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An Anglo-Russian Critic of the Abolition of Serfdom

David Saunders

When the first edition of Donald Mackenzie Wallace’s *Russia* came out in January 1877, *The Times* called it ‘undoubtedly the best book written on modern Russia by a foreigner, and one of the best books ever written on that country by either foreigner or native’.

Most other reviews were equally enthusiastic. Robert Michell, however, was unimpressed. He did not think that foreigners needed better information about Russia. Their suspicion of the country derived not from ignorance but from ‘difference of standard of all guiding principles of action; dissimilarity in habits of life; more than discouraging results following almost every attempt that has ever been made to enter into any kind of enterprise in Russia, &c.’. Even if foreigners did need better information, Russians did not want them to acquire it. The many observers who had ‘pictured and illustrated [Russians] with photographic fidelity ... have only reaped obloquy’. Because writers on Russia were afraid of being condemned by the people they were writing about, they tended to pull their punches. Mackenzie Wallace had fallen into this trap. His book was ‘much better written’ than its competitors, but it lacked analytical bite. Despite having spent six years in Russia, Mackenzie Wallace had failed to give his readers a ‘decided opinion’ on the effects of the abolition of serfdom. Although readers could work out from his book that not all was well in Russia,
the author’s tone was too judicious for this impression to come through clearly.³

At first sight, these reflections look like the product of simple Russophobia. Less than a quarter of a century after the Crimean War, at a time when Russia was about to launch another attack on the Ottoman Empire,⁴ the land of the tsars did not stand high in British affections. For two reasons, however, Michell’s review is worth a second look. First, by virtue of his birth and upbringing the author knew Russia at least as well as Mackenzie Wallace. Second, his older brother Thomas Michell, who knew Russia even better, had written a book-length study of the abolition of serfdom which, in offering a ‘decided opinion’ on the subject, had done the very thing that Robert thought Mackenzie Wallace had failed to do. When, furthermore, Robert said that outside observers ‘reaped obloquy’ for representing Russia accurately, he was alluding to the fact that Thomas’s study had incensed the Russian authorities. In short, the review rested not only on Robert’s considerable knowledge of Russia but also on his brother’s insights and experiences. Thus it invites the question whether Thomas’s study of the abolition of serfdom, which the present article is designed to contextualize, should be restored to the literature about Alexander II’s ‘Great Reforms’.

On their father’s side, the Michells were Cornish. Their paternal grandfather, James, a tax inspector, wrote a history of the parish of St Neot and died at Truro.⁵ Their father, John, was born in Bodmin. After training as a doctor, he emigrated to Russia, where he earned the Russian orders of St
Anne and ‘Military Valour’ and died in St Petersburg at the age of 60 in 1862. John’s wife, Amelia, was born in London in 1812 to ‘Thomas Bishop, of St Petersburg’. Having outlived her husband by more than three decades, she died at a remote house on the River Camel in Cornwall in January 1896.\(^6\) Between 1835 and 1844, John and Amelia had six children at Kronstadt on the island of Kotlin in the Gulf of Finland.\(^7\) The boys came first, Thomas in 1835, John in 1836, Robert in 1837. Where they were educated is unknown. They do not seem to have been sent home to Truro Grammar School, the leading educational establishment in nineteenth-century Cornwall.\(^8\) Sir John Crampton, British Ambassador to St Petersburg between 1858 and 1860, told a House of Commons enquiry into Britain’s diplomatic and consular services in 1861 that Thomas had been ‘educated in Russia’.\(^9\) Since John and Amelia were still in Kronstadt when Thomas was in his fourteenth year,\(^10\) and since the stone memorial which commemorates him in the church at St Neot draws attention to his role in the re-foundation of the British Seamen’s Hospital there,\(^11\) he may have been firmly attached to the place of his birth. It is hard to believe, however, that he was educated there, for the town’s mid-nineteenth-century schools do not look as if they could have given him the linguistic, administrative and literary skills he displayed in later life.\(^12\)

As adults, all three Michell brothers made the most of their Russian upbringing. John served as British Consul in St Petersburg from 1875 to 1903. Among many other activities, he wrote a long analysis of the Russian economy in 1888 and, three years later, spoke at the silver jubilee of Thomas’s re-foundation of the Kronstadt hospital.\(^13\) Robert worked in London
as a Russia expert at the India Office, where, according to a Cornish newspaper, he ‘forewarned our Government of the Russian invasion and the conquest of Khiva in 1871’ and ‘incurred reproach in some quarters for pointing out the intended occupation of Merv, and the absorption of the Turcoman region on the north east of Persia’. 14 Outside the office he published Russia-related articles, proposed a novel classification of Russian verbs, lectured on Russia, and, shortly before his death at St Ives in Cornwall in March 1915, published what is still the standard English translation of the First Novgorod Chronicle. 15

It was Thomas, however, who made the biggest mark. When the House of Commons enquiry into Britain’s diplomatic and consular services asked Sir John Crampton in 1861 whether he had ever felt the need for a ‘permanent officer’ at any of his diplomatic missions, Crampton replied that in St Petersburg he had ‘found it very often inconvenient not to have a person who was thoroughly acquainted with the Russian language’. Luckily, he went on, an attaché had arrived towards the end of his tour of duty who had filled the gap. A British subject, ‘the son of a medical man, who has long resided at St Petersburg and is there still,’ the new attaché could translate documents ‘Perfectly’. 16 This was Thomas, who started work under the Admiralty as ‘Secretary and Interpreter to the War Prison at Lewes’ in November 1855, moved to the Admiralty proper in London in July 1856, and received the appointment of attaché at Britain’s St Petersburg Embassy on 18 July 1860. 17 He used his knowledge of Russian not only in his first post as an interpreter but also at other times in his brief early career in England. The
publisher John Murray turned down his translation of Bestuzhev-Marlinskii’s novel *The Frigate ‘Hope’* in 1857.\(^{18}\) He offered his services as a translator from Russian to the Royal Geographical Society in 1858 and became a Fellow of that body in 1860.\(^{19}\) During a year’s leave from the Admiralty after an attack of diphtheria (which he spent mainly in Cornwall),\(^{20}\) he gave a paper on Russian trade with Central Asia at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and another, on metrication, at the fourth session of the International Association for obtaining a Uniform Decimal System.\(^{21}\) His dealings with the Russian delegation at the second of these meetings later secured him an invitation to attend the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in St Petersburg.\(^{22}\) Just before taking up his post as an attaché at the British Embassy in Russia, he served as one of the secretaries of the International Statistical Congress when it convened in London in the summer of 1860.\(^{23}\) When Britain’s St Petersburg mission felt the need for a clerically qualified and Russophone member of staff, he was the perfect choice.

All the ambassadors whom Michell served in St Petersburg spoke well of him. In 1863, at the time of the Polish rebellion, Lord Francis Napier asked the Foreign Office to let him defer a promotion exam (for which he would have had to go to London) ‘on account of his usefulness at the present crisis for confidential business’. Napier reflected on Michell’s career prospects. On the one hand, he said, he ought not to be kept ‘eternally in the position of an unpaid attaché with a pecuniary allowance on account of his services as an interpreter’; on the other, success in the promotion exam ‘might take him
away from St Petersburg where the particular sphere of his usefulness lies’. The ambassador hoped that the Foreign Secretary would allow Michell to be promoted as least as far as Second Secretary in St Petersburg, and that then ‘some means might be found of retaining him at the Embassy’.24 This is what happened. Michell was promoted to the rank of Second Secretary in the Diplomatic Service in January 1866 and received the additional post of British Consul at St Petersburg in June.25 He continued to receive plaudits for his work. In January 1870 Sir Andrew Buchanan called his book-length study of the abolition of serfdom ‘one of the most interesting and instructive works which have yet appeared in English upon the internal condition and resources of this empire’.26 Lord Augustus Loftus remembered ‘his perfect knowledge of the Russian language’.27

