



# PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь

O P A

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter October 2023

## Congratulations to Perm on its 300 year anniversary!

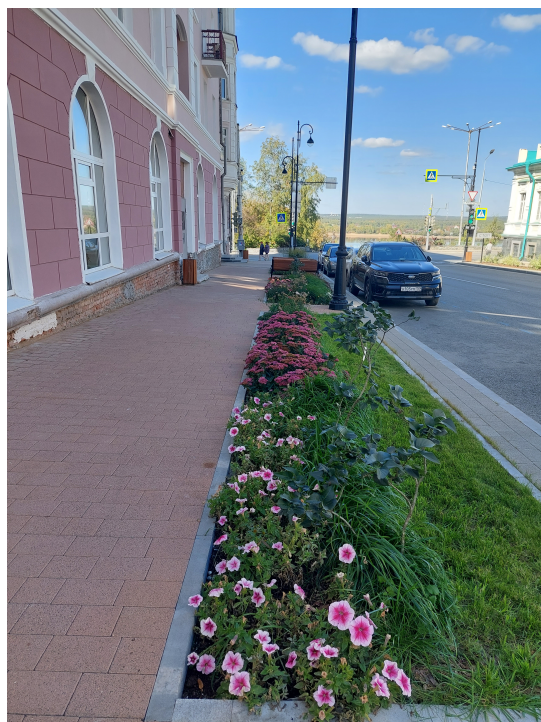
This year Perm celebrated 300 years. Many parts of the city underwent a transformation in preparation for the celebrations. Facades were repainted, pavements were repaired and carpets of flowers planted in parks and streets. On the next two pages are a selection of photos sent by Tatiana Grigorieva.



Esplanade



Komsomolsky Prospect



Sibirskaya street



Sign on the embankment of the Kama river: Счастье не за горами (Happiness is just around the corner)

The Ural Hotel



River Kama Embankment

## Systems Thinking Classes at Perm State University

*anonymous*

I'm a visiting lecturer at PSU Institute of Computer Sciences and Technologies which is the new name for a department in the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics. This is not my primary job. I work full time remotely as a Scrum Master (a kind of organisation coach usually in software development) in a foreign fintech startup. Moreover, I have 4 kids and am still learning other things as well, so it's hard to find time to do anything more.

However, I decided to start teaching students in the university not for money (I spend all the money I get from the the university on taxis to the university and stationery), but to return my debt to society, bring a real commercial experience to the new generation in a respectful and supportive way so they can be sure that there are people who care and that the experience they receive from the teacher is genuine. Moreover, the faculty is my Alma Mater so it's easier for me to understand the students and their environment. And I'm improving the education in the provinces. It's important not to centralise expertise and to provide equality for all.

The systems thinking classes are based on the works of Peter Senge, Edwards Deming, Russel Ackoff and Daniella Meadows. The 'visible' purpose of the classes is to give the students a way to manage complex problems and tasks. But the underlying purpose is to increase the students' mindfulness. During the course we figure out that in our world many problems have no single root cause but have loops between many causes and many consequences. It's important to understand and not to blame one side, and sort out the loops. All the modern war conflicts could be described as such loops, where all the sides are responsible for the situation they created.

My students are future telecommunication networks and information security specialists in their second year of study. I see how it's hard for them to study within the sometimes outdated university processes, so I try to use the experience from my job to involve the students and provide better understanding with respect and support. Nevertheless, I see in those students the thirst to get the best they can from this world and not to give their attention to things which have no interest for them. Moreover, they are talented and deserve to be treated by their teachers in the best way so their potential can be released. In addition, I hope I can influence the university and our educational system to spread this attitude and my experience of how to implement this new idea.

