

SCRSS 90th Anniversary 1924–2014
Society for Co-operation in Russian & Soviet Studies

SCRSS Digest

Summer 2014 £1.00

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Feature

SCRSS 90th Anniversary

By Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary of the SCRSS

Welcome to Our Anniversary Issue

I am delighted and honoured to be introducing this special 90th anniversary issue of the SCRSS *Digest*. The Society, which started life in July 1924, has survived many up and downs over the years, but most importantly it has survived. Its premises in Brixton house a truly unique collection of books, photographs, posters and artefacts connected with Russia and the former USSR, built up throughout its long existence. Our current one-year library project is an attempt to find ways of bringing knowledge of this treasure trove to members, researchers, students and the general public. Why is this important? Because Russia continues to fascinate and intrigue everyone it touches – from the era-defining revolutions of 1917 to the present day. It sparks debate, controversy, passion and lifelong interests. In short, it is never boring.

The Society and its incredible resources will have a role to play for generations to come. I invite you, the reader, to visit our centre and see for yourself, particularly in this special anniversary year. There are specific events you may wish to attend. Or you may prefer to simply make an appointment and come along for an initial visit. But, whether a member or not, you will be welcome. You will see what has already been done to preserve the collections and how we continue to make them as accessible as possible within our limited resources. You will also see that much remains to be done to create a sustainable, long-term future for the Society and its premises.



Ralph Gibson, SCRSS Hon Secretary

The SCRSS is a self-funding membership organisation. If you feel our endeavours worthy of support, then I hope you will become a member or encourage your organisation to affiliate. By getting more people and interested parties to join us, I believe that the Society can thrive as a place to inspire anyone with an urge to learn more about the language, culture, and history of Russia and the former USSR. Enjoy reading the following pages. And do let us know what you think. With your help, our centenary will be marked by louder fanfares!

A Short History of the Society

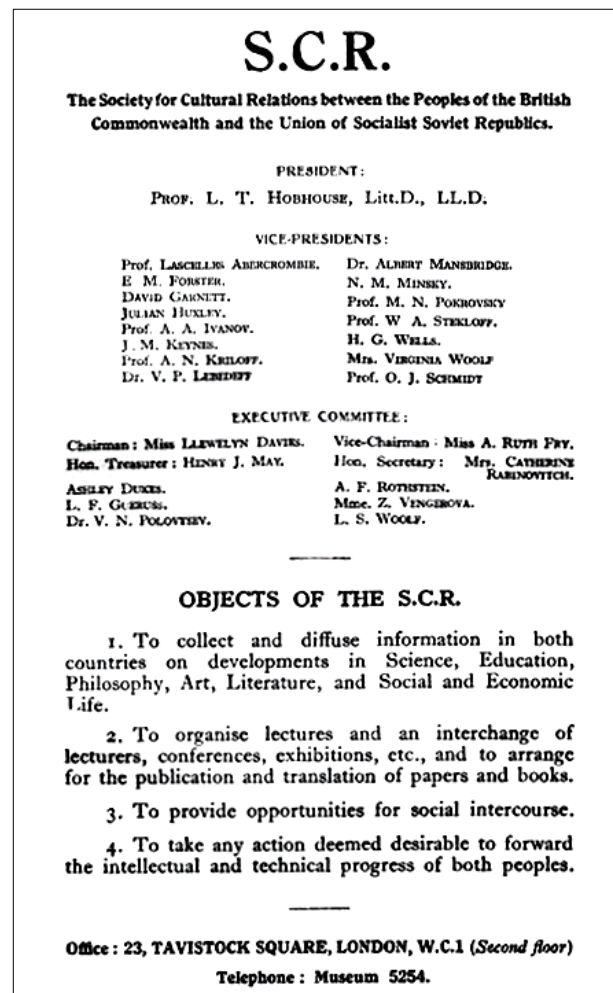
The Society for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR (SCR) was founded on 9 July 1924 in London by a disparate group of British and Soviet intellectuals that included Arthur Ransome, HG Wells, George Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes, JBS Haldane, EM Forster, Bertrand Russell, Virginia Woolf, Sybil Thorndyke, Konstantin Yuon and Alexei Tolstoy.

The foundation of the Society followed the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union by the first British Labour Government in 1924. Some of the foremost intellectuals of the day had come to realise that an organisation was needed “to collect and diffuse information in both countries on developments in science, education, philosophy, art, literature, and social and economic life [...] and to take any action deemed desirable to forward the intellectual and technical progress of both peoples”.

The Society began actively to promote British–Soviet relations, on a non-political basis, through meetings, lectures, film shows and exhibitions. As membership increased, special interest groups were formed, including Education, Art, Medical, Science, Legal, Theatre, Film, Writers, Chess, and Architects and Planners. Materials collected by the groups, as well as donations and bequests, form the core of the Society’s outstanding library.

Many branches outside London were established and the Society expanded its activities to include tours to the Soviet Union and the translation of what was initially a limited supply of Soviet printed material.

From the 1920s onwards the Society arranged visits to the UK by key Soviet cultural and public figures. These ranged from writers (Sholokhov, Alexei Tolstoy, Ehrenburg, Chukovsky, Yevtushenko), composers (Khachaturian, Kabalevsky) and musicians (David and Igor Oistrakh) to the first man and woman in space (Gagarin, Tereshkova), and the puppeteer Sergei Obraztsov.



The Society’s objectives in the SCR’s first annual report, 1924–25 (SCRSS Archive)

Seminars, professional and educational exchanges between the UK and Russia have been a constant feature of the Society’s activities. The 1980s saw an upsurge of interest, with three Anglo-Soviet Youth Dialogues, professional exchanges of architects, actors and young artists, and a major seminar on the environment. In 2006 the Society organised a London programme of lectures and visits on British foreign policy and national / local government for a group from St Petersburg University. In 2012 the Society held its first annual SCRSS Russian History Seminar and in 2014 hosted a conference on British-Soviet Friendship and Cultural Exchange, a topic proving increasingly popular for academic study.

The Society has always promoted Russian language learning. From 1969–96 we ran a popular annual Easter language course in London taught by teachers from Soviet universities. In the 1970s–80s we offered

five-month and ten-month scholarships to study Russian at the Pushkin Institute of Russian Language in Moscow. More recently, since 2007, the SCRSS has run an annual two-day Russian language seminar for teachers and graduates, organised with support from the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation and led by lecturers from St Petersburg State University.

The *Anglo-Soviet Journal* (ASJ) was published continuously from 1940–92. Alongside other articles on Soviet life, it featured a Moscow Diary that provided an inside view of the Soviet capital from a line of insightful correspondents, including Robert Daglish and Campbell Creighton. The ASJ was succeeded by the SCRSS *Information Digest* in 1992 (shortened to the SCRSS *Digest* in 2014).

In 1992, following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Society changed its name to the Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (SCRSS). However, its founding aims of promoting co-operation between the peoples of Russia and the UK remained steadfast.

In 1995 the Society's AGM voted to work towards the establishment of a memorial to the twenty-seven million Soviet men and women who died during World War II. Thanks in large part to the Society's commitment to the project, the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) was established, supported by the Russian Embassy, the RAF-Russia Association and the Russian Convoy Club. On 9 May 1999 the Soviet War Memorial was unveiled in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, adjacent to the Imperial War Museum, in London. The Society continues to play a leading role in the SMTF which organises ceremonies at the memorial and other associated events.

The Society became a registered educational charity in 2004 with a renewed focus on the provision and maintenance of its library collections to support its objective of promoting knowledge of and studies in the language, culture, history and life of Russia and the former Soviet Union.

These collections have yielded several exhibitions in recent years. In 2010 an exhibition dedicated to the Society's important contribution to British-Soviet relations during World War II was displayed at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg and later at the Diplomatic Academy in Moscow. The exhibition *The Arts of Russian and Soviet Modernists from the SCRSS Archives*, shown at the SCRSS in 2012, travelled to Sheffield University in 2013.

In 2013–14 a donation by a member of the SCRSS Council has enabled the funding of a one-year library project. The project aims to develop a strategy for the collections and identify opportunities for external funding and partnerships, development and promotion. It will have a significant impact on the Society and its priorities for the future.

Finally, the Society has been based in a Grade II listed building in Brixton since the late 1960s. Major works were carried out in the early 2000s to convert the top floor into library space and open up the ground floor rooms for SCRSS events and for external hire for meetings, seminars and exhibitions. In recent years, bequests and donations have paid for rewiring, new back gates, significant improvements to shelving in the loan library and investment in new technology. In 2014, in our 90th anniversary year, the Society installed new exhibition lighting and a modern hanging system in the ground floor rooms.

