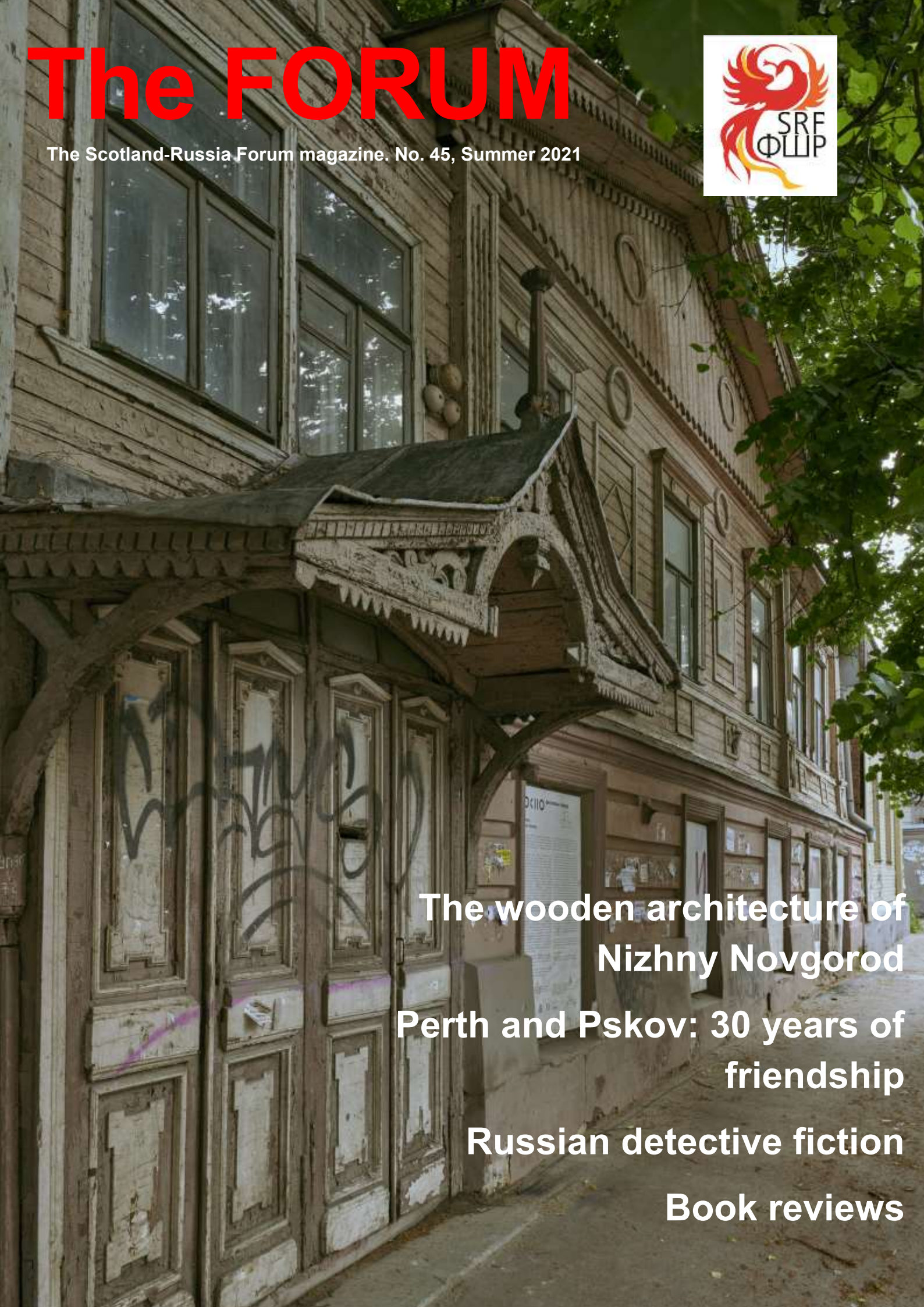
The FORUM

The Scotland-Russia Forum magazine. No. 45, Summer 2021



The wooden architecture of Nizhny Novgorod

Perth and Pskov: 30 years of friendship

Russian detective fiction

Book reviews

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From the Editor

Dear Readers

We hope this summer issue of The Forum finds you in good health and good cheer. Here at the SRF we are encouraged to think that live, in-person events can start to be held again after what seems a lifetime of Zooming.

In this edition we bring you a variety of intriguing features. We open with an article by Dr Claire Whitehead about her research into Russian historical detective fiction. If Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment is the only Russian crime novel you've heard of, then you'll enjoy finding out more.

Next, Alan Paterson brings us an interesting angle on Nizhny Novgorod's 800th birthday by looking into its beautiful wooden buildings. Hundreds of these are under threat—not just in Nizhny Novgorod, but right across Russia— and Alan introduces us to a project that's harnessing people power to save and restore them.

The town twinning movement grew out of a desire of people in many countries to avoid the conflicts of the first half of the 20th Century by bringing together people from cities in different countries. The link between Perth in Scotland and Pskov in Russia has been one of the most active and successful ones, and this year it celebrates 30 years. Iliyana Nedkova marks the occasion with an article about the many artistic collaborative events that have been held this year. The pandemic clearly hasn't dented the spirit of the occasion.

Our book reviews encompass the worlds of fragrance, politics, architecture and memory, with some of the most intriguing books to have been published this year. We commend all of them to you.

As usual, our sincere thanks to all our contributors. If you'd like to contribute an article to The Forum, or if you have any suggestions about future content, do get in touch.

