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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 December newsletter is 22 November 2021.

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Call
for Papers
for the
BASEES Annual
Conference
2022

President's Report

Dear colleagues,
We have come to the end of a very long academic year, the memory of which will stay with us for some time.

While the pandemic is far from over, we have to hope that the next academic year will allow us to return to our classrooms, archives, and conferences. Indeed, we have just announced the **Call for Papers for the BASEES Annual Conference 2022** which will take place at Robinson College, Cambridge from 8-10 April next year. As usual, we welcome paper, panel and roundtable proposals in the following subject areas in relation to the BASEES region: **Politics; History; Sociology and Geography; Film and Media, Languages and Linguistics; Literatures and Cultures; and Economics**. The conference especially welcomes participation by postgraduate research students and early career scholars.

There remains much uncertainty about the public health situation and how, in particular, international travel will recommence under the new normal. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced us all to adopt new ways of working and we have all become used to attending workshops and conferences online. There is much to be said for this, not least in terms of accessibility and the reduction in cost: I found myself tuning in to some wonderful research seminars and talks held in the UK or abroad while chopping vegetables for dinner! Therefore, although we intend to hold BASEES 2022 in person, we are also committed to allowing a limited number of remote paper presentations. These slots will be particularly aimed at colleagues abroad, who are unlikely to secure funding to attend the event and may struggle with travel restrictions. That being said, we hope to see as many of you as possible in Cambridge next spring.

Over the last few months, our community has sadly lost several long-standing members. R. W. Davies and John



Barber, who at one point worked together on a project on Soviet industrialisation, have both passed away in recent months. I never had the opportunity to meet either of them, but like generations of Soviet historians, I encountered the seven-volume series *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia* as a graduate student. I was particularly fascinated by the volume on the socialist offensive in which R. W. Davies reconstructed in incredible detail the complicated interplay between the centre and periphery that led to a process of incremental radicalisation ending in the all-out collectivisation drive of spring 1930 and the campaign to liquidate the kulaks as a class. This was historical scholarship and writing at its very best, and I have been using it in my teaching since first becoming a lecturer as a way of challenging the widespread reluctance of students to engage with economic history. In spring 2020, just before Covid-19 led to the cancellation of the annual conference, BASEES awarded R. W. Davies the **Alexander Nove Award for Distinguished Scholarship** for his seven-volume economic history of Russia. We could not give him the award in person, but I am glad we recognised his major contribution to the field before he passed away. His scholarship will continue to be read by generations of historians. An obituary for R. W. Davies appears on page 3 of the present issue; a tribute to John Barber will appear in due course.

For almost a year now, BASEES has been undertaking a strategic review. We have already made a couple of preliminary changes to our governance that will be formally embedded in the revised structures. In particular, we have created the position of Early Career Academic representative as a co-opted member of the BASEES Executive Committee, and are delighted that Dr Cathy McAteer has >>

>> recently taken up this position. As part of her role, Cathy will join the Research & Development Committee to ensure an early career voice is involved in decision making regarding the disbursement of BASEES grants. Issues concerning early career academics also featured prominently in our BASEES membership and constituency survey, which ran until the end of June. I am very pleased with the high level of engagement generated by the survey (120 responses) - the voices of our members are critical for this success

of our strategic review. Data from the membership survey is currently being collated and a working group led by Dr Alison Long will analyse it closely after the summer, producing a report that will feed into the strategic review. I look forward to studying the feedback and finding out how you, our members and constituents, want BASEES to move forward. We will work throughout the autumn and winter to consider the results of the survey in terms of our core activities and governance. The results of this process, as well as the

BASEES Strategy 2030, will be presented at the next AGM at the BASEES 2022 conference in Cambridge.

I wish all BASEES members a sunny and restful summer. I know that many of you will try to see family for the first time after the repeated lockdowns. I hope that you will be successful in navigating the Covid-19 travel restrictions and will be reunited with your loved ones.

Matthias Neumann

News of the field

In Memoriam: Sue Allott (Bridger) 1953-2020

Sue Allott sadly passed away on 7 October 2020. Like Elizabeth Waters, who died earlier in 2020, Sue was a trailblazer in the UK in the fields of Soviet society, history and politics during the 1970s, shedding light on women's issues and gender roles. Both Sue and Lizzie contributed chapters to a memorable early book, *Soviet Sisterhood: British Feminists on Women in the USSR*, edited by Barbara Holland (Fourth Estate, 1985). They will be much missed by friends and colleagues.

