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Editorial information

Please send any news, comments, or contributions to the editor, Ben Phillips (B.G.Phillips@exeter.ac.uk)

Deadline for submissions for the July newsletter is 13 November 2020.

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 British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies

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President's Report

Dear BASEES members,

I hope this *Newsletter* finds you and your families safe and well. The last few months have been a big challenge to our academic community. We left our campuses, libraries, and archives abruptly: most of us moved back home and started to work remotely from box rooms, kitchen tables and bedrooms. I know that it hasn't been easy to juggle remote working with care and childcare commitments, worries about vulnerable loved ones, the demands of starting your own school at home, and the challenges of procuring pasta and toilet paper in the early stages of the pandemic.

Colleagues' creativity, commitment and high spirits notwithstanding, it is evident that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused major disruption to our sector. Graduate students and post-docs working on time-limited programmes/projects have been hit particularly hard. Severe travel restrictions continue to hamper research across regional and national boundaries and have brought most fieldwork to an abrupt halt. Without decisive action by the government, UKRI, and UUK, the pandemic will leave deep scars on the higher education sector in the UK. This is why BASEES joined 48 other professional academic associations in calling for a 'New Deal For Higher Education' to ensure UK tertiary institutions remain at the forefront of global research, education and innovation. BASEES has taken its own action to address the crisis: in May the Executive Committee decided to prioritise the support of postgraduates in all our R&D activities, while our [postgraduate grant scheme](#) will now also welcome applications for non-travel fieldwork support, such as transcriptions.

Unfortunately, the crisis has also affected BASEES' financial position. The [cancellation of the BASEES 2020 conference](#), only weeks before the event, came at a significant cost. Although at the time the UK Government was maintaining a business as usual stance, the organising committee came to the conclusion that the growing public health crisis made it impossible for us to hold a conference. Despite successfully negotiating a postponement agreement with Robinson



College, Cambridge, that allowed us to provide full refunds to all registered delegates, the association took a big financial hit.

When we cancelled BASEES 2020, we anticipated welcoming delegates back at next year's conference in Glasgow, the first BASEES conference to be held in Scotland. Planning for the move had progressed very well, but in consultation with our partners at CEES, University of Glasgow over the last two months, we had to make the difficult decision to postpone this conference as well. The continuing uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the possibility of (institutional) travel restrictions and widespread cuts to travel allowances at many universities made planning for an event with an anticipated audience of 500 impossible. Continuing the preparations for Glasgow 2021 under the current circumstances would also have exposed the association to unacceptably high financial risk. The Covid-19 crisis has thus forced us to reschedule the [major BASEES events](#) for the next five years. The next annual conference will take place back at Robinson College, Cambridge in 2022, followed by Glasgow in 2023 and Cambridge again in 2024. In 2025 BASEES will not hold an annual conference as we will be hosting the ICCEES World Congress in London in August.

Although BASEES will not stop organising scholarly events over the next two years, we will focus on smaller face-to-face, online and hybrid conferences and workshops. In September 2020 BASEES was supposed to hold the [regional conference 'Globalising Eastern Europe – New Perspectives on Transregional Entanglements'](#) in collaboration with the Leibniz Science Campus 'Eastern Europe – Global Area' (EEGA) in Leipzig, Germany. Unfortunately, this event has now also been postponed: it will be moved to >>

Book Review

Paul Robinson, *Russian Conservatism*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2019. 300 pages. ISBN: 9781501747342. £33.

Paul Robinson's comprehensive and timely *Russian Conservatism* locates contemporary Russian politics within the historical continuum of conservative thought. With a balanced, systematic approach, Robinson guides his reader through a complex and at times contradictory set of beliefs from the early 1800s to the present day, ultimately arriving at a rounded assessment of Russian conservatism in the 21st century.

Robinson defines Russian conservatism as an organic movement that is not against change, but rather tries to guide change and allow it to unfold in accordance with Russia's own nature. A movement that might appear at first to be retrospective in ethos is, he argues, looking to its past for guidance to build the future, effecting a kind of 'managed' change rooted in tradition. Robinson then focuses his historical account on three aspects of conservative thought: cultural conservatism (which he explains as intrinsically linked to the Orthodox faith as an expression of national identity and the embodiment of Russia's opposition to the West), political conservatism (a desire to rule the country in accordance with tradition, the ideal being autocracy) and social-economic conservatism, which grapples with the paradoxical desire to build a strong, competitive state while adhering to Russian traditions and today expresses itself through an anti-globalist stance.

