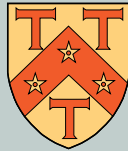
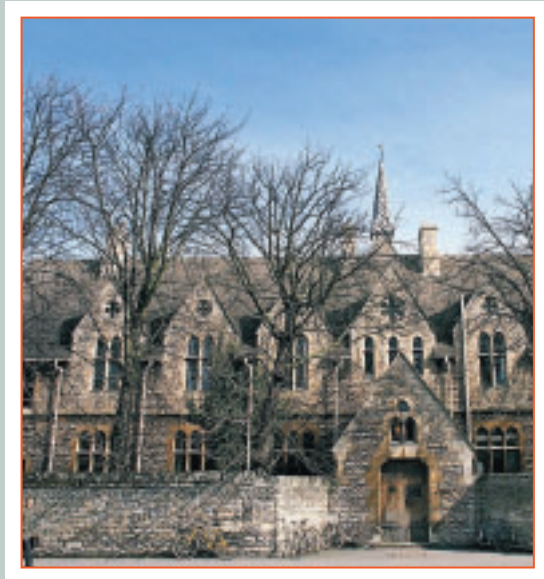


St Antony's College
Oxford



Russian and East European Centre
Fifty Years On



Russian and East European Centre

Fifty Years On

The Russian and East European Centre at St Antony's was established in 1953, three years after the College opened its doors to its earliest students. It was the first of the St Antony's regional centres to be founded and so set a pattern that was to be one of the distinctive features of the College. The Centre's first Director, David Footman, immediately launched a seminar series that was to embrace pre-revolutionary Russia, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was convened on Mondays at 5 p.m. and has met continuously on Mondays in term-time ever since.

It is the longest-running seminar on Russian history, politics and society in Britain.

Sir Isaiah Berlin took a keen interest in the Russian Centre and it was through him that the historian George Katkov came to St Antony's in 1956. Soon after Katkov was appointed University Lecturer in Soviet Institutions. One of the peculiarities of the Soviet Union, given the strict censorship which had such a baleful impact on the social sciences, was that frequently more insight into Soviet society could be obtained from study of Russian literary journals



July 1962 Conference on Soviet Literature, 1917 – 1962, in the Russian Centre Library (then St Antony's Joint Common Room)

than from the socio-political literature. Max Hayward, without ever writing a full-length book, gained a justified international reputation both as a brilliant commentator on Russian literature of the Soviet period and as an outstanding translator. He was later joined by three versatile colleagues: Harry Willetts, Ronald Hingley, and Harry Shukman, all of whom combined the writing of history with much-admired translations from Russian. The most prolific and broad-ranging among them was Hingley, while Willetts became the first-choice English translator of Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

The study not only of the Soviet economy but also of the economies of Eastern Europe was conducted by another mainstay of the Centre, Michael Kaser, a Cambridge economist who came to St Antony's after serving both with the Foreign Office and the United Nations. Eastern European studies were further strengthened by the appointment in 1967 of Richard Kindersley whose particular speciality was Yugoslavia, although his first book was on pre-revolutionary Russian history. Kindersley's Russian had been honed as a naval officer and interpreter in the service of the hazardous British convoys to Murmansk during the Second

World War. His Balkan interests matched those of the College's first Warden, Sir William Deakin, whose own wartime exploits involved being parachuted into occupied Yugoslavia and fighting alongside Tito and his Partisans. A friend of Winston Churchill, Deakin helped Churchill with research for his wartime memoirs.

When Katkov retired in 1971 his successor was Archie Brown who moved from a lectureship in the Department of Politics at Glasgow University and brought an interest in comparative politics as well as contemporary Communism. The study of politics and international relations was further strengthened with the arrival in 1989 of Alex Pravda who had been Director of the Soviet Foreign Policy Programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). In due course Robert Service, a prolific historian and already a Professor of Russian History in London University, replaced Harry Shukman on the latter's retirement, while Carol Leonard, formerly of the State University of New York, filled the gap left by the retirement of Michael Kaser as a specialist on the Russian economy and regional studies.