SCRSS News

New SCRSS Council

Following the Society's Annual General Meeting on 17 May 2014, the membership of the SCRSS Council is as follows. Honorary Officers: President: Professor William Bowring; Vice-Presidents: Robert Chandler, Professor Robert Davies, Dr Kate Hudson, Dr David Lane, Dr Rachel

O'Higgins, Robert Wareing. Executive Committee: Fiona Wright (Chair), Philip Matthews (Vice-Chair), Charles Stewart (Vice-Chair), Ralph Gibson (Hon Secretary), Jean Turner (Hon Treasurer), Christine Lindey (Visual Arts Officer), Kate Clark. Council Members: Mel Bach, Christine Barnard, Andrew Jameson, John Riley, Diana Turner.

SCRSS 90th Anniversary Celebration

On Saturday 5 July 2pm–6pm the SCRSS marks the 90th anniversary of its foundation with a celebration for members and invited special guests at our centre in Brixton. The event includes formal speeches from SCRSS officers and special guests, an exhibition highlighting some of the gems of the SCRSS library, library tours, refreshments and a celebratory toast! We'll be making use of our garden, as well as our ground floor events space. See programme under Next Events on page 6.

Please note: Admission to this event is free, but members wishing to attend should complete and return the enclosed registration form to the SCRSS by 25 June.

SCRSS Library Project

Our one-year library project continues. In March the project manager, John Riley, completed a detailed audit of the SCRSS library collections. The findings were documented in a Formal Statement of the SCRSS Library and Archive, approved by the Council in March 2014. This document provides summary descriptions of each of the collections; a review of library usage, systems and policies; and an analysis of the key issues for the library strategy, including acquisition, de-acquisition, preservation and access. The project will address these strategic issues in the second phase. A library operational plan for 2014 was also approved, with a number of immediate practical tasks. As a result, some material is being taken out of the loan library and back

into related areas of the reference library for greater coherence; a new Political Thought section is planned; and work is currently underway to de-acquire duplicate material and clear a backlog of donations.

SCRSS 7th Russian Language Seminar

The Society hosted an intensive weekend of advanced Russian-language study in April, with lecturers Irina Vosnesenskaya and Irina Gonchar from St Petersburg State University once again demonstrating their incredible stamina. Attendees were extremely positive in their feedback, and we hope to run a similar seminar next year. We are grateful to the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation for their support in organising this seminar.

Dulat Issabekov Book-Signing

The Kazakh novelist and playwright Dulat Issabekov held a book-signing at the SCRSS in April to mark the publication of *The Little Pearl*, his first book in English, (translated by Kate Judelson). Dulat presented the SCRSS with a signed copy of his book and was shown the Society's literature collection, including works by fellow authors from the region, Chingiz Aitmatov and Mukhtar Auezov. The event was part of a Week of Kazakh Literature in the UK, organised by the Aitmatov Academy. For further information, see the advertisement on page 5 or visit www.aitmatov-academy.org.uk.

Villa Design Group Exhibition

In early May the ground floor space at the SCRSS hosted an exhibition and performances by the Villa Design Group as part of their year-long project 'The Inauguration of the Russian Season', which will continue at the Edinburgh Arts Festival in August. The group of young artists demonstrated the flexibility and quality of the Society's facilities and we hope this will lead to more such valuable bookings.

Dulat Issabekov

The Little Pearl
and other stories



The Little Pearl and other stories

by Dulat Isabekov

ISBN 978-0-9926186-5-0

Available at: www.discovery-bookshop.com

Next Events

Friday 20 June 7pm

Lecture: Professor Bill Bowring on *Russia and the European Convention on Human Rights – Following the UK's Example?*

Bill Bowring is Professor of Law at Birkbeck College, University of London, where he teaches Human Rights, Public International Law and Minority Rights. He is also President of the SCRSS.

Saturday 5 July 2pm–6pm

Event: SCRSS 90th Anniversary Celebration

2pm: Doors open

2.30pm: Library tour (half-hour)

3pm: Formal speeches and welcome

4.30pm: Library tour (half-hour)

6pm: Close

Note: this event is for SCRSS members and invited guests only. Admission to this event is free, but members wishing to attend should complete and return the enclosed registration form to the SCRSS by **25 June**.

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees for films and lectures: £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members). Admission fees for other special events: as indicated above.

Full event details also appear on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk.

Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

Holocaust Memorial Day: 27 January

The anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp by the Soviet army in 1945 was marked by a joint event

with Southwark Council, beginning at the Amigo Hall alongside St George's Cathedral and ending with a ceremony at the Soviet War Memorial and the Council's Holocaust Memorial Tree. Speakers included the Mayor of Southwark, who witnessed "horrors and pain beyond understanding" when he lived in Uganda under the rule of Idi Amin, Margaret Hodge MP and Holocaust survivor Susan Pollack.

Victory Day: 9 May

Hundreds of people, many from the Russian-speaking communities in the UK, gathered at the Soviet War Memorial to mark the 69th anniversary of the Allied Victory over Fascism. This year's event took place against the backdrop of the disturbing events in Ukraine and all three keynote speakers referred to the political situation, albeit from different viewpoints. A report and audio can be found on the london-se1.co.uk local news website. The full text of the speech by Russian Chargé d'Affaires Alexander Kramarenko can be found on the Russian Embassy website (rusemb.org.uk) together with photographs of the event.

Ushakov Medal

Some 3,000 British Arctic Convoy veterans have been awarded Russia's Ushakov Medal by decree of the Russian President. This military decoration is yet more evidence of Russia's appreciation of the tremendous contribution made by the convoys to the defeat of Fascism in World War II. A small group of veterans received their medals at a special ceremony on board HMS Belfast on 9 May 2014.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). For information on future events, email smtf@hotmail.co.uk or visit the SCRSS website.

Feature

Homes of the SCR / SCRSS¹: 1924 to 2014

By Jean Turner

It is often possible to judge a person's character by their house and furnishings. Applying this to the SCR, it is clear from the outset that the Society saw itself as part of the genteel intellectual Georgian scene of Bloomsbury, in the shadow of the British Museum and London University. Even its acronym 'SCR' was a reminder of the Senior Common Room and dignified scholars. The buildings it occupied at various times in its history indicate this.

Starting out in 1924 in rented premises at 23 Tavistock Square, WC1, sometime between 1928 and 1933 the Society moved to third-floor premises in 1 Montague Street, WC1. The 1933 Annual Report talks of a difficult period in Anglo-Soviet relations prior to this.

After a brief stay in 21 Bloomsbury Square, WC1, the Society then moved in 1936 to what were clearly more satisfactory rented premises on the first floor of 98 Gower Street, WC1, where it remained until 1947.

This was a time of intense activity for the SCR with the political situation prior to World War II calling for resolute pursuance of the original objectives of its foundation, including cultural exchanges with the USSR. This culminated in a great expansion of the Society's membership and activities, as well as Anglo-Soviet exchanges at government level, during World War II.

Thus in 1947, the Society felt rich enough to embark on a great new adventure, the purchase of a freehold building to accommodate its growing library and cultural programmes.

In order to carry this out, the Council set up a separate company, SCR House Ltd. Its Trustees would be able to make decisions on the sale or purchase of premises suitable

to house a library, meeting rooms and social events. The company took on a repayable loan from the SCR Expansion Fund to purchase 14 Kensington Square, W8.

This was an impressive building, described in the 1947 Annual Report as being of "great charm as well as convenience which will ease the task of the librarians", who were now handling 700 book loans and 430 research enquiries per annum. The three floors and basement housed a ballroom, an exhibition department, four committee rooms, two libraries, a librarians' room and all the usual offices.



1947–62: 14 Kensington Square, London W8
(SCRSS Archive)

The SCR launched a £25,000 appeal to furnish the premises, including a request by the Society's Architects' Section for "gifts of chandeliers for the ballroom and the committee room".

The premises were officially opened on 11 November 1947. This was followed on 22 November by a splendid ball organised by the Theatre Section.

But this glory was not to last. In 1962 the

building was sold for £42,000 and a less spacious building purchased for £14,000 at 118 Tottenham Court Road, W1. The SCR Council justified this as being “a more central location with lower overheads, allowing for a repayment of loans and debts and a long overdue increase in salary for the staff”. However, a vice-president of the Society, Lord Chorley of Kendal, was not too happy about the decision. On 22 January 1962, he wrote:

“Dear Creighton,²

Thank you for your letter of 12th instant. I note what you say about the sale of 14 Kensington Square and must say that I am sorry about this, as it has always seemed to me to be one of the talking points about the SCR that it should be able to entertain its Russian Friends in a house of architectural merit, even on a rather smaller scale. I do hope it will not be necessary to move into one of the modern office blocks without character or aesthetic interest.

Yours sincerely,

Chorley”

Seven years later, in 1969, 118 Tottenham Court Road, W1, was sold for £22,500 and 320 Brixton Road, SW9, purchased for £15,500. Prior to that, in 1967, SCR House Ltd had acquired a bomb-damaged site at 318 Brixton Road for £3,500 with the intention of building new premises on it. In the event, the new building at no 318 was never carried out. The land was eventually sold in 2000 to a private purchaser who erected a residential building to match that at no 320, as required by its Grade II listed building status.

