



UCL

# UnSSEESing

The Alumni magazine  
from SSEES

*Featuring...*

*The British Library, the first  
SSEES graduates, Alumni  
events and... Brexit!*

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## Welcome



*In this issue we celebrate the incredible careers of women graduates from SSEES from the British Library to the Foreign Office. Lesley Pitman, traces this history right back to the first graduates from SSEES. We also focus on the inspiring work of current PhD student, Alexandra Bulat around the EU referendum.*

**Hannah Connell**

*Statue of Isaac Newton (1995) by Eduardo Paolozzi (1924– 2005).  
The statue is in the piazza of the British Library in Euston Road.  
Image credit: Copyright © UCL Digital Media*

# SSEES

## Interview with **Dr Katie McElvanney**, Slavonic and East European Curator at the British Library

*Dr Katie McElvanney completed her MA at SSEES in September 2012.*

### **What did you study at SSEES, and can you tell us a bit about what your time was like here?**

The title of my MA was the somewhat ambiguous 'Identity, Culture and Power'. In reality, it was possible to more or less mix and match from any of the modules on offer. Some of the modules I took included: Russian Foreign Policy, Advanced Russian Language, and Ethno-political Conflict in Central and Eastern Europe. My dissertation focused on women in Russian political youth organisations. One particular highlight was our Russian class, taught by the wonderful Dr Svetlana McMillin!

I have very fond memories of my time at SSEES. I moved from Leeds (where I did my BA) to London to start the MA and loved how international and friendly the programme was. There were also plenty of events and groups, such as the long-running Post-Soviet Press Group. I'm still good friends with a number of people I met during that year today and it's great to see the varied and exciting things our cohort are doing now, from translating and advising for film and TV to working for the OSCE.

*Photographer: Paardad Chamsaz*



### **What first brought you to UCL and to SSEES for graduate studies?**

I was studying Russian and History at the University of Leeds and was keen to do an MA in a related field. SSEES's reputation as a leading institution for teaching on Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, as well as its library and range of MA modules offered, were some of the reasons I applied.

### **Has your career path changed since completing your MA at SSEES?**

Yes, quite a bit! Half-way through my MA at SSEES I got a job with a small due diligence company as a Russian analyst (thanks to an advert on the SSEES careers web page). I worked there for just over two years, during which time the company was acquired by a large international firm and the team expanded considerably. In fact, several SSEES alumni have worked there in the last eight years or so! By the time I left I was a senior associate and responsible for

managing one of the company's largest financial services accounts. While I enjoyed many aspects of my role, particularly the opportunity to use my Russian language and research skills, and knowledge of East European politics and history, I was keen to change direction and was looking at how I could move into the heritage sector.

In 2014, an opportunity arose to do an AHRC funded collaborative PhD in Russian History with Queen Mary University of London and the British Library. I was extremely fortunate to be awarded the studentship. As a collaborative doctoral researcher at the British Library, I was part of the curatorial team for the Library's 2017 centenary exhibition Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths. I also worked extensively with the H. W. Williams Papers, a collection of documents relating to the White movement in the Russian Civil War and in emigration, and began an ongoing project to catalogue the archive. My doctoral research focused on women and journalism during the Russian Revolution and Civil War.

I knew from the early stages of my PhD that I wanted to pursue a career in the heritage sector rather than academia and working at the British Library as part of my project gave me invaluable experience and insight in this area. In the fourth year of my PhD, I spent three months doing research cover for my supervisor and was responsible for the day-to-day management and custodianship of the Library's Russian Collections. Following this, I spent a year working at the Modern and Medieval Languages Library at the University of Cambridge as a Slavonic specialist. In June 2019, I began my current role as a Slavonic and East European Curator at the British Library.

### **Did your time at SSEES influence the career choices you have made?**

My time at SSEES definitely made me realise that I wanted to pursue a career that would allow me to use my Russian language skills. Studying Russian politics at the time also led me to initially look for a job in this area. Later on, when I began my PhD, it was lovely to go back to SSEES (for seminars or to use the library) and to see familiar faces. I still regularly attend events at SSEES – particularly handy that it's just down the road from the British Library!

## **SSEES ALUMNI EVENTS**



**14 November 2019 – Annual East European Food and Drink Event.**

Buy your ticket via Eventbrite now! <https://alumni-eefd.eventbrite.co.uk>

## Tracing the History of the first SSEES graduates

By **Lesley Pitman**



There has always been something important missing from the early history of SSEES, well documented though it has been, and that is the voice of the students. In his epilogue to the revised edition of the history of the school, Roger Bartlett asks: “And what of the students, wonderful, infuriating, encouraging, frustrating, inspiring; teen-age or mature, British and foreign, undergraduate and postgraduate?”

The names of a few early SSEES graduates are well-known and justly celebrated, such as Clare Hollingworth, the war correspondent; Professor Isabel de Madariaga, the historian of Catherine the Great; Dame Elizabeth Hill, awarded her undergraduate degree in Russian in 1924 and her PhD in 1930, and best known for her leading role at the Joint Services School for Linguists.