Through the following ten chapters, Robinson contextualises each major political period in conservative thought over the last 200 years and examines it from these three angles. He considers the Slavophiles, Official Nationality, Pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, Stalin, and ultimately arrives at post-Soviet Russia. Robinson builds a rich and thorough picture of each of these phases in conservative thought, which ultimately leads to fuller understanding of the political situation in contemporary Russia.

Robinson is not inured to the inherent paradoxes of Russian conservatism. Although the ideas that he tackles can at first appear oxymoronic ('liberal conservatism', 'revolutionary conservatism' and 'conservative modernisation', for example), his measured prose and the historical context he provides guides the reader through the most complex ideas. Aside from being one of the first studies to describe Russian conservative thought in such historical breadth, the major strength of *Russian Conservatism* is its clarity of thought, linear organisation, and considered assessment of contemporary Russian politics and its reliance, deliberate or otherwise, on the country's conservative past.

Sarah Gear
Department of Modern Languages
and Cultures, University of Exeter



>> 21-24 April 2021 and there will be a further opportunity to submit paper and panel proposals. In September 2020, a small-scale event will be held in Leipzig and it will be streamed online. We will circulate further information on the event via the Bulletin, mailing list and social media in due course.

Two other events are currently in planning. In May 2021, we will organise a small conference with our partners at CEES Glasgow (dates and theme to be confirmed). BASEES will also launch a new **Study Group for Minority Histories**, with an inaugural event to be held at Birkbeck, University of London next spring. The group's organisers are **Olena Palko** (Birkbeck, University of London), and **Samuel Foster** (University of East Anglia). For further information see below.

The new study group is timely, since debates about the voices of minorities in established historical narratives, discrimination and racism have dominated public discourse since the murder of George Floyd. As I declared in a **statement by the BASEES Committee on the Black Lives Matter** movement, higher education

has a long way to go in terms of racial equality, and BASEES is determined to face up to its own shortcomings in this area. Workshops and meetings had been scheduled at the 2020 conference to provide an opportunity to reflect critically on issues affecting ethnic and racial minorities in our community and our practice. Diversity and inclusion are also core themes of a strategic review of BASEES' organisational structures and activities which we will launch later this year.

This review will involve consultation with all key stakeholders and I am hopeful that it will help us build a more diverse and welcoming association for students and scholars from BAME backgrounds. I very much welcome members' thoughts and input into this process: please feel free to **email me** and to attend the next Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 1 September at 3-5pm. The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom: we will circulate further information as to how to participate in due course.

Matthias Neumann

News of the field

BASEES Study Group for Minority Histories

2021 will see the launch of an exciting new study group for those with an interest in minorities within the national and regional histories of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The Study Group for Minority Histories is open to scholars working in areas related to ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, sexual and other minorities (from the late eighteenth century to the recent past) and looking

for opportunities to collaborate and share and promote their research. If you are interested in joining, please get in touch with one of our present organisers, **Olena Palko** (o.palko@bbk.ac.uk) or **Samuel Foster** (samuel.foster@uea.ac.uk) with a two-sentence synopsis outlining your research interests.

In memoriam: Neil Cornwell 1942-2020

Neil Cornwell, Emeritus Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature at the University of Bristol, was a major international specialist in his subject and a colleague and friend for many years. After a short spell at NUU, Coleraine, he began lecturing in the Department of Slavonic Studies at Queen's, Belfast, in 1973, mainly on twentieth-century Russian Literature. Even at this early stage his preference for the comparative approach to literary studies was in evidence: >>



News of the field

>> his first article, published in *Quinquereme* (2, 1979) was on 'Themes and Ideas in the works by V.F. Odoyevsky, Dostoyevsky and Mayakovsky'. Odoyevsky in particular, an influential Russian writer and polymath largely neglected in both Russia and the West, was to become a major critical pre-occupation for him. Neil tirelessly researched sources on Odoyevsky, including those in Russian archives, producing first a PhD and then a monograph (*The Life, Times and Milieu of V.F. Odoyevsky*, 1986) as well as a number of essays. He can be said to have single-handedly revived interest in Odoyevsky in both Russia and the West.

Odoevsky was remarkable for his openness to European cultural influences and Neil's interest in this comparatist theme drew him to writers such as Pasternak and Nabokov in whose lives and work the relationship between Russia and the West was problematised in unique ways, and on both of whom he wrote authoritative studies (*Pasternak's Novel: Perspectives on Doctor Zhivago* [1986]; Vladimir Nabokov [1999]). Another writer whom Neil approached from this viewpoint was James Joyce. Perhaps Neil's most ambitious comparative study was his book on James Joyce (*James Joyce and the Russians* [1992]), in which he analysed both Joyce's interest in the Russian language and a variety of Russian cultural figures linked with Joyce either by similarity or influence.