It is worth remembering that Brixton was once a well-off suburb of London and still contains some beautiful Georgian terraces. Nos 314 to 320 Brixton Road were two pairs of detached late Georgian houses built in 1826. In World War II, no 318 had been destroyed by a fire bomb.

The houses were built by Evan Roberts, a North Brixton slate merchant, on the site of

former cottages named 1–4 Park Place, part of the adjacent Stockwell Park Estate, a one-time large mansion surrounded by a moat. The Lambeth Minet Library refers to them as “two plain pairs of stock brick houses, well elevated above the road, three storeys high with a semi-basement – set forward both ends and with Greek Doric porches”. So you can see that the SCR retained its preference for Georgian buildings.

No 320 was named Wynne House (you can still see this name above the front door) and, according to the 1856 census, was occupied by Harry Thompson, a physician. No 318 at the time was owned by a Baptist Chapel, situated at the rear of the houses.



320 Brixton Rd, London SW9: 1969 to the present, photographed in 1947

One of my concerns when I became General Secretary of the SCR in 1985 was to try to restore the fabric of the building, which had been deteriorating over the years. Sales of a small piece of land at the rear of No 320 and the site of No 318 enabled extensive repair work to be carried out to the roof, installation of new windows to match the original Georgian ones, conversion of the top flat to library and reference rooms, and restoration of the ground floor to two seminar rooms with a new kitchen and toilets.

Bequests have enabled the SCRSS to install a new heating system throughout and to completely re-wire and upgrade the electrical system. Much still needs to be done to improve the exterior of the building.

However, the Society's unique library and archive are now safely housed in what is a pleasant and friendly building, while modern Brixton has once again become a residential, cultural and commercial centre of some importance.

Footnotes

1 SCR: Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (1924–92). SCRSS: Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (1992 to the present day)

2 Campbell Creighton, Secretary of the SCR

Jean Turner studied at Kingston School of Art and worked for thirty-five years as a local authority housing and schools architect. She was General Secretary, then Honorary Secretary, of the SCR / SCRSS from 1985–2013 and is currently Honorary Treasurer and Secretary of SCR House Ltd.

Feature

Cultural Relations – and Lawyers?

By Bill Bowring, SCRSS President

I am not the first lawyer to serve as president of the SCRSS (and its predecessor the SCR) since the Society was founded in 1924.

Indeed, I am the fourth. DN Pritt QC was Chair of the SCR for eighteen years from 1937 to 1955; a year later he became President, in which capacity he served for sixteen years until his death in 1972 at the age of 84. Pritt was the SCR's fourth and longest-serving president. John Platts-Mills QC became President in July 1989 and served until his death in 2001, followed by the solicitor Jack Gaster who died on 12 March 2007 at the age of 99. I have been President since 19 May 2007, a mere seven years to date. I was also Chair from 1989 to 1997.



DN Pritt QC, SCR Chair and President 1937–72
(SCRSS Archive)

The other presidents have been equally or more illustrious: the sociologist Professor LT Hobhouse was President for the first year of the SCR's existence; Professor of English Lascelles Abercrombie served from 1926 to 1936; the historian Sir Charles Trevelyan from 1937 to 1951; the film-maker and trade unionist Ivor Montagu from 1972 to 1981; and the Labour politician Lord Jenkins of Putney from 1981 to 1989.

So is it complete coincidence that four out of nine presidents to date have been lawyers; and for such a considerable part of the SCR's and SCRSS's long history?

The answer is an emphatic "no". All four lawyers have been proud members of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, which was founded in 1929. Why the name?

The Society was named after Viscount Richard Haldane, who, as a Liberal, had been Asquith's Lord Chancellor from 1912 to 1915. He was hounded out of office by the *Daily Mail*. He moved leftwards politically and was Labour's first Lord Chancellor in the short-lived government of

1924. By 1929, when Labour was elected again, Haldane himself was dead. A small group of barristers formed the Haldane Club to provide legal expertise to the government, trade unions and the co-operative movement.

Ever since, the Haldane Society has been a legal thorn in the side of every government, lobbying for law reforms, civil liberties and access to justice for all; supporting national liberation movements against colonialism; providing unstinting support to the trade union movement; and campaigning against racism and all forms of discrimination.

The barrister DN Pritt was a founder member of Haldane. He was a member of the Labour Party from 1918, and became a life-long defender of the Soviet Union. He was Labour MP for Hammersmith North from 1935 to 1940, when he was expelled from the Labour Party for defending the Soviet invasion of Finland. He was thought by George Orwell to be "perhaps the most effective pro-Soviet publicist in this country". After 1940 he sat as an Independent Labour member, and at the 1945 Hammersmith North by-election was re-elected under that label, gaining a 63 per cent share of the vote against the official Labour and Conservative candidates.

In 1949 he formed the Labour Independent Group with fellow barrister John Platts-Mills and Konni Zilliacus, who had also both been expelled from the Labour Party for pro-Soviet sympathies.

John Platt-Mills joined the Labour Party in 1936 and from 1945 to 1950 was MP for Finsbury. In 1948 he was expelled from the Labour Party, to which he was re-admitted in 1969. His memoir *Muck, Silk and Socialism: Recollections of a Left-wing Queen's Counsel*, with a Foreword by Tony Benn and an Introduction by Mike Mansfield, was published in 2002.

The solicitor Jack Gaster joined the Independent Labour Party in 1926 and the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1935, remaining a member of the latter until its disbandment.



John Platt-Mills, SCR President 1989–2001
(SCRSS Archive)

In December 1948, at the height of the Cold War, there was a split in the Haldane Society. Gerald Gardiner (who was later Labour Lord Chancellor) tabled a motion to disqualify from Haldane membership anyone "who is a member of a political party other than the Labour Party or of any body, membership of which renders him [sic] ineligible for membership of the Labour Party". This was a direct attack on Communist Party members and sympathisers within the Society. The motion was defeated at a highly charged annual general meeting.

The anti-Communists walked away, forming the Society of Labour Lawyers, and the Haldane Society withdrew its affiliation to the Labour Party. Ever since, the Society has remained firmly socialist, but equally committed to independence from any political party.

I became involved in the SCR as a result of serving as an elected Lambeth Labour Councillor from 1978 to 1986, first for Herne Hill Ward, then for Angell. I was the Lambeth Council representative. In 1986, together with my comrades on the Council, I was surcharged £120,000 and banned from

holding public office for five years for “wilful misconduct”, namely protesting against Thatcher’s cuts. I joined the Haldane Society in 1986, served as its Chair in 1991–92, and am now its International Secretary. I am President of the European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights, of which Haldane was a founder member in 1992.

My first visit to the USSR was in 1983 as part of the long-standing (since 1946) town-twinning relationship between Lambeth and the Moskvoretsky District in Moscow. I started learning Russian in 1985, joined the SCR Council in 1987, and in 1988 re-established a Lawyers’ Group in the Society. From 1990 to 1994 I took several large groups of Haldane lawyers and law students to Moscow and Leningrad (later St Petersburg). I was also a student for three weeks in the summer of 1991 (just before the August ‘putsch’) at the intensive Russian language course organised by the SCR at the MADI Institute in Moscow.

My three lawyer predecessors are an inspiration to me. The SCRSS has survived some turbulent times, including the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR. Long may it thrive.

Bill Bowring is Professor of Law at Birkbeck College, University of London, where he teaches Human Rights, Public International Law and Minority Rights. His latest book is ‘Law, Rights and Ideology in Russia: Landmarks in the Destiny of a Great Power’ (Routledge, 2013).

Feature

Five Special Items in the SCRSS Library

By John Riley

Over the course of ninety years, the SCR – and latterly the SCRSS – has collected a huge amount of material of all kinds: books,

journals, records, press cuttings, music scores, photographs, realia. Many are fascinating and there are numerous rarities. This article points to just five of the many treasures.

Princess Turandot

Evgeny Vakhtangov was one of post-Revolutionary theatre’s great talents. His 1922 bi-centennial production of Gozzi’s fable *Princess Turandot* used commedia dell’arte make-up, masks and ritualistic acting.



Cover of *Princess Turandot*, 1923 (SCRSS Library)

A 222-page book from 1923 includes introductory essays, the full text, photographs of the production, and the still vibrantly coloured set and costume designs, protected by tracing paper decorated with striking graphics. There is also a short-score of Nikolai Sizov’s music and a photograph of the twenty-strong orchestra including a pianist, two violinists, a balalaika-player and at least five women wielding combs-and-paper.

With the aid of this book, one could almost

remount Vakhatangov's production. Just 3,000 copies were produced and the SCRSS is fortunate to own two, one of them in amazingly good condition. Sadly, the book was also a memorial to the director, who died in 1923, aged just 40.

