



UNSSSEESING
THE
ALUMNI
MAGAZINE
FROM SSEES
FEATURING
...UNICORNS,
PARTIES,
BORSHCH,
FACEBOOK
AND BOXES!

SEVENTH EDITION | SPRING 2014



Welcome to the seventh edition of *UnSSEESing*.

Over the past year the SSEES Alumni Association has spread its wings, thanks not least to new members of the committee who bring skills and expertise (notably in social media), as well as drive and energy. The latest addition is Dr Clare Griffin who introduces herself here:

‘I arrived at SSEES in 2007 from Cambridgeshire where, according to local lore, the wind that blows across the Fens comes straight from the Ural Mountains. Inspired by that wind, I spent several years at SSEES studying Russian history and language, before eventually having to leave for a real job. Returning to the Fens, I am currently working on a project concerning medical drugs traded (by ship, not wind) in and out of Russia in the early modern period.’

Clare (with Paulina) has been particularly involved in planning and implementing the new SSEES Alumni Facebook page. More details of this and other plans and activities form the main focus of this issue.

Faith Wigzell

SPRING 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

Unicorns at SSEES?

Next Event: April 3rd at 6pm in Room 432

EARLY MODERN MEDICINE

Come along and hear Committee member Dr Clare Griffin's fascinating talk: 'Cinnamon Vodka and Powdered Unicorn Horn: Exotic and Occult Substances in Seventeenth-Century Russian Medicine'. This will be followed by the usual convivial party with food and wine (but no cinnamon vodka or unicorn horn).

In case you feel bemused by the title, Clare explains that unsurprisingly early modern medicine differed from its twenty-first century equivalent. At the Russian court a courtier might be prescribed European plants like rosemary, Eastern spices like cinnamon, American exotics like sarsaparilla, as well as occult substances like unicorn horn. Although to the modern mind these items seem unrelated, to an early modern medical practitioner or patient their use in medicine was entirely reasonable. The talk will look at the medicines used at court and the practitioners, ideas, and trade networks that brought together these various, varied objects. Watch your inbox for booking details. We look forward to seeing you there.

Image, below left: Woodcut illustration from the book *The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* by Edward Topsell, 1658. Author Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. Image, below right: Nutmeg *Myristica fragrans* 1897. Author: Franz Eugen Köhler, Köhler's Medizinal-Pflanzen.



SSEES 1915–2015

Celebrations are planned...!

CELEBRATION TIME!

Outstripping the significance of any future events are the centennial celebrations.

SSEES will be celebrating its centenary throughout the calendar year of 2015. Large numbers of events are planned and many will be of interest to alumni. The grand event being planned by the Alumni Association Committee is an alumni dinner. It will, we hope, be an elegant occasion with an East European flavour. Watch this space.

Events planned for SSEES include a film festival, a major conference, a royal visit, chamber music concerts as well as centenary items for sale like mugs and even the revival of the old SSEES scarf. There will be much more precise detail in the next newsletter. SSEES is very keen that the wider community, in particular alumni, should be involved.



Alumni activities and plans

Facebook, galleries and the Old Vic.



a) For Facebookers, SSEES Alumni Association now has an official presence there: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/183003575236113/> The group is open to all SSEES alumni, staff past and present, and current students; just go to the group page and click 'join group'. All SSEES Alumni events will be posted there, as will a range of other SSEES events, and SSEES-area events taking place elsewhere.

b) Activities over the past 3-4 months include a special visit in December to see Utopia Ltd at Grad (Gallery for Russian Arts and Design), showing model maker Henry Milner's wonderful three-dimensional re-imaginings of pioneering geometric designs by the early Soviet Constructivists. Henry Milner was on hand to explain the background to his work and the exhibition.



c) February saw an outing to the Old Vic to see 'Fortune's Fool', an adaptation of an early play by Turgenev at the Old Vic in February.

d) In April a group will be going to a Russian-language production of Chekhov's 'Three Sisters'.

We are always on the lookout for other possible outings. Do let us know if you know of any appropriate shows, events or exhibitions related to our area. Despite all the outings so far being to Russian cultural events, we are not *velikorusskie shovinisty* (Great Russian chauvinists), and would welcome forays into other areas. Email Lisa Walters with any ideas (l.walters@ucl.ac.uk).

Image, top: Reconstruction of the Tatlin Tower by Henry Milner. Photo courtesy GRAD: Gallery for Russian Arts and Design

Image, below: Old Vic 'Fortune's Fool': Richard McCabe as Tropatchev and Alexander Vlahos as Veletsky. Photo by Sheila Burnett.

