

Contents

Alexander Deineka: The Golden Boy of Soviet Art	1
SCRSS News	5
Soviet War Memorial Trust News	6
Triumph over Adversity: Gulag Literature	7
To St Petersburg with Love	9
In Memoriam	10
Book Reviews	12

Feature

Alexander Deineka: The Golden Boy of Soviet Art

By Christine Lindey

In 1917 Alexander Alexandrovich Deineka (1899–1969) was just eighteen and studying in his native Kursk when the upheavals and excitement of the Bolshevik Revolution began.

He soon travelled to Moscow to study at the now celebrated VKhUTEMAS (Higher Art and Technical Workshops); in this cauldron of aesthetic and political debates he honed his Marxist aspiration to create a new Soviet art. Deineka joined Vladimir Favorsky's Graphics and Printmaking Department, from whom he learned to respect art theory and to construct his compositions in terms of plane and space. This valuable lesson would give Deineka's future paintings, prints and posters a clarity and spatial 'airiness' that contrasted with the cramped fussiness of the enduring dominance of academic painting.



Shot-Down Ace Pilot, 1943, by Alexander Deineka

In 1922 he co-founded the Association of Artists for Revolutionary Russia (AARA). Heeding Lenin's call to build on the achievements of past bourgeois art and to create a new heritage for the new worker state, these artists intended to impart clear meanings in styles relevant to modern times, yet widely accessible to a largely unsophisticated population which in 1917 had been 84 per cent illiterate. The AARA was as committed to the Bolshevik Revolution as some of the avant-garde but they rejected the inherent elitism of experimental styles in favour of the accessibility of realist ones. This posed the dilemma of to what degree they could incorporate recent modernist styles.



Defence of Petrograd, 1928, by Alexander Deineka

Deineka's *Defence of Petrograd* of 1928 sought a compromise. It celebrates the workers' foundation of the Soviet state, expressing the new Soviet reality in a style that moderately absorbs cubism and expressionism, while retaining clear legibility. The figures' resolute expressions and rhythmic marching convey their firm intentions, while the wounded figures on the bridge above show the harsh realities of combat. That the central persons are women affirms Marxist egalitarianism.



Female Textile Workers, 1927, by Alexander Deineka

Yet Deineka rarely ventured into history painting. Most of his subjects celebrate factory workers, miners, modernity, youth and aspiration – as expressed by flight and

sport. Football, the quintessential male working-class sport, claims a special place.

In the 1930s his style lost its cubist-expressionist undertones yet his fluid, loaded brushwork and uncluttered compositions convey a modern sensibility. Visits to Paris, Italy and the USA produced the *Parisienne* of 1935. A light-hearted portrait of an elegant young woman in a red dress and red hat set against a dark wine-coloured wall, it is a masterful variation on the theme of a single colour. In the same year, his portrait of a young Afro-American man captures his sitter's mixed emotions of regret, longing and repressed anger.



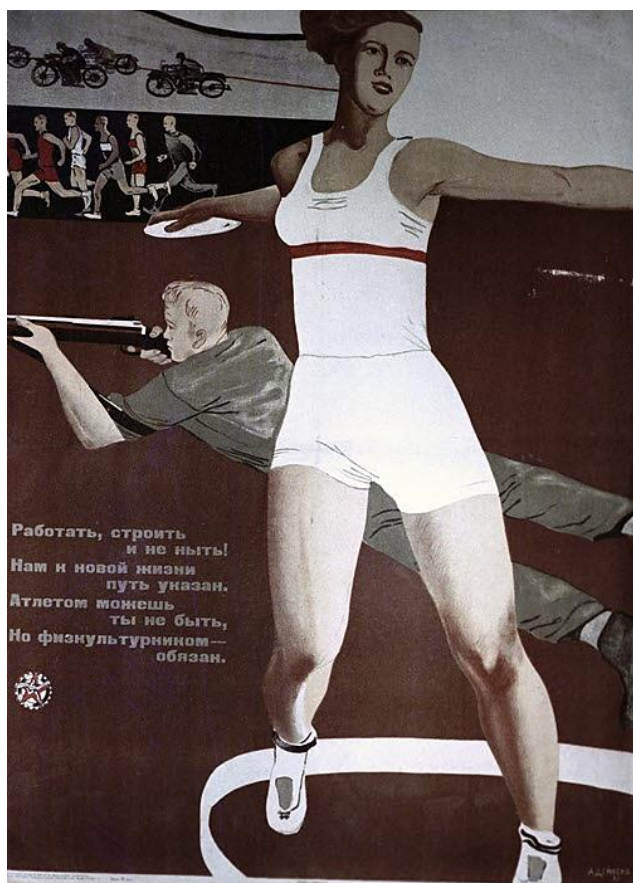
Mosaic at Mayakovskaya Metro Station in Moscow, 1938, by Alexander Deineka

During the Great Patriotic War, Deineka documented the privations of the home front, as well as the epic battle scene *The Defence of Sevastopol* of 1942. But one of his most moving war paintings is the *Shot-Down Ace Pilot* of 1943. Head down, the young man plunges helplessly to almost certain death in the depopulated city outskirts, with no visible help or witness. The diagonal of his body is repeated by the black smoke of his burning plane's descent. The stoicism of the pilot's facial expression is betrayed by his outstretched hand, an instinctive gesture, tragically destined to be ineffectual.

