

STEPHEN WHITE

Stephen Leonard White

1 July 1945 – 15 November 2023

elected Fellow of the British Academy 2010

by

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Summary. Stephen Leonard White was born in Dublin in 1945, to a literary and cultural household. He attained his first degree at Trinity College Dublin in 1967 before moving to the University of Glasgow to pursue doctoral studies. He remained in Glasgow for the rest of his career, spending his last three decades as professor, and was viewed as one of the world's leading scholars of Soviet and post-Soviet history and politics. Author and editor of more than 500 books, articles and edited volumes, and a frequent commentator in the media, he was known for his prodigious work ethic, attention to detail, depth of his scholarship and generosity of spirit. In addition to his own scholarly output, he supervised or mentored an extended family of grateful scholars now spread across the world. He died in November 2023 after an exemplary career spanning more than 50 years.



Stephen White

Childhood and studies in Dublin

In 1939, Sir Winston Churchill famously described the actions of Russia as being like ‘a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma’. Stephen Leonard White, born six years after that remark, spent much of his life trying to unwrap it, authoring over 500 books, articles and working papers on the Soviet Union, Russia, and Central and East European politics. He spent most of his professional career at the University of Glasgow, following a youth and undergraduate career in Dublin, Ireland.

White was born in the Irish capital on 1 July 1945, the son of writer and journalist William John (‘Jack’) White (1920-80) and Edna White (1920-2009, neé McGuckin). His birth came less than two months after the end of the Second World War in Europe, and six weeks before the end of hostilities in the Pacific. Though Ireland had been neutral in the war, it was not immune from its effects. In the summer that Stephen was born, his father was filing a series of reports for the *Irish Times*, ‘Front Line of Europe’, focused on the increasing Sovietisation of the continent’s eastern half. As he wrote, he would have hardly guessed that his infant son would one day be known as one of the world’s leading scholars on the developments he was reporting on.

The White household was steeped in culture. Jack White’s career was to encompass prominent roles as a journalist, broadcaster, dramatist and novelist. A native of Cork, he had studied classics at Trinity College Dublin (his first choices, Persian and Arabic, were unavailable), followed by an LLB in 1942. By the time of Stephen’s birth, he had served as president of the Trinity College Dublin Philosophical Society, edited the *Trinity* literary magazine, won two Vice-Chancellor’s Prizes for English verse and prose (Murphy 2012), and embarked on a career in journalism. Later, following a series of senior journalistic roles at the *Irish Times*, he would move from printed to broadcast media in 1961 when the Irish national television broadcaster, *Telefís Éireann* (later RTÉ), was formed. He had several roles there, culminating as Head of Broadcasting Resources, until his untimely death (at the age of just sixty) while attending a conference of the European Broadcasting Union in Germany in 1980. Stephen’s mother Edna was a native of Donegal; she was schooled at boarding school in Sligo, and took a degree in modern languages at Trinity College, where she was a fellow Trinity Player. She would go on to become a prominent gardening journalist (O’Neill 2002). Family birthday parties were always adorned by tables groaning with homegrown raspberries and strawberries, a testament to that fact that not only literary culture, but horticulture, played an important role in the White children’s upbringing.

From 1946 to 1952, Jack White served as London editor of the *Irish Times*, and thus Stephen White’s early years were spent in England. The Whites wanted their children to have an Irish childhood, however, and shortly returned to the village of Booterstown in County Dublin, where their house at 95 Booterstown Avenue – intended at first to be a

temporary home – remained the family seat until Edna's death in 2009, some 57 years later.

Writing a year after his mother's death, Stephen recalled the influence of these early years in London and Dublin:

Obviously, I was very powerfully influenced by my parents, particularly my father, who was a journalist in the *Irish Times* and later head of Irish television, but (in my view) first and foremost a writer. He produced four novels and a series of plays and other writings,¹ most of these at his typewriter during the afternoons he spent at home before he went into work (these were the hours that were typical in the newspaper industry of the time). I particularly remember the points at which he would get up from the table and make a pot of tea – these, of course, were the moments when he was thinking out the way forward in whatever he was writing at the time. For many years he was the paper's literary editor and so it was very much a writer's environment, with people like Edna O'Brien (1930-2024) and William Trevor (1928-2016) among the home visitors (White 2010).²

Like his parents, Stephen had a distinguished undergraduate career at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). He was one of 21 scholars awarded a prestigious Foundation Scholarship in 1965 (Mary Robinson, *née* Bourke, later the seventh President of Ireland (1990-97) and a good friend of Stephen's, was another), and he graduated in 1967 with a 1st class Moderatorship degree (BA) in Politics and Modern History. Alongside his academic work, Stephen found time for politics. He played a formative role in the Students' Representative Council and served as International Vice-President of the Union of

¹ Jack White's literary *oeuvre* included the novels *One for the road* (1956), *The hard man* (1958) and *The devil you know* (1962) and *The last eleven*, a play about church life in a fast-changing society that won the Irish Life Assurance Drama Award in 1967 and was performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1968. His subsequent play *Today the bullfinch* (1971), about the destruction of life in an Irish valley, as well as various *son et lumière* performances for various Irish and English cathedrals in 1972, also received critical acclaim. He also published the factual book *Minority Report* (1975) an analysis of the role of religion in Ireland (Murphy 2012).

