

William Tyler | Peter the Great 1682–1725

- [Wendy] Hello? Hi, Judi. Hi William.
- [William Tyler] Hi, hi.
- [Wendy] How are you?
- I'm fine and you?
- Very good, thank you very much. Beautiful day in New York. In Hamptons, actually.
- It is a very nice day here on the South Coast. Too windy earlier today and a bit cold earlier today to swim, but it's got much better now. We went swimming yesterday and we were in for about half an hour, which is.
- Oh my God.
- Yeah.
- That's amazing.
- It was good yesterday.
- That's great. Fantastic.
- We got frozen when we came out 'cause the wind was cold. I could not get warm. It was, I did everything crank. It took me about now before I felt normal again.
- It sort of.
- It's good for you, it's good for you. We--
- Excellent. But the wind was too strong and that's a no-no.
- I had that experience once when I went swimming in the lakes in Canada and I jumped into the water and, you know, I was with the kids and everybody's like, "Oh, I'm getting out, it's freezing." And I was like, "No, no, no, I can manage." Anyway, I didn't realise that what happens is you actually got numb. So I was in for about 20 minutes. It took me about at least two hours. I was froze.
- It does sometimes happen. We learn that you can't go in slowly, you have straight in and then swim because otherwise, you begin to seize up the toes up.

- Your capos. Otherwise.

- I once went into the Baltic in Finland. It was on a conference and we'd been into the Sauna and we all rushed into the Baltic. I had never in my life felt so cold. It was summer, but the water was, I dunno what temperature was.

- That is hilarious. You'll never forget these events. Anyway, William, I think now onto Peter The Great. Is that right?

- Today it's Peter The Great. Yeah.

- Fantastic. All right, looking forward over to you. Welcome everybody. Enjoy this beautiful Monday.

- Thank you very much, Wendy.

- Thanks Holiday Monday.

- Welcome to everybody. Now, I was asked a question last week and I didn't have an answer, so I've got an answer. I expect lots of you found the answer anyhow. I was asked how many ethnic Russians now lived in Russia? Well, according to the 2010 survey or census, just under 78% Russian, are ethnically Russian. But, and that's the interesting thing. There are nearly 200, nearly 200 other ethnicities in Russia. The Ukrainians, for example, compose 1.4% of the Russian population. The second question I was asked is, "What is white Russia?" Well, white Russia is Belarus if you translate it, but why was it called white Russia? And actually people don't really know. The suggestion is that in the Middle Ages in Russia, white meant west and Belarus was in the west, hence white. But in all honesty, I think we don't know why. Enough of that. Next thing is for me to say, I have put on my blog earlier today what I've called Peter The Great a micro biography. A number of people say they like to have notes, but they like to listen and so on and so forth. And they'd like a sort of synopsis. So I've tried to see how this would work. So there is on my blog, Peter The Great a micro biography. You can get, you can read it online, but of course if it's there, you can actually print it off for those of you who want to have a hard copy. And what I wrote and this is entirely me. It's not from many book or anybody else, entirely mine. So the facts lie with me. What I wrote was two paragraphs which read this and this will serve as my introduction to my talk on Peter The Great and I've written, "Peter's reign began in 1682 and ended with his death in 1725. He was a larger than life, bigger than quite literally. He stood at six foot, just over six, seven inches tall." You'll see references to 6 foot 7, 6 foot 8 well, I think it's probably safe to say somewhere between 6 foot 7 and 6 foot 8, which is massively tall, particularly for the time. He was a very driven, almost, I think schizophrenic man. He married twice. He had two daughters, one of whom Elizabeth was later to become Tsarina Tsar of

Russia. He also had a son whom he had tortured. And the son Alexis, who was tortured, died as a result of the torture. Now next week I'll talk about Alexis and Elizabeth. Peter was also succeeded directly onto the throne by his second wife, Catherine. Now she's an extraordinary figure because she was an illiterate peasant girl from Lithuania. And I'll talk about her next week because this week I want to concentrate on Peter.

Peter was driven to make Russia a great European power. And to achieve this, he defeated Sweden, who was the major European power in northern Europe. He defeated Sweden in the so-called Great Northern War, which lasted from 1700 to 1721. He also needed to protect his southern flank with a war against the fading Persian empire. The problem being that he had to move in before the Ottoman Empire moved in. And we shall come to all the war later between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. But many of you may recall the war, the Crimean war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire supported by France and Britain. And we were in due course come to that. On the home front, Peter introduced Western styles, both in social matters and in military. But his greatest and lasting legacy was the building of a new capital named after himself, St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg was variously known as the window onto the west. Why? Because through having built St. Petersburg and having defeated Sweden, he has access for the first time. As I say, Russia has access for the first time to the Baltic. But St. Petersburg was also known as the city built on bones. We don't know how many peasants died in the building of St. Petersburg. The highest estimate says a hundred thousand, could have died. I think St. Petersburg, perhaps in itself, is an example of what I'm calling his jewel personality. Good and bad. He's a strange figure, but yet quite a Russian figure. And today, of course, in Russia, he's honoured as one of the greatest, if not the greatest of Czars. And in the post Soviet Union, Czars can be brought up, as it were to be great national heroes. And Peter The Great is one, and doubtless Putin could go on for hours telling us how great Peter was with a sort of suspicion that Putin himself might be greater. So that's my way of introduction. All of that you can find on my blog and you can download it, read it or ignore it. Your choice. Peter's reign marks the first serious attempt to make Russia into a major European power. Today, Putin is determined to restore Russia into being a major international power. But it's the same mindset that Peter and Putin both had. Sometimes Peter is referred to by modern historians as an extreme nationalist. I'm not sure language like that is relevant, to be honest, at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, Peter wasn't stupid by any means, and he realised that the Russians knew so little about the West, and he travelled incognito across Europe, and he stayed sometime in both the Netherlands and in England, soaking up as much knowledge as he possibly could. He was like a human sponge, the sort of ideal student that every school teacher dreams of having. Mark Galeotti in his book, which we've been using a short history of Russia, and thank you to the people who've