Centre Fellows have been consulted by political leaders and parliamentary committees on

many occasions and have made a notable contribution to the development of public policy as well as to academia. Three of the eight scholar-participants in an important seminar convened by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at Chequers on 8 September, 1983, to reassess policy towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were Archie Brown, Michael Kaser and Alex Pravda. The eight academic specialists wrote papers which were read and annotated in advance by the Prime Minister.

The six-hour seminar, attended also by the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence, was later described by prime ministerial adviser Sir Anthony Parsons as having ‘changed British foreign policy’. The academics advised against the policy of minimising contacts with the ‘evil empire’, arguing that radical change in Communist systems was much more likely to be promoted by fully engaging with the Soviet and East European societies at all levels - from dissidents to General Secretaries. The official invitation to Mikhail Gorbachev to pay his first visit to Britain (before he became Soviet leader) had its origins in that seminar.

Although financial constraints have meant that the number of Fellows in the Centre has decreased (with Russian literature surviving thanks only to the Research Fellowship set up in



Max Hayward (1924 – 1979) in 1955

memory of Max Hayward and available to young, post-doctoral scholars for a year at a time), graduate student numbers have greatly expanded. This is one of the most encouraging developments of recent years for, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, interest in Russian studies has declined in the West. Some of the support for the study of Russia had earlier owed much to its perceived superpower status, but the reduction of interest was short-sighted. Now there are far wider opportunities than in the past for interaction with Russia.

The country – even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union - remains the world’s largest, with the richest natural resources, and is a state whose future development will be of pivotal concern for both Europe and Asia. It is a source of

satisfaction, therefore, that Oxford generally and St Antony's, in particular, have constituted a major exception to the international downward trend in the graduate study of Russia in its historical, political, international and economic dimensions. The intake for the Master's courses in Russian and East European Studies, for which more than half of the teaching is carried out by St Antony's Fellows, was in October 2002 by far the largest in the University's history.

Many of the students attached to the Russian Centre have made their mark in a variety of professions, including academia, the higher reaches of journalism, diplomacy, law and international banking. Prominent academics who studied in the Centre include Richard Ullman (Princeton), Sheila Fitzpatrick (University of Chicago), Geoffrey Hosking (London University), Caroline Humphrey (Cambridge), Dennison Rusinow (Pittsburgh), Olaf Riste (Oslo), Francis Conte (Paris), the late John Erickson (Edinburgh), and Gabriel Gorodetsky (Tel Aviv).

Former students in the Centre have also made outstanding contributions at the highest levels of the mass media. Two of the most prestigious positions in British journalism are currently

held by Bridget Kendall (BBC Diplomatic Editor) and James Blitz (Political Editor of the *Financial Times*). Both of them at an earlier stage of their careers served as Moscow correspondents - Bridget Kendall for the BBC, James Blitz for the *Sunday Times*. Other leading journalists who, as students of St Antony's, were supervised by Centre Fellows include Owen Bennett-Jones and Chrystia Freeland. The high-level journalistic connection exists also through Senior Associate Members who have been attached to the Centre. Steve Erlanger of the *New York Times* and David Hoffman of the *Washington Post* each spent a year at St Antony's in preparation for their stints as correspondents of their newspapers in Russia. John Lloyd came to the College to write a book about Russia just *after* completing five years as the *Financial Times* Moscow correspondent.

Some former students in the Centre have also become prominent politicians. In the Czech Republic alone these include Petr Pithart, who has served both as Czech Prime Minister (1990-92) and as President of the Senate, and Jan Kavan who was Foreign Minister and is now President of the United Nations General Assembly. Many leading politicians have visited



*Alexander Yakovlev at St Antony's,
January 1992*

and spoken at the Centre. Among Russians they include Mikhail Gorbachev; Andrei Sakharov; Alexander Nikolaevich Yakovlev; former Russian acting prime minister Yegor Gaidar; Yabloko party leader, Grigoriy Yavlinsky; former deputy prime minister and current leader of the Union of Right Forces, Boris Nemtsov; and Deputy Speaker, Vladimir Lukin. Prominent visitors from other walks of life have included Soviet Generals Rair Simonyan and Dmitriy Volkogonov; writers Vasilii Aksyonov, Andrei Amalrik, Vladimir Tendryakov, Viktor Nekrasov and Andrei Voznesensky; and sculptor Ernst Neizvestny. One of the leading Czech reformers during the 'Prague Spring', who later became an organiser of the oppositional Charter 77, Zdeněk Mlynář, spent

a month at St Antony's as a Senior Associate Member in 1979.