Sue studied French and Russian for her BA at the University of Bradford. She also received her Ph.D from Bradford and went on to make her career there, progressing from lecturer to senior lecturer until retirement in the year 2000. Sue was an inspiration to both undergraduates and postgraduates, who included Rebecca Kay and Kathryn Pinnick. She was always great fun, down-to-earth and with a no-nonsense approach to life.

Under the surname of Bridger, Sue published *Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union* (CUP, 1987), the topic of her Ph.D. She was co-translator and editor with Jim Riordan of *Dear Comrade Editor: Readers' Letters to the Soviet Press Under Perestroika* (John Wiley, 1992); co-author with Rebecca Kay and Kathryn Pinnick of *No More Heroines? Russia, Women and the Market*, co-editor with Frances Pine of *Surviving Post-Socialism: Local Strategies and Regional Responses in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Routledge, 1988); editor of *Women in Post-Communist*



Russia (Interface: Bradford Studies in Language, Culture and History, 1995); and editor of *Women and Political Change: Perspectives from East-Central Europe* (Macmillan, 1999). She was also the author of numerous articles and book chapters focusing on Soviet women's history, with a particular emphasis on the economic and cultural spheres.

In retirement, Sue Allott published an engrossing and touching book titled *A Sheffield Turner's Tale: Life With an Unsung Hero of Steel* (YouCaxton Publications, 2020). It is a fine tribute to her father and a lovely personal memoir. As a social and economic history, it charts working-class life in Sheffield from the

1950s and the impact of the demise of the steel industry, and includes amusing and recognisable tales of living in a student hotel in Moscow in the 1973.

Sue's love of, and interest in, all things Russian never left her. One of her last projects was devoted to unearthing, on the basis of interviews with Russians and Russian sources, the story behind the women cosmonauts' team and the first female space flight, never previously told in English. She had been working on a compelling and accessible manuscript which remains unpublished, and which we hope to take forward.

Mary Buckley and Rebecca Kay

News of the field



In Memoriam: Robert William Davies 1925-2021

Robert William ("Bob") Davies, who died on 13 April 2021, was born in London on 23 April 1925. After war service in the RAF, he graduated in 1950 from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London. Under the guidance of Alexander Baykov at the University of Birmingham, he investigated Soviet public finance, obtaining his PhD in 1954 (Davies 1958). After two years lecturing at Glasgow, he returned to Birmingham in 1956, remaining there until his retirement in 1988. He was the founding director of Birmingham's Centre for Russian and East European Studies from 1963 to 1979, being promoted to Professor of Russian Economic Studies in 1965. He was a keen supporter of BASEES and its predecessor NASEES, serving on the NASEES committee and taking part in annual conferences.

Davies's first work on the Soviet budgetary system already showed a strong historical interest. He was drawn further into Soviet history by the historian E. H. Carr, who was writing a multi-volume *History of Soviet Russia*. Carr invited Davies to join him. The result was a pathbreaking investigation of the origins of the Soviet planning system (Carr and Davies 1967). When Carr stopped his own history at the end of the 1920s, Davies continued with a seven-volume series on the Soviet economy in the decade of the 1930s, through the collectivization of agriculture, forced industrialisation, famine, purges, and war preparations (Davies 1980-2018). This work was recognized by the Alexander

Nove Award for Distinguished Scholarship of BASEES in 2020. In fact, Davies's extraordinary scholarship was admired around the world, including in Russia, the country to the study of which he devoted his life.

While engaged in this work, Davies also led a major project that surveyed Soviet industrial technology and benchmarked its achievements and shortfalls against the technologies of the West (Davies and Zaleski 1969; Amann, Cooper, and Davies 1977). He edited major documentary collections (Wheatcroft and Davies 1985; Davies et al. 2003). He wrote and edited several textbooks, including the first on Soviet quantitative economic history (Davies and Shaw 1978; Davies, Harrison, and Wheatcroft 1994; Davies 1998). He contributed major studies of Soviet and Russian historiography as it changed with the dismantling and collapse of Soviet orthodoxy (Davies 1989, 1997).

