for the types to collect; Chanterelle (Lisichka) are about the earliest of all mushrooms, appearing in July and the growing season stretching into late October. This small yellow mushroom has gills on the underside of the cap and the whole slightly funnel shape has wavy edges. It can be confused with a similar type 'False Chanterelle' which I have eaten by mistake and are tasteless, but apparently have not been harmful?



Birch red boletus and the similar Birch brown boletus (Podberiozovik) shown in the photograph, are the most common and easily identified edible types. This small to very large mushroom type has a cap underside which is covered in very fine vertical tubes looking like the surface of a sponge. The underside colour is generally off-white to grey. The colour of the cap can occasionally vary from orange or dark brown to a paler, even grey colour if the mushroom has been shaded from the sun.

Brown boletus or 'Penny Bun' (Belyi Grib) not so common but the best for taste. Similar to the previous boletus but the underside of the brown cap can be grey or pale yellow with an extremely bulbous stem.

Collecting wild fungi predetermines that the quality is variable; for subsequent consumption sorting for use has to be mentioned. Chanterelle (Lisichka) can be cooked or pickled but are not suitable for drying. They are however prone to a high water content but can be left on sheets of cardboard for several days to semi dry before cooking. Very wet, limp or discoloured specimens should be discarded. All the boletus (Podberiozovik) and (Belyi Grib) types should be processed as soon as possible before they become soft and limp. Small sizes no larger than a clenched fist are fine for cooking or pickling. The larger (small to large dinner plate size) are either too mushy or would turn mushy if cooked, are best cut into thin 2-3mm slices and dried using an electric dryer (Food Dehydrator & Dryer Machine available on the internet). Beware the energy use is fairly high. The boletus types are prone to a parasite infestation, tiny pin sized holes in clusters or completely filling the mushroom head. I normally accept up to a 20% level in any slice of mushroom, otherwise cut out and remove the affected area or discard altogether. The 20% limiting value is based on my inspection of dried Italian mushrooms in the supermarket, they generally show signs of pin holes and are passed as fit for human consumption.

My golden rules are:

- Assume everything is poisonous until you can determine logically otherwise.
- Never pick or eat a mushroom that looks like your shop white field mushrooms. The differences between them and some very similar poisonous wild mushrooms is so subtle that it is not worth the risk.



- Avoid any mushroom with bright red on the stalk or in other places, they can be harmful.
- Apart from Chanterelle (Lisichka) type, never eat any mushroom with gills.
- Stick to the mushrooms you are familiar with and know are safe to eat.
- Any doubt at all about the type discard the mushroom.

For the novice the initial stage is difficult and a book with good illustrations is essential, even better if combined with the presence of a knowledgeable colleague. I would suggest only eating (personally and informing others) a small portion of a single type on your first forage and leave an uncooked portion for identification and analysis should that be unfortunately necessary. This cautious approach can be dispensed with as time goes by once you are satisfied about the types you are consuming.

There are many other different edible mushrooms, I have only explained the easiest to find and identify. Through trial and 'slight errors' I have experimented with various other types which would take far too long to explain in this article. For interest, the mushrooms in the photograph were collected during a two hour walk in a Fife forest. Another good time for mushroom picking locally, is late July to mid-August when I make my annual migration to the *taiga*; now for the rest of the story:

Case packed with a fair range of whiskies, other presents and it's off to Edinburgh airport on a journey to see the relatives in Russia. Three planes and 24 hours later arrive in Tomsk airport which is small, modern, and since my last visit has installed a luggage carousel. Dressed appropriately in shorts, light shirt and trainers, the temperature was 20 to 30C then and throughout my two week stay. Loads of hugs, kisses and emotion at the airport, repeated later in various apartments, the holiday had begun.

A different setting, on the first of several visits to the *taiga*, but similar views of pine, birch trees and the familiar smell of the forest, a few critical things are different and require to be prioritised above any foraging desire. There are things in the forest that see you, as the tasty morsel to whet the palate, a constant awareness of bears and signs of their presence are a priority. Foraging for mushrooms is carried out no further than within sight of the car, a sound on the horn means come back to the vehicle. The presence of fresh faeces, about the size produced by a large dog, black in colour with the consistency of caviar (due to the large berry diet at this time of year) is a sure sign that an animal is in the area. There is no arguing, these animals can run and climb faster than a person, we all go back to the vehicle and find another spot for our mushrooming. Similarly it is very easy to get lost; no forestry footpath signs and information boards here, getting lost in this wilderness would be a serious situation. Again keeping within sight of the car and always being aware of particular trees, tracks and your direction and position is essential.

Apart from the hazards mentioned, the mushrooms we collected seem to be exactly as you would find in any Scottish forest. The

forest floor though can be slightly different; some areas are covered by annual green leafy undergrowth which attracted a lot of attention, with friends raking about using sticks in an attempt to find something. We never did find anything in these areas so I can't be sure what type would grow there, certainly not an area from my experience that would draw my attention back home. In certain pine wood areas the forest floor was bare with hard-packed pine needles, presumably from the weight of winter top snow. Here, if one noticed a small bulge in the needle cover it was worth removing the top, very often to reveal a mushroom pushing up through the crust. Some of my best collections of highly prized delicious 'Penny Bun' (Belyi Grib) mushrooms were obtained in this way.