Very best wishes,

Sheila Sim
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*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

SRF NEWS

The SRF series "Cultural Conversations" will resume again in the autumn.

"CHEKHOV IN SCOTLAND" SRF SYMPOSIUM - 29th SEPTEMBER 2021

Thanks to the sterling efforts of SRF Trustee Tom Hubbard, plans are now well under way for the SRF Symposium "Chekhov in Scotland" which will be held on September 29th 2021 from 18.30-21.30. This will be an online event and more details will be sent out by e-mail to SRF members and also placed on our website.

RUSSO-SCOTTISH MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

It is planned to invite Dr Svetlana Zvereva to repeat her moving, informative and beautiful presentation in the autumn/winter. Members who missed her earlier talk can discover a "history" of the Russian community in Scotland through music; this presentation was, in addition, a wonderful tribute to the life and work of Dr Zvereva's late husband, Dr Stuart Campbell. Her talk also provides a history of the Russo-Scottish Choir they had founded together and there are many short video clips of performances of the Choir, including the Russian Children's Choir.

MICHAEL FRASER 1938-2021

All of us at the Scotland-Russia Forum were saddened to hear of the passing in June of Michael Fraser, a longstanding member and friend of the SRF.

Michael Fraser ('Misha' to his Russian friends) was born in 1938 in India, to a Scottish father and a Russian mother —the latter well known as Eugenie Fraser, author of 'The House by the Dvina'.

Michael lived in India until the age of five, when he and his twin brother George returned to Scotland for their education, first in Broughty Ferry near Dundee to stay with their grandparents and on occasion with their mother (she lived in India with her husband), where they attended Dundee High School. At the age of eleven they became boarders at George Watson's College in Edinburgh for their senior schooling. Michael then did a student apprenticeship in Edinburgh to become a mechanical engineer.

He joined British India as an engineer officer and worked overseas for five years, managing to visit his parents in India on several occasions. In 1963 he left the sea and joined Esso Petroleum. He married Jennifer in 1967 and had two children, Nicholas and Elena. He also completed a degree at the Open University while working as a sales representative. After many locations and different jobs, he became UK manager for lubricants and spent a lot of time travelling overseas. He retired from Exxon after 35 years then worked for a subsidiary oil company. He did charitable work on a panel for the Prince's Trust and also an annual visit to St Petersburg for a Burns Supper dinner in aid of a children's orphanage there organised by Tom Clarke and a group from Glasgow.

Michael had many hobbies including golf and working on his garden. His main joy was his two grandchildren who lived in London. He never forgot his Russian heritage and studied Russian classes at night school at the university, visiting Russia often for holidays and keeping up with the relatives.

The SRF extends its deepest condolences to Michael's widow Jennifer and their family.

‘The Lost Detectives’ - bringing forgotten 19th-century Russian crime fiction to a wider audience

By Dr Claire Whitehead

The detective learns of the murder in The Russian Detective

Most people, whether or not they are interested in Russian literature and culture, have likely heard of Fedor Dostoevskii’s 1866 novel Crime and Punishment. But what about the myriad other crime novels written in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century and which were hugely popular with readers?

‘Lost Detectives: Adapting Old Texts for New Media’ is a collaborative project, funded by the University of St Andrews, between myself (Dr Claire Whitehead, Reader in Russian at St Andrews), and the author and illustrator, Carol Adlam, who lives in Nottingham. Its aim is to bring various forgotten examples of nineteenth-century Russian crime fiction to a new, English-speaking audience through various acts of adaptation, including a graphic novel and radio plays.

I have been researching Russian crime fiction since 2005, having been inspired by Anton Chekhov’s 1883 story ‘Shvedskaia spichka’ (‘The Safety Match’). In this story, Chekhov plays with the conventions of crime fiction (the locked-room mystery, the experienced older detective and his enthusiastic, younger sidekick, etc.) and existing scholarship suggested that he was parodying foreign crime writers, such as the French author Emile Gaboriau. However, I suspected that Chekhov might have been targeting Russian examples of the genre and so began a long journey of academic detection, aimed at unearthing as much late nineteenth-century Russian crime fiction as possible. The fruits of this labour have appeared in various academic articles since 2006 as well as the book, The Poetics of Russian Crime Fiction, 1860-1917: Deciphering Stories of Detection published in 2018. In this book, I discover and discuss the numerous writers who wrote crime fiction in Russia in this period, including Nikolai Sokolovskii, Petr Stepanov, Nikolai Timofeev, Semyon Panov, Aleksandr Shkliarevskii, Andrei Zarin and many others.

However, with the exception of Dostoevskii’s Crime and Punishment and Chekhov’s ‘The Safety Match’, none of these works has ever been translated into English, meaning their audience is rather limited. So, I began to think about ways to bring these works to the attention of more people. Carol Adlam, who previously worked as a Senior Lecturer in Russian at the University of Exeter, had designed the image that graces the cover of my book, The Poetics of Russian Crime Fiction, and during that process we had discussed how else we might work together on Russian crime fiction. And we came up with the idea of a project of adaptation, taking original Russian crime stories and transforming them into English-language works that would appeal to a wide audience. After much discussion, we decided to make the first stage of the project an adaptation of Semyon Panov’s novella Three Courts, or Murder during the Ball from 1876, into a graphic novel that would showcase not only the original work and the broader genre, but also Carol’s talent as an adapter and illustrator. Panov is almost entirely unknown in Russian literary history but wrote five works of crime fiction in

the 1870s, all of which are interesting examples of the genre.

