James Muckle

Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann (1852–1917): A Pioneer of the Teaching of Russian in Great Britain[1]

The alliance with Russia in the First World War led to an explosion of interest in Russia and her language in the United Kingdom. British universities and schools introduced the subject, technical and commercial education was inundated with students seeking to learn Russian for business purposes, private individuals went to classes and bought Russian textbooks, friendship societies burgeoned. *The Times* issued a quarterly *Russian Supplement* or *Russian Section*, in which the language was discussed and opportunities to learn it were publicized. It amounted to what Bernard Pares (1867–1949), that great pioneer of university Russian who was later knighted for his work, called a 'boom'. Yet before 1914 Britain had shown relatively little interest in the Russian language, and it was in this period that Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann made his not insignificant mark by fostering and encouraging interest in a range of ways, and by providing tuition when very little was available. He was one of a small number of enthusiasts at work as early as the 1880s, when promoting Russian must have seemed a thankless task. One purpose of this article is to characterize the context in which he and those others worked.

Britain, Russia and the Russian language in the thirty years before the Great War

Neither in Britain, nor for that matter in America – despite the acquisition of Alaska by the USA and a perceptible amount of immigration into both countries from the Russian Empire from around 1870 onwards[2] – did formal teaching of

[1] The author is indebted to the following: Mrs Siann Hurt, for advice and practical help in tracing the Schnurmanns in census and registration records; to the Provost and Fellows of King's College, Cambridge, for kind permission to quote from the Browning Papers; to Professor Geoffrey T. Martin, Honorary Archivist of Christ's College, Cambridge; to Ms Diane Clements, Director of the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, for information on Schnurmann's career as a Freemason; to the Archivist of St Paul's School; and to Mrs Jill Barlow, Archivist at Cheltenham College, for the supply of various information and of photographs of Schnurmann and of Corinth House.

[2] The USA is not the subject of this article, but for an earlier period to 1967 a scholarly and entertaining history exists: Albert Parry, *America Learns Russian* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1967).

Russian take place, with very little exception, until nearly the end of the nineteenth century. In Britain neither county secondary schools nor independent schools taught Russian before 1914, with one possible exception, as we shall see. At the time Schnurmann began his work, no British university had instituted a Russian department; a mere handful did so in the fifteen or so years before the outbreak of the First World War, but interest in terms of numbers of students was minimal, with the exception of the newly-chartered University of Liverpool. In any case, the ancient universities had little interest in the language as a means of communication: their undergraduates were not tested in its use orally, and university staff concentrated on diachronic linguistic study. Some very slight interest in Russian was shown by the commercial sector, and the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (later Royal Society of Arts: RSA) instituted an examination in Russian in 1889, the first public body to do so. There was only one successful candidate in the first ten years:[3] trade with Russia was nugatory, and only a few businessmen had any serious interest. Nevertheless, some of these men of commerce were instrumental in the early twentieth century in pressing for and in generously donating considerable sums of money to universities for the purpose of establishing Russian departments: notable in this context was John Rankin of Liverpool. At the time of Schnurmann's activity, little of this had come to pass. Only in military circles was serious interest in the practical use of Russian beginning to emerge.

There was, however, an undercurrent of interest. The Anglo-Russian Literary Society (ARLS), which was founded in 1893, typified the concern of certain intellectuals, journalists, business people, military men and other friends of Russian culture, literature and society. It had members in both Britain and Russia and published *Proceedings* for thirty years. The Society was probably the first organisation to press for the introduction of Russian in schools, though many of those urging this policy despaired of schoolmasters' 'obsession with Latin and

[3] Since he was the first candidate ever to gain any such certificate (and since the papers were of quite phenomenal difficulty!) his name deserves to be recorded: he was Charles Moncur, aged 17, who took the exam in Sheffield in its first year, 1889. No more is known of him than this. The RSA keeps a full record of annual reports, syllabuses and examination results at their headquarters in London.