Most people I met were keen to forage for mushrooms but surprisingly few were able to distinguish the edible types. Therefore just about everything was picked and then displayed to a member of the party who was competent to judge and the pickings sorted out.

Visits to several countryside *dachas* filled my time, helping in the gardens to collect vegetables, chopping wood or hanging up

fish for drying was just an expected work routine in *dacha* living. The various sights of Tomsk, river cruises, the fort, churches, mosques, monuments, restaurants, forest museum, walking around my favourite markets filled my days. One constant biting problem especially in the evenings was the flies and mosquitoes (*kumara*) even in certain parts of the city they were relentless. Time of sun up and sundown were similar to Edinburgh so I guess both cities are about the same latitude.

One of my proudest moments was foraging in the *taiga* and subsequently preparing, cooking and serving fried mushroom dishes to my relatives in Tomsk. Following winter ice hole fishing on the river Tom in a previous year, another bucket list item safely achieved. Time passes and eventually the case is packed, inward bound bottles of whiskey supplanted with a clearer Russian national drink to add to my impressive stock at home. More hugs, kisses, and tears; retrace my journey back to Edinburgh airport, walking down the plane steps to the tarmac, 15C felt cold after Siberia.

Russian mushroom soup recipe

by Masha Bond

Russians, as much as many other Eastern Europeans, love wild harvests, especially mushrooms and berries, which are traditionally used fresh during the harvest season and then dry as a supplement rich in vitamins during our long and freezing winters. This soup, made from dried porcini mushrooms, or ceps, is very rich in flavour and is perfect for autumn and winter cold days.

We usually pick and dry mushrooms ourselves, but I found a good replacement in Tesco, it's called Tesco dried porcini mushrooms and comes in a plastic jar.

Ingredients (for 6 servings):

- 1 jar of Tesco dried porcini mushrooms/ceps, or 50g dried ceps
- 2-3 young or 1 large carrot
- 5 young or 1 large potato
- 1 large onion
- Vermicelli or tagliatelle (to your taste)
- 3 table spoons of olive oil
- 50g butter

- Salt/Pepper
- Fresh parsley
- 1 small pack of sour cream
- Rye bread (toasted)

Mushroom soup is best when not spiced with anything but salt and black pepper, as spices will ruin its taste. But one may like to top it with fresh parsley just before serving. I always do.

Preparation:

Put your ceps in a bowl

Boil 3 cups of water and pour over the ceps. Leave it to soak. (It is recommended to soak dried ceps for 30 minutes, but I always give it a couple of hours)

Take a fine sieve and drain the soaking juices into a bowl

Chop onion finely

Pour olive oil and add butter to the saucepan (or pan), add mushrooms and onion, bring to the medium fire and stir regularly, fry for 5 minutes



Cut carrots into thin circles

Boil 1.5 litres of water in a large pot

Add mushrooms and onions, cut carrots and potatoes cut into 1cm cubes

Cook on slow fire for 30 minutes (till potatoes and carrots are just ready), add the juices from soaked ceps. Once boiling, add a small handful of vermicelli or other pasta (tagliatelle is good, as it usually is sold curled in a single serving size (a few per pack), 2 servings will be enough) and boil according to time recommended for your type of pasta

Add salt and pepper to your taste

Serve with 1 teaspoon of sour cream and parsley on top and rye bread toasts on the side.

The activism of a passive people

by Ian Mitchell – “English Language Etiquette for Russians” <http://elerussians.blogspot.com>

Feeling like a wee hair-of-the-wolfhound after a good hit of the Old Bushmills at the Irish Embassy on St Patrick’s Night, I headed for Papa’s Place, the bar just off Red Square in which a group of expats gather at 7 on Wednesday nights for two hours of free beer.

Just out of Revolutionary Square Metro station, I see Frank from Manchester, one of the regulars, hurrying down the street towards me – that is, away from the pub! This is a surprise.

“There’s no beer till 9 o’clock,” he says shaking his head despairingly. “No alcohol at all. I’ve no idea why. All you can get is soft drinks.”

He tells me he has some shopping to do in GUM, which is right on Red Square, so he will go there and come back for 9 o’clock. As it is 7.30, I hesitate. Can I be bothered to wait, or should I just abandon ship and go home, thirsty?

Curiosity gets the better of me, not least as I am only 50 yards from the pub. I am even more curious when I notice groups of Russians walking slowly up from Red Square, some of them with red, white and blue balloons in their hands, most looking as if they want to find a place to dispose of them.

Inside the bar, things are just as Frank said. No alcohol of any sort is being served. A few of the regulars are there, drinking colas with their Cajun chicken wings.

Then Doug Steele, the genial owner, appears and says that the police came in a 6.30, waving a paper ordering all catering establishments within the Garden Ring—which encompasses the whole of central Moscow—to stop serving alcohol until 9 p.m. tonight.

“Something to do with Crimea Day,” he says, shaking his head. “That was the first I knew about it, at 6.30. I could not put anything up on the internet to warn you guys. So there’ll be free beer from 9-11 and also from 7-9 tomorrow.”

It is not hard to understand why we all like Doug, a friendly Canadian who has been in Moscow for twenty years or more and run some spectacularly entertaining pubs in the past. He usually sits in the corner of his bar, keeping an eye on the staff and patrons while smoking a substance that smells like carbolic soap in a huge hookah.

