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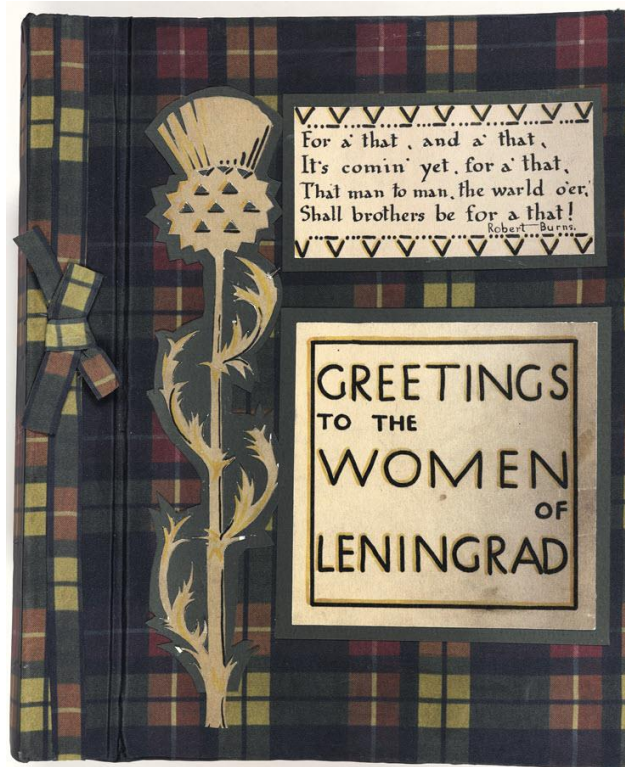
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Feature

"Your Fight Is Our Fight": The 'Scottish' and 'Leningrad' Albums

By Susan Taylor

In the winter of 1941, during the Siege of Leningrad,¹ the women of the towns of Airdrie and Coatbridge in Lanarkshire, Scotland, created a book titled *Greetings to the Women of Leningrad*, now known as the 'Scottish Album'. Containing signatures and messages of support from "women from all sections of the community", including housewives, civil defence volunteers, factory workers, and members of knitting circles, churches and co-operative societies, it was presented in London to Madame Maisky, the wife of the Soviet Ambassador, on 13 December. In its dedication – 'To the Heroic Women of Leningrad' – the signatories pledge their support: "Your fight is our fight and we shall not fail you or be unworthy of your great sacrifice." The original 'Scottish Album' is now housed at the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg, Russia.

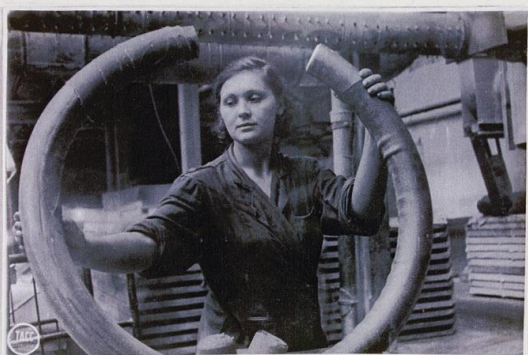


Front cover of the 'Scottish' Album (1941), featuring an extract from the poetry of Robert Burns, and bound in Buchanan tartan

Eighteen months later, a telegram confirmed its safe arrival in Leningrad. Furthermore, Scotland was astonished to receive a gift in return, now known as the 'Leningrad Album'.² Due to an administrative error, it was delivered to Glasgow and presented to Mrs JM Biggar, wife of the Lord Provost, at a representative gathering of women in the City Chambers. It was exhibited at Airdrie Town Hall as part of 'Russia Week' in February 1943,³ then displayed at Kelvingrove Art Gallery, before being accessioned by the Mitchell Library.

The 'Leningrad Album' is both moving and impressive: boxed in gold brocade and bound in antique embroidery, it contains messages of thanks, some to specific groups that had been identified in the

'Scottish Album'. In exercise books and written on scraps of paper, are the signatures of thousands of women – artists, musicians, ballet dancers, scientists, academics, housewives and factory workers – with the largest number coming from the Kirov Works, only 4 kilometres from the German frontline. Supervised by artist Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva (1871–1955), it features woodcuts, hand-coloured lithographs and photographs depicting the city and its people, crests and flags of Britain and the USSR illustrated by Vera Milyutina (1903–87), and poetry by Vera Inber (1890–1972).



М.П. Емельянова - Закачица автомобильного Завода. Ленинград.



Рая Шепелева - Матрос на пароходе „Шлиссельбург“

Photographs of MP Yemel'yanova, making tyres for lorries, and Raya Shepeleva, sailor on the steamship *Shlissel'burg* ('Leningrad' Album, 1942)

Thanks to the efforts of artist and photographer Nadiya Anfalova and Margarita Mudrak, Chair of the Interregional Association for International Cooperation, both in St Petersburg, and Helen Morrison, Tom Clark and the late Elizabeth Clark of

the St Petersburg Forum in the UK, the Mitchell Library received a facsimile of the 'Scottish Album' in November 2024. This acquisition enables public access to the album in its country of origin for the first time since 1941.⁴

The availability of the facsimile was particularly significant to me, both as a long-serving member of staff and as a genealogist: in complementing the 'Leningrad Album', it makes possible a more complete telling of this remarkable wartime story and enables consideration of its potential value as a source for family historians. Therefore, the facsimile 'Scottish Album' has become the topic of my MSc dissertation in Genealogical, Palaeographical and Heraldic Studies.