Among the most important findings of Davies's work is that, while the ideas of Lenin and Stalin mattered a great deal, they did not predetermine the eventual shape of the Soviet economic system. The first two decades of Bolshevik rule saw a process of experimentation and adaptation, alternately spurred by radicalism and restrained by pragmatism. Like Carr before him, Davies believed that Soviet industrialisation was the most important event of the twentieth century, because it decided the outcome of World War II. His research also exposed the great social and economic costs of forced-march economic development. It also showed that many outcomes of Soviet rule were unintended, and that Stalin's refusal to acknowledge or adapt to the unintended outcomes greatly increased the costs of his policies, sometimes measured in millions of lives.

Davies was not only an extraordinary scholar, but a builder and a leader. On foundations laid by Alexander Baykov, he developed the Centre for Russian and East European Studies at Birmingham into a world-leading institution. Of particular importance were the varied links that he promoted with Soviet historians despite the political and diplomatic tensions of the Cold War. At the Centre he held large ESRC research grants continuously for forty years. These supported numerous PhD students and research assistants who, having cut their teeth under his guidance, went on to lectureships and chairs of Russian studies around the world. >>

Selected major works (in order of publication)

Davies, R. W. 1958. *The Development of the Soviet Budgetary System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carr, E. H., and R. W. Davies. 1967. *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929* (2 vols). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Davies, R. W., and Eugene Zaleski (eds). 1969. *Science Policy in the USSR*. Paris: OECD.

Amann, Ronald, Julian Cooper, and R. W. Davies (eds). 1977. *The Technological Level of Soviet Industry*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Davies, R. W., and Denis J. B. Shaw (eds). 1978. *The Soviet Union*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Davies, R. W. 1980-2018. *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia*. Vol. 1, *The socialist offensive: the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture, 1929-1930*; vol. 2, *The Soviet collective farm, 1929-1930*; vol. 3, *The Soviet economy in turmoil, 1929-1930*; vol. 4, *Crisis and progress in the Soviet economy, 1931-1933*; vol. 5 (with Stephen G. Wheatcroft), *The years of hunger: Soviet agriculture, 1931-1933*; vol. 6 (with Oleg Khlevniuk and Stephen G. Wheatcroft), *The years of progress: the Soviet economy, 1934-1936*; vol. 7 (with Mark Harrison, Oleg Khlevniuk and Stephen G. Wheatcroft), *The Soviet economy and the approach of war, 1937-1939*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wheatcroft, S. G., and R. W. Davies (eds). 1985. *Materials for a Balance of the Soviet National Economy, 1928-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, R. W. 1989. *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Davies, R. W., Mark Harrison, and S. G. Wheatcroft (eds). 1994. *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

News of the field

>> The grants also funded a seminar series that became the core of a convivial network, joined by young and old researchers from many institutions and disciplines. Their gatherings often spilled over into the home that he shared with his wife Frances (who predeceased him), and their children Maurice and Cathy.

As a scholar, Davies was cooperative and egalitarian. He was a careful and respectful listener. He shared his prodigious knowledge freely. He nurtured enthusiasm, while reminding those who looked to him for guidance that these were not enough: scholarship also required ceaseless attention to detail, deep knowledge of sources, and the willingness to rethink cherished ideas when the evidence pointed elsewhere.

As a young adult, Davies was among those on the British left who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s because of the Soviet Union's stand against fascism in Germany and Italy. He left the party in 1956 after the Soviet Army's suppression of the Hungarian uprising. Concluding the final volume (published in 2018) of his *Industrialisation of Soviet Russia*, he wrote of the first volume (1980):

In this book I already assumed that what had been emerging in the Soviet Union was a new civilisation . . . But the Soviet system which emerged by 1940

was fundamentally different from the new civilisation which I had envisaged when I began this work. I continued to hold my original conception when I was writing about the early 1930s. But as my work continued, and my knowledge of the later 1930s became more detailed and more reliable, it became clear that the Soviet system, despite playing a major role in the defeat of Nazism, was no longer any kind of 'new civilisation' or socialist society, but a repressive regime in which violence and tyranny played a major part. My earlier conception of the course of Soviet history was fundamentally mistaken.

While my view of Soviet history has changed, two things have remained the same. One constant factor in my work has been the idea that, when the details of history are in conflict with preconceived ideas, the latter should give way. Another is that I remain on the Left, believing today as before that a better organization of society is possible.