After hearing Michell say a few words at a meeting of the Politico-Economic Committee of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in April 1861, the tsar’s brother, the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, also noted the excellence of his Russian.28 A late nineteenth-century British journalist and historian claimed that ‘the Russians looked on Michell as a native’.29 He must also have seemed perfectly English, however, for just before writing the despatch in which he suggested how best to keep Michell at St Petersburg, Napier had asked London not to send out a member of staff who was married to a Russian lady on the grounds that ‘The more purely English the Embassy is kept the better’.30 Thus he appears to have been perfectly at home in both the cultural spheres he inhabited.
Unfortunately (from the point of view of his career), he was not perfectly comfortable with the political, economic, and especially social developments which he witnessed in Russia. The critical positions he adopted eventually irritated the tsarist authorities beyond measure. Matters came to a head in January 1874, just before the Duke of Edinburgh arrived in St Petersburg to marry a daughter of the tsar. Michell was the natural person to act as the Duke’s dragoman, but three days before the wedding The Times reported that this ‘Englishman who has lived in the land till he has become a Russian of Russians’ had mysteriously disappeared. Although the newspaper’s correspondent thought that the explanation for his absence was merely that he had gone to England on business connected with the forthcoming nuptials, he admitted that ‘no one in St Petersburg would for a moment accept such a simple solution of this nine days’ mystery’. The explanation was indeed more complicated, for a dispute over matters of protocol had exposed what turned out to be longstanding Russian resentment of Michell. Lord Granville, the British Foreign Secretary, instructed Lord Loftus, Britain’s Ambassador, to discuss Michell’s departure with the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The tsar had apparently ‘been led to believe that Mr Michell had shewn himself ill disposed towards Russia’. Britain wanted to know on what grounds. At first, Aleksandr Gorchakov, the Russian Foreign Minister, claimed that no particular explanation was necessary. If Britain had told him that an official of the Russian Embassy in London was ‘distasteful’, he would have posted him elsewhere without further ado. Loftus, however, felt that a member of his staff ‘whose qualities and
attainments particularly fitted him for the Post he filled ... should not be removed on trivial grounds’. Gorchakov then claimed that ‘Mr Michell had been imprudent and unguarded in his language and was not therefore a “persona grata”’. Loftus doubted whether Michell ‘entertained any feelings which could prompt him to use language hostile to Russia’. ‘[O]n the contrary,’ he said, Michell ‘was most assiduous in his efforts to improve the commercial relations between the two countries’. After Gorchakov admitted that gossip might have muddied the waters, Loftus asked the Foreign Minister to let the tsar know that Michell had not expected ‘to be lodged at the Winter Palace during his personal attendance on the Duke of Edinburgh’.

When Gorchakov expressed reluctance to raise such a trivial matter, Loftus urged him to reconsider and concluded by saying that Michell would shortly be returning to St Petersburg. Gorchakov hoped that, if Michell did return, he would be ‘prudent and guarded in his language’, and said that, even if the British official’s behaviour were exemplary, ‘his position would not be a good one: ... he would not be viewed as a “persona grata”’.32

In the light of Gorchakov’s displeasure, Michell could not carry on working at the St Petersburg embassy. The incident of early 1874 put an end to his official career in Russia. Britain, however, continued to think well of him. He was a guest at a royal ‘Drawing Room’ at Buckingham Palace within a few weeks of his arrival in England.33 When he resigned formally from the diplomatic and consular services at the end of 1874, the Foreign Office commended the ‘zeal and ability’ which he had displayed in its employ.34 In November 1875 he was made a Companion of the Bath, an honour which
was not often conferred on such relatively low-ranking bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{35} Although he spoke of his ‘shattered career (\textit{ma carrière brisée})’ in a private letter of March 1876 to Gorchakov’s right-hand man,\textsuperscript{36} he found work for a few years as the resident manager of an English company in Odessa and then applied successfully, in August 1878, for re-admission to a position under the Crown in the diplomatically challenging statelet of Eastern Rumelia.\textsuperscript{37} In 1880 he became Britain’s Consul-General at Christiania (Oslo),\textsuperscript{38} where he stayed until his retirement (to Cornwall) in 1897. He died on 5 August 1899.\textsuperscript{39}

In view of the fact that Britain obviously did not think Michell was unsuitable for government posts, it is not likely that the tsar and Gorchakov took steps to have him removed from service in Russia merely because of a few ill-chosen words or a misunderstanding about lodging arrangements at the time of a royal wedding. The diary of P. A. Valuev, the tsar’s Minister of State Properties, provides a fuller explanation:

It is said that Michell has been expelled, that he has been ordered to depart within 24 hours and so on. His expulsion is being ascribed either to productions of the pen of Mr Michell which are unwelcome to Russia or to unwelcome oral comments in the presence of Russian officers in the Prince’s suite. The truth is apparently the following. Mr Michell’s newspaper articles have long aroused the dissatisfaction of Prince Gorchakov. He told the tsar about this, and the tsar told Lord Loftus. In this connection the selection of Michell for the Prince’s suite was highlighted, and the contradiction between the assurances and the
actions of the English government. Loftus conveyed this to Michell, and the latter, already embittered by the fact that a place had not been set aside for him in the palace and that he was not invited to the hofmeister's table, asked that he be despatched as a courier without delay.\textsuperscript{40}

If Valuev is to be believed, the main reason why the Russian authorities felt antipathy towards the British Consul was that 'Mr Michell's newspaper articles have long aroused the dissatisfaction of Prince Gorchakov'. Vexatious diplomatic niceties occasioned by the preparations for the royal wedding of 1874 were pretexts. The Russian authorities mistrusted Michell because of things he had written. What was so objectionable about them?

Despite the wording of Valuev's diary entry, Michell did not often write 'newspaper articles'.\textsuperscript{41} He did, however, write a great many other things. He is best-known today as the author of all five editions of John Murray's \textit{Handbook for Travellers in Russia, Poland, and Finland}, the principal English-language guide to the Russian Empire before Baedeker's \textit{Russia} came out in English in 1914.\textsuperscript{42} Were these the reason why the Russian authorities turned on him?

It is true that when the publisher John Murray initiated his series of travel guides in the 1830s, he found Russia problematical. Potential authors tended to share the view of most British people in the first half of the nineteenth century that the land of the tsars was to be viewed with suspicion.\textsuperscript{43} When Thomas Denman Whatley offered him what was to be his
first guidebook to include Russia, he replied that he ‘could not venture to publish your Northern Tour as a mere ordinary book of travels’, but that he would welcome a blander and more technically informative volume. The subsequent correspondence makes clear that although Whatley accepted Murray’s counter-proposal, he did so rather reluctantly. Agreeing to let Murray excise from his manuscript ‘such paragraphs as appear to you most likely to incur the wrath of the powers that be in Russia’, he saw ‘no use in carrying such a caution too far’, and subsequently asked Murray to print a few copies of the ‘expunged parts’ separately and bind them into copies of the final version of the book so that he could give them to the people who had assisted him. Although he promised to say in his preface that he had ‘studiously abstained from touching on any point that might bring the book within the clutches of the police and thus entail trouble on the traveller’, and although he guaranteed that the people who received the versions with the excised passages would not ‘ever travel out of this country or in any way endanger the free circulation of their expurgated brethren in the Tsar’s dominions’, he clearly chafed at having to repress some of the things he felt about Russia.

