

BOKPYT CBETA

AROUND THE WORLD MAGAZINE

ARTICLES ON SCOTLAND

Translated by Maria Artamonova

Friendship Starts with an Introduction

01 June 1962

From a Scottish diary

A grey, gloomy morning. Our hotel room overlooks roofs. A greasy shine of wet roof tiles. And chimneys, chimneys, chimneys... As many chimneys as there are fireplaces in each house. There are whole clusters of them on every roof. Smoke, almost invisible in the light mist, is pouring out over Edinburgh, Scotland's ancient capital.

The wet pavement slabs in Princes Street, the city's main thoroughfare, lead to an old palace. Mary Stuart lived here once. There are portraits of kings in a dark gallery faced with bog oak. It looks like the gallery was put together in haste, so that all the crowned bearded men look alike.

The other end of Princes Street stops abruptly at the foot of a hill. On top of it, a fortress: the embryo of today's city. A guard is keeping watch. He is wearing a skirt and a chequered garrison cap. Nearby are the fortress gates, moat, walls green with age. If you climb the wall and look down, you will see the streets of the modern city, the gleaming shop windows with American four-eyed cars.

This mixture of old age, artificially revived by the twentieth century, and modernity can be felt everywhere here.

At Edinburgh University, the students told us proudly about their student debates. They described the skill of some speakers, their wonderful way of getting everyone to listen to them, the rhetorical battles between faculty favourites.

'And what are the subjects of these debates?' we asked them.

'Everything.'

'Such as?'

'We discuss the same issues as the Parliament. And it often turns out that we have a different take on this or that matter. We send the opinion we work out during the debate to London...'

'So what? Will the House of Lords consider it and say: how clever are these Edinburgh students! Will they take another vote?'

The students laugh:

'Of course, everything will stay as it is, but still...'

In the evening, we have a conversation in our hotel lobby, near a traditional fireplace, with Forbes Munro, Secretary of the Scottish Union of Students. Forbes tells us about the system of education, about the Union and its activities.

'The Scottish Union of Students, Forbes says, considers one of its most important tasks achieving equal scholarships for every University student. At the moment, students get between 50 and 300 pounds a year. We are against that. We don't care if the student has poor or rich parents. Our ideal is independence for everyone...'

But what if the student's parents are poor and ill and even the 'limit' of 300 pounds is not enough? Why should such a student be 'made equal' with those (even those few) for whom £300 is pocket money? No, the Union's ideal does not look ideal at all.

A small bus is taking us to St Andrews, a student town. Dirt is hissing under the wheels, snowflakes are whirling lazily. Sheep are grazing on white fields touched with mist. Sometimes, you glimpse narrow streets of small towns through the windows. The bus drives onto a ferry. The half-hour voyage across the Firth of Forth begins. Seagulls are circling around the supports of a huge bridge, neatly constructed and tightly riveted together.

And here, at last, are the ancient gates of St Andrews. This is the kind of gate that Walter Scott's strikingly taciturn, idealistically noble, armour-clad characters would ride into. The town is famous for its 12th-century ruins, its University, one of the oldest in England, and its golf. St Andrews is a golf capital, a true Mecca for the lovers of this game. Only here can you buy an excellent set of clubs, so complete that special carts are needed to ferry it around. Only here can changes to the international rules of the game be approved. For a golf lover, spending a summer in St Andrews is what climbing Everest is for a mountaineer. The Scots were genuinely taken aback when they saw that we were not awed by the shop windows with their super-clubs or the lawns dusted with snow where players were pacing up and down, despite the frosty wind. The Scots are hardy people. But the coal and electricity prices have hardened them even more.

We were 'toughening up' as well. The hotel rooms are very cold. The small gas and electric fires can only be lit by putting a shilling through a slit in a special machine. But even when the fires are on, they are not much use. Their warmth is more moral than physical. When we were once asked how we liked the Scottish frosts, we replied jokingly that we were mostly feeling them when we were lying in our beds.

So we were not particularly excited by either golf or the frost; we were more keen to see something else: the young students of this ancient University.

...A sunny Sunday morning. The peel of the cathedral bell is floating above the town. Young men and women are hurrying to the cathedral. They are wearing long red gowns. The ladies wear curious black caps, with multi-coloured silk tassels hanging from a flat square top. A red tassel for a first-year student, a blue for a second-year, etc. The Professors and tutors are all wearing austere black gowns. We went into the cathedral as well and sat down in the back row. A sermon, followed by a prayer. The girls bow their heads, their tassels hanging motionless. Tender girly necks with the light down of curly fair hair are tinted by the technicolour rays of light falling from the tall colourful stained-glass

windows. The prayer over, the psalm number is announced. A rustle of books – they are some kind of church songbook. The organ quickly drowns the cathedral in sound. Everyone is on their feet, singing...

And once again, it feels like this is all unreal: these red gowns with crimson velvet collars, these psalms, this organ music, soaring freely under the high vaulted roof. It feels like this is a crowd scene in some Shakespeare film, and the students are just here to earn a bob or two.

But this is all real. This well-oiled system of upbringing honed over years, in which the church plays a very prominent part. A tried and tested system, but not as dependable as it once was. And this must be a concern for some of those people who put on their black gowns every Sunday.

Since we mentioned clothing, let me point out that our ideas about the kilt, that famous Scottish skirt, are not quite correct: the Scots do not just wear kilts on national holidays. Many of them prefer the skirt to any other type of clothing on weekdays as well. A jacket with shoulder straps, a striped student scarf around the neck, a dark chequered skirt and thick woollen knee-high stockings are a typical student attire. A small, purely symbolic knife is worn inside the stocking. These knives proved very useful for us once.

We were sitting in a student's room. The fireplace, the coffee, everything as usual. Then we struck a conversation about disarmament. One of the Scottish students, a jolly, nice fellow, asked:

'Now tell us frankly, why are you against disarmament?'

This sounded so ridiculous that we were taken aback. It took a moment for us to regain our capacity to speak.

'Oh, I agree,' the Scotsman said after he'd heard us out. 'But why don't you accept proposals on control?'

'Do you know that Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev has repeatedly said in his speeches that the Soviet Union is ready to accept any proposal on control if Soviet proposals of general and complete disarmament are accepted as well?'

'No, we don't...'

'And are you clear on the principal differences between the positions adopted by the USSR and US Governments on this matter?'

'Not really,' the jolly chap admitted, speaking for everyone.

'Now look.'

And then we used... Scottish knives. We threw them into the ash in the fireplace - this symbolised disarmament. We slapped the Scotsmen on their jacket pockets - this was control.

'Now let's throw the knives away first and then look for them. And not the other way round, agree?'

Our hosts were delighted.

‘This is worth showing at the Uni, right, Peter?’ a jolly lad in a skirt was asking a friend of his.

It’s not by chance that the Scottish are concerned about matters of disarmament. American submarines bearing Polaris missiles are based in the Holy Loch. Of course, the Scottish have been told that the missiles are here for the protection of the jolly fellows in skirts. But how can one believe it, remembering the Polaris test launches from the Patrick Henry submarine? One of the missiles flew in the wrong direction and one lost control. Another test or two like that and... who knows what may happen?

Isn’t this why the words of the Scottish national poet Hugh MacDiarmid are so popular here:

Whether in Europe, or the USA, along our peaceful rivers –

There is no place for missile bases anywhere...

After the ‘knife-edge’ conversation, we had another meeting on the same day.

The room is hot and full of smoke. A young man sits down on the arm of my armchair. He is bald, with a wide toothy grin. First we talk about the weather. Now to the important bit. This is the reason why he landed on my arm rest: the festival. It looks like the anti-festival protesters have not had any new ideas over many years. Everything is well rehearsed: ‘Moscow’s idea’, ‘Communist propaganda’, ‘suppression of the freedom of expression’.

‘What about holding the next festival in London?’ I ask suddenly.

‘Oh...,’ a minute of confusion. ‘No, no need... Our young people don’t want it...’

‘That’s not true, I’ve spoken to dozens of your young men and girls and many of them told me “See you in Helsinki!” ‘

This story won’t be complete if I don’t mention an incident that happened in Aberdeen.

On the last day of our stay in Aberdeen, a relatively large city in east Scotland, Volodya Maslennikov, the leader of our group, was approached and asked to speak on TV about our meetings with Scottish young people. Volodya agreed and invited me to come along to the TV studio at 5 p.m. Then we were told that the programme had been moved to a later time. Around five o’clock we returned to the hotel after a tour of the city and were about to have our dinner. During the dinner, the hotel owner called for our interpreter. A minute later, the girl came back, looking dismayed and embarrassed.

It turned out that three lads had turned up at the TV studio, called themselves by our group’s names and spoke on TV on their behalf. They knew no Russian at all, so they had to resort to broken English in order to look like foreigners.

The journalists who same came (they had ‘smelled a rat’ from the start) told us that our pathetic doppelgangers had invented some unbelievable professions for themselves and responded to questions by quoting from a statistics reference book: which of our cities had universities and how many students there were. When they asked if corporal punishment was used in Soviet universities, they quite objectively said no (as they say, we must be thankful for small mercies).

In Russian, we call this hooliganism. This was our take on this prank pulled by three students. The correspondents got busy with their pens, and a few minutes later they were already telephoning their dispatches to the publishers.

Meanwhile, our 'doppelgangers' had turned up at the hotel. They were three young fellows, two of them first-year students at Aberdeen University medical department. At first, they were rather cocky: they were roaring with laughter and trying to pat us on the shoulder. We had to make them realise that there could be no friendship between us.

'Why did you do it?' we asked.

'We wanted to raise some money to set up a cancer research lab,' they answered incongruously.

'We've got some English money which we could have lent you,' one of us said, although we all realised that there was no such lab.

Peter Slater, President of the local Student Union, agreed with us. He made a statement for the press on behalf of the Union, condemning this act. The pranksters became more subdued and began to apologise.

It was already nearly midnight, when there were floodlights, tape recorders, microphones, tripods and cinema cameras in the hotel: the TV studio had come to see us. Mr Buchan, one of the studio's officials, said:

'Oh, this is just an innocent prank. Once, students took apart their Professor's car, dragged it to a house roof and reassembled it again there. Now that was something!'

Then we had a short conversation in front of the camera. We told of our meetings with the Scottish young people, of our debates and of how often we were able to find common ground. When we were asked about the 'Aberdeen pranksters', we said that we had always known that the English had a great sense of humour so we expected people in the country of Jerome K. Jerome and Bernard Shaw to be able to think of a funnier joke.

Now, as the world's youth is living and breathing the preparation for its Seventh Festival, I am once again thinking about the time we spent in Scotland. We had different meetings there. But now I understand very well that the sum total of our conversations and discussions was positive. Because we could see and get to know one another. We were laughing and singing and trying on the chequered skirts worn by the jolly Scottish lads. And of course, friendship starts with an introduction.

