



**UNSSSEESING**  
THE  
ALUMNI  
MAGAZINE  
FROM SSEES  
FEATURING...  
MAIDENS,  
MUGS AND  
CENTENARY  
DINNERS!

EIGHTH EDITION | SUMMER 2014



### Welcome to the eighth edition of *UnSSEESing*.

**The current edition of *UnSSEESing* is the last before the centenary year of 2015, and, unsurprisingly, has its eyes fixed on the future. Throughout the year there will be conferences, concerts and an East European film festival and we will post and circulate details of them as the final programme emerges.**

On the very first day of that year the new Director takes up his post. In this issue Professor Jan Kubik explains his interest in coming to SSEES. We also offer an insight into the location chosen for the Alumni Centenary Dinner next June, as well as information about other alumni events and activities.

Next year being an exceptional year there will only be one double-sized edition of *UnSSEESing*, due out in late May. Apart from advertising centenary events, it will focus on the student experience over the decades. Do you have anecdotes about your time at SSEES that you would like to share? They can be very short, though they shouldn't be libellous. So please think back and send your recollections to Lisa Walters ([l.walters@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:l.walters@ucl.ac.uk)).

*Faith Wigzell*

SUMMER 2014

# SSEES



The UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies is one of the world's leading specialist institutions, and the largest national centre in the UK, for the study of Central, Eastern and South-East Europe and Russia.

[www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees)

## Meet the **New SSEES Director**

**Professor Jan Kubik who currently teaches at Rutgers University has been appointed Director of SSEES with effect from Jan 1st 2015. Asked what impelled him to apply, he explains:**

At some point in my life – still in high school, I believe – I developed a strong interest in the mystique of power. Why would people tolerate and even support autocratic and often unwanted rulers? Is it just fear? An ill-begotten habit? Misguided faith? And why, sometimes, would they rebel?

I grew up in communist Poland, the happiest barrack in the camp, with censorship more relaxed than elsewhere. Through my older brother, a theater director, I was exposed to Polish theater in the 1970s – phenomenally bold and innovative. While Tadeusz Kantor's and Jerzy Grotowski's experiments were redefining the boundaries of theater aesthetics, rebellious student productions were drilling holes in the system's protective shield and providing an intoxicating opportunity to think freely. I am convinced that a path to answering the question about the mysteries of power was discovered through this experience. The powerful can (try to) shape your mind (Stalin's famous toast to the Soviet writers as the "engineers of human souls"), but your mind, nourished by excitingly unconventional and rebellious art, can resist and find its own truths.

Then Solidarity happened, and a kind of cultural rebellion clearly allowed millions of Poles to see each other as a community outside the system. In New York I started working on my doctoral dissertation and my first book. Eventually *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power* was published, my academic interests defined,

and my approach charted. I wanted to study the relationship between power (politics) and culture (art), and finally I knew that this could be done only in a precariously ill-defined area between established academic disciplines. Since then I have been searching, perhaps not always consciously, for a place where that disciplinary 'in-betweenness' is seen not as a refuge for disciplinary eccentrics, but as a source of indispensable cross-fertilization. SSEES in this respect is a dream institution. It is constituted so as to create opportunities to roam freely between various fields of knowledge. As its Director, I very much hope that I will be able to find new ways not only to amplify this unique *métier*, but also to make new converts to its allure.

"I am convinced that a path to answering the question about the mysteries of power was discovered through this experience."



NEW DIRECTOR

# Alumni Events Programme

## Food and Drink party

Following the very successful East European Food and Drink Party last October, we are organising another, but have decided to hold it in the festive run-up to Christmas.

No champagne this time but *burek*, *bliny* and other culinary delights will be there.

**4th December in the Masaryk Senior Common Room, 6.15pm-8.30pm** is the date for your diary. Booking details will be posted in November.

## Grand Alumni Centenary Dinner

The main alumni centennial occasion will be the grand dinner on **June 14th 2015**. The decision to hold it at the Ognisko Polskie / Polish Hearth situated at 55 Prince's Gate in Kensington was a deliberate one. Not only is the food highly rated, but the building, which has recently been refurbished, is a superb location. The dinner will be held in the Polish Club's first-floor Ballroom in this splendid nineteenth-century town house.

For those who do not know the Club and its magnificent premises, Ognisko Polskie was opened in December 1939 after an initiative from Count Edward Raczyński, Polish Ambassador to Britain and Lord Lloyd, Colonial Secretary and Chairman of the British Council. It was certainly by chance that the timing for the inauguration of the Polish House by HRH the Duke of Kent on the 16th July 1940 coincided with the retreat from France and the arrival of the Polish Government and the Free Polish Armed Forces in London.