British Poets

The SCR was formed by Leftist intellectuals and through the 1930s and 1940s had a number of specialist groups, including a Writers' Group. Its membership boasted some of the best-known authors of the day and they developed strong links with Soviet authors.

In late 1946, as a cross-cultural initiative, the SCR recorded several British poets reading some of their new works. In early 1947 this was presented to the Soviet Ambassador who forwarded it to Moscow to be held at VOKS, the Soviet international cultural co-operation body.

The poet-readers included TS Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNiece. The recordings are introduced by Walter de la Mare, with a commentary from compiler John Lehmann. Alongside them is a cablegram from Alexander Karganov, VOKS' head, thanking JB Priestley, President of the SCR Writers' Group, for the gift.

The SCRSS has copies of the discs but has also transferred it to CD.

Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia

The fifty-one volumes of the second edition of the *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia* were published between 1949 and 1958.

Volume 5 (*Berezna – Votokudno*) appeared in 1950, but in 1953 – “due to overwhelming popular demand” – subscribers received a letter asking them to remove pages 22, 23 and 24, and the “accompanying portrait”, and to replace them with the new pages, which were enclosed.

The replacement included a lengthy entry on the Bering Sea, along with a page of photographs, while some other entries were altered to take up more room.

Why the change? As well as the portrait, the guilty pages included nearly a page and a half on Lavrentiy Beria, whose trial had started in June and who would be shot in December, and a short piece on an Armenian housing estate named after him. All this was, of course, removed.

The SCRSS has two copies of this early manifestation of de-Stalinisation. Whatever Soviet subscribers did, one of our copies followed the letter's instructions. However, for the other, the request was ignored. In this copy the Beria entry remained in place and the new pages were placed beside it, while the covering letter was taped over the bottom of Beria's portrait. Also included are two cuttings about the changes, taken from unidentified Polish newspapers.

Vozdushnye Puti

In 1960 in New York a book-length literary ‘almanakh’ was published under the editorship of Roman N Grynberg. *Vozdushnye puti* (initially translated as *Airways* and then *Aerial Ways*) included new writing and pieces by émigrés and others who might have found difficulty in getting into print in the Soviet Union.

Akhmatova's work appeared regularly and the first issue opened with parts of one of the many variants of her masterpiece *Poem Without a Hero*. There was also a lengthy appreciation of Pasternak by Gleb Struve. Issue two (1961) featured fifty-seven poems by Mandelstam and returned to Akhmatova's poem. The latter was inspired by her *ménage-a-trois* with Olga Sudeikina and Arthur Lourié, and the journal adds his *Zaklinanie* (*Incantations*, 1959), five short pieces of music inspired by the poem and dedicated to Sudeikina, as well as an essay by him. Issue three (1963) saw more texts from Lourié, several stories by Babel and a piece by actor Mikhail Chekhov, then living in the USA and well known from his role in

Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. Issue four included the start of Nabokov's translation of *Lolita* into Russian and some of his mother's letters, while issue five centred on Marina Tsvetayeva and included nine poems by Josef Brodsky.

Such journals were central to the émigrés' grip on their Russian-ness (the 1950s had seen a similar journal, *Experiments*, also published in New York, of which we have some copies), and would have been treasured by their owners.

Music Scores

The final entry is not a single item, but a collection. Our music scores range from folk songs, through works by the best-loved Russian composers, to pieces that, even for specialists, may be little more than names. There are also many works by composers from the various Soviet Republics, notably the Baltics and Belorussia.

Polovinkin was prolific and (in the 1920s) well regarded, and we have several collections of songs and piano pieces. There are selections from two now-forgotten classics of socialist realist opera: Chishko's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1937) and Mokrusov's *Chapaev* (1943). The oratorio *The Birth of Hiawatha* includes a typed four-page letter from composer Igor Boldyrev, with some indications of the approach the performers should take. There are some slightly familiar names: an orchestral intermezzo by Andrei Balanchivadze, brother of choreographer George Balanchine, and a piano concerto (arranged for two pianos) by the international soloist Tatiana Nikolayeva.

Print runs were often very short: the set of parts of Shekhter's tone poem *Turkmenia* (we also have a score) is one of just 200 that were printed in 1933.

As with so much at the SCRSS – a huge cache of almost unknown material awaiting rediscovery!

John Riley is a writer, teacher, curator and broadcaster, specialising in film and music,

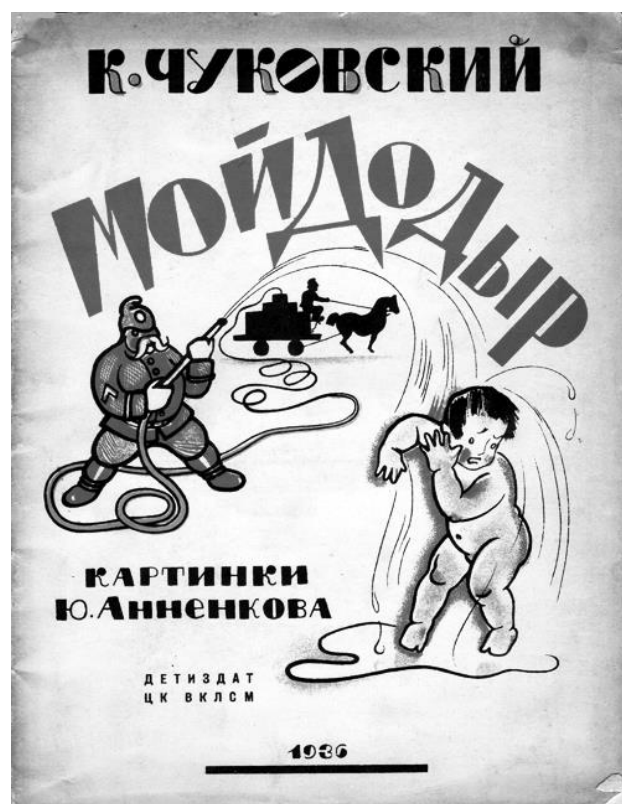
particularly from Russia and the Soviet Union. His publications include 'Dmitri Shostakovich: a Life in Film' and 'Discover Film Music'. He is a member of the SCRSS Council and currently acting as project manager for the SCRSS's one-year library project.

Feature

Baba Yaga in Brixton

By Jane Rosen

The SCRSS Library was set up in 1924 in the first year of the Society's existence and the two have always been indivisible. The Society organised its first exhibition of posters and books in May 1925 and by 1927 the Library held 1,400 books in 27 languages. The first Librarian of the Society was appointed in this year.



Chukovsky's *Wash 'Em Clean*, 1936, illustrated by Yuri Annenkov (SCRSS Library)

Children's books have always featured in the collection, which today consists of over

2,000 books. Three quarters of the holdings are in Russian and about 650 are picture books. There are 300 volumes in English translation and about 100 in other languages of the Soviet Union.

The purchase of books has never been the main acquisitions method of the Society. Its first books were the gifts of its members. Over the years, SCR members with common interests formed sections on their subjects, collecting information on Soviet life and culture, and forming links where the flow of information – and books – passed between the two countries.

For example, the Chair of the Education Section, Assistant Editor of the *Anglo-Soviet Journal* and eventually a librarian of the Society was Beatrice King, the author of *Russia Goes to School* and other publications on the Soviet education system. She was active in the SCR from 1934 until 1971. Deana Levin was another Chair of the Education Section from 1953–62 and author of *Children and Soviet Russia* (1952). Together, it appears that they were in some way responsible for the donations of children's books from Soviet publishers.

The period of the Second World War, and just after, saw the proliferation of these special interest sections. One of the most active was the Writers' Group. Its members included the children's writers LAG Strong, Eric Linklater, Eleanor Farjeon, Kathleen Hale and Walter de la Mare. Among other activities, the Group organised a lecture on Soviet children's literature in 1947, given by the prominent historical children's writer Geoffrey Trease. Other children's writers who were involved with the Society at a later date were Donald Bissett, James Aldridge, Leila Berg and Jim Riordan.

The Soviet organisation VOKS, which arranged cultural relations with other countries, is first recorded as donating books to the Society in 1936. VOKS and its successor SSOD were responsible for donating journals and books to the SCR until 1991. Donations were also received from the friendship societies of the various Soviet republics, libraries and publishers. A

significant proportion of these donations were in the field of children's literature. Children's books were always central to publishing policy in the USSR. Immediately after the Revolution the Deputy Commissar for Education, Nadezhda Krupskaya, stated that children's literature was "one of the mightiest weapons in socialist education of the new generation."¹ Many gifted writers and illustrators were involved in the creation of this literature.