Three Courts tells the story of the investigation into the murder of Elena Ruslanova, who has her throat slit and her diamond tiara stolen during a ball held at her family's mansion to celebrate her engagement. In spite of the fact that there are 227 guests present at the celebration, no one witnesses the murder as Elena is killed in her dressing room, a crime scene that recalls the locked-room setting of Edgar Allan Poe's early detective story, The Murders in the Rue Morgue. We agreed that the description of various spaces in Panov's story (the mansion, its surrounding garden, Elena's dressing room with its glass roof, and the various corridors that run through the house) would make it an exciting text to adapt visually into a graphic novel. Carol's first job was to produce ten 'proof-of-concept' pages of the graphic novel, which could be used to pitch the adaptation to a publisher. These images were also displayed to the general public in June 2019 in the outdoor gallery space in St Salvator's Quadrangle at St Andrews University, with some explanatory information. In early 2020, Carol had a meeting with a representative from the publishers, Jonathan Cape, who were very interested in the idea of publishing the graphic novel adaptation, and she signed a contract with them in April 2021. So, the graphic novel based on Panov's novella will be published in 2023-24 under the title The Russian Detective.

The success of this first stage of the 'Lost Detectives' project, and the enthusiasm expressed for it by members of the public at various events, including the exhibition of the artwork, convinced us both that more works should be adapted in different media. So, the second stage of the

Detail from cover image of *The Poetics of Early Russian Crime Fiction*

project, which is still ongoing at the present time, has two interconnected strands: the adaptation of a further three works of late Imperial Russian crime fiction as well as the production of a podcast series in which Carol and I, along with various guests, discuss both the project and issues relating to adaptation more broadly. Guests on the 'Lost Detectives' podcast series have included Dr Simon Grennan, who has not only written about the theory of adaptation but is also the author of Dispossession, a graphic adaptation of Anthony Trollope's novel John Caldigate. We also spoke to the renowned Scottish crime writer, Val McDermid, about her various experiences of adaptation, including the TV series Wire in the Blood, Traces and the new series based on her Karen Pirie novels, which has been filming in St Andrews and the East Neuk of Fife in 2021. These conversations, as well as the other episodes, can be listened to here: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~lostdetectives/

At the same time, I continue to work with Carol on adaptations of other works of early Russian crime fiction. The second text selected for adaptation was Nikolai Timofeev's 1872 volume, Notes of an Investigator, which includes seven stories all of which are narrated by the same judicial investigator hero. In order to give a flavour of these various stories and their interconnected storylines, Carol came up with the idea of reimagining them as an episode of Radio 4's flagship news show, The Today Programme, but set in 1864. In the programme, the presenters, Russified versions of John Humphreys and Martha Kearney, cut to segments from various correspondents reporting on court trials as well as on instances of civil unrest, including the Polish uprising in the west of the empire. The script of the radio play also includes a Russian shipping forecast as well as racing tips featuring well-known literary horses! Today in 1864 has prompted interest from a producer at BBC Radio 3 and so will be entered into the BBC's commissioning competition in 2021, so watch this space!

Carol has also produced a second radio play script of an 1876 novella by the writer Alexander Shkliarevskii, A Secret Investigation. Shkliarevskii was a prolific writer of crime stories during the 1870s and 1880s, hugely popular with readers, but who always struggled to earn a living or establish a reputation from his writing. Carol has entitled her adaptation of this work, Curare, after the South American poison that is used to kill various victims in a manner that evades detection for a long while until the husband of one woman voices his suspicions to the investigator. In Curare, Carol combines elements of Shkliarevskii's original story with various historical events occurring at a similar moment in time, including the admission of women to the Russian Imperial Medical Society in the 1870s, the beginning of the anti-vivisection movement in Russia and elsewhere, and ideas about images retained on the human retina after death that might be captured by photography. Carol and I hope that this script will also be produced as a radio play for broadcast in the near future.

Carol is also in the relatively early stages of adapting the work of one of Russia's first female crime writers, Aleksandra Sokolova, who occasionally wrote under the pseudonym Blue Domino. Sokolova is a fascinating figure because not only did she write crime fiction, as well as historical and romance novels, but she was also one of Russia's first prominent journalists, working for various periodicals from the 1860s onwards and briefly owning Russkii listok in the 1870s. Two of her crime novels, Without a Trace from 1890 and The Song Has Been Sung from 1892, showcase how the genre can function somewhat differently in the hands of a female writer, with greater criticism of the failings of the judicial system as well as of the plight of women in a patriarchal society.

Carol and I have also presented our work together at the Victorian Popular Fiction Association annual conference in 2018, and Carol has presented her work at the 5th International 'Illustr4tion' conference in Dijon, France (2019), as well as at Nottingham Trent University. Carol has a forthcoming chapter (""The Bobrov Affair": Creating a Graphic Novel Adaptation of a "Lost" Russian-Empire Crime Novel') in the book Illustration and Adaptation, to be published by Palgrave McMillan in 2022. I published an article in 2019 in the journal, Victorian Popular Fictions, on the exploitation of space in Panov's novella and I am planning a book-length project on the work of Aleksandra Sokolova.

We both hope that our continuing work on the 'Lost Detectives' project will give more people the opportunity to appreciate works of early Russian crime fiction and to get to know underappreciated writers from the late Imperial era.

Dr Claire Whitehead is a Reader in Russian at the University of St Andrews, working on Russian literature and culture from the nineteenth century onwards. Her two principal research areas are crime fiction and the fantastic. Along with author-illustrator Carol Adlam, Claire is currently working on adapting various works of nineteenth-century crime fiction into other forms, as well as recording a podcast series.