Originally educated as a graphic designer, Deineka also created superb illustrations, decorative designs and posters, in which he was freer to use modernist simplifications. In the poster *Work, Build, Don't Whine*, of

1933, the dynamism of a young female discus thrower is juxtaposed with the concentrated stillness of a soldier aiming his rifle. The themes of flight, swimming and football in his 1938 mosaics in Moscow's Mayakovskaya Metro Station epitomise his continuing faith in Bolshevik ideals, despite the increasingly bleak international situation.

His protagonists are almost all young and well-proportioned Soviet 'new people', energetic builders of the new world. It is easy to scoff at Deineka for naivety and unwillingness to face facts. Yet it is more difficult to inspire by depicting joy, fun and success than to convey the dramas of sorrow, disaster and tragedy.



Work, Build and Don't Whine (poster), 1933, by Alexander Deineka

He embraced the Bolshevik Revolution's progressive ideals, and his optimistic depictions of early Soviet life were intended to inspire and to combat cynicism, indifference and alienation.

Rebellious enough to question aesthetic orthodoxies and to pioneer new

approaches, yet a Marxist to the core, Deineka remained acutely committed to the artist's social responsibility. He trod the tightrope between these polarities during the tumultuous Bolshevik years and into the aesthetically conservative late 1930s and 1940s.



Skiers (mosaic), 1950, by Alexander Deineka

Deineka ruffled many an academician's feathers yet was eventually honoured as a Hero of Socialist Labour, People's Artist of the USSR, a full member of the USSR Academy of Arts and Lenin Prize winner. As Soviet art's golden boy, he sailed through the 1950s and 1960s as one of its doyens.

Christine Lindey is an art historian with a special interest in Soviet and Socialist art. She has taught art history at Birkbeck College, University of London, and at the University of the Arts, London. Her latest book 'Art for All: British Socially Committed Art from the 1930s to the Cold War' (2018) is published by Artery Publications.

Acknowledgements

This is an edited version of the article 'The Golden Boy of Soviet Art', first published in the Saturday / Sunday January 30-31 2021 issue of the *Morning Star* (page 17).

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SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

Centre Re-opening

Thanks to members and Trustees volunteering, we can now commit to opening the SCRSS centre for members every Tuesday between 14 September and 14 December 2021, from 11.00 to 16.00. Please check out details on the enclosed flyer and on the website. We hope members will take this opportunity to access the collections and borrow books from our Literature and Quick Loan sections. Though you are welcome to simply turn up, due to Covid it would be helpful to drop us an email in advance, so that we can spread visitors out if necessary. On the Tuesday itself, you can call the SCRSS on 020-7274-2282 to speak to our volunteer staff.

Library News

Mel Bach, our Honorary Librarian, continues work on the set-up of our new Library Management System. If you are interested in becoming a library volunteer to undertake cataloguing or any of the other myriad tasks associated with a large library, then please contact the Honorary Secretary in the first instance. With the opening of the centre on Tuesdays (see above) there is now a regular day for library volunteers to spend time at the centre.

Centenary Club

Membership of the Centenary Club continues to grow. There are now twenty-six members who have committed to 60 monthly donations of £17, five annual payments of £200 or a one-off donation of £1,000. The donations received have helped to transform the day-to-day finances of the Society and stabilise them in the period up to the centenary in 2024. If you would like to join the Centenary Club and

help to secure the long-term future of the SCRSS, please get in touch with the Honorary Secretary.

Affiliate Membership

One of the Society's Strategy 100 aims is to increase membership, including affiliations, ahead of our centenary in 2024. A number of educational and community organisations and several businesses already support our work by being affiliated members. If you are involved in any organisations that you think might join that list, please encourage them to do so. Details are on the website (under the About Us section linked from the home page). If you have any questions, please contact the Society.

Membership Renewal

As always, this *SCRSS Digest* mailing includes membership renewal notices! To save on postage, all renewals due up to the end of the year are included. Please help the administration of the Society by responding promptly. If you wish to set up a standing order to renew this year and in subsequent years, the Honorary Secretary can supply bank details.

Next Events

Please note that the weekly Tuesday library openings from 14 September to 14 December 2021 are not listed below. Full details of all events are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk.

Wednesday 15 September 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture: Caroline Walton on *Those Who Survived the Siege of Leningrad*

Tuesday 21 September 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture: Andrew Jameson on *Russian Comes of Age*

Tuesday 28 September 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture: Dr Cathy McAteer on *Translating Great Russian Literature – The Penguin Russian Classics*

Saturday 6 November 2021, 09.00–14.30
Zoom Online Event: SCRSS Advanced
Russian Language Seminar –
Contemporary Russian Literature
Led by Dr Svetlana Bukreeva, Associate
Professor at the Leningrad Regional
Institute of Education Development.

