

# THE FORUM



The Scotland-Russia Forum magazine. No. 41, Summer 2019

[www.scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org)

*“Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs”*: the must-see exhibition of the summer

*Russian garden lovers in Scotland*

*My Estonian Grandmother*

*Professor R F Christian remembered*

*Voluntary sector connections in Russia*

*Plus book reviews and SRF news*

## Contents

Front cover: The marriage of Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia (1868–1918), 26th November 1894 - Laurits Regner Tuxen 1895–6. From the major new exhibition at the Queens Gallery, Edinburgh. *Image courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust/ (c) Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019*

- p1 Editorial
- p2 SRF news
- p3 **Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs: an exhibition review, by Helen Molchanoff**
- p6 **Professor RF ('Reg') Christian remembered, by Jim Halliday**
- p7 **My Estonian Grandmother, by Agnes Miller**
- P9 **Russian garden lovers in Scotland, by Sheila Sim**
- P11 **Making connections in Russia, by Pat Armstrong, Chief Executive of ACOSVO**
- p12 **Book reviews:**
- *Putin v. the People* by Samuel Greene and Graeme Robertson. Reviewed by Martin Dewhurst
  - *Rock, Paper, Scissors* by Maxim Osipov. Reviewed by Elena Malysheva
  - *Salt and Time: Recipes from a Russian Kitchen* by Alissa Timoshkina. Reviewed by Sheila Sim
  - *Stalingrad: a Novel* by Vasily Grossman, trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler. Reviewed by Tom Hubbard

# From the Editor

Dear Readers

I have the (rather terrifying) privilege of taking over the editorship of The FORUM from Jenny Carr, our previous Chair, who stood down in January after 16 years of leading the Scotland-Russia Forum. She is a hard act to follow! We are enormously grateful to Jenny for her many years of hard work on behalf of the SRF. But she is not leaving the scene—see our News section on the next page.

The articles in this issue cover a wide range, as usual. We start with a review by Helen Molchanoff of the wonderful new exhibition in Edinburgh this summer: *Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs*. It is on at the Queen's Gallery until 3rd November, but don't wait until the last minute to go and see it.

By sheer coincidence, the majority of the contributors to this issue studied Russian at St Andrews University. Professor Christian, chair of the department while I was there, passed away last year, and many of us attended the lovely memorial service organised by his daughter Jessica earlier this year. Jim Halliday knew him well, and writes fondly about him here.

The geographical scope covered by the Scotland-Russia Forum continues to be 'Russia and her neighbours' - even if those neighbours aren't always necessarily the best of friends. Agnes Miller (as it happens, one of Prof Christian's tutees) is half Estonian and has a fascinating family background. She writes for us about her grandmother.

As a sort of companion piece to my earlier article on gardens in Russia in last summer's issue, you'll find an article describing my experience of leading garden tours of Scotland for some very knowledgeable Russian tourists. Our final article, by the Chief Executive of the Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations, describes her experience of making connections with the voluntary sector in Russia.

We have four book reviews, covering politics, cookery and two works of literature in translation—all of which are highly recommended. Very many thanks, as usual, to our reviewers.

Finally, if you would like to suggest future topics for us to cover in *The FORUM*, or indeed if you would like to write an article yourself, do please contact me via the SRF or directly at [sheilasim2@gmail.com](mailto:sheilasim2@gmail.com). I'd be happy to hear from you.

Very best wishes,

*Sheila Sim*

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July 2019

*The aim of the Scotland-Russia Forum is to promote interest in Russia and its neighbours in order to improve understanding of those countries in Scotland.*

[www.scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org)



## The FORUM

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# SRF News

More information on the SRF: [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org)

## News since Winter 2018/19

**Schools:** Jenny Carr continues to devote her efforts to encouraging Scottish schools to include (at least some) Russian culture and language in their curriculum. In addition to maintaining the “Find out about Russia” site set up by SRF volunteers a few years ago ([www.findoutaboutrussia.co.uk](http://www.findoutaboutrussia.co.uk)) she has moved relevant parts of the main SRF site to a new site - [www.russianinScotland.com](http://www.russianinScotland.com) - and hopes to develop that as time goes on.

She will also be developing an introductory course on Russian language and culture for schools, to be hosted on the British Council’s Schools Online site, with help from the Future of Russia grant which the SRF received last year. She hopes to complete it by the end of this year or early 2020. Once it is online she plans to promote it energetically in schools with the help of SCILT.

If anyone would like more information please email Jenny on [jennycarr06@outlook.com](mailto:jennycarr06@outlook.com).

## Events

Summer events with a Russian theme. It’s festival season in Edinburgh, and there are various events with a Russian flavour—quite literally, in the case of Alissa Timoshkina’s appearance at the Book Festival on Sunday 11 August, where we’re told “you’ll feel far from the Siberian chill with a warm cuppa and some Russian treats” (if you can’t make that event you can read a review of Alissa’s cookery book in this issue). At the Fringe there’s “Oleg Denisov: Russian Troll”, a British comedy show “Russian Roulette” (apparently combining Russian literature with gambling devices) and the return of the Russian Comedy Experience (yes, that’s Russian standup comedy) - or for something more sedate and traditional, there’s the Russian String Orchestra. There’s also Forest, a physical theatre performance from the Moscow Art Theatre School — described as “uncensored contemporary young Russia”. The main Edinburgh International Festival features many Russian performers, mainly but not exclusively in classical music.

Arguably the most interesting cultural event this summer is the *Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs* exhibition at the Queen’s Gallery, which we review in this issue. The Royal Collection Trust is organising several activities to coincide with the exhibition, including talks and workshops (e.g. the chance to make your own Fabergé-inspired egg!)