Illustration by V Goryaev to Yuri Olesha's *Three Fat Men*, 1956 edition (SCRSS Library)

One of the most innovative groups was Raduga, based in Leningrad. Its Studio for Children's Literature under the noted translator Samuil Marshak encouraged writers and illustrators better known for their adult works to produce material for children. The group was also responsible for the children's magazine *Novy Robinson* which lasted from 1923–25.

Marshak later became head of the children's section of the state publishing house Gosizdat. The formation of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932 saw children's literature take on even more importance. Gorky, Marshak and Kornei Chukovsky all spoke on the necessity of providing good and imaginative books for the new Soviet child. The same year saw the foundation of

the critical monthly journal *Detskaya Literatura*, followed a year later by the launch of the publishing house of the same name. To give some idea of the advances made – the number of children's books published had risen from 500 books a year at the beginning of the twentieth century to 448.7 million by 1975.²

The Society's children's collection reflects this rich tradition and forms an unbroken history of Soviet children's publishing. The earliest volumes are from the 1920s, showing the innovation of a new society that saw the education of children as key. These are books written by the greats of Soviet children's literature – the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, Samuil Marshak and Alexei Tolstoy. Many are picture books illustrated by artists such as Yuri Annenkov, Vladimir Lebedev and AM Laptev.

The 1930s are well represented with volumes of fiction, folk tales, adventure stories, often military, poetry, and lots of books about science and flying. Authors represented include Lev Kassil', Kornei Chukovsky, Valentin Kataev, Vassily Grossman, Arkadii Gaidar and Nikolai Ostrovsky. Illustrators represented include KP Rotov, Yuri Vasnetsov, KV Kuznetsov and Evgeny Charushin.

This was also the period when the information book began. Not only did the progress of mechanisation and new practices in farming need to be explained to the young, so did the planning of the new economic system. The engineer M Ilin produced what Gorky called "prose poems" – a new and inspiring way of looking at science and invention.

By necessity publishing for children during the Second World War, although remaining a high priority, had to contend with paper and printing shortages. Here we have reprints of Tolstoy's stories, tales by Gaidar and stories by new writers such as Boris Polevoi.

The post-war period is also well represented, again with the classics and new editions of Marshak, Yuri Olesha and

Mayakovsky. This period also saw the publication of adventure stories by Anatoly Rybakov, better known here for his adult novel *Children of the Arbat*. A recurring theme in this period is, of course, the Second World War with works such as *Semenov* by Kamil Ikramov.

New writers and illustrators emerged in the sixties and afterwards. Writers include Albert Likhanov, Alexei Alexin, Irina Tokmakova and Nikolai Nosov. The coverage of books from this period is very rich.

Children's books were central to publishing policy throughout the Soviet period. They received high quality paper, illustrations and writing. Children's literature provided possibilities for authors and illustrators to flex their creativity and produce original and radical works. The SCRSS provides an opportunity to access a library of original texts covering the Soviet period in its entirety and to discover the wealth of this genre. It also provides a chance to study these texts with supporting secondary sources of biography, pedagogical science, art, and a collection of photographs that document education and the arts from the 1920s to the 1980s. This can assist in providing an insight into the political and social life of the USSR. After all, to fully understand the culture of any country it is necessary to have a grasp of its literature for children. And, it's a lot of fun too!

Footnotes

1 Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (Eds): *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, Routledge, 2008, p 4

2 Gregory Walker: *Soviet Book Publishing Policy*, 1978

Jane Rosen is Librarian at the Imperial War Museum, London, where she recently served as historical advisor for the exhibition 'Once Upon a Wartime: Classic War Stories for Children'. She was previously SCR Librarian from 1989–2003. Her current research interest lies in radical and working-class children's literature.

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Feature

Film at the SCR

By Kate Clark

From its foundation the SCR played a significant role in the showing and promoting of Soviet films, largely through the tireless work of Stanley Forman, for many years the Society's Vice-Chairman and later Chairman. As director of Plato Films and ETV Films Ltd, Stanley facilitated monthly showings of films from the various parts of the Soviet Union at SCR premises, the Bowater House Cinema in Knightsbridge, the Commonwealth Institute, the Bijou and other venues.

Long before Stanley's contribution to the SCR's film work, the SCR had benefited hugely from the participation of film director, producer and critic Ivor Montagu. In 1925 Ivor Montagu had set up the Film Society in London, introducing European art films and Soviet political cinema to British intellectuals and film makers.

Many leading Soviet film directors visited the UK under the Society's auspices. Our annual report of 1953–54 records a visit by film director Grigory Alexandrov and the director of Moscow's world-renowned Puppet Theatre, Sergei Obraztsov. They visited the British Film Academy, the British Film Institute, Pinewood, Ealing and Group 3 studios, and other film organisations.

The Society has held monthly film showings during most of its existence, and their variety must have done much to foster greater understanding between our two countries. Documentary and science fiction, avant-garde and socialist realist, Eisenstein classics alongside films showing the difficulties of building a new socialist society, such as *Communist* and *The Bonus*, films from Central Asia showing the struggle for women's emancipation – all had a place in the SCR's repertoire.

In the mid-sixties the SCR screened *Destiny*

of a Man, based on Sholokhov's novel, and our annual report of that year notes that "this was the most popular of all, no doubt because this was a set book for the G.C.E.".

The unforgettable Georgian film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, directed by Sergei Parajanov, and *Ten Days that Shook the World*, from John Reed's book about the 1917 October Revolution, give some idea of the wide variety of films the SCR screened in 1967.



Cartoon of Stanley Forman from the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, 1981 (SCRSS Archive)

As director of ETV Films, which imported and subtitled many Soviet films, Stanley Forman was involved in a special screening of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* at BAFTA and the *Guardian* lecture by Tarkovsky at the National Film Theatre in 1980.

We showed Tarkovsky's early film *Ivan's Childhood* the next year, followed by a fascinating season of Larisa Shepitko's films, including *The Ascent* and *You and I*, by courtesy of ETV Films.

Stanley Forman represented the SCR at various film festivals. In a piece about the 12th Moscow Film Festival for the *Anglo-Soviet Journal* in 1981 he writes: "The Soviet contribution was rich and varied and sometimes surprising. I liked *The Tree of Jamal*, a Turkmenian film directed by Narliyev (who made the delightful *Daughter-in-Law*) and I found Gleb Panfilov's *The*

Theme of great sensitivity and honesty. What is certain about the future of Soviet cinema is that its scope, range and quality are steadily improving. In particular the films that are emerging from the studios in the republics are going to give the Mosfilm and Lenfilm studios a good run for their money. In the fields of documentary and animation, there are remarkable achievements to record – and not a few failures. Just like life.”

In April 1985, ETV Films and the SCR jointly sponsored the premiere of the film *Marshal Zhukov* at the Princess Anne Cinema, Piccadilly, to mark the 40th anniversary of the defeat of Fascism in Europe. Stanley chaired a Q&A with an audience of 200, including the Soviet Ambassador and many film and TV people. The film was somewhat politically sensitive at the time, since it omitted mention of the purges of top military generals during the thirties, and was before the days of *glasnost* when such issues from the USSR’s past began to be aired openly.

During the *perestroika* years film director Elem Klimov came to London and personally introduced his moving but harrowing World War II film *Come and See* at the SCR’s screening at the Bijou Cinema. And that same year director Nikolai Gubenko, the USSR’s last Minister of Culture, came over to present his film *Life, Love and Tears*.

One of Stanley Forman’s personal favourites was Nikolai Ekk’s 1931 film *Road to Life*. This was based on the educationist Anton Makarenko’s eponymous book relating the efforts to rehabilitate street children orphaned by the 1918–21 Civil War. The film was introduced by Stanley at an SCRSS showing in October 1998. “Recognised as being the first Soviet sound feature film,” Stanley wrote, “at the time of its release there were some criticisms about its ‘sentimentalism’, but it occupies a high place in Soviet film history for its fusion of technical, dramatic and musical achievements.” The film was regarded in East and West, Stanley said, as a work on the same level of innovation and importance as the better-known silent films by

Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov that preceded it. It achieved immediate fame worldwide at the 1932 Venice Film Festival where Ekk, destined to be remembered for this film alone, was voted Best Director of the Year.

The SCR / SCRSS film work has had ups and downs over the years: in the early years, Soviet films were shown without subtitles, so were obviously of limited interest to non-Russian speakers. Much later, during the years of *glasnost*, when there was increasing interest in everything Soviet among the general public, the SCR encountered unforeseen problems. As the SCR Annual Report for 1986–87 notes: “The wide interest shown by the independent cinema in London, such as the Metro, in contemporary Soviet film, has tended to reduce the impact of the SCR Film Shows and made it more difficult for our Society to obtain outstanding new Soviet films.”

But throughout the ninety years of our existence, the SCR/SCRSS has screened the widest variety possible of Soviet films, be they conventional or controversial, innovative or run-of-the-mill; we have endeavoured to show the rich tapestry of Soviet life through film during the difficult years of the Cold War and the rapprochement years of the Khrushchev and Gorbachev eras. And now, when the Soviet Union no longer exists, we continue to show films from the Russian Federation and the former Soviet republics.