sent me notes saying they've read it or they bought it. Yeah, I'm pleased about that. There's another book, which I'll mention another time, which has just been reprinted about Putin. However, Galeotti says, "Peter's motto was, I'm a student and I seek teachers." I am a student and I seek teachers. And that's what he sought in the west, especially in the Netherlands and England. And one of the things he wanted to do were always was to create a Russian Navy. But of course he needed the authority for that which he hasn't got when he comes to the Netherlands and England. But you can see his mindset in terms of the future war with Sweden, which will give him access to the Baltic. So he learned about ship building. He stayed at what was then a village outside of Amsterdam called Zaandan, Z-A-A-N-D-A-N, Zaandan. If you go to Zaandan, it's today a very modern town with a very modern one high street. But if you go to the bottom of the high street and you go along by the side of the water, you can find the house, a wooden house in which Peter lived whilst he was in the Netherlands. And it's virtually untouched as far as I could see from when Peter stayed in it. So if you are ever in Amsterdam, take the train. It's only 10 minutes. Go to Zaandan. It's a very nice street to walk down. There's some excellent cafes by the way. And go and visit his house. It's very much worth doing. Incidentally, it also has an excellent hotel and much cheaper than those in Amsterdam, right next to railway station. One of the things he also brought back with him from the Netherlands was the flag. Now I'm not very good on flags. I'm sure there are people listening who know every flag there is to know across the world. But for those of you who don't, the Russian flag has parallel lines, white, blue, red. White, blue, red. And that is a copy of the Dutch flag, which is red, white, blue. It's simply taking the colours in a different order. And he used the version that he got, red, white, and blue to be the flag of the Russian Czarist's navy. Today, it's the flag that Putin uses sometimes with the symbols of Czarist Russia in the middle and sometimes not. He came here to England. And Robert Massie, in the best biography there is, in my view of Peter the Great, it's a very, very large book. And as you can see from mine, well thumbed and well used, but it's on my original book list on the blog, Peter The Great by Robert Massie. And Robert Massie writes this of Peter's visit to England. "As in Holland, Peter visited workshops and factories continually asking to be shown how things work, even demanding drawings and specifications. He looked on an in on a London watchmaker to buy a pocket watch and stay to learn to dismantle, repair and reassemble the intricate mechanism." He's one of these men who has to know how to do it for himself. And he was very skilled at doing anything really with his hands. He was also impressed by the carpentry on English coffins, and he wanted an English coffin to be sent back to Moscow so that the funeral directors in Moscow could copy an English model." I can't sort of get my head around why English coffin should have been any better than Russian coffin, but apparently they were. But as Massie tells us, "Society in London most attracted him was the forest and moss belonging to the ships warding rose in the great merchant fleet, anchored in the pool of London."

Daniel Defoe one day counted no less than 2000 ships in the heart of London." Now London got a bit difficult for him people, although he was incognito, he's six, seven plus you can't miss him. And people began following him around. So he decided to go down to Greenwich on the Thames. He's near the water, he's near the king ship building yards. So he goes down to Greenwich and he needs a house. And the government, the English government was supporting him all the way along. The English government provided him with a house, not one of their own of course, but the house belonging to John Evelyn, the great diarist. And he had no choice about it. The government simply requisitioned it and put the czar in. Massie writes, "The house was John Evelyn's pride. He'd spent 45 years laying out its gardens, its bowling green, its gravel and groves of trees." Some of you will know that John Evelyn wrote a book, the first really proper scientific book about trees. And he's into gardening in a big way. "To make room for Peter in his comrade. And another tenant, Admiral Benbow would also be moved out by the government. Unfortunately, for Evelyn, the Russians cared little for his reputation or for his lifelong effort to create beauty. They vandalised his house even while they were still there. Evelyn Stewart, who remained on in the house. Evelyn Stewart, wrote to John Evelyn, "There is a house full of people and right nasty, the Czar lies next to the library and dines in the parlour next door studies side. He dines at 10 o'clock and six at night. He's very seldom at home a whole day, very often in the shipyard or by water, dressed in several dresses." They don't mean dresses, I mean clothes. "The king is expected here this day, the king of England is expected here this day. The best parlour is pretty clean for him to be entertained. The king pays for it all." The king? Well, the government pays for it all. And finally, Massie says, "It was not until the Russians had left at the end of their three month stay, and Evelyn came to see his once beautiful home, that the full extent of the damage became apparent. A poor hurried off to the royal surveyor. So Christopher then and the royal gardener, Mr. London, to ask them to estimate the cost of repairs. They found floors and carpets so stained and smear with inking grease. That new floors had to be installed, tiles had to be pulled down from the Dutch stoves and brass door locks had been pried open. The paint work was battered and filthy windows were broken. And more than 50 chairs, everyone in the household had simply disappeared, probably thrown into the stoves. Feather bed sheets and canopies were ripped and torn as if by wild animals. 20 pictures of portraits were torn, probably used for target practise. Outside the garden, it was ruined. The lawn was trampled into mud and dust. And they said at the time, as if a regiment of soldiers in iron's, shoes are drilled on it, the magnificent holly edge, 400 feet long, nine foot high and five feet thick, had been flattened by wheelbarrows, ran through it. The bowling green, the gravel parts, the bushes and trees are all ravaged. Neighbours reported that the Russians have found three wheelbarrows are known then in rundown and had developed a game with one man, sometimes ZAR inside the wheelbarrow and another racing him into the hedges." It is the first

record we ever had in England of the government paying reconvenes to an individual. And Evelyn was paid 350 pounds, an enormous sum at the end of the 17th century, an absolutely enormous sum. But then he'd suffered a great deal.