Nizhny Novgorod: 800 years of architecture

By Alan Paterson

In the summer of 2018, I was fortunate to spend a month working across Russia in Sochi, Kaliningrad and Nizhny Novgorod. "Nizhny" is an amazing city. It has a rich and interesting history and architecture, and a thriving contemporary cultural scene. And on 21st August 2021 it celebrates its 800th birthday.

Originally built as a garrison town to defend the region from the Tatars, the kremlin defined Nizhny Novgorod. Sited on high ground beside the Oka river, where it joins the Volga, you could see for miles. Those views are still enjoyed today.

Trade routes developed along the rivers; craft skills and production flourished in the region. The wooden kremlin was completely rebuilt in stone and brick between 1500 - 1511 by Italian architect Pyotr Francesco Fryazin and a large group of Italian masons. The design of thirteen towers was even commented on in Rome at the time.

The new kremlin mostly survived into the twentieth century. In 1952, a full and historically accurate restoration began under the direction of architect S L Agafonov and today, once again, the kremlin defines the very heart of Nizhny.

In the nineteenth century, the Nizhny Novgorod Fair, a world-wide trading market, expanded significantly, bringing wealth and a huge influx of people to Nizhny and encouraging a cosmopolitan outlook. The streets radiating out from the kremlin were filled with wealthy merchants' houses blending European romanticism with Neoclassicism and seventeenth century Russian architectural styles. Today these impressive buildings house shops, museums, legal and academic institutions, cafes, bars and restaurants, making for a lively city centre.

However, the main expansion of Nizhny, then re-named Gorky, occurred during the Soviet era. Much like Glasgow in the nineteenth century, rapid industrialisation saw the population rise from 97,000 in 1900, to well over a million by 2000. The need for housing saw huge numbers of apartment blocks built, new districts created and Constructivist experiments in city planning compromised by the speed of expansion. Many of those blocks are now being refurbished with many more new developments underway - 'the apartment' is very much the modern model for city living. But it wasn't always so. Nizhny still has many examples of the traditional wooden houses that once filled the town. And they, of all Nizhny's architecture, are what fascinate me the most.

Undeniably charming, these 'olde worlde' exteriors hide some radical building concepts. Moving house? Yes - quite literally. These houses can be dismantled, moved and rebuilt - and repeatedly, should you wish (think IKEA flat-pack, but on a much grander scale). The museum of wooden architecture in Nizhny has a collection of buildings from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, all moved and reassembled from across the entire region.

These buildings are immensely strong and have structural integrity - they do not require any foundations. This simple fact has significant consequences for the built environment. The placement and orientation of individual houses is very flexible and can follow the natural contours of the land. Trees can grow right next to these houses - without the fear of subsidence - and frequently do.

Construction sites need the minimum of clearance; so the existing natural environment can be largely preserved with all its resident wildlife. And the continuity of the natural landscape is maintained. The houses appear 'embedded' in nature, making them much more appealing as homes.

But are they practical? They survive Russian winters (-15C, 4ft of snow) and Russian summers (+30C) heated by little more than a stove. And if maintained, they can last hundreds of years.

And there has been constant evolution throughout the ages to incorporate new building styles and materials: cladding, stucco, brick, gable ends and terracing, and continuing today with metal roofs and gutterings. As wood is easily worked, this house type remains flexible, accommodating extensions, balconies and other modifications. Carved wooden panels form an integral design element around windows and eaves.

Very high craft skills are matched by surprisingly sophisticated design aesthetics here. Unfortunately the carved panels are rarely replaced in modern restorations. Lost skills, or just way too expensive? Either way, an important feature of the style is being lost.

And this is not the only threat to these wooden treasures: fire is a huge risk (although in the photo on the right, the structure is more intact than may be imagined).

Before (July 2018)

After (July 2019)

8 Varvarskaya, the oldest 'at risk' house in Nizhny Novgorod

But much worse is neglect. Lack of maintenance inevitably leads to rot, dereliction and collapse, allowing developers to bring in the bulldozers (previous page, 'before' and 'after'). And that fragile continuity of nature and connection to the past is also destroyed.

These buildings need to be valued; they need care. And this is what The Tom Sawyer project aims to do. Named after Mark Twain's paintbrush wielding hero, this umbrella group aims to help local enthusiasts to set up restoration projects. Local businesses sponsor the cost of materials and volunteers and tradespeople paint and repair the buildings. And volunteers also come from abroad, again facilitated by the umbrella group. The volunteers stay with local families, sample Russian life and do some painting. So if you're handy with a paint brush and want to brush up your Russian, this opportunity may interest you.

But what about Nizhny itself? As part of the 800th anniversary celebrations, many public projects have been created, including the restoration of several historic wooden houses: the now defunct Museum of the Intelligentsia and the 'at risk' oldest house in Nizhny Novgorod.

Which seems an entirely fitting way for Nizhny to celebrate 800 years.

So perhaps these old but eco- and climate-friendly buildings will be saved from decay and the developers; allowing the city to maintain connections to its past, keep its unique urban/au naturel environmental balance and provide a strong platform from which to go forward for the next 800 years.

All photos © Alan Paterson

Alan Paterson is a freelance camera operator with a passion for all things hand crafted from wood. He first visited Russia in 1985, and continues to be fascinated by Russian architecture and culture.

