

# *East-West Review*

*Journal of the Great Britain-Russia Society*  
*Spring/Summer 2020*



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# East–West Review

The journal of the Great Britain–Russia Society, registered charity no. 1148802

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The Great Britain–Russia Society's aim is to advance the education of the public in particular but not exclusively in the following: the historical background, culture, the economic, political, social conditions and trends in the Russian Federation and its near neighbours. This is done through lectures and members' meetings and this journal, as well as by encouraging as wide a range of people as possible to become members.

Prospective member subscribers should send a cheque for £20 in favour of Great Britain–Russia Society to the Hon. Treasurer at the address above. By standing order, however, membership costs only £17; standing order forms can be provided by the Hon. Treasurer on request.

Back numbers of *East–West Review* published from Spring 2014 onwards and offprints of most articles published in Volume 7 (2008) and later can be obtained from the Editor; contact details as above.

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### Cover picture

Street art seen in September 2003 on a vacant lot almost opposite the Bulgakov House (now a museum) in Andriyivskij Uzviz, Kiev. The artist may be ‘Honoured Artist of Ukraine’ Artemiy Prysyazhnyuk, 1947-2017.

This mural features a memorable scene from Bulgakov’s novel ‘Master and Margarita’ in which a naked Margarita hosts Woland’s Grand Spring Ball.

See also the illustrations on pages 31-33 to Roger Cockrell’s review of ‘Mikhail Bulgakov: The Life and Times’ by Marietta Chudakova (tr. by Huw Davies).

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## List of Contributors

**Ksenia Afonina** is an independent curator and researcher into the art of World War II.

**A E Bevan** published his account of a family camping holiday in the Soviet Union in *Yorkshire Digest*, an informal collection of writing, some authors of which also had books in print with the small printer/publisher, The Advertiser Press Limited. Bevan appeared on the publisher's list as Editor of the 1968 edition of *Smith's Taxation*.

**Roger Cockrell** graduated from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, in 1965 and, after a year at Moscow University as a British Council scholar, was appointed as a lecturer in Russian at the University of Exeter. In 1980 he was appointed Head of the Exeter Russian Department. He continued in that post for 24 years. He features prominently on the Alma Classics list as translator of works by Bulgakov, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Gogol and Tolstoy, and is the author of several other books.

**Martin Dewhirst** had a long and distinguished career as a lecturer in Russian in the Department of Slavonic Studies at the University of Glasgow, where he is now an Honorary Fellow. He has written and published widely on contemporary Russian literature and the arts, and especially on cinema.

**Thom Dinsdale** is a writer and international advertising professional based in Amsterdam. His writing and work take him to Russia and beyond.

**Barbara Emerson** is Vice Chairman of the Great Britain-Russia Society. She read PPE at Oxford and is the author of three biographies.

**Vera Liber** is a freelance writer and translator.

**Martin McCauley** was formerly Senior Lecturer in Politics and Chair of the Social Sciences Department at University College, London.

**James Muckle** trained as an RAF translator; he later read Russian at Peterhouse, Cambridge; his doctoral thesis at Leeds was on N S Leskov. He taught Russian in schools, was a teacher-trainer, and was active in the Association of Teachers of Russian. He has made a special study of education in Russia and has published a history of the Russian language in Britain.

**Kate Pursglove** read Modern History at Oxford, and has taught Russian history. She has visited the USSR and Russia with her husband, who taught and now translates Russian Literature. She enjoys reading Russian novels and poetry, and writes, publishes and reviews poetry.

**Andrew Sheppard** is the Editor of *East-West Review*.

**Tony Wolstenholme** Captain, RN (R'td), is a former Head of Naval Technical Intelligence in the Ministry of Defence.

**Since** the New Year issue of *East-West Review* went to press, we have been much saddened to learn of the deaths of two former contributors.

**Barbara Forrai** gave us a colourfully illustrated account of her 2014 Expedition to the White Sea in our Winter 2014 issue. She described that adventure as 'the last trip on my Arctic Wish List'. She was nothing if not an intrepid traveller (and was many other things too), for at the time of her death on 4<sup>th</sup> March she was aged 93.

**John Dewey** provided a series of articles about the poet Fyodor Tyutchev, liberally infused with sample poetry in Russian and in John's own translation to English. His last article, 'Four Funerals and a Tyutchev Poem', a moving piece even if read without knowledge of his death on 16<sup>th</sup> December, appeared in our New Year 2020 issue. His two books, *Mirror Of The Soul: A Life of the Poet Fyodor Tyutchev* and *Fyodor Tyutchev: Selected Poems*, are both out of print, but may be downloaded free of charge in e-book format on <http://www.tyutchev.org.uk/> His translation of and commentary and notes on Alexander Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* are also available at that web address.