If you’re heading to London, Tate Modern presents (until September 8th) the first retrospective of Natalia Goncharova ever held in the UK. Most of the works have never been seen in this country before. I enjoyed it.

Chai n Chat. The group continues to meet in Edinburgh on the first Thursday of the month and welcomes all who are interested in Russian-Scottish relations, especially native Russians so that the chat can be in good Russian.

Fingask Follies. SRF member Helen Molchanoff, who reviews the Romanovs exhibition in this month’s issue, is the Director of an annual professional musical revue – the Fingask Follies — which will be celebrating its 25th season in 2020. Bookings are being confirmed for next year’s Most Colourful Season, and written contributions are welcome. You can find Helen at [www.fingaskcastle.co.uk](http://www.fingaskcastle.co.uk)

## The Future

When Jenny Carr decided at the end of last year to stand down, the Scotland-Russia Forum faced uncertain times. We were therefore delighted when Margaret Tejerizo agreed to become our new Chair. The organisation continues in excellent hands, and we feel the future is sunny. We also have a reinvigorated committee; we are delighted to welcome Peter Harvey as our new Treasurer, together with new trustees David Caldwell and Jennifer Scarce. Having decided to call time on our Summerhall office, we now have a financial situation as healthy as it can be for such a small organisation.

Please be aware, though, that although we have a new registered address at Glasgow University, this is not our own office. We can accept mail, but not visitors. And we do not have a dedicated phonenumber, so please contact us initially by email at the usual email address: [info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org).

What we lack, as always, is people to organise events. We would be thrilled if any of our readers would volunteer to take this on. Do please contact us with any suggestions for events or activities, and let us know if you’re willing to help getting them up and running. We look forward to hearing from you!

*Sheila Sim, SRF Secretary*  
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# Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs: an exhibition at the Queen's Gallery, Edinburgh

Reviewed by Helen Molchanoff

*Haste ye to the Queen's Gallery by the Palace of Holyroodhouse.*

Until 3rd November 2019, Peter the Great, the man who opened Russia's window onto Europe, will be there to welcome you at the bottom of the main stairs. His portrait, by



*Exhibition entrance featuring a portrait of Peter I, Tsar of*

Sir Godfrey Kneller, is the first exhibit in this remarkable show. It was commissioned by Peter himself as a present for William III, whom he met several times during his stay in London in 1698. He was there to study shipbuilding, with a view to making Russia the power of the oceans. This strong neoclassical image determined the way Peter was seen throughout his reign. The British society engraver John Smith adapted the portrait into a popular mezzotint. The fact that it is part of the Royal Collection and was painted in Britain is a particularly appropriate way to underline the strong connection between the two countries, which this exhibition does.

Of particular interest to Scottish historians is a letter in Peter the Great's own hand to the Old Pretender's agent, dated St Petersburg 5th January 1724. Although the content is rather vague (and fairly illegible to the modern eye) this letter was used by the Jacobites to try and encourage Russia to support their cause. When Peter's daughter Elizabeth managed to overthrow Ivan VI and his mother and restore "a legitimate ruler and dynasty", the Jacobites felt that if Russia could do it, so could they, with Russian backing! The backing never came...

Most exhibitions relating to Russia tend to dwell obsessively on Nicholas II and Alexandra, while this one opens doors onto other connections. It is fairly common knowledge that two of Queen Victoria's granddaughters were married to Russia: Ella to Grand Duke Sergei, Governor of Moscow, and Alexandra to Nicholas II. Both are now venerated as Russian Orthodox Saints. Less well known is that of Victoria's second son Prince Alfred ('Affie'), Duke of Edinburgh, married Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna in 1874. The exhibition includes a stunning picture of their marriage in the Winter Palace in St Petersburg by Chevalier (below), and also an enchanting watercolour sketch with sliding sections so that Queen Victoria, who was unable to attend, could be talked through both elements of the ceremony: Orthodox and Anglican.

The artist Laurits Regner Tuxen recorded another marriage, also in the Winter Palace, that of Nicholas and Alexandra.



*The Marriage of Prince Alfred and Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna, by Nicholas Chevalier, 1874*



*Departure of the Emperor and Empress of Russia from Balmoral, by Orlando Norie, 1896*

There are two versions of this picture. The one shown in the exhibition (and on the front cover of this magazine) was commissioned by Queen Victoria and is a beautiful close up of the ceremony; the other was for the Dowager Empress and hangs in the Hermitage. Tuxen has another two family gatherings on show: Copenhagen 1885, and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 with the Duke of Edinburgh's mother, Princess Alice of Battenberg, pictured bottom right as a little girl (overleaf).

Scotland was a focal point for regular family reunions, and in October 1896 Queen Victoria was visited by her favourite granddaughter Alicky (Alexandra Fyodorovna), her husband Nicky (Nicholas II) and their baby daughter Olga.

Alexandra had her portrait painted when she was at Balmoral, and this is in the exhibition. There is also an atmospheric watercolour by Orlando Norie (above) which shows Highlanders lined up with flaming torches to mark the departure of the Emperor and Empress from Balmoral. While he was there Nicholas wore the uniform of the 2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys), to which he had been appointed Colonel in Chief by Queen Victoria on the occasion of his marriage in 1894.

There are some extremely early black and white photographs from 1856 (below) by Corporal James Mack, a pioneer of photography, who travelled to Russia



*Corporal James Mack was sent as a photographer in the diplomatic mission representing Queen Victoria at the coronation of Alexander II in 1856. The image on the left includes a man wearing full Highland dress.*



*Portraits of The Duchess of York, 1923, and her daughter Princess (now Queen) Elizabeth, 1948, both by exiled Russian artist Savely Sorine*

for the coronation of Alexander II at Queen Victoria's behest. Of particular interest is one of the Church of St Nicholas, Moscow, with a figure in full Highland dress flanked by a couple of serfs; and another of a group of peasants hay making in Peterhof with two of members of Lord Granville's entourage (one of them is wearing a stove pipe hat which looks particularly out of place in this rural setting).

