Society for Co-operation in SCRSS Russian and Soviet Studies

Digest

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Contents

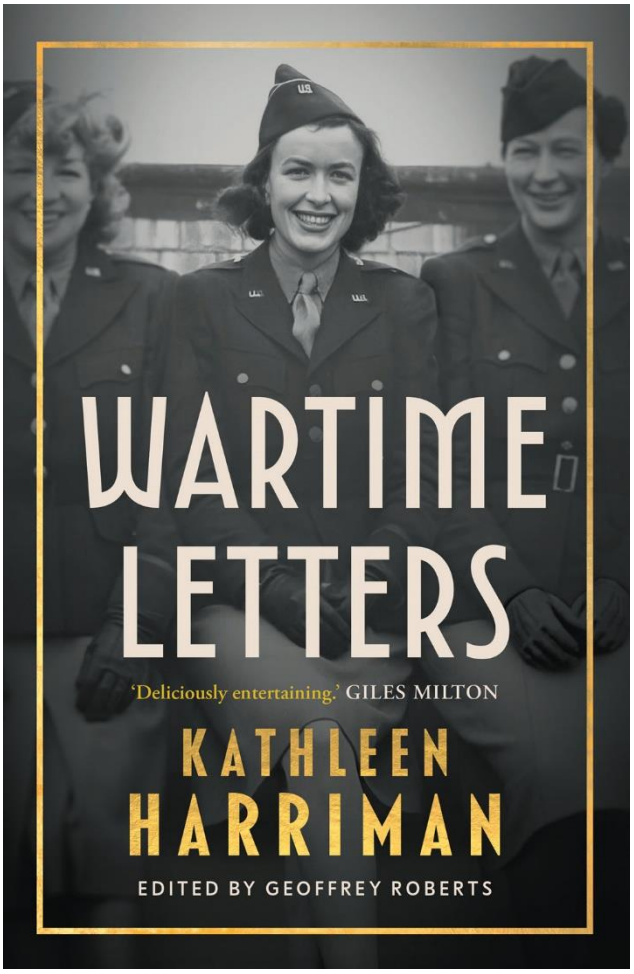
Feature

Kathleen Harriman: Mission to Moscow

By Geoffrey Roberts

Kathleen Harriman was the daughter of American businessman W. Averell Harriman. A journalist by background, she accompanied her father on wartime postings to London and Moscow where he served as Franklin D. Roosevelt's envoy and, later, as US Ambassador to the USSR. In more than 200 letters, Kathleen wrote about her trips to war-torn cities and sites of atrocities, the people she met and her experiences. Professor Geoffrey Roberts' new book 'Wartime Letters: London and Moscow 1941–1945', published by Yale University Press this year, brings together Kathleen's letters to tell the full story of her wartime life.

Upon arrival in Moscow in October 1943, one of the first people Kathleen Harriman met was Ivy Litvinov, the English wife of Maxim Litvinov, the former Foreign Commissar. "She's sort of a bitch but rather an amusing one and certainly worth cultivating," she wrote to her sister, Mary, in New York.



Another acquaintance was Polina Zhemchuzhina, the wife of Litvinov's successor as Foreign Commissar, Vyacheslav Molotov. Kathy liked Polina, too, although she felt uncomfortable when the Soviet grand dame insisted on holding hands. "Mme Molotov is a sweet little thing," Kathy reported. "She plays the harp. Is middle-aged with large quantities of braided undyed blonde hair." By the end of the war the two women were almost bosom buddies. At a Kremlin banquet in May 1945, recalled Kathy, Polina sent a bottle of 'vodka' across the table to her: "She met my eye, and we drank a silent toast. The bottle she sent me contained Narzan water. Friendship of the first order!"

Kathy also liked Polina's husband. "Moly", as she called him, had "a hellova sense of humor and nice twinkling eyes." She was impressed when Molotov personally delivered the news of President Roosevelt's death. She also thought Molotov "rather sweet" when he sat next to her at the memorial service for Roosevelt in Moscow.

Kathleen Harriman with her father Averell (left) and Vyacheslav Molotov (right) at a reception in Moscow

Kathy was 25 years old when she arrived in Moscow. For the previous two years she had worked as a war correspondent in London, where her father Averell was Roosevelt's lend-lease troubleshooter, tasked with facilitating the flow of American aid to embattled Britain. In London, Kathy socialised with Winston Churchill and other eminences of the British war effort.

Kathy's best friend in London was Pamela Churchill – married to Churchill's son, Randolph. The same age as Kathy, Pam had an affair with Averell during the war, a romance that was rekindled in the 1970s when she became Mrs Harriman.