Offprints of the *East-West Review* articles by both Barbara and John can be obtained from the Editor on request. Print copies of the back numbers concerned are also available.

## A Story of Life, Art and Friendship

In memory of Pavel Ivanovich Afonin (1920–2011)

By Ksenia Afonina

*This story is a small tribute to my grandfather, Pavel Ivanovich Afonin, his family and friends, and all people of his generation who advocated important human qualities of integrity, loyalty, courage, endurance, perseverance, friendship, humour and creativity. I believe there is still much for us to learn from them and our shared past.*

June 2020 marks the centenary of the birth of my grandfather, Pavel Ivanovich Afonin, although the exact date of his birth even his mother could not remember. He was the 13<sup>th</sup> child in a peasant family from central Russia – an unlucky number in a part of the world where many people are superstitious. Several of her children had died in infancy, so his mother had little hope of seeing her youngest offspring grow to adulthood. However, Pavel Ivanovich would indeed grow up to live through and take an active part in some of the most horrific and extraordinary events in Russian history – collectivization, purges, war – to witness Perestroika and the dawn of Putin's Russia. What kept him going was stamina, self-discipline, a sense of humour, and art.

He was born in the small village of Novy Mochim in the Penza region. His father, Ivan Ignatievich Afonin, kept a farm, on which his children helped out as they could. From the age of five, Pavel would sit on horseback as his elder brothers and sisters ploughed the fields. It was at that same age that he discovered his passion for drawing. His relatives recalled that he would draw with anything he could find, from chalk to a piece of coal. Even then, he had a good eye for detail.

When collectivization began, Pavel was still a young boy, but he remembered vividly the time when armed representatives of the new Soviet state came to appropriate all the family's cattle and equipment, and how his father was arrested on charges of espionage – an absurd accusation given that he had never in his life left the village. While he was being escorted to the regional centre he managed to escape and get to Tula, where an elder brother lived.

The brother, David, was also arrested and exiled to Siberia as the son of a 'kulak'. That was the term used for well-off peasants who worked their own land. David and his wife died in Siberia of typhus.

Soon, the rest of the family reunited in Tula and began a new life. At first they starved, and until his father found work Pavel had to beg to provide for the family. In his later years he still vividly remembered how he was once badly bitten by a guard dog at one of the private properties he entered, asking for food for his sick mother. His father was still in hiding at that time.

When Ivan Ignatievich emerged from hiding, it was difficult to find work and he had to accept a position as a groom and carpenter. Soon, however, he was fortunate to be employed as a guard at a bakery. That enabled him to feed his family. To help make ends meet, Pavel worked as a herdsman at ten years old.

His formal education in drawing and painting began in Donskoy. There he attended art classes under the supervision of the artist Nikolai Samokish, an acclaimed painter of battle scenes. He recommended that Pavel should try to enter the Academy of Arts. Encouraged by his brother Maxim, Pavel travelled to Moscow. When he arrived, however, the application process for the Academy was already closed and he was sent on to the Moscow Architectural Institute, where the entrance exams were still open. Pavel passed the drawing exam with the highest grade and was admitted. At 16 years old, he was the youngest in the class. It was there that he met his life-long friend Vladimir Atanov, with whom he was to share experiences of both art and war. Vladimir Atanov later became

a prominent watercolour painter, eventually heading the Department of Painting at the Architectural Institute. It was also at the Institute – at a dance – that Pavel met Antonina Grigoryeva, an art student, who later became his wife.

He had just finished his third year at university when in 1941 the Axis countries invaded the Soviet Union. He recalled Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June in minute detail. His brother Maxim travelled to Moscow to congratulate him on completing his



Top: Pavel at work in 1935.

Bottom: Self-portrait, 1942.



