



St Petersburg Communications Museum

Report by Alan Pennington



During our time in Saint-Petersburg in September for the EDXC conference, Chrissy, Dave and I visited the "A.S. Popov Central Museum of Communications". Although situated near St Isaacs's Cathedral in the centre of the city, it took us a while to discover the anonymous entrance door to the museum at 4 Pochtamtskiy per. ('Post Office Lane'), just around the corner from the main post office! The first museum collections were started back in 1872 when telegraphy, was the technology in use for distant communications. The museum moved to its present site, a former palace, in 1924. It suffered bomb damage in WWII, reopened in 1950 but was closed between 1974 and 2003 because of the state of the building. Alexander Popov's name was added to that of the museum in 1945. As mentioned in October's 'Communication', Popov is considered to be the inventor of radio in Russia.



Museum on Soviet 1960 'Radio Day' stamp

After buying our 200 rouble (£2) tickets, we were then free to wander through the uncrowded galleries, housing collections which cover the history of the postal service (including the Russian National Collection of Philately), telegraphy, telephony, space communications and satellites, as well as radio and television. Some exhibits were labelled in English, though most were in Russian. And in each gallery sat a lady guide, keen to tell us about the important exhibits in Russian, even though we could not understand each other!

As well as displaying old radio and TV sets, the museum also had a scientific-educational gallery showing the basic physics of radio communication ('How Radio Works'), including an interactive domestic piano-key receiver with a Perspex front panel instead of grille cloth. Also a VEF Spīdola



from the early 1960s with internal circuit board and turret tuner etc exposed (see photo left). The Spīdola was made in Riga, Latvia and was the first mass produced transistor radio with shortwave manufactured in the Soviet Union. As well as long and medium wave bands, it covered shortwave bands 16, 19, 25, 31, 41, 49 and 52-75 metres.



(You may remember the report in 'Communication' on the visit to the VEF factory in Riga in 2008 which you can read online on the BDXC website at <http://www.bdx.org.uk/latvia.pdf>)



In the main gallery there were many glass cabinets displaying lots of radios and TVs, but one set stood out because of its attractive design, alongside the more mundane sets. This was the Zvezda 54 ('Star 54'), a 5-band set covering SW 3.95-12.1, 6.13-7.34 and 9.5-12.1 MHz, as well as LW and MW. The reason it stands out is maybe as its exterior is an exact copy of the early 1950's French Sonora (SNR) Excelsior 52 set. (The Zvezda 54 appeared in an exhibition at London's GRAD gallery – see August 2014 'Communication').

Amongst the less flamboyant radios, a 4 valve ARZ (AP3 - Aleksandrov Radio Works) caught the eye because of the picture of the Kremlin in Moscow etched in the centre of the tuning dial (see right). This set dates from either 1949 or the early 1950s and although only a domestic MW/LW set, was produced with a number of different pictures on its dial, such as Stalin era heroes, real or from folklore.



Also amongst the other exhibits there was a model of the famous Shukov radio tower in Moscow, built between 1919 and 1922 (in May 1922 radio broadcasting started). The tower is still standing, though in need of restoration. The tower appeared in lots of exhibits e.g. in the masthead of this Radio paper from 1925 (see left) and on this Soviet stamp



issued for Radio Moscow's 50th anniversary in 1979.

One of the earliest wireless sets we saw was a crystal set, its ceramic base picturing a child, wearing headphones, on top of the world with the letters 'СССР' (see next page)



Alexander Popov was not forgotten at the museum with exhibits including some of his test equipment. Even the philately section featured Popov on many stamps, including this miniature sheet (below), issued to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his birth.



As well as radio sets, a display cabinet housed several old Russian television sets, one of which was showing a video with clips of the opening sequence of the main evening news bulletin "Vremya" (Time) through the ages. It was broadcast on USSR Central Television from 1968 and is still aired today on Channel One Russia. The screen shot (left) is from 1977. You can see a similar sequence on Youtube (search for "Vremya Idents").



In the museum atrium there were also satellites on show, bringing the story of Russian communications up to date. The museum is well worth a visit if in Saint Petersburg. Check opening times on its website - an English version is at: <http://www.rustelecom-museum.ru/?lang=en> . There is also a slide show online (from a few years ago?) at: <http://worldwalk.info/en/catalog/943/gallery/>.

left: Chrissy and Dave and one of the cases of Soviet radios.

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