Previously, only limited information was available regarding the signatories of the 'Scottish Album' – research carried out to date mentioned only the key figures.⁵ Therefore, this is a timely opportunity to revise who is remembered for this act of solidarity, by examining the lives and circumstances of those who might otherwise have remained anonymous and unexamined.

The facsimile reveals new data: names and, in some cases, addresses, occupations, places of work and so on. Therefore, it is a catalyst for further investigation of these women – and some men – as individuals, and to trace their lives through examining various primary sources (Old Parish Registers; statutory records of birth, marriage and death; censuses; wills and so on).

Where there is a scarcity of biographical information to enable identification or trace lineage of an individual, a prosopographical approach will be used to create a collective biography, based on common characteristics such as age, place of birth, marital status, number of children, class and so on. In this way, it will be possible to place them within their specific historical and cultural context, and to understand their social networks, relationships and affiliations.

Janet Hamilton.

3

Left: A sample of the pages of signatures from the 'Leningrad' Album (1942). **Right:** Extract from *Poland* by Janet Hamilton and signatures of Industrial Women Workers of the Sun Foundry, Coatbridge, from the 'Scottish' Album (1941).

My research will employ a combination of case studies and sampling of this discrete population of approximately 1,650 signatories to create a finding-and-mapping aid for demographic analysis. It will be of wider significance by offering insights into the wartime shift in women's employment and voluntary service, particularly in relation to the paucity of records in Scotland for this time-period.⁶

It will also consider whether there was something particular to Airdrie and Coatbridge that brought about the unique gift of the 'Scottish Album'. For example, to what extent did the rapid industrialisation of

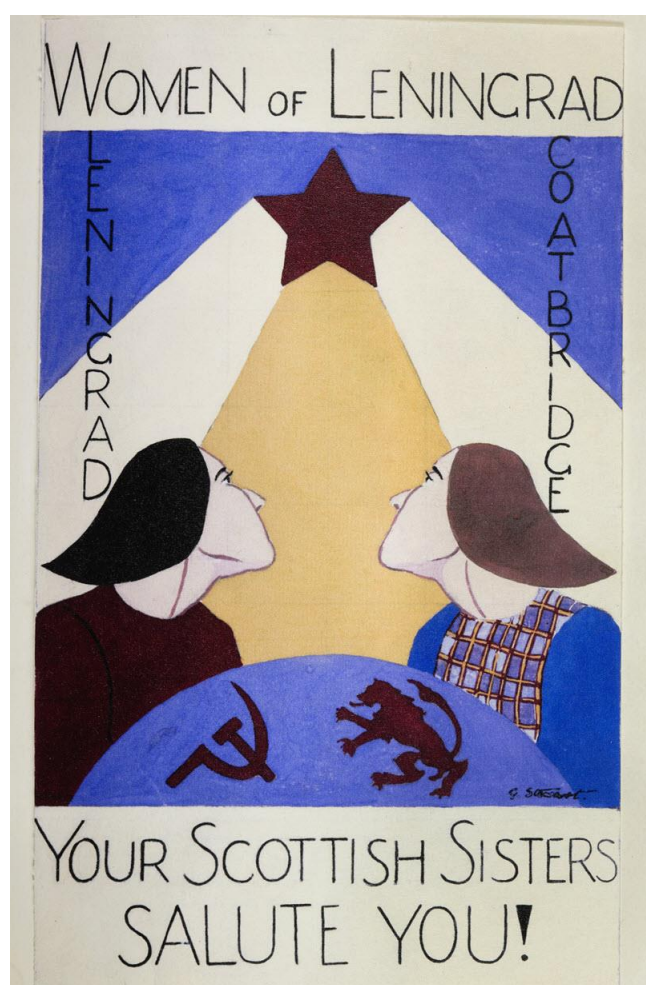


Illustration by Margaret Plant ('Scottish' Album, 1941)

the area in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, together with its tradition of political engagement and collective action, play a part? Did the area's strategic importance in producing armaments and munitions for the war effort increase their sense of vulnerability and make them feel more keenly the plight of the

besieged? Was the local sense of community made stronger by the increasing threat of Luftwaffe bombing campaigns on nearby Glasgow and Clydebank?



Smolny Institute, Leningrad, 1924, by Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva ('Leningrad' Album, 1942)

Another key area for investigation, relating to the origins of the 'Scottish Album', is Scoto-Russian political and cultural relations in the run-up to the Second World War. Beyond its obvious anti-fascist sentiments, it includes slogans indicative of pro-communist sympathies, while the prioritisation of cultural life in defiance of existential threat is another topic to explore, signalled by the album's celebration of the work of the Scottish national bard – and Russian favourite – Robert Burns (1759–96), and the Coatbridge-based poet Janet Hamilton (1795–1873).

There is a particular directness and poignancy that comes from considering historical events from the perspective of one's own family. Eighty years have now passed, and we are several generations on, since the end of the Second World War. By providing a more nuanced understanding of the signatories of the 'Scottish Album', it is hoped that my research, which will be presented to North Lanarkshire Libraries, will contribute to an improved awareness for current generations of their ancestors' roles on the Home Front.

Inspiration for the current research was sparked by the generous work of Professor Minchenkov of St Petersburg University who had, in July 2017, visited the Mitchell Library and translated into English a selection of the signatures in the 'Leningrad Album'. It is hoped that future collaborations with Russian speakers will enable the completion of this work and teach us more about those who endured the great suffering of the Blockade.

Image Credits

All images of the 'Scottish' and 'Leningrad' Albums reproduced in this article are ©CSG CIC Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collection: The Mitchell Library, Special Collections.