Ya. Golovanov

If We Make the Sea Our Postman

01 July 1972

(extract)

Our tale about 'messages in a bottle' will be incomplete if we don't tell the story of how they once replaced real post.

The small Scottish island of St Kilda lies away from sea routes, 20 miles west from the Outer Hebrides archipelago. Its impregnable rocky shores are always shrouded in cold spray. Between August and May, fierce storms practically cut the island off from the outside world. It is not surprising that in 1930, all the inhabitants left it and moved to Scotland. But before that... This is what happened before that.

In the early 18th century, the wife of a Scottish Earl was secretly exiled to the island for political reasons. Knowing that St Kilda was located in the area affected by a powerful branch of the Gulf Stream and that the current was moving north-east, the exile found a way of letting her friends know of her miserable fate. Her message in a bottle was soon discovered on the shore of the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides.

This must be the incident remembered by the English traveller John Sands who was brought to St Kilda in September 1876 by his own curiosity. During the following eight months, the unfortunate tourist could not return home because of bad weather and at last decided to send a message with the current. While he was marooned there waiting for better seas, a three-mast Austrian bark was shipwrecked on the treacherous rocks of St Kilda. The nine surviving Austrian sailors were put up by the island's inhabitants. John Sands told them his own story, and the marooned travellers decided to try their luck. They made three copies of a message detailing their plight, addressing it to the Austrian Consul in Glasgow. Two of these they sealed in bottles which were placed in an empty fishing boat, and one was concealed in a flotation ring from the stricken ship. They sent the boat and the ring afloat... And not two weeks after that, John Sands and the Austrians (not to mention the islanders whose meagre households struggled to support so many uninvited Robinsons) were overjoyed to see the English steam corvette the Jackal neared St Kilda. As it turned out, the flotation ring launched by the Austrians downstream was found in the shore of one of the Orkney Islands exactly a week after it was set adrift. John Sands later discovered that his message in a bottle was found after nine months near the shores of Norway.

Thereafter, the inhabitants of St Kilda, trusting in Neptune's free services, began to use empty bottles to send letters to Scotland. It is known for a fact that three or four out of every five letters sent reached their destinations!

In 1889, a post office was opened on the island. But the islanders were still using their 'messages in a bottle' to communicate with the mainland. To aid the inhabitants of this hardy island, the UK Royal Mail decided to cover the cost of forwarding the bottled messages to their addressees. Moreover, it officially announced that anyone who found a bottle, a jar or a postal raft from St Kilda will receive a guinea as a prize. In 1906, when everyone was astonished to find a raft from St Kilda turn up in the Isle of Lewis after a mere two days, the prize was raised to a crown. This decree is still in force.

Lev Skryagin

The Chequered Olympics

01 May 1977

It is also called 'Olympics in Skirts'. Both definitions, 'chequered' and 'in skirts', are meant to highlight the original Scottish character of the sporting event we are about to discuss. Of course, these titles were made up by anyone but the Scots, who take their national costumes for granted. Especially when it comes to an All-Scotland event such as the Braemar Festival which is held annually in May.

Braemar is a small village seventy kilometres south-east of Inverness. And Inverness is a universally recognized capital of the Highlands, the mountainous part of Scotland which has preserved its Gaelic language and its customs.

It goes without saying that the participants and spectators at the festival wear only the colours of their clan, for why should the Camibells [sic] wear the tartans of the Cunninghams and the McDougals put on the kilts of the McKormicks? It's not just the individual athletes but the clans who compete!

The festival includes dancing, singing, sports competitions (sport is a part of folklore here), but when King Malcolm Canmore (Malcolm the Great Head) founded this tradition, folklore was the last thing on his mind.

As was tradition, to be honest.

The King was tired of his lazy errand-runners who would fall into a trot as soon as they were out of the castle gates. Little did they know that the King was watching them from his window, otherwise they'd be off like a shot. Later, the messengers explained their slackness by the fact that the road went abruptly uphill once out of the royal residence at Kindrochit Castle. Malcolm the Great Head summoned to his castle all the young men who were eager to become royal messengers and founded uphill racing competitions. This was the first genuinely Scottish sport.

And since this provided an opportunity to find recruits for the royal retinue, the King made contestants toss a long and heavy tree trunk to test their force. This is how the second Scottish sport came about.

It was from these contests that the present-day 'Chequered Olympics' started. For several centuries, runners laboured up the summit of the Craig Choinnich hill, before spreading out to other hills and mountains.

Around two hundred years after the first competition, three sons of a clan lord came to the starting line. Two made a quick rush for the mountain, while the third one tarried for several minutes. However, after some time he outstripped his middle brother and kept going up steadily. One more effort, and he was level with the older brother. They ran abreast for a long time, and then the

youngest brother took the lead. With a tremendous effort, the older brother drew level with him once again. Then the younger brother shouted:

‘I’ll yield to you if I get half the prize!’

‘Never!’ gasped the older brother. ‘The winner takes it all!’

All right then! The younger brother made a final dash for victory and came first to the finish.

The expression ‘The winner takes it all’ has become a Scottish saying. This is what the present-day runners shout when they leave the starting line.

There was an attempt to close the games down. Queen Victoria banned hill racing, stating that it was ‘harmful to her subjects’ health’. The Scots, of course, didn’t discontinue their races – what’s more, they chose a steeper mountain, the summit of Ben Nevis, the highest of the Highlands at 1,343 metres.

It was here that the contests were held between the Victorian times and 1957, until one young racer died after losing consciousness mid-way. Since then, the runners have returned to the traditional Craig Choinnich hill.

As for tossing the caber, a spruce trunk is used for that purpose. The trunk is taken by the narrow end, and the result is measured by the distance between the tosser and the place where the butt end hits the ground. The most famous caber, tossed six times by champions, weighed fifty-five kilos and measured six metres in length. After the sixth victory, this trunk, ‘the Braemar caber’, was recognized as a standard and is now kept at the games committee premises.

Since 1819, the sporting events have been part of a general folklore programme, with folk singers and dancers flocking into Braemar.

And like any Scottish festival, the ‘Chequered Olympics’ start with bagpipes. A hundred bagpipe players, each wearing the skirt and plaid in his clan colours, take a long march around the area, announcing to each and sundry that the festival has begun.

As always, in May, in the village of Braemar.

Tartans Forever

01 May 1979

In 1840, an impoverished Scottish Lord MacNeil, head of Clan MacNeil, sold the island of Barra to a wealthy member of Clan Gordon of Cluny. Other MacNeils lived on the island, but they had no right to the land, and Gordon wanted to use the island for sheep breeding. The damp windy climate and green grass all year round made the sheep’s wool especially long and thick. Shepherds were of course required to watch the flocks, and it was only natural to invite more Gordons of Cluny rather than hiring the MacNeils.

The MacNeils were being gradually ousted from the island, by denying them rental rights or by other coercive means. This ousting took more than a year or two to achieve, with the most tenacious MacNeils hanging on until 1923.

It is from these migrants from Barra that the one hundred and twenty thousand present-day MacNeils are descended. They are scattered all over the world, from New Zealand to Canada. A direct descendant of the clan head, Ian MacNeil of Barra, teaches Law at the University of New York.

The first generation of migrants to leave their native island retained a nostalgia for it for their entire life. Their children, the second generation, tried their best to become 100% Americans, Australians, New Zealanders. The grandchildren were more preoccupied with their own affairs, and they were no longer yearning to return to the foggy and rainy island of Barra or had any interest in the clan's native customs and traditions. But the following generations, so American (Australian, New Zealander, Canadian) that they no longer felt any need to prove it to anyone, started remembering their roots, and arriving more and more at the same thought: 'We are Scots wherever we might be!'. And not just any Scots: 'We are the MacNeils of Barra!'.

This was an observation made by the New York Professor MacNeil, who maintains a correspondence with all the MacNeil associations worldwide. But he is a Professor for anyone except for his compatriots. For them, he is the Clan Chieftain, and hence the head of all the MacNeil unions.

When a Scotsman recalls his ancient homeland, he thinks of gloomy moors, ruined castles, a threadbare ancestral kilt and *pibroch*, a mournful bagpipe tune.

One can picture any moors and castles they fancy, but the skirt will be very specific: the combinations of coloured threads and chequers will always provide a clear indication of which clan it belongs to. It is as impossible to wear somebody else's colours as it is for a ship to display a foreign flag. There is a special official in Scotland, the King of Arms, chief herald and overseer of the clan hierarchy. His complicated responsibilities include making sure that no-one appropriates wrong titles or tartans or plays some other clan's bagpipe music during a ceremonial march. From all over the world, he receives queries on clan membership and insignia.

And somewhere in the town of New Hamburg, Nebraska, the local MacDiormids or Farchersons, who had been thrown by fate on the American soil five or six generations before, will read a letter from Edinburgh only to discover with horror that they had inadvertently sinned: worn their ties with somebody else's green thread and thus encroached on the rights of the Cunninghams or the Craighalls. After that they will of course order new kilts from the motherland, the true one that will feel closer to the body.

Each clan has its own festival, when all clan members wear their costumes, wherever they are.

About twelve years ago, our editing office was visited by a famous Canadian traveller, writer and Arctic explorer Farley Mowat. It was in late November, but Mowat came in his Scottish dress: a short skirt, thick chequered woollen hose folded under the knees. From under his jacket, a huge leather purse or sporran lined with seal fur was hung over the kilt. It turned out that all of his clansmen were wearing the same dress on that particular day, so that he could always spot a kinsman in a crowd and celebrate with him, or help him if need be.

Although the chances of bumping into another Mowat in a Moscow crowd were slim, and the weather was hardly conducive to walking around with bare knees, with an icy wind blowing drifts of snow around, there was no question of wearing anything else.

'A tradition,' Farley explained.

And he calmed those present: 'It was harder in the Canadian tundra, but I cannot do anything else on this day...'

...Nevertheless, the tradition of clan colours is not so ancient.

The thing is that the English had once banned the Scottish from wearing their national costumes. This happened in 1746, when the last Scottish hopes of independence crumbled into dust during a battle fought on a heath of Culloden near Inverness. The ban remained in force until 1782, and when it was lifted it turned out that the old patterns had already been forgotten. (And everyone used to wear whatever they liked anyway). So they had to invent new patterns assigned to each clan.

Even the kilt skirt, this most Scottish element of the costume, was not once worn by all Scotsmen alike, but only by the mountain-dwelling Highlanders. The valley-dwelling Lowlanders were modestly wearing trousers, which did not even have chequered patterns. (Clothing which leaves the knees bare and covers the lower part of the leg and calf is not a uniquely Scottish accessory. It is also widespread among mountaineers elsewhere: the Tyrolean lederhosen and gaiters, the dress of Himalayan peoples in Bhutan which consists of a tucked-up robe which falls to the knees, with the calves protected with a form of stockings. This is clearly convenient for walking on steep mountain paths.)