Work in progress

Find out more:

Museum of Wooden Architecture: https://vk.com/club16938909

Tom Sawyer Project: https://en.tsfnn.ru/

Nizhny 800: https://nizhny800.ru/

Tom Sawyer Project poster

Perth-Pskov: 30 Years of Friendship

By Iliyana Nedkova

It was 4 December 2020 and the twin cities of Perth and Pskov, although still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, were determined to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the signing of the momentous Twinning Memorandum on that very winter day. Friends of Pskov and Perth flocked to their computer screens to vicariously share a taste of champagne and light a candle for each of the three decades on the homemade chocolate cake. Stories of friendships sustained over generations were shared across the virtual highway. Amidst the celebration the Friends of Pskov Association announced its new initiative: an online monthly festival of poetry, art, drama and music in Russian, English and Scots, supported by Perth & Kinross Council and the UK Twin Towns and Sister Cities Foundation.

We launched the festival on 15 March 2021, marking the very date when the signing of the Twinning Agreement between Perth and Pskov took place in Perth. For this first of six Friends of Pskov monthly gatherings we invited our Twin City Ambassador and Scottish Makar Jim Mackintosh, in association with the Federation of Writers (Scotland), to Zoom in on the twin cities literary greats – Alexander Pushkin and William Soutar. Pushkin often retreated to his dacha in the hinterland of Pskov, while Soutar spent his entire life housebound in his Perth home, often writing in Scots. We even managed a world premiere – a new 'owerset o' a Pushkin's poem Evil Spirits 'intae' Scots as a spoken word Zoom collaboration between Jim Mackintosh and Russian-Scottish theatre maker and translator Natalya MacDonald. We loved hearing from Dr Billy Kay about the Scottish diaspora in Russia over the centuries, including the stories of architects, doctors, soldiers, royal family nannies and defiant 'lassies'. Other performers included Iain Jordan, Chloe Mackay, Iona Fyfe, Debra Salem and Iain Mackintosh. We felt that the people-to-people bond that has lasted for 30 years between the twin cities of Perth and Pskov was being truly sealed for the next 30 years of 'bricht' new twinning horizons.

Inspired not only by the cultural legacy of Pushkin and Soutar but also the first cast iron bridges in Russia built by Scot architects and masons, throughout our festival we set out to construct bridges firmly set on the foundations of contemporary art, over the rivers flowing through the twin cities of Perth, Pskov and Tartu – Pskov's twin city in Estonia, which we have reached out to back in 2017. For our second of six monthly 'blethers', held on 15 April 2021, we headed alongside the banks of the twin cities rivers in search of al fresco creativity. Borrowing the art term 'en plein air' from the French, meaning 'out, in fresh air', we zoomed in on plein air painting, we took a detour to the French Riviera and the Black Sea Coast of Bulgaria before traversing Perthshire for the quintessential Scottish landscape.

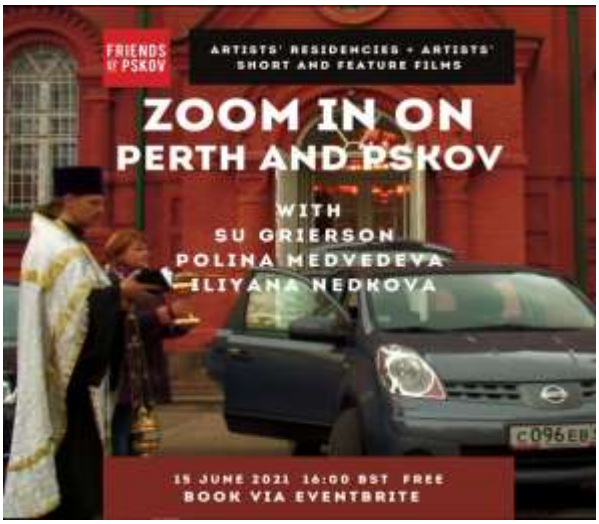
In these times of restricted movement and restraints on gatherings indoors, we were pleased to re-discover the international tradition of plein air residencies and focus on

Pskov Plein Air, which has been a popular creative residency destination for artists from all 15 twin cities of Pskov, including Perth and Tartu since its inception in 2003. Pskov Plein Air is not only part of the worldwide town twinning movement. It also belongs to the plein air movement which has been advocating for creativity on location in the great outdoors since the 1990s. With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting two editions of Pskov Plein Air in 2020 and 2021, we were pleased to turn our second Friends of Pskov Zoom in on Plein Air Creativity event into a reunion for participants in this residency including artists Oleg Tsvetkov (also founding curator of Pskov Plein Air), Andrew Hunter, Dave Hunt, Serafima Zibnitskaya, Barbara Pease, Inna Lyalina and musicians Svetlana Rodionova and Alexei Ipifinov.

Zoom in on Freedom was the third of our Friends of Pskov monthly gatherings over Zoom held on 18 May 2021. We started with revisiting Peace Child – the first event to involve Pskov, Perth's twin city in 1991. A socially engaged theatre production directed by Ken Alexander, Peace Child was the sensation of Perth Festival of the Arts 1991 and a factor in Perth winning the Royal Mail International Twin Town Award 1991. It featured an international cast of around 140 young people from Perth's twin cities, including 16 young people from Pskov. The success of Peace Child was followed by a humanitarian aid campaign for the people initiated by the Pskov Friends of Pskov Association at a time of tremendous political and economic change heralding the break-up of Soviet Union.

As part of our fourth of six Friends of Pskov monthly gatherings held live on 15 June 2021, we zoomed in on artist's films and had a 'blether' with the filmmakers – two outstanding contemporary artists Su Grierson of Perth and Polina Medvedeva of Pskov. In her response to our April session on pleinairism, Su Grierson delivered an illustrated talk Taking Down the Walls and considered international artists' residencies in terms of their wider impact and opportunities for the local community.