Captain William Jesse, the second author whom Murray employed to provide guidance for travellers to Russia, was probably more anti-Russian than Whatley. In a book he published before his dealings with Murray, he noted that ‘The Russians call the Circassians slave dealers’, but then asked: ‘[W]hat are they themselves, with all their civilization?’ Even a British reviewer of this book found its picture of Russia unacceptably negative.
Jesse did not abandon his opinion, however, for he repeated it in a volume he published after working for Murray.48 When he wrote the relevant part of the second Murray guide to include coverage of Russia,49 Murray had to engage in a good deal of excision before he could allow his work into print. Jesse objected to Murray’s alterations, commenting sardonically at one point: ‘Karamzin wrote I believe his history by order of the Russian government and is therefore I presume unobjectionable’.50 Even after Murray’s interventions, the guidebook still said that ‘nine-tenths of Russian travelling is through a most uninteresting country’, that Russian hotels were to be essayed only ‘if the stranger desires to obtain a lasting impression of how dirty and disagreeable an inn can be’, and that travellers would be well advised to avoid Russian soups.51

If Michell’s guides had spoken in terms similar to those of Whatley and Jesse, they might indeed have been the reason why, in 1874, the tsar and Gorchakov took advantage of a storm in a teacup to put an end to his official career in Russia. In fact, however, they were very different from their predecessors. Michell felt he could not ‘rely on a single word in the old Handbook [i.e. that of Jesse]’.52 In any case, he had in mind a more scholarly volume. Far from courting controversy, he intended to concentrate on information. He believed that people travelled to Russia not to relax, but to improve themselves. When sending Murray the first instalment of the first edition, he explained: ‘A handbook for this country cannot be written like a guide for any other European country. Travellers come here to study Russia, to Spain, Italy, &c they go to enjoy scenery, climate and art. This is
comparatively terra incognita – everything has to be explained. The handbook must consequently be composed of condensed lectures’. When working on the third edition, he insisted: ‘As to descriptions, it must be kept in mind that Russia is not visited by Cochney [sic] tourists or by single ladies of a romantic type. We only get the better class of travellers who seek information and facts and who are very eager to know the history of Russia’. Thus his guides tended to be dry rather than inflammatory.

Insofar as Michell’s guides did touch on politics, furthermore, they were supportive of the tsarist authorities, for they depicted a country that was changing for the better. The preface to the first edition asserted that Russia was now ‘a country ... highly interesting to those who study the political progress of nations and the consequent increase of their well-being’; that ‘there is now no country on the Continent where foreigners are more free from the vexatious proceedings of custom-house and police-officers’; that a stranger could now ‘converse on politics as freely as in his own country, and study the social condition of the empire ... without any fear of the liabilities described by writers on Russia ten years ago’; and that railways had eliminated ‘the necessity of posting through a country of which the language to a Western traveller is incomprehensible, and of which the roads were, perhaps, the worst in Europe’. Although later volumes sometimes modified these words of praise – the second edition, for example, drew attention to greater severity in the application of Russia’s passport regulations – and although there were parts of the Russian Empire such as Vil’na of which Michell did not think highly, the overwhelming impression one gets from his
correspondence with Murray is that he believed new editions of his
guidebook had to be drawn up frequently because Russia was making rapid
progress. Even the edition of 1875, which came out shortly after he had felt
obliged to resign from the diplomatic and consular services, and which he
nearly abandoned, spoke of ‘the philanthropic Sovereign who has liberated
the serfs, and whose wise legislation is improving the institutional and the
material condition of the country with a rapidity, and on a scale of magnitude
and comprehensiveness, unexampled in any other State, ancient or
modern’. Michell believed that his guidebooks would enhance, not damage,
his reputation among Russians. When working on the first edition, he told
Murray that he thought ‘the Russians will be glad to see it’, and that ‘It will
find an immense sale among the Russians who have no guide books in their
own language’. He hoped that reviewers of the edition of 1875 would point
out the ‘enormous service’ it ‘rendered to Russia’, for ‘This sentiment will find
an echo here [i.e. in Russia] and will have the effect of rehabilitating me in
public opinion here – an important point after what has taken place ...’. It
seems unlikely that remarks of this kind were without foundation. The
guidebooks were informative rather than provocative; they depicted a
modernizing country; and they were better than anything in Russian. From
the point of view of Russians, they testified to the merits of the author, not to
his untrustworthiness.

Nonetheless, the attention that Michell’s guidebooks paid to the
‘modernization’ of Russia gives an inkling of the broad area in which the
tsarist authorities took exception to him. Although the guidebooks provided
ample evidence of the fact and the speed of Russia’s transformation, they did not dwell on its direction and nature. These were matters on which the author’s views differed from those of the country’s rulers. To pin down exactly how they differed, one has to look at Michell’s other writings, which have attracted little attention since they first saw the light of day.

His first publication after his appointment as an attaché at the British Embassy in St Petersburg was an article in which he set current Russian politics in the context of a highly personal outline of the country’s political traditions. In the light of twelve recent publications, one in English, three in French, and eight in Russian (the 1842 edition of Karamzin’s *History of the Russian Empire*, two parts of Sergei Solov’ev’s history of Russia, Boris Chicherin’s 1856 study of Russian provincial institutions in the seventeenth century, an 1858 book entitled *Russian People and State* by the Moscow law professor Vasilii Leshkov, I. D. Beliaev’s seminal *Peasants in Rus´* of 1860, the 1861 edition of the collected works of Konstantin Aksakov, and articles on Rus´ by Afanasii Shchapov in the journal *Vek*), Michell argued that, because Russia’s political systems had not always been strongly authoritarian in the past, the country need not hold fast to authoritarianism any longer.64 After devoting much of his space to the medieval veche, to Novgorod and Pskov as opposed to Moscow, to the Assemblies of the Land of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (which he called the ‘States-General’), and to Catherine the Great’s Legislative Commission of 1767-68 (which he called a ‘Parliament’), he drew attention to the ‘sudden rebound of intelligence and honesty in the country on the death of Nicholas’.65 Not all the reforms which
had ensued since then had been well thought-out. To remedy their flaws, ‘the Emperor will be compelled to call in the co-operation of representatives of the people’. It would be particularly difficult for the tsar to set his face against the introduction of constitutional government if he had to make concessions of a constitutional kind in peripheral parts of the empire such as Poland and Finland, for, at a time when communications were much better than they used to be, ‘a popular assembly cannot sit next door to the capital of an absolute sovereign without undermining that absolutism’. As a result of the reforms, the country’s social orders were in disarray. Nobles and peasants were dissatisfied for different reasons, but they formed ‘one great opposition party against the small governing section of the community’. In Michell’s opinion, ‘The intellectual force of the country strongly demands, as in France [in 1789], the assembly of the States-General’. He recommended bringing such a body into being by abolishing provincial but retaining the district assemblies of nobility and admitting to them ‘all qualified landholders both in town and country’ (for ‘The abolition of serfage has made the general introduction of a property-qualification very easy’). The imperial Senate could be turned into a sort of upper house. Only changes of this kind could prevent the break-up of the empire; ‘a return to constitutional government’, Michell believed, was ‘as logical, just, and necessary, as it seems urgent for the preservation of the Romanof dynasty and the unity of Russia’. Clearly, Michell’s political sympathies lay with those who wanted greater change than Alexander II felt able to grant. Although, at the time of his essay on political representation in Russia, his views on the subject were
not wildly at odds with the opinions of some of those who had the ear of the tsar, and although, at that time, it did not seem wholly impossible that Russia might acquire a central parliament, no such body came into being until after the revolution of 1905. The local representative institutions established by the zemstvo reform of 1864 turned out to be the political high-watermark of Alexander II’s ‘Great Reforms’. After Dmitrii Karakozov attempted to assassinate the tsar in April 1866, the chances of further political reform diminished greatly. In the political sphere, Michell was to be a disappointed man.

He was also less than completely satisfied by the course of Russian commercial policy. When Britain abolished the Corn Laws in 1846, it became the European country most strongly committed to free trade. At that time, in the era of Nicholas I, the tsarist authorities took the view that Russian producers had to be protected from cheap imports. They did not believe that competition from abroad would encourage domestic producers to become more efficient. Although they permitted foreigners to establish commercial concerns inside the country, they placed restrictions on the activities in which they could engage if they did not take out Russian citizenship. After the accession of Alexander II in 1855, the ground began to shift in the commercial sphere no less than in other areas of policy. Russia revised its tariffs downwards in 1857. The appointment of Mikhail Reitern as Finance Minister in 1861 augured well for the possibility of further reduction. In the summer of 1865, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell, encouraged Britain’s Chambers of Commerce to send a delegation to a
'National Exhibition of the Arts and Manufactures of Russia' in Moscow, and offered them 'Mr. Michell, who is perfectly acquainted with the Russian language,' as a guide. Lord Clarendon, the next Foreign Secretary, submitted Michell’s report on the delegation’s visit to Parliament and shared it with the Russian government. In Clarendon’s view, the report promised well for the future of Anglo-Russian commercial relations. The reduction of Russian tariffs in 1857, he said, had not ‘justified the apprehensions entertained by those in Russia who regarded them as likely to produce disastrous results; and a spirit of enterprize appears to exist in Russia which has led, notwithstanding the system of artificial protection, to very satisfactory results’. Clarendon clearly hoped that the Russian authorities would go further down the road of free trade. They too, or some of them, were planning to reduce the number of restrictions they placed on international trade. Russian tariff reformers may have thought of Michell as an ally in their cause, for *The Economist* asserted in August 1867 that he had been appointed British Consul in St Petersburg in June 1866 ‘partly through Russian influence’.