² This and other autobiographical quotations later in this memoir are taken from a short 2-page note written by Stephen White in March 2010 (White 2010). White was invited to contribute to the Mattei Dogan Foundation's *Dictionary of Eminent Social Scientists: Autobiographies* and prepared this short entry for it, a copy of which he passed to the current author at the time. As far it has been possible to discern, the dictionary was never published. Several social scientists list their involvement in the project on their websites, but the current author has not been able to find any official bibliographical record of it. A French-language biography of the eminent sociologist Dogan (who died shortly afterwards, in October 2010), indicated that the project failed to launch, mentioning '*la creation d'un Dictionary of Eminent Social Scientists : Autobiographies (DESSA) qui, a ma connaissance, n'a jamais vu le jour, car, pour certains, il sentait le souffre*' ['the creation of a *Dictionary of Eminent Social Scientists: Autobiographies (DESSA)*, which, to my knowledge, never saw the light of day, because, for some, it was considered controversial.'] (Hoffmann-Martinot et al. 2022: 403).

Students in Ireland, representing them at a series of sometimes stormy international conferences (this was the time of the Vietnam war).

Move to Glasgow

Stephen's pride in his Irish roots remained intense throughout his whole life, but it was a Scottish city – Glasgow – with which he was eventually to become synonymous. Following his studies in Dublin, he moved to Glasgow, to what was then called the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies (ISEES), to take a master's degree. After a year, he moved to the doctoral programme. In his 2010 reminiscences, he explained that the choice of Glasgow had been a natural one:

Glasgow was, at the time, the place to be in Soviet studies; the world's leading journal, *Soviet Studies*, was edited there (it still is, under the new name of *Europe-Asia Studies*), and there was a collection of internationally recognised scholars, among whom Alec Nove was the most prominent. He was one of my lecturers, then my supervisor, later a friend, a colleague and indeed a neighbour.

Nove, who like Stephen loved the opera and was an inveterate traveller, would prove an inspiration and mentor to Stephen throughout his career, until his death in 1994.³

In 1971, Stephen spent a year in Russia, attending Moscow University as a one-year British Council exchange student. During his time in Moscow, he travelled on the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Manchurian railway to Beijing, at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Entry to China at that point was highly restricted; the entry visa owed more than a little to a fortuitous friendship with a fellow doctoral student from Norway who was studying in Glasgow and whose family was well-connected in consular circles. Such was the exoticism of his trip that it apparently attracted newspaper attention in Glasgow on his return.

'I had thought of continuing my studies further at this point', White noted in 2010, 'but my parents said it was time to get a job, and in any case a position had become available at Glasgow when Archie Brown moved to Oxford. I applied and was appointed. The department at this time was in the hands of W.J.M. ('Bill') Mackenzie (1909-96), a humorous man of very wide erudition, and Allen Potter, an American who had been in charge of the survey research centre at Essex' (White 2010).

White was appointed lecturer in 1971, and completed his first doctorate, in Soviet Studies, in the Institute in 1973. In April of that year, at the age of 27, he married Ishbel, with whom he went on to enjoy a fifty-year marriage. The University of Glasgow's

³For a full biography of Alexander Nove (1915-94), see Brown & Caircross (1997). For Stephen White's own obituary of him, see White (1994).

ancient scholarly heritage, the city's lively cultural life, and the friendly local environment created a propitious atmosphere in which they flourished – Ishbel developing a successful career in the National Health Service, and Stephen at the University of Glasgow. He remained at the University for the entirety of his career thereafter, other than for short absences on visiting fellowships. His appointment in the Department of Politics in 1971 was the start of an unbroken record of service that encompassed a promotion to Reader in 1985, and to Professor in 1991. He served the rest of his career until 2017 in the named James Bryce Chair of Politics, moving thereafter to the role of Professor Emeritus until his death in 2023. He retained close working relationships with colleagues in the ISEES institute next door (which went through several reincarnations after the turn of the century, eventually becoming what is today the Central and East European Studies research subject in the School of Social and Political Sciences), as well as the interdisciplinary Centre for Socialist Theory and Movements, founded in 1981, for whom he delivered a memorable keynote lecture as late as 2015. He collaborated with many other colleagues across the university throughout his more than fifty years there, who similarly valued Glasgow's scholarly heritage and democratic traditions.