Rumour has it that there is a demonstration in progress on Red Square in favour of the annexation of the Crimea. Putin is addressing the allegedly enraptured multitudes. In order to avoid trouble, the police have banned all alcohol sales until it is over. Nobody knew about this, but we all mutter about the usual lack of planning in Moscow, or rather the way in which the authorities do not feel they need to give notice of things like alcohol bans, or closed roads or suspended bus services. They simply stop them without explanation and then stand around watching while people sort themselves out.

“They did the same at the time of the Nemtsov funeral,” one of our group says.

We fall to discussing that event, and I say how different it was from the first big protest in Moscow, held at Bolotny Square just south of the Kremlin, three years ago when the prospect of another term with Putin as President was beginning to alarm the “intelligentsia”.

I went to both events, and was struck how much more serious and sombre the atmosphere was at the Nemtsov march. People were not ranting about the government but quietly waving Russian flags en masse.

Then somebody comes into the bar and tells us that the demonstration is a bit of a joke, and that the people he spoke to all seem to have been ordered by their employers to attend. He saw people trailing Russian flags along the ground. That would explain my bored-looking balloon holders.

The curious thing is that Putin publicly accused the Bolotny crowd of having been paid to attend—by “the Americans”. That was complete nonsense. I could see the sort of folk that were there. However, it was true that people were paid to attend the pro-Putin

rally which was held two months later on the huge, hideous, Albert Speer-ish plaza where the World War Two memorial stands, bleak, windy, massive and cold.

I went to that too, with a Russian friend, just to see what was going on. The first lady we met complained to us that this was her only day off in the week from the Post Office, but she had been ordered to attend, and was getting double pay for doing so. Another person told us that he had been flown from Novosibirsk by his factory for the demonstration. The price was attending a couple of lectures, but he was happy to put up with that as it gave him an opportunity to visit his brother.

Everyone had to go to a registering tent and sign a form to attest to their presence. Then they had to go to a coffee shop a hundred yards away to collect their money. As we left, a rumour ran through the smallish crowd that the money had run out and no-one was being paid. Everybody shrugged their shoulders in the usual patient Russian way and left. There was no hint of a mood for going and smashing up the coffee shop, as I hope there would have been in Britain.

We discussed this and a lot more until 9 o’clock when the free beer started. A few minutes later, Frank re-appeared. Where have you been, we asked?

“I was in the café at the top of GUM having a beer,” he said with a grin. “No alcohol ban there!”

We could only conclude that the police had been too lazy to walk up the three flights of stairs, which illustrates one reason why life in Russia is still tolerable, despite Mr Putin’s political ugliness. Though ubiquitous and well-equipped, the police are usually almost as passive as the people they are policing.



A Russian Orthodox chapel in a Scottish castle

by Vicky Jardine Paterson



The last thing most people would expect to hear drifting out of a fairytale Scottish castle would be the soft hallowed tones of a Russian Orthodox mass. But step into Fingask Castle on 7th January, for example, through its great wooden portal and then through a little door on the left and you might be transported by an Antiphon from the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostomos. For this is Russian Christmas. And here, in a low vaulted corner of this great 17th century house, home to Andrew and Helen Murray Threipland, is the most charming and unexpected little Russian Orthodox chapel. This is where you might also find celebrating this most special time a Roumanian priest from Glasgow or even Aberdeen, and an intimate little congregation which, as Helen says, “appears out of nowhere”. A loyal contingent from St Leonard’s School is usually among them, boys and girls from all over Russia – Odessa, Moscow, Pskov, St Petersburg – sent for the best of private education. A number of these tend to turn up at the various services held here through the year – Easter, weddings, funerals as well as Christmas

Originally a kitchen in the mid-seventeenth century and the oldest part of the house,

Andrew and Helen first used this room in 1998 for a dinner party. They lit a fire and promptly got engulfed by smoke. “We opened the door, we closed the door, we opened the door, we closed the door,” recalls Helen, “and then we just had to give up. We couldn’t see anything!” It was then just used as a dump – boxes, bottles, old

shoes and macs – until Helen decided one day they should make something special out of it. A chapel in fact. So in 2005 they started and the first step in the conversion was setting up an altar. This actually was, and still is, a hall chest which used to hold tennis racquets. “But,” says Helen, “it has angels carved into it. It might have been used for storing church linen. It was sort of meant... one doesn’t have to look far in life if you have the eyes to see things.”

Now, ten years on, you walk into a dark yet golden space. The original little windows set in the great stone walls let in little light, but the whole chapel glows. It glows with the shimmer of gold from a choice collection of icons; it glows from the ochre plastered walls and central arch decorated with frescoes. It was painted by Andrew and Helen’s great friends Elena Gubanova and Ivan Govorkov four years ago with the central figure of Christ standing holding a book, an angel at either side. The words on the book are from John 7.24. “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgement.”