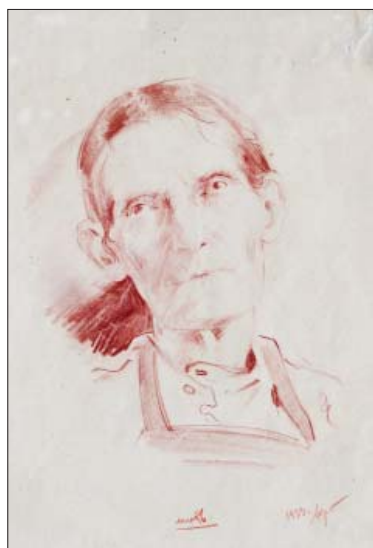
studies with the highest grades. Pavel lived in a student dormitory near Sokol. 'We had a lovely cup of tea with sugar cubes and both went to a local barber for a haircut. It was there we heard Vyacheslav Molotov's announcement that the Nazis had crossed the border of the Soviet Union and that we were now at war. Silence fell in the barber's shop – no one knew what to think or expect,' recalled Pavel in his late eighties.

The best students were given the task of protecting the most important architectural buildings and monuments in Moscow from Nazi air attacks. Pavel Afonin took part in camouflaging the building of the Bolshoi Theatre. That was a complicated job.

Soon afterwards, he was selected to join The Military Engineering Academy named after Kuibyshev, based in the town of Frunze in Kirgizia (now Bishkek), where officers of the engineering forces received their training.

After completing the course, Pavel was sent in 1942 to the Kalinin Front. First, however, he was granted a brief home leave, and during this short Moscow visit he proposed to Antonina Grigoryeva. On visiting her family in central Moscow, he learnt from her sister that she was about to marry a respected NKVD colonel.

He turned away



*Top: The Kuibyshev Military Engineering Academy, Frunze, 1941.*

*Centre: Antonina Gavrilovna, 1941.*

*Bottom left: David Khodzhaev, 1942.*

*Bottom right: Mother, 1943.*

heartbroken, but in leaving he walked the length of the long hallway of the communal flat on his hands. (The flat had formerly belonged to Antonina's family, but after the Revolution was shared with eight more families; eight to ten people to a room.) This antic attracted the attention of the bride-to-be and of her father, Gavriil Porfir'yevich, who was fond of Pavel. He called the young man aside, and told him not to give up and come back tomorrow.

On returning next day, Pavel brought a present, or a kind of dowry; of ten kilograms of butter, an extremely rare find in those days. That helped to melt the heart of Antonina's mother – and a marriage was agreed upon.

Antonina herself was given little say in the matter. She remembered thinking Pavel a pleasant boy who made her laugh, but she hardly knew him at all. As he was on his way to the front, she did not want to upset him; and she did prefer him to the other prospective husband, who struck her as 'boring and stuck up'.

Thus their union came about in the midst of war. It continued for more than 50 years until Antonina's death.

'From Frunze via Moscow we were sent to the Kalinin Front. When I arrived, I felt a distinctive stink of death and saw many white patches all

around.... It took me some minutes to realise that they were the bare feet of corpses.' Thus Sergeant Pavel Afonin described his arrival at the Kalinin front.

However, there was no time to dwell on the vagaries of life and death. In a month, he became commander of an engineer-sapper unit as part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Shock Army, which he led until the end of the war. All the while, he never stopped drawing. In the rare moments of rest between battles, he created more than 200 portraits of his brothers-in-arms and sketches of life at the front.

His unit took part in liberating Leningrad, Vyborg, Poland and Estonia, as well as the Berlin operation. In 1945, as commander of an engineer reconnaissance team, he was ordered to build a crossing over the Oder near Kienitz. This was in the midst of one of the hardest operations of the Second World War. Both sides suffered tremendous losses.

Pavel recalled: 'Several battalions were allocated for the construction of the crossing. We cut down pine trees 12 to 14 meters long to build dams as the ice on the river was thin and could not support tanks. The area was constantly bombed and strafed by Nazi scout planes and many of my comrades-in-arms never



reached the other side of the river.'

During the Vyborg offensive in 1944 Pavel suffered serious concussion.

'This was part of the operations of the Leningrad Front, we participated in the liberation of Gatchina, where at the last minute we managed to deactivate mines set in the Gatchina Palace, then fought to lift the Siege of Leningrad and stormed Vyborg. There, I was twice seriously wounded in the head by shrapnel. I survived thanks to a sudden ceasefire ordered by [Carl] Mannerheim [the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish defence forces (and Finland's President 1944-46)]. My comrade, the regimental doctor Vakhtang Kandalaki, saved my life by swiftly operating on me at that time. On the same day, 5-10 minutes prior to the second injury, I accidentally ran into my close friend Volodya Atanov. I remember how through the shell noise I suddenly heard his cry, "Pasha!"