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Footnotes

1 The siege lasted for 872 days, from 8 September 1941 to 27 January 1944.

2 Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Anna Petrovna. [1942] *Leningrad Album*. Album of drawings, watercolours, woodcuts, lithographs and photographs; also messages of greeting. (Accession number: 597344). Mitchell Library, Glasgow, URL: <https://libcat.csghlasgow.org/web/arena/> (accessed 10 May 2025).

3 Henthorn, Hannah. (2024) 'Russian solidarity in Airdrie and Coatbridge during the Second World War: the Leningrad Album in context', North Lanarkshire Council / Working Life website, URL: <https://www.culturenlmuseums.co.uk/blog/russian-solidarity-in-airdrie-and-coatbridge-during-the-second-world-war-the-leningrad-album-in-context/> (accessed 08 November 2024).

4 Anfalova, Nadiya and Interregional Association for International Cooperation, St Petersburg. [2024] *Greetings to the Women of Leningrad*, [facsimile of the 'Scottish Album' of 1941, compiled by Nadiya Anfalova for the Interregional Association for International Cooperation, St Petersburg]. (Accession Number: 1004406). Mitchell Library, Glasgow, URL: <https://libcat.csghlasgow.org/web/arena/> (accessed 10 May 2025).

5 Henderson, Margaret. (1989) *Dear Allies: A Story of Women in Monklands and Besieged Leningrad*,

Coatbridge, Monklands District Library Services. This book focuses on the organising committee members: Agnes MAXWELL, Harry MAXWELL, Harry WALKER and Margaret PLANT.

6 For example, the 1931 Scotland Census will not be available until at least 2031, there are limits on access to the 1939 National Register for Scotland, and there is no 1941 Census.

SCRSS News

Latest news by Jane Rosen, new Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

SCRSS AGM 2025



New SCRSS Honorary Secretary Jane Rosen with Ralph Gibson, who stood down from the role at the AGM in May 2025 after twelve years' service

Many thanks to everyone who attended the AGM on Saturday 17 May, either in person or online. Elections of SCRSS Council members took place (new nominations and re-elections). We are delighted to welcome Claire Weiss as a new Trustee; existing Trustee Diana Turner was re-elected. Following the AGM, the SCRSS Council met to appoint the Executive Committee (EC). The full list of the Society's President, Vice-Presidents, EC and Council is as follows. *President and Vice-Presidents:* President and EC Member: Professor William Bowring; Vice-Presidents: Dr Kate Hudson, Dr David Lane, Dr Rachel O'Higgins, Professor Geoffrey Roberts. *EC and members of the SCRSS Council:* Chair:

Ralph Gibson; Honorary Secretary: Jane Rosen; Honorary Treasurer: Jane Rosen (*pro tem, until the June 2025 Council meeting*). *Members of the SCRSS Council:* Wendy Ansley, Bethany Aylward, Kate Clark, Michael Costello, Jeremy Hicks, Andrew Jameson, Meirian Jump, Christine Lindey, Philip Matthews, Diana Turner, Claire Weiss.

The meeting saw the resignation of the Society's long-standing Chair Philip Matthews (see tribute on page 11) and Honorary Secretary Ralph Gibson. Both have provided stalwart service to the Society with Phil joining the Council in 1984 and Ralph in 1994. Phil has chaired meetings and events with grace and charm, and has been one of the major supporters of the Soviet War Memorial. Without Ralph's efforts in his time as Honorary Secretary, the Society would have struggled to reach its centenary: he was overwhelmingly responsible for the success of our outstanding anniversary year in 2024. We are delighted that Phil remains a Trustee of the Society and will continue as Chair of the Soviet War Memorial Trust, and that Ralph will continue as Trustee and Chair of the Society. We thank them for all their work and dedication.

The meeting approved the SCRSS Council's motion to increase the membership rates from June 2025 for new members and from January 2026 for existing members.

Next Events

First-Saturday-of-the-month library openings continue over the summer and autumn 2025. We are currently planning the autumn events programme – please see the SCRSS website and member e-newsletters for the latest details.

Saturday 21 June 2025, 16.00–17.00

Zoom Online Lecture in Russian: Anastasia Belyaeva on *Петропавловская крепость: История и современность* (Peter & Paul Fortress: Past and Present)
Anastasia Belyaeva of the State Museum of the History of St Petersburg discusses the

history of the fortress – founded in 1703 – as architectural monument, tomb of the Romanov Imperial Family and political prison, before considering the museum today. *SCRSS members and affiliates only, free of charge – book via Eventbrite.*

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

80th Anniversary of the Allied Victory over Fascism in 1945



The newly restored Soviet War Memorial, London, in early May 2025 (Photo: SWMT)

Thanks to the efforts of the Trustees of the Soviet War Memorial Trust (SWMT), the Soviet War Memorial was fully restored ahead of the 80th Anniversary of the Allied Victory in the Second World War.

A substantial donation, secured from the RNVR Officers' Association in commemoration of their role in the Allied Arctic Convoys, paid for the regilding of the inscription on the memorial stone, the cleaning and coating of the main sculpture, and the fixing of stonework on the plinth.

Due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the SWMT did not organise a formal act of remembrance. However, on 9 May 2025 diplomats from several embassies of former Soviet republics laid wreaths and, throughout the day, hundreds of tributes were placed on the Memorial by individuals and organisations, including the RMT trade union in remembrance of those who participated in the Arctic Convoys. Flowers were laid on behalf of the SCRSS and the SWMT.

