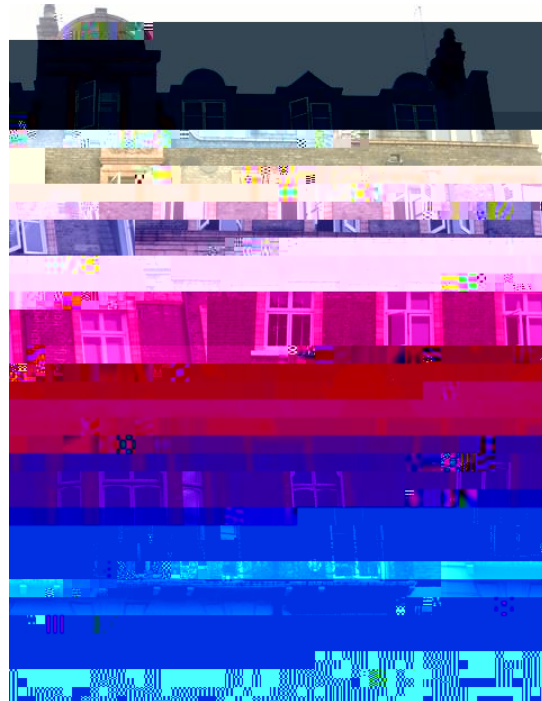


Post-War Courses at SSEES for Regular Officers



In view of the large numbers, separate premises were essential and the Admiralty leased no. 38 Russell Square from the British Museum. The building, on the corner of Russell Square and Montague Place is now the location of the registered offices. Expecting up to 150 students each year, they also leased a large house at no. 47 Russell Sq. from the Bedford Estate, and when numbers did not materialize relinquished the house at no. 38.



How many courses were there and how large were they?

Courses ran from A (1951-52) to T (1957-58). There were to be three courses a year starting in October, January and April. However, Course A began in October 1951, B in January 1952, but C which comprised Navy and Army servicemen only started in October 52. The aim was to train a maximum of 50 students on each course, of whom 25 would be coders (special) (Navy), something more than

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running the o *kursanty* that the reason was that Bolsover did not like Toms. Doubtless, the SSEES Director was looking forward to a quieter life after Hingley. Informants from post-Hingley courses do not mention Heads of Courses,

Hingley for his inability to keep his lectures to the prescribed length Hingley avoids giving his name.

Since teachers were not expected to fraternise with the students, sometimes little more than their names remain.^{viii} There was a degree of amusement to be had in names of some. Mr Tsarist gentleman given to staring vaguely out of the window, could not have been more different from his shoe-banging namesake, while Lazar Kaganovich was not on leave from the Politburo [Elliott and Shukman:158]. Amusement had to be gleaned where possible, so the relatively easy-going Mrs Cholerton, a Russian married to a distinguished Moscow correspondent of the *Telegraph*, is remembered by Will Ryan for her garbled versions of English idioms. The formidable Russian lady Mrs Harley rounded on

The teachers who stuck in the memory tended to be physically distinctive. One such was Madame Alkhazova, a lady of Wagnerian proportions, remembered by John Roberts as a lady from Moldova with elaborate gypsy-style earrings and lots of chins, and by Norman Bancroft for her booming voice, theatrical manner and almost apologetic manner. Another was Mie aw (Mietek) -Melechowicz (1922-91), a Pole with one eye, no hands and a missing forearm, lost either in a grenade accident or in an air crash. He had different hooks for different activities and so would deftly screw in a special one for holding chalk and writing on the board.

Clifford German
drink vodka from a small glass balanced
on his wooden elbow, and another and a [94].



There is one female instructor who is vividly remembered by the young men. This was the glamorous divorcée Kosara Gavrilovi (b. 1924), the daughter of the President of the Agrarian Party in pre-War Serbia. Described by one *kursant*

strong opinions
and a Cambridge degree in French and Russian. Rumoured to have boyfriends with sports cars, Will Ryan remembers that she once demonstrated ski turns standing on a desk. After a few years she moved to the US to take up a post at George Washington University, subsequently involving herself in Serb politics and literary translation [Cash and Gerrard: -

was the only one of the émigré teachers with whom Hingley socialized.