Neil was also interested in the use of fantasy and the absurd in literature: his long-standing interest in the Russian absurdist Daniil Kharms led to a collection of essays on the author, while two monographs were devoted to *The Literary Fantastic* (1990) and *The Absurd in Literature* (2006) respectively.

Two other academic achievements of Neil's are particularly worthy of mention. One is his foundation of the journal *Irish Slavonic Studies*, which he edited from 1980-1986 and became an international publication featuring a substantial review section as well as academic articles. Another is the monumental *Reference Guide to Russian Literature* (1998) which he edited (with Nicole Christian as associate editor) and has since become the standard reference work for information on Russian writers, with information on 273 Russian writers and nearly three hundred key works of Russian literature. Neil's contribution

to reference works also includes *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature* (2001) and his editorship (2000-12) of the *Russian Literature* and Henry James sections of the online *Literary Encyclopedia*. One of Neil's most striking capabilities was his detailed knowledge of Russian literature and its wealth of criticism and theory. He was outstandingly supportive of the research of other scholars; many of those who knew him will have enjoyed his hospitality and good company. He will be greatly missed.

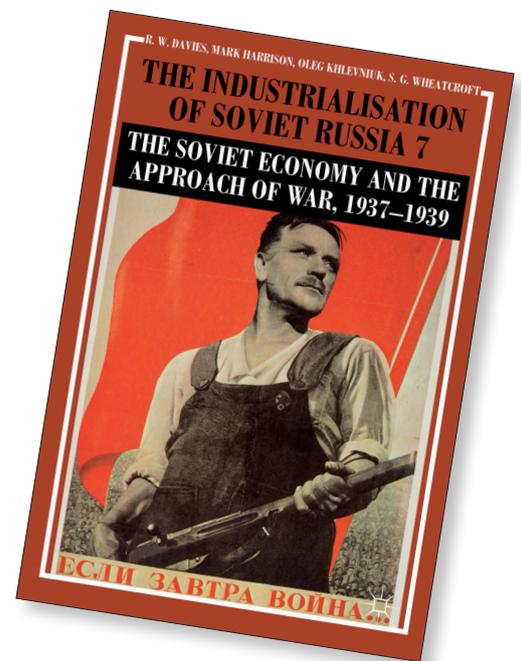
Robert Reid
Keele University

The Alexander Nove Award for Distinguished Scholarship

BASEES had planned to make an award via video link to R. W. Davies at the annual conference in April: Mark Harrison, co-author of the latest *Industrialisation of Soviet Russia* volume, was going to pick up the medal we were having forged for the occasion. Alas none of this could take place and I was deprived of my chance to make a speech about the seven volumes at the annual dinner, in which I would have expressed the hope that some young economic historians would pick up the baton to continue this project into the WWII/GPW years and onwards. This would be an extremely difficult act to follow, as is obvious from the citation we composed to honour Bob's effort (reproduced below). We wish Bob and his co-authors health and happiness in the years ahead.

Judith Pallot
Christ Church College, Oxford

"This special award is being made to the seven-volume economic history *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia*, which has come to the end with the publication of the seventh and final volume: *The Soviet Economy and the Approach of War, 1937-1939* (Palgrave, 2018). The pivotal role in the series has been played by R. W. (Bob) Davies (b. 1925), a mighty figure in Soviet (Russian) and East European Studies and a founding member of this association, serving on the precursor NASEES committee from 1963-1977. The final volume of the series is co-authored by Mark Harrison, Oleg Khlevniuk & Stephen G Wheatcroft (who also co-authored volume 5).



The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia was a continuation of E.H. Carr's project to write a history of the Bolshevik revolution. Between 1950 and 1969 Carr published 14 volumes of his *History of Soviet Russia*, covering the period from 1917 to 1929. To help with the final set of volumes, entitled *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, he recruited a co-author, the young economist R. W. Davies of the University of Birmingham. Carr stepped back from his project in 1929 citing the increasing secrecy of the Soviet regime in the 1930s and the lack of primary documentation as his reason. Where Carr stopped, Davies took up the work. The seven volumes of *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia* cover the period from 1929 to 1939: in what must be a record, the project was funded continuously by the Economic and Social Research Council from 1973 to 2010.