Greek'.[4] Russian literature had not yet had the impact on English-speaking readers which it came to have when Constance Garnett's translations of Dostoevsky appeared in the 1910s, but Ivan Turgenev was widely read and respected – to the extent of having an honorary doctorate conferred at Oxford. The Russo-British Chamber of Commerce dates from 1908; but it was not until 1909 that an inter-parliamentary group was formed. In 1912, when Schnurmann was almost ready to retire, Professor Bernard Pares in his *Russian Review* published a list of fifteen free-lance tutors in Russian all over the country; one could also learn Russian at the Berlitz and Gouin schools. A dozen or so Russian grammar books of one sort and another, many of them dreary and unsatisfactory, appeared between 1850 and 1914. It may at least be concluded from the existence and the regular reprinting of these publications that there were individuals who wished to learn the language.

At the same time, Russia was detested by many politicians and by many among the general public.[5] The Victorian press tended to paint a dismal picture of a country oppressively ruled and seething with discontent, to the extent that there were many in Britain who were ready to condone Russian revolutionary terrorism. While a few travellers and journalists attempted to present a more balanced picture, the influx of refugees (particularly Jewish ones after the pogroms of the 1880s) did nothing to reduce what one civil servant called the 'asperity which existed' between the two countries. In the early twentieth century the Cabinet was split over relations with Russia, some ministers claiming to trust the Russian 'bear' not a whit. Indeed, the only sector in which Russian had been studied on a substantial scale since 1885 was the Army, and to a lesser extent the Navy.

Among the relatively few names that emerge in this pre-1914 period of Russian teaching is that of Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann, and his contribution to the development of Russian (and Slavonic) language teaching was made in several fields. He taught Russian by correspondence. He offered Russian in a school as an 'extra'. He was the first teacher of Russian, Bulgarian and Czech ('Bohemian', as it was called) at Cambridge University. He coached army and naval officers for their interpretership exams with the War Office and Civil Service Commission

[4] 'From a correspondent: learning Russian', *The Globe and Traveller*, 8/8/1892. My source for this article is a cuttings book once belonging to the ARLS, and now kept at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College, University of London; a handwritten note attributes the article to A. A. Sykes, an energetic proponent of the learning of Russian.

[5] A useful account of public and politicians' attitudes to Russia is given in Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia 1894–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

(CSC) and he was the first CSC examiner in Bulgarian (in 1897). He wrote a Russian grammar book which looked at the language from the point of view of the learner, rather than of the academic analyst. He deserves at least a small corner in the pantheon of pioneer Russian teachers. This short account of his career is offered as a contribution to rescuing his memory. But there is more to it than the personal issue: his story reflects the hard 'grind' in which innovators at this period had to engage in order to establish the subject in Britain. They probably did not see it as an issue of national importance, but modern teachers of Russian now appreciate that it was indeed so.

Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann: a biographical sketch

It is very hard to be exact about the facts of Schnurmann's life and career. The entry under his name in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* is very short,[6] and is inaccurate as to dates. Even his name is fluid. He was born Johann Nestor Schnurmann on 18 February 1852 at Pabianice, ten miles south-west of Łodz: a Polish Jew and a citizen of the Russian Empire. The name, however, implies a trace of Germanic ethnicity. The hyphen and the name 'Ivan' were a later affectation: the hyphen does not appear in British census returns, and the initials I or J alternate there. 'Ivan' is recorded by census enumerators from 1901; he may well have adopted it as promotion of a more Russian 'image'. He was rumoured in the schools where he later taught to have been a nihilist and to have been exiled to Siberia before he came to Britain in about 1877, though this cannot be confirmed. It may be that he promoted the notion among his schoolboy charges in order to increase what today we would colloquially call his 'street cred'. He became a British citizen in 1889.[7] The details in his naturalization papers, for fairly obvious reasons, are most likely to be accurate, but other sources are inconsistent. For example, the 1881 census gives his age as 38 (when it was clearly ten years less – probably a clerical error), twenty years later he is 48, ten years after that only 56. His first wife Sophia was recorded as 35 in 1881, 50 in 1901, and 68 when she died in 1905. We make of all this what we can! As for his academic qualifications, Schnurmann is reported in an obituary in the Christ's College Cambridge Magazine to have studied in

[6] This is most easily consulted at http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/, p. 106.

