

Mike Pushkin



I arrived at CREES as a postgraduate in autumn 1966. The first person I met in the old Baykov Library on the first floor of the Ashley Building was fellow-postgrad Greg Andrusz. I recall thinking how refreshing it was that CREES had people working on such topics as the sociology of housing in the USSR – the first of many surprises induced by the breadth of the CREES engagement with its subject area. My second postgraduate year was spent at the History Faculty of Moscow University (MGU). On my return I left CREES to begin my 35 years as a lecturer in the Department of Russian Language and Literature. The rigour of the CREES approach to the handling of evidence left its mark, though, in the heavily quantitative aspects of my work on social mobility in the nineteenth-century Russian universities. My CREES colleagues, both academic and administrative, have shown me nothing but warmth and friendliness throughout my career, and I felt a comforting sense of homecoming when I completed my career at Birmingham University by teaching part-time at CREES for several years after my early retirement.

Over the years CREES and the Russian Department collaborated to an extent which may surprise more recent arrivals. There were a number of shared posts. Liz Mackie, who has lived in Sydney since the early 1980s, taught Soviet literature in the Department and sociology of literature at CREES. She was rightly renowned for her talent as a cartoonist. Especially memorable were her cartoon during the 1968 sit-in, with the university depicted as a VC10 airliner, with its constituent groupings of senior figures around the VC, academic staff and students portrayed as passengers seated in separate classes in different parts of the plane; and another one of the early CREES triumvirate of Bob Davies, Bob Smith and Geoff Barker (who had earlier interviewed me together for postgraduate admission).

Liz was succeeded in the early 1970s by the internationally respected translator, the late Michael Glenny, the first English translator of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914*. He galvanised the student body into Russian drama activities. These included an open-air production of Act 2 of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in the back garden of the ground-floor flat at 8, Wake Green Road, Moseley, which he had inherited from Liz Mackie along with her teaching post. He even engaged a professional director (Faynia Williams). The cast included Hugh Jenkins as the guitar-strumming Yepikhodov. With talcum powder on my hair I played the aged retainer Firs, a real-life role I have made my own over the years.

Another shared post was that of David Adshead, who was responsible, together with Mike Berry, for ensuring the exceptional quality of Russian language teaching for CREES undergraduates and especially postgraduates. Dave too returned to teach at CREES for some years at the end of his career. In the 1970s Russian Department and CREES staff co-operated on a major research project, the Russian Social Science Language Project, which used word counts among other techniques in those early days before the advent of computerised corpus linguistics. In that decade the Russian Department also initiated a series of conferences for teachers and sixth-form students of Russian, an idea subsequently developed further by CREES.

The two departments often shared undergraduate teaching and programmes. For many years Department students benefited from Maureen Perrie's Russian history teaching on their programme, and they were increasingly given the opportunity to choose from a wide range of CREES social science options. After the closure of the Russian Department in 2003, the Russian undergraduate programme was transferred to CREES. By a delicious irony of history, recent CREES language and literature staff, now transferred to the Department of Modern Languages, are housed in the very same Ashley Building where CREES first embarked on its illustrious half-century.

In 1990 I renewed my contacts with MGU as the Russian Department's Year Abroad Tutor. For most of that decade the MGU Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies (FIYaR), headed by its founding Dean (1988) Professor Svetlana Ter-Minasova, put on one-term Russian language courses in Moscow for our students. In 2002 she was awarded a Birmingham University honorary doctorate and was greatly impressed by her visit to CREES during her stay. Some years later FIYaR sent three lecturers and a cameraman to film interviews with CREES staff and students for inclusion in the DVD attached to their latest English-teaching text-book. Professor Ter-Minasova later invited me to attend the celebrations in November 2008 marking the 20th anniversary of the founding of FIYaR.

She recently invited me to participate in her literature panel at the 2013 'International Likhachev Readings' conference (16-17 May in St Petersburg). As a CREES postgrad in spring 1967 I had posted on the CREES *stengazeta* a big display about the young Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky. In latter years I have renewed my interest in his work, meeting and interviewing him fairly often in Moscow and London. My paper at the 'Likhachev Readings' was devoted to Voznesensky, who died in May 2010. Thus my early years in CREES have finally been put to some use, four-and-a-half decades later.

Meanwhile in January 2005, again on Professor Ter-Minasova's invitation, I attended the jubilee celebrations (held in MGU, the Bolshoi Theatre and the Kremlin) to mark the 250th anniversary of the founding of Moscow State University. While there I was approached by a number of scholars from all over the world (including USA, Japan, Sweden) when they saw I was from CREES. They passed comments such as 'How lucky you are to be able to work in such a tip-top unit, with people like Robert Davies and others'. I have indeed been lucky.

Mike Pushkin
Honorary Senior Research Fellow, CREES
Visiting Tutor in Russian, Birmingham Conservatoire