Instead of keeping a diary, Kathy wrote hundreds of letters about her experiences in London and Moscow – about her encounters with ordinary people, as well as the Soviet-Western military-political elite. Political as well as personal, these letters are full of astute and often funny observations about the historical events she witnessed. They provide a vivid and sometimes offbeat picture of life in the upper circles of the Grand Alliance, as well as insights into Moscow life during the latter stages of the war. Her letters home circulated widely among family and friends. Winston's wife, Clementine Churchill, was among her fans: "Pam has shown me the delightful long letters you have written to her. I think your letters will make a wonderful book one day – not, however, to be published just now!"

I came across Kathy's letters in the Library of Congress, where – in September 2001 – I was combing through the W. Averell Harriman Papers. The letter that hooked me was her lampooning of US diplomatic reports: "These are lengthy and usually manage to say nothing at all of importance. If you don't say anything you don't get blamed for creating an impression which at some future date will be proven false." To this letter, Kathy added a PS: "On re-reading, I've discovered I'm in a very blasphemous mood. So please for God's sake read this letter and tear it up and don't show it to anyone."

Kathy's irreverence was irresistible and, as a Soviet specialist, I was intrigued by her perceptions of the Kremlin leadership and her experiences of the communist system's vagaries, which confounded Western Cold War stereotypes. Kathy went to Moscow with an open mind and decided that being in Russia was not as bad as she feared and more interesting than she expected. "Maybe I haven't made life in Moscow as enticing as I intended. But by comparison to what critics painted it to be, it's damn near paradise." On another occasion she wrote: "You know the Russians are such nice people – if only we could get to know them – then perhaps I might be able to understand them."

Kathy's moods and attitudes toward Russia did wax and wane, generally in sync with the ups and downs of Soviet-American relations during the war. High points were the Big Three summits at Tehran and Yalta, the lowest being the controversy about the supposed lack of Soviet aid to the Warsaw Uprising. "The war is going wonderfully well again now," Kathy wrote to Mary in March 1945, "what with the offensive on the Western Front. Gosh it's exciting. But the news is slightly dampened here by our

gallant allies who at the moment are being most bastard-like."

Kathleen Harriman, holding a bouquet, at the US Air Force base at Poltava, Ukraine, June 1944

Kathy was determined to avoid what she called the "Moscow rut" – living in a diplomatic enclave cut off from the country and its people, alienated from the communist regime, and having little idea of the life and attitudes of the great mass of the population. So, she spent a lot of time learning Russian, becoming socially functional in the language, and able to make polite, if stumbling, conversation (her fluent French helped when it came to talking to the intelligentsia).

She tried as much as she could to interact with the world beyond Moscow's diplomatic circles, visiting Soviet schools, hospitals, churches and military bases. She also pursued her own interests – skiing, she was third in the women's section of the 1944 Moscow Championship, and horse-riding. In 1945 Stalin gifted Kathy a horse called Boston, a veteran of the Battle of Stalingrad, who was shipped to the USA after the war.

Kathy was something of a celebrity in Russia during the war. The cream of Soviet society flocked to Spaso House, the grandiose but dilapidated ambassadorial residence located in Spasopeskovskaya Square in the Arbat district. Director Sergei Eisenstein imagined Kathy as a 'Dollar Princess' and drew caricatures of her.

I was not the first historian captivated by Kathy's letters but I had the idea that this fantastic source should be published as a book. To that end, I travelled to New York in March 2002 to interview Kathy about her letters, with a view to persuading her to let me publish them. Publishing the letters, I told her, would make her a twenty-first-century feminist icon! But Kathy was adamantly against publication, saying that she didn't want to take advantage of her wartime luck and privilege.

Subsequently, we arrived at an implicit agreement that I could publish the letters after she was gone. After Kathy's death in 2011, her son, David, gave me access to her private papers, where I discovered a treasure-trove of wartime correspondence and memorabilia, far more extensive than the Library of Congress holdings.

Kathleen Harriman, third from the left, at the Katyn massacre site, January 1944

Kathy experienced and learnt a lot during her time as a war correspondent in London between 1941 and 1943. But nothing could have prepared her for the Katyn Forest trip of January 1944. A carefully prepared excursion, the Soviet aim was to persuade Kathy and other Western journalists that the Nazis had massacred thousands of Polish prisoners of war when the Smolensk area

was occupied by the Germans from 1941 to 1943. In fact, the Soviets had executed the anti-Soviet Poles in spring 1940. But Kathy allowed herself to be persuaded that the Nazis were the guilty party, as did most of the other journalists.