Davies is survived by his children Maurice and Cathy, daughter-in-law Nicky, and grandchildren Michael and Lucia, all of whom contributed to his care and comfort in his last years.

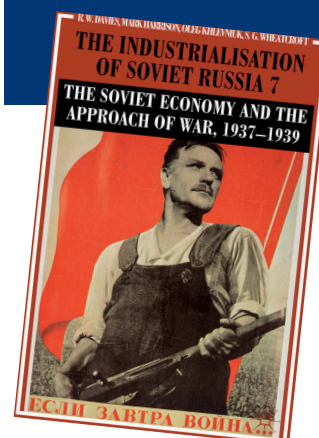
Mark Harrison
University of Warwick

Davies, R. W. 1997. *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

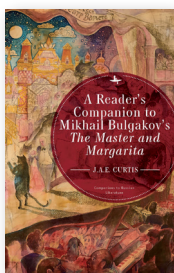
Davies, R. W. 1998. *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, R. W., Oleg V. Khlevniuk, E. A. Rees, Liudmila P. Kosheleva, and Larisa A. Rogovaya (eds). 2003. *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence, 1931–36*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Davies, R. W., Mark Harrison, Oleg Khlevniuk, and Stephen G. Wheatcroft. 2018. "The Soviet economy: the late 1930s in historical perspective." University of Warwick, CAGE Working Paper no. 363. [Available here >>](#)



Book Reviews



J. A. E. Curtis,
A Reader's Companion to Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita. Companions to Russian Literature, Academic Studies

Press, Boston, 2019. 194 pp.
ISBN: 9781644690789. \$29.95 (paperback).

As its title suggests, this book is designed for those approaching *The Master and Margarita* for the first time (perhaps on an undergraduate Russian course), and as such it makes an excellent introduction to the text. However, it is also suitable for those who are already familiar with *The Master and Margarita* and with Bulgakov scholarship, and perhaps are returning to teaching the text after a break, since it provides a comprehensive overview of scholarly literature on the novel and contains some particular and original insights into it. There has been a huge amount of research done on Bulgakov

over the last forty years (especially since the 1980s), and Julie Curtis – one of the world's leading Bulgakov scholars – carefully unpicks the valuable work done by some from the more marginal work by others.

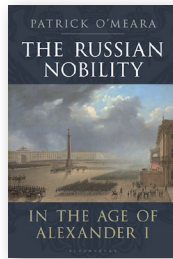
The book begins with a carefully crafted biographical sketch of Bulgakov's life. Since Bulgakov's work used many autobiographical themes, and cannot be understood outside the context of the historical events and political forces of his day, this is invaluable background reading. There follow two chapters on the >>

Book Reviews

>> history of the text: the first relates to the writing process and drafts of *The Master and Margarita*, the second to the publication history of the novel. Despite being a detailed and in some places quite technical analysis, this is useful for readers, particularly if they are reading the novel alongside scholarly works. It is fairly well known that Bulgakov wrote *The Master and Margarita* 'for the drawer' and completed it only towards the very end of his life, but the circumstances in which this happened, and the tortuous process by which the novel came to be published, are of considerable interest in themselves and tell us much about the wider historical context. The following chapters focus on the structure of the novel, characters and themes (e.g. good and evil, biblical themes and satire). Much of this will be familiar to those with a working knowledge of Bulgakov scholarship, and Curtis offers a bird's eye view of criticism in order for readers so inclined to explore further. She also makes clear her own position on key critical debates, arguing, for instance, that some research into Bulgakov is overly focused on 'decoding' the text through a particular interpretative key (e.g. the Soviet political context or Bulgakov's attitude to religion), and that this monistic approach sometimes blinds critics and readers to the nuances and complexities of the text. The penultimate chapter uses close textual analysis to look at narrative voices and stylistic techniques, which is of particular interest to students and scholars of Russian literature. Bulgakov's skill as a writer sometimes gets overlooked by critics, who can be overly focused on the political and religious themes in his work, and Curtis goes some way towards correcting this. The last chapter comprises an overview of English translations of the novel, which should be useful for students of Russian studying translation and for translation scholars.

The only omission from this excellent companion is some discussion of the novel in a more global context, although Curtis does allude to its reception in popular culture. There is a helpful bibliography of further reading. Overall, this is a hugely enjoyable read. It is beautifully written and carefully curated, yet allows Curtis's own nuanced readings to shine through.