Polina Medvedeva echoed Grierson's approach by her artistic practice of live mixing of stories, voices and soundscapes in her own artist's films and collaborative live



screening performances. Medvedeva's documentary 'road movie' The Champagne Drinkers: Russia's Informal Economy from the Back Seat of a Taxi (2015, 53 min) was a focal point of our discussion. Reminiscent of Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexeivich's book Second-Hand Time (Fitzcarraldo, 2016), both film and book give voice to those whose stories are lost in the official narratives of nation-states. The film uses the taxi, rather than the kitchen, as a storytelling vehicle charting the decline and survival of Soviet culture. We were reminded of Alexeivich's words 'In 5 years everything can change in Russia, but in 200 years - nothing.'

This quote opens Tom Jeffreys' new book The White Birch. A Russian Reflection (Little Brown, 2021) – the subject of our next live conversation as part of our monthly Friends of Pskov Zoom in on festival series.

Six months, six blethers – all marking the 30th anniversary of the signing of the twinning agreement between Perth and Pskov 1991-2021 – all confirming the crucial role of contemporary art, literature and artivism within the town twinning movement of today.

Iliyana Nedkova is a Scottish Bulgarian curator and writer of contemporary art and a committee member of Friends of Pskov Association since 2017 (See www.iliyananedkova.wordpress.com.) Watch the edited recordings of Friends of Pskov Zoom in on festival events on the Friends of Pskov YouTube channel.. See www.friendsofpskov.co.uk.

The Scent of Empires: Chanel No5 and Red Moscow, by Karl Schlögel

Reviewed by Sheila Sim

Historian Karl Schlögel begins this book in a Proustian manner, with his memories of an all-pervasive scent that characterised festive occasions throughout the Soviet Union. He later identifies the fragrance as Krasnaya Moskva, or Red Moscow, and sets off on the trail of this story. His impulse is the notion that there is not just a 'noise of time' (in Mandelshtam's words) but also a 'smell of time' – that we move not just through soundscapes, but also scentscapes.

Both Krasnaya Moskva and the enormously successful Chanel No. 5 can be traced back to a common origin: related fragrances created by two French perfumers living in tsarist Russia, Ernest Beaux and Auguste Michel, to honour Catherine the Great on the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty. Beaux returned to France after the Russian Revolution and met Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel (who chose No. 5 from his formula), while Auguste Michel stayed in Russia and based the fragrance Krasnaya Moskva on his original perfume.

Schlögel documents the parallel lives of Coco Chanel and Polina Zhemchuzhina-Molotova (wife of Soviet foreign minister Molotov), who played a key role in the Soviet perfume and cosmetics industry. She is said to be responsible for the design of the bottle for Krasnaya Moskva, whose stopper resembles the onion domes of the Kremlin. Both women came from the provinces and made their way to the heart of cultural and political life, similar in their energy and self-confidence. They died within a year of each other, Molotova in 1970 and Chanel in 1971.

Schlögel takes us on a wonderful, winding journey through the political and cultural worlds of Paris and Moscow from Revolution to the present day. The book is full of names from French and Russian culture that we know so well: Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, Malevich, Christian Dior, Elsa Schiaparelli, Mayakovsky and Lilya Brik, Bulgakov, André Gide, Picasso and Chagall… It's a roll call of some of the major cultural figures of the 20th century.

Perfume lovers will be delighted by the names of all the fragrances listed in the book, from the sublime to the ridiculous. The Bolshevik revolution brought the rejection of all forms of refinement, and perfume was scorned as the epitome of a bourgeois lifestyle. Fragrances were still produced, but the names in this new era were politicised: Pioneer, Tank, Collective Farm Victory, and (my favourite) Hello to the Chelyuskin Crew. The 1950s and 1960s were the 'golden age' of Soviet perfumery, and fragrances were produced not just for the domestic market but also for export. Names of perfumes increasingly referenced objects of natural beauty – Coral, Crystal, Amber – and generally became more lyrical and romantic.

But Schlögel doesn't sugarcoat his tale. A book devoted to 20th century scents and smells must also acknowledge the unpleasant end of the olfactory spectrum. He reminds us that all of the horrific scenes we picture when we think back on the last century are impregnated with odours: the smell of corpses piled in concentration camps, smoke billowing out from crematoria, burning books.

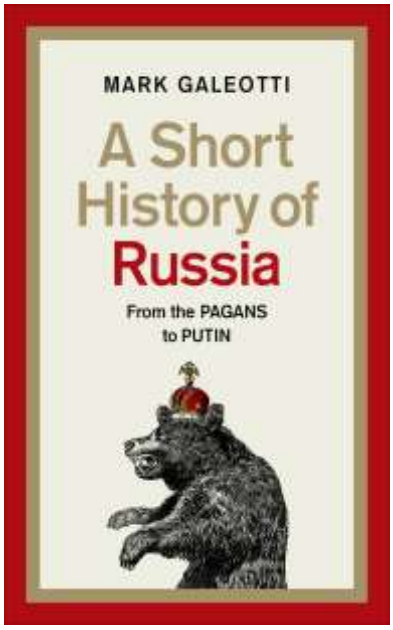
Schlögel brings the book right up to the present day in focusing on the building at 23 Nikolskaya Street in Moscow, where the current owner wants to open a boutique for his perfume company – the very building where tens of thousands of people were sentenced to death in Stalin's Great Purge of 1937. Under mayor Luzhkov's tenure, this was one of endless historical buildings due to be torn down to make way for offices or parking – but thanks to the organisation known as Memorial it has been saved and there is a petition to transform this 'monstrous crime scene' into a museum of political repression. In fact, says Schlögel, a fragrance has been composed in protest: "Composition No. 23 opens with notes of the old papers and inks that were used to sign the death sentences. The story continues with the aroma of a damp basement, soon followed by the main ingredient: the sharp smell of gunpowder, which is gradually replaced by a note of ash, leaving behind a bitter aftertaste".