The Soviet War Memorial is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park that surrounds the Imperial War Museum in Southwark, London. The SCRSS was instrumental in organising its creation and unveiling in May 1999, and continues to play a significant role in the SWMT.

Feature

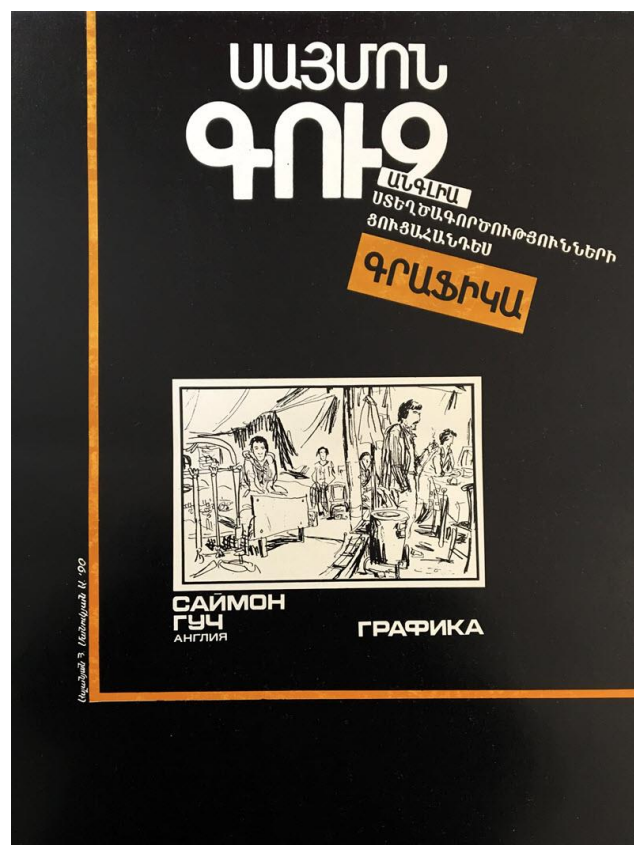
Armenia, Autumn 1989

By Simon Gooch

The Autumn 1989 issue of the *Anglo-Soviet Journal* included an account of the weeks I spent in Armenia, drawing survivors of the December 1988 earthquake and the conditions they were living in, six months on. The project – enabled by the SCR¹, and its Secretary, Jean Turner, in particular – was to publicise the British charity Aid Armenia's plans for a new children's hospital in Kirovakan, one of the three towns that had been devastated. In October 1989 I revisited Armenia, hoping to record progress before the first anniversary of the disaster.

My host in Yerevan was again Eduard Artsrunyan – 'Edik' – painter, professor and patriarch, with hatchet nose, big moustache

and wild grey hair, who used the strong colours that distinguish twentieth-century Armenian art. Chain-smoking, working hard on his worry beads, and nothing if not critical, Edik could stir up controversy in any situation. On my first trip he had lavished hospitality and shown me the sights (including his own paintings in the Art



Poster for Armenia: *Drawings from the Earthquake Zone*, an exhibition of Simon Gooch's work planned for Yerevan but rearranged in Moscow, 1990 (Reproduced from Simon Gooch's personal archive)

Gallery of Armenia), but delayed taking me up to the earthquake zone. It was frustrating, but Marina – one of the group of artists we regularly ate, drank and argued with – took me aside and whispered: "Edik was not always like this. He lost thirteen cousins in Leninakan." In the article, I wrote of friends who had driven through a road block in a hail of bullets, then pulled at the wreckage with their bare hands. That was Edik, his two sons and his brother Hambik.

In late October 1989 the increasingly bloody confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh led to an Azeri rail blockade, holding up progress on reconstruction. "*Koshmar*, Simonjan,"

was Edik's regular refrain – a nightmare. There was little *benzin* (petrol) to be had, and on the mountain road to Gyumri (as Leninakan had been rechristened) Hambik's wallowing Volga saloon eventually ground to a halt. We begged half a litre from a passing truck and carried on to a garage where a crowd scuffled around a single pump.



Simon Gooch (left) with Eduard ('Edik') Artsrunyan in Moscow, 1990 (Copyright: Simon Gooch)

Hours later, entering the flattened city, it was clear that *domiki* (portacabins), containers and Mongolian yurts had largely replaced army tents. People were insulating these basic homes with anything they could find, including sheets of asbestos. A new suburb had begun to go up, but the forest of tower cranes stood stock-still. The new British School – to be named for Lord Byron, the great Armenophile – was just a steel skeleton, waiting for materials to get through.

I stayed with Artsrunyan relatives in an intact house, though they preferred to sleep in a crowded *domik*. By day I prowled the featureless streets and was invited into cobbled-together shacks to be offered coffee and cognac. Drawing people is a collaborative process, with time to talk and get to know each other, but now everyone

was distracted by televised sessions of the Armenian People's Congress, taken over by the radical Karabakh Committee. Struggling to survive in the wreckage of their city, they sensed that rigid political structures were also shifting. No one knew it then, but these passionate squabbles, aired live, would herald the disintegration of the USSR itself.

I left Yerevan on the 72nd anniversary of the Great October Revolution. Lenin Square was empty and the only flags flying were the tricolours of the old, pre-Soviet republic. The parade was cancelled and Armenians were enjoying a long lie-in. At Zvartnots Airport I said my farewells to Edik, who clutched my arm wordlessly and pointed to a snow-covered Ararat rearing up above the vineyards and beyond the Turkish border. The tiny plane, its cabin laden with giant watermelons, just managed to force itself over the mountains, and in twenty minutes we were in Tbilisi.