Kathy wrote a long letter to Mary and Pam about the trip: "The Katyn Forest turned out to be a small measly pine tree wood. We were shown the works by a big Soviet doctor who looked like a chef in white peaked cap, white apron, and rubber gloves. With relish he showed us a sliced Polish brain carefully placed on a dinner plate for inspection purposes. And then we began a tour to each and every one of the seven graves. We must have seen a good many thousand corpses, all in varying degrees of decomposition, but smelling about as bad. The most interesting thing, and the most convincing bit of evidence, was that every Pole had been shot through the back of the head with a single bullet. Some of the bodies had their hands tied behind their backs, all of which is typically German."

Edmund Stevens, Moscow correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, was another eyewitness. He recalled: "One woman, a Russian interpreter fainted after the first whiff and had to be carried out. But not Kathy. She got herself a front row position alongside one of the dissecting tables where a rubber-gloved [doctor] with a scalpel was slicing the corpse as zestfully as though he were carving a Thanksgiving turkey. Kathy, apparently conscientiously determined to make a full report back to the Ambassador – on this occasion she was her father's nose as well as his eyes and ears – lingered on until the last."

Unbeknownst to Stevens, Kathy had a cold and couldn't smell anything!

When I interviewed her, I suggested the letter about Katyn was a bit flip, as if she were using dry humour to distance herself from the horror show. To which she raised an eyebrow and replied: "Yes, well what would you expect me to do – try and get closer?"

An infinitely more joyful occasion was the great Victory Parade of June 1945, where Kathy happily observed how captured German banners were flung at Marshal Zhukov's feet – "a swell idea".

Kathy's mission to Moscow ended in January 1946 when she and Averell embarked on a tour of Asia and the Pacific that would take them home.

Geoffrey Roberts is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and Emeritus Professor of History at University College Cork. His latest book is: 'Wartime Letters: London and Moscow 1941–1945' by Kathleen Harriman, edited by Geoffrey Roberts, Yale University Press, 2026, ISBN: 9780300278545, Hardback, 512 pages, £30.00.

Note

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On 30 April 2026, Professor Roberts gave a talk about Kathleen Harriman's *Wartime Letters: London and Moscow 1941–1945* at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. A recording is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FH4nAJVx560.

SCRSS News

Latest news by Jane Rosen, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

SCRSS AGM 2026

The SCRSS AGM took place on Saturday 16 May. Elections to SCRSS Council were held: Helen Mercer was elected as a new Trustee, while ten Trustees (marked by * below) were re-elected. Our President and three Vice-Presidents were also re-elected. After the AGM, the SCRSS Council met briefly to appoint the Executive Committee (EC). The full list of the Society's Trustees and Officers is now: *President and EC Member:* Professor William Bowring. *Vice-Presidents:* Dr Kate Hudson, Dr Rachel O'Higgins, Professor Geoffrey Roberts. *EC and members of SCRSS Council:* Chair:

Ralph Gibson*; Honorary Secretary: Jane Rosen*; Honorary Treasurer: Diana Turner. *Members of SCRSS Council:* Wendy Ansley*, Bethany Aylward*, Kate Clark*, Jeremy Hicks*, Andrew Jameson*, Meirian Jump*, Christine Lindey*, Philip Matthews*, Helen Mercer, Claire Weiss.

SCRSS AGM 2026 (Photo by Karl Weiss)

Honorary Secretary Jane Rosen, completing her first year in the role, briefly outlined the Annual Report for 2025. Honorary Treasurer Diana Turner presented the Accounts for 2025, highlighting the deficit, analysing reasons for income decrease and noting the building as the key cost. Chair Ralph Gibson outlined current development discussions on the Council to secure the Society's future, then opened up a useful Q&A with members. The AGM was followed by refreshments and a chance to view the collections.

Financial Appeal

Our mailing of the *SCRSS Digest* in February 2026 included an appeal for donations to support the Society's work. I am delighted to confirm that the response from members was generous, with many top-ups to membership subscriptions, a small number of large one-off donations, and several members signing up under the New Centenary Appeal for regular monthly or annual donations. At this time of growing financial uncertainty, such generosity will help us to continue the Society's mission to advance knowledge and study of the cultural and social achievements of the Soviet Union. However, we still need to do much more to increase awareness of and access to the SCRSS collections, and the Trustees are currently looking at options to develop our offer more fully.

If any members have not already donated to the Appeal, and are in a position to do so, please do consider a regular monthly donation, however small. For the Society's bank account details, please email the Honorary Secretary, Jane Rosen, on ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk. Thank you for your continued support.