Now I've told that story in some language, A because it's fun, but mainly because I want to talk about Peter. I talked about him being schizophrenic, dual personality. This isn't schizophrenia. This is Russian barbarism alongside European civilization. This is a Czar who wants Russia to become westernised civilised. And yet here he is destroying somebody else's hedges in a wheelbarrow. And you need to sort of carry these two images of Peter with you. Indeed, the way he wrecked England's house brought to my mind as I was writing out the talk for today, nothing less than the actions of Russian troops in Ukraine at the moment. We would regard the actions of Russian troops as barbaric. And that's what the English did in the 17th century. When they heard of what the czar had done in Evelyn's house, barbaric. Now being Russian, Peter was obsessed, not just with the advance of Russia to the front rank of countries, but also the point. I've been labouring for a number of weeks, the security of Russia's borders. And to do this, he fought, as we've seen a 20 year war between 1700 and 1720 with the powerful kingdom of Sweden, a war we call, "The Great Northern War." The battlefield of this war were strikingly at huge distances, one from another. The war ranged from Norway in the far north to Ukraine in the south. And it was in Ukraine in 1709 that Peter's great new army for he created a new army and this new army he created in nine years from 1700 to 1709. And in 1709, it actually destroyed the Swedish army of Charles XII in southern Ukraine at a place called Poltava. When I was about 11, I read a book thread with Cree's book, the 15 Greatest Battles of the World. And that's when I first ever heard of Poltava. And I guess some of you here tonight may not have heard of Poltava. P-O-L-T-A-V-A, but it is a really important battle. Why? Not because it destroyed Sweden as a major power. But that saw for the first time Russia as a major European power. From 1709 onwards, the West cannot and has not, or at least if it has at its own peril ignored Russia. Russia in 1709 at Poltava makes a stake in the ground, which has kept ever since. We are a major European power. Well that's some doing. The war dragged on to 1720. In the end, Charles XII dies in battle. The Swedish empire is destroyed. It's carved up amongst other nations in Northern Europe, around Germany, Poland, and so on. And in the book, on the great Northern War, published by Osprey published all the sort of military things. We read this, if I may share this with you. Here we go. "In the end, several disastrous the drain on vampire national resources. And Charles XII's death in battle obliged for Sweden to come to terms practically all their territories outside Scandinavia were then occupied by Sweden's enemies relegating Sweden to the status of a secondary power thereafter." Wow. It was a humiliating ending to Sweden's bid for power. When the war began. Militarily, we read, "Russia lag far behind contemporary European army. Since Russia's enormous natural resources

and population had never been harnessed for such purposes. The poor regarded military service and imposition, while the Aristocracy showed no interest in military or naval careers, it is a tribute to Peter's extraordinary vision, energy and root determination with his eyes constantly turned to the west, he would achieve such revolutionary improvements." And it's, it's amazing. One of the changes. Now this is I think, relevant to the war in Ukraine. He had conscriptions. "The conscripts were physically hardy farmers. And since they were neighbours, their regimental cohesion was good. The crown paid officers of provincial units by giving them a homestead among the wards exempt from taxes. Consequently, the officers and men were no known to each other." So I'm a small landowner here in Weinberg and I'm given tax exemption, wow. To recruit and I recruit from an army. So why do they come? "The allotment system." The conscription, in other words allotted, think of the American system at Vietnam. "The allotment system could mobilise troops rapidly upon the call to serve, conscripts assembled locally and within a couple of days were organised into 50 man Corp ships. Three of these made up a company. Four companies formed the battalion and two battalions originally, which could be must in roughly a week following a declaration of war." Now that is very impressive. In European terms at this period, within a month he's got battalions ready. The officers are known to the men, the men to the officers, the men know each other. And that of course creates regimental esprit de corps without having to do anything about it because I'm going to support my friend and my neighbour, and he's going in turn to support me. It was a brilliant organised. Well, fleet of organisation if you like, and give the chaotic mediaeval nature of the Russian army before, when it first went to war with Charles XII, it was humiliated, but within 10 years or so, 20 years, it's now one of the very best armies in Europe and therefore in the world. And it's down to one man's driving passion. But he also was very interested in ships and he wanted a Russian Navy. And he created a navy as he created an army. And the Navy, he needed a port in the Baltic. The the north is hopeless. He's not interested about a navy at the moment in the east, in the south it will be different in the sea of Azov. You remember we'd seen maps of Ukraine on the television, the sea of Azov, of Mariupol. But he's really interested in the Baltic. He's got his eyes set on Western Europe. This is what Hosking in his book, on Russian History, a very short introduction rights of Peter and his Navy. He writes this, "Having conquered territory in the Gulf of Finland. He began to construct a new city there." As we've said, St. Petersburg. "Soon St. Petersburg shipyard were teaming with workers constructing the frames of a new battle fleet whose headquarters were Constantine on an island a few miles down the Gulf." So not only has he created an army, he's created a navy. It was a result of the war against Sweden and the desire to command the Baltic that he began the building of St. Petersburg and Constantine in the middle of that great northern war. And he created this magnificent city of St. Petersburg. And Hosking writes in this way, he says this, "St. Petersburg was much more than a naval base. It soon became the new capital of the empire