Other instructors turned up later at SSEES. Natasha Scorer, an excellent teacher who later married Peter Norman, taught on the *ab initio* Russian course 1958-59; Helen Rapp was as much praised by her *kursant* pupils as by SSEES undergraduates who lamented her departure in 1959 or 1960; Lyuba Volosse, blonde and pretty, as well as prone to blush [Elliott and Shukman:158]. Well over a decade later she was teaching conversational Russian at SSEES.

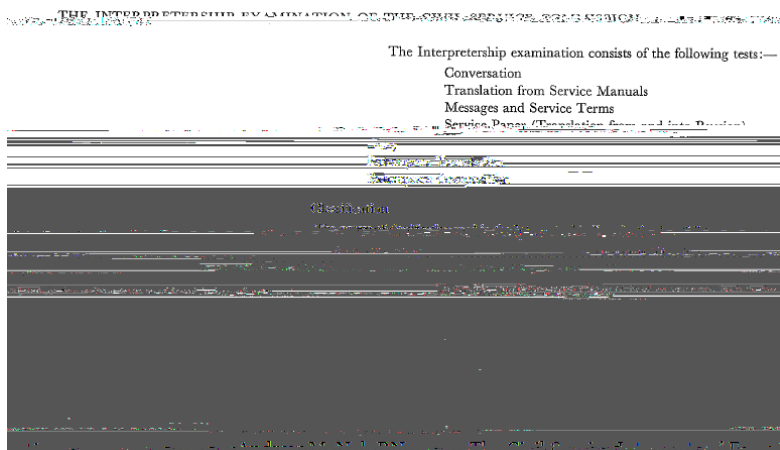
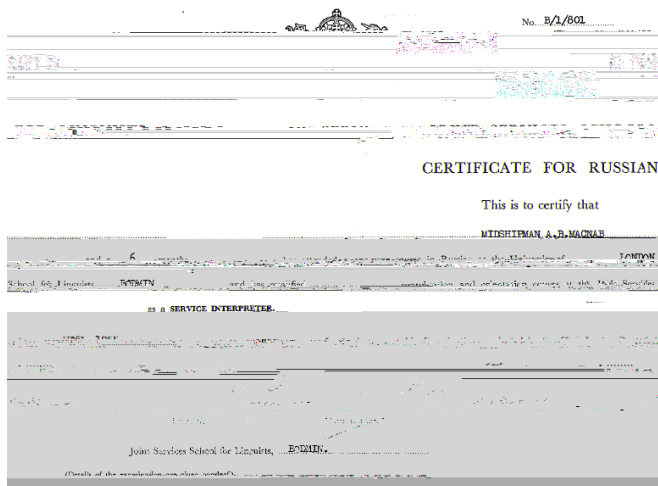
The JSSL team at no. 47 was completed by a caretaker, , and secretarial and administrative support, the latter including the brilliant Jeremy Wolfenden, depicted by

Sebastian Faulks in his *Three Fatal Englishmen*, who had been unable to take the Civil Service exam and returned to JSSL London [Hingley]. At one point (1953) a Mrs Southwood ran a small canteen in the basement of 47 Russell Square. The programme for the

smiling service, a genuine night-club atmosphere and finest Bloomsbury cuisine, all doubtless written with heavy irony.

Cambridge v London

The rivalry between Hingley and Liza (as she was known, though not to her face) has been well documented by Elliott and Shukman. Liza Hill had been involved in an advisory capacity on the setting-up of JSSL and had been teaching Russian courses to regular servicemen since the end of the War. Without her it seems doubtful that the JSSL project would have been so effective. It was she who saw clearly that about 50% of the trai



but Servicemen, and that every lesson was a parade
tremendous, with five or six hours of

152]. The pace was

Kursanty could not weaken since important tests were held every couple of weeks on a Friday and a major one at the end of each term. If you failed to reach the pass mark of 60%

Inevitably, some did not enjoy the experience, and all courses suffered some degree of attrition.