Research on history, political culture and Soviet politics

Stephen White's research career was one of constant evolution, but can be divided into two broad periods that pivot around the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s: his work on questions of Soviet and socialist history and political culture in the 1970s and 1980s; and the comparative study of post-Soviet politics, democracy and autocracy from the early 1990s until the end of his career.

Much of his early research was historical in nature. His first peer-reviewed journal article, published in 1972, was on Gramsci (White 1972). In the mid-1970s, he published a plethora of articles focusing on the Soviet Union's nascent foreign relations in the early days of communism, as well as the Leeds Convention of 1917 (White 1974a), the Baku Congress of 1920 (White 1974b), the Labour Party's Council of Action in 1920 (in the context of opposition to British involvement in the Russo-Polish War) (White 1974c), and a study of anti-Bolshevik control officers and British foreign policy in the early Soviet period (White 1976). A more substantive output of his doctoral and postdoctoral research was the book-length study of *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*, published at the end of the decade (White 1979a). As several reviewers noted at the time, the book was not, as such, about the Revolution. Primarily, it focused on the period bracketed by the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of March 1921 and the British diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union in February 1924. It examined debates around how best to contain

Soviet Russia. In White's telling, diplomatic engagement with the Soviet Union in the early 1920s was a continuation of the previous military intervention: an attempt to undermine it through engagement, rather than isolation. One reviewer noted the wide array of sources of both British and Soviet origin, commenting that 'Dr White handles all this data with great control and authority' (Addison 1980). Another noted that 'White's book will undoubtedly take its place among those which will need to be read by anybody wanting to understand and discuss the British response to the Russian Revolution' (Dukes 1980).

White found the time to take a second doctorate in the early 1980s at Oxford, in what was then the Politics Sub-Faculty, on the topic of 'The Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western Relations, 1921-1922'. His working life was nothing if not busy: he combined his full-time position at the University of Glasgow with frequent visits to Oxford in pursuit of this further doctoral research, supervised by Richard Kindersley and (briefly, during Kindersley's absence) Archie Brown, whose departure for St Antony's College in 1971 had paved the way for White's own employment in Glasgow.⁴ He was awarded an MA and DPhil in Politics from Oxford in 1987, but prior to that had already published a book related to the research, *The Origins of Detente: The Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western Relations, 1921-1922* (White 1985), which questioned the conventional wisdom that the Conference was an unmitigated failure. It clearly set out the interests of each of the participating states, and traced the events of the conference and the developments that led to the signing of the bilateral Treaty of Rapallo between Europe's ostracised powers, Germany and Soviet Russia (rather than the planned multilateral agreement). Characteristically, the depth of the research – which involved looking at primary sources and archives in nine countries – was praised for its 'clarity, balance and comprehensiveness' (Liever 1988) and 'impeccable scholarship' (Light 1988) – even if some reviewers questioned whether *détente* was a concept better suited to the time the book was written than to the period in which its events had taken place (Levin 1987; Gorodetsky 1991).

Alongside his historical research, the other main strand of White's work in the 1970s and 1980s concerned socialisation processes in the Soviet Union. His first article in the pages of the aforementioned *Soviet Studies* journal (White 1974d), was on the topic of 'Contradiction and Change in State Socialism'. Like some of his other articles in this period (White 1977; White 1980), it questioned the effectiveness of co-optation, political education and propaganda in the Soviet Union. Encouraged by Archie Brown to take a closer interest in the concept of 'political culture', this line of enquiry was a natural progression for a political scientist whose first degree had primarily focused on history. In *Political Culture and Soviet Politics* (White 1979b) – at the time, the first full

⁴Brown was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991.

book-length study of the Soviet political culture – White criticised the lack of historical depth to contemporary research on the Soviet Union. He argued that many studies examined Soviet society simply as the direct result of Marxist-Leninist resocialisation rather than – as White contended – the result of historical continuities in political culture on which the particularly Soviet version of Marxism-Leninism had built. Among the book's many reviewers was Gabriel Almond, the doyen of political culture scholars, who argued that if pre-existing political cultures persisted in communist societies despite extensive resocialisation efforts, it would prove the merit of the concept. The resulting test, he argued, had been 'convincingly confirm[ed]' by White (Almond 1981).

Building on this pioneering work, much of White's research in the 1980s focused on a broader comparative understanding of communist systems, sometimes working in collaboration with others. The methodological problems of separating out national and systemic factors in communist political cultures was a question to which he returned (White 1984b), while other studies focused on the mechanisms by which communist institutions functioned in practice (White 1982; White 1990; White 1991a) and how incarnations of state socialism differed (Nelson & White 1982; White, Gardner & Schöpflin 1982; White 1983; Simons & White 1984). Underlying these studies was a belief – shared by his collaborators – that it was important to make analytical distinctions between the institutions of communism. The merits of this approach would be shown later, when the former communist states went on significantly different trajectories after 1989. In many cases, these mapped on to institutional differences that were already apparent before the collapse of state socialism.