The final room of the exhibition is mainly connected with the 20th century. On show is the last letter in the archives sent by Nicholas II to King George V, dated 4th February 1917 – three weeks before his abdication: "I know full well that you will keep your promise to me to fight to the end..."

Following the murder of the Imperial Family in 1918, King George V and Queen Mary assembled a collection of works of art that had belonged to their Russian relations as poignant reminders of happier times. In 1923 the exiled Russian artist Savely Sorine was commissioned to paint the Duchess of York (later Queen Mother), who 25 years later

commissioned him to paint a portrait of her daughter Princess (now Queen) Elizabeth (left).

The final picture in the exhibition is one of the latest bequests to the Collection (2016) – a portrait of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh's own great grandmother Grand Duchess Alexandra Iosifovna of Russia, by Winterhalter.

This is just a taster of a must-see exhibition which includes portraits, sculpture, photographs, clothing, medals, porcelain, icons and archival documents from a period spanning more than 400 years. Many of the works of art were commissioned as diplomatic gifts, others as intimate personal mementos, including miniature masterpieces by Fabergé.

The Exhibition Catalogue, priced at £29.95, is a beautifully produced 478 page tome – definitely worth buying for Russian enthusiasts. It is informative and includes some of the exhibits from the Queen's Gallery in London which did not make the journey to Edinburgh.

*Helen Molchanoff is a second generation White Russian documentary film maker, who read Russian and French at St Andrews University. She continues to organise private showings of the series she co-produced for the Discovery Channel: "The Last of the Czars", featuring interviews with people who could remember seeing Nicholas II. She enjoys watching the never ending story of the Romanovs unfold.*

**To mark the exhibition the Royal Collection Trust is hosting several events at Holyroodhouse during the summer, including talks, workshops and 'Fabergé Fridays'. All details can be found at: [www.rct.uk/visit/the-queens-gallery-palace-of-holyroodhouse](http://www.rct.uk/visit/the-queens-gallery-palace-of-holyroodhouse)**

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*Mosaic Egg and Surprise by Fabergé. The 'surprise' is an enamel portrait of the five children of Nicholas II and Alexandra. It was later bought by King George V and Queen Mary.*



*Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 (with the Duke of Edinburgh's mother, Princess Alice of Battenberg, pictured bottom right as a little girl), by Tuxen.*

## Professor R F Christian remembered

by Jim Halliday



Reginald Frank Christian, who held the Chair in Russian at St Andrews University from 1966 to 1992, died in May 2018 aged 93. He was a pre-eminent Tolstoy scholar with an international reputation. In addition he served on a number of important committees overseeing the rapid expansion of the University which took place during the early part of his tenure: from 1975-1978 he was Dean of the Arts Faculty. He was notable for his unflinching kindness, quiet humour, patience and self-effacing manner.

Prof. Christian's journey to Russian was somewhat unconventional. Unusually for a Russian teacher of that generation he did not learn his Russian in one of the schools of languages operated by the services, but was largely self-taught; modern languages were all but non-existent in Oxford in the early 1940s. After leaving the Liverpool Institute in 1942 he gained a scholarship to Queen's College, gaining distinction in Latin and Greek. While there he joined the University Air Squadron and in 1943 suspended his studies to enter the RAF. He was assigned as Pilot Officer to the Atlantic Ferry Unit, delivering Liberators and Dakotas from Canada to North Africa, India and Scotland; later he conveyed VIPs to international destinations. His father's 1943 Christmas present, Aylmer Maude's translation of War and Peace and biography of Tolstoy, sparked an interest in Russian literature. Wishing to read Russian novels in the original, he began to teach himself Russian.

After graduating with First Class Honours in 1949 Reg joined the staff of the British Embassy in Moscow, but finding the work unfulfilling he switched to an academic career, initially in Liverpool then in Birmingham, before taking up the newly established Chair in Russian at St Andrews in 1966. He travelled widely in the USSR and visited Tolstoy's estate at Yasnaya Polyana.



The staff of the Russian Department – Harvey Pitcher, John Sullivan, Chris Barnes – were inspirational teachers who conveyed enthusiasm for their subject. Prof. Christian created an ambience in the Russian Department that was simultaneously intensely academic and yet intimate. This was partly due to invitations to the Christians' home at the Roundel, where Mrs Christian plied students with delicious home-made scones. Occasionally on spring days tutorials with the Professor took place in his garden; Reg would be sitting in a deck chair surrounded by manuscripts and papers when students arrived.

Prof. Christian liked to keep himself fit. He was often to be seen striding around St Andrews, his blue RAF great-coat flapping open in the stiff breeze. Staff meetings sometimes took the form of vigorous walks along the West Sands. Sports were always an important part of Reg's life: he was a keen footballer and enjoyed tennis; he was a demon squash player capable of demolishing students half his age.



'Reg' with Tolstoy's grandchildren

Prof. Christian's wife Rosalind, whom he married in 1952, was a Quaker with an interest in Buddhism and Eastern philosophy. She was a vegetarian and Reg became one too, in keeping with his belief in a life of Tolstoyan asceticism.

In March of this year Reg's daughter Jessica organised a concert in his memory in the Byre Theatre. It was a very moving event attended by around 150 people, featuring Russian music and recitals, with tributes from friends, colleagues and former students. Each spoke of the warmth of the Professor's personality and the breadth of his outlook and interests, the sympathetic approach he had to his students and the interest he took in their activities and experiences. He enriched the lives of generations of students, who remember him with fondness and gratitude.