It had been Georgians, making a film in London in the summer of 1989, who roused me from a state of collapse after my first return from Armenia. Now it was happening again. Instead of putting my feet up, I was effectively kidnapped and taken on an exhilarating ride to the Black Sea coast by actor friends from Telavi who had dates to fulfil in Zugdidi, on the border with Abkhazia. After the short run ended, the town laid on a banquet with much patriotic speechifying and close-harmony singing of a heartbreaking purity.

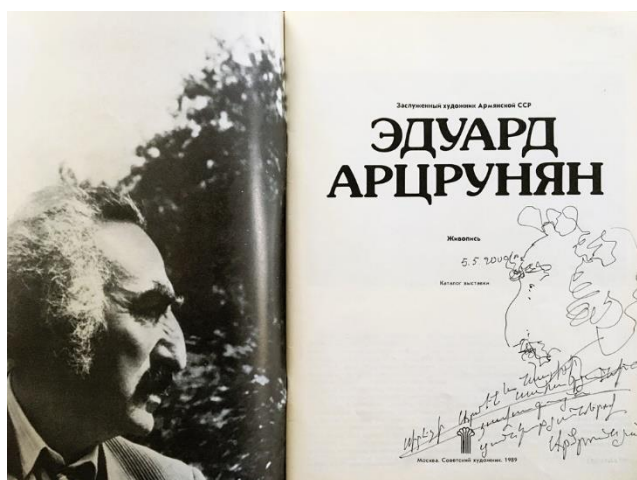
Just before leaving for Moscow, I was enjoying a relaxed and unceremonious evening in Tbilisi with young westernised Georgians, when someone said that the Berlin Wall was coming down that night. Everyone went quiet, wondering what the implications were for them and their country, and only the visitor from the UK was rash enough to propose an optimistic toast.

Back home I set up the exhibition *Armenia: Drawings From the Earthquake Zone* in half-a-dozen venues, starting at the TUC's Congress House in early 1990 and ending in Glasgow Central Library. There was a plan to take the work to Yerevan, and a



Top: *Asbestos House, Leninakan*, Simon Gooch, 1989 (Copyright: Simon Gooch)
Bottom: *Women Making Lavash*, Eduard Artsrunyan, 1990 (Reproduced from Simon Gooch's private collection)

poster was printed there, but my visa was refused. Armenian contacts in Moscow assured me that they could put the show on there, so I arrived at Sheremetyevo Airport in the autumn of 1990 with a portfolio of drawings. In the foyer of the Malaya Bronnaya Theatre the formal opening began with speeches (one from Edik, who had come up from Yerevan to organise the hang), flowers and TV cameras.



Eduard Artsrunyan catalogue, 1989, inscribed in Armenian for Simon Gooch by the artist, with self-caricature (Reproduced from Simon Gooch's personal archive)

Edik came to stay with me that Christmas and New Year, the first of many Soviet visitors I housed when international travel became possible. He was in didactic mood, and on an icy London street he lectured me about Gauguin for half an hour as buses came and went. In the National Gallery he expatiated at even greater length on Rembrandt while we had a good lunch, with a bottle of red, in the restaurant. We fell asleep on a padded bench in front of *The Rokeby Venus*, till Edik's snoring brought the guards and we were escorted from the premises.

A regular theme of Artsrunyan diatribes was that I should dedicate my whole life to Art, but those months in the Caucasus had shown me that drawing was not enough: I needed to write in order to do justice to the complexities of an extraordinary experience. The Edinburgh-based newspaper *Scotland-on-Sunday* published an article after my first trip to Armenia, and from then on they let

me wander round Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation in a time of great change and report on my travels.

Though I explored the wilds of the Russian North, where I was always the first Westerner anyone had ever met, and crossed the White Sea with a drunken crew to the great monastery on the Solovetsky Islands, reborn from the Gulag, I never got back to the Caucasus. The political and economic situation had become very difficult. You could no longer get cheap internal Aeroflot flights. Friends emigrated. But Edik came to London once more, bringing an Armenian feast with him: a slab of *bastourmas* – a version of pastrami; *sujuk* – a string of walnuts sealed in grape juice toffee; and a large and shapely bottle of cognac ("for your wedding feast"). He got very grumpy when the thread holding together his worry beads – each named for plague, war, hunger, God, family, friends etc – broke (we fixed it with hard-wearing fishing line), and sat up half the night painting visions of Hayastan to sell to the local community of the *Spiurk*: the worldwide Armenian diaspora.

All went quiet for a few years, but then Edik's wife Natascha rang from Yerevan to say that he had had a stroke and could no longer work. I wanted to see him again, but dithered, and in 2010 he died. I often think of him. Above my desk I have a beautiful, timeless painting by Eduard Artsrunyan, People's Artist – of women making *lavash*, or unleavened bread. I only learned a few words of Armenian, such as *baref* (hello) and *Angliatse negaritch* (English artist), and for the rest my broken Russian had to suffice, but I can also say 'thank you': *schnurrhakalutsun, Edikjan*.

Simon Gooch later worked as a genealogist and historian. His most recent book is a biography of his grandfather 'Edwin Gooch: Champion of the Farmworkers' (Poppyland, 2020).