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

*Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary
Secretary, SWMT*

Eric Carter (1920–2021)

The death of Eric Carter was announced a few weeks before events took place at the end of August 2021 to mark the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the first Arctic Convoy in Northern Russia. Eric was a regular participant in SWMT events over many years. In 1941 he travelled to Arkhangelsk on that first convoy, as a pilot in RAF 151 Wing. This force was sent to protect Murmansk in the vitally important first months following the attack on the USSR by Nazi Germany and its allies. Eric and other pilots also helped to train Soviet airmen, who successfully operated the hundreds of Hurricanes subsequently delivered during the war. Eric wrote his own account (available in the SCRSS Library) and there is a wonderful documentary film called *Hurricanes to Murmansk* that also tells the little-known story (see <http://atollproductions.com/>).

Stanley Ballard (1923–2021)

One of the few remaining Arctic Convoy veterans, Stanley Ballard passed away in June 2021, a week after his 98th birthday. Stanley attended the unveiling of the Soviet War Memorial in 1999 and, as a leading figure in the Russian Convoy Club, was a keen supporter of its events and ceremonies. He also featured in the SCRSS

photo exhibition *London–St Petersburg: City and People* in 2014. The Cambridge Russian-Speaking Society (an SCRSS affiliate) has a memorial page on its website at <http://www.camruss.com/en/stanley-ballard-1923-2021/>.



Mayor of Lambeth, Cllr Adedamola Aminu and Stanley Ballard at the SCRSS's *London–St Petersburg: City and People* photo exhibition in December 2014 (photo and the exhibition portrait of Stanley above them by Vaughan Melzer)

Next Events

Sunday 14 November, 2021

Event: Remembrance Sunday

The SWMT Trustees will make a final decision closer to the day, but unless Covid-related restrictions are imposed between now and then, the resumption of public ceremonies at the Soviet War Memorial will begin on Remembrance Sunday.

The Soviet War Memorial is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park which surrounds the Imperial War Museum, London. It was unveiled in 1999 on the initiative of the SCRSS and the Society has been supporting the work of the SWMT since its foundation. The Trust normally organises three main ceremonies at the Memorial each year to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in January, Victory Day in May, and Remembrance Sunday in November. See the SWMT website for more information: www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com.

Feature

Triumph over Adversity: Gulag Literature

By Andrew Jameson

Browsing in a London bookshop one day, I came across a book by Alexander Solzhenitsyn which I had not seen before: *Invisible Allies* (Harvill, 1997). I was even more surprised when I saw that some of the names mentioned in it were people I had known: Lamara Kapanadze of the Academy of Sciences Institute of Russian Language, who had helped me with my Russian project; and Ivan Rozhansky (of whom more later), also a member of the Academy of Sciences, a classical historian. They had both helped Solzhenitsyn by hiding microfilms of his *Gulag Archipelago* at their dachas to ensure the records survived, since the KGB had already seized one lot of papers. Instantly, I was drawn back into those exciting years of the 1960s when the Russian intellectuals I knew had resolved to act as if the much-vaunted Soviet Constitution really meant what it said.



A scene from Alexander Tchaikovsky's opera *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Perm Tchaikovsky Opera and Ballet Theatre, 2010), based on the book by Alexander Solzhenitsyn

It was in November 1962 that *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was printed in the journal *Novy Mir* at the express command of Nikita Khrushchev, and this was another sign of a new beginning. The

tale (*povest'* in the Russian genre system) had been honed by Solzhenitsyn over the years of waiting. Literary scholars were entranced by the style of writing used, the so-called *skaz*. The story is told as a stream of consciousness 'in Ivan's head', interspersed by quoted oral speech from the other characters: colloquialisms, camp terms, slang, Ukrainian. No wonder translators found this a very difficult text.



A street mural depicting the poet Varlam Shalamov, Moscow, 2015

How *Ivan Denisovich* (Penguin, 1963) was treated in East and West is quite revealing. In the Soviet Union, there was not one version, but four: the journal, a newspaper supplement and two small paperbacks. The editors of each removed, variously, things they thought showed Russia in a bad light. In the West, on the other hand, there was a race to see who could translate and publish first. The race was won by Ralph Parker, but in his haste the work lost a lot of its special character. Few people knew or cared. For those that do care, however, we have a restored text by Harry Willetts (Harvill, 1991), with details of the omissions.

Very different from the rough banter of Solzhenitsyn, but equally powerful, are the *Kolyma Tales* (Penguin, 1990) by the poet Varlam Shalamov. The detailed foreword tells us all we need to know about Kolyma, the area leading to the Bering Straits and therefore the remotest of the Gulag regions. Conditions in the gold fields were worse than Siberia. The period was during the war when Russia was receiving help from the USA in the form of Lend-Lease, which plays a part in the stories. Rather than criticising

'the system', Shalamov mixes wise advice on surviving these conditions with poetic observations on the life force of nature, which gives hope of survival. The collection is recommended as a vivid, concentrated short read.

As most of us know, it was the purges that boosted the population of the corrective labour camps enormously. What is not always clear is that, in the initial stages, the purges were internal, and only of Communist Party members, the overwhelming majority of whom at that time were honest, progressive, reform minded and well educated. In my copy of *Pravda* dated 24 May 1934 there are reports titled 'Khronika chistki partii' ('Chronicle of the Party Purge') from Gorky, Rostov and Pyatigorsk.