If some felt that there seemed no point to what they were doing, the courses themselves had inherent difficulties stemming from both syllabus and teaching staff. Some of the teachers spoke a type of Russian current before 1914, while the British /P AMCIDF114(che)3(rhe)3()h[(S)] TJ

lapses into political or personal anecdote. But there might be comment. Clifford German relates that -Melechowicz entered the room in March 1953, declaring has died aged 72 years, 2 months, four days - 72 y



Peter Oppenheimer (now an Oxford economics don) sang a Noel Coward song at the piano, and the whole thing was set in the jungle of a desert island... There was a plot of sorts, and the hero (Rick Pollock, later interpreter for Mrs Thatcher with Gorbachev who lived on the other side of the building. For details of an earlier pantomime, see Appendix I.

London beckoned to these lively and intelligent young men, who needed a release from the unrelenting pressure of the course. Norman Bancroft talks of debating current affairs, playing various sports including rowing on the Serpentine, -old provincial

Numbers in each intake dictated that three intakes annually of some fifty people, but there is little doubt that SSEES wanted to keep the JSSL separate from its own more lofty academic activities and the Admiralty for its part probably had no desire to have the motivation of its midshipmen undermined by contact with laid-back undergraduate wastrels. It is hard to tell how much contact there actually was. In the early years Professor Seton Watson gave lectures on Russian history over at SSEES; Ron Hingley says he learnt a great deal over the years from these lectures, so by implication they were repeated, probably over years rather than just one course (John Roberts who was on Course A recalls only one such lecture). Similarly in the early years *kursanty* made use of the University of London sports facilities, Norman Bancroft recollecting that in 1951-52 they played rugby and football on the University grounds at Motspur Park (now Fulham). However, Course C also played in Hyde Park, though this might have been because of its proximity.

Nonetheless there existed at one point some sense of attachment to SSEES; one RAF *kursant*, who was on the course in 1956 or 57 says that they owned SSEES scarves (black, gold and pale blue). He still owns his. That cohort at least must have been sufficiently aware of the college as an undergraduate institution to make the effort to visit the official suppliers and buy a scarf. Geoffrey Elliott on the last course in 1958 who was transferred to London from Cambridge when that course closed does not remember any contact with SSEES it was just language classes and more language classes, tests and more tests. The facilities of the university such as the Senate House refectory were never made known to them. It was a mid-morning coffee and a bun at the (then much smaller) refreshment hut in Russell Square, with lunch in the Air Ministry canteen in Kingsway, or the ABC in Southampton Row if it was raining [Elliott].



The Impact of JSSL on SSEES

With conscription about to end, the decision was taken to close down the JSSL programme, and for the War Office to set up its own Russian-language programmes.^{xiii}

But there certainly was a large impact. Inevitably, the teaching methods and particularly the materials from JSSL were recycled. Students in the 1960s remember a blue textbook of translation passages, the red dictionary, copies of *Two Captains* and the edition of *Crime and Punishment* with stresses, all with JSSL stamped inside the covers. Undergraduates, including a qualified teacher familiar with the latest pedagogical theories about effective learning, objected to the rote learning of lists of words with irregular

Some chose to study Russian; in the mid to late 50s numbers swelled dramatically in the university departments offering courses in Russian. SSEES was no exception. In the academic year 1959-60 it is likely that at least 75% of those studying Russian had learnt it in the forces, mainly as translators. You could tell who they were by the speed with which they could reel off numbers in Russian.