created to mark Peter's determination to break into the European constellation of powers." And he built this, I'm sure many of you been to St. Petersburg, this magnificent modern city, huge boulevard. The city that London could have had after The Great Fire, but that London never had because Londoners, well we know about ourselves to the English, were totally conservative and people didn't want big boulevards and great plans for London. We wanted to put our houses back exactly where they were. Cheek by jowl with each other, leaning over the street. We never got a beautiful city like St. Petersburg. And when the Prince Regent, later in the end of the 18th beginning 19th century constructs Regent Street and those roads that we know around Buckingham Palace, it's too late. It's too late. The city of London remains tiny, a mess architecturally, a mess because old buildings have been knocked down. New buildings unsuited to the narrow streets put up and all because we are bloody minded and want exactly what we had before Peter. Peter didn't have to worry about anybody. He decided to, that's where he wanted his city. And that's where it was, despite the fact that if you had written down on a piece of paper, the least likely place, the builder city, it was the marshes upon which Petersburg was built. But he doesn't care. He wants it there and he has it there. How many people die in the construction? What is that Peter? He doesn't consider that. But in the England at the time, Oh, everything's controlled by people going to law and saying, "We don't want this, we're going to have that." And on and on and on it goes. Russia is an autocracy. But we had had a civil war in which we dug our heels in and said, "Individuals can't. We are not going to be rolled over by any auto autocracy ever again." But Peter is the ultimate autocrat. Now you could say that he did good things, yes. And St. Petersburg is a brilliant thing. But he did it at a price, the price of a people who built it. He also insisted that nobles, nobles from the court aristocracy should move from Moscow to St. Petersburg. You can imagine how appalling that was. I can only give an English example if you are in other countries, give your own examples. But it's as though the government said, which they have said, but never delivered. We will move government from London to Manchester. "What Manchester?" And they said, "What St. Petersburg, but we don't want to go." We just refused to go. And of course, I suppose lots of the husbands had enormous trouble persuading their wives, but they had no choice. They were told to go. So they went. And maybe the wife said, "Oh, well it won't be so bad, we can build something really grand." No, you can't at St. Peter, everything has to be the same. I decide what sort of house you can have. This is rather like a builder in England, in Wadebridge or someone building an estate or with the same houses, you know, Ticky Tacky houses to quote the song. And they had to have what they were given, where they were given it. Wow, this is some autocrat. Why doesn't anybody stand up to it? Well, he's made Russia great. Russia is moving forward. The nobility are leading a more cultured life with balls, but not just like Western Europe. Balls and dances and excellent food. And they're employing people, a French chef, an English gardener. But people are coming in from all across Europe, not

just to manage army and Navy from Germany and Scotland and so on, but all the things of life. He's drawing upon expertise from outside. And so the quality of life for the nobility at least is on the up. This is a society that has to have the latest. You mean you haven't got a watch. It wouldn't have been a wristwatch pocket watch. You mean you haven't got the latest pocket watch. Really? I've got two. And so that sells the idea in the end if you like. And I don't, I challenge anyone actually to live in St. Petersburg and not be impressed by the city they lived in. It must have been wonderful to go to dances and balls in the palaces of St. Petersburg. But its beauty and horror created by the drive of one autocrat was our Peter The Great, very Russian if you like.

Peter had achieved a great deal. He'd achieved security in the west with the defeat Sweden. No one else is going to challenge him. Well, not in the foreseeable future. He's got access to the Baltic with a fleet and no one's going to challenge him in the Baltic. It also, of course protects trade directly. He's been at war with the Persian empire and he's settled the southern boundary. So he does what Putin dreams are doing to secure his borders and make Russia safe. Yes, he's done that. But in the business of doing that and the creation of this new capital named after himself. He's made a big declaration, not just to his own people, but to the whole of Europe. Russia has arrived. Russia is a western European power, and Russia is a powerful western European power. And within less than a century, Russia is allied to the western nations. As they destroy Napoleon's bid to conquer Europe. Russian troops are to march through the streets of Paris. And it all began, all began with Peter The Great. However, the problem with an autocracy is that, it depends upon the individual sovereign. If I asked you before we began to name the most, just to name three Czars. Everyone I think would've said Peter The Great, everyone would've said Catherine The Great. And most people would've said the total failure, Nicholas II These are the three standout Czars in most people's imagination. Two successes, one failure. The rest with the exception of Alexander II, I would argue, the rest are pretty well, they range from mediocre to worse. And that's the problem with an autocracy. You think of England in this same period, from 1700 to 1917, the monarchy becomes less and less and less important. And the election of a democratic prime minister becomes more and more important. Okay? Not everybody had the vote, that's true. Women didn't get the vote until after the first world war. But on the other hand, the male vote was extended before the 20th century to virtue every man in the country. So there is a democracy. There is no such democracy. There's no such way of pulling the czar back. There isn't a elected chamber that says, "Hang on a moment we disagree." There are individuals who disagree, easy to get rid of them in an autocracy. And if there are enough individuals at the height of society who disagree, well there's always assassination as a possibility. And we'll come across that as we go through our story. So although Peter achieved so much, was he able to build it into the future? There's much talk in our day of political