*Jim Halliday studied Russian at St Andrews University. His first job after graduation was as a researcher in the Foreign Office, followed by over thirty years teaching Russian at Heriot-Watt University, with regular work and study visits to the USSR and its successor states.*

# My Estonian Grandmother

Agnes Miller

When people ask me for stories about my family they usually expect me to talk about my grandfather, the Estonian astronomer, Ernst Julius Öpik. However, his story has been told elsewhere, so this article is about my Grandmother, Aliide Öpik, his second wife. While she always lived in the shadow of her husband, she was a truly remarkable person and has a story that deserves to be told.

She was born Aliide Piiri on 30 June 1899, in Väike Torila, not far from the shores of Lake Peipsi near Kallaste in Estonia. Her family home was one of only six farms in the hamlet. They were extremely poor – the home consisted of two rooms, one for the family and one for the animals. In fact, little Aliide did not even have her own bed until the age of about four, sleeping on a pile of old coats. Grandmother recalled the home being lit either by rush lights or by oil lamps if there was more money. Clothes were washed in the river and were ironed with hot stones.

Aliide was the youngest of three surviving children. In 1903 her mother died and her father remarried. From this marriage Aliide had a half-sister and a half-brother.

Very little else is known of Aliide's early life or family, except that Aliide's father put great store on schooling and Aliide herself recognised that her route out of the poverty would be via education. However, the nearest school to the farm was an hour's walk away, which in the freezing winter temperatures was quite a hardship. Aliide's family was so



*Aliide, photographed in the 1920's.*



*Aliide's childhood home in Estonia. Taken sometime in the 1930s.*

poor that the children did not have underwear and Aliide walked to school in -20C without long stockings. Her knees were bare, and when she got to school would be blue with cold. She would only just have begun to feel warm again when it was time for the walk home. Even so, she only ever missed one day's schooling.

At school Aliide learned to speak Russian, as at this time Estonia was under Russian rule and a process of "Russification" was underway. Russian was the official language of the state and the language of instruction in school, with severe punishments for children who spoke Estonian.

Aliide proved to be a very good student of Russian—so good that she was offered a scholarship to study the language at Tartu University. Nevertheless, such was her hatred of the foreign occupiers that she refused the scholarship, enrolling instead in Chemistry on her own account. For a girl from a humble peasant background this was both a remarkable achievement and a very difficult undertaking financially. In fact, it proved impossible. Aliide had so little money that obtaining even such basics as food and clothing was difficult. Possessing only one skirt, when she spilled some chemicals and burnt a hole in it she was forced to wear her coat all the time. Once she went three days without eating. Eventually the hardships became too much, and she gave up without finishing her degree. I once asked her why she hadn't pushed on just a little longer. "Well," she explained, "they moved the chemistry department to the other side of town, and I couldn't afford the bus fare". Even as an old lady in her seventies, her eyes filled with tears as she remembered her bitter disappointment.

Estonia declared independence in 1918, though it took a war to finally expel the Russians. Sometime after the Treaty confirming independence in 1920, Aliide attended a lecture given by a handsome young Estonian astronomer, just back from working in revolutionary Russia. During the lecture he appealed for people to work on a project at Tartu Observatory, counting stars. Grandmother applied and ended



up not only counting stars, doing secretarial duties, running the team of women who, in those pre-computer days, did the number crunching for the astronomers, but also dating the handsome young astronomer. When she went to that lecture, Grandmother couldn't have known that she was about to meet the great love of her life, whom she would eventually marry, have three children with and follow across Europe.

If the Declaration of Independence in 1918 was a moment of great joy, the loss of independence when first Russia invaded in 1940, then Germany and then Russia re-invaded in 1944 came as a crushing blow for Aliide. She once spoke to her daughter of her anguish when, as the Soviet army advanced on the country, her son joined up, risking his life in what was a lost cause. As events turned out, the family was to flee the country before he fired a shot in anger.

Having been warned that he was on a Soviet "hit list", my Grandfather packed his family and as many belongings as possible onto a cart and they set off across Estonia from Tartu to Tallinn, where they took ship for Germany and exile.

The four years from 1945 were spent in four different refugee camps and were very dark, difficult times. Germany was disintegrating and conditions in the camps were crowded. Food was scarce; disease was rife. The children contracted tuberculosis, pneumonia, diphtheria and hepatitis. My Grandfather's mother and sister died in extremely suspicious circumstances in a nursing home, probably so that someone could steal their belongings. Aliide endured the loss of her country, friends and family; only her sister Alma accompanied the family out of Estonia. The only other member of her family she saw again was her brother



*A photo of the family taken in one of the refugee camps in Germany (date unknown). Back row, left to right: Ernst Öpik (husband), Aliide Öpik, Uuno Öoik (son). Front row: Tiitu-Imbi (Aliide's daughter and Agnes's mother) Helgi (daughter) and Alma Parts (sister).*

Edgar, in 1988 when he emigrated to Canada. Not surprisingly, in her own words she "lost the will to live". It was only her determination that her children make something of their lives that pulled her through that terrible time.



*Aliide wearing the traditional Estonian costume she embroidered herself, outside her home in Bangor, Northern Ireland. Taken late 1970s / early 1980s.*

Eventually my Grandfather secured a post at the Armagh Observatory in Northern Ireland, where they settled, first in Armagh and later in Bangor.