Parties Past and Future

Cocktails and Borshch...



Natalie at the party



Food at the party

Last October, SSEES Alumni Association experimented with a different kind of event: an East European Food and Drink Evening'. So successful was this that there'll be another next autumn. Natalie Moss (Russian and German 2002) was there:

'The email about the event evoked memories among those of us who studied Russian at SSEES. Days of eating borshch, apple sharlotka and homemade pilaf with previously unheard of Central Asian spices at the dacha, as well as discovering *khachapuri* and Georgian red wine at restaurants with amazing carved wooden decorations. Other memories were more mixed – being served cocktails of *shampanskoe* mixed with beer and my personal favourite of being presented with a bowl of steaming hot, boiled muesli with the nuts carefully picked out and presented separately in an eggcup by a proud khoziaika (this was after an ultimately futile attempt to avoid being overfed by claiming that we 'normally only ate muesli at breakfast')'.

Happily the food at the SSEES event fell into the former category – we were presented with an impressive array of East European dishes, some kindly donated by Lituanica and others made by alumni – salads, blini with red caviar, roll-mops, *burek*, various smoked sausages and cured meats, black bread and an entire plait of cheese. There were also some great desserts, including a delicious apple strudel. We were also treated to some lovely *shampanskoe* from Solvalub which was much tastier than the Soviet champagne I remembered drinking in Russia, which only ranged from brut (sweet) through half sweet (very sweet) to sweet (syrup).

It was great to see so many people there, catch up with former classmates and lecturers as well as to meet people from different years and hear their stories of travels around Eastern Europe. There were quite a few who hadn't gone to a previous event, indicating the appeal food has! It was a lot of fun and I can't wait to go to the next one.'

The next party will be held in the autumn of 2014.

SSEES alumnus gets into boxes

Starting up a start-up



Ben Prouty

SSEES alumni work in all kinds of spheres, of which entrepreneurship is one. Ben Prouty (Economics and Business with East European Studies 2002-2005) has been part of two entrepreneurial businesses. Ben says:

'If, like me, you have any inkling that the corporate life is not for you, I strongly suggest experiencing a start-up at a young age. That way you can get a taste for what it is like, without the pressures or financial obligations of your own start-up.'



Ben immersed in his new role!

Initially he worked at Streetcar, the UK's first pay-as-you-go car-sharing scheme spanning London, helping it grow to over 1,000 cars, placed in private driveways, multi-storey car parks and council car club bays. In 2010 when Streetcar was sold to rivals Zipcar (and then to Avis), Ben studied for an MBA before joining Streetcar founder Brett Akker for his second project, LoveSpace, which aims to disrupt the self-storage industry in the same way that Streetcar did the car rental industry. LoveSpace provides storage by the box, by the month, with collection and delivery to any UK address. Following a soft launch over the summer where LoveSpace proved particularly appealing to students needing storage over the vacation, the company has gone from strength to strength, with their new website operating from November. <https://lovespace.co.uk>

Ben's primary role is the development of new partnerships and he says that taking a new business from inception to a point where it is established takes real resilience; 'I'm really enjoying the challenges that starting a new business entails and I look forward to building and growing more start-ups in the future. There are always new and better ways of doing things and I'm always on the look-out for ideas that could translate to successful new businesses.'

LOVESPACE



And finally a bit of this and that...



ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

SSEES Alumni Association now has its own bank account. The aim is to get enough of a float, that when we organise an outing to a paid event, one of the Committee members doesn't have to pay out of his or her own pocket. It also offers the opportunity for alumni to pay for tickets to events by bank transfer, thus saving the Eventbrite fee.

In an increasingly competitive world, we have found that internships offer graduates the kind of work experience that employers seek and which often lead 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).

We would also like to thank both those alumni who have given their time to help out at alumni careers events for current students, and those who have nobly dipped into their pockets to help today's students with bursaries.

Please don't forget to tell the Development Office if you change your contact details. Equally, if you know fellow alumni who would like to receive UnSSEESing but currently do not, please tell them to register at www.ucl.ac.uk/alumni/update-your-details.

If you are interested in current events in Ukraine, and want more in-depth information, try consulting SSEES Library's very useful webpage of resources: www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/library/directory/ukraine2014.htm

Committee Members:

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

To contact the SSEES Alumni Association, please email Lisa (l.walters@ucl.ac.uk)

www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/alumni