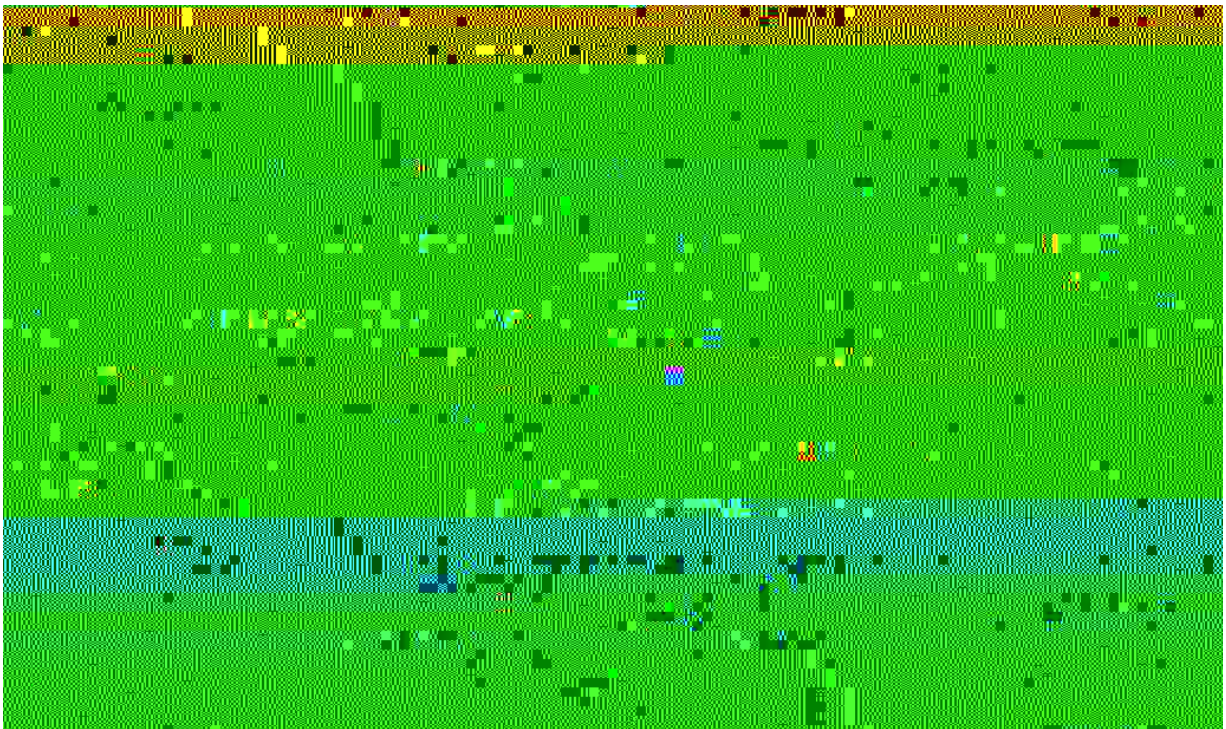
One took a Russian-related path with a difference: Geoffrey Prime, who lasted only three months at SSEES, but returned to Russian later in his RAF career, subsequently became a Soviet spy. Jeremy Wolfenden, by contrast, became a British spy while working in Moscow as the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, where he was blackmailed by the KGB.

Whether *kursanty* chose to pursue Russian further or went off to university to study all manner of subjects and/or enter unrelated professions, the country had fostered a body of highly intelligent people with a deep love of Russian culture and the language itself. No complete list of those who attended the course at SSEES exists. The most famous names among the 4000-4,500 JSSL participants like Sir Eddie George, Dennis Potter, Michael Frayn, Sir Peter Hall, Alan Bennett, the poet D. M. Thomas and the historian Sir Martin Gilbert were at Cambridge, but the SSEES course produced many who shone in varied walks of life. What the SSEES course, like its Cambridge counterpart, delivered in particular was a supply of future academics in the Russian field, ready for the expansion of Russian in UK universities in the second half of the 1960s: Antony Cross (Cambridge), Charles Drage (SSEES), Antony Hippisley (St Andrews), Gareth Jones (Bangor), Robin Milner-Gulland (Sussex), Will Ryan (SSEES and Warburg Institute), Mike Shotton (Oxford), Michael Waller (Manchester) and Marcus Wheeler (Belfast) are just some who did the London course. Others became school masters helping the development of Russian teaching in schools in the 1960s. Many chose a different path elsewhere in academia, or, like the actors Jeffry Wickham and Peter Woodthorpe as well as the artist Patrick Procktor RA, in the arts. Many have written books, including autobiographies, worked in television, radio, theatre and film, become ambassadors, senior civil servants, lawyers, businessmen and scientists.^{xv} Some

SSEES during National Service or not, but for others the year in London changed their lives. And all of them remember this as an extraordinary period of their lives.

APPENDIX I

Since writing this essay Peter Hill Sadko, or There
is Nth, 1953 in the Assembly Hall at the
Institute of Education. Written by Jeremy Wolfenden and Gerald Howell, the action switches
form the 14th to the 20th century as can be seen from roles such as Patriarch of the Masaryk
Hall, a character called Bayswater (a reference to their accommodation in Sussex Square),
ce to the infamous reader) as well as midshipmen extras.
There are familiar names in the cast, like Boris Thomson, later a lecturer at SSEES, and
jokes aplenty: Are you feeling
Tired? Depressed? N



Course C Rugby