A scene from the theatre production *Journey into the Whirlwind* (Sovremennik Theatre, Moscow, 1990), adapted from the novel by Evgenia Ginzburg

In *Journey into the Whirlwind* (*Krutoy marshrut* in Russian) by Evgenia Ginzburg we see the whole process as it takes place from the beginning, something which we do not have in other accounts. Edward J Brown in *Russian Literature Since the Revolution* (Harvard UP, 1982) unusually devotes five pages to Ginzburg's memoir, describing it as "a beautiful and moving account of arrests, courts, trials, jails and labour camps, written by a highly intelligent and sensitive woman who is also a literary artist". In contrast to *Ivan Denisovich*, everything is described in absolute clarity in good literary Russian. What is more, it is clear that Evgenia is deeply immersed in

Russian and European literature, and constantly refers to it.

A wonderful chapter is 'All Sorts to Make a World' where a large group of women are travelling by prison train to the Far East under orders: No books! Silence at stops! They are caught listening to Evgenia reciting. They are in bad trouble, being accused of having a book, until someone suggests that Evgenia be allowed to prove that she was reciting from memory. Half an hour into *Eugene Onegin* the guards are seduced into admiration for Evgenia's performance and they ask her to continue. There is more to this than just an amusing interlude – it lends credibility to the great number of conversations reported verbatim by her in almost all the chapters.

As a postgrad at MGU in the 1960s, I was introduced to Ivan Rozhansky, who lived not far from the university on Prospekt Vernadskogo. I mentioned that I had translated *Krutoy marshrut*. Ivan had bought what was one of the earliest Grundig tape recorders while at a conference in Germany, and had proceeded to hold literary *salons* in his roomy apartment and record the readings. He allowed me to take copies of many well-known writers onto my UHER Report tape recorder, which I was using as part of my Russian project, and these I still have. Amongst them there is Evgenia's voice reading two chapters from her memoir.

One evening I was invited to a dinner party at Ivan's home, and when I arrived there was quite a crowd, including Lev Kopelev (from *The First Circle*) and Evgenia herself. After a while, Natalia our hostess asked Evgenia if she had seen any translations of her memoir, *Krutoy marshrut*¹, and she said that her son (Vasily Aksenov) had picked up Part 1 (Harvill, 1967) in London. Then I was introduced as the 'other' translator (actually of a pirate edition published by a certain Alec Flegon, but I didn't mention that). The situation didn't permit a detailed discussion, but I told her that I had made the better job of her poetry! (Yes, there are poems...) The evening got very jolly, and Lev and Evgenia

put together a history of the Soviet Union in song, in which we all joined.

If there is a moral to this very short article, I would say: Gulag literature does not have to be misery memoirs. It is also a tribute to human courage, toughness and ability to survive.

Footnote

1 A note about editions of *Krutoy marshrut*. Because it was smuggled / exported out of Russia at different times, Part 1 was published as *Into the Whirlwind* by Harvill in 1967, and Part 2 as *Within the Whirlwind* by Harvill in 1989. My voice recordings are from Part 2. Avoid the Penguin 1968 paperback (small type, poor binding). For comfortable reading I recommend *Journey into the Whirlwind* (USA, Harcourt / Harvest 1967 / 1995 paperback, for its larger type, good binding and useful footnotes. The paperbacks contain only Part 1, but the bulk of the story is there.

After studying Russian and radio technology at the Joint Service Language School, Andrew Jameson first worked in signals intelligence in Berlin. After Oxford, he taught Russian at Essex University, while also working as a sound recordist in Russia for the Nuffield-funded Russian Language Project, collecting samples of different styles of Russian and creating a sound archive of Russian recordings. He later taught Russian at Portsmouth Polytechnic and Lancaster University. Now retired, he works as a professional translator and gives regular talks on the history of the Russian language for the SCRSS.

Acknowledgement

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Feature

To St Petersburg with Love By Caroline Walton

Caroline Walton explains how her book 'The Besieged' about the Siege of Leningrad came to be published in Russia in 2021.

ТЕ, КТО ВЫЖИЛ 900 дней Блокады



Cover of the new Russian translation of Caroline Walton's *The Besieged: A Story of Survival*

In 1999 I went to St Petersburg to speak to survivors of the Siege of Leningrad. The horrors of the siege had already been well documented; I wanted to know how people were able to transcend unimaginably hard circumstances without losing their humanity. I discovered that, paradoxically, those who shared their insufficient rations with others were more likely to survive. An actor described how his troupe shared a portion of their rations with the starving child he had adopted. A former gymnast described how emaciated old people held out pieces of bread to children... And those Leningraders who had no food to give shared their creative energy – they acted, danced, sang, read to wounded soldiers, kept diaries and wrote poems. In giving of themselves, they found a way to survive.

The resulting book, *The Besieged: A Story of Survival*, was published in the UK in 2011 by Biteback Books. An editor commented at the time: "What the siege survivors have to tell us is relevant to us now and in the

future.” With the passing of time, that comment becomes increasingly pertinent.

In 2019, my Russian teacher Galina Deriabina convinced me that the book needed to be translated into Russian. Most of the survivors I had spoken to had since died. Galina said she wanted their legacy to live on, so that future generations of Russians would know what their ancestors and fellow citizens were and are capable of. She approached Margarita Mudrak, Chair of the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation, whom I had met in 1999 when I went to the Association to speak about my research.