Subsequently the building became a legendary and very popular Wartime London Club 'keeping the home fires burning', quite a 'hotspot'. After the war it remained the cultural and intellectual hub for Poles in London. Links between SSEES and Ognisko Polskie include similarities in their foundation – the British government was obliged to support both because of the perceived lack of knowledge of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is also of note that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the daughter of Count Raczyński worked at SSEES.

In 1978, after many years as a tenant, Ognisko Polskie bought the building from the University of London. After a recent change in management it has had a major kitchen and restaurant refit and the Polish Hearth now looks forward to a bright future, one in which a number of SSEES alumni are actively involved and still keep the home fires burning. There seems no better place to hold our dinner.

**Early booking is advisable. Booking date to be notified at the end of September.**

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*Images overleaf: staircase at Ognisko Polskie and Ognisko banqueting room.*

# Grand Alumni **Centenary Dinner**



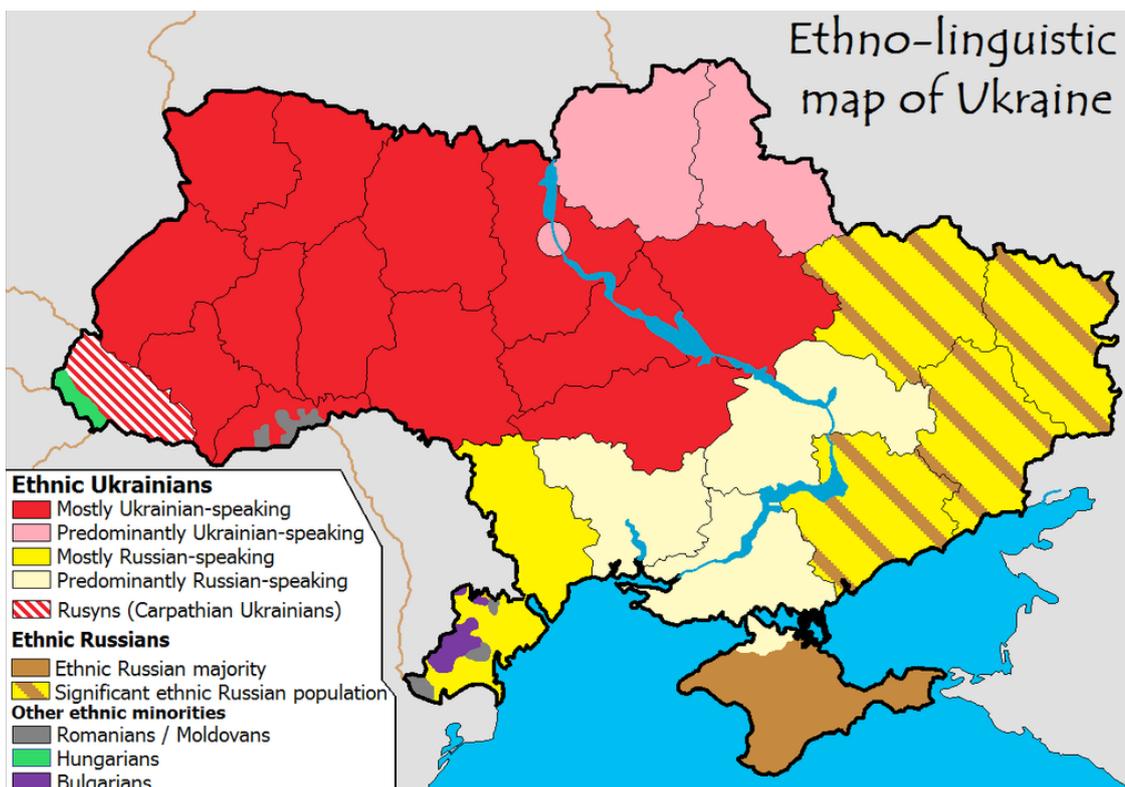
# Alumni Events Programme

## Interpreting Putin's Ukraine Policy: a Date for Your Diary, March 19th 2015

Although the Grand Dinner in June is the major alumni event of 2015, it is not the only special event in our centenary year. We are delighted to announce that Dr Pete Duncan, a man of many parts (not least chairing the SSEES Centennial Committee and arranging highly successful careers evenings for SSEES students, as well as teaching and caring for his students), has agreed to give a talk on an aspect of the key issue affecting the SSEES part of the world, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. There is much speculation about Putin's Ukraine policy, and this will be an opportunity to hear the views of someone both knowledgeable and thoughtful.



Pete is certainly one of the SSEES academic staff most likely to be known and appreciated by you, the alumni. So do make a note of the date and come to the talk, meet fellow alumni and enjoy the usual drinks and refreshment afterwards. Booking details will be circulated in late February or early March 2015.