There is a special link with St John. Helen’s great grandfather, Alexander Novikoff, had built the beautiful church of St John (see pic) near the family seat, Novo Alexandrovka, at Tambov, south east of Moscow. The estate was subsequently renamed Novikovo after him but the church was, of course, destroyed during the Revolution. Helen’s grandfather, Paul Molchanoff, a colonel in the Semionovsky Regiment, managed to escape to Finland in 1923 with his wife and

son, Alexander aged 2, on the pretext that she was ill and needed treatment. Thence they managed quickly to flee to London, to Helen’s great grandmother, Olga Novikoff. This great and grand lady, co-worker of Gladstone’s, was the MP for Russia in London, a well known political writer, defending the Slavonic cause. She lived at Claridge’s in the winter, and back in Russia in the summer. Her mother, Aliabeva, a great beauty much admired by Pushkin who wrote about her, stayed on in Russia and died there. “Last Christmas,” says Helen, “the priest conducting the service told me I must get the chapel named because when he prays he prays to a saint. I thought of St John because of my great-grandfather’s church, and then I suddenly realised that the book in Christ’s hand, painted by Elena and Ivan, is showing the words from St John anyway. So I think that’s what it will be.”

A few years ago, a Russian friend who was staying in the house noticed one of the portraits up the staircase and asked who it was. Helen explained that it was her great-grandmother Olga Novikoff. In less than three hours the friend had traced the estate on a map, and five months after that Helen was there with her friend putting up a 3-metre cross on the site of the former church. “The people who gathered to watch and pay homage,” adds Helen, “had no idea that any of the family had survived.” Almost 100 years on, the chapel at Fingask is an extraordinary testimony to a former people as well as to the resurgence of the Orthodox faith not only in Russia but in Scotland as well.

Ekaterina Yurievna Genieva: obituary notice



Ekaterina Genieva with Terry Breen, head of languages at Moffat Academy, Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland, on a visit in 2013

Ekaterina Genieva, who has died aged 69, was the long-serving director general of the Russian State Library for Foreign Literature who took the opportunity afforded by the collapse of communism to turn it into a liberal, open literary institution, respected throughout the world. ‘Katya’ also made a difference to life in the small historic spa town of Moffat, Dumfries and Galloway, and to Scotland, through an initiative based on her long-standing working friendship with Moffat resident Elizabeth Roberts, co-founder of Moffat Book Events, which brought Russian visitors distinguished in Russian cultural life to regular annual literary conferences in Moffat.

These annual conferences on Russian themes in Moffat, Dumfries and Galloway, will continue this Sept 18-20 with a conference on Scottish influences on Tolstoy, author of ‘War and Peace’ and ‘Anna Karenina’.

Even under communism Ekaterina Genieva was not afraid to challenge officialdom. As a student at Moscow State University in the early 1970s she wrote her dissertation on James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, then banned in the Soviet Union. She spent some four decades at “Foreignlib”, a refuge in Soviet times for intellectuals forbidden to work elsewhere. She also supported the liberal Russian Orthodox theologian, Father Alexander Men, until his murder (almost certainly by the KGB) in 1990, keeping his spirit alive with conferences and publications after his death. She also mounted exhibitions on anti-Semitism and other difficult topics.

During the coup attempt of August 1991, she defied the KGB and made the library’s printing press available to publish banned newspapers. She also forged a partnership with Book Aid, a British-founded charity which sends secondhand books to areas of need around the world. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ekaterina Genieva emerged as one of the leaders of cultural reform, serving on President Yeltsin’s Council for Culture and Arts and as president, from 1995 to 2004, of the Open Society Institute (the Soros Fund) in Russia, which provides support to individuals and organisations involved in promoting civil society and the development of democratic ideas.

She gave her personal backing to projects including the “Pushkin Library” programme to establish a supply network for 5,500 libraries within Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States after the state distribution system had collapsed. In a sign of the times the Institute (now the Open Society Foundations) has recently been listed by Russia’s Federation Council as one of 12 organisations to be considered for banning by the country’s prosecutor general.

Ekaterina Genieva published numerous papers and bibliographies and edited works by, among others, James Joyce, the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. She initiated conferences and founded cultural, educational and research programmes which drew together Russian and foreign experts and researchers as well as young Russians looking to redis-

cover previously censored literary classics and the religious roots of their culture, and establish contacts with the outside world.

To safeguard her reforms she assembled an international board of trustees, whose members have included James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, and a former head of the BBC’s Russian Service.

Ekaterina Genieva was well aware of the risks run by pro-democracy campaigners in Putin’s Russia. In 2006 she was first on the scene when Yegor Gaidar, the architect of Russia’s market reforms in the 1990s, collapsed while on a book promotion tour in Ireland – a day after the former Russian KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko died of radioactive poisoning in a London hospital – reporting that she had found him in a corridor, unconscious and vomiting blood. Gaidar’s symptoms also suggested poisoning, but this was never confirmed. Gaidar, who died in 2009, blamed enemies in the Kremlin.

Ekaterina Genieva was born in Moscow on April 1 1946 and after leaving school, worked as an attendant in a hospital ward before taking a degree in Literature at Moscow State University.

She joined the Library for Foreign Literature on graduation in 1971 as a senior editor, also working part time as an instructor at Moscow State University. She became a friend and ally of the library’s formidable founder Margarita Rudomino. Appointed deputy director general of the library following the fall of communism in 1991, she became its director general in 1993.

Ekaterina Genieva was awarded honours by countries around the world including, in 2007, an OBE. She also earned the distinction of being the first woman to become a member of the Athenaeum club in Pall Mall.

In her last interview before her death from cancer, Ekaterina Genieva said that she had “a lot of ambitious plans. Not enough time”.