leaders wanting to leave a legacy. In the states, they have presidential libraries and we don't have that. In Britain, we only have one the library. But we do have, we do have prime ministers who seem very often when in office to be concentrating more on their legacy than on the job in hand. Perhaps it's inevitable, but their legacies can be destroyed or can be built upon or changed. But in Russia, Peter's legacy is difficult. One area in which he took no action at all, was the position of serfs. Hosking writes this about serfs, "Serfdom, constrained peasants, freedom of movement, imposed taxes and or heavy labour obligations on them." As I said last week. "And at times, military service." As we've seen this week. "It usually provided subsistence, but on meagre soils and a harsh climate where cultivation was marginal and might be threatened by bad weather or by extra demands from superiors. Their relationship with their landlord, if they had one was ambivalent, he could be a source of patronage and protection. But on the other hand, his demands were unpredictable, not effectively restrained by anyone, and sometimes ruin as the owners. At all times, there were peasants who found these conditions intolerable and left the village illegally to seek a better life in the more fertile south or in the Euros and Siberia. There was plentiful land and no landlords." It wasn't until 1861 that serfdom is finally abolished in Russia. We're not talking about people who don't have the boat, we're talking about people who are tied to the land who had very limited rights. So by 1861, Russia is terribly behind western Europe. So Peter's dream in the late 17th century simply has this huge flaw which exists right virtually to the end of the Czarist regime in Russia of serfdom. So what did he do? Well, he tried to reform the state and that wasn't always, well, let's listen to what Hosking says. This is what he tried to do, "Peter wanted to ensure that government was conducted by responsible and qualified officials. He endeavoured to create what he called a regular state, adopting European patents of government with Sweden and England as his models. He replaced the old chancellors with colleges whose collective administrative boards were meant to ensure that merit rather than patronage determine the appointments." Well that sounds grand, except unlike England and Sweden and the Netherlands, there was no strong middle class. So who gets appointed on merit? Well, the nobility, but one of the things he did was to introduce education. So if you're an aristocratic family, you send your son to be educated because you in there, he's got a bonus. He's educated, therefore he can get a job of merit. But he also has this aristocratic family background, which gives him an edge anyhow. So Peter's reforms didn't really work in that respect either. "Nobles," says Hosking, "were first aghast at these impositions, but they shouldn't discover that they were in a far better position to acquire and benefit from education than any other social class meritocracy modified, but did not endanger their domination of the political scene and social life." And so it continued right up until 1917. It didn't, of course it could have done had Czars between 1725 and 1917 sought to modernise it. Well, there were some attempts, but in the last analysis it doesn't work. It doesn't work. He did have one

major reform, and this certainly wasn't a break on his autocracy, quite the reverse. He removed a break on his autocracy. His great reform was the Russian Orthodox Church. Up until his reign, it was independent of the czar and independent of the state. It was headed by a patriarch, I think pope or arch bishop or a chancellor, a senior church official appointed from within the church. He simply abolished the patriarchy and replaced it with a committee called the Holy Senate and the Holy Senate. Yes, it had churchmen on it, but the Chairman was appointed by the czar. And the chairman did not have to be a priest at all. It could be anybody. In other words, Peter ensured that he controlled the church. Put another way, he ensured that the Czars controlled the church from that point until the revolution of 1917.

And what happens after that? Well, Stalin gets rid of the patriarchy, sorry, of the Holy Senate who brings the patriarchy back, but in such a way that he controls the patriarch. Putin controls the patriarch. You didn't need the Holy Senate to do what Peter did. You just needed to control who's elected patriarch and then to make them your man. There's never been a woman. And that's what Putin does, is what Stalin does. So the point is, from Peter's reign until the present day, the church has been stifled in terms of any opposition that it can present to the regime. Czar, Stalinist or Putin. And so there's no parliament, there's no church. The only possible criticism can be from other nobles coming together and removing czar that's all. In the end, revolution from the bottom up. But it takes, it takes 200 years and then they find themselves in another autocracy under Marxism. And then they get rid of that after 80 year years only to find themselves in the autocracy of Putin. Once hark should bleed for Russia, Russia should, should on the evidence of Peter's reign, be on a par with us in the west, not with a chip on its shoulder because the west keeps advancing and Russia has to always run to catch up. It shouldn't be like that, but it will be like that until we get a political system that is removed from autocracy. It's a dreadful thing to think. I said serfdom survived, right through to the late 19th century. But autocracy has survived, right through to the beginning of the 21st century. The monasteries, it's true. Peter said, must provide help to the poor, the sick and army veterans. Some did, some didn't. Russia's a big country, it was unenforceable. Worse parish priests, the Orthodox church has confessions like the Catholic church and parish priests were who took confessions, were meant to report to the Czars police any of their parishioners who in confession admitted to seditious sports against the government. So there am I confessing and saying, "Father I could not provide enough food for my family. So I stole a chicken from my neighbour and I blame the czar." The priest goes off and reports me. This is like the way the KGB operated. In the USSR how yet KGB operate under Putin. An auto autocracy weapons of secret police and informants. Peter even issued instructions about beards. You weren't allowed to have a beard. Russians had beards. He wanted you to be clean shaver like those in the west. Hosking puts a note about this. He writes this. "Peter ordered that salons falls and