Library

After the immense success of our Saturday opening in February 2026, the March, April and May openings were very quiet. This did mean that our regular library volunteers got a lot done in terms of cataloguing, interfiling and classifying the collections, while the Honorary Secretary managed to catch up on filing, but we missed our members! Please do visit us on our first-Saturday-of-the-month library openings from 11.00 to 16.00 – to say hello, look at the collections, have a cup of tea or coffee, and for a chat.

To check in advance what material the library holds on Art, Cinema, Education, History, Theatre, Theatre Design and Religion, visit our online catalogue at https://scrss.soutron.net/Portal/ (link also available from the SCRSS website home page on the top right). The catalogue already holds some 7,500 records, but work on cataloguing other parts of the collections continues each week. Most books are in Russian, but there is plenty of English-language material too. If you wish to use the SCRSS Archive or view specific items from the reference collections, please let us know by email, in advance of visiting.

Next Events

Wednesday 1 July 2026, 19.00–20.00
Zoom Online Talk in English for SCRSS Members Only: Elena A. Bugreeva on *Shakespeare in Russia: Russian Translations of Shakespeare's Literature*

Talk in English for SCRSS members only, in partnership with the Interregional Association for International Cooperation, St Petersburg, a non-governmental organisation. Shakespeare's genius has always attracted Russian writers, translators and theatre audiences. Dr Bugreeva outlines the history of translations of his works into Russian from the sixteenth to late twentieth century. She considers the key translations and focuses on a more detailed analysis of *Hamlet*, translated by Pasternak and Lozinsky. *Booking:* free, SCRSS members / affiliates only, tickets on Eventbrite at eventbrite.co.uk/e/1989175497460.

Saturday 4 July 2026, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Library Opening

Saturday 1 August 2026, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Library Opening

Saturday 5 September 2026, 11.00–14.00
Event: SCRSS Library Opening

Saturday 5 September 2026, 14.00–15.30
In-person Talk: Jim Jump on *'The Cause of All Progressive and Advanced Mankind': Soviet Policy and the Spanish Civil War*
This year marks the 90th anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War, a defining event in the build-up to the Second World War. Though called a civil war, it was in fact an internationalised conflict in which the USSR gave military assistance to the Spanish Republic, and Hitler and Mussolini supported the rebel forces led by Franco. While the Comintern helped organise the International Brigades, the USSR made considerable diplomatic efforts to persuade Britain and France to abandon appeasement and support Spain's cause. Soviet policy towards the Spanish Civil War is often misunderstood and distorted, viewed through a Cold War prism rather than as a genuine attempt to counter the threat of European Fascism. Jim Jump is Chair of the International Brigade Memorial Trust. *Booking:* tickets on the door from 13.30. Normal fees apply: £5.00 (£3.00 SCRSS members).

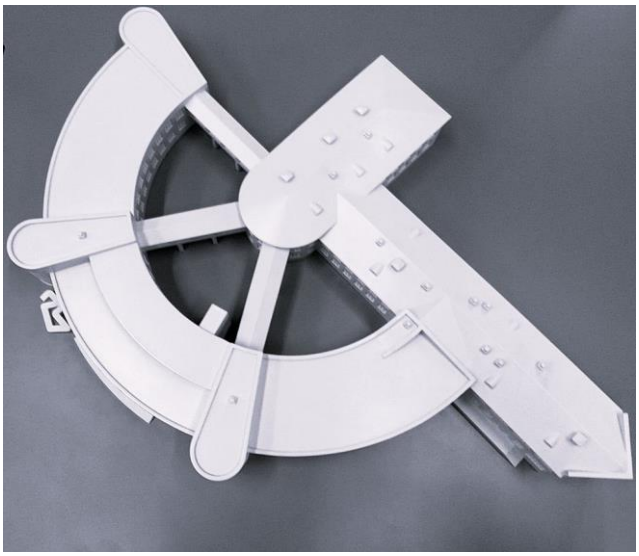
Please always check the SCRSS website for the latest details of our events.

Feature

Samara's Restored Hammer and Sickle Factory-Kitchen

By Olga Sidenkova

In the Spring 2023 issue of the *SCRSS Digest* I wrote an article about the Constructivist Factory-Kitchen building in Samara, built in 1932 in the shape of a hammer and sickle to symbolise the unity of workers and peasants.



Model of the 1932 Factory-Kitchen building, on display in the entrance foyer of the museum today

The building was designed by Ekaterina Maksimova (1891–1932), one of the first Soviet female architects. She already had experience in designing similar projects as a member of the state organisation 'Public Catering' (*Народное питание* or *Нарпит*), set up in 1923 to develop a network of work canteens to support industrialisation. The Samara Factory-Kitchen is the only building in the world in the shape of a hammer and sickle and is recognised as a masterpiece of Soviet Constructivist architecture.