My Grandmother lived a long life. Too frail to return to Estonia, she did live to see the independence of her homeland in 1991 and the restitution of the home her husband had built for her in Tartu. Although this must have been small compensation for all her loss, when I said to her "Well, Grandmother, just by living so long you beat the communists" she did give me her quirky little smile. Despite their unswerving hatred of the Soviets, my grandparents made a separation between the ruling communists and Russian culture and ordinary Russian people. My Grandmother never forgot their beautiful language, and wrote letters to me in Russian during my degree course to help me practise. It would be worth it, she encouraged me, as I struggled with the intricacies of Russian syntax in my freezing St Andrews bedroom, just to be able to read Pushkin in the original.

After the death of her husband in 1985 Aliide went to live with her daughter (my mother) in Edinburgh, then later with her son in Melksham, where she died in 1994 shortly before her 95th birthday.

And now I am going to go and blow the dust off my copy of *The Bronze Horseman* and re-read it in homage to a truly extraordinary lady, Aliide Öpik, my grandmother.

# In Tune With Nature: why the Russians are heading to Scotland's gardens

Sheila Sim

We were on our way to An Cala garden in Argyll when the driver of our minibus asked if he could stop briefly to check his satnav. It was a glorious September day, and my group of Russian visitors took advantage of the break to stretch their legs. When I looked up, they were gone – dispersed, as if by the gentle autumn breeze.

Fortunately it wasn't the first time this had happened, and I quickly located them. Two were looking for mushrooms in a small birch grove; a couple more were collecting berries further along the single-track road; one was foraging for nuts; others were identifying wildflowers. It's very hard to keep a Russian in check when the natural environment is there to be enjoyed. They do have a particularly close affinity with nature. Eventually I rounded them up and we continued on our garden tour.

Garden tourism in Scotland is flourishing. Our national garden tourism body, Discover Scottish Gardens, was officially launched in 2015 with the help of VisitScotland's Growth Fund. Research has shown that every year nearly 700,000 British holidaymakers visit a Scottish garden, with 35,000 of these indicating that a garden visit was the main reason for their holiday. Garden tourism is worth around £240 million to Scotland every year in terms of tourism spend. But what about international visitors?

In partnership with Moscow travel agency Profytravels, owned and managed by Elena Lysikova, I have been actively promoting Scotland as a destination for garden tourism. For several years I have led groups of Russian enthusiasts around Scotland's magnificent gardens.

The gardening links between Scotland and Russia go back several centuries. Catherine the Great was the first to employ Scottish gardeners and landscape architects; the great imperial gardens of St Petersburg - Tsarskoye Selo, Peterhof and Pavlovsk - owe more than a little to Scottish expertise.

When planning my Scottish tours I try to ensure that we cover a variety of gardens and styles: from the historic and formal (think of Crathes and Drummond Castle) to the new and contemporary (such as Little Sparta and Broadwoodside). We visit large private gardens (such as Carlside, Teasses, Portmore and the like) but also those designed on a more intimate scale (Shepherd House or An Cala, for example). For the botanists and plant experts I try to include a visit to at least one of Scotland's four great botanical gardens at Edinburgh, Dawyck, Benmore and Logan. The annual guidebook produced by Scotland's Gardens Scheme always helps me plan my itineraries.



*Russian group at Greywalls in East Lothian, with head gardener Neil Davidson*

One of the gardens on my recent tour was Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott. Scott's works became hugely popular in Russia after first being published there in the 1820s, and his writing has been credited with influencing many of the country's most important literary figures including Tolstoy and Pushkin. ("Walter Scott! He is food for the soul!" declared Pushkin in a letter to his brother in 1825.) My literature-loving group were delighted to visit the garden that Scott himself designed.



*Abbotsford, Scottish Borders*

So, what kind of visitor makes the trip here from Russia? As with British garden groups, there is a preponderance of women. Some of them are looking for ideas for their own gardens; some are studying garden design. It's not uncommon for a garden magazine editor or journalist to

take part (there are many Russian garden publications, all of which feature British gardens prominently). Men are few and far between—though Elena’s garden photographer husband, Andrei, accompanies most groups.

In addition to their capacity to escape into the woods and fields at the drop of a hat, my Russian visitors have their other idiosyncrasies. I have learned, for example, that a visit to a garden centre is a must during their visits, since few of them will consider returning to Russia without at least three or four newly purchased plants in their suitcases. Until recently this would have been because it was difficult to buy plants in Russia (for many years most plants were imported from Germany), but these days there are plenty of decent garden centres in Moscow and beyond.

I don’t encourage it. I watched one of my visitors shaking soil from the roots of a plant and wrapping it in damp newspaper before her flight home. “Can’t you buy these plants at home?” I asked. “Yes,” she replied cheerfully, “but taking some home is part of the holiday experience!” The garden designer Rosemary Alexander, who teaches garden design to Russians, observed recently that she can’t take her groups to the same hotel twice as they tend to clog the plumbing with soil.

I have witnessed some lively conversations between my visitors and Scottish garden owners. Although part of my role is to act as interpreter, it is often clear that my guests speak more English than they first let on. They are curious and not shy about asking questions, and they take delight in the warmth and openness of the Scottish response.

“I found the Russian group to be way more knowledgeable than most – and way more forthright”, says Frank Kirwan, whose garden at Humble Dean in East Lothian was much admired by my recent group. “My favourite moment was when I ventured what I thought was the botanical name of a particular specimen, to be met with an emphatic ‘Nyet, nyet, nyet!’ from a rather formidable Russian lady of mature years, who then recited a much more plausible full Latin name...”

Andrei, one of the very few male garden tourists from Russia, has visited and photographed gardens all over the world. He is a regular visitor to the UK, and I asked him for his thoughts on Scottish gardens. “My favourites are

Carolside and Portmore in the Scottish Borders,” he reflected. “They contain such great variety and a kind of unpredictability, where you see formal elements rubbing shoulders with very naturalistic areas.” He adds, “I find that Scottish gardens tend to be more relaxed than English ones; there’s a greater sense of freedom about them. And Scots really appreciate the beauty of nature”. It seems we have much in common indeed.