For scholars of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev's election as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 marked an important turning point. As *perestroika* developed, so also did White's focus on the electoral and democratic changes in the country – the subject for which he was perhaps to become best known in the latter half of his career. Until this point, Soviet elections – with their pre-chosen slates of candidates and official turnouts of well over 99 per cent of the voters – had provided little material of note for psephologists to analyse, a situation that was to change notably. Less than three years elapsed between his article about the 1984 Supreme Soviet election, entitled 'Non-Competitive Elections and National Politics' (White 1985b) and his review article on recent literature on the USSR, called 'Winds of Change in Moscow' (White 1987). The distinction between those two titles referenced a rapid change in Soviet politics, and the winds in question reached hurricane force in the following years. White's next book, *Gorbachev in Power* (White 1990) had hardly rolled off the printing presses before its title became an oxymoron. The updated edition, *Gorbachev and After* (White 1991, 1992a) covered the draining of power from the centre to the union republics and the developments leading to collapse of the USSR in late 1991. The fourth edition, simply called *After Gorbachev* (White 1993), updated the story

to the early post-communist years in the newly independent Russian Federation. This book, in all its iterations, still provides perhaps the most integrated overview of the *perestroika* era, highly readable and richly illustrated by contemporary material and debates as well as thematic overview. By this point, further variations on a theme of Gorbachev were moot, however; as his publisher noted, 'we really need a new book, don't we?' (White 2000: xi).

Post-Soviet research

Gorbachev's fall, together with the collapse of communist regimes in eastern Europe and the end of the Soviet Union itself, represented a defining moment for the many scholars who had specialised in such regimes. As a political scientist trained in historical and comparative methods, White was better placed than many to adapt to the situation. As he explained in 2010, 'the collapse of the USSR at the end of 1991 changed everything, and not just for the people who had been Sovietologists. Some despaired, or changed their profession; some, indeed, lost their jobs. In my own case, it opened up new opportunities – or perhaps more accurately, extended them further' (White 2010).

These new horizons extended in at least five directions. There were opportunities to consult newly-opened archives; to speak with Russian policymakers directly; to work more closely with colleagues in the country; to ask ordinary Russians what they thought of their institutions and society; and finally, to tie the study of Soviet successor states into the wider examination of comparative political systems. All of these were opportunities of which he took full advantage.

Though the window was brief, the unprecedented access to archives in the early- to mid-1990s proved a boon to Kremlinologists who had spent the previous decades trying to decipher the inner workings of the Soviet Union without any direct access to its decision-making forums. As part of an exchange programme between Scottish and now Russian (rather than Soviet) historians, White visited Moscow in spring 1992, shortly after the Soviet Union's collapse. He was given a pass to the central Party archives, without asking for it. Until this point, it had been all but impossible to get beyond the front door of the darkly forbidding Institute of Marxism-Leninism, recently renamed as the Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documentation of Contemporary History (RTsKhIDNI). Now, on entering, he was asked what he would like: the Stalin papers or the Politburo minutes? 'A cognac', was his reply, overwhelmed by the sudden change.

Building on a longstanding interest in elites (Mawdsley & White 1990), he was able to make full use of these new possibilities. Together with his Glasgow colleague Ewan Mawdsley, he produced *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev* (Mawdsley &

White 2000), the culmination of a multi-year study which remains to this day perhaps the definitive account of the Soviet elites spanning the entire duration of the USSR's history. Using papers from the Party, state and photographic archives, as well as sound recordings, memoirs and other reference sources, Mawdsley and White traced the career trajectories of all 1,932 persons who had served as members of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party between 1917 and 1991. Their work proved beyond a doubt that the members of the Central Committee were far from just being 'short, powerful men whom nobody could really tell apart', as Sir William Hayter, British Ambassador to Moscow in the 1950s, once described them (Hayter 1974: 103). This archive research was complemented by an extensive oral history project. Working in collaboration with Russian colleagues at the Institute of Sociology in Moscow, they sought direct interaction with surviving members of the Soviet leadership from the 1960s to the 1980s, resulting in an oral archive of over 100 multi-hour interviews with the top former Soviet politicians, including ex-ministers, Party first secretaries, and even a former chairman of the KGB (White, Kryshtanovskaia, Kukolev, Mawdsley & Saldin 1996).