Margarita arranged for translation and publication of the book by Vladimir Nikiforov at the Asterion publishing house in St Petersburg, financed by the Hrachya Pogosyan Foundation. Translated as *Те, кто выжил 900 дней блокады*, it is being published on 8 September 2021 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the start of the siege. It will also be distributed free of charge to veterans’ organisations, schools and universities.

The book is both a memorial to the *blokadniki* and inspiration to all of us as we face life’s challenges – it feels particularly poignant that the book is being published during a pandemic.

The book concludes: “As Russians, with their innate qualities of ‘*dushevnost*’ and ‘*sobornost*’, as Leningraders, with their innate love of culture and humane values, the *blokadniki* triumphed over the darkness of the abyss.”

I am profoundly grateful to both Galina and Margarita for being driving forces in the publication of this Russian edition. I would also like to thank the students and teachers at St Petersburg University who translated it – Iulia Bardyuk, Vasiliy Ermolin, Veronica Lyzhina, Christina Nikulina, Anastasia Pankratova, Svetlana Tkachyova, Victoria Shilina and Bogdan Khristenko, as well as my friend Anna Annenkova, the Moscow philologist, who helped me to edit the book.

A copy of the Russian publication will be presented to the SCRSS Library.

SCRSS member Caroline Walton is an author of books on Russia and the former Soviet Union, including ‘Little Tenement on the Volga’, ‘The Besieged’, ‘Smashed in the USSR’ and ‘My Cossack Family’. She is also a Russian-to-English literary translator and editor: www.sirinbooks.com. She lives in London with her husband, whose grandmother was one of those who survived the Siege of Leningrad.

In Memoriam

RW (Bob) Davies (26 April 1925 – 13 April 2021)

Bob Davies was one of the outstanding post-war historians and commentators on the history, economics and politics of the USSR. He was a long-standing member of the SCRSS / Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR and a Vice-President from 1982 until his death.

He was born in Forest Gate, East London, in 1925, attended Westcliff High School, then worked in Ilford Public Library until he joined the RAF as a radio mechanic. His career in Soviet studies began on demobilisation when he attended the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, followed by a PhD under Alexander Baykov at Birmingham University. After a short spell at Glasgow, he returned to Birmingham as a lecturer in Russian and Soviet history. He was a founder member and the first Director of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies (CREES) at Birmingham, and under his direction it became a leading centre of research into Soviet history and economics. Bob’s own contribution to Russian studies was outstanding. Among many books on the history of the USSR, he was the main author of the seven-volume history of the industrialisation of Soviet Russia published by Palgrave Macmillan. He also wrote on

science policy. He contributed to our Society's *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, notably two long essays: 'The Discussion on the Periodisation of Russian History and its Place in the Development of Soviet Historiography' (1951) and 'Heavy Industry and the Soviet Consumer' (1955). Bob was politically active in the Communist Party of Great Britain, which he left after 1956, though he remained a life-long socialist.

I knew Bob as a teacher when I was a student in Baykov's department, and later I became one of the first appointments in CREES. I am indebted to him for turning my interest in the Russian Revolution to a study of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in the 1905 Revolution. I was more interested in Lenin's ideas of Party organisation at the time, but he posed the question as to what kind of political party had been formed under Lenin after 1903. So, I turned from the theory of the Party to its practice.

CREES was an important formative influence in the development of many students of the Soviet Union. Its members were generally regarded as 'bourgeois objectivists' in the USSR – in those days something of a compliment. CREES has played an important role in the post-war period in framing Western understanding of the history of Russia and the Soviet Union (less so, the societies of Eastern Europe); Bob developed the fields of Soviet science policy and economic planning. The Centre's success was the result of Bob's patient, persistent and active promotion of Soviet studies and his commitment to the history of the Soviet Union. His many students have contributed positively to the understanding of Russia and the USSR.

Bob was a gentle critic, an independent and fair-minded friend, and a colleague with a sense of humour. He was married to Frances in Marylebone Registry Office in 1953, and is survived by his two children Maurice and Cathy, his daughter-in-law Nicky, and grandchildren Michael and Lucia.

Dr David Lane

Zsuzsi Yardley (1940–2021)

The SCRSS Russian Language Evening Class was very sad to learn of the death of Zsuzsi Yardley, who passed away on 3 June this year.

Zsuzsi joined the class at its outset in 2015. She attended regularly in all weathers, battling her way on three buses from Beckenham to Brixton. She always had something interesting to contribute and everyone looked forward to hearing her news: demonstrations attended, theatres visited and, during lockdown, online concerts and films enjoyed. The class has not been the same without her friendly smile and tales of her latest cultural adventures.

Zsuzsi first came to England from Hungary in 1956, heading to Birmingham University to study engineering, and her long career took her all over the world.

Many members will remember her, either from the Russian class or as a regular attendee at SCRSS events. If anyone would like to make a donation to the SCRSS in memory of Zsuzsi, we feel it would be a fitting tribute to a loyal and long-standing member. You can donate via the Donate Online link located top right of the SCRSS website home page or by cheque / post to the SCRSS office.