Ekaterina Genieva, born April 1 1946, died July 9 2015

Katya’s successor as Director General of the State Library for Foreign Literature is Mr Vadim Duda – see <http://www.mkrf.ru/press-center/news/ministerstvo/na-dolz-nost-direktora-biblioteki-inostrannoy-literatury-vgbil-naznachen-vadim-d>

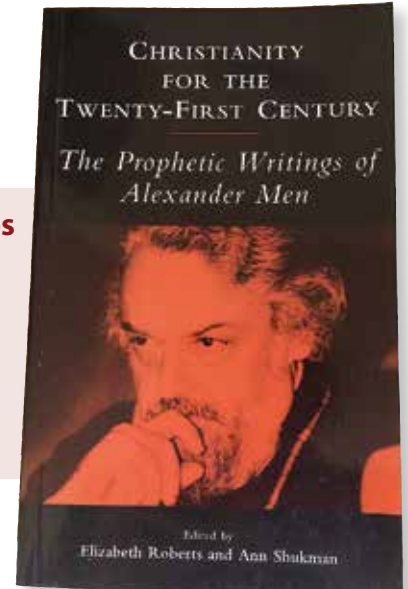
Richard Demarco CBE, OBE is to help present an exhibition and symposium in Katya’s honour – further announcement and details in our next issue. (Ed)

The Falling Seedpod

By April French, Ph.D. Candidate, Brandeis University

Alexander Men' 1935-1990 was assassinated on Sept 9 1990. A series of events to mark the 25th anniversary of his death will take place at the State Library for Foreign Literature (VGBIL) in Moscow and at Semkhoz 8-10 September 2015.

Illustrated here: *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century: The Prophetic Writings of Alexander Men* Edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Ann Shukman. Available at £10 plus p&p from **Elizabeth Roberts** liz@crookedstane.com



On September 8, 2014, I stood before the small wooden memorial that marks the location where Father Alexander received the blow that led to his death. A sign on the memorial reads, “This is where Father Alexander Men received a martyr’s end.” I took some time alone to reflect on what Father Alexander has meant to me (an example of unswerving faith in Jesus Christ and a desire that as many people as possible would know the Gospel message, courage under pressure, speaking truth to power, being present to people in the moment, and standing for open dialogue and inquiry and against all forms of chauvinism). While reflecting, I kept hearing sounds as if someone were walking or jumping through the woods behind me, but I could tell it was actually the sounds of nature. Finally, as I was preparing to return to the guesthouse on the property, I realized that nuts were falling from trees. Suddenly, I heard one falling right above me and stepped out of the way. It landed right in front of the wooden memorial, so I picked it up and prayed John 12:24: “Unless a kernel of wheat [or a chestnut-like seedpod] falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” With these words, Jesus Christ was hinting at

his impending death and the need for his disciples to follow him and tell others about him. But it struck me in that moment that my work is one of the many “seeds” that have come about after Father Alexander’s death, and hopefully through it, more people will benefit from his teaching. The next morning, around 6:15 am (the time Father Alexander was struck from behind exactly 24 years earlier), I went out to the wooden memorial again. I expected to find many people gathered there, but I was the only one—aside from the many people hurrying along the path (now paved) to catch the elektrichka to Moscow (or another town in the area) for work. A few of them slowed down enough to cross themselves as they walked by, as a sign that they remember the importance of this day.

Ten years earlier, as I was serving as a Protestant missionary in Irkutsk, Siberia (where Father Alexander had studied biology as a student), some Evangelical Christians introduced me to the works of this Russian Orthodox priest. Knowing that Protestant and Orthodox Christians have a strained relationship in Russia, I was intrigued to read the works of a priest so many Protestants clearly respected. I read Syn

Chelovecheskii (The Son of Man, Father Alexander’s magnum opus, a Life of Christ) and could not put it down, and the course of my life was changed. I would soon move back to North America to receive theological training with an emphasis in the history of Christianity; I wrote my master’s thesis on Father Alexander. Although my dissertation project is not on Father Alexander (I am studying Evangelical women and children in late-Soviet Siberia), I have the full intention of returning to him, in order that more in the English-speaking world would have an opportunity to come to know him through my work. I will keep the seedpod that fell a year ago as a symbol of the task at hand.

April French (MATS, Regent College) is a Ph.D. Candidate at Brandeis University. Her specialty is Russian history, specifically the history of Christianity in the Soviet period. She is the editor of a translation of Father Alexander’s work on prayer (*An Inner Step Toward God* (Paraclete Press, 2014)) and has recently completed a forthcoming essay on Father Alexander’s Jewish identity and his unswerving stance against chauvinism.



The path in Semkhoz where Fr Alexander was murdered

Image courtesy of Jennifer Gough Cooper

Leningrad 1943: Inside A City Under Siege

Alexander Werth, (I. B. Tauris: 2015).

Hardback: £20.00

Those who have spent any period of time in St Petersburg will be aware of how heavy the memory of the Leningrad Siege hangs over the city. While the physical traces of those almost 900 days of encirclement may have faded (though shrapnel damage remains tattooed on the masonry of the Anichkov Bridge, left as a reminder of how lethal the city's famous thoroughfare, Nevsky Prospect, became during those three years), the siege left an indelible imprint on the psyche of Russia's northern capital.