### Oxford Perm Association contact details

Position	Name	Telephone	email address
Chair	Karen Hewitt	01865 515635	<a href="mailto:karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk">karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk</a>
Secretary	Anne Harrap	07929 981216	<a href="mailto:anne.harrap@gmail.com">anne.harrap@gmail.com</a>
Treasurer	Chris Cowley	07760 251465	<a href="mailto:chrisacowley@gmail.com">chrisacowley@gmail.com</a>
Membership	Liz Wheeler	07891 141293	<a href="mailto:wheater170@btinternet.com">wheater170@btinternet.com</a>
OIL	Sally Richards	07504 052264	<a href="mailto:s.c.richards77@gmail.com">s.c.richards77@gmail.com</a>
Website/ newsletter	Jessica Vlasova	07766 025313	<a href="mailto:jessica.vlasova@gmail.com">jessica.vlasova@gmail.com</a>

## **Improving the lives of the elderly in Perm Region** *adapted from Irina Serova's article*

The Perm host of one of our members sent him an account of a seminar on ways of improving health in the elderly population in Perm by boosting the immune system. And how should that be done? Apart from the purely medical treatments, the experts considered much that would be familiar to gerontologists in Britain – but with some notable cultural differences.

Keep exercising, keep active, get out more: this was standard advice. But what does it mean in a climate where snow and ice are on the ground for six or seven months, and where many five-storey blocks of flats lack lifts? One suggestion was to use communal funds for altering homes ‘such as making doorways wider, removing high thresholds, instalment of shower cabins in bathrooms, *making solariums on balconies* [our italics], as well as subsidizing elderly people’s expenses on transport and communication.’

Times have changed in Perm as elsewhere. When trying to stick to ‘Go out, don’t stay at home!’ older people don’t feel as welcome as they did. ‘We can’t fail to notice that yards are now much more suitable for young people and elderly people have lost some territories which they once considered theirs. There are no wooden benches in the yards where elderly women can sit and socialize; there are no tables with benches around them where old men used to sit and play dominos, checkers, backgammon and even chess or just socialize; there are no chin-up bars for adults. City development has led to elderly people losing a space which was significant for them and the number of people who spend all their time indoors has grown drastically.’

Above all, say the researchers, ‘a simple talk with an elderly person is the most universal and available care and way to relieve stress. ‘Talking to the elderly is a crucial non-banal banality.’

\* \* \*

## **Book Review**

*Jonathan Saunders*

*Epics of Everyday Life* was published by Susan Richards in 1990. It chronicles her adventures, mainly in Moscow but also in far-flung parts of Russia such as Stavropol (some 500 miles east of the Crimea), neighbouring Dagestan, and Baku (in the separate state of Azerbaijan). She also went to Novosibirsk, the largest city in Siberian Russia and eight-hours flight from Moscow. Having become fascinated by Russia when she read Dostoevsky at school in the '60s, she subsequently studied Russian and did a PhD on Solzhenitsyn before becoming a journalist and sometime film-maker. Now (post the fall of the Berlin Wall) in her '40s and intoxicated by the prospects being set in motion by Gorbachev's policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (change), she wants to meet Russians, young and old, who share her hopes for a more open Russia, one that would be more accessible to Westerners like herself.

Without prior contacts, she initially looks for people on Arbat Street - Moscow's artistic quarter - and quickly finds herself being lectured to by visiting Ukrainian historian, Victor, who enthuses about perestroika. She buys a ticket for that evening's performance by a Ukrainian touring company about current social themes, takes the bus with the number as indicated on the poster and is able to find the theatre, thanks to the help of a friendly drunk. After the performance which described "familiar" (the author's word!) problems like the suicide of an abandoned schoolgirl following her seduction by a classmate, she is invited for a drink with the performers. She also re-meets the young woman who had helped her on the bus, got off at the same stop, did not trust the drunk who was showing her to the theatre so followed her and had the curiosity to enter behind her and watch the performance too!