Reitern, the Russian Minister of Finance, duly enacted major changes to Russia’s tariffs in 1868.

Michell commented on the new tariffs at length and produced an English-language version of the new duties. Although he was pleased by the direction of travel they implied (‘The objects which M. de Reutern desires to attain ... are those which have been fully realized in Great Britain under the Free Trade policy inaugurated by Sir Robert Peel’), his commentary made clear that he did not believe they went far enough. ‘[O]nly 53 rates,’ he
claimed, had been ‘apparently reduced to any considerable extent’. Many more Russian import duties were either staying the same or going up. Not surprisingly, in view of Britain’s heavy emphasis on manufacturing, he stressed that it was ‘difficult to see how any proper equalization of conditions between the Russian and the foreign manufacturer can be effected, unless the importation of machinery into Russia be absolutely free, and the duties on raw materials and chemicals be both few and of the lightest description’.76

Perhaps Michell was naive to expect more substantial changes to Russian tariffs than Reitern achieved. When reviewing his report on the British industrialists’ visit of 1865, The Economist had sounded a note of caution about the chances of improved Anglo-Russian trade. Whilst conceding that Russia had been making ‘various important modifications’ to its basic policy of commercial protectionism, it still emphasized ‘how seriously Russian commercial prosperity is affected by the protective system’ and pointed out the extent to which vested interests in Russia resisted the idea of free trade.77 Michell probably came round to this point of view in the course of the next two or three years. Writing to his ambassador when on leave in Britain at the beginning of 1869, he described the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce’s ‘hope that as the Russian Government gets more powerful and less afraid of silly clamour, a more enlightened Tariff will be gradually introduced’. At the same time, however, he confessed that he had been ‘quite tired of this question even in Russia’.78 These comments seem to indicate that he was fully aware of the extent to which the question of reducing Russian tariffs was bedevilled by Russian politics. To judge by his presence
at the annual dinner of the Cobden Club in 1877 (when W. E. Forster roused the assembled company by expressing the belief that ‘the time had come when the advocates of Free Trade in every country would gain strength against their own Protectionist party’), he remained an enthusiast for removing tariff barriers. By then, however, Russia was beginning to go back even on the incomplete steps it had taken in the direction of free trade in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1904, the geostrategist Halford Mackinder was to make Russia’s protectionism a significant feature of the threat that he believed the country posed to world peace.

Thus Michell wanted to go further than the Russian authorities in the spheres of both politics and economics. In these areas, however, his views differed only in degree, not in kind, from those of a number of well-placed tsarist bureaucrats. On their own, they were unlikely to have made their proponent unacceptable to Russia’s rulers. The same cannot be said of his views on the transformation of Russian society. Altering the relations between nobles and peasants was by far the most far-reaching of the changes which the tsarist government set in train in Russia in the 1860s. Whereas questions of political representation and international trade concerned only minorities in Russia, relations between lords and peasants involved almost everyone. Michell’s incisive critique of the way in which St Petersburg set about altering these relations was to bring his official career in Russia to an end.

Michell was not opposed to the abolition of serfdom per se. On the contrary, he approved of it. He felt, however, that the tsarist authorities had
failed to replace it with true peasant freedom. He hinted at his position as early as 1863, when he argued in passing in his article on Russia’s political arrangements that St Petersburg ought not to have made land available to the former serfs when it granted them their freedom. It was not true, he wrote at that time, ‘that personal freedom without land would reduce the peasantry to pauperism’. Iakov Rostovtsev, a key figure in the abolition of serfdom, had initially shared this view, but after a process of intense reflection in 1858 he had changed his mind. Michell’s adherence to a position rejected by the emancipators was not likely to win him well-placed friends in Russia. When, at the end of the 1860s, he wrote about abolition at length, he was likely to make enemies.

The occasion for Michell’s full-dress explanation of his views on abolition did not have to do with Russia. In order to attempt a resolution of the difficulties which were bedevilling landlord-tenant relations in Ireland, Gladstone’s First Ministry embarked on an investigation of land tenure in other countries. Lord Clarendon, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, required all Britain’s European missions to answer a series of questions on the subject. Before answering them, Michell composed a set of ‘General Considerations’ in which he narrated the rise and fall of serfdom and discussed its abolition from the point of view of peasants, landed proprietors, and the Russian state. His prefatory essay and ensuing formal answers made a book-length study of some 75,000 words. Whatever its value to London in respect of the difficulties Britain was having in Ireland, it was the best-informed and most substantial contemporary British analysis of its subject.
The position it adopted was very clear: freeing the serfs had been a laudable objective, but Russia had gone about it in the wrong way. Although nobles had benefited in the sense that they received liquid capital in return for the fractions of their estates they had to give up, and although the former serfs had received title to immoveable property, the state had not been able to fund the operation without retaining the poll tax. Retention of the poll tax had a series of unwelcome effects. Without the revenue it generated, the state could not ‘advance ... money to the peasantry’ for the purchase of land, but without strengthening peasant communes, and without insisting on collective peasant responsibility for repayment of the money it had advanced, the state could not recoup its losses. Strengthening peasant communes and insisting on collective peasant responsibility for repayments entailed retaining limits on peasant freedom of movement. Consequently, ‘the Emancipation Act was calculated, by a variety of subtle provisions, to prevent the peasantry from leaving the soil’, and Russian peasants were still tied down ‘almost as firmly as in 1592’. 85

What, then, ought the tsarist authorities to have done? Michell reiterated the point he had made in 1863. The state need only have freed the serfs and given them ‘the rights and privileges of citizens’; it had not been obliged to make land available to them. Although this ostensibly anti-peasant standpoint sounds like the lament of an imaginary dissatisfied Russian nobleman, in Michell’s case that is not what it was. He knew perfectly well, and explained, why the authorities had not gone down the road he thought best. Russia’s rulers understood that, because peasants thought they already
owned the land, denying them title to it might have led to risings. The authorities also knew that, without the security of landownership, peasants might somehow have been re-enslaved by their former owners. Michell further accepted that Russians on the left of the political spectrum thought of peasant landownership as a good in itself, whether or not it entailed financial difficulties. People who thought like this ‘looked upon the free Russian peasant, cultivating his own acres, as the ideal of a citizen destined to regenerate Russia’. Thus Michell knew why abolition had been accompanied by land transfer. He still believed, however, that as a result of this provision, ‘much of the substance of the great reform of 1861 was sacrificed’. Because of it, peasants did not receive two important rights which they had lost at the point serfdom was introduced: ‘the right of free locomotion’ and ‘the right of freely disposing of their own labour, energy and resources’. The laws of 1861 allowed landlords to oblige peasants to buy land even ‘where perhaps the land was comparatively bad’. Since, to buy land, peasants had to borrow from the State, ‘the Emancipation Act has forcibly made the peasant both an agriculturist and a debtor to the State, which, being his mortgagee, has acquired a vested interest in his immobility. That interest is strengthened by the system of poll taxation, which compels the State to prevent the absconding of the chief contributor to its resources’.