By 2008, the building was set for demolition but Samara's residents defended it through massive protests across the city that continued for nearly fifteen years. This achieved a positive result: the demolition was cancelled, the building was later

entrusted to the care of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and 1.3 billion roubles were allocated from the federal budget for the restoration of this architectural landmark to its original design. In this article, I would like to give un update on what has happened since 2023.

Exterior of the building at night, showing the curve of the sickle section

In May 2024, the Tretyakov Gallery's Samara Branch finally opened its doors and unveiled its first exhibition in the restored Factory-Kitchen building: *A Matter of Taste: Images of Food in Russian Art* («*На вкус и цвет. Образы еды в русском искусстве*»). I visited this exhibition in the summer of 2024, and found it both engaging and rich in symbolism: food had returned to the building once again, but not as a product made here, rather as food depicted in art. Once an assembly line driven by utopian ideals of food preparation and consumption, the space was now serving food for the soul. The exhibition included works by such famous Russian artists as Karl Bryullov, Natalia Goncharova, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin and Zinaida Serebryakova.

Currently, there are three branches of the Tretyakov Gallery in Russia: in Kaliningrad on the west of the country, in Samara, and in Vladivostok in the Far East. In Samara, the spaces on the first floor within the Constructivist building host temporary exhibitions of masterpieces from the Tretyakov Gallery, as well as from other Russian and international collections. On the ground floor there is an educational centre offering exhibition programmes run by museum educators and invited artists, as well as open events such as lectures, masterclasses, concerts and film screenings. A separate space, the 'Tretyakov Gallery Club in Samara' includes a library with access to multimedia resources and the online Tretyakov Gallery collection, a gift shop and coffee shop. On Sundays, the Club hosts art breakfasts.

The Factory-Kitchen Museum is situated on the ground floor in the left wing of the sickle (curved) section of the building. This is a permanent exhibition telling the story of the building, its architect – Ekaterina Maksimova, the fate of the Factory-Kitchen after its opening in 1932, and personal memories of visitors and employees. As visitors move along a symbolic path from what was the kitchen through the serving line to the dining room, they see artefacts uncovered during the building's restoration, items donated by former employees, and exhibits provided by Ekaterina Maksimova's descendants from the architect's personal collection. Alongside the history of the building, the exhibition reveals the history of Soviet public catering and Soviet cuisine in general – from 'Public Catering' and the *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* («*Книга о вкусной и здоровой пище*»)[1] to the present.

Interior of one of the three circular stairwells in the sickle (curved) section of the building

The latest temporary exhibition, which opened at the Samara Branch on 30 April 2026, is *State of Flow: The Volga in Russian Art* («*Состояние потока. Волга в*

русском искусстве»), exploring the relationship between man and the River Volga over the past 200 years. The exhibits are on loan from the Tretyakov Gallery, private collections and other regional state museums, such as those in Astrakhan, Nizhny Novgorod and Yaroslavl. The exhibition covers the entire length of the Volga and includes seventy-three works by fifty Russian artists, spanning the early nineteenth century to the present day, and examining how the Volga became part of classical landscape painting in Russia.

A view the exhibition space in the Tretyakov Gallery Samara Branch, on the first floor of the sickle section, during the opening exhibition *A Matter of Taste*, summer 2024

The goals of the Samara Branch of the Tretyakov Gallery are stated on its website as follows: 1) To create a flagship regional cultural centre integrated into the local, national and global context. 2) To highlight twentieth and twenty-first century art in all its diversity and engage audiences in the creative process of understanding heritage, including contemporary art. 3) To promote art and culture as a key factor influencing quality of life. 4) To build a creative platform that will be linked to the current and future development of art and the economy. 5) To create a new attractive destination for cultural tourism on a national and international scale.

In April 2025, the Tretyakov Gallery's Samara Branch was named 'Museum of the Year' at the XIII *The Art Newspaper Russia* Awards, and achieved the same title 'Museum of the Year' under the 2026 Cosmoscow Foundation Annual Programmes. These awards are a great achievement. The museum will continue to adhere to its mission and present new exhibitions and other interesting projects in the future.

Olga Sidenkova is a member of the SCRSS. She was born in Samara, now lives in London, but returns regularly to her native city. Her interests are history, literature, art and travel.

Footnote

1 *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* was the first and most famous Soviet universal cookbook, published in 1939 by the People's Commissariat for the Food Industry. It was reprinted, with updated editions, continuously from 1947 to the end of the USSR in 1991, and is still in print today.