Footnote

1 SCR: Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR, the original name of the SCRSS from 1924–92.

Feature

Philip Matthews: Retiring SCRSS Chair

By Diana Turner, SCRSS Trustee



Phil Matthews, SCRSS Chair until May 2025, at the SCRSS Centenary Celebration on 6 July 2024
(Photo: Billy McKee)

Longtime member Philip (Phil) Matthews retired as SCRSS Chair at the Society's AGM in May 2025, after forty-four years of activism. A Council member since 1984, when he initially represented the Wessex Branch, he became Vice-Chair in 1990 and Chair in 2016. In addition, he played a key part from 1995 in the Society's project to establish what later became the Soviet War Memorial in London, unveiled in 1999.

Phil was born in 1942 in Woodford, near Wilton in Wiltshire, and initially followed his father into farm work at the age of 15. He left to join GPO Telephone (later known as British Telecom) and became active in the local branch of the Post Office Engineering Union, eventually becoming a full-time union official. He continued at British Telecom until 1994, when he accepted a voluntary redundancy package that would allow him to take his company pension and pursue other interests. Alongside his trade union work, Phil was a Labour Councillor in his native Wiltshire from 1964 until 2022, with only one break of six years. After Woodford Parish Council and Amesbury Rural District Council, he moved to Wilton in 1974 to get married and joined Wilton Town Council in

1980. During this time he notched up three consecutive years as Mayor from 2013–15 and again in 2021 for one year before he stood down. However, at the May 2025 local election Phil became a Wilton Town Councillor once again. Phil's long-term experience in local government and trade unionism equipped him with skills from which the SCRSS (and the Soviet War Memorial Trust) has been lucky to benefit.

So where did his interest in the USSR come from? "[A] friend of mine asked me if I wanted to go to the Soviet Union... [We] and twenty-nine others bought a second-hand... 1949 double-decker bus from the Thames Valley Bus Company in Reading and drove it to Leningrad in 1970... The second year, the summer of 1971, we went to Ukraine and drove to Odessa, again in a double-decker bus." Both trips were successful. In Leningrad they stayed in Repino, a resort on the Gulf of Finland, and met up with local university students. In Odessa they lived in



Phil's wife, Christine Matthews (holding a folder), conducts a tour of Salisbury for Soviet teachers visiting the Wessex Branch, 1985 (SCRSS Archive)

summer camps and made friends with tourists from other parts of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries.

However, it was only ten years later that he learned about the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR) from a fellow Labour Party member. Phil joined the SCR in 1981 and within a year the Society's Wessex Branch had been formed, bringing together members in the Salisbury and Wilton area under Phil as Chair and Lila

Grisley as Honorary Secretary. In 1984 Phil also joined the SCR Council, representing the Branch. The Branch organised local events for Soviet visitors, touring exhibitions and film shows. A highlight was the annual one- or two-day visit by Soviet teachers of Russian language from the SCR's popular Easter Russian Language Course in London. "When they came to Wilton,



Phil Matthews by the grave of Soviet soldier V. Duschin, Shaftesbury Town Cemetery, 30 April 1995 (Photo: Phil Matthews)

whoever was Mayor of Wilton at the time used to give them a reception in the Council Chamber and they'd visit Wilton Church. But one year, [April 1985], we took them to Salisbury... There's a picture of my wife [Christine] with them. She was a [Blue Badge] guide and a historian as well. I was quite honoured that she was giving a talk to the Russians. Yes, those visits to Wilton were always very very successful." Not least given the Russian connection with Wilton's Church of St Mary and St Nicholas, which fascinated the visitors. It was built in 1845 by Catherine Woronzow, Countess of Pembroke, second wife to the 11th Earl of Pembroke at Wilton House, together with her son. Catherine was the daughter of Count Simon Woronzow, Russian Ambassador to England 1796–1806. Through Phil's connection with the church, in October 2020 he was asked by the Russian Ambassador to read out, on his behalf, an official message of congratulation at the service to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the church's foundation.

Undoubtedly, Phil will always be recognised for the vital role he played, alongside the

late SCRSS Honorary Secretary Jean Turner, in the successful project to erect the Soviet War Memorial in London in 1999. Yet, the impetus for this came four years earlier on the 50th Anniversary of the Allied Victory over Fascism in 1995, when Phil, as Chair of the Wessex Branch, was approached by the Russian Embassy about several Soviet war graves in the Salisbury area. These were Soviet prisoners of war liberated from Nazi slave camps by British and US forces in late 1944 to early 1945 and transferred to the UK for medical treatment.

"Now, I didn't know there were any locally, [but] there were three in Tidworth Military Cemetery and one in Shaftesbury Town Cemetery. And I was asked, could I organise religious services over the graves? And I did. And I approached Downing Street and John Major very kindly sent them a very moving message to read out... [The first] service was held in the morning on [Sunday] 30 April 1995 at Tidworth Military Cemetery. They were met by the officer in charge...



Inauguration of the Soviet War Memorial, London, 9 May 1999. HRH The Duke of Kent lays the first wreath as Phil Matthews conducts the ceremony from the podium (Photo: SWMT)

and the Embassy brought schoolchildren from the Embassy School, and it was very very successful... They all came back to my house for lunch. Then we went on to Shaftesbury in the afternoon and the grave there. And at that one it was very moving because the nurse that [had] looked after the Russian prisoner of war happened to come down... – she must have been in her 80s – [it] was a very moving situation." The presence of these Soviet graves became a

cause célèbre locally and the ceremonies, attended by representatives of the Russian military attaché, the Mayor of Shaftesbury, the MP for North Dorset, as well as Phil and SCRSS Vice-Chair Stanley Forman, were covered by both local and Russian television, radio and press. “Because of that [event], people started asking, if they were our Allies in the war, why was there nothing in London to commemorate them? And that’s how the Soviet War Memorial came about.”