In Michell’s opinion, land transfer was particularly retrograde because it was at odds with the generosity with which peasants had been treated in some of the other recent changes. They had been granted ‘civil rights ... far beyond the liberties enjoyed by the peasantry of the freest and most civilized
nations’; ‘Their self-government ... includes the administration of justice within village communes’ and ‘numerical preponderance’ in the new local assemblies (zemstva). Michell believed that the distance between the generosity of the civil and administrative developments and the control implicit in the land transfer operation was so considerable that peasant frustration might be greater in the future even than it had been before abolition; ‘the civil rights of the Russian peasantry are, on the one hand, limited [by the effects of the land transfer operation] to a degree which almost neutralizes them, and, on the other, extended in their communal organization to a point that renders their exercise dangerous both to the liberty of the individual and the welfare of the State’. Michell did not deny that the abolition of serfdom was beneficial in some regards. He was particularly pleased to note the increase, after 1861, in the rate at which large peasant families were breaking up, for he deplored the tyranny of peasant patriarchs. Family division favoured previously oppressed groups, women and young men. In the wake of family division, a young man might be less inclined to migrate in search of work. On the one hand, he was no longer under the thumb of his seniors. On the other, he was much more directly responsible for his wife and children. But if he did stay, the state need not have enacted abolition in such a way that ‘a nominally free peasantry continue[s] to be firmly attached to the soil’. Although it was possible that, in the short term, family divisions made peasants poorer, the evidence was inconclusive, for Russia had witnessed an ‘extraordinary increase of trade ... since 1861 in articles of peasant luxury’.
From Michell's point of view, advantages of this kind paled into insignificance when set against the drawbacks of the way in which abolition had been enacted. He kept returning to the point that, in effect, peasants were still tied to the soil. Although he conceded that, strictly speaking, peasants were obliged by the legislation of 1861 only to become tenants (not owners), and then only for a period of nine years (whence the belief of some peasants that ‘real’ freedom was to be theirs on 19 February 1870), in fact they could be required to accept outright ownership of land by nobles who were determined to sell land to them. Nobles whose land was not very fruitful tended to fall into this category. Because, furthermore, the state wanted to know where peasants were at all times (so that it could tax them), they could surrender their tenancies in the first nine years after abolition only if they bought land in communes other than those to which they belonged or inscribed themselves in another taxable class.

In this disadvantageous scenario, Michell saw merit in the so-called ‘beggar’s allotment’. Instead of remaining tenants for ever (a theoretical possibility at the point of abolition), or becoming proprietors tied down by long-term mortgages, the former serfs had a third option in 1861: ‘accepting at the hands of the lord a quarter of the maximum land allotment, inclusive of the peasant homestead, as free gifts, given by the lord, and accepted by the peasant, as a settlement of all claims and a rupture of all compulsory relations between them’. Michell tabulated by province the nearly half a million peasants who had taken this option by 1 March 1869. He felt that they were making ‘a protest against the false principles which would seem to
pervade the Act of Emancipation’. In his eyes, acceptance of the ‘beggar’s allotment’ derived from ‘a spirit of independence, and an impatience to become free’. He believed that if nobles had not been granted the right to enforce mortgage-based proprietorship, many more peasants would have opted for the beggar’s allotment. Although its value could not be very easily ‘estimated in money’, it gave peasants ‘the invaluable advantage of escaping from the otherwise unavoidable condition of becoming debtors to the State and attached to the soil for the long period of forty-nine years. They acquired a greater portion of those civil rights of which they had expected the entirety in 1861’. Scholars have taken a century and a quarter to echo this part of Michell’s argument.

Michell concluded the peasant section of his ‘General Considerations’ with his sharpest criticism of the abolition legislation: it strengthened peasant communes. Communes, he said, had served a useful purpose prior to the entrenchment of serfdom at the end of the sixteenth century, but since then they had been agencies of lords and the state. That peasants were not naturally communal was demonstrated by the sharp increase in the rate at which they were dividing their families. The Russian government, however, was keener on the commune than ever. It needed to keep it in place to ensure repayment of the peasants’ enormous debts (i.e. the loans it had made to them to enable to buy land from nobles). To be sure of getting its money back, it had to bind peasants together in ‘a “reciprocal bond” – the bond of “frank pledge” [krugovaia poruka]’. To ensure that peasants did not escape the implications of the ‘reciprocal bond’, communes had to be able to
deny their members passports. According to Michell, ‘the despotism of such an uncivilized democracy exercises a most baneful influence on the moral and material development of the people, and ... that development is at present subservient to the paramount interests of the Exchequer and War Department’.

Ending the section of his study which centred on peasants, Michell held that abolition did not really benefit them at all. In essence, it was ‘a law for the security of the interests of the Crown’. The position of the Russian serf was quite different from that of the poor tenant farmer in Ireland (whose circumstances had been the occasion for his analysis). Whereas an Irish tenant farmer suffered from the impermanence of his tenure, Russian peasants, according to Michell, suffered from the permanence of their tenure. The Russian peasant’s inability to leave the land ‘was one of the conditions of slavery, and the Emancipation Act has reproduced it in another form’.

In view of his sharp conclusion on abolition from the point of view of the peasantry, one might imagine that Michell thought the other two interested parties, nobles and the state, had done well out of the reform. In fact, he did not take this view. Most nobles had objected to the reform on principle. They thought of ‘expropriation of their lands in favour of the peasantry as a violation of the rights of property’. When abolition went through, they suffered in various ways: the state called in noble loans; income from former serf estates fell away sharply; the countryside was anything but tranquil; they did not get central representative institutions to match the peasants’ strengthened powers of communal self-government; and those of them in the
north and centre of the country who had factored the peasants’ off-farm earnings into the rents they had charged them under serfdom lost income because of the failure of abolition to take these earnings into account in the setting of rates for the peasants’ land purchases. Admittedly, there were certain respects in which nobles benefited: some of them were pleased that the way in which serfdom was brought to an end more or less allowed them to retain the labour they needed (because of the obstacles which the legislation put in the way of peasant migration); many of them came to see the value of making use of the new elective organs of local government to ‘study and promote their interest on the spot’\textsuperscript{100}; and nobles in the southern part of the country (where the land was fruitful) could even be said to be in a ‘thriving position’.\textsuperscript{101} Nevertheless, one could not argue that abolition served the interests of nobles in general. Nor did the state benefit to any great degree, for it had to cope with the discontents of the other two interested parties. If, finally, the object of the exercise had been to improve the country’s food supply, better communications had probably been playing a greater part in what little improvement had been taking place in that regard than any post-abolition increase in productivity.\textsuperscript{102}

From all three of the main points of view, therefore – those of peasants, nobles, and the state – Michell felt that the legislation on the abolition of serfdom had been misguided. The ‘defects’, he said, ‘are ... so serious as to require, not palliative remedies, but radical cure’.\textsuperscript{103} ‘That cure,’ he concluded, ‘will doubtless be found in the history of other European countries, which have long since abandoned the communal tenure of land,
the system of “frank pledge [peasant collective responsibility, *krugovaia poruka*],” and poll taxation. Russia’s model for a world without serfs demonstrated ‘the injuriousness of laws intended to stimulate artificially the formation of a class of small proprietors and the attachment of a peasantry to the soil’.

This last phrase was the crucial one for Michell: he believed that small peasant proprietors belonged to the past, not the future. The second part of his study, where he went into great detail on some of London’s specific questions, painted the effects of the abolition of serfdom in even more lurid terms than Part I. The long sub-section in Part II in which he discussed peasants’ standard of living concluded: ‘This sketch of the circumstances of the peasantry, painful as it may seem in many particulars, is applicable to three-fourths of the peasantry of Great Russia, fixed to the land as freeholders or perpetual tenants’.  

The key phrase, from Michell’s point of view, was ‘fixed to the land’. He was trying to hammer home his belief that the central defect of abolition was the fact that it attempted artificially to entrench ‘a class of small proprietors’. In Michell’s view, the attempt was bound to fail; Russian peasants would eventually have to be allowed to go their own way.