# Cinnamon Vodka and Powdered Unicorn Horn: Alumni Event April 2014

**Katja Richters writes:**

**I always enjoy attending SSEES alumni events, but the title of Clare Griffin's talk seemed particularly inviting.**

It promised to take me – and other alumni – on an entertaining excursion into a part of Russian history about which I had no idea, but found exotic and interesting. As I later discovered, the talk was based on Clare's post-doctoral project which analyses European trade in the 17th century by looking at what the Russian court at that time bought and prescribed for various ailments. The substances and combinations we heard about were imported from all over the world and seemed even more extraordinary than I had initially expected. Most people in the audience agreed that they were unlikely to heal the conditions they were prescribed for and some sounded quite outlandish indeed!

I personally found the part about unicorns and the healing powers ascribed to their horns particularly fascinating. Clare explained that, at some point, people found it somewhat strange that nobody had ever seen a live unicorn although drawings of them were widely available. They were, however, reassured by the assertion that unicorns were very, very shy and that it was therefore difficult to catch a glimpse of them. In order to come by their horns, the Russian court imported narwhal tusks from Denmark and other Nordic countries, probably at great cost due to their rarity.

The evening finished, as always, with drinks, eats and good company in the Masaryk room. The beverages available were less exotic than the ones we had heard about during the

presentation, but if I remember correctly, there was talk about making cinnamon or berry-flavoured vodka at home. With a bit of luck we might be able to taste some at the next event.



*Image above of Clare Griffin*



*Image above Woodcut illustration from the book The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents by Edward Topsell (1658). Author Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries*

## Pictures from the Production



*Image above: The Snow Maiden with Her Entourage*

**Photos: 2014**

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*Lower image: shows Andy Doll with his arms in a Y shape, while Jamie Bennett and Oliver Jones do high kicks at the far left.*



## Maidens and Mugs

### SSEES students embrace The Snow Maiden

There can be no finer example of the benefit SSEES and UCL respectively gain from the merging of the two institutions than the production by UCL Opera in March of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden*. As I learnt when I interviewed Ed Cottell, Andy Doll, Jamie Bennett, Oliver Jones, Emily Niner and Jessica Wong, close on a dozen SSEES students had been involved, one as co-leader of the orchestra (Sam Kopelman) and the rest as chorus members and in various smaller individual roles – professional singers sang the main roles.

The performance was a terrific achievement, with quality singing from soloists down to the chorus. The production was visually striking and the acting highly competent; all the more impressive in that they had only been rehearsing since the beginning of that term. As one critic put it, this was a joyous evening of music-making to melt the iciest of hearts.

For the SSEES students, all active members of UCLU Music Society, it was a bonus to be doing a Russian opera. They had all been involved in choral singing at school or in local choral societies before university, and in some cases had considered studying music. For Ed Cottell, Vice President of UCL Opera, his choice of university was even dictated by the presence of an opera society and the absence of a music department. As others agreed, music students would otherwise have taken all the choice roles. Inevitably, the time the cast spent together has forged close friendships with each other and with other UCL students – friendships that will certainly last well beyond university.

### Centenary Mug

The Alumni Association has produced a centenary mug, designed by Sarah Klemz, which features sketches of Senate House and the current SSEES building within Roman and Arabic numerals for one hundred (see the mock-up of the design below). Grateful thanks are due to alumna Matilda Moreton for her invaluable help in the production of the mug. It will be on sale at the East European Food and Drink event on December 4th and events in the centenary year.

**Price £8.50**, to include protective packaging in a bubble-wrap bag. Postage and packing (for those who can't get to events or to SSEES) will be additional.



MUGS AND  
MAIDENS

And finally a bit of this and that...



ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

In aiming to keep the centenary dinner affordable, we are delighted to receive contributions from some of you. We are still seeking sponsorship for the dinner, in particular prizes for the raffle and 'Know your SSEES' quiz to be held at the dinner. If you think you can help, please contact Lisa Walters ([l.walters@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:l.walters@ucl.ac.uk)).

SSEES is very grateful to those alumni who have offered or arranged internships for students. We need more since, in an increasingly competitive world, internships offer graduates the kind of work experience that employers seek and which often leads to full time employment. If you are an employer, or you work for an organisation that would be interested in offering internship opportunities for SSEES students, we would like to hear from you. Contact Dr Peter Duncan ([p.duncan@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:p.duncan@ucl.ac.uk)).

Please don't forget to tell the Development Office if you change your contact details.

Committee Members: **Faith Wigzell** (President), **Angela Garrett** (Vice-President), **Clare Griffin**, **Kathryn Larin**, **Paulina Polak** and last but not least **Lisa Walters**, our invaluable admin support person.

[www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/alumni)