[7] National Archives, HO 144/307/B5569, from which the details of his birth are taken.

Russia, Berlin, Bulgaria and Cracow,[8] and although he does not seem to have been awarded a degree, this would not be unusual for a continental intellectual of the period. When he joined the teaching staff of Cheltenham College he had a doctorate attributed to him, but this disappeared from subsequent editions of the school prospectus; it was probably a simple mistake. It may be that a Polish Jew was so conditioned to cover his tracks to avoid the secret police and the anti-Semitic bigots in the Russian Empire, that he continued this practice in his adopted country. It must also be admitted that anti-Semitism in Britain was far from hidden in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as any student of the period will confirm: maybe Russian habits of obfuscation and deception proved beneficial.

Always remembering the approximate nature of the evidence, Schnurmann's career in Britain can be summarized as follows. After his arrival in 1877, he married Sophia (maiden name unknown), a Londoner, before 1881. For five or seven years we have no evidence of his employment, though he and his wife gave 'professor of German' as their occupation in the 1881 census. For 'professor' at this period we must assume 'teacher'. From 1884 to 1892 he taught at St Paul's Preparatory School, where he has left little trace in the records, except that he is listed among the teaching staff (as *J.* Nestor-Schnurmann) in a school handbook dated 1890. We may assume that he taught general form subjects, perhaps Latin and French; he offered German as an extra at one guinea a term.[9] In 1892 he moved to Cheltenham College, where he stayed for the rest of his teaching career. At Cheltenham his teaching load seems to have been very light, but he opened and ran Corinth House, a small boarding house for Jewish boys: it had seventeen boarders in 1901 and twelve in 1911. From 1897 to 1899 he travelled weekly for two days to Cambridge University, where he taught Russian to Foreign Office personnel. At some stage before 1901 he and Sophia adopted a son, Harry, born in 1883.[10] In 1905 his wife died, and the following year he married Alice Bergtheil, a South African. He retired in 1914 and died in 1917.

A little can be deduced from this brief account to indicate Schnurmann's character and personality. On arrival in Britain it can surely be assumed that

[8] *Christ's College Magazine*, vol. XXXI, 1916–1917, p. 54.

[9] For this information I am indebted to the School Archivist.

[10] Harry continued the family tradition of obfuscation by changing his name to 'Sherman', perhaps in despair at routine mispronunciation of Schnurmann.

he had to show determination to earn a living; the variety of his career indicates an enterprising and hard-working nature, and his marriage relatively soon after arrival declares confidence in the security of his financial position. Without further evidence we cannot draw conclusions from his remarriage so soon after widowhood, but it perhaps indicates a need to restore familial normality in his middle age. He had a facility for making useful friendships, with which he established and maintained his career. His principal sponsor on naturalization was the Rt Hon Henry Charles Matthews QC, MP, whose son Schnurmann had taught, presumably at St Paul's. No better sponsor for a naturalization application than the current Home Secretary can be imagined – and Matthews would doubtless have been gratified to see himself described by a Police Sergeant George Bush in the confidential report on Schnurmann as a 'thoroughly respectable and responsible person'.[11] Another eminent contact was the somewhat notorious educationist Oscar Browning,[12] who took Russian lessons from him, and was his referee for posts at Cambridge.[13] Perhaps significant is Schnurmann's membership of the Freemasons: he was initiated in 1890, and as early as 1895 had joined the Royal Arch in the Foundation Chapter of Unanimity No. 82, Cheltenham. 'Exaltation' to this order of Masonry suggests far more than routine membership of the movement, and he retained his affiliation until his death.[14]

Russian by correspondence: Schnurmann the textbook-writer

Nestor-Schnurmann began as a teacher of languages, in particular (we may assume) of German, although at St Paul's he taught French; while thus earning a living, he was clearly exploring the possibility of similarly capitalizing on his Russian. His first idea was to teach it by correspondence, and he was probably – though this cannot be proved – the first person in Britain to offer organized tuition in Russian in this way. The earliest evidence which can be traced for his provision of correspondence courses is to be found in the Oscar Browning papers at King's College, Cambridge: sixteen letters from Schnurmann survive at King's.