Looking forward rather than backward, White also co-published several studies on the changing nature of the post-Soviet elite with a Russian colleague, Ol'ga Kryshtanovskaya, whom he first met in 1990 (Kryshtanovskaya & White 1996, 2005; White & Kryshtanovskaya 2003, 2005). The most widely noted of these dealt with elite continuity and the military-security officials who appeared to have acquired a dominant position already under first the Putin presidency – the so-called 'militocracy' that would come to play such a dominant role in Russian (and by extension, world) politics two decades later.

The ability to ask ordinary Russians about their political and societal situations placed White at the forefront of the late-blooming 'behavioural revolution' in post-Soviet area studies that allowed the study of public opinion in a manner not previously possible. Most notably, a conversation in 1991 with Richard Rose (elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1992), professor and Director of the Centre for the Study of Public Policy at the neighbouring University of Strathclyde, led to him inviting White to meet and talk about his idea for a series of barometer surveys covering former Soviet and communist states. There was a mutual interest in co-operation between colleagues with complementary quantitative skills and country and contextual knowledge. Through Rose, contact was established with Ian McAllister of the Australian National University, who was to become perhaps White's closest academic collaborator in later years (e.g., White & McAllister 2003; McAllister & White 2008a, 2008b, 2011). The seminal book *How Russia Votes* (White, Rose & McAllister 1997) represented a fruitful collaboration between the three authors, and also marked perhaps the high-water mark of relatively open Russian elections in which traditional psephological methods could bear the most fruit.

Aligning with White's earlier interest in political culture, other collaborations resulted in further comparative studies about public opinion and value change in Central and Eastern Europe throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Collaboration with his colleague Bill (William L.) Miller, a Fellow of the British Academy elected in 1994, led to *Values and Political Change in Postcommunist Europe* (Miller, White & Heywood 1998). Shorter studies looking at electoral behaviour and public attitudes in various contexts were published with other colleagues (e.g., White & Kryshstanovskaya 1993; White, McAllister & Kryshstanovskaya 1994; White, Wyman & Oates 1995; Wyman, White, Miller & Heywood 1995; Rose, Munro & White 2001), as well as a developing interest in the connection between party politics and political communication that led to fruitful co-operation with a colleague who was an expert in this area (White, McAllister & Oates 2002; White & Oates 2003).

From the turn of the century onwards, White commissioned or co-commissioned regular biennial national representative surveys in Russia and its neighbours, supported mainly by his ESRC-funded projects with some co-funding from colleagues at other UK, Australian and Irish research bodies and universities. These formed a rich primary source of empirical data, charting changing attitudes towards politics, foreign policy, the economy and society on a regular basis. Russian politics remained his major interest, and his outputs in the Putin era also encompassed studies of the changing electoral system (White & Kryshstanovskaya 2011) and questions of electoral integrity, protest and disengagement (White 2005; White 2011; McAllister & White 2011; White & Feklyunina 2011; White & McAllister 2014).

Perceiving, perhaps earlier than most, the potential new dividing lines arising from European Union and NATO expansion, he expanded his interest in the politics of Russia's neighbours, leading a series of research projects examining the what he termed the new 'outsider' states – those not included in the mainstream European security architecture, but which were trying to forge new independent identities beyond Russian influence. This led to a deeper focus in his research on the post-1991 fates and political values of the populations of other communist and post-communist systems, most notably Ukraine and Belarus (White, McAllister, Light & Löwenhardt 2002; White, Korosteleva & Löwenhardt 2005; White, Allison & Light 2005; White, Korosteleva & Allison 2006; White, Korosteleva & McAllister 2008; White, Biletskaya & McAllister 2012). Latterly, he also brought comparative perspectives to bear on the political economy of China (McAllister & White 2017; White, McAllister & Munro 2017).

Alongside these numerous articles and edited books on electoral studies, politics, societal change and foreign policy, White's most significant individual research outputs in the first decade of the new century came in the form of two comprehensive monographs on post-Soviet politics, both characteristically readable, deeply researched, and conceptually robust. The first, *Russia's New Politics* (White 2000) was published at the

transition between the Yeltsin and Putin eras. Described by one reviewer as ‘detailed and rounded’ (Bachkatov 2000), it set the reforms of the 1990s into a broad context. It challenged the received wisdom that the states where autocracy had receded were necessarily in a one-way transition to democracy, and questioned whether the end of the Soviet Union had marked as abrupt a change as had been thought at the time. Hindsight has proved him right in both perceptions.