In 1953, Lord Lauerdale, the head of Clan Maitland, was due to carry the Scottish flag with St Andrew's cross at the head of a ceremonial procession. It went without saying that he had to wear Scottish dress. But the Lowland Clan Maitland had no tartan of its own. But a solution was found: luckily, the Maitlands were related to the Highland clans of the Cubbinghams [sic] and Gunns. They lent their own colours, joined to create a new tartan or chequered cloth, that of the Maitlands. Subsequently, Lord Lyon designed the Maitland tartan after long deliberations and entered it in the official clan colours book. After that, tartans were also made for other Lowlanders.

By the way, this was a way for the Lowlanders, who speak a dialect of English, to stress their affinity with the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders (who not so long ago had referred to the plain dwellers by the same derogatory word *Sassenach* as the English).

It has only been just over twenty five years since the Lowlanders first wore Highland costumes, but it has already become a tradition.

Traditions arise in different ways, but once they emerge, they tend not to die out. That is what makes them traditions. Take an old man in crimson stockings who is guarding the Tower of London. Are they so very comfortable, especially on a hot day, especially when wearing a tight pleated lace collar and hard hat? Would he rather wear a dark sateen robe, light working trousers and sandals? But once upon a time, this is how everyone went about their business: girded with swords and wearing stockings and collars. At some point, the Treasury must have forgotten to assign new uniforms to the Tower guards. The clothes worn by other people would change, first slightly, and

then more and more drastically. But the old man was still clad in his old-fashioned attire. And then no change was possible: such dress was now traditional and therefore due to be preserved. (This is, of course, no more than conjecture.)

Scottish traditions have a different origin: a desire to preserve their national character against all odds. Especially since the English Kings had been trying to eradicate that character for a very long time. But everyone knows that for every action there is a reaction. In Scotland, the tenacious and stubborn local character has to be factored into the equation.

Once upon a time, Scottish Kings had the right to demand that all the clans sent archers for the King's Bodyguard. The Royal Company of Archers still exists: these are four hundred middle-aged landowners, who have to leave everything and turn up in Scotland armed with bows and arrows whenever the Queen visits. The commanders of units are still every bit as meticulous as before about the elasticity of the string and the sharpness of the arrow-points as they were in the 12th century. And every elderly archer can drive an arrow through a thick plank – tradition requires that each hereditary member of the guard should practise ceaselessly with the type of weapon assigned to him.

All of this, of course, takes a lot of time, but as they believe in Scotland, nothing welds the clan together like performing traditional and ancestral duties. And belonging to a closely-knit, if archaic, organisation makes it easier to live in today's unstable world. A clan member can always rely on his kinsmen's help. If you are an entrepreneur or a clerk, you are nothing but a rival for another businessman or civil servant. But for a MacNeil, you are first and foremost a MacNeil, the same as he, and only then anything else.

Since 1806, a clan mutual support society has existed in Glasgow, which helps its members to get jobs. Over the last one hundred and seventy-three years, the organisation never lacked for work.

In May two years ago, an international gathering of the clans took place in Edinburgh, which brought together people with the same – Scottish – names.

The delegates wore national costumes, or what is considered to be Scottish national costumes in Florida, Saskatchewan, or near Melbourne.

Stewards were maintaining order. Knives had to be issued to those who did not have them: a true Highlander ought to have a knife tucked into his right hose, with a hilt engraved with a thistle flower and encrusted with a topaz (at least, a topaz-coloured glass), as tradition demands! Some foreign Scotsmen were inexperienced enough to attempt to tuck in their knives on the inner side of the leg, which did not bode well as it meant a declaration of war. Peaceful people always wear their knives on the outside.

The bagpipes were whining, the guests were competing in tossing the caber and uphill racing, and eating haggis, a smoked sheep's stomach stuffed with spiced meat slices. Haggis may not suit everyone's tastes at first try, but it is incredibly filling.

Then they were dancing a group dance hand in hand, and clicked their fingers as they jumped over crossed claymores.

A good old truly Scottish dance...

...which was adopted by the Scottish aristocracy from the French Royal court in the 18th century...

But have the French preserved this tradition? And when they were dancing in Versailles, were they wearing kilts, each bearing the colours of their clan?

L. Martynov

Fire over the Waves

01 December 1980

A hope of prosperity

About two years ago, a book was published in London about the future of the North Sea. Against the background of oil derricks, a plump baby was smiling – a symbol of success for the new North Sea oil extracting industry. And not even fifteen years ago, an expert on oil geology was asked about the potential of the North Sea basin and announced pompously that he was prepared to drink all the oil they'd find there. His statements were proven wrong very quickly.

Since the Ekofisk oil field was discovered in 1969 almost in the geographical centre of the sea, the powerful oil concerns Exxon, Mobil, British Petroleum, Standard Oil, Texaco, Shell have peppered the blue surface with their staked plots. An invisible but durable barrier has divided the North Sea basin between the shore states. Three quarters of the area of the North Sea floor, the most promising part, was allocated to Great Britain and Norway. Oil companies sought to obtain permits from governments to explore the underwater oilfields so they promised prosperity to the remote places along the North Sea coasts in a world where liquid fuel prices are always rising.

In the North of Scotland, along the shores of Cromarty Firth, lie the green hills of Easter Ross. These are the least fertile soils in all of Great Britain. The population is scant, the towns are nondescript, and the villages are all but abandoned. When the oil boom rolled in, it took five or ten years to build and oil port, storage and processing facilities in the deep firth and along its shores. Jobs came too.

A similar fate awaited Loch Kishorn, a typical 'middle of nowhere' place in North-West Scotland. For a long time, its inhabitants, struggling to make ends meet on their derelict farms, had travelled to big cities in search of work. The local priest Allen Macarthur remembers: 'Every Monday, while it was still dark, I saw our lads file up for the bus. I followed them with my gaze. The bus left, and the village was empty until Friday.'

But now the deep gulf of Loch Kishorn has been chosen for the construction of a giant platform, 'the Kishorn Monster', intended for the Ninian oil field. The building of a six-hundred-ton behemoth brought life to Kishorn. The village streets were filled with lorries. The hustle and bustle awoke the single-storey houses from their age-long slumber.

...At first, the agitation also engulfed the Scandinavian shore of the 'sea Texas'. But monopolies were never intending to waste money to make remote areas prosperous. Earnings, earnings, earnings – manifold and as soon as possible. At what price? Whatever. And it doesn't have to be monetary.

Considering the huge costs of production and technology, it is easy to understand why the oil produced in the 'sea Texas' is several times more expensive than Middle Eastern oil.

And still the monopolists did not go begging as they calculated the profits already received and projected, and the governments of the North Sea countries and a part of the population which gained qualifications and jobs were happy. This was before the 'blackest day of our lives', which is how the first disaster on the Ekofisk oil field has been named.

The black day for Ekofisk

Disaster struck late at night on 22 April 1977. An oil blowout was allowed to happen on Bravo, one of the Ekofisk exploitation platforms. Oil started sipping into the sea.

But let us take a step back from technical circumstances for a moment. The work of an oil rig worker is hard and demanding enough on land. But at sea, where the risk is greater, where even the simplest operations require extra attention, where new equipment and new working methods often need to be mastered by trailblazers in their field, the challenges are much greater. If one also remembers that oil drillers have to spend long weeks away from their familiar surroundings, hundreds and thousands of miles from their homes and families, the deficit of qualified experts may not seem so strange. As in any 'Klondike', there are a lot of people who are fond of adventures but not necessarily have the right professional and psychological training. Not every company can always manage to staff the drilling platform crews with experienced workers. But they have to move fast, or they will be outstripped by other companies.

It is believed that on the Bravo, they were too hasty in correcting an error. But even then, they were acting negligently. One way or another, the spill was not eliminated quickly.

W.A. Roberts, Vice President of Phillips, the owner of the stricken platform, had to admit: 'Yes, we are responsible for what happened...'.

But while governments, company managers, newspaper journalists were hunting for culprits and piling up accusations on land, oil was pouring into the sea. Before a more or less effective fleet of oil collecting vessels could be assembled, the North Sea winds and waves carried tens of thousands of tons of oil around.

The gas-oil mix was gushing to the sea surface at a speed of 360 kilometres per hour from the depth of two and a half kilometres. The roaring of the terrible fountain could be heard from far off. The arriving ships were lashing the stricken platform with powerful jets of water. A fire on the oil well was prevented. None of the hundred and twenty oil workers on the rig were seriously injured. But the oil spill on the sea surface was ever-growing in size: on 25 April, it was ten miles long and two miles wide, and 24 hours later, it was twenty miles long and five miles wide.

Airborne monitors established that the oil spill was drifting east, towards the Jutland coast. The threat of a huge environmental disaster hung over the richest Danish fishing areas. Oil was getting

nearer to the shallow waters near the coast. Plaice, cod, haddock, North Sea herring, seagulls, fulmars were faced with poisoning. The chemical shield could be a threat for plankton and prevent the marine biodiversity from reviving for many years on end. Meanwhile, a large percentage of the population of these countries were depending on fishing or fish processing for their livelihoods. Luckily, the wind soon changed and the oil stain returned to the oil field. The coastal areas, most sensitive to oil pollution, were saved...

Meanwhile at the rig, they were trying to stop the blowout. The oil was spilling out, heated to eighty degrees. The fountain above the Bravo rose to the height of a fifteen-storey building and fell in hot rain of oil.

When the emergency team made its first attempt to cap the blowout, the air was so saturated with oil vapours that it was impossible to work without masks. Meteorological stations were not reassuring with their forecasts: a storm was drawing near. Second attempt, third, fourth... Finally, a safety valve was placed over the well opening. But... it turned out that in their haste, they had installed the valve upside down. In this position, it could not withstand the pressure in the mouth of the well, which exceeded 300 atmospheres. The fountain was gushing as before.

The company involved Paul Adair, a well-known expert in oil disaster management, who had worked in the North Sea before. In 1968-1969 he liquidated the oil and gas spills here on other wells owned by Phillips. Adair's team was able to fix the upside-down valve with bolts. After that, the mouth of the well was sealed with a special anti-ejection device. Above, on the rig deck, a second line of defence was installed, a four-ton metal hood. Finally, a special solution was pumped into the well from a ship anchored near the rig. It took 181 hours after the blowout to stop the oil fountain.