From the moving and unforgettable Museum of the Defence of Leningrad, whose dignified elderly staff quietly lead you to one of the most poignant exhibits in the collection – an example of the pitiful average daily bread ration (125 grams) permitted to a family at the height of the famine – to the visceral, defiant power of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, the blockade that killed over a million people is now as much a part of the St Petersburg legend as the Bronze Horseman or the White Nights.

In Leningrad 1943, British journalist Alexander Werth returns to the city of his birth to witness first-hand Leningrad emerge from the darkest days of the Nazi encirclement, as the tide of the Second World War begins to turn in the Allies' favour. For Werth, whose family fled St Petersburg in the wake of the Russian Revolution, it is a bittersweet homecoming, and his account is intermittently laced with sepia childhood memories of pre-revolutionary St Petersburg.

But Leningrad is no place for sentiment – Werth is “cured of old nostalgic nonsense” by the testimonies he gathers from the city's residents. Leningrad, cut off from the rest of the Soviet Union by the German encirclement, is forced to fend for and feed itself – indeed, one factory director refers to Soviet-held territory beyond the blockade as “the mainland”.

From the factory workers in the Kirov works who labour round the clock under almost constant shelling, to the story of a schoolteacher dying of hunger who con-

tinues to prepare daily lesson plans as his body wastes away, the reader is moved by the single-minded resilience of a population battling to keep their city alive.

While the accounts of individual and collective heroism testify to the bravery of the city as a whole, there is no sense of triumph here: one is continually reminded of the enormous human cost of the defence of Leningrad, and of the repulsive, hateful nature of total war on the Eastern Front – one child evacuated to the countryside stares in horror at pigs, convinced by propaganda posters that they are Germans, such is the dehumanising effect of a war of ideology forced upon ordinary people.

Readers in 2015 will doubtless be dismayed that, 70 years on, civilians are once again suffering and dying in a conflict in Eastern Europe over which they have little control.

Lewis White



The Ballet Lover's Companion

by Zoë Anderson

Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia

by Janice Ross

Classical ballet is experiencing something of a renaissance in both popular culture and academic writing. A number of major new studies have emerged over the last few years, while broader public interest in the form has led to an increasing demand for introductory writing on ballet.

These divergent approaches are represented in two of this year's most widely publicised ballet texts. Zoë Anderson's somewhat romantically titled reference book, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, provides a sweeping overview of the evolution of classical dance, documenting the major ballets from the Romantic period to the present day. Anderson's research cannot be faulted, but attempting to compress such detail into a medium-sized volume is a challenging task. Consequently, the book falls between categories, at once being too detailed to be classed as a beginner's guide to ballet, but also too broad a

survey to provide in-depth information for the more seasoned theatre-goer.

Anderson's writing is strongest in her analysis of contemporary choreography, and in these sections the book distinguishes itself from existing literature. However, the length of the volume has certain consequences, and thus Anderson's work primarily serves as an elementary introduction to the lengthy, complex history of ballet. Despite the disappointing lack of photographs, this will certainly be a welcome addition for many new dance fans' libraries.

2015's second major ballet publication is Janice Ross' *Like a Bomb Going Off*, a striking account of the seminal choreographer Leonid Yakobson, who remains largely unknown outside Russia. Ross provides a detailed analysis of the work of a true innovator who, unlike his contemporary George Balanchine, has never achieved global

recognition for his profoundly avant-garde efforts. Ross' meticulous research also references a wide range of dance historians and theoreticians.

Of particular interest are the sections in which Ross focuses on Yakobson's Jewish identity. She returns repeatedly to the theme of the Jewish body in ballet as Other, a subversive motif that Yakobson utilised throughout his choreographies. Yakobson's ballets dispensed with classical and Soviet ideals of the body and movement, replacing them with highly expressive qualities reflective of the Modernist tendencies occurring on Western stages, inflaming state censors. Her discussion of the political impact of ballet is also fascinating – for instance, noting that televised broadcasts of *Swan Lake*, a perennial favourite of the powers that be, inevitably preceded major political crises.

Dr Lucy Weir



Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: Adventures in Modern Russia

By Peter Pomerantsev

London: Faber + Faber, 2015

Peter Pomerantsev was born in the USSR but left it at a tender age with his parents and was lucky enough to attend a very good school in London and then study at a very good university in Edinburgh where, earlier this year, as some readers will know, he gave a scintillating presentation of his first (but not, I suspect, his last) monograph. After graduating and learning the ins and outs of documentary film making, at the beginning of the century Pomerantsev went to Moscow and used his knowledge, technical skills and bilingualism to size up the new post-communist Russia and the allegedly post-Soviet Russians.

His account is divided into three Acts, sub-headed 'Reality Show Russia', 'Cracks in the Kremlin Matrix' and 'Forms of Delirium' (how many more Acts there will be before 'The End' – if it ever comes – is left for us readers to predict). The feeling I had was as if Rasputin, not Lenin, had come to power in Russia after Nicholas II abdicated in 1917. As Pomerantsev writes, the Soviet Communist 'party and KGB and diplomatic elite and great actors' were 'the last to profit from the old order and the first to profit from the new one' (p. 137). So did the 1991 coup and counter-coup really amount to a revolution? The author uses the word 'masquerade' (the title of a play by Lermontov) about life in Russia since then, and indeed there is something theatrical (in the negative meaning of the word), inauthentic, unnatural, about politics and public life in Russia today. He gives the impression that most of the new top-level political authorities are avtoritety, a word now commonly used to refer to criminal bosses who should be in prison rather than in the Kremlin and the Presidential Administration. What was in late Soviet times shamefully hidden well under the surface of society is now paraded shamelessly, brazenly, out in the open (at least for those with eyes that see).