Note

All photographs reproduced in this article were taken by Olga Sidenkova. You can visit the Tretyakov Gallery's Samara Branch webpage (in English) at https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/for-visitors/museums/filial-tretyakovskoy-galerei-v-samare/?lang=en.

Feature

Russian Connections in the Baltic States

By Andrew Jameson

In July 2025, my wife Melanie and I flew to Helsinki, and on the next day took the ferry to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, where we joined a group tour of the Baltic states. We both speak Russian, and our interest in the

tour was in these countries' links with Russia in the past and in recent history, as well as in the countries themselves.

Andrew and Melanie standing either side of the pedestrian bridge over a stream in the twin town of Valga / Valka that marks the Estonia-Latvia border

The total populations of the three states, from north to south, are: Estonia 1.36 million, Latvia 1.87 million, Lithuania 2.7 million. The percentages of Russian native speakers within each are: 29.6, 33.8 and 6.8, respectively. Estonian belongs to the Finno-Ugric group of languages, while the other two are the most ancient survivors of Indo-European, which somehow survived in a remote corner of Europe. They are the closest languages to Slavonic. In addition to this, their lands were occupied successively by Teutonic crusaders, Swedish kings, German princes and Russian tsars. After independence, how were these folks going to communicate with one other? In the Soviet period Russian was compulsory in all the schools, but was often resented. Now people seem more willing to use Russian as a lingua franca. However, with the entry into the European Union, education in Russian has been phased out and, in future, English seems to be the only solution.

Our hotel in Tallinn was not far from the Old Town, probably the prettiest of all the old towns we would see. We spent time in the Great Guildhall (Hansa Museum), which, in the past, was the centre of Russian trade. From Tallinn, the trade route into Russia went overland to Novgorod. In the museum we saw examples of the actual items traded, including bundles of forty squirrel skins used to make warm shirts (Norse 'serkr'). Traders would demand their 'serkr', and over time the Russian language adopted this word with the meaning 'forty' (Russian '*sorok*'). Many precious furs, such as ermine, were traded all over Europe.

From Tallinn we moved on, via the Lahemaa National Park on the Gulf of Finland, to a 'manor house', Palmse Manor, that typifies the mixed populations of the Baltic states in the past. The estate was acquired by the Baltic German von der Pahlen family in 1676, as many others were. The Manor has recently been handsomely restored. Unusually it has a distillery and – wait for it – an old-fashioned Museum of Vodka.

Palmse Manor, Estonia

Our visit continued to Tartu, Estonia's second largest town with one of Europe's older universities, founded in 1632. Like many Baltic towns, it once had a German name 'Dorpat', and later a Russian name 'Yuriev'. It is an outstanding hub of culture of all types, including the Estonian National Museum. To scholars of Russian, it is a very special place: the university has had, from Soviet times, a centre of Russian semiotics, something that no other republic in the

USSR had, and something that the cultural bosses in Moscow were powerless to forbid.

Back on the road, our guide took us to a gently sloping field with a tiny stream running across it. She said: “Once upon a time there were two guard points by that little bridge. This is Estonia, and that is Latvia, but after independence, they took them away. Please step over into Latvia.”

‘House of the Blackheads’, Riga, Latvia

Riga, capital of Latvia, came next. It is beautifully sited on the River Daugava and is famous for its hundreds of ‘extreme’ Art Nouveau buildings. Many imposing buildings that were damaged during the war have been restored and the impression is of a complete cityscape where every need is satisfied. The eccentric ‘House of the Blackheads’, built by young unmarried men in the fourteenth century as an unofficial meeting hall, is amazing. And the magnificent Monument of Freedom, designed by Karlis Zale in 1935, is an inspiration to all that see it. Not even the Soviets dared to take it down.

The seaside resort for Riga is Jurmala. It is a classic Victorian resort with all the expected mixture of shops, cafes, churches, museums and galleries, parks, cinemas, theatres, concert halls, botanical gardens and so on. It is shaded by pine forest. Jurmala was a popular resort for Russian families, particularly government officials. Swimmers note: the Gulf of Riga here is very shallow, so do not expect much more than a paddle!

The seventh day of the tour began with the lavishly decorated and furnished Rundale Palace, designed by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, who also designed the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The estate had been bought in 1735 by Ernst Johann von Biron, the trusted adviser of the Russian Empress Anna. In the many years following, the building was misused in many ways, but since Latvian independence it has been restored to its former glory. It houses a large number of pictures of nobility of the period, including the future Catherine the Great, shown as an attractive young woman.