The SCRSS is proud that leading figures from the film world, such as Ivor Montagu and Stanley Forman, played such a major part in the work of the Society over so many years.

Kate Clark was Moscow correspondent for the Morning Star from 1985–90 and The Scotsman from 1989–90, she was also Deputy Features Editor of the BBC Russian Service from 1993–96. Now retired, she is a member of the SCRSS Council. Her autobiography ‘Chile in My Heart: A Memoir of Love and Revolution’ was published in 2013.

Feature

Robert Daglish's Moscow Diary

By Andrew Jameson

One of the undoubted stars of the SCR's *Anglo-Soviet Journal* (ASJ) was Robert Daglish (stress on the first syllable). From 1957 to 1987 he contributed one of the most valuable and informative features of the ASJ: the Moscow Diary, besides other articles and reviews. Who was he, and why does he command such respect?



Robert Daglish at the 100th anniversary of Jerome K Jerome's birth, Moscow, 1959 (SCRSS Archive)

His grandfather was from North Shields, the family moved to London and prospered. Robert was born in 1924, went to the prestigious Dulwich College school and then into the RAF. The war ended before he saw active service and he was transferred to a Joint Services Russian course. After demobilisation he went to Jesus College, Cambridge, and then took a job in the Diplomatic Service.

At the British Embassy in Moscow he worked under Archie Johnstone, editor of the *Britanskii Soyuznik* (The British Ally). The two men shared an admiration for the Russians, and before long Johnstone left the Embassy and "threw in his lot with the

Soviets", as Robert's obituary puts it. Robert did not share his colleague's views, but had already fallen in love with Inna, also working at the Embassy. The rules were inflexible: he was accused of "fraternisation" and ordered home in July 1949.

Unusually for those times, he refused to return to England and asked the Soviet Government for permission to stay. Shortly after this, he was offered work at the Foreign Languages Publishing House (FLPH) and settled in Moscow. It is possible that an attempted defection by a Russian woman in Washington at about the same time made it easier for the Russians to accept Robert. In 1954, when the law on foreign marriages was relaxed, he and Inna married.

The next step would be to take Soviet citizenship. However, as the Daglish family history website relates, the still naïve Robert was strongly dissuaded from doing so by a colleague at the FLPH, Lev Navrozov.¹ Robert did not cut off his ties with his family – far from it. After the death of Stalin he visited England frequently, including all Christmases, and often Inna travelled with him. A Robert Daglish fund now exists at Cambridge, set up by Inna for students travelling to Russia.

It was both the SCR and Robert's good fortune that the position of the Society's Moscow Correspondent, held until then by Ralph Parker, became vacant in 1958. As Robert modestly states: "In those days the XX Congress was still on our minds. Ralph had written about all the things that were closely connected with it [...] The fact that I was working for the SCR and trying to write, just as a beginner writer, for the ASJ gave me a stimulus to look at things much more closely than I would have done had I just been working as a translator."²

One of Robert's earliest contributions to the ASJ, an article entitled 'Soviet Novels of 1957'³, illustrates this. Instead of the usual academic armchair article, he visited and interviewed the secretary to the Lenin Prize committee, and describes the rules and selection procedures. He outlines the critical

storms that raged and gives each critical point of view succinctly. Uniquely, he represents the Soviet mind-set of those days fairly, something which is important for the understanding of this period. The main work discussed is Nikolaeva's *Battle on the Way* (*Bitva na puti*).

Robert was fortunate enough to meet Kornei Chukovsky at the end of his life, when he was living in the writers' village of Peredelkino outside Moscow. Chukovsky's wonderful children's poetry, his enthusiasm for studying child language, his children's library, his books on translation, and his personal reminiscences on Russian writers from 1900 onwards bring together all that is finest in Russian culture, and this made a deep impression on Robert. His portrait of Chukovsky⁴ is another of his early contributions to the *ASJ*. This article will be especially fascinating to those who have visited these places.

To underline the excitement of those years, Robert's next article is on new developments in the Soviet cinema.⁵ Everything was possible, Stalin had been 'dethroned and creative forces unleashed – some of us still remember those times. The average attendance at Soviet cinemas at that time is given as 9,000,000 per day – but what were the audiences getting? *Quiet Flows the Don* was made with real Cossacks who revolted when a particular battle scene was not true to life – half of the extras had seen the real event! In *The Cranes are Flying* the first hint of the new wave comes in the scene where Veronika desperately tries to find her fiancé at the station, pushing through the columns of soldiers.

In the summer of 1963 we find Robert analysing Shostakovich's 13th Symphony, *Babi Yar*.⁶ In a bold statement, reminiscent of those famous Russian critics of the nineteenth century who criticised Russian society through the medium of its literature, Robert takes his stand against the Cold War. "It would be the greatest of pities [...] if considerations of the cold war were allowed in any way to mar appreciation of the magnificent new work by Shostakovich that

this poem has inspired. Shostakovich, as he said recently, has always been interested in moral and ethical growth, and he finds a perfect subject in the Yevtushenko of these poems, so scrupulous in his judgement, so determined to root out any kind of complacency that he speaks sometimes with more fury of the crimes committed by his own people than of those committed against Russia in recent memory. His work is that of a man who not merely says, but believes. It is marvellously enriched by the music."

It is a shame that space does not allow us to say more here. Little mention has been made of Robert's long and honourable career as a translator, in particular his personal involvement with the Nobel prizewinner Mikhail Sholokhov and the creation of the standard translation of his works. However, perhaps this should form the subject of another article.

Footnotes

1 Lev Navrozov's amusing story about this is available in a document file from the author at a.jameson2@dsl.pipex.com (the original diary has expired on its website)

2 R Daglish, 'Moscow Diary, 1958–1984', *ASJ*, Autumn 1984, pp 10–14 (a piece Daglish refers to as "an attempt at an autobiography-cum-SCR-biography")

3 R Daglish, 'Soviet Novels of 1957', *ASJ*, Summer 1958, pp 15–18

4 Chukovsky website: www.chukfamily.ru/Kornei/Biblio/Daglish.htm

5 R Daglish, 'A New Sense of Direction', *ASJ*, Autumn 1958, pp 20–22

6 R Daglish, 'The Shostakovich Thirteenth', *ASJ*, Summer 1963, pp 21–25

Andrew Jameson is a former lecturer in Russian at Lancaster University, now a translator and researcher in Russian Studies. He is a member of the SCRSS Council.



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Feature

The SCR and the Cultural Thaw of the 1960s

By Dr Emily Lygo

The years 1956 and 1968 are both significant watersheds in the history of the communist movement, points of serious decline in international support for Soviet communism. The revelations about the Stalin era in Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the XX Party Congress in 1956 led to soul-searching among many communists internationally, and to a drop in Party membership in Britain and other countries. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 prompted another such reaction, and yet further losses in support for Soviet communism.

While the SCR was not a Party organisation and focused on Soviet culture in its publications and events, there was nevertheless a significant overlap between its membership and that of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Thus, the Soviet events of 1956 and 1968 had repercussions for the Society. In 1956 these included a number of resignations, which incidentally seem to have led to the closure of the Writers' Group, and a grass-roots rebellion among academic members, in particular, protesting against the Stalinist editorial line of the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*. In 1968 there were further resignations, often by quite prominent members. It might be supposed that these two years were landmark points in a more general decline in the fortunes of the Society, beginning after the euphoric years of the Alliance during World War II when the Cold War began to dominate East-West relations.

This picture is belied, however, by the history of the intervening period. The late 1950s and 1960s witnessed a Thaw in cultural relations between Britain and the USSR, which was a part of the cultural and political Thaw in the USSR under Khrushchev. For the SCR, this change in

political climate was most welcome, and also seems to have been instrumental in shaping the nature of the Society's membership and activities during the period. Members of the Society seem to have wanted different kinds of activities from those traditionally organised, perhaps because these new members came from different social and political backgrounds. Emphasis in the Society's activities shifted from the lectures and general provision of information about the USSR that had dominated the earlier years to the creation of opportunities to learn Russian and to meet Soviet citizens.



Yuri Gagarin at an SCR garden party in his honour, Kensington Square, London, 1961 (SCRSS Archive)

In the Society's annual reports from the late 1950s and early 1960s we find accounts of the SCR's activities interspersed with the wider, fast-changing progress in Anglo-Soviet cultural relations. In the editorials there is palpable excitement at being in tune with a wider enthusiasm for Russia in Britain at the time, and the reports of activity are no longer confined to SCR events. In the 1959 report, for example, we find the announcement of the signing of the 1959 inter-government agreement which envisaged an ambitious programme of exchanges. The editorial notes that the realisation of this programme would be down largely to individual institutions, apparently anticipating its own involvement.