This fascinating book, full of intriguing and captivating nuggets of information, will be of interest to a very wide readership. Detailed endnotes and bibliography will satisfy an academic audience, but the easy style makes it accessible to the general reader. The translation from German by Jessica Spengler is so good as to be entirely unnoticeable.

Polity Press, 2021. Hardback ISBN: 9781509546596, £20

A Short History of Russia, by Mark Galeotti

Reviewed by Vin Arthey



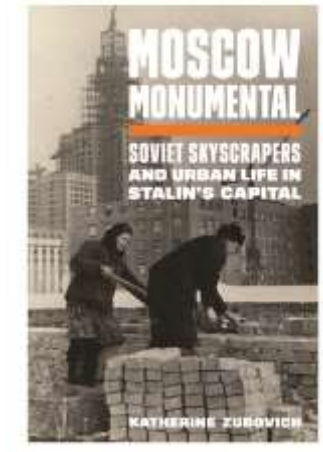
I first came across Mark Galeotti through research into the Soviet and Russian military and intelligence matters, and then heard him speak about his *The Vory: Russia's super mafia* (Yale University Press, 2018) at the 2019 Edinburgh International Book Festival. There, self-effacingly, he spoke about his luck studying Russian history and working on his PhD ('The Impact of the Afghan War on Soviet and Russian politics and society, 1979 – 1991') at the very time the Soviet Union was collapsing. Now, his tweets, blogs and articles are a key source for information and well-founded opinion about Russia and what is happening there.

This book can be seen as a logical follow-up to his *We Need to Talk About Putin* (2019, also published by Ebury). There, Galeotti drew attention to Vladimir Putin's version of Russian history and how the Russian President uses it to create an idea of the Russia he represents, thereby establishing the Russian people's loyalty both to the nation and to himself. The question that follows, of course, is 'how accurate is Putin's version of Russian history?'- which is what A Short History of Russia is for. Galeotti begins by offering images, metaphors illustrating the task – the sheer size of Russia; Russia's oldest 'book' – three wax coated boards which were reused and written over; successive Russian leaders - tsars, aristocrats, archbishops, Party leaders – looking out from Russia at the same time as looking into the nation (that is, if nation is even the right word).

These triggers seem ever present, through the 'founding' of the state of Kievan Rus to the adoption of Orthodox Christianity. Then, the effect of the Mongol invasion in the 13th century (the reality of a threat from without) is hardly likely to have prevented the arrival of the European Renaissance. Surely the landscape and the forests were to blame? Galeotti sees that from the 17th century there is an always faltering move for Russia to 'Europeanise' along with an associated worry of the country becoming unstable as vested interests come under threat.

A Short History of Russia is ideal for someone coming to the subject for the first time but is delightful and to an extent challenging for the Russophile. It is a terrific read, with some marvellous turns of phrase. I loved the terms 'bling and spin' to describe Catherine the Great's rule, and Galeotti nails Putin's view of history thus: '(He) demands that (his) new, official story of the country should be something 'free of internal contradictions and double interpretation' – as if true history was ever so neat.' Unsurprisingly in such a short book there are no notes, bibliography as such or index, but each of the eight chapters begins with a small photograph (three of them taken by Galeotti himself) which illustrate the theme of the pages that follow. There are eight useful maps, and at the end of the introduction and each chapter there is a paragraph of further reading - which also serve as extra acknowledgements, for Galeotti thanks or honours many of the writers.

A Short History of Russia by Mark Galeotti is published by Ebury Press, Hardback £12.99 ISBN 9781529106381



Moscow Monumental: Soviet Skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin's Capital, by Katherine Zubovich

Reviewed by Martin Dewhirst

Russia is not only a huge, but also a remarkably horizontal country. Even the Ural mountains' (gory) don't inspire the imagination as much as, say, the Alps; the Urals were and are hardly a serious barrier to invaders from the East. Indeed, even in Moscow the Lenin (since 1999 again called Sparrow) gory are always translated into English as 'Hills' (kholmy), presumably to avoid making a mockery of the concept of 'mountains'.

Perhaps this flatness helps to explain the Russian need to (over?)compensate by constructing and tolerating a strong, anti-democratic 'vertical of power' to prevent the whole country from unravelling?

Before 1917 Russia was an autocracy with bell-towers of churches and fire lookout towers often the only features on the distant horizon. After 1917 there was a cult around the Soviet air force and the prospects for space travel. In the 1930s it wasn't yet possible to go into space, but work started on the construction of the very-high-rise 'Palace of Soviets' after the demolition of one of Moscow's greatest churches. (I should point out that Russian, like some other languages, has the same noun for both 'sky' and 'heaven'.) Even the Americans couldn't go into space at that time, so the Soviet people in Moscow went to the other extreme and put the shabby New York subway to shame by constructing veritable palaces deep, deep underground for the brand-new Metro.