[11] Matthews was the first Roman Catholic ever to be appointed cabinet minister. Schnurmann's three other sponsors all had Jewish names.

[12] For details on Browning see: Ian Anstruther, *Oscar Browning, a Biography* (London: John Murray, 1983).

[13] King's College Library, Cambridge, OB/1/1192/A.

[14] For this information I am indebted to the Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

Browning is credited with knowing or having studied at least 36 languages.[15] The earliest letter is dated 12 March 1884; writing from Clapham, Schnurmann outlines his method: once the alphabet is mastered, the 'Robertsonian' system comes into play.[16] A Russian short story, divided into paragraphs with a literal English translation appears. 'I next put it into an interrogative form, which my pupils can by this time reply to in Russian, and thus we conquer the conversational part, and with these words, which are now quite familiar to him I begin to develop the grammar, thus you see I dispense with grammatical exercises, always tedious and discouraging to beginners […] I then give the lexicology of this, tracing every word from its respective language. I have always found this a great aid to the learner.'

Schnurmann charged four shillings a lesson, payable every fourth lesson. The materials he posted to his learners were, of course, hand written, and from a later letter it seems that the copies were in such demand that he could not always supply Browning immediately with the next lesson. However, as this was going on, Schnurmann was working on his book *The Russian Manual*, which was published by W. H. Allen, also in 1884.

In its own way this book is innovative. It is intended for self-tuition and claims to 'avoid all useless digressions'; it adopts a similar methodology to that of the correspondence course. One can criticize the directions about Russian pronunciation, which lead to curious transliterations such as 'paravotshik' for переводчик and 'kondetyerr' for кондитер. The very first exercise illustrates the method: a list of Russian–English vocabulary is given and explained in some detail; the first three sentences of Lermontov's 'Taman′' are presented for translation into English; questions in English are asked − to be answered in Russian. ('What is the name of the most miserable town in Russia? What sort of a town is B [the name Taman′ is not used in the text]); finally, 'Translate into Russian: I did not die of hunger. The postillion arrived in the post-chaise.' It would not be easy to learn Russian from this book, but it is, in modern terminology, 'student-centred', in that it focuses on the problems the student must overcome when learning and provides connected text, while most of its few contemporary competitor grammars resort largely or even entirely to bald description.

[15] Anstruther, 186.

[16] Thomas Jaffray Robertson, *The General Principles of Language, or, the Philosophy of Grammar* (Montreal/Toronto: 1861). The 'system' is now barely remembered by language teachers.

For that reason, *The Russian Manual* must be considered if not a landmark, then at least a step on the way to the development of modern teaching materials for Russian. Earlier grammars for English-speaking learners are few and far between, and only one or two can be considered as competitors to Schnurmann's at the time of its appearance in 1884. Ludolf's remarkable 1696 *Grammatica Russica*, written mainly in Latin and published in Oxford is of great historical and linguistic importance, but would not have been available or of very much use to the learner in 1880. A poor piece of work by the pseudonymous British businessman W. H. M. D. appeared in St Petersburg in 1822 and was deservedly forgotten; this last rebuke does not apply to the sound and innovative *Practical Grammar of the Russian Language* by James Arthur Heard (also St Petersburg, 1827),[17] but its place of publication, its lack of a prestige publisher, and the lapse of time since its appearance meant that it too was scarcely remembered. The *English–Russian Grammar* of Carl Reiff (Carlsruhe, 1853, 1857 and 1862), though a translation of a German original, came to be regarded as standard for three decades from its first appearance in 1853 (twice reprinted: 1857 and 1862). Two other translated works were published in 1867 and 1882, but sank without trace. The main competitor to Schnurmann was Henri Riola's *How to Learn Russian* (London: Kegan Paul, 1878). Riola was another naturalized Russian immigrant, from Taganrog, and the success of his book is illustrated by the fact of its six reprints between 1883 and 1915.[18] In this respect it beat Schnurmann hands down: his grammar was not reprinted.