It also notes that the BBC began radio Russian language courses that year with the response exceeding all expectations, and that there had been a satisfying increase in the number of schools providing Russian courses. In the early 1960s editorials had occasion to report on the Royal Ballet tour to Moscow; the British Trade Fair in Moscow; tours of the Kirov, Rostropovich, Richter and the Moscow State Circus in Britain; the first Soviet industrial exhibition in Britain; the 1962 Earls Court Exhibition of Soviet Life; and visits by Yuri Gagarin, Evgenii Evtushenko and Kornei Chukovskii, all of whom were entertained at receptions at the SCR during their stays in Britain.

This boom in cultural relations is the context for the SCR's own development and activities. The 1959 editorial describes how the Society had found that, while attendance at talks and lectures tended to be small, there was a greater interest in social gatherings with the possibility for personal intercourse with visitors and in discussions. With this in mind the Society initiated a programme of pen friend exchanges between British and Soviet schools and schoolchildren. In the coming years the novelty of contact with real Soviet citizens became a key benefit that the Society could offer. By 1961 there were quite a number of Soviet tourists coming to Britain (in 1960–61 the annual report gives the figure as 5,000). The Society began to invite these tourists to garden parties in the garden at its premises in Kensington Square, with the opportunity to meet British members of the Society. These parties proved very popular with members, and continued until the premises were sold and the Society's new location lacked a garden in which to host the events.

The 1959 editorial also records that interest in the study of Russian had greatly increased. The Society was running regular Russian evening classes by this time, but from the late 1950s it began to specialise in teaching advanced Russian, in particular to teachers of Russian in Britain who were supplying the many new courses in schools and evening institutes. It began to hold lectures in Russian with Soviet speakers to cater to these teachers' needs. Just two

years later, the SCR first sent an undergraduate student on a scholarship to Moscow for a year, funded by the USSR–GB Society in Moscow; this scholarship arrangement continued until the fall of the USSR.

In contrast to the earlier years of the Society, when trips to the USSR were largely focused on observing the development of Soviet culture and society, from the 1960s onwards the chief objective of SCR-organised trips to the USSR was the study of Russian. In 1963, further capitalising on the obvious increase in interest in Russian language, culture and tourism in the UK, the SCR organised three summer schools in Russian language, two tours to the USSR, a teachers' seminar for Soviet teachers of English in London, and arranged for two groups of British teachers of Russian to attend international seminars on teaching in Moscow. It also sent fifty-four students plus teachers to an international summer school in Moscow. The numbers involved in these activities are striking. Sending students and teachers on courses became a major part of the Society's activities, while its sponsorship of half-year and year-long scholarships to Moscow continued.



Soviet teachers of English at the SCR summer school in Woolwich, 1962 (SCRSS Archive)

Overall, then, these changes point to a significant shift in the focus of the Society, brought about in response to interest expressed by members, and very much in tune with a wider interest in learning

Russian and in Soviet culture. This interest was propagated by the Government policy to increase the number of people learning Russian, but was perhaps not only down to this. Various phenomena probably contributed, most of which had been made possible by Khrushchev's Thaw: Evgenii Evtushenko's fame as a new Soviet poet, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Boris Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago* and the furore surrounding it, the reception of Soviet dissidents in the West, the developments in the space race and Gagarin's flight, and the exposure to Soviet culture through tours of ballet, exhibitions and so on that came about because of the cultural agreements in the period. The enthusiasm and interest in Soviet and Russian culture at this time was perhaps also a reaction to the binary of Cold War politics, an affirmation that, in spite of ideological differences, the USSR was culturally relevant, accessible and fascinating.

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Feature

Soviet War Graves in the UK and the Impetus for the Soviet War Memorial

By Phil Matthews

In 1994, a year ahead of the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, the SCRSS AGM passed a resolution to ensure recognition by the British Government of the Soviet contribution to the defeat of Fascism in its planned

celebrations for May 1995. As part of its efforts on this issue, the SCRSS Council sent messages to the new Russian Ambassador, Anatoly Adamishin, the World War II Commemorative Committee, Viscount Cranbourne and Malcolm Rifkind. Happily, following the Queen's visit to Russia later in 1994, Prime Minister John Major attended the celebrations in Moscow on 9 May 1995, while the heads of state of six CIS countries were represented at the London VE Day celebrations.



Pupils from the Russian Embassy School lay flowers at the Soviet war graves in Tidworth Military Cemetery, 1995 (© Phil Matthews)

In parallel with these major events, the Russian Embassy in London approached the SCRSS with details of eighteen Soviet war graves in cemeteries scattered across the UK (at Aldershot, Chester, Harrogate, Hartlepool, Huddersfield, Liverpool, Leeds, Shaftesbury and Tidworth).¹ Four of these graves were in the Salisbury area:

Shaftesbury Town Cemetery, Dorset
V Duschin (army), died 7 February 1945

Tidworth Military Cemetery, Wiltshire
N Horiacyk (unknown status), died 16 April 1945
A Novokreshchenov (army), died 7 May 1945
S Suleimanow (civilian), died 15 May 1945

Note: The spelling of the soldiers' surnames reflects the form given on the headstones.

The Russian Embassy asked whether the SCRSS's Wessex Branch, of which I was Chair, could organise a ceremony at both

cemeteries, in conjunction with the Russian military attaché, to honour these Soviet soldiers and civilians. Agreement for a 50th anniversary commemorative ceremony was given by the adjutant at Tidworth and Shaftesbury Town Council, and support obtained from local branches of the British Legion. The presence of these Soviet graves, previously unknown to local people, became a *cause célèbre* and the ceremony was covered by both local and Russian television, radio and press, including journalists from Russia's Itar-TASS news agency and *Pravda*.

The ceremonies took place on Sunday 30 April 1995, with wreaths laid on the graves by representatives of the Russian military attaché, the SCRSS (myself and Vice-Chair Stanley Forman) and pupils of the Russian Embassy School. The delegations were welcomed by Captain Wells of the Tidworth Garrison at Tidworth Military Cemetery and by the Mayor of Shaftesbury, Philip de Mattis, at Shaftesbury Town Cemetery. The Right Hon Nicholas Baker, MP for North Dorset, also attended and a personal message from Prime Minister John Major was read out.



Phil Matthews by Dushin's grave, Shaftesbury Town Cemetery, 1995 (© Phil Matthews)

But why were these Soviet war graves in the UK? All had been Soviet prisoners of war liberated by British and American forces from Nazi slave labour camps in late 1944 – early 1945. All had been in a serious medical condition and transferred to military hospitals in the UK for treatment. Sadly, these eighteen men did not survive. They

were buried in the UK in graves provided by and still looked after by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, each headstone bearing a Soviet star.

Pravda's UK correspondent at the time, Pavel Bogomolov, published an article about the two ceremonies on 7 May 1995². This abridged extract gives an idea of the importance of the event for the Russians who took part: "We arrived at Tidworth at 10 o'clock [...] Silence – not a rustle of wind. On three tombstones, carefully tended like the others, are engraved the Red Army star. One describes an infantryman, S Suleimanov, together with his citizenship. Previously, the occupation had taken him for slave labour in Germany. And here are I Goriachik and A Novokreshchenov, also concisely described [...] Their names were recorded in fascist concentration camps in Belgium, Holland and Western Germany before being liberated by the British. It is important to recognise the exceptional care given to them, first in army hospitals, then in hospital in Britain [...] Here, during the Last Post and two minutes' silence, literally all heads were bowed in mourning. Remembering, perhaps for the first time, what it must have been like to experience the war in Russia. These deaths, as it were, cemented the friendship between the peoples of our countries [...]"

"From the Tidworth war cemetery, we travelled to Shaftesbury [...] Perhaps the most important person present was the medical sister, Celia Diblee. It was under her care, on 5 February 1945, that Private Vladimir Dushin was placed when he arrived in Britain. Coming to his grave for the first time, Celia said: 'He was 29 years old then. He was in an extremely serious state. A skeleton lying there. We, of course, did everything we could for him. But, as we could see, he was already dying. He didn't know a word of English and I, on my side, didn't know a word of Russian. But I wanted to say something to give him some comfort and I whispered: "Moscow, Stalingrad, Leningrad." I saw my patient smile at what I was trying to do. The moment he began to smile, he passed away peacefully [...]"

It was the discovery of these eighteen Soviet graves and the success of the 50th anniversary celebrations at Tidworth and Shaftesbury that provided the inspiration for the Soviet War Memorial in London. The SCRSS played a significant role in this initiative as a founder member of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF). Set up in 1997, the SMTF organised the fundraising and built the momentum to create the first monument in the UK to commemorate the sacrifice of 27 million lives by the citizens and armed forces of the former Soviet Union in its joint struggle with the UK, USA and France against Fascism during World War II. The Soviet War Memorial was unveiled on 9 May 1999 in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Southwark, London SE1, adjacent to the Imperial War Museum.