However, little has been written about the very first students, those brave enough to join a new institution set up in the middle of the First World War.

The School’s published calendars list their names and degrees but no more than that. While the School taught large numbers of students from the very beginning, most were there for short intensive courses of language training. Only a select few took a degree. In total, 37 names are listed for the period between 1920-21, when the first students graduated, and 1939-40. Just 16 of these students were undergraduates; the rest were PhD students, with a smattering of MAs, awarded in History. In setting out to discover more about them, some interesting stories have been uncovered.

There are brief pen portraits of some students in Dame Elizabeth Hill's memoirs, but that is only a part of the story. Phyllis Kemp and Joshua Cooper studied alongside Elizabeth Hill. Graduating with a first in Russian in 1924, Joshua was, according to Elizabeth Hill, "lovely, well meaning, clever but absent minded", after graduation he "disappeared into the Foreign Office". In recent years his lengthy career as one of the UK's great cryptographers, has received the attention and the honours it deserves. Phyllis Kemp, the third and final student in Elizabeth Hill's cohort graduated with the first degree in Serbo-Croat. The National Archives hold 300 pages of security files on her, and Radio 3 recently broadcast a programme dedicated to her influence on one of the UK's most well-known composers. She is the first of the many SSEES staff and students to have been accused of being communists. In her case there is little doubt. Elizabeth Hill called her "a remarkable young woman" but always something of a rebel", with "a cruel streak" She attracted scandal throughout her life, but also produced academic work which is still cited today. The first PhD was awarded in 1925, in economics, to Margaret Miller.

She became both an academic and a campaigner, at considerable personal cost, for the right of women to keep their jobs after they married.

Before Elizabeth Hill and her cohort, the third and fourth students to graduate were Harold T. Cheshire and Walter A. Morison, both in Russian. Both went on to publish academic work. Morison published translations of Russian and Serbian poetry and prose, and Cheshire wrote on the Ottoman and Russian Empires. Their works can be found in libraries today. Mary Leben and Cecily Ryder were the first students to graduate from the School. Both were students of King's College for Women, received their degrees in Russian in 1920. They could not have been more different in their backgrounds. Mary (born Marja) Leben had come to the School from Łódź via Berlin, whereas Cecily Ryder had been educated at home by governesses and was related to the Earl of Harrowby. There is much still to tell about the first cohort of students to graduate from SSEES, and the students who succeeded them.

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## SSEES ALUMNI EVENTS

The SSEES Alumni Committee will be organizing an **Anniversary Celebration Dinner** – details coming soon!

## Researching the EU referendum – **Alexandra Bulat**

*Alexandra Bulat is a current PhD student at SSEES*

I'm Alexandra, a PhD student at SSEES and a migrants' rights activist and project manager in *the3million*. I'm currently writing up my PhD thesis, a qualitative study of attitudes towards EU migrants in Tendring and Newham. I've worked throughout my studies on different projects (mainly on migration) and have always sought to engage with the public on this important topic.

A few months into the first year of my PhD, a three-month placement opportunity with the British Library caught my attention in one of the many newsletters I receive. It involved researching the EU referendum campaign through the British Library's ephemera collection and web archive resources. I spent the summer reading hundreds of sources and trying to answer this (seemingly) simple question: who spoke about EU migration and how?

Undertaking this British Library placement while a student at SSEES has been one of the best projects I have taken on. I could not believe how rewarding my results were. During my placement, I wrote research blog posts, reports and organised a roundtable bringing academics and library staff together to discuss how researchers can best use library collections. I then engaged the public with the research (and actual 2016 campaign materials) in various contexts: from the Bloomsbury Festival in 2017 to the LSE Library 'What does Brexit mean to you?' exhibition in 2018, and even a recent Brexit inspired local arts exhibition called 'Uncharted Territory' in my hometown, Cambridge. And yes, I did use this research for one of my PhD chapters as well!

*Photographer: Marta Kotwas*



## SSEES EVENTS

On June 4th **Pete Duncan** and **Angela Garrett** hosted the first Alumni Afternoon Tea Party for this year's finalists to celebrate the end of their exams, wish them well for the future and introduce them to the alumni association. We hope to make this afternoon tea an annual event!

## SSEES Alumni News

We wish to congratulate SSEES alumna, **Ms Deborah Bronnert CMG**, who has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Russian Federation.



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## SSEES – contact us

Please don't forget to tell the Development Office if you change your contact details:  
**<https://aoc.ucl.ac.uk/alumni/alumni-community>.**

If you have any questions about our activities or events, please contact **Claudia Roland**:  
**[ssees-events@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ssees-events@ucl.ac.uk), [Claudia.roland@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Claudia.roland@ucl.ac.uk)**

Join our SSEES Alumni association facebook group – we have over 350 members.  
Don't miss out on exclusive news and events.

SSEES has a new LinkedIn page, make sure to list UCL SSEES as your academic institution:  
**<http://www.linkedin.com/school/19211654/admin/>**

Please Follow us and contact Claudia if you would like to share or post a job opportunity.

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