other social gatherings be held in which women needed to be barred from grand social occasions were required to participate. He wanted Russian nobles to take their right place. In the European diplomatic world where such socialising was de rigueur. Nobles and merchants were required to abandon masculine caftans and Don Western style jackets, waist coats and breeches. They were ordered to cut off their beard as a compulsion, which many found offensive, even such religious, since Orthodox. But for orthodox believers, a beard was a sign of masculine dignity bestowed by God. Those who resisted shaving had to submit to the humiliation of having it done forcibly and publicly." An autocracy. Could he have done better? Yes. Could he have done worse? Yes. Why is he Peter The Great? Because the Russians at the time gave him that title because he made Russia secure and because he made Russia an important nation in the eyes of the world. They weren't bothered about other things. And certainly the nobility weren't bothered about the certs. Does this not sound like Putin? Does not sound like Putin with those around him? Not bothered. How many young Russians die in Ukraine? Not concerned really, as long as Russia is seen in the world as a major power and he is seen as the man who delivered it, that's how he sees himself. He doesn't see himself as a social reformer. He doesn't see himself as a political reformer. And nor did Peter. Peter and Putin are much the same. If they do have reforms at home like dancing, no beards and education, it is only to copy the West. It isn't because deep down they believed it was right. It's because if you've got, it's like boys in a playground. If you've got a football, I want a football, maybe I don't really play football, but if you've got one, I want one. Then you know what boys are like, one has something, everyone wants it. So Peter The Great is great in Russian terms, but you see great in European terms, I would argue no he isn't. And if I was giving you an essay to write, that would be what I would want you to talk about. To argue that he was greater than I'm suggesting and that he was genuine in his reforms or whether you agree with me, that actually that was a little concern to him.

And on a personal level, his first wife, he ditched. Because he found this very attractive surf woman, a woman, a surf Lithuania, who was meant to be very, very attractive. So he sent his first wife into a nary usual Russian style. He elevated his second wife to be co-ruler with him the year before he died. But at the same time he had a mistress and the mistress was pregnant and the second wife feared that she would be dumped in a monastery. He would marry this mistress who would bear him, possibly a son who would inherit the kingdom because his son Alexis was already dead. So the second wife arranged for his mistress and her unborn child to be murdered. Lovely people were buried. It's like school boys or schoolgirls who are terribly polite. When the teacher is in the room, the teacher leaves and they become savages. Peter could act the part of a western ruler if he chose to, but take the mask away and it's mediaeval barbers still in Russia. And going to attempt by quoting two authors to come to a sort of conclusion. I've been quite controversial in this and I've intended to

be, 'cause you can make your own mindset. You don't have to agree with me remember. And I hope some of you might read Robert Massie or even, I know it's long, but it's so fascinating. It's a sort of book you said, I read a chapter before I turn the light out and you find you've read two because you want to know what happens next. But first I want in a conclusion to quote from Geoffrey Hosking's book and his quote goes like this, "There was an electable paradox at the heart of Peter's intended transformation of Russia. He wanted to inspire Russians to initiative and achievement, but by command from above." You can't show initiative if someone is laying down such strict rules of living as whether you can have or have not a beard. You can't, you can't show initiative in a firm if the CEO is micromanaging. Nothing is worse than a micromanager. It was said in Britain that Mrs. May was a micromanager and it's no good. Think of Church, you don't micromanage, you appoint people and get them on with it. But Peter micromanaged. And then the final piece. I want to read is from that magazine on the Romanov, which I've used before and I thought this was a really good piece. And it goes like this. "There was scarcity an aspect of Russian life that Peter did not transform the army, the Navy." Absolutely true, absolutely true. "Two big pluses. International commerce." That's also true. He opened up the way to the west in terms of shipping through the boat. "The institutions of government less successful, industry less successful. The calendar." Yes, he caught up with the rest of Europe with the calendar. "The coinage." Well, sort of the coinage began to improve from a very crude coinage, little tiny, like a side of your fingernail in silver with a very, with some Russian letters on one side telling you the name of the czar. And on the other side, a very crude version of St. George and the Dragons. St. George being the patron saint of Russia. And Peter began to copy to some extent European coinage. "The written language." He simplified the way it was written down. "The way people dressed." Well, micromanaging. "Education." yes, but not across society. And you said, well, it wasn't across society in western Europe. By the beginning of the 18th century, education was widely available to a wide business and professional middle class in England and even lower down in society to not the state, but through churches providing education, at least reading and writing. "Not to mention the creation of one of Europe's most beautiful citizen Petersburg. All true. Peter's reputation has constantly been a matter of dispute my point. Sometimes he's been judged the worst kind of tyrant and to others, he's been seen in the kindly guise of the most benevolent dictators. Some people see him as the rescuer of his country from the dead hand of the past. Others label him in the pressure of the people indistinguishable from the death spots of earlier centuries. Some praise the ruler and brought his country into the community of leading nations. Others, deplore the czar who was the traitor to everything truly Russian. What is beyond question is that Peter The Great belongs to that tiny collection of rulers who changed his country, changed the which he lived and changed history." He did because the victory at the battle over Charles XII in 1709 in the southern Ukraine announced of a

world that Russia is now a major power. And that's what we're living with, with Putin's Russia in 2022. Thanks for listening. I'm sure there's lots of questions people want to ask. Let's see. Boom. Yes we are.

Q & A and Comments

– No, they are 1.8% of the Russian population as a whole. That doesn't include Ukraine of course, which is not Russian.

Q: "Why did Peter have his own son tortured?"

A: I'll tell you the full story next week. The short version is because the son was in modern language. His father was very macho. The son was a bit of a wimp, didn't want to be czar, wanted to live a private life as a country gentleman. And he ran away from his father to, he ran away from Russia and when he was conned to come back by his father, he was tortured.

– Oh, thank you Monique and Danny. Peter The Great's boots are displayed in the Kremlin museum in Moscow. They're truly enormous. So it right bears out our point about him being enormous.