At sea, the enormous oil spill remained as evidence of the disaster, caused by breached health and safety standards. According to calculations, as much as twelve thousand tons of oil got into the sea. Only 750 tons were collected over a week. The oil stain consisted of two parts: a thicker brown layer covered an area of around seven hundred square kilometres, and a thin bluish film surrounded it. A fleet of twenty oil refining ships was always in the disaster area, but only a small part of the contaminated surface was covered by a layer of oil that was thick enough to collect. Outside the brown stain, oil collectors could not operate as efficiently. Here, the oil for the most part evaporated or was dispersed by waves.

Shattered hopes

The Ekofisk disaster caused a scandal, which broke the fog of war the oil companies sought to maintain over the direct aftermath of their predatory incursion into the incorruptible sphere of the environment.

The North Sea is one of the most explored basins. Threads of pipelines crisscross the sea floor. There is lively traffic on the marine thoroughfares. From ships and rigs, waste of all kinds is unceremoniously dumped into the increasingly polluted sea. There were many occasions when such little gifts tore through fishers' nets and trawls.

Fishermen and farmers are forsaking their traditional trades. A seaman's life on one of the supplementary vessels run by oil companies is a lot more lucrative than the hard life of a fisherman. The same magnet draws young people away from farms and local industries.

Many Norwegians object to oil for reasons which have nothing to do with nostalgia. Here is a typical opinion expressed by an ordinary townsman, an electrician from an Oslo tram station: 'Oil is bad for fish, and fish means food. You can't eat oil.'

Before the oil fields were discovered, around one percent of Norway's employable population had been unemployed. The oil rush gave eight thousand new jobs to Stavanger alone. The sardine and herring capital was turning into an oil industry centre.

Or one would think so... But the available jobs did not as a rule go to local people.

Chaps from Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas turned up in the Norwegian fiords. New districts sprang up: a special world with its own lifestyle. And the influx of foreigners did not improve the coast dwellers' opinions about oil.

A similar picture could be seen along the British coast. Peterhead was once a small fishing town. An ideal natural harbour and the proximity of pipeline end points attracted the oil companies to it. It seemed that an age of prosperity was about to begin... But young Scotsmen are complaining: 'I cannot find a job', 'All the good positions are taken by newcomers'. An old woman in a bakery says the same thing: 'My husband and my son are still going to sea to fish, like hundreds of others. But oil harms fish. Oil prosperity is not for us.'

In the town of Alness, the population has doubled over ten years, but the newcomers and the 'natives' do not mix easily. The manners of a 'late 20th-century Klondike' have invaded the provincial backwater: drinking, brawls in the streets, abandoned children, ruined families.

In the Shetland Islands, the provincial way of life is still maintained. The small farms lead a measured life: the men are fishing or tending sheep, while women plant potatoes and oats and spend their evenings knitting or praying for their menfolk at sea. At rural festivals, islanders are still twirling around in their whirlwind reels in between sedate conversations revolving around sheep.

But the oil companies decided that the Shetland 'voes', the narrow deep fiord-like gulfs, were extremely well-suited for oil ports and oil terminals. The Islands Council allocated the abandoned maritime base at Sullom Voe as a port in return for annual 'intrusion' fees. The companies are obliged to repay some of the damage caused by the construction and use of oil pipelines and containers, as well as potential tanker accidents. For the monopolies, the fee isn't too burdensome (between two and six million dollars a year), but after giving this temporary handout to the islands' meagre budget, the companies have their hands untied. And they refuse point blank to accept any responsibility for much more significant damages. The damages which cannot be measured by money.

A steel tomb

Among the inhospitable expanses of the North Sea, three hundred and twenty kilometres off the Scottish coast and three hundred and fifty off the Danish coast, two drilling platforms are located side by side. One of them, Edna [sic], was duly pumping oil from an underground reservoir. The other, Alexander Kielland, was used as living quarters, although it had originally been designed as a working unit. They even built an eighty-metre drilling rig, which is entirely useless in a marine hotel.

Edna was anchored to the ground. The half-submerged Kielland was able to move autonomously. In good weather, oil workers would use the hundred-metre gangways between the platforms.

On 27 March 1980, the sea was stormy. The wind was gushing to fifty five knots. Waves up to ten metres high were crashing down on the metal foundations of the platforms. They did not cause much damage to Edna but the twenty thousand-ton Kielland was shaking on its hollow steel legs supported by deeply submerged pontoons.

At 6.45 GMT, a powerful blow broke one of the legs, the one which was located under the drilling rig. The centre of gravity shifted, and the platform started to tilt. In several minutes, the list increased to 45 degrees. New hits by waves finished it off quickly – the platform fell over and capsized. The captain just had time to send a warning signal, but for many it came too late.

A mere four and a half hours before the disaster, the previous shift had finished its two-week stint and sailed off to Stavanger. It was replaced by a new crew.

It is believed that 228 people were on the Kielland on that day, mostly Norwegians. Beside them, the team included Britons, Finns, a Portuguese man and a Spaniard. At the time of the accident, nearly a quarter of them were in the cinema. Escape from tragic death was only possible for those who snatched the few available moments to run through a maze of corridors, landings and gangways to the deck. One of those who survived was Tony Silvester. He was able to reach a lifeboat and after three hours adrift in the stormy sea he was rescued by a helicopter alongside six other lucky men.

The Norwegian Olav Skotheim was watching a cowboy film with the rest. 'We suddenly felt a terrible jolt to the bottom of the superstructure. The deck listed. I was literally thrown into the open door. I tried to get to the cabin to find a life vest, but the iron deck stood upright. I realised I had to jump... It was just under a hundred metres to Edna, but swimming there felt like a lifetime.'

Helicopters were the first to reach the scene of the disaster. The pilots faced a horrific picture: the four legs of the capsized platform were rising forlornly from the roaring sea towards the low-lying dark grey clouds. The Kielland survivors were everywhere: some in lifeboats, some on inflatable rafts, and some were kept afloat by their life vests. The rescue operation was begun immediately. According to one of the pilots, forward visibility did not exceed a hundred metres. The lower edge of the clouds was only thirty metres above water. Around two hours after the accident, several commercial vessels arrived at the scene. A special medical team was dispatched from Stavanger.

Darkness descended and interrupted the rescue work. Few survived the night. In the morning, planes, two dozen helicopters, and 47 ships were combing through the disaster area from air and from sea. In the steely grey North Sea swell, calming down gradually after the storm, the bright orange supporting pontoons of the capsized platform and the empty rubber rafts were looming forlornly. The hopes of the rescuers were dwindling with every hour. In the end, eighty nine people were rescued and forty two bodies were recovered. Eighty five oil drillers must have drowned when they were trapped in the internal rooms on the superstructure.

This was not the first time when lives of oil workers were taken by the cold waters of the North Sea.

In the summer of 1973, a helicopter crash on the Stavanger-Ekofisk line cost the lives of four drillers.

In November 1975, a fire broke out on the Alpha well in the Ekofisk oil field. Six workers died in a lifeboat as it fell into the sea from a great height.

The divers Peter Walsh and Peter Carson were sucked into a pipe during a pipeline construction operation near the Orkney Islands, while Per Skipmas and Robert Smith died when the diving bell suddenly rose to the surface.

In March 1976, a drilling rig was transported during a storm and hit the shallows near Bergen. Six crew members drowned as they tried to reach the shore in their lifeboats.

In October 1977, a diver died during a fire on the Norwegian Maersk Explorer platform.

In February 1978, a platform on the Stafjord oil field caught fire and five workers died.

Several weeks before the Kielland disaster, an oil blowout was narrowly prevented on the Haakon Magnus rig. On the West Venture rig, the holding tackle was in a critical condition. The Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, the highest controlling body in the industry, only learned about the two latter cases... from the newspapers!

On 31 March, the fifth day after the Alexander Kielland tragedy, Norway declared a national day of mourning. The Government promised to do everything to establish the causes of the disaster. This is not just a matter of importance for the Norwegian petroleum industry: floating bases similar to the stricken platform harbour five thousand oil workers in the North Sea alone.

Like dozens of similar sister platforms, Alexander Kielland was constructed in 1976 by the French company CFEM in Dunkirk. The company's representative has claimed that platforms of this type were built to withstand the harsh North Sea winter storms. They can support waves surging to twenty or thirty metres.

It was at first believed that the underwater part of the fifth support was damaged due to an unregistered collision with a vessel. Such a blow could have played a fatal part in stormy winds. But in the morning it turned out that the support was floating near the capsized platform, undamaged.

But why would the platform capsize after losing just one of the supports? The builders' calculations had proved that theoretically, it should have remained stable even on four legs.

If such calculations are correct, the disaster should be blamed on the operators, Phillips Petroleum Company. In its rush to get maximum profits, the company's management was eager to start the operation of the oil field. It is believed that a false move was made when the platform was first installed, causing the anchor cables on one side to be taut as strings and those on the other side to sag. After a sharp push by a storm wave, the anchor cables tore, causing the platform to list.

The French experts from the company which installed eleven rigs of this type in oil fields all over the world believe that a fatal role was played by the four-deck superstructure where the floating 'hotel' was located. It is quite possible that the drilling rig and superstructure had shifted the platform's centre of gravity. Another fact is doubtless interesting. It turns out that the floating hotel was due to be replaced in the nearest future, with the replacement Henrik Ibsen rig already on standby in Stavanger.

Can it be that a fault in the fifth support had already been detected? However it may be, the company was not in too much haste to replace the rig: the platform itself was not used for oil extraction, and the replacement would cost 50 million dollars. Either the company's experts were not as professional as the experts working for other firms, or the company's management was deliberately ignoring the drilling health and safety rules.

Safety matters became a subject of turbulent discussion in the Norwegian Storting. Finn Kristensen, head of the parliamentary industrial commission, denounced the negligent attitude to health and safety displayed by oil companies: 'In determining the development rates of oil extraction, the safety of the oil workers should be a priority.' Many bitter words were said by other MPs as well.

But all of this was said AFTER the event. It was only proven in hindsight that the government apparatus is unable to monitor many aspects of the operations of oil companies, including compliance with health and safety standards.

And no-one at all remembered the environmental and social fallout of both the uncontrolled oil production growth in the North Sea and the disasters which have become statistically all but inevitable. A question posed by a group of MPs on full suspension of operations in North Sea oil industry at least until the end of the investigation into the Kielland events was left unanswered.

The opinion of the European public was expressed by Communist and labour publications:

'It is time an end was put to the voluntarism of the monopolies; the sea industries have to be placed under the control of the state and the society as a whole.'

Of course, the technological progress is unstoppable. Humankind needs the riches of the sea floor, and it will develop them. This is an essential problem of our civilisation.

But can development be achieved at the price of the natural environment and be paid for with human lives?..

A. Moskvina

Stones in the Cold Sea

01 September 1983

It is foggy outside, and grey, wherever you look: low grey terraced houses under scales of grey roof slates. But within this grey carapace is a world which gladdens the soul with its light beige paving stones, its narrow winding alleys and its smell of roast pies and vanilla. This is not a modern world at all.