Christine Barnard and Yaffa Clarke

Below is an abbreviated version of one of Zsuzsi's favourite poems, by the Hungarian poet József Kiss (1843–1921).

Fires

*Can you recall the playful brushwood fire,
Its crackle on the mud-brick fireplace
Where flickering, the carefree flames inspire
A tale, a song and smiles on every face?
From spitting branches, from the glowing
ember
I spied the secret heartbeat of the song.
Where is that fire, who can still remember?
Mine turned to ashes – others may burn
along.*

*And where is now the lass who stirred the fire...
And where's the lad, the dreamy young admirer,
Who wouldn't want to leave her any more...
For whom the weeping wood had shed a tear...*

*As fires with new devastating powers
Engulfed me with devouring interest:
To burn for justice – what rewardless mission!
To burn for fame – for just to make a mark?
And as I fought for wordly recognition
My hair turned white, my mind a gloomy dark...*

*What mighty fire! Not like any other...
Primordial upheaval was its mother,
And revolutions are its doughty sons...*

*And crawling from their holes we see the cheated,
Defrauded victims by the million...*

*I'm sitting here in silence, lonely, broken,
The hours passing faster than a flash,
And sometimes dreaming, sometimes half-awoken
I'm poking in the dying, doomy ash.*

Dr James Muckle (1937–2020)

The SCRSS was sad to learn of the death in December 2020 of James Muckle.

Dr Muckle studied Russian at Cambridge and Leeds after National Service, then taught Russian in schools and universities, and was a teacher-trainer (from 1974 in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham). He wrote widely about education in the Soviet Union and the history of Russian teaching in the UK. He energetically promoted the teaching of Russian as Chair, Vice-President and President of the UK's Association of Teachers of Russian, and was awarded the Pushkin medal by MAPRYAL, the Russia-based International Association for the Teaching of Russian Language and Literature, for his contribution to the teaching of Russian. He was Editor of the

Journal of Russian Studies from 1974–80, and set up and ran the Bramcote Press, which published titles on Russian studies, from 1991–2014. Among other works, he published three volumes of translations from and a study of Nikolai Leskov, and a biography of James Heard, the teenage emigrant to Russia in 1817 who made a distinguished reputation as an educator there.

Dr Muckle was an SCRSS member and wrote occasionally for the *SCRSS Digest*, most recently a feature 'The Social Impact of the 1950s Russian Courses for National Servicemen' in the Summer 2019 issue.

Diana Turner

Book Reviews

Lenin150 (Samizdat) 2nd Edition
Edited by Hjalmar Jorge Joffre-Eichhorn
(Dajara Press, 2020, ISBN: 978-1988832-87-6, Pbk, 342pp, \$34.76*, 45 col illus)

Published to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Lenin's birth in 2020, this rather extraordinary book was conceived out of the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, but brings together contributions from all continents. It is, as the Editor points out, "the product of a rather leisurely executed 9-year plan", starting with a visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2011 and a return in 2020 "to further document Lenin in his natural habitat". By which they mean the many photos by Johann Salazar of items of Kyrgyzstan *Leniniana*.

One of the 'Kyrgyzstan comrades' acknowledged by the Editor is Charles Buxton. Charlie organised the group with which I first visited Russia in 1983. A member of the SCRSS, he is known to readers of the *SCRSS Digest* for his feature articles, including 'Social Enterprise in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia', (No. 3, Autumn 2018, pp 8–10). And he is organising, from Bishkek, a conference on this book and on Lenin on 16 October 2021.

In 2019 Charlie published *Ragged Trousered NGOs: Development Work under Neoliberalism* (Routledge), and I wrote an endorsement, as follows: "This new book traces Charlie's journey from East London, where he combined political activism with community organisation, to the Soviet Union, FSU and Central Asia... [He] presents a deep and critical reflection on the theory and practice of international development and civil society capacity building. He challenges the very aid system on which [their work] largely relies."

Charlie is listed as a member of what the Editors call the 'Central Committee' for this book. One of many examples of 'irony'. I wish he had contributed a chapter. There are 27 chapters by authors as diverse and eclectic as Leon Trotsky, Alain Badiou, Kevin B Anderson, Michael Brie, Jodi Dean, Ronald Suny, Wang Hui and Slavoj Žižek. The book also includes poems by Aisiluu Kokayeva.

The three Editors, or 'Politburo' as they call themselves, wanted to adopt "a decolonised and depatriarchalized internationalist approach to the composition of the book"; however, the final product "had a certain Eurocentric and male bias". I agree. Their two-fold criteria were "critical solidarity with Lenin" and "writing with joy". They most certainly did not want to add to the list of 'balanced' accounts of Lenin's life and work, i.e. Lenin the Antichrist. Good. But the authors were encouraged to enjoy "chillin' with Lenin"! There is not very much joy, and I am not sure what "solidarity with Lenin" would mean. For me at least, Lenin is to be found in the scandalous and contradictory company of the revolutionaries Oliver Cromwell and Maximilien Robespierre, and is to be taken seriously. But this often rather inappropriately ironical book, with its strange Kyrgyz photos, is certainly worth the suggested small donation for which it can be acquired online.