While the project continued, the world changed. The Soviet Union opened up, then collapsed. Its archives became available to the world, solving the obstacle that had defeated Carr, and Davies became a leading figure among many who made the Soviet state the best documented authoritarian regime of modern times. The topics embraced by the seven volumes include forced industrialisation and collectivisation, famine, the emergence of the command system, the limited scope for reforms, mass killings and forced labour, the path of consumption and living standards, the militarisation of the economy and war preparations, and the character of Soviet economic growth and development."

Interview: Mark Harrison

The *Newsletter* speaks to Mark Harrison, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the University of Warwick, about his recent memoir, *There Was a Front, but Damned if We Knew Where: Moscow, 1972/73*.



What made you want to write this memoir?

One summer evening in the late 1990s, only a few years after the end of Soviet rule, I walked through central Moscow with the Swedish historian Lennart Samuelson. We looked into a bar that was crowded with happy, noisy twenty-year-olds, something unthinkable only a decade earlier. Lennart turned to me and snapped: "These young people. They don't know what it's like to live in a totalitarian society!" Many years later the number of people that recall everyday life in Europe's last great police state is rapidly shrinking. My students, even those who come from Russia, struggle to imagine a world without instant communication and unregulated information sharing. I began to feel that what I remembered, being increasingly scarce, might also be of growing interest, if only for curiosity. So I decided to write down what I remembered.

You describe in detail the ways in which Anglo-Soviet tensions in the 1970s put exchange students in something of a bind. Do you see any parallels with today's situation?

In his book *Private Truth, Public Lies*, the economist Timur Kuran coined the phrase "preference falsification." Economists tend to assume that preferences are freely stated, but often what we express is limited to what is thought to be socially acceptable. We hide our true thoughts to avoid disapproval or ridicule. This can happen anywhere, but preference falsification is much more intense in authoritarian societies where dissent and nonconformity are explicitly penalized.

As exchange students in the Soviet Union, we had to collude with the system of

preference falsification. This did not seem to have much to do with fluctuations in Anglo-Soviet relations. Soviet society was it was, not as we would have liked it to be, and we had to accommodate to it. The state exercised guardianship over history, and this ruled out many fascinating lines of research we might have pursued, given the choice. As foreigners we enjoyed many privileges, but could not make a fuss without risking our positions and drawing negative attention to our friends and contacts. So, we all toned down our expressions of interest and spontaneous reactions to what we encountered in Soviet life.

When I visit Russia today I am again mindful that I should be careful about what I say and who I mix with, and should avoid causing trouble for my Russian colleagues and friends. Again the reason is not so much poor Anglo-Russian relations as the fact that Russia is once more an authoritarian state. It is worth adding that restrictions on everyday life in Russia today are far less intrusive than under Soviet rule. Soviet society was organized in such a way that the KGB could look for and monitor anything out of the ordinary. The same is not true of Russia today, even if the FSB would perhaps like it to be.

What advice would you give to graduate students doing research in Russia and the former Soviet Union these days?

I am reluctant to offer advice. Many graduate students that I have met in recent years have been far more self-motivating, adventurous, and courageous than I ever was. It may seem that I was brave to go off and study in the Soviet Union, but I wasn't brave at all, I just followed a bureaucratic process that was highly organized and institutionalized. I was also very lucky to be accepted: very

few places were available, and I was fortunate that my launching pad was an Oxford college. Nowadays most students seem to have superb language skills and they go off and live in villages for months or years, or they travel on their own by train and plane across Russia's regions, making their own connections with archives and institutes and finding their own accommodation. I don't really know how they do it, and I wish I had been more like them.

If I have any advice, it would be that a good way to stand out in a competitive world of adventurous and well qualified people is to have one more skill, and I tend to think the most important thing to add to language skills and knowing a lot about the world is data skills.

How has the Russian studies field (very broadly defined) changed since you were a graduate student?

Several decades ago the field seemed to be tidily segmented by subdisciplines – economics, politics, history, literature, and so forth. Nowadays few people care about maintaining disciplinary boundaries. This is a positive thing. At one time I began to fear that the field had rather lost interest in economics and economic history. More recently I have become optimistic again. The force driving my optimism is that my discipline of economics has responded to the data explosion by becoming more applied and empirical, economists have become more interested in history as a source of data over long periods, and Russians working in economics are turning back to the economic history of their own country. Thus the widening scope for high-quality economics and economic history is drawing new people into the field.

Russian in Plain English

Earlier this year (Newsletter no. 28, February 2020), I expressed serious concern about the huge gap between language teaching practitioners and applied linguistics researchers within UK Slavic Studies. Many students appear to be taught in more or less the same way they were 50 years ago. Such teaching methods may not necessarily be the most effective or learner-friendly, leading to discouraged students and a rising drop-out rate (up to 33% in Year 1, according to Isurin, 2013, RLJ). With the declining popularity of Slavic and Russian language degrees, letting this tendency take its course may prove costly for all of us.