The shop windows: no overdressed mannequins, no flashy nickel-plated household goods, no knockout cosmetics, but some earthenware, leather, fabric items without any plastic in sight. Everything is handcraft. This is one big curiosity shop. This is Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkney Archipelago.

Two thirds of the islands are uninhabited, and even those inhabited have hardly seen any newcomers. In total, there are over seventy islands. Kirkwall is located on the largest of them, Mainland Orkney. There are four and a half thousand people living in the town. For the Scottish county of Orkney, this is a lot. The second, and only, other town, Stromness, has even fewer inhabitants.

According to one version, Orkney meant 'a wooded island' in the language of the Celts who first settled here. But now it is believed that no trees had ever grown here. The islands are covered in heaths, grasslands and moss growing over peat bogs. Only near the farmsteads, people have been able to plant some sickly birches.

But the islands have always had stone. The fields in which cows and sheep graze are separated from one another by stone walls one metre high, erected without any mortar. The flat grey stones are just fitted one on top of another in several layers. On top, they are held in place by heavy boulders placed upright. The house roofs are stone too, with a thick layer of moss growing on them.

Stone is the master of the Orkneys, the main wealth of this land. And its record, too.

Nikita Kasalishchev, editor of the ship newspaper, did not take us on the scheduled tour. Nikita is an archaeologist by training, and he was more interested in dedicating the day to history. But the trouble was, it was Sunday. We knew that on this day, the whole of Scotland, which includes the Orkneys, only does one thing: goes to church. But we saw a young red-headed woman in the office of the tourist agency. Her name was Jean, and we thought she was too warmly dressed for the mild climate of this northernmost part of the United Kingdom. A thick home-knitted jumper could be seen under the collar of her well-worn tweed jacket. I was wearing a raincoat, and Nikita had not even bothered to bring his. 'Won't you be cold?' Jean asked. The archaeologist defiantly put on his sunglasses and reminded us it was August, not December. Jean shrugged:

'An Orkney August...'

But we did not return to this matter. This was our first introduction to the Orkney custom: not to interfere in other people's business and let anyone do whatever they think fit.

'Do you understand British well?' Jean inquired.

'??'

'Scotland is part of Britain but it is not England. I do not expect you know our local tongue, Gaelic. I prefer not to refer to the language we are speaking now as English.'

Well, 'British' it is then. And we jumped into an orange Opel.

A narrow road is taking us between hills, past pastures, farmsteads and lakes, first south, then west. The programme says that we are due to see the gulf of Scapa Flow, the prehistoric village of Skara Brae and the enigmatic Ring of Brodgar.

'So,' I say, 'We are in Scotland, but we are driving on the left, just like in England.'

'They are driving in England the way we do in Scotland, that's how it is,' Jean says calmly. 'Do you know, by the way, that left-hand traffic is more logical than right-hand traffic? In the old days, when there were no cars, all that British coachmen could accidentally touch with their whips was the roof of the coach coming in the opposite direction. You hold your whip in your right hand. And on the Continent, the poor innocent pedestrians would often be hit for no reason.'

After half an hour's journey across the island, we found ourselves near the Maeshowe shrine. Inside, archaeologists had found prehistoric burials. The stone slabs of Maeshowe are covered with over a thousand signs. So far, no-one has been able to read them. Mentally dividing one of the slabs into squares, Nikita was about to start copying the signs onto paper. It was clear from the effort on his face that he was not going to leave until he had copied all of them. After a quarter of an hour of watching an archaeologist at work, I looked at Jean quizzically, and she immediately promised to produce photographs of these inscriptions after we returned to the capital...

It was late morning, and black cows had already sated themselves with grass and were lying majestically on the ground. The closer we got to Skara Brae, the more sheep we saw: grey with a slightly reddish tinge. Against emerald-green hills criss-crossed by grey boulder walls, the sheep looked as if they, too, were carved of stone.

I turned the radio on. The car was filled with a merry tune sung by some band, but we didn't have a chance to listen to the end. Jean's left hand turned the tumbler, and we soon heard the galloping rhythms of the purely Scottish circle dance, the reel. For some reason, it reminded me of my childhood, of a courtyard in central Moscow, and the endless roudades of the accordion which our neighbour Khairulla played every weekend with abandon.

After meandering along the coast of shallow bays, we came to a plain from which we could see in the distance the blue expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. A stone barn provided the only landmark in the flat area. The closer we were to the ocean, the more viciously did the wind lash our faces with sand and small pebbles. The breakers were making a laboured, whooping sound. I put on my raincoat hood and followed Jean along a narrow track towards the prehistoric settlement of Skara Brae. Nikita was hiding from the wind behind my back. The 'rooms' of this subterranean dwelling, ten all in all, are divided by walls constructed of grey and beige rocks and boulders. They are linked by narrow passages only half a metre wide. We use one of them to shelter from the merciless wind. Each room has its own furniture: seats, a fireplace, beds. Everything is made of stone, even the doors and pillows.

'Skara Brae,' Jean says, 'is one of the oldest sites of human habitation in Northern Europe. It was used by the Picts, whose occupations were fishing and animal husbandry. These dwellings are over three and a half thousand years old. The roof was made of whale bones, which served as rafters over which all sorts of rubbish and food waste was piled, which later became turf.'

'Wild storms they have here,' Nikita mumbled, fumbling for his notebook with fingers stiff with cold. 'But how many people lived here, and what evidence of their presence has survived?'

'Scientific excavations of Skara Brae,' Jean says, 'did not start until 1920, when a male and a female skeleton were found. But it is absolutely clear that more people used to live here; there are over ten beds all in all. It is also clear that these two did not just stay here by chance, as the Skara Brae

inhabitants are unlikely to have buried their dead in this way. But what was the matter? Torn necklaces made of wild boar tusks and sperm whale teeth were found outside the dwelling, which shows that the Skara Brae inhabitants had to leave their home in haste, rushing to the exit in a panic, and some women may have lost their ornaments in the commotion. But those two may have been ill or decided to disregard the danger for some other reason. What this danger was is still unclear.'

'Look, there are some spiral patterns here!' Nikita exclaimed, stooping near a wall of some shard of pottery.

'Congratulations!' Jean beamed. 'You are the first of my guests to notice this rarity. Skara Brae is the only place in the British Isles where this evidence of a high culture of the Neolithic people of Scotland was found.'

'But is it?' Nikita objected. 'Spiral patterns are believed to be a sign of a fairly low level of social sophistication.'

'Such people,' Jean retorted drily, 'simply disregard the fact that our ancestors prized artistic expression, clarity of design and rhythmic character of the patterns above all else. But the main thing is the loyalty to traditions. Do you think we still haven't found out about cement? But we are still building our walls without using any binding solutions!'

Our cursory tour was enough to demonstrate to us that the people of the Orkneys are sincerely convinced that everything customary for their native isles is the best.

We started speaking about the stone tomb at Quanterness (we were due to visit it). Jean said:

'The tomb was built in 3,700-3,500 B.C., which means that such constructions made up of large blocks of natural or roughly worked stone...

'Megaliths,' Nikita specified.

'...exactly,' Jean didn't miss a beat. 'These Scottish megaliths are older than the Egyptian pyramids. They are contemporaneous with the ancient structures of Mesopotamia, so those who believe that the megalith culture was a Mediterranean import are mistaken.'

In the restaurant of the Royal Inn which we visited along the way, on Jean's advice we were treated to the famous Scottish *haggis*, boiled lamb stomach stuffed with the heart, liver, and lungs, with grease, flour and onions, richly salted and peppered. Haggis had to be followed by whisky. 'Unlike an Englishman, a proper Scotsman,' Jean explained, 'would never drink whisky with soda or anything else, but only in its pure state.'

There were a lot of people in the restaurant, and a broad-shouldered fellow wearing a nylon jacket with a bright Walter Scott logo sat down in the free place at our table. The fellow wanted to learn what kind of people we were. When he did, he became a little aloof and asked his second question: how did we like it in the Orkneys and in Scotland as a whole? When we nodded approvingly, he gave us a broad smile and proceeded to rake his pockets for everything they contained: cigarettes, a keyring, some coins, and the mushrooms he had just picked in a nearby meadow. Then we became aware once again of a character trait common to the Orcadians: if you praise the Islands, you become the islander's best friend. It turned out that Walter Scott was the owner of an Orkney

transportation company where our new friend worked as a driver. The famous name was also displayed on the wall of the silvery 'box on wheels' parked outside the entrance to the restaurant.

The road was deserted, and only our friendly driver broke the solitude of our car by overtaking it boldly on the right.

'It looks like it's not only churches that are open in the Orkneys on Sundays,' Nikita pointed out. 'Walter Scott doesn't want to sit still either.'

'Don't forget me, too...' Jean said. 'And all because this lad and I only have permanent jobs over the weekend. This is profitable for the managers – they don't have to pay salaries for the whole week. Of course, we need to do other jobs on weekdays, but better that than losing your place. We have hardly any industry to speak of, and tourists come once a year and mostly on holidays. We could, of course, move to the Continent – this is how we call the British mainland. But firstly, they have three million unemployed of their own, and secondly, it's a shame to leave your homeland.'

No industry to speak of? But an oil terminal for tankers has been built on the island of Flotta. This is where the pipeline leading from the British oil rigs in the North Sea leads. Cannot the Orcadians get jobs there?

'Don't forget,' Jean replied, 'that companies prefer to bring experienced specialists to training local ones. But if there is any threat of pollution to the sea or our land, the Orcadians will not just refuse to work there but make sure that the public learns about it. Why would the companies need such employees? There was a case when some natural resources were found here. I can't remember which. But the Orcadians unanimously voted against their extraction. We are too much in love with our stones and our sea, our Orkneys.'

But please don't think we are all that conservative. We need jobs, but we are well aware that not all resources for industrial development have been exhausted. Meat or fish processing, for instance. Textiles. But none of that can survive the competition with the Continent: the forces are too unequal. We cannot survive without state help, and the state is in no mood to help us...'

Then Jean seemed to remember that moaning was not an Orkney tradition and pursed her lips.

'Let's get a move on, we have little time but we have to see the Ring of Brodgar. This is our Orcadian wonder of the world.'

And Jean put her foot down on the gas.

A few minutes later, we saw the teeth of a giant comb rising over the plain thick with purple heather. These were rectangular stone slabs dug into the ground to form a perfect circle.

Jean revealed to us that the diameter of this circle was one hundred and four metres, and that there had originally been sixty stones. All of them were placed exactly six degrees in relation to one another. Only thirty six stones have survived, and only twenty one of them are still upright.