Crossing into Lithuania we were met by the most extraordinary sight: the Hill of Crosses. Its origin probably goes back to a memorial formed of large iron crosses for the victims of a rebellion in 1831. In the late 1950s Lithuanians returning from the Siberian Gulags began to erect crosses on the Hill in memory of family and friends who had died in exile. The monument grew spontaneously into a national protest and the Soviet authorities bulldozed the hill four times before giving up. The Hill is now in general use and has grown several times larger since then.

Plokstine Cold War Museum, a former missile base, Lithuania

Travelling on to the port of Klaipeda, the following day we visited a geographical oddity, the Curonian Spit. Just opposite the port, in the sea, there is a huge island sand dune stretching for many miles, but following the coastline. This ‘island’ moves gradually along the coast, slowly drowning in sand the fishing villages spread along it. It is 100 feet high and on the coastal side is thickly wooded, with roads and paths. About

halfway along, it enters the Russian territory of Kaliningrad *oblast* which is an 'external' province of the Russian Federation. The original historic city of Königsberg was mostly destroyed during the Second World War. It was rebuilt in Soviet style and renamed Kaliningrad after Mikhail Kalinin, the nominal head of state of the Soviet Union for many years. The city had originally been part of East Prussia, an external province of Nazi Germany, but was divided between the USSR and Poland after the war.

Day nine reminded us of one of mankind's more idiotic schemes. We visited the Plokstine Cold War Museum, a former underground Soviet nuclear missile base – one of the launch pads for the Soviet ICBMs that were planned to be fired in the event of a nuclear war. From here we drove across the country and spent the night in Kaunas, the 'rival city' to Vilnius. Kaunas holds most of the history of Lithuania up to the year 1665, when it was destroyed by the Russians. The city was revived by the strength of its economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, when Poland annexed Vilnius in 1920, for twenty years it enjoyed a 'golden age' as the capital of Lithuania. Following that, the city endured the horror of wartime German occupation. Later, Kaunas became famous as the site of the first demonstration against Soviet rule in 1972, and the resistance that followed.

The climax of our tour was Trakai Island Castle. Founded by Grand Duke Gediminas in the fourteenth century, and improved by Vytautas the Great, it was one of the strongest fortresses in Europe. Vytautas strengthened his position by settling a group of Turkic fighters (Crimean Karaites) there as his bodyguard. The red stone and brick castle floats on the beautiful Lake Galve with connections by water in all directions.

Our final day was spent in Vilnius, notable for its Song Festivals. The huge importance of these, in which all Baltic states take part, are that they are not just music festivals but a political statement of national identity. There was no basis for banning the festivals in the Soviet period and they flourished everywhere. As one example today, the World Lithuanian Song Festival in Vilnius, which takes place every four years, lasts for six days, culminating in a final mass event with 12,000 singers on the Song Dome stage.

The best source of information for visiting the Baltic states are the Bradt travel guides. They far exceed any others in the depth of information provided on history, society, nature, culture and language.

Andrew Jameson first worked in signals intelligence in Berlin before becoming a university lecturer in Russian. Now retired, he works as a professional translator.

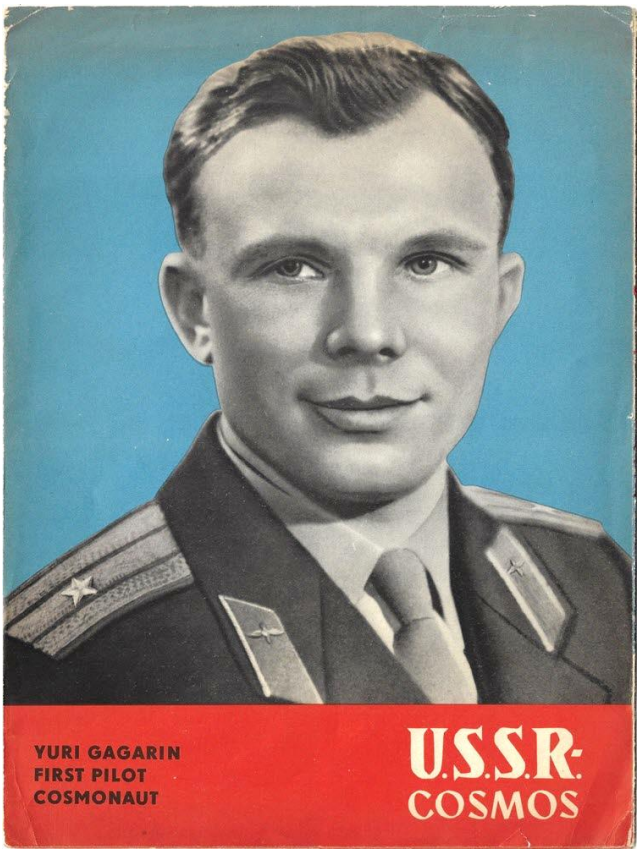
Note:

All photographs reproduced in this article were taken by Andrew Jameson.