Q: "What was the name of the town near Hamza?"

A: Zaandan, Z-A-A-N, Zaan, D-A-N, DAN, all one word, Zaandan. You can look it up in any guidebook. You can look up Peter's house in any guide book.

– "Peter and tag along a black seaport." I'm not sure that I know the answer to that. So, sorry.

Q: "Is it true that Peter worked in an English shipyard?"

A: Yes. Down at Greenwich.

– "My Belarusian students," says Mona, "were very firm about my knowing they were white Russians. I let it ride." Well, yes, it is. Why they do that is because remember we said, think last week, the Ukrainians thought themselves as little Russians and greater Russia was Russia and the Bella Russians were white Russia, except that the Ukrainians thought they were the original Russians call it. It it gets it. It's a twisted story.

– Ina says, "There is a story going when Peter was visiting London, he was shown ships in the harbour and told that in the middle ages a person on trial will be drawn on some rope under the bottom of a ship, that the person on trial survived was considered guilty. Peter offered them right away, one of his people to try and was upset when he was

told that England stopped this method centuries ago." Exactly, exactly what you say, you write, "I think it clearly shows a level of his mentality." Exactly. Right. And it survived the 18th and 19th century, but they didn't kill them then.

- Yes. All sorts of countries. Yeah, dear, Ina says, "British made a lot of barbaric actions in India, not to mention Americans in Korea and Vietnam." Yeah. It's not so much actions in a war or individual one-off things like the (indistinct) and the British in India, but it is that the whole of society was in a state of barbarism.

- "It does not diminish Putin's barbarism." No, it doesn't.

Q: "How could Sweden with its small population, hope to defeat Russia?"

A: Well, two things. One, it had the best professional army in Europe. Two, it had the best general in Charles XII and three, it had a much bigger population because it didn't just include Sweden, it included a lot of the landmass of Europe from Germany through to Estonia. Parts of Norway. It it was some, it was an extremely, it was an extremely large territory held and it also employed mercenary troops from Germany.

- Yes, you've answered it John. You've said what I've just said in more detail. "In those days, my guess is to have more people." Absolutely right. Your guess is right.

- Angela says,

Q: "What was the size of Sweden before the war with Peter?"

A: I haven't, I can't tell you the size straight off like that. It had, it was large. Let simply say that. Both in Scandinavia and on the European mainland, if I put it like that, yes.

Q: "The British used Powell's recruitment in World War I to create esprit de corps the same way as Peter the Great. Do you agree?"

A: Yes, they did. The officers weren't necessarily, however, from their own area, the Powell's regiments are where people were told if they joined up together, they would serve together. And it was later said, served together and die together. And that's why so many towns in the north of England had huge numbers of dead after the Battle of the Song because they all went over the top together and didn't survive.

- Anthony said, "Frederick The Great said of Russia, the German, it will take the whole of Europe to keep these gentlemen within bounds." True. I'm not sure gentlemen, you see is the right word.

Q: "What was the financial source?"

A: Simply by taxing, by taxation. It's a big country, over 7 million people. They are taxing.

– Oh,

Q: "Why was it named Saint?"

A: Because it was St. Peter's. They chose a saint and so they chose Peter because of Peter The Great, but St. Peter's. But it just sounded better. There's no deeper reason.

– "What was Peter's relationship with the Orthodox church, I'm assuming?" Well, I, oh, question answered. Thanks. I you put that on before I got that.

Q: "Who gave Peter the word 'great'?"

A: His court very late in his life.

– Yes "When I was in St. Petersburg guides kept mentioning the influence of Paris on Peter The Great." Yes. I said, you are absolutely right, Arlene. It relates to the architecture and layout of the city. Yes, he did make them speak French because it was the language of diplomacy in Western Europe. But he got most of his inspiration from Protestant Europe, from the Netherlands, from Sweden itself and from England.

– I'm sorry, I don't think I've thought, well, I've lost it now. Where have I lost that?

– Here, Ronnie says, "The history of Russia was the movement of people away from authority. Then authority followed to Alaska." Yes, you are right. I think I now understand what you're saying. You are saying, Ronnie, that people went into this wilderness, think about the West in American history went to this wilderness of Siberia where they really did escape, as it were, the structures of the state. But the state followed them. The state followed them 'cause it wanted to tax them. No. So you're right. Absolutely right.

Q: "How could the Russian people end the autocracy? Could the modern world within some communication enable the people to create a more democratic system, or is the autocratic system as part of the soul people?"

A: No, I don't think anything's part of the soul of any people. And if you remember between the two revolutions of 1917, Russia was a democracy under Kerensky. So no, no, no. I don't, I no, I'm

optimistic, but I'm, what I'm worried about now is that we don't know what democracy is in the West. And some of you heard me talk about that. So we certainly wouldn't think that Britain is a good example of democracy and we wouldn't think America is a good example of democracy.

Q: "How tall is Putin?" says William.

A: I have no idea how tall Putin is, but he certainly isn't, let's put it this way. He isn't 6 foot 7. I think he's relatively short, isn't he?

– Jonathan says, "The (indistinct) in St. Petersburg is so enormous, only huge entities could have commissioned such a project." Well, that's a bit embarrassing because I'm having a statue to myself put on the promenade outside.

– Helene, I think I've answered the question briefly about torturing his son. I promise I will, I won't give you the details of the torture, but I'll give you the details of the story.

Q: "English nobility, united against the king resulting in Magna Carta. This did not happen in Russia. Why not?"