After crossing a small heathery moat surrounding the ring, we came close to the stones and stroked their rough stony sides. The top part of each of the sandstone slabs seems to have been cropped,

making each slab look like the number one. The stones reminded us of a mille-feuille cake. There was something about their colouring (orange, light pink, coffee-coloured) that recalled patisserie.

‘Scientists,’ Jean said, ‘have various opinions about the origins and purpose of the Ring of Brodgar. Some believe that the stone-enclosed space was a temple where sun worshippers performed their rites. Others see the ring as an ancient observatory; they believe that another stone building must have existed inside, which consisted of gate-like structures.

‘Trilithons,’ Nikita specified. ‘I think the Ring of Brodgar is a version of a Neolithic and Bronze Age megalithic structure called a cromlech. They usually look like this: large separate stones forming a concentric circle. In the centre there is usually a dolmen or a menhir – other types of stone structures.

Jean clearly had something to say to that to prove how unique the Ring of Brodgar was, but Nikita’s speech was interrupted with a sing-song sound of the bagpipe. We turned round and saw a man wearing a Scottish kilt. He was puffing his cheeks as he drew near us. The soft, springy heather was brushing against his bare knees. A girl of about nine was with him. It looked like the bagpipe player had not seen any tourists all day and so was rushing to earn some cash while we were there. The music, simple yet touching, seemed to hover in the damp air. We gave the bagpiper a modest fee. He hadn’t asked for it but took it with great dignity. Then he asked us:

‘Are you wondering what this is?’

The girl opened her mouth to speak but her father stopped her.

The bagpiper said in a low voice:

‘The Ring of Brodgar stones are pillars that used to support stone platforms. The bodies of the dead were once placed on these platforms. Birds would flock here and soon only a clean skeleton would remain, to be buried at Quanterness. Have you heard about the tomb?’

Jean clearly disagreed with this theory. She pursed her lips but she made no attempt to interrupt him. Nikita couldn’t contain himself!

‘Wait a second! There is a clear inconsistency here. The tomb in Quanterness is fifteen hundred years younger than the Ring of Brodgar...’

‘Ah, young man,’ said the bagpiper, ‘but who can calculate the age of the ring correctly?’

‘Each Orcadian has a different theory about this,’ Jean whispered.

‘Daddy,’ the girl asked, finally seizing a pause in our conversation, ‘let me tell you everything as Miss MacDonald told us at school!’

And she rattled on, without catching her breath:

‘Can’t you see that these stones are all that remains of the Chief Giant’s castle? In the old days, giants used to live on our island. At that time, people didn’t have lorries or cranes. They didn’t even have spades. Chief Giant was very evil and scary, so the other giants, the smaller ones, didn’t like him. And people were very scared of him because he was an ogre.

And his castle was very boring, without any toys or TV. There wasn't even a simple pipe to play. People were scared of the Giant and his servants and hid in underground houses so that he wouldn't notice them. But every year, giants would patrol the island to catch a fisherman or a shepherd. After some time, the Mainland island was nearly empty, and the only place where some people remained was the underground village of Skara Brae. There was a boy among them who would play the pipe when they were all very sad because they had nothing to eat. A girl he was friends with would ask him to play.

So one day, Chief Giant's servants went hunting but came back empty-handed because they couldn't find a single man. Chief Giant got very angry, he ran off from his castle and started looking for food. Earth was shaking from his stomping, he was so heavy. And he fell into one of the underground rooms at Skara Brae whose roof couldn't hold his weight. In terror, all the inhabitants rushed to the exit, but the little piper remained and continued to play for the girl. Chief Giant had never heard the sound of music before, so he stopped and got stuck in the mud among the stones.'

Jean, who must have heard the same tale at school in her time, was listening very carefully, with a smile on her face. When the father and daughter had left, she was silent for a while, and then she smiled again.

'You know why else I love our islands? There are as many stories as there are Orcadians. And all of them coexist in peace.'

Kirkwall – Moscow

V. Chudov

Before the Ceiling Collapses (excerpt)

01 October 1983

And what prospects do the 43 thousand unemployed young people have in Scotland, half of them fresh out of school? In Scotland, the unemployment figures are simply unbelievable: nearly eighty percent of men have no jobs.

'I am 26 years old,' the unemployed Robert Ross says. 'I used to get some seasonal jobs every now and then, but for the last two years I am completely broke. My brother finished school six years ago. But he has only worked for one year, and he is again without a job. Our father has been unemployed for a long time.'

The workers of the steel plant where Mr. Ross Senior used to work elected Robert as their representative in the people's march against unemployment. While he was marching on the capital, his friends were picketing Faslane, an atomic submarine base where NATO wants to deploy the American Trident missiles.

'The people's march against unemployment,' says Jane McKay, Secretary of the Glasgow Trade Union Council, 'was meant to draw the attention of millions of Britons to the plight of the unemployed. In order to protect the unemployed people's mental state somehow, we set up special centres financed by trade unions. One cannot simply bear this burden alone. The centres have craft workshops, sports teams, discos, general education sessions. But the main focus of the centres is on rallies, demonstrations, marches against unemployment and the government's inaction.'

There are already several such centres in Glasgow. The government is looking for a pretext to ban them.

V. Gladunets

Glasgow Green, the Heart of Scotland

01 June 1984

In the first moment after getting off the London to Glasgow train, I couldn't get my head round what was happening. It was 6 a.m. on a Saturday, but people were scurrying about as it were the rush hour. There were lines in front of the tightly locked shop doors (shops do not open until 10 a.m.). An elderly newspaper seller interrupted his usual incantations ('Standard, Standard, buy the Standard!') and eagerly provided the explanation:

'It's the Oddment Day, a day of cheap sales. A holiday!'

...The sleepy porter in the Buchanan Hotel concentrated with effort, leafed through the guest book and shrugged his shoulders.

'Yes, you have a room booked, Sir. It will be ready by midday. But it's only just gone six.'

'All right, I'll take a stroll around the city.'

'As you wish, Sir. The Heart of Scotland is always open to those who come here with good intentions'.

'The Heart of Scotland? What do you mean?'

'Glasgow Green, Sir.'

Fight while we've a spark

The central square is festooned with flags: a national festival has just finished. A crowd of teenagers, hoarse after a night of shouting, is walking home in their two-coloured scarves: the Celtic footballers had one another victory the evening before. Ten more minutes on foot, and the stone boxes are becoming lower and lower, suddenly giving way to a view of the Clyde embankment, wrapped in fog thick as cotton wool. And beyond, across the bridge, lies Glasgow Green.

Glasgow Green is a focal point of Scottish history, a microcosm of public life. Here, in the city's main and oldest public part, a Roman amphora was found that has lain here since 150 B.C. In the Middle Ages, cattle was driven here to the common pasture, with the abattoir close by. They say that it was Glasgow Green that triggered the Industrial Revolution. Over two hundred years ago, James Watt was taking a walk here on a similar early Saturday morning when he was struck with his ingenious idea about a steam engine with a dual-action cylinder. 'I had not walked further than the golfhouse when the whole thing was arranged in my mind,' the jubilant inventor wrote to a friend.

Under the Glasgow Green trees, turbulent rallies were held in the 1830s, 60s and 80s which put forward demands for a parliamentary reform; at the start of this century, Glasgow Green witnessed May Day demonstrations. John Maclean, a prominent figure in the Scottish labour movement, spoke here in 1920. In 1936, rallies held here sought to send a message of support to the revolutionary Spain. And of course, every Scotsman will tell you that it is here that likely lads came to toss a ball about in 1875 and 1888, giving rise to two football clubs, Rangers and Celtic.

Glasgow Green has always been the beating heart of the Land of the Scots (which is the literal translation of this administrative and political region of the UK). Fairground stalls were put up next to the court building, a Refuge for Young Women stood side by side with a carpet factory designed to imitate the Doge's Palace (29 female workers were killed during construction because of the contractors' negligence). This was a place for public executions and carnivals, the 'Scotch Washing' and rendezvous with the devil.

As for 'Scotch Washing', it is not hard to imagine what it was. Since the old days, the Scottish women did not like to wear their hands raw with washing. Instead, they climbed into huge tubs and trampled the washing with their feet, like Georgian grape stompers. Historical chronicles attest that astonished travellers were unable to tear their eyes away from these Scottish Amazons who were dancing a merry jig in their tubs full of washing.

And to speak of the devil, legend has it that the Prince of Darkness made an appearance on Glasgow Green in the spring of 1750. This was the time when the first Scottish Episcopal Church was being constructed here. The construction only took 12 months, which is quick enough even for modern standards. People in the know were saying that there must have been some devilry at work here:

'Look at St Andrew's, the Presbyterian Church. It's been thirty years since it was begun and there is no end in sight. These sinners must have got help from the devil himself.'

This old legend mirrors the unending rivalry between the two churches, the state-wide Anglican church and the Scottish national Presbyterian church, although both are branches of Protestantism.

For many years, the Glasgow Green lifestyle reflected the beating of Scotland's political heart. With time, the park turned into a true symbol of liberty for the downtrodden classes. A soap box, the traditional speaker's stand, could well have featured on Glasgow Green's imaginary coat of arms.

...The morning stroll around the famous park continues. Here is a former homeless shelter; a shop which had once sold the simple trinkets crafted by the inmates of the Glasgow Green prison. Here is

Nelson's column, the first in Britain, erected in 1806 to mark the eighth anniversary of the Battle of Aboukir Bay¹, and here are the ruins of a quaint structure which looks like a collapsed subway.

It is this story that is perhaps the most telling. The thing is that the city's elders, for whom Glasgow Green was a thorn in their side since the park was so important for the city's paupers, had made numerous attempts to take away this 'rabble tribune' and to prevent the 'dangerous and malevolent gatherings' from happening there.

One of such attempts was made early in the previous century, when Alexander Allan, the owner of a wool factory, built his mansion near the very boundary of Glasgow Green. Of course, the nouveau-riche landlord wanted to have his own magnificent access to the Clyde embankment. A cascade of staircases cut through the park, while the people gathering for a meeting had to huddle in a specially dug narrow channel christened locally as a 'pen'.

Alexander Allan came to a sticky end. The weavers who worked for him staged a walkout in protest, and the financial speculations of the would-be commercial tycoon finished his destruction. The 'Pen' was destroyed, and its ruins remain a reminder of yet another failed attempt on the part of the city administration to suppress this hothouse of popular resistance.

Around a hundred years ago, Glasgow's fat cats tried to destroy the park again, this time literally. A coal deposit was discovered under Glasgow Green which could be developed by open-pit mining. The city elders were ecstatic: they could put an end to the 'rabble's' gathering place and use the money from coal sales to settle a major debt which arose from the ruining expenditure of building opulent parks for the aristocracy in the West End, Glasgow's rich districts.