Katherine Zubovich's monograph is clearly written, well organised, beautifully presented and splendidly illustrated. She concentrates on the execution of the 1947 plans to build a number of high-rise buildings in various parts of Moscow which would ensure that it would become the irresistible centre of the new, gradually expanding, socialist (and later communist) world. (Did Stalin suspect that the communists would shortly come to power in China?)

The author stresses that the main aim was not to provide better accommodation for the Soviet toiling masses. Indeed, this project made the housing shortage in Moscow even worse. Most of the flats in those vysotki (the word neboskryob – skyscraper – was avoided as much as possible in case people might think that this project was merely an imitation of American practices) that provided apartments were allocated to members of the Soviet 'new class'. As early as in 1954 Khrushchev criticised the whole venture, and a few years later instituted the building nationwide of basic blocks of flats (khrushchoby – to rhyme with trushchoby - slums) for millions of 'ordinary' people. And it was at this juncture that it was finally decided not to build the 'Palace of Soviets'. After the 1991 events the church that had been demonstratively blown up in 1931 to make way for the Palace was reconstructed.

Zubovich has the good taste not to express any malicious pleasure at this particular outcome of a Great Experiment. Some readers will also be relieved to learn that there is not a single reference either to Dr Freud or to 'phallic symbols'. Even the Tower of Babel is mentioned in passing only once, in a quote from an American periodical. What is worrying is that in this new century, when there is an abundance of empty land in Russia, yet another vysotka (the 'Triumph Palace') has been built in central Moscow and the hideous new 'Moskva-City' business centre is spoiling the capital's skyline. And as I was writing this review it was announced that Gazprom is planning to build a second tower in St. Petersburg. At 703 metres tall, it will be the second highest building in the world, cost at least 150 billion roubles to construct, and spoil the skyline of the former Russian capital as well. Stalin would probably have approved.

Some people never learn.

Moscow Monumental is published in 2021 by Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-0-691-17890-5 (hardcover)

In Memory of Memory, by Maria Stepanova (trans. Sasha Dugdale)

Reviewed by Elena Malysheva

Maria Stepanova, a poet, essayist, journalist, and author of ten poetry collections, was born in Moscow in 1972. In Memory of Memory, written in 2018, and beautifully translated by Sasha Dugdale, has been long-listed for the International Booker Prize. It is dedicated to the study of her Jewish Russian family roots, cataloguing and understanding not just her family history but the past in general. Like Pierre Bonnard, a French painter, who often worked from memory, Stepanova is looking for ways to restore the lives of a generation, who "wanted to remain invisible". She tries to find and grab onto a thread of history, which was regularly and deliberately torn by the Soviet regime. Stepanova examines old letters, postcards, photographs and knick-knacks, like a trail of breadcrumbs left by our families to guide us into, not out of, the dense forest of their past lives. Stepanova admits that she was putting off the task because she was waiting for "a better self" to take it on. To what extent do we unconsciously alter our past lives by simply being us, by remembering things in the way that we do? Memories live in the blurred mixture of what had happened and what we had been told about it. At one point in her explorations, Stepanova visits Saratov, a house she was told had been once occupied by her relatives: "Everything was as I'd hoped, perhaps, even more so than I'd hoped. I recognised my great-grandfather 's yard unhesitatingly [...] even though I'd never seen it or had it described to me". Later, her friend admitted they had got the addresses mixed up. "That is just about everything I know about memory", says Stepanova to end the chapter. What is memory? Is it a way to "domesticate the past, however unbearable" and make it ours, something we can live with? In Stepanova's novel, memory becomes a character of its own. It sleeps quietly until awakened by a glimpse of a place we think looks familiar - a tune, a smell, an unusually memorable handwriting. Why do we keep the remnants of the past that take up space and are almost never looked at or used; yet it pains us to throw them away? Stepanova's depictions of the old photographs create a strong sense of presence. Inevitably, if we don't know the people in the photographs well enough - or at all - we tend to make up for the missing information assuming, speculating and hoping that our imagination will give them a better, more interesting past. Poetically speaking, people captured in photographs are like dead stars, whose light reaches us many years after they had passed on. But In Memory of Memory is not a sentimental journey. It is a thoughtful, beautifully written philosophical documentary, an exploration in search for answers and a process of building a relationship with the past.

In Memory of Memory is published by Fitzcarraldo Editions 2021,

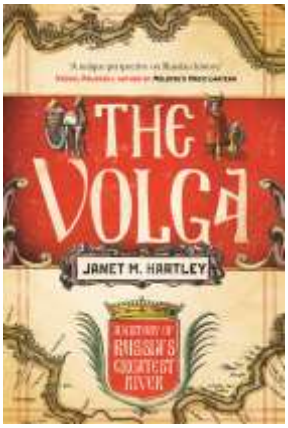
ISBN 978-1-913097-53-0

You may also like:

The White Birch, by Tom Jeffreys

The birch, genus Betula, is one of the northern hemisphere's most widespread and easily recognisable trees. A pioneer species, the birch is also Russia's unofficial national emblem, and in The White Birch art critic Tom Jeffreys sets out to grapple with the riddle of Russianness through numerous journeys, encounters, histories and artworks that all share one thing in common: the humble birch tree.

ISBN-10 : 1472155661, Corsair



The Volga: A History, by Janet M. Hartley

The longest river in Europe, the Volga stretches over three and a half thousand km from the heart of Russia to the Caspian Sea, separating west from east. The river has played a crucial role in the history of the peoples who are now a part of the Russian Federation. Janet Hartley explores the history of Russia through the Volga from the seventh century to the present day.

ISBN: 9780300245646, Yale University Press

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