It is entirely fitting, however, to end the book with Brecht's thrilling 1939 poem *An die Nachgeborenen*, translated as 'To Those Born After'.

* Free download available at <https://darajapress.com/publication/lenin150-samizdat-2nd-expanded-edition>. Print copy available for \$34.76 at <https://www.lulu.com/en/us/shop/johann-peter-salazar-and-patrick-anderson-and-hjalmar-jorge-joffre-eichhorn/lenin150-samizdat/paperback/product-j6dngn.html>.

Professor Bill Bowring

The Hammer and the Anvil

By Larissa Reisner (translated by Jack Robertson, Bookmarks Publications, March 2021, ISBN: 9781912926916, Pbk, 190pp, £10.00, available from <https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>)

The Hammer and the Anvil, an eyewitness account of particular episodes in the Civil War, is a riveting good read. Larissa Reisner was an upper middle-class young woman when she joined the Bolsheviks immediately after the 1917 October Revolution and became a first-rate journalist, writer and internationalist before tragically succumbing to typhus at the untimely age of 30.

This 190-page book includes Reisner's vivid dispatches from the frontline, as well as extracts from Trotsky's *My Life*. "This fine young woman flashed across the revolutionary sky like a burning meteor," Trotsky writes. The book also includes several short biographical sketches of other revolutionaries who knew Reisner, has an informative introduction by Judy Cox and a short summary by the translator of the volume, Jack Robertson, whose prose is very readable throughout (although there are a few typos and mistransliterations).

At times encircled by the enemy – either by the Whites, the British or other foreign interventionists, among them the Czechoslovaks – the Red Army and Navy troops fought as best they could, given all the limitations of insufficient equipment and weaponry, and the chaotic nature of what were essentially new armed forces born out of the old tsarist conscript forces. There were discipline problems, deserters who had to face punishment. But also much that was hopeful, as Larissa Reisner notes: "And

creativity also belongs to us, it's not just a bourgeois trait. For instance, we needed to blow up some exceptionally well-equipped ships supplied by the British, for the superbly armed White Fleet. So, unknown to anyone, a communist engineer, Brzezinski, invented a brilliant thing: he worked out how to fix mines to the keels of ordinary sailing boats and in that way was able to arm a whole flotilla of sailboats."

It's one thing to know in general about the Civil War. But quite another to read the real gripping stories of particular episodes, whether at Sviyazhsk or on the Volga: "...you can hear the heavy braying of the horses bogged down in a quagmire, and then we get going again with shuffling steps. The rain keeps on coming, an impenetrable pine forest creaks in the wind, and with every flash of lightning you can make out the murky shape of a peasant supporting the flank of his exhausted horse..."

Reisner's adventures and masquerades evading the tsarist authorities in Kazan, the insights into the personalities of her fellow revolutionaries, her comments on the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Constituent Assembly – all make for a fascinating read and give rise to the desire to study the period more fully for oneself.

Through inevitable retreats and successes, Larissa Reisner's love and admiration for the "common people" shine through her writings.

In Britain, we are used to reading of the so-called 'Red Terror' after the Russian Revolution, but Reisner witnessed the appalling atrocities of the Whites during the Civil War: "...the wives and children of the Red Army soldiers were flung into the Kama and even babes-in-arms were not spared... No one will ever know, no one will ever sound off to an over-sensitive Europe about the thousands of soldiers shot on the high bank of the River Kama and buried by the current in the muddy shallows which inundate the uninhabited shoreline."

Comprehensive notes on her dispatches give useful information as to events and

people mentioned, as well as their fates in the years following the Bolsheviks' victory in the Civil War.

Kate Clark

Worlds Apart: The Journeys of my Jewish Family in Twentieth-Century Europe

By Nadia Ragozhina (SilverWood Books, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-78132-978-8, Pbk, 307pp, £11.99, e-book: ISBN: 978-1-80042-053-3, £3.99, family tree, illus)

This is the story of the achievement of the family historian's ultimate dream – the bringing together of the history of a family scattered over Europe by the events of the last hundred years. Based on family connections and interviews, and delving into relatives' memories, documents and pictures, Nadia Ragozhina was fortunate enough to retrieve the histories of almost all members of the close family. At the same time Jewish families, being in one sense international (as Yevgeny Yevtushenko says in *Babi Yar*), can extend over many countries, and this gives the account an extra dimension.

The story is told in five parts, each containing an account of the family in different locations in one particular historical period. The history goes back to the late 19th century when two brothers separated, one going East and the other West. The Eastern branch gets full coverage, and they live through recent Eastern European history, including Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and two world wars. The accounts given are not those of a historian, but of civilians. It shows how ordinary people coped in their day-to-day lives with the revolutionary changes in Russia – political, social, sometimes sudden and contradictory.

You may ask, how much of the book is about Russia, since this is what we are interested in at the SCRSS? Of the total 307 pages in this book, 109 are devoted to Russia, the USSR and Poland (one item on the latter). As a family historian myself, I have to pay tribute to the skillful way the information collected has been woven

together and presented. There are no major criticisms, just a few minor points that should have been dealt with at the editing stage. However, these do not spoil the reading of the book, which is written in a light conversational style.