The battle-lines were drawn in earnest. An anonymous Scottish popular poet wrote at the time:

"If you come tae the Green, John, ye maun expect a fight

For a' the folk at oor gate-end'll stan' oot for their right

We'll come wi' sticks an' stanes, John, an' fight while we've a spark

You'll never get the Glasgow Green to pay your west-end park'

The matter was taken to Parliament. And there the Scotsmen mounted a passionate defence of their public park: 'The Green belonged to our fathers, now it is ours and tomorrow it will pass on to our children. And if we are men we will never suffer anyone to take our lawful rights away!'

The battle for Glasgow Green continues to this day.

'The park is public property,' they say in Scotland today, 'and we will never give it to private companies, rail and motor tycoons!'

Over the last thirty years, the city council believes the park has become less important as a focus for political protest. Or has it?

¹ In 1798, the English fleet led by Rear-Admiral Horatio Nelson defeated the French fleet near the Isle of Aboukir in the Nile delta, thus cutting Napoleon's army off from France.

...Several people are peering at the map of Glasgow Green under Nelson's Monument and discussing something excitedly. The first impression ('tourists') was immediately dispelled after I saw CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) badges on their jackets. There are also members of the Great Britain-USSR Association.

'We are preparing an anti-war rally and selecting a place for a march where columns of protesters will converge. We are protesting against the US' rogue policy in Grenada, against the deployment of American cruise missiles in Britain which has already begun, and we are full of determination to prevent a nuclear disaster.'

The pulse of Glasgow Green is once again beating urgently and rapidly. The chain of public protests going deep into its history has not been broken off. Anti-missile, anti-war protests follow one another like the 'fiery crosses' which served the Scottish mountain clans as an alarm signal which was passed by runners from village to village in case of danger. The speeches of the present-day peace campaigners echo the voices of those who had fought against social injustice and political oppression through the ages.

The cunning men of Barrows

The sun was rising, melting the hoarfrost crystals on the grass. Then the lanes, damp with morning fog, dried up and finally crowds of people poured into the open shop doors. The Oddment Day had begun.

A stone's throw from Glasgow Green is a place no less famous in Central Clydeside², although its popularity is of a different kind. This is a 'flea market', Barrows, or Barras as the locals call it. Of course, the shop sales had dealt a blow to the market vendors on this particular day, but there were plenty of people here as well. Human streams and rivers flowed into a turbulent sea shaken by powerful tides which exposed and concealed dozens and hundreds of wheelbarrows used for lively trade. It is these wheelbarrows under tarpaulin were the 'barrows' that had given the market its name.

Here one can buy the insignia of long-defunct secret societies and clubs, cracked old photographs and postcards, faded medals and badges, memorabilia of military campaigns of the past century, an 18th-century mantelpiece and portraits from the time of Edward VII, an electric stove produced in 1930 (in good condition) and a 'Teddy' jacket, clay pipes black with use...

The market's attraction and living soul are its sellers who make you forget about the wares – so picturesque are the vendors of various oddments and so sharp-tongued. To palm off some worn soldier's boots to a buyer, they 'sell' a story which could have adorned any military memoir. It was said that Geordie Bennett, Barrows' most popular personality, could sell a double bed to the Pope without missing a beat.

I bump into the seller of decidedly bizarre products: blunt, dented shaving blades. He is sipping his coffee and glancing lazily at the bustling market, resigned to his role of a hermit in hell.

² The Central Clydeside Conurbation is the most densely populated area of Scotland with the centre at Glasgow itself (Ed.).

‘Yes Sir, what you are seeing is the real Barras,’ the hermit began slowly, trying to savour the pleasure of the conversation. But that was not entirely altruistic: a conversation is easy to turn into a sale, and they are masters of that here. ‘To be honest, trade is not too lively at the moment, but I don’t need much although I have first-class goods here. See for yourself. I’ve been coming here for fourteen years, and I inherited the business from my father. It’s a family venture, you might say...’

Fifty years ago, ten years ago and today, the same timeless cry can be heard over Barrows:

‘Hop-hop! A lighter and coat peg going cheap, in excellent conditions. All together just for fifty p.!’

P is the short for ‘penny’. This is a bargain. A crowd gathers, the carefully packed lighters and peg are snapped up, but when you unwrap this clever packaging, you end up with... a matchstick and a needle, in an excellent condition, as advertised.

In the corner, a burly fellow with an accordion has made himself comfortable in a sunny spot. On the ground before him is a hat with some 10 p. coins. With a cheeky grin, the lad is singing the next verse in a pleasant baritone:

I’ll spare no coins for my little Rose –

For Christmas I’ve bought my wife a ring.

Silly me, I forgot gold goes green in spring

If it’s been bought at the Barras.

Many who come to the flea market do not want to make money but try to buy some essentials at bargain prices: a threadbare jacket, a worn coat, some washed out underwear. As a recent poll held by the International Research Centre for Trends and Public opinion indicates, over seven million people living in the British Isles live below the poverty line. Around five million of them cannot afford new clothes and are forced to buy everything second-hand.

In short, the Barrows is not going to close any time soon, and it looks like the Glaswegian flea market will be bustling for a long time yet...

A hospital for ‘fat cats’

The boundary between England and Scotland is quite well defined. It is the so-called Hadrian’s Wall, a 120-kilometre long wall which bestrides the British Isle in one of its narrowest places. The name indicates that the wall was built by the Romans under Emperor Hadrian in the first half of the second century A.D. in order to protect the lands they had conquered from Celts or Picts. This Hadrian’s Wall has for a long time been held as the boundary between England and Scotland.

Once you’ve crossed it, you are in a very different country. Suffice it to say that if you call a Scot ‘English’ you risk to offend him gravely which can even land you in trouble. The way of life here is different, as are the rules, customs, and manners. There is even special Scottish money. North of Hadrian’s Wall, the same pound of sterling is secured by a Scottish rather than English bank, and there is some national heraldry pictured on the banknote instead of the Queen’s profile. In London, they treat such pounds with suspicion.

Scotland is the traditional stronghold of the Labour Party. Progressive, democratic tendencies and ideas have always been strong here. The working Scotland has repeatedly initiated major actions of the British proletariat, and the Clyde dockside workers still revere the teachings of the late William Gallacher, former President of the Communist Party of Great Britain, a true friend of the Soviet Union.

...By day, Glasgow looked decorative, festive, well-tended. After London's tower of Babel where you are crushed by the feeling of loneliness in a crowd, a feeling familiar to millions of people living in the British capital, it is Scotland (paradoxically!) that seemed to me to be this canonical Albion that we know from classical literature. The people struck me as good-natured and friendly.

Huge loudspeakers face the central street, four lads with guitars on a stage are 'warming up' the public, the popular tune played by the Kajagoogoo band is blaring, and some have already begun to dance.

Further on, a different crowd. They have a different feel, a fighting spirit. Nearby is a brand-new hospital building. But the people look like they are protesting. An unusual situation: what can be wrong with a new hospital? It's not a casino or a multimillionaire's club – or indeed a military base!

'Everything inside must be state of the art. And the building itself cost around twelve million,' a woman standing nearby explained. 'But we are not likely to get there? Wait, let me speak to everyone.'

With an air of determination, she made her way towards a neat fence not yet dismantled by the builders which surrounded the hospital. People were standing there shoulder to shoulder, forming a solid wall.

'Are many here in need of medical help?' the woman addressed the crowd. 'Many are. Tomorrow if not today. Your children and your parents if not yourselves. And the government is once again planning to move healthcare into the private sector. Here is a new hospital. Who will own it? The local administration? Not at all! It has already been grasped by the 'fat cats'. The prices of medication have risen by seven times, and not even the middle class can afford a visit to a specialist doctor. We don't need such hospitals or clinics, most of us cannot afford healthcare. This is a mockery of those in need of medical help!'

In front of our eyes, the hospital was transformed into a tombstone over patients' hopes. We remembered a dramatic story told by an English journalist. A patient of a private clinic committed suicide by pulling a plastic bag over his head. He had calculated that paying his treatment bills would force his family to live in the streets. But this way, they would get insurance...

'Auld Reekie'

It takes forty minutes to get from Glasgow to Edinburgh on a suburban train which passes through an open tunnel hewn in the rocks. Sometimes, the train emerges from the tunnel, and then you see magnificent green meadows which seem made for knightly tournaments, blue lakes and small cottages surrounded with cold-resistant autumn flowers.

In the centre of Edinburgh, the Walter Scott Monument can be seen from afar; it looks like a cross between a chapel and a castle turret. The Scots are not fond of megalomania, but here they did splash out: the monument to a great Romantic author must be one of the tallest in the world when it comes to literary figures.

The sky above the city is blue, with brisk wind blowing from the Firth of Forth. It is hard to believe that Edinburgh was once nicknamed, in jest or sarcastically, 'Auld Reekie'.

While the train is nearing the station, I leaf through the pages of my guide book:

'Founded in the 10th or 11th century, Edinburgh was the medieval capital of an independent Scottish state for nearly two centuries. The University is one of the oldest in Europe (1583)...'

On a steep hill, the fantastically beautiful Castle, Edinburgh's main attraction, is soaring above the city. There is, strictly speaking, some gravitas in the common names which have become proper names. 'The Castle' does not need any other attributes to define it. The Castle is the Castle. Similarly, the Royal Park in Edinburgh is referred to simply as 'the Park'. That's it, the Park with a capital P.

They say that those who have never been to a Scottish pub or met John Barleycorn would never understand the spirit of this country. The Pilgrim's Refuge, Lancelot's Arms, The King's Servants and many nameless establishments are scattered all around Edinburgh. The history of many pubs goes back centuries – or so the advertisements say.

Tired after my walk, I pop into a pub. The first impression: the tables here must have been last scrubbed around the time of the Battle of Hastings. The permanent grime on the vaults, the prison irons near the wall, the cracked stocks for the head and arms – all of it looked rather like a medieval torture chamber. There was something of Haymarket Square here, the place where public executions used to be held in Edinburgh. But we were in the last quarter of the 20th century, and the pub was shaking with gales of laughter.

Making my way towards the centre of the crowd, I saw that it was mesmerised by watching an age-old spectacle: two burly fellows were egged on to try their strength: each tried to press his rival's arm to the table. A little further, they were playing darts: men were flinging small feathered arrows at targets from around ten paces. By the way, this ancient pastime which was born in pubs has now become a professional sport: there are regional, county and country-level darts championships.

I was nursing my half-pint at a small table outside, next to a tanned young man in a well-worn soldier's jacket. Not to strike a conversation in a pub is like breaking all the ten commandments at once, so a minute later I already knew that the chap's name was Ralph and that he had roamed all round the world over the twenty seven years of his life.