SWMT Trustees Phil Matthews (right), Jean Turner and Councillor William Skelly, former Mayor of Southwark, receive awards at the Russian Embassy in recognition of their work for the Soviet War Memorial, 2010 (Photo: SWMT)

The following month, at the SCRSS AGM in 1995, a resolution was passed to campaign for a permanent monument recognising the USSR’s role in the defeat of Fascism in the Second World War. To this purpose, the Society and other interested parties formed the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) in 1997. It organised both the fundraising and the official unveiling of the Soviet War Memorial on 9 May 1999 in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Southwark, London SE1. Phil, Chair of the SMTF, officiated at the ceremony where the British Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt Hon George Robertson MP, and HE the Russian Ambassador, Yuri Fokine, unveiled the Memorial in the presence of HRH The Duke of Kent and representatives of ten Embassies of the former Soviet Union, local politicians, and war veterans. “I think that was probably, in my opinion, one of the most successful things the SCR has ever done, quite frankly... It was a great relief that the monument was such a great success. To have the Duke of Kent, the

President of the Commonwealth War Graves, there to lay the first wreath was really something.” As Chair of the SMTF (transformed in 2018 into the Soviet War Memorial Trust), Phil has continued his involvement with the Memorial since 1999 at annual ceremonies and associated educational events.

Phil’s work for the Soviet War Memorial was recognised by the Russian Embassy with the award of two medals – in 2010 on the 65th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War and in 2015 on the 70th Anniversary. These are in addition to an award in 2005 for his ‘Contribution to the Cause of Friendship’ on the 80th Anniversary of the USSR’s establishment of cultural relations with foreign countries.

Phil has stood down as Chair, he says, due to his age and the distance from Wilton to the Society’s office in London. Reflecting on the SCRSS’s centenary event in 2024, he says: “I was most proud on that day to have been a part of the SCR for so many years and to have been so involved with the Soviet War Memorial.” He reiterates that the establishment of the SCR in July 1924 was a phenomenal step, coming only six months after the UK’s First Labour Government, elected in January that year, made good on its election promise to recognise the Soviet Union. Taking us back again to the Soviet War Memorial and this year’s commemorations, Phil adds: “The 80th Anniversary of VE Day must [give recognition to] the contribution of the former Soviet Union’s 13 million service personnel and 14 million civilians who lost their lives in the Second World War.”

Sources

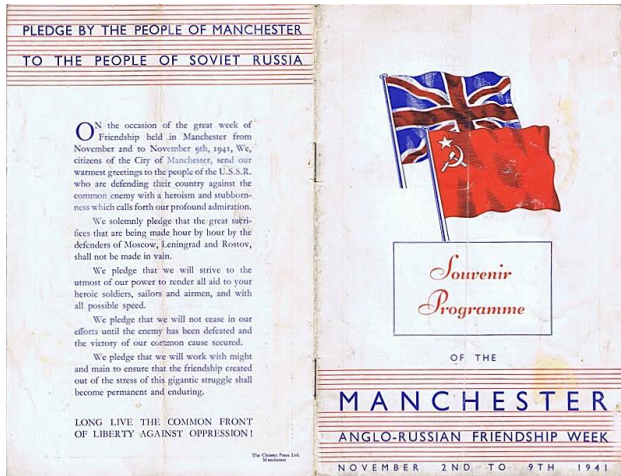
Interview conducted by Diana Turner with Phil Matthews on 5 March 2025, and two follow-up emails from Phil dated 8 March and 11 March 2025.

Phil Matthews, ‘Soviet War Graves in the UK and the Impetus for the Soviet War Memorial’ in *SCRSS Digest*, Summer 2014, pp. 24–26.

Jane Rosen, *An Unpopular Cause: A Centenary History of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR*, SCRSS, 2025.

80th Anniversary Gallery

To mark the 80th Anniversary of the Allied Defeat of Fascism in 1945, we present a small selection of photographs and artefacts from the SCRSS Archive.



Manchester Anglo-Russian Friendship Week souvenir programme, November 1941, including an exhibition organised by the SCR's Manchester Branch



The Anglo-Soviet Alliance
On the Soviet-German Front. Left to right: Captain V. Cotham, Colonel Isherwood, given the highest Soviet award, Order of Lenin, and Soviet Captain Andryushin, watching their comrades off to engage the enemy

On the Eastern Front
English airmen manage a game of football in the interval between attacks on the enemy



No. 151 Wing RAF, with Soviet colleagues, stationed in North Russia, 1942 (from the *Anglo-Soviet-Journal*, Vol. III, July-September 1942)



The Soviet Home Front was a table-top exhibition that toured factories in London in 1943. It was organised by the SCR's Exhibition Department which had been set up in 1941 to deal with the increased volume of requests for exhibitions once the USSR entered the war as Britain's ally



The SCR's Hero Cities exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, April 1944. It had transferred from Harrods, was visited by 7,250 people in Whitechapel, and continued onto Fulham before touring to several SCR Branches outside London



Reception for the SCR's 20th anniversary in June 1944. Left to right: Mrs Pritt, Soviet Ambassador Fedor Gusev, Sir Charles Trevelyan (SCR President), DN Pritt (SCR Chair) and Dr GM Vevers (Editor, *Anglo-Soviet Journal*). The photograph on the back wall shows Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill at the Tehran Conference in 1943

Reviews

The Baton and the Cross: Russia's Church from Pagans to Putin

By Lucy Ash (Icon Books, 2024, 360pp, ISBN: 978-1-83773-183-1, Hbk, £25.00)

This book is published at a time of rapid resets in international relations between the great powers. It is the most thorough publication in English since 1991 on the theme of church-state relations. As a history of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), it updates Jane Ellis's *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986).