Several years after leaving St Petersburg, Michell made clear that his study of 1870 was the main reason why the tsarist authorities had more or less engineered his departure. ‘It is no secret,’ he wrote in 1881, that the author of the English Report on Land Tenure in Russia, presented to both Houses of Parliament in 1870, incurred the
displeasure of the Tsar Liberator by his unfavourable criticism of the great Agrarian Law, which had already at that period produced, according to his observations, results that were highly unfavourable, as well as pregnant with extreme danger, both to the economical condition of the country and to the social and political welfare of the State.\textsuperscript{105} Despite the damage which his analysis had done to his career, however, he did not change his mind. When Gladstone’s Second Irish Land Act was passing through Parliament in 1881, he took the opportunity of another review of recent Russian-language publications to reiterate his belief that it was not a good idea to attempt the creation of a class of small landed proprietors.\textsuperscript{106} Although, in this instance, he proceeded with care, promising his publisher that he would make his argument ‘as little controversial as possible and moderate’, and asking that ‘the matter ... be kept very quiet until after Mr W.E.G. [Gladstone] has spoken on the Land Bill’, for fear that the Prime Minister might ‘put a gag on me or send me to S. America’,\textsuperscript{107} he was convinced ‘that an attempt will be made to obtain a more extended application of the “Bright’s clauses” of the Bill of 1870 with the view of stimulating peasant proprietorship in Ireland’, and was determined ‘to show that such a policy has been an utter failure in Russia’.\textsuperscript{108}

Clearly, Michell’s hostility to small landed proprietors ran deep. He found additional support for it in the last part of his career, when he was British Consul-General in Oslo. No sooner had his review article of 1881 appeared in print than he wrote to his publisher from Norway to say that he was ‘now studying the agrarian question in this country – which is one of
peasant proprietors. Emigration is assuming very large proportions and I have no doubt I shall find that economic laws exercise the same influence here [as in Russia and Ireland].\textsuperscript{109} That is precisely what he did find (or convinced himself that he had found). His foray into Norwegian agrarian structures gave rise to the last of his long review articles in 1886.\textsuperscript{110} Like the book-length study of 1870 and the article of 1881, this was no mere impartial appraisal. On the contrary, Michell made clear in the opening lines that his targets in writing the article were not so much Norway \textit{per se} as ‘The advocates of a general redistribution of landed property in Ireland’ and people who believed in making ‘three acres and a cow’ available to ‘the agricultural labourers of other portions of the United Kingdom’.\textsuperscript{111} Such people, he believed, might derive comfort for their views from the way in which land was held in Norway. Had Norwegian small proprietorship worked out well? Michell did not believe that it had. If, in the first part of the nineteenth century, the country had been populated overwhelmingly by small landed proprietors, the proportion was now diminishing. Towns had doubled in size. ‘As in other advancing countries,’ Michell wrote, ‘the attraction of towns, and the facilities for obtaining employment in them, operate also in Norway, to the disadvantage of the yeomen farmers of the present day; ‘the Robinson Crusoe existence of the yeoman farmer ... has suffered so much invasion that it has wellnigh \textit{sic} disappeared’; Norwegian farmers had ‘exceptionally heavy burdens on their backs in the form of pecuniary indebtedness’.\textsuperscript{112} The peculiarities of Norwegian land tenure had not insulated them from the general European depression. The ‘best hands’ were
emigrating. The same sort of thing was happening in Norway as had been happening in Russia. When Russian legislators drew up the legislation which put an end to serfdom, they thought they were making enough land available to peasants to enable them to support themselves and to pay their mortgages and the poll tax. The passage of time made clear that they had not succeeded in this objective. The creation, in Russia, of a Peasant Land Bank, the reduction of peasant mortgages there, and the abolition of the poll tax demonstrated that the tsarist regime had been forced to try and alleviate peasant hardship at the expense of the Treasury. In short, ‘the salient results of bolstering up [in Norway] ... or of artificially creating [in Russia] ... a numerous body of small landed proprietors, have been strikingly identical in regard to the ultimate economic condition of the agrarian classes’. In Michell’s opinion, Britain would be extremely ill-advised to attempt either of these things on home soil. Converting Irish tenants into small landed proprietors and making ‘three acres and a cow’ available to English agricultural workers would both result, ‘infallibly and speedily, in damage to the State, after ruin to the individual’.

Since Michell repeated his views on land tenure in Norway in a guidebook to the country in the 1890s, his attacks on the notion of small peasant proprietorship may be said to have continued over the best part of a quarter of a century. In Russia, in Ireland, in Norway, and in England, he thought the idea should be abandoned. Railways and cities made small peasant proprietors a thing of the past; attempting to encourage them was a mistake.
It is easy to understand why Michell’s opinions made him unpopular with the tsarist authorities. In the face of resistance from nobles and misunderstanding on the part of peasants, Russia’s rulers had had the courage to enact the abolition of serfdom. An official at the British Embassy in St Petersburg who argued that the social order they had put in its place was not conducive to the long-term prosperity of the country was unlikely to meet with their approval. It is no wonder that Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs took advantage of disagreements about diplomatic niceties at the beginning of 1874 to bring about Michell’s departure from his post.

In Britain, on the other hand, The Times not only commended Michell’s view of post-abolition Russia but made his study of 1870 its principal example in an article which began by pointing to a recent striking improvement in the readability of official reports. Whether Michell’s analysis was correct, however, became open to doubt after the publication of Donald Mackenzie Wallace’s Russia in 1877. Robert Michell was surely trying to defend his brother’s views when he published the negative review of Mackenzie Wallace’s book with which the present article began. Chapters thirty-one and thirty-two of Mackenzie Wallace’s book, both of which were called ‘Consequences of the Emancipation’ (one treating the subject from the point of view of landed proprietors, the other from that of the peasantry), reveal an observer who was much less certain than Michell that the way in which serfdom had been abolished in Russia had been unfortunate. Mackenzie Wallace’s approach to the question was invariably judicious, rarely condemnatory, often emollient, on occasion even laudatory. He
explained that because ‘agrarian relations are still in a transitory, chaotic state’, final judgments on abolition could not yet be pronounced. Although he spoke approvingly of the fact that landed proprietors had been ‘dragged ... forcibly from the old path of indolence and routine’, he felt that the terms of abolition prevented them from putting their agrarian operations on a sound footing except in some southern parts of the country. He was ‘not prepared to pronounce any very decided opinion’ on the question whether ‘the material and moral condition of the peasantry [has] improved since the Emancipation’. Although he acknowledged that in some parts of the country peasants stood little chance of meeting their financial obligations, he also claimed that the drawbacks of peasant self-government were ‘by no means so great as is commonly supposed’. Peasant communes, he believed, did not by definition prevent peasants from adopting more sophisticated farming techniques, and abolishing them would have far more dramatic consequences than the abolition of serfdom. So far as peasants were concerned, Mackenzie Wallace concluded that there was ‘far less ground for despondency than is commonly supposed’.

When this relatively generous appraisal of the immediate effects of the abolition of serfdom is set alongside that of Michell, it can be argued that the differences between them put their authors at the head of the two main English-language traditions on the subject. As a firm critic of the way in which abolition was turning out, Michell looks like a sort of proto-‘immiserationist’, a forerunner of Geroid Tanquary Robinson, whose lurid depiction of the lives of late-imperial Russian peasants dominated the literature for more than a
generation after its first publication in 1932. On the other hand, Mackenzie Wallace’s more sympathetic and in some ways more positive account of the Russian countryside in the 1870s qualifies him as a precursor of the post-Robinson school of thought which has been strongly in evidence since the appearance, in 1977, of James Y. Simms’s contention that post-abolition Russian agriculture was not in such a bad way as Robinson made out. Robinson did not draw on Michell and Simms did not draw on Mackenzie Wallace, but once Michell’s study of 1870 is restored to the literature on its subject the two sides in the scholarly debate in English about the merits and drawbacks of the way in which Russian serfdom came to an end turn out to have been in evidence earlier than historians may have realized.
1 The Times, 18 January 1877, p. 3.


4 Alexander II declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 12/24 April 1877 (V. M. Khevrolina, ‘Vostochnyi krizis 70-kh godov XIX v.’, in A. N. Sakharov et al. [eds], Istoriia vneshnei politiki Rossii, 5 vols, Moscow, 1995-9, vol. 4, pp. 174-219 [193]).

5 James Michell, Parochial History of Saint Neots, in Cornwall, Bodmin, 1833; Royal Cornwall Gazette, 7 March 1856, p. 8 (notice of James’s death), and 27 May 1881, p. 5 (notice of death of James’s son Nicholas, in which James is described as an inspector of taxes).