White’s last single-authored monograph, *Understanding Russian Politics* (White 2011), followed a similar disposition, but reflected the fact that the Putin regime of 2011 was quite different from Yeltsin regime of the late 1990s. It was pitched somewhere between the general reader and the specialist. He painted a comprehensive picture of developments in Russia since the collapse of the USSR and particularly since the turn of the century. In his latter works, most notably *Understanding Russian Politics*, there was no longer any question about whether Russia was democratising: though he was careful to balance both the positive and negative changes in Russian politics society, White argued perhaps ahead of others that these made the country a ‘fully developed example of the typical strengths and weaknesses of authoritarian government’ (White 2011: xiii). As with his previous books, *Understanding Russian Politics* masterfully wove information from primary documents, opinion surveys, official speeches and illustrative anecdotes into a comprehensive study of Russia’s trajectory in the first decade of Putin’s rule, and represented the culmination of many years of research on Soviet and post-Soviet politics. It was dubbed ‘essentially the most interesting and easy to read volume of all writings on modern Russia’ by one reviewer (Osipian 2012), who saw only its length – at 466 pages – as an inhibiting factor to reading it in a single sitting. The thickness of the book was, however, a matter of some pride to White, who likened the completion of the research for it to reaching the summit of his personal Mont Blanc.

Other research and pedagogical activity

By contrast with many prolific scholars, Stephen White never saw his educational role as any less of a priority than his research agenda. For him, teaching and research were inherently complementary aspects of scholarly life. One former graduate student (now a professor) recalled White’s first words to him: ‘My name is Stephen White; I am the postgraduate admission tutor. If you have any problems come and see me. Your job is to study – and my job is solve your problems.’ He thoroughly enjoyed teaching and imparting his knowledge to new generations of students and public audiences, many of whom found their interest sparked by an idea or fact from one of his lectures. Alongside his scholarly output of research monographs and articles, he also authored or edited numerous textbooks intended for use by high school and university students. His first,

The USSR: Portrait of a Superpower (White 1978), was aimed at high school children and provided a readable introduction to the Soviet Union's political and socio-economic systems. Though aimed at the mass rather than specialist market, it nonetheless contained insights that stood the test of time. For instance, the Scottish school pupils of the late 1970s who read his prediction that 'disputes about the distribution of economic resources ... may be expected to acquire an increasingly "nationalist" character as the pace of economic advance slows down and the interests of competing Union Republics become less easy to reconcile' (White 1978: 6), would have been well-prepared when that exact turn of events played out a decade later. Further high school textbooks followed in the 1980s. As with the aforementioned Gorbachev volumes, the titles could barely keep up with their rapidly-changing subject matter: *The USSR: A Superpower in Transition* (White 1988c); *USSR: A Superpower in Upheaval* (White 1991b); and finally, *The USSR: End of a Superpower* (White 1992b). White's role in the highly successful 'Developments in ...' series, primarily used as university textbooks, should also be noted. Commissioned by Stephen Kennedy of Palgrave Macmillan, he was co-editor of the first edition of *Developments in Soviet Politics* (White, Pravda & Gitelman 1990), and remained a constant presence as co-editor of the successor books until *Developments in Russian Politics 9* (Sakwa, Hale & White 2019), almost three decades later. A companion series on the former Soviet satellite states, *Developments in East European Politics* (White, Batt & Lewis 1993) went through five editions with the same editorial team. By the time of the last edition under White's lead editorship, *Developments in Central and East European Politics 5* (White, Lewis & Batt 2013), the region in question was well-integrated into the wider European economic and security structures.

Stephen White was always working on side-projects that were simultaneously scholarly, cultural and slightly off the beaten track of traditional political science or history. Throughout the 1980s, he made use of three British Council Anglo-Soviet exchange trips to the Soviet Union – and other trips to Uppsala, Paris and New York, amongst others – to track down the archives of propaganda posters from the early Soviet times. Though not the first such study, the coffee-table volume on *The Bolshevik Poster* (White 1988b) was perhaps the most comprehensive examination hitherto, both visually striking and contributing much new knowledge to the field (and still to be found in airport bookshops twenty years later). In *Russia Goes Dry* (White 1996), he traced the Russian relationship with alcohol and set the Gorbachev-era anti-alcohol campaign into context.

In his latter years, his main side interest was in the post-1991 fates of Lenin statues around the world. He adapted conference trips, study visits and even family holidays around the quest to photograph as many of these as possible (and establish the stories behind them), also enlisting friends and colleagues in the task. On a visit to the present author's university in Sweden, his keynote address was followed by a six-hour round trip

together through a forest in blizzard in search of a long-lost cast of the Soviet leader originally sent from Lithuania to a Scanian plywood factory owner as part-payment for a timber consignment during the economic crisis of the 1990s. Another colleague got a phone call late on the final evening of a conference in Seattle, asking if he could obtain a photograph of the city's 5-metre high Lenin statue (relocated in the 1990s by an eccentric local businessman from Slovakia to the Fremont district of the city) while he was in town. Scheduled to return to home the following day, our colleague nonetheless managed to obtain the requisite snap for Stephen's album just before his departure (much to the bemusement of a local taxi driver, who wondered whether he was an avid communist or otherwise why he was travelling with such urgency to see the monument before breakfast).