A: That's a very good and not an easy question to answer, partly because the church in the 13th century was supportive of the English nobility. They'd had the experience of supporting Beckett against Henry II. They weren't averse to taking on the king. You could ask that question about any other country other than England in the Middle Ages. It just so happened it was with us. I would, I don't think I can really answer that. It would require a great deal of thought. And I'm not sure I'd get anywhere.

– The Hermitage says, Monday, "Fascinating by shocking. When we left the tort and wandered on our own magnificent temperatures slapping against open windows." They know, the mistress was killed, was murdered. I was asked how, "What was it, what was the outcome of the plot to murder as mistress?" She was killed.

Q: "Why were the British so nice to Peter?"

A: That's a difficult question. Because he was a reigning monarch. I think that's the only answer. And in truth, we wanted trade with Russia. We wanted Russian amber, we wanted Russian furs. We wanted Russian wood above everything. So we need to keep it.

Q: "The approach to Jews?"

A: I have an answer to that. There was no antisemitism at the time, and a very small number of Jews.

- Oh, Georgina says, "Holland America ships, one of the ships is called Zaandan. I travelled on it, never knew the historical significance." Yes, at Zaandan was in Peter's time where a duck ships, some of duck ships were actually built.

- Alfred and Mona, "There is a significant difference between individuals acts of barbarism and public institution of barbarism, a state that continues to exist in many parts and factions." And that's a, well, thank you very much. I'm doing this all off the cuff and it's quite difficult sometimes. So give a coherent answer. Your answer is splendid. I'll go along, I go along with Alfred's and John's answer.

Q: "Where were the Jews?"

A: I'll say something about the Jews next week, I'll make a note, but in fact, it's not a very large community and many of them are in the south.

- "When my grandfather was a boy, went to school for the Sons of Nobles. If the teacher." Esther, this is incredible. "When my grandfather was a boy, he went to a school for the," sorry, "He went to a school for the sons of nobles. If the teacher asked a question, one of them couldn't answer, he would call 'Jew' to one of those seated in the back row." That's the 19th century I take it. Or early 20th century. That's a different story about Jews later in the empire. A very different story.

- Oh, "Story is that Peter was born there and he wanted to make its capital what change his mind." Okay, I didn't know that.

- "There's a similarity of Peter and Louis XIV in lack of the changes that could have been introduced." Yes, yes. In part, yes, certainly in terms of allowing people to have a voice, at least the middle class, because revolutions are led by the middle class.

- Robespierre was a lawyer. You need to have some system of letting steam out of this situation. Yes, that's what I was saying. Tony, you are right.

Q: "Wasn't Russia once divided in coloured quadrants? I maybe recall white in the west, black and east, and possibly red and blue to north and south. I'm coming from a well spent youth remembering cocktails called white, Russian, and black."

A: You're absolutely right. If you look up white Russian, the first thing you get is cocktails. Absolutely. Dear me, Tony, really? That's fantastic. Vodka, coffee and cream, hic. Ah, wonderful, wonderful. Everyone have a white Russian then tonight. No, you are right. That's what I was saying. They saw the west as white, but that's only one

version.

Q: "Who would've designed and built Navy and Petersburg in relatively short time?"

A: Oh, navies were easy to be built in a short time. You just needed lots of men. It was an easy to construct a wooden war ship, and they brought in expertise from Western Europe to oversee it.

– "Putin is 5 foot 7." Thank you, Joe. You looked it up. So that's a good foot. Shorter than I thought he was short. That's a good foot. Shorter than Peter.

Q: "Why did I omit Ivan the terrible?"

A: Well, Daniel, you could put him in. I'd prefer to forget Ivan.

– Sheila says,

Q: "Were Jews forbidden to live in Russia?"

A: I'll tell you the full story next week.

– Ronnie says, "There were almost no Jews in Russia at the time." That's what I've said. "Only after this moment in Poland, and then Catherine the Great." That's absolutely true. Where are is in the south. There are some Jews, but there are not many. And you are right. It changes with Catherine and it changes Poland. Only upon {indistinct} did Catherine acquire Jews, right. Yeah, you are absolutely right.

– Yes. Peter did think about changing the national religion at one stage. But didn't.

– "Peter had one known Jewish aid." Shifak, if I pronounce that correct, says Raphael. And I don't know how to, I'm terribly sorry. I'm not sure how to pronounce your name, so I won't, I won't make a fool of myself. But thank you for the comment. Yeah.

– Jonathan Matthew says, "When Putin stands on his wallet, he's really tall." That is clever. I didn't comment about the Stout, which were the palace guard, the old core of the old army.

Q: "How much did this colour Peter's later view because of the trouble that they had caused earlier?"

A: No, I didn't do that. I it was a take me down a long alley that I didn't really want to go down, but I think part, no. I'm not sure.

– [Wendy] William.

- [William] Yes.

- William, hi.

- Sorry. I've got to stop.

- Yeah, I going to jump in and say we, I want to thank you for another outstanding presentation. We have Robert Fox on, in just 40 minutes. He's going to be talking about current affairs. So I wanted to just give the, I just want to give Judy a break and let's, and give you a break. Time for a whiskey, I'm sure. So I'd like to say thanks for, yeah. As I said earlier, another fabulous presentation.

- You're welcome Wendy and everyone's welcome. And thank you ever so much for listening, and thank you for your very interesting questions. And I'll promise. I'll do a a little piece about Jews. I might even if you're lucky, put it on my blog like I did this week.

- So.

- Very good.

- Next week. Bye.

- Thanks a million. Take care. Thanks Jude, take care.

- [Jude] Thank you.

- Bye bye. Thanks.