6 For John’s Russian orders, date and place of death, and age at death, see Royal Cornwall Gazette, 4 July 1862, p. 8. For his place of birth and the fact that he was a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons see the plaque dedicated to his wife in the parish church of St Neot, Cornwall. See also Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, Armorial Families: A Directory of Gentlemen of
*Coat-Armour*, 5th edn, Edinburgh, 1905, p. 960, where he is said to have
‘served in the Russian Campaign in Poland 1831, and in the Russian Navy
until 1845’, and to have been an MD (but not a Member of the Royal College
of Surgeons). The plaque in the church at St Neot gives Amelia’s place of
birth and provides the quoted description of her father. She died at ‘Outlands’
on the River Camel on 12 January 1896 (Southport, General Register Office,
[hereafter, GRO], death certificate, 1896, March quarter, volume 5c, p. 49,
no. 324).

7 London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter, LMA), Ms. 11196/1 (Records of
Baptisms, Marriages and Burials at the Chapel of the Russia Company at

8 I am grateful to Ms Jennifer Hancock of the Cornwall Record Office, Truro
(hereafter, CRO), for the information that they do not appear in the school’s
surviving pupil lists (CRO, X267/3).

9 *Report from the Select Committee on Diplomatic Service*, House of
Commons Parliamentary Papers (hereafter, HCPP), 1861 (459), p. 132,
paragraph 1334.

10 Their second daughter died there at the beginning of 1849 (LMA, Ms.
11196/1, p. 1016).

11 On his part in which see Marie-Louise Karttunen, ‘Making a Communal
World: English Merchants in Imperial St. Petersburg’, unpublished PhD
dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2004, pp. 263-78; ‘The British Seamen’s
Hospital at Cronstadt’, *Illustrated London News*, 29 December 1866,
Supplement, p. 465; and University of Nottingham, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Buchanan Papers (hereafter, Buchanan Papers), BU 19/103 and BU 19/104 (an exchange of letters at the end of 1866 between Michell and Sir Andrew Buchanan, the British Ambassador to Russia, in which Buchanan accepted an invitation from Michell in his capacity as Chairman of the Hospital Committee to become a Patron of the re-founded establishment).

12 For the fact that there does not seem to have been a school in Kronstadt in the middle of the nineteenth century which could have educated Michell to a high standard see ‘Uchebnye zavedeniia’, ch. 11 of F. A. Timofeevskii, Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk dvukhsotletiia goroda Kronshtadta, Kronstadt, 1913 <http://www.kronstadt.ru/books/history/timofeevsky.htm> [accessed 27 January 2013].


14 Royal Cornwall Gazette, 17 November 1892, p. 6.


16 HCPP, 1861 (459), pp. 132, 135, paragraphs 1334, 1377, 1379.


18 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Special Collections (hereafter, NLS), Ms. 40808, f. 1, Michell to John Murray, Admiralty, 3 June 1857, acknowledging the return of the translation and regretting that it had been ‘the occasion of so much trouble’.

19 London, Royal Geographical Society, Manuscript Archive (hereafter, RGS), CB4/1174, Michell to Sir Roderick Murchison, Admiralty, 11 March 1858, offering his services as a translator. Ibid., Michell to Dr H. Norton Shaw, Loughborough, 23 March 1860, declaring his intention to apply for election as a Fellow. I am grateful to Ms Sarah Strong of the RGS for the information that Michell’s Fellowship Certificate is dated 23 April 1860.
20 RGS, CB4/1174, Michell to Shaw, London, 31 December 1858; Michell to Captain [Richard] Collinson, London, 27 January 1859; Michell to Shaw, Lampen (a farm outside St Neot in Cornwall), 16 July 1859; Michell to Collinson, Lampen, 1 August 1859.


22 RGS, CB4/1174, Michell to Shaw, St Petersburg, 2 November 1860.


24 London, The National Archives, Public Record Office (hereafter, TNA, PRO), 30/22/84, ff. 35-6, Napier to Earl Russell, St Petersburg, 22 April 1863.


26 Reports from Her Majesty’s representatives respecting the tenure of land in the several countries of Europe: 1869-70, Part II, HCPP, 1870 (C.75), p. 22.


30 TNA, PRO, 30/22/84, f. 33a, Napier to Earl Russell, St Petersburg, 6 April 1863.

31 The Times, 20 January 1874, p. 8.

32 TNA, PRO, FO 65/882, no. 48 (a 5-folio despatch), Lord Augustus Loftus to Earl Granville, St Petersburg, 28 January 1874. See also Baddeley, Russia in the ‘Eighties’, pp. 392-3, and Merritt Abrash, ‘A Curious Royal Romance: The Queen’s Son and the Tsar’s Daughter’, Slavonic and East European Review, 47, 1969, 109, pp. 389-400 (pp. 399-400).

33 The Morning Post, 27 February 1874, p. 5.

34 TNA, PRO, FO 65/918, draft letter on behalf of Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, to Michell, Foreign Office, 8 January 1875 (the first item in this unfoliated file).


36 London, British Library (hereafter, BL), Egerton Manuscripts, 3199, f. 58, Michell to Baron Jomini, Odessa, 5/17 March 1876.

37 Royal Cornwall Gazette, 16 January 1875, p. 4 (report of move to Odessa); BL, Add. Mss. 39021, ff. 259-64, Michell to Sir Austen Layard (the

38 *The Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 7.

39 NLS, MS. 40809, f. 100, Michell to John Murray, Penzance, 9 February 1897 (retirement); GRO, Consular Death Indices (1849-1965), vol. 10, p. 1471, no. 98 (the consular rather than the domestic death indices because Michell died at the Dalen Hotel, Telemark, Norway, where he was presumably on holiday).


41 With the exception of ‘The Trade of Odessa’, *The Times*, 9 February 1876, p. 4. For his contributions to the magazine *Quarterly Review*, see below. An obituary of Michell claimed that the Russian authorities’ hostility to him in 1874 could be traced to ‘certain [newspaper] letters on Central Asia’ which they thought he had written but were in fact by someone else (‘Mr. Thomas Michell’, *The Standard* [London], 16 August 1899, p. 7). A misunderstanding of that kind could surely have been cleared up. As we shall see, Michell accepted that the root cause of his expulsion was one of his publications, but not a newspaper article.
42 The five editions of the *Handbook* came out in London in 1865, 1868, 1875, 1888, and 1893; they will be cited here by first word of title and date of publication.


44 NLS, Ms. 41910, pp. 221-2, Murray to Thomas Denman Whatley, copy, London, 25 April 1838.

45 NLS, Ms. 41262, Whatley to Murray, 13 July 1838 and 23 January 1839 (underlining in the original). Whatley's book appeared as *A Handbook for Travellers in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Russia, being a guide to the principal routes in those countries, with a minute description of Copenhagen, Stockholm, St Petersburg, and Moscow*, London and Leipzig, 1839. The final version of the book still contained the instruction, ‘Do not, on any account, profess liberal opinions’ (p. 4).


47 Anon. (Elizabeth Eastlake), untitled review of three books about Russia, *Quarterly Review*, vol. 69, no. 138 (March 1842), pp. 380-418 (reviewing Jesse at pp. 383-408). Here and subsequently, authors of the anonymous articles in *Quarterly Review* have been identified by means of Walter E. Houghton and Jean Harris Slingerland et al. (eds), *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, 5 vols, Toronto and London, 1966-89.

49 *Handbook for Northern Europe, including Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia*, London, 2 vols, 1848-9, vol. 2 (Finland and Russia).

50 NLS, Ms. 40619, Jesse to Murray, Ingatestone, 14 October 1848.


52 NLS, Ms. 40808, f. 9, Michell to Murray, St Petersburg, 9 November 1864.

53 Ibid., ff. 6-7, Michell to Murray, St Petersburg, 12 October 1864 (emphasis in the original).

54 Ibid., f. 61, Michell to Murray, St Petersburg, 5 December 1873.


56 Michell, *Handbook* (1868), p. 50, and compare NLS, Ms. 40808, f. 34, Michell to Murray, St Petersburg, 2 or 7 December 1867: ‘It will be necessary to retract all I have said about the passport system, which has again become odious. Gen. Trepoff is treating the Petersburgians as if they were disaffected Poles at Warsaw! The spie systems and secret police all in full vigour again since the attentats!’ (emphases in the original).