Pomerantsev's 'take' on the current situation in Moscow and several distant parts (Far East, North Caucasus, the Kaliningrad exclave) of the Russian Federation is, for me, both alarming and extremely sad (several of his friends and acquaintances have committed suicide), but then so is his 'take' on London, where British TV documentaries can also be subjected to editorial 'control' (not 'censorship', of course!) and also

where 'due diligence' to prevent the greedy acceptance of dirty money from Russia (and, naturally, from many other countries) is often just a really bad joke. As some Westerners say, "Well, if the money doesn't go here it will go somewhere else" (p. 267). And 'others sigh and say well everything has changed here already anyway and there is no West any more: for who are we to teach anyone how to behave?' (p. 268). Even more worryingly, Pomerantsev concludes: 'I've noticed something new when wandering around the protests and talking to the new Moscow dissidents. If once upon a time they used the phrase 'the West' in general, and the word 'London' in particular, to represent the beacon of what they aimed towards, now the words 'London' and 'the West' can be said with a light disgust, as the place that shelters and rewards and strengthens the very forces that oppress them' (p. 279). What is happening to 'Western values'?! Thus, the author is illuminating about and critical of both Russia and the West. As he writes, 'I'm not even sure who won the Cold War after all' (p. 41). One can only hope that this will make it easier for a Russian translation of this book to find a publisher in Moscow. There is much that is wrong both 'here' and 'there', and the more people who realise this, the better our prospects will be.

Martin Dewhirst

Selected autumn reading list from

John Sandoe:

sales@johnsandoe.com

www.johnsandoe.com

Stalin's Daughter: The Extraordinary and Tumultuous Life of Svetlana Alliluyeva

Rosemary Sullivan

A riveting account of the Kremlin childhood, defection and subsequent life in the US of the woman who referred to herself as 'the political prisoner of my father's name'. £25



Nabokov in America: On the Road to Lolita

Robert Roper £20

Restless Empire: A Historical Atlas of Russia

Ian Barnes

Introduction by Dominic Lieven in the excellent large-format series (cf. 'Crossroads Of War', on the Middle East) £25.95

Under Western Eyes

Joseph Conrad

Set in St Petersburg and Geneva, this is one of Conrad's most accomplished novels. Concerned with ideas – autocracy, revolution, reason – some of its themes are as relevant as they were in the author's time: Russia and the Russian character, the loss of privacy in a surveillance society, the mind of a revolutionary. Pbk £8.99/Hbk £10.99

The Silk Roads: A New History of the World

Peter Frankopan

The author argues that the networks along the ancient Silk Roads are reasserting themselves, and the global importance of the region reviving accordingly. £25

Comrade Baron: A Journey Through The Vanishing World of the Transylvanian Aristocracy

Jaap Scholten

Published in Hungary in 2011, this book has only just come to our attention. A personal history of the Transylvanian aristocracy under Communism and of Scholten's time researching them. Pbk £16

The Idea of Europe

George Steiner

And it's not much more than that right now. £9.99

Intercept: The Secret History of Computers and Spies

Gordon Corera £20

Fear and the Muse Kept Watch

Andy McSmith

How Russian artists survived under Stalin £19.99

Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings

Owen Hatherley

A clever and insightful history of Communism told through its architecture. £20

The Gates of Asia. The Eurasian Steppe and the Limits of Europe

Warwick Ball

See www.eastandwestpublishing.com

Swan: The Life and Dance of Anna Pavlova

Laurel Snyder, illustrated by Julie Morstad

A wonderfully illustrated book for young balletomanes (5-8). £11.99



Image courtesy of Leslie Black

The War Hasn't Yet Started

by Mikhail Durnenkov

4 to 9 May 2015, at the Play, a Pie and a Pint Theatre in Glasgow

In the Presniakov Brother's play *Terrorism*, a jigsaw puzzle of scenes suggested that terrorism has as much to do with personal relationships as it does with international criminal syndicates. According to the Presniakovs, the word 'Terrorism' with a capital 'T' has come to overshadow its more common and equally terrifying cousin: the terror of abusive relationships.

Mikhail Durnenkov manages a similar feat in his latest play. Commissioned by *a Play, a Pie and a Pint Theatre*, in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland, *The War Hasn't Yet Started* assembles eight self-contained scenes which suggest that war may have more to do with rupture inside the individual's psyche, than with politics.

Does war amount to a father promising to burn down a brand new house built for him by his son – simply to avoid the humiliation of being dependent? Is war what happens when a wife is obedient to her violent but devoted husband? Does war erupt if the man addicted to games on his phone turns his attention to the real world and lets the 'fire'

inside him burn on the outside? Durnenkov depicts the perverse logic of self-destruction. This play is not a polemic, offering clear answers. Instead, the playwright has created a dark comedy about the dehumanising effects of living in a society on the brink of an all-out war. Durnenkov provides only a sliver of optimism. Each scene ends before the major decision is taken: we will never find out if the father actually burns down the house or the wife ends up killing her abusive husband. Perhaps they are joking? Maybe there is another exit from these seemingly one-way paths to war?