I was a little alarmed by the tone Ralph used when he said 'roamed'. I asked a few questions and got evasive answers, as if the atmosphere of the pub conducive to verbal outpourings had somehow been dispelled. But we had the conversation going. After a little pause, my companion told me what his 'travels' were. His job was risky, frightening, but, as Ralph put it, 'cushy': he was a mercenary. His tale I reproduce below is a summary of his answers to my questions.

'At the moment, there is enough work both in Africa and the Near East. But I wanted to drop by my old home – I haven't been here for ten years. I bolted for the army in seventy-four, and I haven't been able to throw off this skin.' Ralph tapped his jacket absent-mindedly. 'I killed my first man in Northern Ireland. This is how it was: we were on night patrol. We were on guard of course, but we still missed him. He jumped from around the corner, threw a stone at me and ran. I fired, of course, a quick squirt at his legs. That was what we were trained for. My gun gave way and I got him through the back. It was dark but I clearly saw the lad stumble and fall on the pavement.

Yes, the training in Northern Ireland was not to sneeze at! Yes, of course, it was a dirty war, but it was great practice. The orders were simple: if a suspect tries to move, shoot at once. I nearly burned in Ulster: they threw a petrol bomb at our people carrier.' He turned back his sleeve and showed me his left arm, which was disfigured by scars. 'I burned again in Rhodesia, but I went there on my own free will as a contractor. Then what? Then it was 1978, and me and thirty other lads, I knew most of them from Ulster, were on the Mozambique border. We were greatly appreciated: British fellows are always considered the best on the market.

No, I am not some serial killer. When I was a kid, I wanted to become a sailor. But my dad was never at home, he got a job with some company in the Near East, looking for oil, and my mother... Well, my mother had no time for me. So I had to look for my own job. Those who hire us never ask who we are and where we come from. All they need is to get the job done. But risk is risk. I've been wounded six times, but I was paid for that too. But my arm has been giving me trouble and wasting away lately. And I've just got free right now. Have you heard of the Seychelles? I survived again, I've come back and now I've been thinking about my future. While I have the cash, I might open a business here in Edinburgh. But then,' he took another sip, 'the lads have told me they are hiring for Salvador. Maybe I can take the plunge one last time? We are valued higher than the American GIs, and we've been through Ulster.'

At that moment, a girl with a tray of paper flowers and a collection mug came up to our table.

'Twenty pence for the young people,' she demanded, rattling her mug.

I was curious about this new organisation aiming to help the young and tried to question the girl about who exactly she was planning to help. Her answer was vague: 'Well, we are helping young people in general.' But when the collector found out she was speaking to a USSR citizen, her tone changed abruptly.

'Here, take this. You are like a lost sheep now, but you'll be able to see,' the girl spoke urgently, handing me a book in a colourful cover. The title read *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*.

I refrained from any further explanations, as things were now clear. This was yet another pseudo-Hinduist sect which had proliferated across the ocean and were now sending their emissaries to Western Europe. I regretted the lost minutes: while I was setting the record straight with the Bhagavad Gita priestess, Ralph had left and melted into the crowd. I had noticed that he looked up as if he was stung when the phrase 'USSR citizen' was uttered.

Ralph was replaced by a man of around thirty five wearing a familiar Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament badge. CND – these letters can be seen more and more often on the walls of buildings, on posters, badges, shirts or jackets.

'Did you see that mercenary?!' the unknown man asked me. The English language lacks a suffix equivalent to the ironic or diminutive one in Russian, but the man's intonation was such as to enable me to get that precise meaning. 'Here is a paradox. Our lads are cruising around the world, burning and killing, and before you know it, there are missiles being deployed on our islands. This is a false paradox. Everything is crystal clear. The newspapers are screaming about the red threat. But it is precisely such 'brave' soldiers with Ulster experience that are the threat. I am sorry, I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. So you don't think we are all like him, please take this as a memento.' The Scotsman unpinned his CND badge from his lapel and handed it to me.

'Thank you... You don't have to... There is no need...' I stammered. 'Please at least let me know your name.'

'Well, let's say John Barleycorn. Or John Buccleuch. Or MacGregor. What's the difference? We have many honourable families and clans. The main thing, I am a Scotsman. Do you hear that? Me, not him!'

John Barleycorn-Buccleuch-MacGregor shook my hand, got up and vanished in the crowd again...

The Scottish crowd is a wondrous sight. You cannot see such vivid contrasts anywhere in England.

Several gentlemen in grey tail-coats and tall hats must be in a hurry to get to a wedding. Here is a bunch of students dressed any old how. And only once, which is most surprising, only once did I see a gentleman wearing a kilt, the national Scottish skirt with a sporran, a seal fur purse, at his belt. Not only did he exude a feeling of perfect dignity, he clearly disapproved of the young people prancing about in jeans.

This at least made me agree with him: it is not jeans that shape the image of today's Scotland. That image is complex. There are the relics of the clan system, the traditions of the labour movement, the anti-missile marches, the cult of Walter Scott. And of course, there is the poetry. One does need to possess a vivid imagination to feel the poetry of the Scottish landscape: the silver threads of streams flowing from the mountains, the ancient castles, the blue saucer-like lakes, the fierce, crushing winds blowing from the Firth of Forth, the dizzying air of the highlands...

And of course, I couldn't fail to remember these lines as I was leaving Edinburgh:

Ye Powers of peace, and peaceful song,

Look down with gracious eyes;

And bless auld Coila, large and long,

With multiplying joys;

Lang may she stand to prop the land,

The flow'r of ancient nations;

And Burns'es spring, her fame to sing,

To endless generations!

Andrey Dubrovsky, Candidate of History

Glasgow – Edinburgh – London - Moscow

The Big Hunt for Nessie

01 January 1988

Let's be honest: the majority of zoologists are sceptical about accounts of a monster allegedly haunting the lake of Loch Ness in Northern Scotland. As for believers in giant reptiles, over the past years they have made many attempts to prove they are right. One of them, Ichiro Kou, even built a mini-submarine with a gun shooting anaesthetic bullets. Fortunately for Nessie, the local authorities banned the enterprising enthusiast from using his equipment. Another 'hunter', from West Germany, scattered ten tons of bread crumbs over the surface of the lake, hoping to attract the animal. Alas, like in the previous cases, these expenses were wasted...

...The scale of the plans for a new operation called Deepscan, carefully designed by the 38-year old Adrian Shine, was really impressive. Twenty speedboats equipped with state-of-the-art electronic equipment were meant to comb through the depths of the lake for several days.

During the tests held in October 1986, the equipment's sensitivity was calibrated to detect the movement of any fish larger than 10 centimetres. This thick electronic 'mesh', due to be imposed to the entire volume of Loch Ness, did not seem to leave the monster with any chance of escaping if... 'If it really exists,' Shine added. The results of the scan were thoroughly analysed by computer experts who set up camp on the shore.

'To be honest, I am not convinced there is a reptile,' the expedition organisers said. 'It is more likely to be a very large fish. And I don't think I would be dissatisfied if we found a six-metre eel or sturgeon.'

'Years spent hunting for the animal have convinced me that this must be a figment of the imagination,' Chris Booth, an expedition participant who wanted to try his luck one more time told journalists. 'On many occasions, I've seen floating objects which would make less experienced people think of a monster. Most of the Nessie "evidence" can be explained by floating stumps, gas emissions and other phenomena. In any case, a prehistoric monster, let alone more than one, would find it hard to hide from people. And no bodies or skeletons have been found so far.'

The big hunt for Nessie

The current Deepscan operation is a continuation of a 1982 expedition. Using much less sophisticated technology, Shine was then able to obtain 40 reflected sonar signals which suggested the presence of a large moving object at a depth of 100 metres. Unfortunately, the contact was short and made it impossible to identify the unknown object.

‘Everyone pictures Nessie differently. At the moment, it is just a set of undecipherable echo signals for me at this stage,’ Adrian Shine said before the search began. ‘And if all we get as a result is similar signals, this will indicate nothing. And we’d have to start from scratch.’

In October 1987, hundreds of people came to the environs of Loch Ness. Joined by 300 journalists from different countries, they were eager to see the start of the ‘hunt’.

On the morning of 9 October, a huge crowd gathered near the scientists’ camp. The last preparations were being made next to the landing. Shine gave a signal, the engines roared, and the boats left the pier one by one. Near the starting site, they formed a line cutting the lake in two. The operation had begun: the equipment was switched on, and the sonars were sending their first signals into the dark depths of Loch Ness.

Windy weather and strong waves on the lake prevented the use of underwater TV cameras, which the scientists had hoped to lower to a depth of over 200 metres. But the first hours of search brought up intriguing results.

Approximately in the centre of the lake, the radio signal made contact with an unidentified object located at a depth of 74 metres (the lake itself was 228 metres deep at that point). More large objects of unclear shapes were discovered close to the bottom. As the flotilla neared the site where Mr Shine had obtained his mysterious signals five years before, the radio transmitters used by expedition participants for communications carried excited messages of new contacts with underwater objects.

Boat crews despatched buoys at points of contact to confirm the results at the next try.

Unfortunately, weather interfered with the scientists’ plans. The rising wind and waves were tossing 10-metre vessels from side to side. There was no question of retaining the boats in a single line and keeping even distances between them. And this meant that there was no guarantee that nothing would be missed by the sonars. The people who had been monitoring the readings of the machines for several hours on end were also in need of a break. In such conditions, the operation organisers thought it best to postpone work till the following day.

So, the first day of searching was over. At the evening press conference, the organisers looked rather upbeat.

‘The scanning results clearly indicate that there are some objects under water,’ Adrian Shine announced. ‘Of special interest is the especially strong response at the depth of 74 metres. This really looks like a living creature. At the bottom of the lake, we can speculate there might be natural outcrops which produce the image we are seeing on our screens, but what could have reflected the echo signal at a smaller depth?’

Saturday 10 October left many mysteries unsolved. Although the boats were combing the area where the sonar had made contact with an unidentified object at 74 metres the day before, this time the radio signal found no obstacles all the way to the bottom. Was it a technical glitch exacerbated by the rolling of the boats? Or are there indeed mythical monsters, which are not likely to be met twice in the same place?

The scientists could not obtain any answers to those questions over the subsequent days. Their cutting-edge equipment: powerful sonars, computers, TV and video cameras were once again unable to solve the mystery of the Scottish lake.

Despite its fruitless search for Nessie, operation Deepscan, which cost its organisers a million pounds sterling, made it possible to study the lake itself. Over a few days, most interesting information had emerged about the underwater currents, movements of shoals of fish, water temperature and density at different depths. As for Nessie...

'We are all impressed by these unidentified signals. We have to find out what their nature is,' Adrian Shine said. 'But I am inclined to reasonable scepticism.'

P. Syutkin