57 NLS, Ms. 40808, f. 60, Michell to Murray, St Petersburg, 5 December 1873.

58 See, for example, NLS, Ms. 40808, ff. 53-54, and Ms. 40809, ff. 56 and 75, Michell to Murray, 25 July 1872, 16 September 1892, 31 May 1893.

59 NLS, Ms. 41914, p. 235, Murray to Michell, copy, London, 17 June 1875, lamenting that it was ‘so long … since you desisted from the revision’.

60 *Handbook* (1875), pp. iii-iv.
NLS, Ms. 40808, ff. 9 and 12, Michell to Murray, St Peters burg, 9 November 1864 and 15 January 1865.

Ibid., ff. 62-3, Michell to Murray, Odessa, 27 October / 8 November 1875.

In Handbook (1868), p. vii, Michell acknowledged the use he had made of P. P. Semenov, Geografichesko-statisticheskii slovar’ Rossiiskoi imperii, 5 vols, St Petersburg, 1863-85, but Semenov’s compendium was not aimed at tourists.

Anon (Thomas Michell), ‘Constitutional Government in Russia’, Quarterly Review, 113, 1863, № 225, pp. 60-95. (Quarterly Review did not give titles to its articles, but from the point that it started to use running heads it is customary to employ these.) Michell referred to this article in a paper he wrote for his Ambassador (‘Memorandum by Mr Michell on the Public Opinion of Russia in reference to Poland’, BDFA, Part I, Series A, 1, p. 55).

Michell, ‘Constitutional Government’, p. 84.

Ibid., p. 87.

Ibid., p. 87.

Ibid., p. 90.

Ibid., p. 92.

Ibid., p. 95.

For discussion of currents in Russian high politics at about the time that Michell was writing, see, for example, V. E. Voronin, Russkie pravitel’stvenye liberaly v bor’be protiv “aristokraticheeskoi partii” (seredina 60-kh – seredina 70-kh gg. XIXv.), Moscow, 2009.
Whence the reason why Michell published an explanation of the British Naturalization Acts of 1870. Before these Acts, British subjects could also be subjects of other countries. Afterwards, they could not. Some of the British community with whom Michell dealt in his capacity as British Consul in St Petersburg had become naturalized Russian subjects. After 1870, Michell could no longer espouse their interests unless they renounced their allegiance to the tsar. See Thomas Michell, *Analysis of the Laws that Affect the Position of British Residents in Russia since the Passing of the Naturalization Acts of 1870*, St Petersburg and Moscow, 1871.

Clarendon’s covering letter and Michell’s lengthy *Report on the Present State of the Trade between Great Britain and Russia* make up HCPP 1866 (3603). Part of the report, but not the covering letter, is reprinted in BDFA, Part I, Series A, 1, pp. 92-119. Quotations in this paragraph come from the covering letter (which is unpaginated).


T. Michell, ‘Memorandum on the Proposed Alterations in the Russian Tariff of 1857’, in *Commercial Reports received at the Foreign Office from Her Majesty’s Consuls, during the year 1868, August to December*, HCPP 1868-69 (4110-I-VI), pp. 1-334; T. Michell (tr.), *Tariff of Customs’ Duties levied on the European frontier of the Empire of Russia and Kingdom of Poland, from

77 ‘Our Trade with Russia’, The Economist, 24 February 1866, pp. 222-3.
78 Buchanan Papers, BU 24/61, Michell to Sir Andrew Buchanan, Edinburgh, 5 February 1869.
79 The Times, 23 July 1877, p. 6.
82 See the letters that Rostovtsev wrote to Alexander II in August and September 1858 (‘Pis´ma g.-a. Rostovtseva iz za-granitsy k gosudariu´, in Anon., Materialy dla istorii uprazdneniia krepostnogo sostoianiiia pomeshchich´ikh krest´ian v Rossii v tsarstvovanie Imperatora Aleksandra II, 3 vols, Berlin, 1860-2, 1, pp. 380-407) and the letters he exchanged with the former Decembrist E. P. Obolenskii in the following two months (Perepiska E. P. Obolenskogo s Ia. I. Rostovtsevym. 1857-1860 gg., ed. P. V. Il´in, St Peters burg, 2011, pp. 35, 52, 111, 140).
83 *Reports from Her Majesty’s Representatives respecting the Tenure of Land in the Several Countries of Europe: 1869, Part I*, HCPP 1870 (C.66), pp. 2-4.

84 ‘Report by Mr. Michell on the System of Land Tenure in Russia’, *Reports from Her Majesty’s Representatives respecting the Tenure of Land in the Several Countries of Europe: 1869-70, Part II*, HCPP 1870 (C.75), pp. 22-122. The ‘General Considerations’ take up pp. 22-63, the answers to Lord Clarendon’s questions pp. 63-92, and documentary appendices pp. 92-122. The study concludes with an almost entirely Russian-language 24-item bibliography, many of the items in multiple volumes (p. 122).

85 ‘Report’, p. 29.

86 Ibid., p. 30 (from which all the quotations in this paragraph are taken).

87 Ibid., p. 30.

88 Ibid., p. 31.

89 Ibid., p. 33.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., p. 36.

92 Ibid., p. 37.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., p. 39.


96 Ibid., pp. 46-53, from which all the quotations in this paragraph are taken.
97 Ibid., p. 53.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 54.
100 Ibid., p. 57.
101 Ibid., p. 58.
102 Ibid., p. 62.
103 Ibid., p. 63 (from which the other quotations in this paragraph are also taken).
104 Ibid., p. 81.
106 Ibid., passim. The six items that TM took as the starting point of this article were the Russian legislation of 1861; the 1873 report of a Russian Committee of Enquiry into the condition of the Russian countryside a decade after the abolition of serfdom; A. I. Vasil’chikov, Zemlevladenie i zemledelie v Rossii i drugikh evropeiskih gosudarstvakh, 2 vols, St Petersburg, 1876; Iu. E. Ianson, Opyt issledovaniia o krest’ianskikh nadelakh i platezakh, 2nd edn, St Petersburg, 1881; H. Sutherland Edwards’s The Russians at Home and the Russians Abroad, 2 vols, London, 1879; and his own study of 1870. He was still reading the best Russian-language material on his subject, for the 1873 report continues to attract scholarly attention (in, for example, I. A. Khristoforov, Sud’ba reformy: russkoe krest’iansstvo v pravitel’stvennoi politike do i posle otmeny krepostnogo prava (1830-1890-e gg.), Moscow,
Vasil’chikov’s book provoked two of Russia’s foremost scholars to write a 200-page counterblast (V. Ger’e and B. Chicherin, *Russkii diletantizm i obshchinnoe zemlevladeenie: Razbor knigi A. Vasil’chikova “Zemlevladenie i zemledelie”, Moscow, 1878*); and Ianson’s book is central to a recent discussion of the size of post-abolition peasant allotments (N. M. Aleksandrov, ‘Skol’ko krest’ianinu nado zemli? (K voprosu o norme krest’ianskogo nadela v poreformennoi Rossii), *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, 2012, 5, pp. 100-9 [103]).


109 NLS, MS. 40808, f. 73, Michell to Murray, Christiania [Oslo], 6 May 1881.


111 Ibid., p. 384. Jesse Collings, MP, popularized the slogan ‘three acres and a cow’ when promoting land reform in Britain in 1885.

112 Ibid., pp. 392, 394, 405.

113 Ibid., p. 406.

114 Ibid., p. 413.

115 Ibid.

117 *The Times*, 10 June 1870, p. 4.


119 Ibid., 2, p. 322.

120 Ibid., 2, p. 346.

121 Ibid., 2, p. 359.

122 Ibid., 2, pp. 368, 373.

123 Ibid., 2, p. 380.