Durnenkov's style in *The War* is reminiscent of the stylistic experimentation of Caryl Churchill or Martin Crimp. Scenes can be played in any order. Roles may be assigned to actors of any age and gender – although the cast size is specified as three. Durnenkov's play shuns a comfortable narrative arc as well as a binary dramatic conflict. While experiments of style have been evident in Durnenkov's previous plays, *The War* is his boldest and most successful experiment to date.

Rendered into a literal translated by Alexandra Smith and adapted into Scots by Davey Anderson, the premiere at the Play, Pie and Pint Theatre is humorous and disturbing – in the best possible way. Smith and Anderson have made an utterly convincing version which speaks directly to the audience in Glasgow, while also referring back to its original culture in an unforced way. Anderson's direction is well-paced but places a restrictively realist framework on a play with a more enigmatic and challenging style. Wisely he allows the performances to take centre stage. Among the good performances, Lewis Howden and Anita Vettesse excel in their versatile transformations between scenes.

This is compelling, political drama at its best.

Noah Birksted-Breen Ph.D student at Queen Mary University of London and artistic director of Sputnik Theatre Company

Chair's notes

Jenny Carr - SRF Chairperson

The SRF tries to promote interest in Russia and her neighbours – and although there is still not much awareness of most of the post-Soviet space in Scotland we are now all too aware of events in Russia and Ukraine. Yesterday the moving Ukrainian/Dutch documentary “Maidan” showed to a packed house at the Edinburgh Filmhouse and the image of the lone Russian veto to the UN resolution on MH17 will not be easily forgotten.

However “apart from that Mrs Lincoln” there is a lot about Russia, and Ukraine, which people are not aware of – and we continue to try to raise an informed interest in politics and culture alike.

In particular we are continuing our efforts to get Russian into the school curriculum. We are trying to improve and publicise our children's website www.findoutabout-russia.co.uk. The “Find out about Russia” competition for primary school children has finished – and we had well over 100 entries from all over the UK. Most were pictures of Baba Yaga and you might have seen some during Theatre Alba's Fringe production of “Baba Yaga” in early August and on www.theatrealba.com/art-competition-for-schools-baba-yaga. They will be on our “Find out about Russia” website soon too. Thanks to generous sponsorship from the Scottish Government, CRCEES, the Russian Teachers' Group, European School-

books Ltd and others we will be able to send lots of prizes to winners and to the schools most involved. We will have a stand at the “Languages Show” in Glasgow next March (the first time this event has been held outside London) and will give you more details on that as plans progress.

Readership of our “virtual” promotion of interest, via the e-bulletin, our website, and social media continues to grow steadily. Our membership is stable and we thank you for your loyalty, support and interest.

We had record attendance for two discussions earlier this year (on the Russian economy in January and the media, with Peter Pomerantsev, in March). Many thanks to our partners the Edinburgh University Business School and the university's Politics and International Relations Society.

You will receive this as the August Festivals in Edinburgh are coming to a close, although I am writing as they have yet to start. Our plans for September are sketchy – but will probably involve an EGM (or AGM) and a welcome party for Russian-speaking students. Our language classes start again in September and we will hold an Open Day for intending students and anyone just wanting more information on 5 September (10am-1pm at Summerhall). We very much hope our Russian tutor (Natalia Samoiloova) will be joined by the AUGB's Ukrainian tutor



who will provide information about their Ukrainian classes. Interested linguists might be tempted to try both languages? And, last but not least, our “Чай и Чат” conversation group starts up again on 3 September.

Finally – an appeal to our membership for volunteers. We need people with ideas and willing to work independently. In particular – events organiser, designer for the Review, advertising salesperson for the Review, and someone who could offer regular and reliable administrative assistance in the office. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you are interested to work for us in any of these areas.

Jenny Carr
jenny@scotlandrussiaforum.org

Glasgow-based Michael Kerins, author and storyteller, runs a charity for young Russians www.slatecharity.com

SRF Review: How, when and why did you become interested in Russia?

When: I first visited Russia in September 2001; it was a few days after the attack on the twin towers in New-York City. Our flight out of Edinburgh was one of the first handful of flights to leave after the no fly moratorium was lifted. The airport tension was visible and it felt very unnerving indeed. Ewan McVicar and I stayed the night in Moscow in the famously infamous **Intourist Hotel**. We walked the few hundred yards to Red Square in the dark. I have never forgotten the sense of awe and wonder, that Red Square left in my psyche.

How: Ewan McVicar a fellow storyteller invited me to bring some stories – especially The Adventures of weetom – As far as I remember the Scottish Arts Council, now Creative Scotland paid for my visit.

Why: The trite answer to that is why not – I was just captivated by the differences of life immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union. In Soviet times Perm was a closed city. Closed to Russians and I had never experienced that ethos before. Foreigners were a novelty and many people had never seen a foreigner before. Russia was and to some extent still is the most foreign place I have ever visited. My godson called Michael was born to

my pals Lev and Oksanna in October 2006. Russian train journeys gave me a little insight into the vastness of Russia, and my experiences with staff and students at Universities and schools added to the wonder of it all. In 2002 I set up an international translation competition to give students of English access to new writing in contemporary English so that the every changing world of language would be available and in context for free. See www.slatecharity.com

http://www.slatecharity.com/slatecharity/2015_Texts_English.html

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