Ash's prologue is a poignant personal testimony to the largest open-air swimming pool in the world. She used it on several visits to Moscow. Stalin's destruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in 1931, Khrushchev's building of the pool (on the cathedral's footprint) in 1958, and Yeltsin's re-building of a new cathedral in 1995, all illustrate the power, suppression and resurgence of Russian Orthodoxy.

The thrust of Ash's treatment of the ROC is an analysis of Patriarch Kirill's support for Vladimir Putin's policies since 2012.

Ash's work is well researched, both by reference to academic sources, as well as numerous interviews and reports of informal talks with contacts. Sometimes the tone is offhand – do we need to know that Kirill was “looking morose” (p.186)? Soviet repression of the ROC and persecution of Orthodox believers from 1917 to the mid-1980s is covered in detail. The attacks on other denominations and religions in the Soviet era could have been given space. State persecution of Protestants (Baptists and Pentecostals) was especially heavy during Khrushchev's rule.¹

Ash devotes a chapter to Vladimir Putin's Christian observance. His identification with Orthodox beliefs and the ROC emerged when the Russian honeymoon with West European democracies and the USA, between 1991 and the late 2000s, had

soured. This is reminiscent of the Slavophile and Westernizer debate in the nineteenth century. Putin turned inwards to the memory of the greatness of Holy Russia, and the Russian and Soviet empires. Russian democracy suffered as dissidents were silenced.

At the same time, Patriarch Alexei II – Kirill's predecessor, who died in 2008 – called for foreign missionaries to be banned from entry. Orthodox opposition to indigenous Protestant and Catholic churches hardened. From 2006 Orthodox belief was exclusively taught in schools. Twenty years earlier atheism was exclusively taught! Gradually the ROC was calling the shots in the culture wars against Islam, Jewish culture and Western liberalism (exemplified by gay rights). Ash notes (p.184): “What seemed extreme in the early Putin era had gone mainstream.”

Kirill's early years were marked by a desire to modernise the ROC and to support public debate. In early 2012, however, he suddenly expressed complete support for Putin and, today, actively supports the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Ash concludes that “the Church will try to exploit the growing conflict between East and West to cement its authority”. The pattern of collusion during Imperial and Soviet power continues.

Gordon Harris

Footnote

¹ See works by Michael Bourdeaux: *Faith on Trial in Russia*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1971; *Opium of the People* (Chapter VI), Faber & Faber, 1965; *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel* (Chapter 6), Hodder & Stoughton, 1990.

Birds, Beasts and a World Made New
By Guillaume Apollinaire and Velimir Khlebnikov (translated by Robert Chandler with 8 other contributors, Pushkin Press, 2024, 272pp, ISBN: 978-1-78227-992-1, Pbk, £10.99)

If you're a history or politics buff, move on and read something else. Right, that's got the Philistines out of the way. Let's start the review. The unspoken programme of this

book is to compare how two supertalented avant-garde writers and thinkers responded to the cultural crises of fin-de- siècle France and Russia and the first worldwide war.

Apollinaire belongs to French culture (originally of Polish / Lithuanian descent). He is one of the foremost poets of the early twentieth century. He is credited with coining the term 'Cubism' to describe the art movement of the period, and 'Surrealism' to describe the music of Erik Satie. He wrote poems without punctuation, determined to be modern in both form and content. He added meaning to some of his poems by varying the arrangement of words / letters on the page, which he called *calligrammes*. Nowadays the term for this is *concrete poetry*.

Khlebnikov is a legendary figure in Russian literary culture in many ways of which we can only mention a few. In his poems and prose he often used the flexibility of Russian word formation – roots, prefixes and suffixes – to create 'new' Russian words. These can be understood by people with a good knowledge of Russian, but they pose an extra problem for translators! However, the English language also has the resources to deal with such problems, and here they have succeeded well. We should mention that there are a few illustrations by and related to Khlebnikov at various points, and they are not listed, but they are worth finding. These are probably not so easy to locate as pictures of Apollinaire.

Robert Chandler has provided a detailed article to help us appreciate the position each writer occupied in society and their relations with other arts, particularly the visual arts. Khlebnikov had much more training in mathematics, science and natural history, and he also appreciated Slavic folklore. He collaborated in the writing of the Futurist manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (copies available from this review's author – it's very short) but was not a militant modernist. Both poets died early deaths, one in November 1918 from war service (Apollinaire), the other in 1922 from malnutrition and typhus (Khlebnikov).

The poems and writings follow, neatly divided into seven categories: Birds and Animals; Art; Other Poems; War Revolution Civil War and Famine; Fate History and Numbers; Last Things; Memoirs by Others. Each category contains a short article, then poems or writings, for each writer. These categories vary slightly in content according to what is available. Finally, we have a chronology of both writers together, further reading, and detailed endnotes. Perhaps we should have called this volume an encyclopaedia? It certainly should receive a book prize. By the way, you don't need to know French or Russian, both are explained as needed. One last comment. When I was at Moscow State University in the 1960s, several times I heard the comment from various people that "Хлебников – это человек двадцать первого века!" ("Khlebnikov is a man who belongs in the twenty-first century!").

Andrew Jameson

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