Elizabeth Harrison



Patrick O'Meara,
The Russian Nobility in the Age of Alexander I. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. 367. ISBN 978-1-78831-466-2. £85.80 (hardback).

There has been a revival of interest in the Russian nobility in recent years and this important book by Patrick O'Meara, in which he extends his earlier studies of the Decembrists to provide a fuller picture of the nobility during the reign of Alexander I, is a welcome addition. For O'Meara, this was a period of unprecedented opportunity: basking in the patriotic defeat of Napoleon, Alexander had the authority to enact significant political and social change, while some 'enlightened' nobles were eager for reform after their experiences of the conflict. Yet, O'Meara argues, this opportunity was 'squandered' due to a combination of Alexander's indecisiveness and the conservatism of the majority of nobles who felt that victory over Napoleon had validated existing structures.

Using a wide range of evidence, O'Meara explores the deep divisions within the nobility in chapters on identity, the 'standing' of nobles, education, local government, the noble assembly, relations with the Tsar, views on constitutionalism and serf reform, and the Decembrist Revolt. There is plenty of rich detail and the sections on education, noble assemblies and the Decembrists are particularly significant contributions to our understanding of the nobility during this period. That the nobility was deeply divided has long been established, but the nature of the divides emerge clearly here, whether in the fragmented subgroups that made up the nobility, the vast differences in wealth and education, or the diversity of cultural and political interests. What is also evident is the bitter contempt held by some nobles towards others, especially the attitudes of 'reformers' towards 'idle' elites and 'inert' bureaucrats and of those in the cities towards their uneducated and uncultured rural counterparts.

Despite the book's title, this is not a comprehensive account. By his own admission, O'Meara is interested in the

'political culture' of the nobility nationally and provincially, and his discussion of various topics is geared towards exploring the genesis of political views and actions. This means that this book is more about noblemen than noblewomen, although the education of girls is discussed, as is the role of women as hosts of salons and literary circles. This is also a book about Russian nobles with little to say about indigenous elites co-opted into the nobility as the empire expanded. Focused on Alexander's reign, it occasionally overlooks earlier developments (such as in education) or longstanding debates (insecurities over noble status and concerns over service, for instance, were constant concerns throughout the eighteenth century).

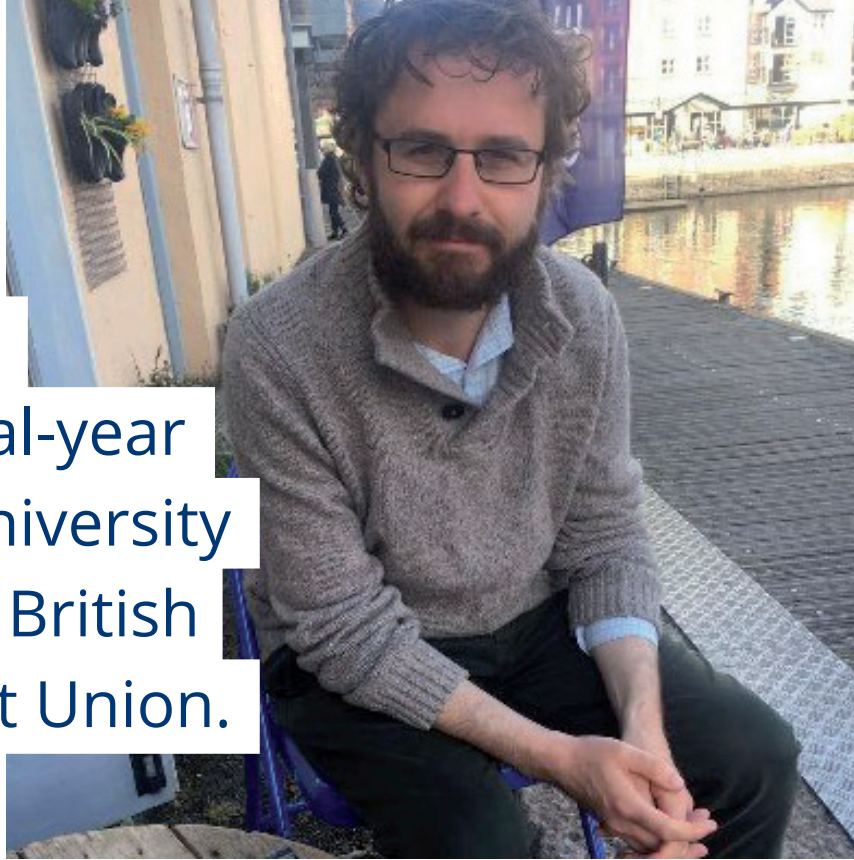
A bigger issue is the privileged position given to the Decembrists. There are numerous evocative critiques of the regime and the nobility from those who later became Decembrists or sympathised with them. Unsurprisingly, such figures were extremely dismissive of the position of the nobility and blamed them for Russia's lack of progress. Undoubtedly, there is much truth here: commentaries on the nobility across centuries constantly bemoan the deficiencies of provincial nobles. Nevertheless, recent works on the provincial nobility, and on topics such as education, have painted a more nuanced picture and this reader is left desiring a more critical interrogation of these self-serving assessments and more voices from the provinces.