Members of the Centre were prescient in analysing sources of change within the unreformed Communist systems and as leading analysts of *perestroika* and of the transformation of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s. While now also making use of new sources on the dramatic changes of the late Soviet period, they are undertaking major analyses of political and economic change in post-Soviet Russia. Among the numerous publications of current Centre Fellows are Archie Brown's *The Gorbachev Factor* (OUP, 1996; winner of the W.J.M. Mackenzie Prize and the Alec Nove Prize) and his edited volume, *Contemporary Russian Politics* (OUP, 2001); Carol Leonard's *Agrarian Reform in Russia: The Road from Serfdom* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003) and her edited book, *Microeconomic Change in Central and Eastern Europe* (Palgrave, 2002); Alex Pravda's co-authored *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (OUP, 1996) and co-edited *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe: International and Transnational Factors* (OUP, 2001); and Robert Service's *Lenin: A Biography* (Macmillan, 2000; *ForeWord Magazine History Prize*) and *Russia: Experiment with a*

People, From 1991 to the Present (Macmillan, 2002).

Emeritus Fellows continue to publish fascinating works. These include the co-authored book by Harry Shukman and Geoffrey Elliott (the latter an Honorary Fellow of St Antony's and good friend of the Russian Centre), *Secret Classrooms* (Little, Brown in association with St Ermin's Press, 2002), a lively account of the National Service Russian course, and Michael Kaser's *The Economies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997). A number of important books have had their origins in doctoral theses supervised by Centre Fellows. In the last few

years alone, these have included Charles King's *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Hoover Institution Press, 1999); Alexander Lukin, *The Political Culture of the Russian 'Democrats'* (OUP, 2000); Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (Palgrave, 2000); Jeffrey Kahn, *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (OUP, 2002); Julie Newton, *Russia, France, and the Idea of Europe* (Palgrave, 2003); and Tiffany Troxel, *Parliamentary Power in Russia, 1994-2001* (Palgrave, 2003).

The Centre has benefited from having its own excellent Library



Mikhail Gorbachev, October 1996, in Fellows' Dining Room of St Antony's, flanked (right) by Ralf (Lord) Dahrendorf (Warden of St Antony's, 1987-97) and Roy (Lord) Jenkins (late Chancellor of Oxford University)

which is particularly strong on many aspects of Russian and Soviet history, politics and the economy. It has also been fortunate that since 1982 it has had at its heart Jackie Willcox whose exceptional skills have enabled her to combine the roles of Librarian and Secretary. At an earlier stage of the Centre's existence, two people did these jobs. If the campaign to expand greatly the space for new Library acquisitions and the resources to purchase them is successful, then in due course a full-time Librarian as well as Secretary-Administrator will be required.

The seriousness of the Centre has never been confused with

solemnity. Christine Nicholls, the author of the official history of St Antony's College, concludes her chapter on the Russian and East European Centre by noting that it was a 'mixture of scholarship and fun which characterised the Russian Centre both before and

after the fall of communism'. As the Centre enters its second half-century, our hope is that high-level scholarship, and its institutional underpinnings, will be still further

strengthened and that this will be done without loss of the conviviality and congenial atmosphere which have been such distinctive features of its past.



Front (centre) Fay and Geoffrey Elliott, the donors of the Elliott Studentship, whose first holders were Polly Jones (front, left) and Shaun Morcom (front, right). Behind: Alex Pravda (left), the current Centre Director, and (right) Archie Brown



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