Gems from the Archive

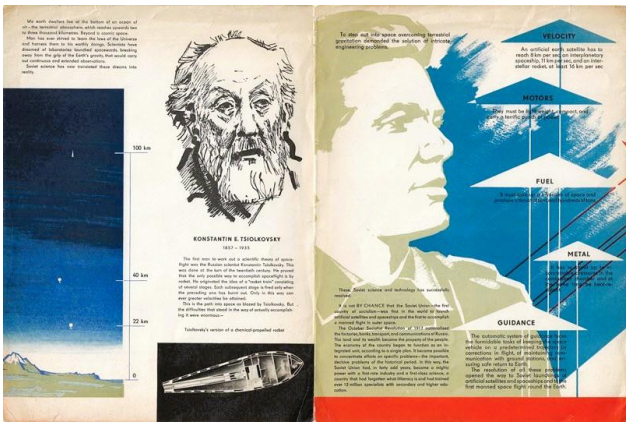
Yuri Gagarin, 1961

By Diana Turner



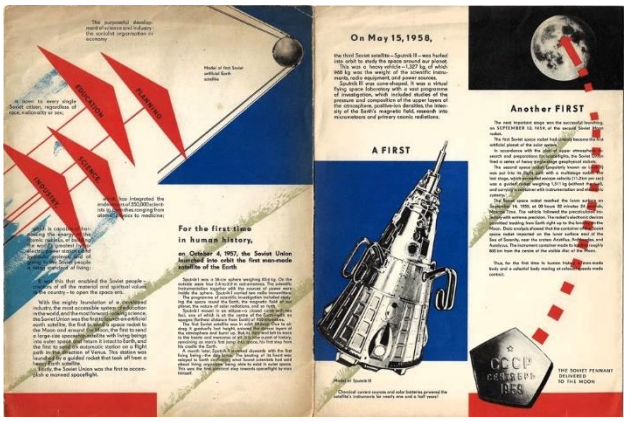
Cover of the brochure held in the SCRSS Archive

Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to fly in space on 12 April 1961, when he orbited the earth in less than two hours on a tiny spacecraft named Vostok. This year, 2026, marks the 65th anniversary of the event.



Pages 2–3 describe Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's scientific theory of spaceflight and how Soviet science solved the complex engineering problems

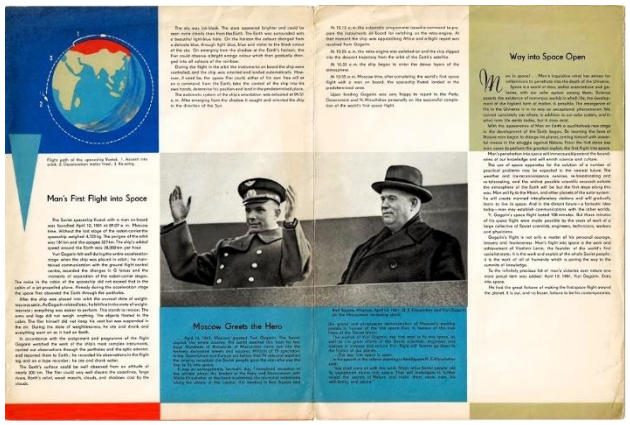
One of the many SCRSS archive boxes of Soviet pamphlets contains material on Yuri Gagarin. A recent dip into this box revealed several copies of a 10-page foldout brochure *U.S.S.R. Cosmos: Yuri Gagarin First Pilot Cosmonaut*.



Pages 4–5 describe the launch of Sputniks I, II and III, and two space rockets, between 1957 and 1959

The brochure is beautifully designed and richly illustrated in 4-colour. Its dimensions when folded are 20.5cm (width) by 27.8cm (height). There is no indication of publisher, but it is clearly a Soviet publication, likely produced in 1961 by Novosti Press Agency Publishing House for distribution abroad.

The brochure covers the science that paved the way for Soviet manned flight in space – from Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's scientific theory of a 'rocket train' (pages 2–3); to the USSR's investment in the development of science and industry that led to the launch of the first man-made Sputnik satellites and space rockets between 1958 and 1960 (pages 4–6); to the spaceship Vostok and Gagarin's training (pages 7–8); to Gagarin's space flight in 1961 (pages 9–10).



Pages 9–10 describe Gagarin's flight on 12 April 1961 and show him waving at the crowd, next to Nikita Khrushchev, on Red Square two days later

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