*Sheila Sim is the Editor of FORUM and also a translator and garden photographer who leads occasional garden tours of Scotland for Russian groups. See [www.sheilasim.com](http://www.sheilasim.com)*



*An Cala garden, Argyll*



*Russian group posing at Carolside garden, Scottish Borders*



*Elena and Andrei Lysikov in Edinburgh*



*Humble Dean garden, East Lothian*

# Making connections in Russia

**Pat Armstrong**, Chief Executive of the Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations (ACOSVO) details the experience that she and other third sector chief executives had on a recent exchange to Russia.

The idea for our leadership exchange programme came from an exchange I took part in with a Serbia leader through the Euclid Network, the European network of civil society leaders. So how could I refuse when around 10 years later I heard about the opportunity to do an exchange with Russian NGO leaders – and could also offer the opportunity to Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations ACOSVO members?

The main focus of the exchange was on financial sustainability and considering ideas for future collaboration. It involved matching 10 peers from the UK and 10 from Russia. In December 2018 we hosted the Russian peers, with four of the 10 coming to Scotland and myself and three ACOSVO members being the matches. We had Anna, Kira and Olesya coming to Edinburgh and matched with myself, Petra Biberbach from PAS and Jacqueline Cassidy from Children in Scotland. Anastasia was matched with Meg Wright and headed north to Ross-shire Women's Aid.

**We put a programme together to learn about each other's business models, the services we offer, and the way that we lead.** We managed to include a visit to our organisations, the parliament, a few charity shops in Stockbridge (purely for research purposes of course) and the Scotch Malt Whisky Society (to try some local dishes). Then we all headed to London where the last couple of days brought all 20 of us together to consider how we could learn from each other more widely and jointly consider the above topics.

A few short months later we were heading to Petersburg and Moscow for the return leg of the exchanges. We had been told it might be cold and thought as hardy Scots we were well prepared – **but didn't expect everywhere inside to be incredibly warm (seemingly fuel is very inexpensive and rooms don't have separate temperature controls).** Our cases full of warm jumpers quickly became redundant – as long as we had serious hats and down jackets for outside.

Understanding the context and environment that our peers worked in was our first culture shock. So different to what we are used to (the sector is much younger as well as the policies and political structure being very different). We very quickly realised our peers were incredibly inspiring leaders working in difficult circumstances but determined **to make a difference in people's lives.**

We visited our peers who led infrastructure organisations, helping to share learning and encourage collaborative **working, we found out about a network of "kind cities" across Russia (take note Carnegie's work on Kindness in Scotland)** who held a kindness festival every year, saw a homeless shelter with offices in the loft, counsellors and lawyers helping people in very small meeting rooms, com-

pact dorms and shared laundries (full of folk in dressing gowns while their clothes were getting washed). It was very humbling to see the numbers of people helped, the compassion shown and the creativity brought to finding ways round problems and working solutions. We also found that a bed for the night is free to homeless people **so they don't have to beg.**

**We later visited a circus project ("circus for rebels") working with children and young people who are living in considerable disadvantage, including experience of institutionalisation in 'orphanages' and poverty, alongside children with learning disabilities.** It was amazing to see how involved they became, what a difference it made to have that focus in their lives – and how moving the show was when we were lucky enough to go to a performance later in the week. **A few of us couldn't resist trying the odd cartwheel and spinning some plates.** We also had to compare the charity shops. The concept has only been imported to Russia in the last few years, so is still being developed and we all had lots of ideas to share.



We also managed to fit in a few cultural experiences, from the ballet to the banya, to the Gorky Park parkrun and a huge selection of local foods to be tried (including red caviar and mixed meat dumplings – think they were getting us back for the haggis!).

The last couple of days we were all back together – exploring a shared space for the community and NGO sector to come together and another host of ideas to be shared.

I came back with a list of connections to be made across our countries. Many new friends, a humbling reminder of how important it is to be able to find innovative ways round obstacles when you have a mission and passion for what you want to achieve. Also a reminder that when we come together as peers with a shared objective to learn from each other, trust and relationships build incredibly quickly. I am hugely grateful for the opportunity to take

part in the project and want to offer a huge thanks to our peers for sharing their lives, their ideas and their leadership journeys.

I'm back refreshed, exhausted, inspired, grateful, humbled and determined. I feel strongly that we need to make the most of these experiences and opportunities. We need to make connections where we can to look for possible collaborations going forward, and more importantly value and nurture the relationships we have been fortunate enough to develop through the peer exchange experience.

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## BOOK REVIEWS



### ***Putin v. The People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia*** **by Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson**

Reviewed by Martin Dewhirst

The most challenging, controversial and provocative words in this calmly written and very readable book are those in the title. Is Putin really opposed to most of his electorate? If so, why is only a still very small percentage of that electorate openly critical of him? After all, everyone who knows more than a few Russians realises that nearly all of them are anything but stupid.

If I have one criticism to make of this 'must read' study, it is that the authors – an American now working in England and a Scot based in America – do not really get to grips with this mystery. For what it's worth, my hunch is that, to oversimplify, we are still living in a neo-Soviet (and even neo-Tsarist!) era, with most people in the so-called Russian Federation (it isn't really a Federation) blaming not the supreme leader but his close advisers for everything that goes wrong. A key question is, 'How much longer can the present situation last?'. Are Russians and non-Russians ready for a change? If they are not, they should read this book.