However, while the market may have decided that Riola's grammar was preferable, more mature reflection might suggest that it was considerably less than the answer to a prayer. It is a massively thorough volume, over 560 pages; it claims to be based on the 'Ollendorfian system', whatever that was in practice, but it is hard to see any enlightened 'system' behind its rationale and construction. Schnurmann at least had fifteen pages of 'dialogues', which were in effect a very useful phrase-book, something totally missing from Riola's work. Moreover, Schnurmann gave sixty pages of 'idioms'. No such helpful material is present in Riola's sixty-five lessons, each of which opens with a grammatical disquisition, followed by brief phrases illustrating the vocabulary, morphology, and syntax.

[17] The book appears to have been published by its author, as the title page states: 'St Petersburg. Printed for the author and sold by Sleunine, and by Boosey and Sons, London'.

[18] I have had access to the fifth edition, 1895.

But in no time at all we are on to solid pages of English (Riola's rather comic English) for translation into Russian. These zany, wildly irrational sentences give a great deal of amusement:

> Have you my ram or that of my cook? – I have neither your ram nor your cook's. – Whose ram have you? I have the captain's ram. – Has he the white biscuit or the baker's good new bread? – Has he enough cheese? He has not enough cheese, but he has plenty of good wax. – Has this rich Englishman a wooden or a stone castle? He has neither a stone nor a wooden castle, he has only a good wooden house. – Has the ass enough oats? No, he has not enough. – Has the old bootmaker his own boot or mine? Not yours, but his own.[19]

And so it goes on for literally hundreds of pages, with one irrational sentence tumbling over the next. It recalls the 'Goon Show' and 'Monty Python's Flying Circus', but it lacks even their manic logic. Perhaps it was the unconscious humour of these exercises which sold the book; more likely, it was the fact that the introduction was written by a man of considerable prestige in Russian studies, W. R. S. Ralston; although, if this introduction is read carefully, one perceives that Ralston's praise of the book is somewhat grudging. Schnurmann, on the other hand, is not deflected from the vital notion that the learner needs connected text sooner rather than later, and he gives it from the start; in Riola's grammar the 'later' never comes. Probably the real reason for Riola's success is that the dry grammatical presentation (wrong though some of its explanations undoubtedly are) was what the Victorian language-learning public expected and felt at home with. Schnurmann's inventive approach was more than they could handle; it certainly deserved better.

Schnurmann made two other contributions to the textbook literature: an *Aid to Russian Composition*, published in 1888, and a student edition of Lermontov's *Geroi nashego vremeni* with translation and biographical sketch.[20] This last work appeared just as Schnurmann was hoping, fruitlessly, to be appointed to Cambridge University, and the Lermontov edition was indeed published by the University Press. It is not a work of original scholarship, however, and Schnur-

[19] These sentences come from pages 57–58 of the fifth edition.

[20] Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann, *Russian Reader. Lermontof's Modern Hero* (Cambridge: University Press, 1899).

mann states that the biographical introduction is indebted to an essay by P. A. Efremov.[21]

Russian in the Army and Navy

The second field in which Schnurmann contributed to the development of Russian teaching was in coaching army and naval officers. This work was probably more important than it may seem on the surface. At the time it began (around 1885) no-one in schools or universities was teaching Russian. As the dons of Oxford footled around, making fun of what they called the 'Letto-Slavic languages'[22] and obstructing their development as teaching subjects, the military sector was at work. A major feature of British paranoia about Russia in the early 1880s was the conviction among many but by no means all in government circles that Russia had designs on the British Empire in India. Modern historians mock this notion, arguing that the Russians would scarcely have been capable of mounting a campaign across the Himalayas and through Afghanistan. Whatever the truth of this, anxiety in the diplomatic mind worked very much to the advantage of Russian language learning.