White as a teacher and scholar

Trinity College Dublin's alumni page described Stephen White as 'the most prolific author on Russian and Soviet themes in these islands' (Trinity College Dublin, n.d.), and it would be difficult to argue with this assessment. Including those aforementioned, he produced nearly 500 publications, not including book reviews and miscellaneous newspaper articles, from 1972 to 2019.

He served as a highly regarded head of department in the 1990s and, alongside his permanent posts in Glasgow, also held visiting positions and fellowships in a wide range of other establishments, including: the Open University; University of Strathclyde; Balliol College Oxford; Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples; the Institute of Applied Politics, Moscow; the Research School of the Social Sciences, Australian National University; the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna; and the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Bologna. He was remembered as a particularly conscientious external examiner for University College Dublin in the late 2000s, pleased to have a brief academic re-affiliation in his home town. He also served as president of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) from 1994 to 1997, and was a stalwart of that organisation. He served for many years as chief editor of *The Journal of (Post-)Communist Studies and Transition Politics* (now *East European Politics*), adept at identifying referees amongst many authors whom he may never have met, but with whose works he was familiar. He was General Editor of the Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Monographs from 1990 to 1999. In addition to his degrees from Glasgow and Oxford mentioned above, he was awarded the prestigious higher doctorate, LittD, from his *alma mater*, Trinity College Dublin, in 2001, making him amongst the very few scholars to have three doctorates of different types. He was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2002, and

became a Fellow of the British Academy in 2010. The latter was a matter of immense pride to him.

Stephen White's attention to detail was legendary. Colleagues marvelled at the speed with which he could offer cogent and comprehensive comment on a text; the distance from which he could spot an error in a university policy document; and his punctiliousness in authenticating archival accuracy. In the introduction to *Understanding Russian Politics*, he noted his preference for consultation of the printed newspaper collections in the Historical Library in Moscow rather than the increasingly available digital versions of the same material, 'not ... because of any obscurantism, but because sources of this kind [electronic newspaper articles] do not contain page references or (usually) graphics, may disappear or otherwise become unavailable, and in a small but disturbing number of cases may differ from the printed original' (White 2011; xi).

A strong empiricist, he dug deeply to uncover the historical truth, wherever history had inadvertently buried it. In an era in which analysis is often based on superficial generalisations and informational shortcuts, Stephen White's approach was the opposite: deep understanding, reached the long way round. For such a prolific researcher, his ability to assimilate exceptionally large amounts of information very quickly – in several languages – was a highly useful skill. When he once lost his luggage on a transatlantic flight *en route* to a conference, it was not the lack of clothes that concerned him, but the fact that he had already read all six books in his hand luggage on the way over, and would not now be able to read the others he had packed in his suitcase until the following day. It usually took less than 24 hours for a complete manuscript to be returned to a colleague, replete with comments and suggestions (and with any transliteration errors meticulously corrected).

This same ability to swiftly see the underlying patterns in troves of information allowed him also to weave obscure and often surreal details into his well-crafted narratives. For instance, on p. 126 of *After Gorbachev* (White 1993: 126) he recounted a 1989 experiment from the pages of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, in which 24 out of 30 cats had refused to touch the standard-issue Soviet sausage-meat available at the time, when offered it. In *Russia Goes Dry* (White 1996: 124), we could read about the theft during the mid-1980s anti-alcohol campaign of 140,000 roubles-worth of sugar in Dzhambul in Kazakhstan, the mastermind behind which turned out to be none other than the director of the local sugar factory himself. These apparently disparate anecdotes added colour to the dry official statistics which he had, of course, also consulted; all three points of data confirmed that the reforms of *perestroika* were unravelling.

He always took as solid starting points the established theoretical frameworks, and placed great store on the systematic collection of data, of which there was never too much available. Over his 45 years of travelling, he accumulated a collection of primary material on the Soviet Union and Russia as impressive as any in the world. (In some

cases, more so: a colleague once fell over a copy of the definitive history of the Belarusian tractor industry on the floor of his office, and was proudly informed that not even the Bodleian had such a volume!) The door to his office at the University of Glasgow was always open, both metaphorically and physically – but the uninitiated visitor would barely have been able to get through it. Piles of books, offprints, documents, posters, souvenirs and pamphlets created a labyrinth through which careful navigation and no sudden movement was the key, their owner usually to be found in the furthest corner of the room, typing furiously behind these mountains of paper. Amazingly, however, he had a perfect mental map of what was where, and when it had been obtained, and could usually dig directly to the relevant point in the mound and locate any given document in seconds. The entire basement of his house was given over to a collection at least twice as large, with a floor-space twice as cluttered – though a line was reportedly drawn when he temporarily wanted to store the collected works of Lenin in the bathtub, while awaiting new shelving.