Volodya was also known for his sense of humour, which he employed in the most unexpected circumstances. He recalled seeing Pavel walking towards him with blood streaming from a head wound over his uniform and medals, and thinking how he wished to capture the

*Top left: Aunt Elena, 1943; Top right: Girl at the Kalinin front line, 1943.  
Centre left: Sapper, 1944; Centre right: In the hospital, 1944.  
Bottom left: Hero of two World Wars, 1944; Bottom right: Old Soldier, 1944.*





*Left:*  
*Wounded Sailor, 1944.*  
*Centre:*  
*Vakhtang Kandelaki, 1945.*  
*Right:*  
*Father, 1964.*

scene in watercolours as it was so colourful. But when he shared his thoughts with his wounded friend, Pavel failed to find it amusing. After the war, they would exchange jokes about that meeting, and raise glasses to Mannerheim for saving Pavel's life.

Following the head injury, Pavel spent a month in a hospital near Vyborg, where he created a series of drawings. Then forward once again towards Berlin.

He was among the first to reach Berlin as part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Shock Army, commanded by Marshal Zhukov. For his war service, he received the Order of the Red Star, two Orders of the Great Patriotic War (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Class), and the Order for Services to the Motherland. His 18 medals, included one for defending Leningrad.



Vladimir Atanov and Pavel met three times during the war; a major coincidence, as they were assigned to different forces. Vladimir fought in the infantry, whilst Pavel was part of an engineer-sapper unit. Their special friendship continued until their last days.

After the end of the war, the two friends both returned to Moscow to finish their education in architecture. Pavel graduated with honours from the Moscow Institute of Architecture in 1948. Two years later he was again called up for military service, this time to rebuild Kaliningrad, which had been completely destroyed during the war. There he met Vladimir yet again and they worked together on rebuilding the city.

In the mid-1950s, Pavel and his family moved to Leningrad. There Antonina Gavrilovna found acclaim as a sculptor and painter. She worked as a drawing teacher and created public monuments to national heroes and political leaders in Kaliningrad and Leningrad.



*Left: In the Vyborg Hospital, 1944.*  
*Above: Pavel Afonin, 2010.*

While working at the Komarovskiy Military Engineering-Construction Institute in Leningrad, Pavel defended his doctoral thesis and headed the Department of Architecture over a period of 16 years. He continued teaching until he was more than 80 years old. Until 2008 he delivered lectures on architecture, served on the examination board, and of course continued drawing.

Vladimir Atanov returned to Moscow after Kaliningrad and continued his professional development at the Architectural Improvements Faculty of the Moscow Architectural Institute. He worked on creating some of the historic landmarks of the Russian capital, including the Palace of Soviets of the USSR. In 1979, he returned to the Moscow Architectural Institute as a Professor of Painting. From that moment on, watercolour painting and teaching became the main work of his life until his final days.

The two friends visited each other regularly throughout the rest of their lives. They loved to paint and joke, whilst recalling their shared experiences of war and peace. Professor Atanov died at the age of 90 in 2011, just a couple of months ahead of Professor Afonin. □





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## Great Britain–Russia Society

### Talks Programme: Spring-Summer 2020

In common with virtually all other organizations with a programme of public addresses, the Society unfortunately had to suspend its Talks Programme in mid-March, leaving the Winter Programme incomplete. We also had to cancel the Annual Members' Meeting.

A Spring-Summer programme was at that time in preparation. With the prospect of our most usual talks venues remaining closed and the government's social distancing restrictions continuing for some time, physical locations for the intended talks could not be booked, and dates were not finalized.

However, the Committee has explored the possibilities for continuing with the programme by electronic means and at the time of this issue of *East–West Review* going to press an initial four speakers have agreed to present their talks by way of the Zoom video-conferencing platform and discussions are under way regarding the dates for the talks.

Further information on the talks, their dates, and how members can book for and access the talks will be e-mailed soon to all members for whom the Society has an e-mail address.

For you to receive these notifications, it is essential that the Society has a current e-mail address for you. If you think it possible that we do not have such an address for you, please e-mail the Membership Secretary on [Membership@GBRussia.org](mailto:Membership@GBRussia.org) with an update.

[www.gbrussia.org](http://www.gbrussia.org)



*These gentlemen may look like the cast for a 1909 production of Gogol's 'Revizor' ('The Government Inspector'), but the photograph was labelled by its creator, Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky, 'Group of peasants from Korobovo'.*

*Vera Liber's review of the Kidd Pivot company's recent performance at Sadler's Wells of their dance theatre piece 'Revizor' can be found on pages 46-47.*