From 1885 officers, especially in the Indian Army, were given the opportunity to learn Russian and qualify by means of the Civil Service examinations as interpreters. Some of these officers went to the Staff College and got a smattering (Riola taught there); some went to Nestor-Schnurmann or others like him for private tuition. If they achieved 25% in a preliminary War Office examination, they could get furlough for a year or more to study in Russia. Some, indeed, if specially favoured, were allowed to go to Russia in total ignorance and begin their studies there.[23] There exists a splendid memoir by one such officer, Lt-Col. Robert Spottiswoode (1841–1936), who did just that.[24] An estimated four

[21] M. Iu. Lermontov, *Sochineniia Lermontova* (St Petersburg 1880), 2 vols., 4 ed., edited by P. A. Efremov.

[22] The introduction of Russian to the ancient universities is recounted in James Muckle, *The Russian Language in Britain* (Ilkeston: Bramcote Press, 2008), 40–47.

[23] Further details of the system are to be found in D. O'Connor, 'Russian language training in 1893', *The Rose and the Laurel* [journal of the Intelligence Corps], 2002, which traces the career of another of Schnurmann's military students: Brigadier General Reginald Burton. See also Muckle, 32–39.

[24] Lt-Col. R.C.D'E. Spottiswoode, 'Russia', in his *Reminiscences* (Edinburgh and London: The Edinburgh Press, 1935). Despite this late date of publication (the author was well over 90 years old when he wrote – and superbly, it must be said), the chapter refers to the mid-1880s.

hundred officers qualified by 1914: a considerable number, dwarfing the universities' one or two graduates per year. Some came to Schnurmann in Cheltenham; we do not know how Schnurmann advertised his services, but doubtless small advertisements in the press and word of mouth played a part. Those officers who studied Russian under this dispensation, those of them who recorded their feelings at least, often confessed to a love of Russia and the Russians and to complete scepticism as to the British government's assumption of Russian hostility to British India. It is a very interesting example of the unintended consequences of an educational project which had entirely different aims: British authorities sent army personnel to Russia in order to find linguistic means of countering imagined Russian hostility to British interests, and it worked as a stimulus to good international relations.

The University of Cambridge

We now turn to Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann's role in Russian and Slavonic languages at Cambridge University. Even by the 1890s that noble institution had shown very little interest in matters Slavonic. A hilarious article by A. A. Sykes derides 'the mediaeval and insular ignorance' of Russian which prevailed at Cambridge[25] in 1892, portraying dons squabbling over the transliteration of titles of the mere dozen library books in Cambridge written in Russian which they sought to catalogue, academic travellers who went to Russia and left most of their Russian behind, and implying that one of the town's hairdressers was a better Russian linguist than any of these. Only a Cambridge man would dare make fun of his own university in this way.[26] However, by 1897 the Special Board for Indian Civil Service Studies sought to train Russian linguists, and the Foreign Office provided £50 a year to induce Mr Schnurmann to make the journey from Cheltenham for two days a week. Fifty pounds does not sound very much, even for the 1890s, and the weekly journey by what was known even into the 1950s as 'the terrible railway' via Bletchley must have been a disincentive. But he came, and he clearly had hopes of a continuing appointment. From 1896 he had been a 'member' of Christ's College, an honorary and informal position, which he

[25] More of this article ['From a correspondent: learning Russian'] is quoted in Muckle, 45.

[26] Arthur Alkin Sykes (1861–1939) was a teacher, linguist, Civil Service examiner, and journalist with a few popular books to his credit.

retained for the rest of his life; he was reported to be a popular visitor to high table for many years. Someone, possibly Oscar Browning or one of his friends at Christ's, had introduced him. For two years Schnurmann taught the Foreign Office personnel. Part of his duties was to be available for ninety minutes a week in a room in Christ's College to assist any member of the University who was learning Russian, Bulgarian or Czech. But there it ended. By 1899 the Foreign Office students were no more. The University, however, had decided it was 'desirable that some provision for instruction in Russian should continue to be made'. Mr Schnurmann's teaching 'had given great satisfaction', though the necessary concentration of his teaching into two days a week had proved less than satisfactory for his students. But would he be tempted by £50 a year? Scarcely, though college funds might have supplemented this − if, indeed he had been able to obtain a college post.