Its authors have much of value to say about 'wedge issues' such as attitudes to religion and sexuality; about young, active Putin supporters such as Kristina Potupchik; Russians who have risked their lives to fight in Ukraine since 2014; the amazing neo-Eurasianist Alexander Dugin; a

liberated young Russian, Mikhail Zygar; the role of Durkheim's 'collective effervescence'; the protests in Moscow in 2011-12 near the spot carefully chosen for the murder of Putin's most plausible opponent, Boris Nemtsov; and Navalny's anti-corruption campaign. Among the most interesting insights, despite the proviso that the respondents might not be speaking completely frankly, are those resulting from public opinion surveys. If you haven't the time to read the whole book, dip into pages 3-5, 104-08, 122-25, 138-58 (especially interesting about 'agreeable' people – people who prefer to agree rather than disagree with *any* opinion presented to them), 184-88, 198-99 and 221-26.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the first lines and the last lines of the main text. 'Vladimir Putin is a popular man. He is also a dictator. That is not a contradiction' (p.1). 'Putin's power will crumble when we least expect it. And yet, looking back, we will all have seen it coming' (p. 233).

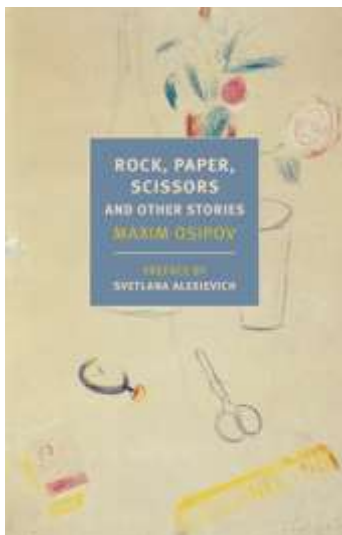
I think the cookie has already started to crumble. But will what comes after it be any better?

*Martin Dewhirst is a former Lecturer in Russian at the University of Glasgow*

*Putin v. The People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia, by Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson.*

*Published by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2019. Hardback, no price indicated.*

*viii + 287 pages. ISBN 9780300238396.*



**Rock, Paper, Scissors and Other Stories** by Maxim Osipov. Translated by Boris Dralyuk, Alex Fleming and Anne Marie Jackson.

Reviewed by Elena Malysheva

Maxim Osipov is not the only Russian author to find himself on the intersection between literature and medicine. But even a reader unfamiliar with the works by Chekhov and Bulgakov will spot the medical precision with which Osipov examines and diagnoses the condition

of the Russian province.

The life of most villagers in the central story *Rock, Paper, Scissors* is marked predominantly by a lack of choice or motivation. “First I’ll do my time in the army, then I’ll do my time inside”, says one of the village boys to the narrator when they discuss his future.

The narrator, who teaches at the local school, and Roxana, a migrant worker who disrupts the storyline by killing a man, are the two people whose emotional landscape is not barren. Unsettled, they constantly question themselves and are both convinced: there are answers. “Rejoice in the simplicity of the heart, trusting and wise”, the teacher tells his pupils. Unlike most people in the village, whose speech is mostly monosyllabic, their inner monologue is introspective and patient. “Delve deep within yourself and wait; the answer will come, as it always does, complete”, Roxana says to herself. The poetic rhythm of their rhetoric is reflected beautifully in Alex Fleming’s translation.

The poignant story *Good People* explores the “humiliating” nature of old age and the profound loneliness of those, who the “good people” want to help but fail

to notice. The protagonist, Bella, suffers from Alzheimer’s. Defeated by the borderline aggressive attention of her former colleagues, she is gradually absorbed by her past. Bella dissolves in her own memories, which seem to make much more sense than reality.

Even though Osipov is not shy to expose human nature in its most unattractive form, none of the harrowing elements of his stories are gratuitous: it is what it is. “I understand you must be pretty ... surprised, shocked and all that, but that’s life; things happen”, says Betty, a character from *On the Banks of the Spree*. A ruthless, pragmatic and emotionally stale woman, she comes to Germany to find her half-sister. Driven by a self-diagnosed sense of righteousness she expects her sister to accept her friendship, forget the past and move on.

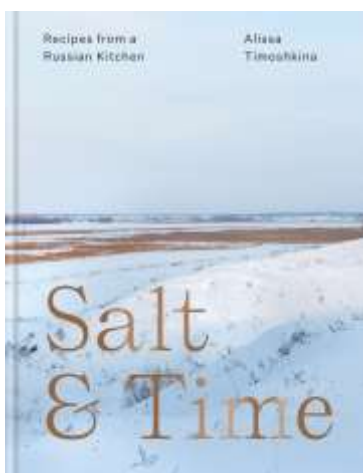
From this nonchalance, sense of misplacement, fear and absurdity of life in a country that has become terrifying and unfamiliar yet again, comes an honest and intense commentary on contemporary Russia. There - just like on an operating table, whether good or bad, terminally-ill or in recovery - everyone is a patient.

*Elena Malysheva is a Russian translator based in London. She translated R.P.Jhabwala’s Heat and Dust for Inostrannaya Literatura in 2016 and has most recently finished working on a large film project. She teaches Russian Language and Literature at a secondary school*

*Rock, Paper, Scissors And Other Stories* By Maxim Osipov. Preface by Svetlana Alexievich. Edited by Boris Dralyuk. Translated from the Russian by Alex Fleming, Anne Marie Jackson and Boris Dralyuk. Published May 2019 | NYRB Classics | £11.99 paperback 978 1 68137

## **Salt & Time: Recipes from a Russian Kitchen** by Alissa Timoshkina

Reviewed by Sheila Sim



What do you think of when you hear the words ‘Russian cooking’? Maybe you recall the grey dumplings and tasteless cabbage of Soviet-era canteens, or if you’re more charitable you might have a romantic image of caviar and blinis. Alissa Timoshkina, in the introduction to this new book, acknowledges that Russian cuisine is trapped between those two very

opposing ideas. In *Salt and Time* she aims to get beyond the usual stereotypes to reveal a cuisine that is “vibrant, nourishing, exciting and above all relevant”.