Although most BASEES members do not research language pedagogy, many of us do teach language courses at some point in our careers (the more so these days with departmental budgets tight). Moreover, first- and second-year language courses supply the majority of enrolments for more advanced levels, as well as candidates for postgraduate research. How we teach students at these language levels is thus becoming considerably more important than has traditionally been assumed.

I have therefore produced an innovative textbook, underpinned by theories of cognitive processing, language acquisition and psycholinguistics, that aims to teach Russian to complete beginners as effectively as possible. It is designed to help learners understand the logic behind the Russian sound system and spelling, enabling them to start reading independently within a very short period of time by activating their cognitive processing of letter-sound correspondences in special exercises. It also helps them understand the basic principles of the Russian inflection system, teaching them to use the endings in their speech and enabling them to produce a range of independent sentences after just 20 hours of classroom time. Speaking activities support every small chunk of theory which is introduced. The materials on which the book is based have been piloted with several groups, delivering extremely positive results.

The book, called *Russian in Plain English*, is published by Routledge, and is ready for pre-ordering with free delivery [here](#). If you have questions, please email me on either n.v.parker@leeds.ac.uk or romashka1996@hotmail.com – your comments and suggestions are really appreciated.

Natalia V. Parker



The *Newsletter* speaks to Caroline Ridler, a first-year PhD student at the University of Nottingham working on late Soviet rock music.

How did you end up in the Russian/Slavic Studies field?

At school, I had the opportunity to study GCSE Russian. I was passionate about languages and could not resist the challenge: I was fascinated by the alphabet, grammar, and culture. Russian was not offered at my sixth form, but I was able to continue studying Russian ab initio alongside French as part of the Modern Languages BA at Durham University. The course at Durham enabled me to explore many aspects of Russian culture – one of which was the St Petersburg underground rock scene. Since I knew I wanted to take my studies in Russian further, I applied to the MSt in Modern Languages at the University of Oxford, where my master's dissertation (supervised by Polly Jones) focussed on the Soviet rock musician Viktor Tsoi. This led to a PhD on Viktor Tsoi, Leningrad rock poetry, and the cultural politics of glasnost at the University of Nottingham. The project is supervised by Polly McMichael (a world expert on Soviet rock music) and Claire Shaw at the University of Warwick, and is funded by the Midlands4Cities DTP (AHRC).

What are the highlights of your career to date?

I am in the first year of my PhD, but I have already had some fantastic opportunities to travel and share my research. In December last year, I went to Bremen to present a paper at the Colloquium of East(-Central) European History at the Research Centre for East European Studies (University of Bremen). It was exciting to connect with scholars in Russian and Slavonic Studies outside the UK and to access rare materials in the Centre's archives, including original copies of *Roksi* (Leningrad underground rock) samizdat. In February, I presented at the New Russias festival at the University of Manchester, where I had the chance to attend unique cultural performances, including concerts from Russian rock and pop bands Motorama and Pompeya, documentary film showings and the first English-language performance of Vladimir Vysotsky's songs.

Tell us about your current research.

My PhD focusses on the Soviet rock musician Viktor Tsoi, who died in 1991 and became a cult hero throughout the Soviet Union and post-Soviet world. I trace his rise to fame in the late 1980s in the context of the rapid cultural and political changes of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika. I aim to show that rock music did not make a wholesale transition from 'underground' to 'above ground', but instead that Tsoi's example illustrates how many rock musicians straddled 'countercultural' and 'mainstream' definitions in the late 1980s. My research examines the process of mythmaking which shaped Tsoi's image and legacy – his reputation as 'authentic' and 'sincere' contributed to his popularity amongst perestroika-era youth – and question how far various myths, such as Tsoi as a 'rock-poet' and as the 'last hero' of the Soviet rock underground, coincide with his actual biography.

What are the challenges facing PhD students at the moment?

The coronavirus pandemic has been profoundly challenging for universities and has hit PhD students and early career researchers particularly hard. With Teaching Affiliate budgets cut, many PhD students including myself will not have the opportunity to gain crucial teaching experience next year. This follows on from many years of undervaluing the work of PhD students whose roles as teaching staff have become casualised, precarious and underpaid. Many PhD students also fear for their futures in academia as job cuts, increased workloads, and the move to online teaching (accelerated by Covid-19) suggest that there will be fewer future research and teaching positions. More imminently, researchers are struggling to complete (or needing to completely alter) their projects, with libraries shut and research trips postponed.