Footnotes

1 There are eighteen Soviet war graves in the UK, but sixty-six on Jersey and 264 on Alderney in the Channel Islands. Thousands of Soviet prisoners were sent to the Channel Islands as forced labour during the Nazi occupation.

2 Pavel Bogomolov, 'They will not be forgotten: Wreaths on the tombs of Soviet soldiers near the English Channel', *Pravda*, 7 May 1995

Phil Matthews is Chair of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund, Vice-Chair of the SCRSS, and Mayor of Wilton in Wiltshire.

Feature

Snapshots in SCRSS Library History

By Diana Turner

These extracts from the Society's annual reports at its first and subsequent tenth anniversaries offer a glimpse into the development of our historic library. Today the library holds over 30,000 books,

periodicals, pamphlets and artefacts, with a further 60,000 photographs, slides and realia.

First Year: 1924

First Annual Report of the S.C.R. 1924–5

"The Committee desire to acknowledge, with many thanks, gifts of books which form the nucleus of a small lending library."

10th Anniversary: 1934

Eleventh Annual Report of the S.C.R. 1934–1935

"The Library continues to be used by a considerable number of members and is now open every day; books may be borrowed at any time during ordinary office hours and various periodicals are available for reference. Our thanks are due to VOKS in Moscow for the many periodicals they continue to send us. During the year copies of all important publications on the U.S.S.R. have been added to the Library, and various enquiries on particular aspects and for advice on special bibliographies have been dealt with."

Library staff: Elena White (Honorary Librarian), Miss Rojansky and Mrs A Barr (Volunteer Library Assistants)

20th Anniversary: 1944

SCR 1924–44 [Annual Report]

"July, 1944, finds the Society possessed of unrivalled resources of material about the U.S.S.R., the value of which can be judged by the number of inquiries which pour in daily by letter, telephone and personal call; these average 150 per week, which means that in a year some 7,500 are dealt with. One of the S.C.R.'s most valuable assets is the library, where over 4,000 volumes in English and Russian, as well as files of newspapers and periodicals, are consulted by 800 readers a year. A lending library of Soviet music, of gramophone records and lantern slides, book lists and discussion notes, and the provision of expert lecturers

are other facilities available to the 4,000 members. The Exhibition Department lists twenty-five full-scale exhibitions for loan [...] and during its two and a half years' existence has supplied some 600 main displays, as well as 2,000 smaller ones."

30th Anniversary: 1954

SCR Annual Report 1953–1954: 30 Years

"Some 3,000 books were added to the holdings of the Library during the year, in addition to some 400 translations of individual articles, over 1,500 copies of journals and 2,000 newspapers [...] The volume of work of the Library has been fairly heavy, but members still make less use of its facilities than could be wished. In the first eight months of 1954 issues of books and journals totalled 3,178, of which roughly half were by post to provincial and outer London members. In the same period the Library dealt with over 1,500 inquiries [...]"

40th Anniversary: 1964

SCR Annual Report 1964

"The volume of requests for visual aids and teaching material on the geography, history, educational system, music and folk dances of the USSR again increased. The meeting of these requests is one of the main contributions the Society makes to the understanding of the USSR. Many enquiries involve preparation of a detailed answer from reference books because the information required is not available in English language publications [...] In addition many calls were made on the Photo Library by publishers, theatres, television companies, etc [...] Once more the stock of the Library has greatly outrun the shelf accommodation available."

50th Anniversary: 1974

SCR Annual Report 1973

"Since the summer of 1973 the Library has unfortunately suffered from lack of staff [...]"

However, [...] 340 enquiries by letter were dealt with [...] and approximately 90 telephone calls and personal visits [...] Approximately 70 large parcels of free non-returnable material (mainly pamphlets in English) and 120 smaller packets have been sent out, mainly to teachers, students and school pupils, engaged in studies ranging from PhD theses to school project work [...] The information files of cuttings in English have been expanded, and large numbers of pamphlets in Russian have been organised according to subject [...]"

"Requests from publishers have continued to increase in number this year, reaching 124. We continue to do a considerable amount of research for BBC and other producers and designers, as well as supplying photographs to them."

Library staff: Miss Ann Simpson (Librarian) until January 1974

60th Anniversary: 1984

SCR Annual Report 1984–5

"More of the public appear to be aware of the SCR's existence and resources [...] The Information Officer has been called upon to help organisations such as tour operators [...], business concerns etc, as well as bodies with close specialised links with the Soviet Union e.g. the Press (Soviet Weekly, Novosti), the Soviet embassy, specialist tour operators and educational bodies [...] Sources [for press cuttings] have increased in volume [...] which means this is a very time-consuming, but essential, task."

"[The Main Library] has suffered considerably from staff departures and re-deployment and continues to be run on a volunteer basis only [...]"

"[The Visual Aids] Librarians have actively sought new material [...] SCR members and friends have donated slides, photographs, art books, catalogues, posters, postcards and an array of everyday items which have already proved invaluable. The Librarians have continued photographic documentation

of SCR events and the restoration and preservation of old material. The huge task of making prints from the rare collection of lantern slides has been undertaken and every effort has been made to take original photographs while visiting the USSR.”

Library staff: Pamela Barlow (Information Officer), Roxane Permar and Beryl Graham (Visual Aids Librarians)

70th Anniversary: 1994

SCRSS Annual Report 1994–1995

“In the last year the Library suffered a slight flood in one of its basement rooms [as well as] a more serious leak [...] Twenty-four [books] were lost in this way [...] Also due to one of the three break-ins [...] we lost the use of two bookcases, enforcing us to crowd everything together. This makes the space problem in the Library even more of an issue [...]

“Use of the Library has increased this year. From April 1994 to May 1995 there were 251 members [borrowing] approximately 1057 items [...] The most popular sections of the Library were the literature, translations, children’s and linguistics sections [...]

“As the result of an advertisement in the magazine of the Bureau of Freelance Photographers, the Visual Aids Library now holds a total of 169 prints and 1446 transparencies under contract from contributing photographers. Many are of exceptional quality.”

Library staff: Jane Rosen (Librarian and Information Officer), Andrew Lord (Research Administrator – Visual Aids Library)

80th Anniversary: 2004

SCRSS Annual Report May 2004–2005

“Over the past year, the Society has continued to function with only one paid member of staff [...] helped by a team of skilled volunteers [...] The loan library is in regular use, especially with Russian

members. Starting in the summer of 2004, Jerry and Sheila Clarke commenced a major upgrading of the Loan Library, re-organising existing shelves to raise them 6” off the floor to prevent any further damage from flooding [...] They have since then spent several months erecting new shelving and re-shelving the whole of the literature section, producing a transformation of the library [...]

“The information department, particularly the newspaper cuttings files, continues to be used widely. Most researchers are undergraduate and postgraduate students, some from the universities affiliated to the SCRSS [...] The SCRSS also regularly provides information packs for school students.”

Library staff: John Cunningham (Library & Administrative Assistant)

Diana Turner is a member of the SCRSS Council and has been Editor of the ‘SCRSS Digest’ for ten years. She works as an information management specialist.

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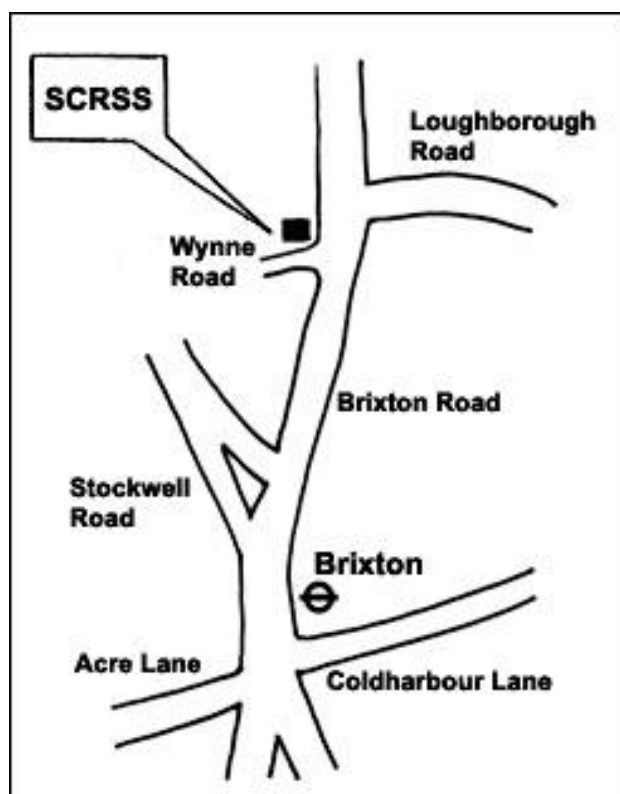
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