The Browning papers nevertheless show that Schnurmann applied twice to Cambridge University, and that Browning thought highly enough of him to recommend him for employment. It is far from clear from the letters what position the first application (in October 1899) was for. Later, on 4 February 1900 he wrote to Browning: 'I have been asked by some members of the University to apply for the Russian lectureship [this must certainly be separate from the earlier application] and they have promised me their support with the Council.' He asks for a further testimonial from Browning. He was unsuccessful in his application. The competition was between Ellis Minns, a noted Cambridge scholar with excellent Russian and an established reputation for his work on the Scythians, on Slavonic palaeography and iconography, and Dr A. P. Goudy, not a Cambridge man, a graduate of two Scottish universities who had been teaching at Liverpool, and who was elected after a demeaning scrap which reflects some discredit on the University.[27] The University archives contain *non placets* galore, all set up in type and pleading (unsuccessfully) for a Cambridge man to be appointed. Schnurmann, if he had any sense, was doubtless happy to return to Cheltenham.

Schnurmann the schoolmaster

And what of Cheltenham College? Can we declare Mr Schnurmann to be the first schoolmaster to have taught Russian within any school in Britain? There

[27] Cambridge University archives, UA CUR 113/V, Russian.

was no other school at the time in which Russian was taught: Board of Education statistics for the period confirm this for state schools, and no public school claimed in 1914 to have been teaching it before that time. One thing is certain: Russian was *offered* at Cheltenham College year after year in the prospectus as an 'extra' from the time of Schnurmann's arrival there. The College, however, cannot say whether any boy ever took up the offer. It seems inconceivable, however, that no-one did in fifteen years. Mr Schnurmann's house was for Jewish boys. Surely there must have been Russian Jews among them at some time? Census returns for 1901 and 1911 do not, however, show any names − though many of them look specifically Jewish − which could be Russian, and with no more than one or two exceptions the places of birth given are in England. There are none in Russia. However, there must surely have been at some time a keen linguist or two who wanted to learn some Russian with their housemaster? Or did Schnurmann keep offering it in the prospectus out of sheer determination? The one clue we have is in the introduction to Schnurmann's edition of Lermontov. The second and third sentences of the introduction[28] read: 'Give the student a book and a dictionary, he will doubtless succeed in worrying out the meaning of a few pages or sentences; but at what cost of time and labour? For boys, this labour may have the effect of quickening their mental faculties; but those who study Russian are for the most part men, whose faculties are more or less trained […]' Why mention boys if he has never taught Russian to any? Why 'for the most part men' if he has only ever taught men? The evidence is slender, but unless conclusive proof to the contrary appears, we can fairly safely award Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann the accolade of being the first teacher of Russian in a British school.

Conclusion

Schnurmann was not a great figure in the history of Russian studies, and he was not in modern terms a scholar. He was, nevertheless, a pioneer and a tireless worker for the cause of Russian language teaching in Britain. Progress in education owes a lot to determined and enterprising people such as he was. He had an impressive series of 'firsts': the first teacher to offer Russian in an English school, the first teacher of Russian at Cambridge University, the first person (as far as we can tell) to offer a correspondence course in Russian to the public. His *Russian*

[28] Schnurmann, *Lermontof's Modern Hero*, vii.

Manual of 1884 was only the second grammar written by a resident in Britain and published in the United Kingdom which was consciously aimed at helping the student to learn, as opposed to describing the language in academic terms. There are few pioneers who can lay claim to so much. His career exemplifies the energy and inventiveness with which Russian and Slav immigrants in need of a livelihood had to promote themselves in the later nineteenth century, thereby enriching the educational milieu in ways we now take for granted. Perhaps the most significant feature of his activity is this: he had other language and teaching skills which he could have used to make a living, German and French in particular, and in fact he did do so; he did not need to teach Russian. However, and for whatever reason, he chose to promote the Russian language, and he did so with initiative and vigour. Schnurmann must have found it galling that, very shortly after he retired in 1914, the 'boom' in Russian studies burst forth: he was no longer able to share in it, unless, of course, he continued for the very few years of his retirement to coach individuals in Russian. Yet the ground had been prepared by him and others for this boom, and we, his successors, owe a debt of gratitude to Ivan Nestor-Schnurmann and his like.