Obituary published in *The Scotsman* and *Herald Scotland*

**Dr Oliver Smith, Born: 28 June, 1979, in Solihull. Died: On Skye, April 2013, aged 33**

In his few short years as an academic, Oliver Smith had already exceeded the achievements of many of his generation of scholars.

A superb linguist, generous teacher and prolific writer, he had an extensive bibliography of publications behind him and a stellar career was predicted in his particular field of Russian studies.

Though he only arrived at St Andrews University five years ago, his potential was immediately evident and he quickly progressed from a teaching fellowship to a permanent post as lecturer, proving to be an engaging tutor – not least for his ability to employ his musical skills on the accordion to persuade his class to belt out the Russian national anthem – and a most industrious researcher.

Tragically, his full potential was never to be realised: he fell during a solo hillwalking trip on Skye in April and his body was found two months later on Bla Bheinn, or Blaven, one of the island’s most picturesque peaks.

Yet for someone in the relatively early stages of his academic career he leaves a rich archive of work, mainly focused on the Russian intellectual tradition as it developed from the start of the 19th century.

Born in Solihull, he grew up in Warwickshire and was educated at prep school before attending historic Warwick School. He went on to obtain a first-class degree in Russian from Leeds University and a masters in Russian Studies, followed by a doctorate from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College London.

Still in his 20s, he came to St Andrews in 2008, to a teaching fellowship at the Russian department, and was soon spotted as someone with suitable attributes for a permanent position. Two years later he was appointed as a lecturer and went on to make a significant contribution to both the academic and administrative aspects of the department and School of Modern Languages.

Most of his work centred on Russian religious thought. He had a particular interest in representatives of the Russian Spiritual Academies such as Metropolitan Platon and Fedor Golubinskii, as well as the 19th-century Russian thinker Vladimir Soloviev and his successors.

He published a monograph on Soloviev, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter*, which peers described as one of the best recent works about Russian philosophy, praising his ability to tackle complex philosophical concepts with unusual clarity, lucidity and cohesion.
He also published several pieces on Russian environmental thought, and was recently working on questions of biblical exegesis and the influence of the prophetic tradition on Russian thought.

He had won a two-year Humboldt research grant from the German government to work on his next book, a second monograph, this time dedicated to the prophet Daniel in the Russian tradition, and to liaise with Russian colleagues at Trier University.

He taught all components of Russian language, as well as honours modules in Russian intellectual history and literature, and was involved in various administrative duties in his own department and the school. He was examinations officer, library officer, co-ordinator on the Mundus postgraduate programme, the Russian study abroad programme, and served as a liaison for the university’s environmental policies.

He also co-organised the Centre for Russian, Soviet and East European Studies’ 2010 conference on the Caucasus, which attracted significant British Academy funding, and its conference on Orthodoxy last year.

Colleagues knew him as a brilliant linguist who spoke Russian beautifully and was always happy to take on extra responsibilities, while students appreciated his friendly, approachable manner and obvious enthusiasm for his subject.

He had first become interested in Russia when he visited St Petersburg as a schoolboy. Later the country introduced him to his wife. They met in the late 1990s when they were both studying Russian at Moscow State University. They married in 2004 and have a one-year-old daughter.

Beyond work his other interests included reading and music – he was an accomplished pianist and had organised a visit to St Andrews by piano tutor Simon Nicholls of the Birmingham Conservatoire – plus the outdoors and the environment. A keen walker, both out on the hills and on the streets of cities he visited, his first serious trek had been in the Altai region of Siberia. He also trekked in America and Crete. In addition he loved birds and birdwatching, was keen on sport, particularly swimming and cycling, and was a strong Scrabble player.

A devout Anglican and deeply spiritual man, becoming a father was the best and most important thing in his life. Devoted to his little girl, he spent as much of his free time as possible with her enjoying two of his favourite pastimes, reading and playing the piano together.

He is survived by his wife, Shelley Jacobsen, their daughter Thea, his parents Gail and Richard and sister Victoria.

Published on June, 12th 2013, The Scotsman (author: Alison Shaw)
Source: http://www.scotsman.com/the-scotsman-2-7475/obituaries/obituary-dr-oliver-smith-lecturer-1-2963058
Also published on http://www.heraldscotland.com/comment/obituaries/dr-oliver-smith.21371040 on June, 18th 2013
Body found on Skye confirmed as Dr Oliver Smith

Dr Smith came to St Andrews in 2008 when he was appointed to a teaching fellowship in the Russian Department. He became a permanent lecturer in 2010 and was involved in many aspects of both academic and social life. He taught at both sub-honours and honours level and also worked as an examinations officer, library officer, co-ordinator on the Mundus post-graduate programme, the Russian study abroad programme, and served as a liaison for the university’s environmental policies.

Principal Louise Richardson praised Dr Smith in an email to staff and students for his “dry wit, a very sharp intellect, a scholar with a stellar career ahead of him and, most importantly, a readiness to give of his own time to help others.”

She commented: “Our thoughts and sympathies lie very much with his wife Shelley and their young daughter Thea”

Rebecca Emerick, a former student of Dr Smith’s, told The Saint:”The Russian department is one of the smallest in the university and for that reason we’re all pretty close knit. One thing the students have in common is our love for the five great characters who teach us- Whitehead, Keys, Emily, Svetlana and Dr Oliver Smith.”

“Dr Smith was very popular. He was kind, friendly and extremely mischievous-everything you want in an tutor. It was only really when you sat down over a game of Russian Scrabble with him and watched him instantly whip up multiple triple word scores in one go or heard him on the piano that you glimpsed how intense and elegant his mind was.”

“I know I speak for all of us who knew him when I say his absence is felt very deeply.’

Published on June 6th, 2013 (author: Laura Abernethy)

Full text on: http://www.thesaint-online.com/2013/06/body-found-on-skye-confirmed-as-dr-oliver-smith/
Dear Fellow Slavists,

I am writing to share unhappy news of one of our own.

Oliver Smith, Lecturer in Russian at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, went missing while hiking on the Isle of Skye on April 6, 2013. Owing to poor weather conditions, despite many days of full-scale search and additional efforts by mountain rescue teams and the coast guard, Oliver has not yet been found. His wife, Shelley Jacobsen (a children’s librarian who is also a fellow Slavist trained at Yale) and their 17-month-old daughter, Thea, are now back in Cupar, Fife awaiting any further news from the search teams.

Oliver is the author of the book *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter* (2011) as well as of numerous journal articles and chapters in collaborative publications. His research focused on the Russian intellectual tradition as it developed from the beginning of the 19th century. The bulk of his work was centred on Russian religious thought, and he had a particular interest in representatives of the Russian Spiritual Academies such as Metropolitan Platon and Fedor Golubinskii, as well as in Vladimir Soloviev and his successors. He was most recently working on questions of biblical exegesis and the influence of the prophetic tradition on Russian thought and had won a two-year Humboldt research grant from the German government to work on his next book, to study German, and to liaise with Russian colleagues at Trier University. At St Andrews, Oliver taught all components of Russian language, as well as honours modules in Russian intellectual history and literature, including Russia’s Silver Age. He also had several other roles at the university, including helping to co-ordinate the Mundus degree programme, the Russian study abroad programme, and serving as a liaison for the university’s environmental policies. Oliver holds a bachelor’s degree in Russian from Leeds University (a First), a master’s in Russian Studies from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College London, and a PhD also from SSEES/UCL.

Many members of the Slavic community and friends have already reached out to Oliver’s family with extraordinary kindness and willingness to lend a hand in both emotional and practical matters during this painful time. Heartfelt thanks to them for their warm support.

(April 2013)