Andrew Jameson

The Anglo-Soviet Alliance: Comrades and Allies During WW2

By Colin Turbett (Pen & Sword Books, March 2021, ISBN: 9781526776587, Hbk, 248pp, £25.00)

The publication of SCRSS member Colin Turbett's new book coincides with the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Union's entry into the Second World War. However, the book covers more than its title suggests. On the one hand, it looks at the history and expression of the wartime alliance between Great Britain and the Soviet Union at the government and military co-operation level. On the other hand, it considers the impact of the alliance on the British public and domestic politics, in particular on left-wing politics and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

The author starts off with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the rise of the CPGB in Britain, pointing out how the fortunes of the Party were tied to the Soviet Union's successes and failures. There are interesting historical references to the inter-war years regarding the CPGB. Turbett also draws attention to the concern of inter-war British governments about the threat the new Soviet state posed to British interests at home and abroad. Prior to the USSR's entry into the war, Churchill had been a leading adversary of the Soviet Union and its communist project, and had tried to reduce its influence in the UK. The chapter 'Keeping Communism at Bay' includes many facts about the Intelligence Services and the CPGB up until 1941.

Chapters 3,4 and 5 deal with the Wartime Alliance, Unity in Action and, of course, the heroism of the Arctic Convoys to Murmansk and Archangel, again with fascinating facts, details and photographs. The alliance itself

caught the popular imagination on the home front in Britain (with Soviet newsreels being played in cinemas and the Government sponsoring trips to Russia) and saw some tremendous solidarity efforts. These ranged from national fundraising initiatives such as the Red Cross Aid to Russia Fund (sponsored by Clementine Churchill), to mass-supported pro-USSR charity events, to local initiatives by ordinary citizens. An example of the latter is the tablecloth signed and embroidered by over 800 women in Coventry in 1943, at the end of the Battle of Stalingrad, and sent to Stalingrad's citizens as a symbol of wartime solidarity. Each person who signed the cloth donated to a fund, which was used to provide medical aid. Unfortunately, much of the record of the British public's support for its Soviet ally was quickly buried and forgotten once the Cold War began.

The book ends with the aftermath of the Second World War, the division between capitalism and the Soviet Union and its satellites, the nuclear arms race and, of course, the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.

All in all, this is a very interesting read. The book is based on contemporary sources and post-war analyses. It is well illustrated with some 100 black/white photographs, many from the author's private collection and showing how the alliance was communicated – and perceived – at the time.

Phil Matthews

Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order

By Kathryn E Stoner (Oxford University Press, 2021, ISBN: 978-0190860714, Hbk, xix + 317pp, £22.99)

Kathryn Stoner, of Harvard, Princeton and now Stanford Universities, wants to show how Russia really is a threat to the West. She presents more than 250 pages of closely packed text, brimming with information, tables, graphs and figures.

The book contains four sections, with eight chapters. The sections are: I. Is Russia

Resurrected?, II. The Geographic Domain and Policy Scope of Russian Power, III. The Means of Russian Power, and IV. The Domestic Determinants of Russia's Resurrection. She is clear in Chapter 3 that "contemporary Russia can clearly be considered an expanding global power in reality, not just in aspiration, given the geographic reach and the policy scope and weight it has established abroad".

By "resurrected" Stoner means that, without having "the most" of the traditional means of power (three M's: men, military and money), "Russia has managed, rather unexpectedly, to be one of the most disruptive influences in contemporary international relations" (p.27).

So, she emphasises the fact that Russia has significantly increased its spending on higher education as a percentage of its GDP since 2000, to the level of Germany. It has a high proportion of university graduates with STEM degrees, 30 per cent in 2016, in comparison to 25 per cent in the UK and 18 per cent in the USA. She is fascinated by the reform of Russia's armed forces and its new hardware: 70 per cent of Russia's conventional equipment and 82 per cent of its nuclear arsenal were modernised as of 2020... "Russia's actual military capabilities far exceed that of any other European country in practice." (p.195).

In her conclusion, Stoner says that Russia, thirty years after the collapse of the USSR, was not playing a weak hand of cards well, "rather that a resurrected Russia had gained a few strong cards with which to challenge other players" (p.265).

There is one important factor that Stoner appears to have overlooked: the role of Sergey Lavrov as Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2004, and permanent representative at the UN from 1994 to 2004. Lavrov, who has a sense of humour, is by far the most experienced and capable foreign minister in the world, and responsible for many of Russia's successes, especially at the expense of the USA.

However, for Stoner, Russia's aggressive behaviour abroad is the result of the threat of internal instability to the Russian regime, which she describes as a "patronal autocracy". She mentions the willingness of many Russians to come out onto the streets in 1917, 1991, 2011, 2012, 2017 and 2019 – and I would add the reactions to the arrests of Mr Furgal, the popular former Governor of Khabarovsk, and of Mr Navalny. But in my view, the nightmare of Mr Putin and the regime is the threat of separatism in the Russian Federation.

Professor Bill Bowring

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Printed and published by:
SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB
Tel: 020 7274 2282
Email: ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk
Website: www.scrss.org.uk
Registered Charity No 1104012
Editor: Diana Turner
Publication date: September 2021