Still, this should not take away from the fact that O'Meara's arguments are thought-provoking and generally convincing, and there is much to consider in this book when assessing Russia's prospects for reform, the achievements and failings of Alexander I, the causes and consequences of the Decembrist Revolt, and, of course, the position and role of the nobility. Ultimately, O'Meara seems correct in portraying this period as one of opportunity and the fact that so little changed was in no small part due to the dynamic between the monarch and the nobility.

Matthew Rendle
University of Exeter

ECR Spotlight

The *Newsletter* speaks to Nicholas Hall, a final-year PhD student at the University of Exeter researching British travellers in the Soviet Union.



How did you end up doing a PhD?

I did a Master's in History at Cardiff, and at the end of that programme my supervisor suggested I could do a PhD. He suggested Russian history, knowing of my love of Russian literature and my interest in (of all things) the work of Isaiah Berlin. Thus began a long road that took me, via a six-year research associate post at Oxford and numerous Russian classes (ever ongoing), to Exeter, where I began a part-time PhD in 2016. I am on course to submit this calendar year.

What are the highlights of your career to date?

I've published a few things, and presented at various conferences (including in Rome, which was quite the treat). I've also received various tranches of funding for projects over the years, but I think the highlight is the opportunity to *be able to do this at all*. Scholarly study is, for me, strongly connected to creativity and the ethical: it focuses the mind on one's purpose, contributions, and interconnectedness with other people and the world. As such, I feel very privileged to be able to spend a lot of my time considering complex, fascinating problems in history, and considering how they interrelate with other areas of life.

Tell us about your current research

I look at British travellers in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Rather than considering their observations in light of their political commitments and assessing how 'right' or 'wrong' they were about the Soviet world, I look at how they framed, discussed, behaved during and reflected upon their travels. I use their travel accounts to explore discourses of travel, to interrogate how Soviet people responded to foreigners in their midst, and to draw some conclusions on life under Stalinism.

A keyword for my thesis is 'sincerity'. Many travellers were very conscious of the fact of Soviet cultural diplomacy, and thus were keen to demonstrate to their readers that they were fully aware of the problems of blindly trusting Soviet sincerity, and of negotiating Soviet cultural diplomacy. I also look at how travellers portrayed the Soviet people, how they sought 'truth' and where they looked for it, and how Soviet people treated foreigners as anything from people to avoid to people to befriend. In sum, I am fascinated by ideas of performance, sincerity, trust and truth-telling: I hope to extend my research on these issues in future by using the example of the Soviet Union as seen in Britain to interrogate contemporary British understandings of truth in communications – a crucial issue in today's world.

What are the challenges facing PhD students at the moment?

Obviously the job market. I hope, but do not expect, to move into an academic role after my studies finish, and have irons in other fires to ensure I'm not cast adrift if that time comes. That's fine – there's always competition – but I do think that if one considers the talents, ambitions and accomplishments of so many scholars early in their careers, the time and effort poured into their work, and the amount some sacrifice and suffer for their work, the likely reward at the end is completely incommensurate. I don't ask for 5,000 new academic posts to be created, but I wish that effort and passion could be better rewarded in some way.

And so say all of us. Finally, what are your thoughts on the future of the field?

The saturation of PhDs plus minimal opportunities is obviously a problem, as is a tendency in government and parts of wider society to seriously undervalue the humanities, especially languages. This can only lead to a dimmer, duller, narrower world where we understand even less about our condition than we already do.