Alissa was born in Omsk, and it is Siberia that has inspired this book. In culinary terms this vast area of Russia may not be a land of plenty, but due to its history of exile and migration it has in fact adopted food traditions from many other areas including Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Korea. Alissa recalls from her childhood the diversity of produce on offer at her local markets that resulted from this combination of influences.

Alissa’s book gives a much more nuanced account of Russian cooking than we have seen up to now. Yes, there is

cabbage here – but her cabbage pie is flavoured with smoked paprika, chilli and nutmeg, and looks much tastier than it has a right to. Some of the Russian classics have been prettily deconstructed, and given a lighter, more contemporary touch. Her Olivier Salad, for example, is vegetarian version and uses a combination of crème fraiche and Greek yoghurt instead of the traditional, heavier mayonnaise. Herring in Furs is also deconstructed to beautiful visual effect (I cannot wait for an excuse to add some beetroot juice to a little crème fraiche, just to achieve the divine shade of pink of the sauce shown in the recipe).

There are classic Siberian dishes here such as pelmeni dumplings, together with pre-revolutionary favourites like koulebiaka and the much-loved Central Asian plov. But alongside these sit a few new things that you might not expect – fern stir-fry, anyone? Or squid poached in smetana sauce? There is also plenty here for vegetarians and vegans, reflecting Alissa’s wish for the food to be ‘relevant’.

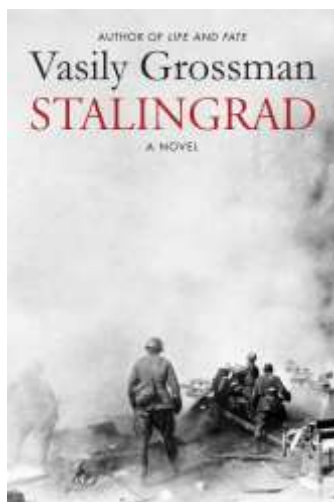
The structure of the book is straightforward: six main chapters cover starters, soups, mains, pickles, desserts and

drinks. There are other, shorter sections that address some of Alissa’s key ingredients and where you can buy them. Scottish readers may be interested to learn that the sea buckthorn berry, native to Siberia, is used ‘endlessly’ in Russian cuisine; for UK readers she lists a stockist in Cornwall, but those of us lucky enough to live in East Lothian can simply step outside the front door and go foraging.

As with any modern day cook book you would expect to see high quality photography, and we are not disappointed here; the photographer, Lizzie Mayson, perhaps deserves a more prominent credit than she receives. The food styling is spare, and the images give the various dishes room to breathe in their settings. The colour tones are generally cool throughout, reflecting the Siberian chill. But this book will warm the cockles of your heart—and your tummy.

*Sheila Sim is the Editor of The FORUM.*

Salt & Time by Alissa Timoshkina is published by Mitchell Beazley, £25. Photography by Lizzie Mayson



## **Stalingrad: a Novel by Vasily Grossman. Translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler**

**Reviewed by Tom Hubbard**

During January and February of 1943, at the time of the final phase of the Battle of Stalingrad, the BBC broadcast a radio dramatisation of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. A pamphlet guide was published, carrying an introduction by the distinguished English novelist E M Forster.

Tolstoy, according to Forster, regarded both public and private events as borne along on ‘the Stream of Life’ whose course cannot be altered by the individual or the social group. Vasily Grossman’s *Stalingrad*, which together with its equally epic sequel, *Life and Fate*, would seem to belie such determinism; Grossman’s fiction is predicated rather on human capacity to change the direction of history, albeit in the face of formidable odds and at great cost in violent deaths.

The human agents in *Stalingrad* are forced to live life at its extremes, and yet they find the spirit to quote or otherwise allude to the Russian literary classics, in which they may find comfort, but which constitute their intimate cultural inheritance which is under threat. The stream metaphor cited by Forster on Tolstoy could be reworked in the more active sense deployed by the Scottish poet, folklorist and World War II soldier Hamish Henderson (1919-2002); for him ‘the carrying stream’ was a people’s culture which can be cherished, developed and augmented by succeeding generations. Indeed, Vasily Grossman’s work testifies to both the challenges of war and the arts of peace.

In common with Tolstoy’s great novel, *Stalingrad* ranges from historically and geographically panoramic tableaux to a focus on family intimacies and small groups of (often quirky) individuals. However, as Robert Chandler observes in his commentaries on Grossman’s ‘dilogy’, it is Chekhov who emerges as the most potent literary pedigree. ‘Many individual chapters in *Life and Fate*’, writes Mr Chandler in his introduction to that novel, ‘are surprisingly like Chekhov’s short stories.’ The much-celebrated blend of the comic and the tragic in Chekhov is pervasive in *Stalingrad*; Chekhovian also are those evocations of serenely expansive Russian landscapes, in equipoise to human conflicts.

It may have been Carl Jung who first pointed to the affinity between sentimentality and brutality; Grossman notes that as a marker of Nazi culture. Its Soviet counterpart, of course, wasn’t unprolific of similar *poshlost*’.

Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, together with co-editor Yury Bit-Yunan, are to be heartily congratulated on their magnificent achievement in overcoming the chequered history of the original novel’s appearance, and on presenting it to us, for the first time, in a vigorous English translation.

*Tom Hubbard is a Scottish novelist, poet and Visiting Professor of Literature whose recent book ‘Slavonic Dances’ includes the tale of a Glasgow poet and singer who discovers Russian culture while in St Andrews.*

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