White as a mentor, friend and colleague

From this review of his academic works, the reader could gain the impression that Stephen White's life was dedicated to serious scholarship alone. But his work ethic was accompanied by a generosity of spirit as mentor, friend, colleague and family man. He saw it as his role not just to advance knowledge, but to share it, and to encourage the next generations. He had high expectations of himself and others; but saw academia as a vocation rather than a career, part of which involved helping others to attain the same high standards that he expected of himself. He not only read and wrote prodigiously, but also collected materials for others on his travels, and posted them at his own expense, or left them in a pigeon-hole, on his return.

Visitors to the University of Glasgow were frequently taken by him on day trips to Scotland's many historical sites to show them its cultural heritage, reflecting his pride in his adopted city and country. Working with Stephen White was not just enlightening – it was fun. He had a lively sense of humour and a warm human interest in others' welfare, and enjoyed putting people at their ease. On many an occasion he and Ishbel hosted guests – visitors and colleagues alike – at their West End home, borne of a desire to make people feel welcome and included as part of the family. One colleague noted that his first acquaintance with Stephen White came as a young scholar, when the latter made a meticulous scientific dissection of his academic conference paper, followed by a generous invitation to a drink afterwards, 'so that you can now explain to me why I am wrong'. He was thereafter taken under Stephen's wing for the rest of the conference and introduced to various colleagues with whom he might have common academic interests.

Over 30 former doctoral students and research assistants (many of whom themselves have gone on to successful careers in academia and beyond) can attest to feeling part of this extended family, having benefited from White's thorough training and academic worldview which placed scholarship and the quest for objective knowledge above all other considerations. He remained to the last a staunch defender of collegiality and academic freedom. A first-rate manager, he was not at all enamoured of managerialism.

Outside the classroom and the office, he had wide range of interests, with sometimes paradoxical traits that combined into a unique and generous personality. A political radical, he also had a love of tradition. He was a generous donor to libraries, and to the arts more generally, enjoying performances by Scottish Opera (both classic and contemporary) and endowing a seat in Glasgow's Theatre Royal. Perhaps influenced by his childhood steeped in literature, he was as familiar with the classic works of fiction (in several languages) as with the most obscure writings of 19th-century Russian philosophers and the latest *avant garde* novelists. He took his scholarship extremely seriously, but could rejoice in the absurd and comment on it with an appropriate turn of phrase. He was always trying to understand the world's complexities, but could explain its uncomplicatedly. Generations of students had their interest in current affairs sparked by his lectures, and the Scottish public obtained understanding of current events, particularly as the Soviet Union collapsed, through his frequent appearances on BBC radio. (The national broadcaster's main Scottish studio was for many years conveniently located almost directly opposite his front door, ensuring that a pre-prandial appearance on the airwaves did not necessarily inhibit his ability to be home in time for dinner.)

He lived life in a hurry. A gap in his schedule was an opportunity to read, write, meet or otherwise do something productive. On one occasion, he took immense pride in having taken advantage of the nine-hour time difference and the Earth's rotation to deliver a paper in Japan in the morning and make an appearance at a conference in the north of Scotland on the same evening. At the same time, he had the patience to delve deeply and systematically through an archive or into a research problem and to devote however much time it took to the task.

Unfortunately, his days of hurrying ended abruptly following a debilitating stroke in late 2015, forcing him to adapt (albeit reluctantly) to a slower pace of life thereafter. He retired to the position of Professor Emeritus in 2017, but retained an avid curiosity in developing events of the world (of which there was no shortage), and an ability to perceive their patterns. For the present author, some of the most vivid memories remain reflective fireside chats in his home during these post-stroke years.

For Stephen White, colleagues were an extended family. But it was his actual family – particularly Ishbel, with whom he celebrated a golden wedding anniversary in the final year of his life, and his son Alex, a successful filmmaker – whose company gave him the greatest pleasure, whose achievements made him most proud, and who supported him

most in all his endeavours. Together with his sisters Melissa and Victoria, he is survived by them.

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Note on the author: Derek S. Hutcheson is Pro Dean of the Faculty of Culture and Society at Malmö University in Sweden, and Professor of Political Science in the Department of Global Political Studies (GPS) at the same university. He has researched extensively on Russian and post-Soviet politics, as well as the comparative study of electoral politics, transnational citizenship; electoral turnout; and local democracy. Prior to working in Sweden, he was head of European Studies at University College Dublin (2006–13), and an ESRC and British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Glasgow (2002–05), in which capacity he worked closely with Stephen White, who also supervised his doctoral dissertation from 1998 to 2001.

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