From such convoluted beginnings, and further visits to the Arbat, the author builds up a network of friends and acquaintances, and finds a delightful landlady who will share her home with her. After two short visits in 1988, she prepares the ground for two much longer sojourns in 1990. Scribbling down her thoughts and observations wherever she went, she was able to fill 360 pages and have them published before the end of 1990. This rapid production line was doubtless facilitated by an editor who understood that Russia (or the USSR as it would remain until 25 December 1991) had become the country that everyone wanted to read and talk about.

More than thirty years later, why revisit such an old publication, we might ask. Several thoughts come to mind. Firstly, this is an account by a Russian speaker observing Russians on the cusp of huge change when people no longer had to look over their shoulders and wonder if they were being watched. Encouraging the people she meets to talk about their own pasts, criticise previous governments about the wrongs done to them or their friends and relatives, as well as expressing their hopes for the future, is cathartic.

Personally, I grew tired of the endless criticisms of (for example) the idiocies of office life where qualified people were given futile tasks but woe betide them, if they dropped the pretence that they were really working. My problem was not with the Russians who thought it was unique to their own dysfunctional bureaucracy. Had the author never worked in a large office in Britain with its own insane logic? She must have known that similar non-jobs proliferate. The difference, however, was that normally it was easier to change jobs "in the West".

In a creaking society where shortages and inequalities were part of everyday life, what redeemed Soviet society in the eyes of those visiting foreigners who might otherwise be quite critical was the amazing generosity of the Russians and their capacity for friendship – as the author's own experiences showed and as she acknowledges. By the end, and on return to the West, she is worrying whether her Soviet friends could survive "in this world of pleasant surfaces and hard underlying realities."

As we know, the '90s with its regime change, soaring inflation and the woes of economic collapse, provided ex-Soviet citizens with a very tough introduction to the market. Horror stories from that decade abound and the author provides a taster recounting how her friend's son was swindled out of 13,000 roubles borrowed from his father's friends. The failure of Yeltsin to control inflation and the "oligarchs" probably made the election of Vladimir Putin inevitable. According to my friends, Perm, at least and until very recently, appeared to have weathered the storm. Indeed, the market seems to have fulfilled its task of plugging the gaps. So the author and her Russian friends may feel that the pain of transition was worthwhile...

## **Western correspondents and Stalin's wartime disinformation strategy**

Book review by *Marcus Ferrar*

Alan Philips, who served as a Moscow correspondent for Reuters and the Telegraph, has just published his second book - *The Red Hotel: The Untold Story of Stalin's Disinformation War*.

It relates the daily battles that the Anglo-American correspondents fought with the Soviet censor in Moscow in wartime. The censor was invariably the winner - but the experience of working in wartime Moscow changed forever the lives of the reporters and their Soviet translators.

Under Stalin, fraternisation between westerners and Soviet citizens was prohibited, but inside the walls of the Metropol Hotel it was tolerated by the secret police, even encouraged, as a way to manipulate the foreign reporters.

The faded luxury of the hotel became the scene of honey traps and lasting romances, of confidential conversations and shameful betrayals. At moments of heightened tension punch-ups broke out between the rival clans of journalists, the 'Kremlin stooges' who supported Stalin all the way and the 'fascist beasts' who were itching to tell the real story of life under Uncle Joe but were frustrated by the censor and their duty to support a wartime ally.

The book explores some of the issues that preoccupy international correspondents today, but which were writ larger in the time of Stalin: how to cover news fairly and with honour in an authoritarian regime; the vital but usually unacknowledged relationships with local translators and fixers; and how to ensure the safety of local staff who stay behind when the journalistic caravan has moved on.

Stalin's success in muzzling the Western press worked in that era of print and radio. In today's digital age, the intentions may be the same, but the battle between restrictive authority and free media is now a different game.

Some reviews:

"Almost faultlessly balanced between racy narrative and historical analysis" - Julian Evans, *The Sunday Telegraph*

"This book gives a superb flavour of the compromises, betrayals and self-delusion required to report on the USSR" - Richard Cockett, *The Literary Review*

"A sizzling read full of bitchiness and high jinks" - Roger Boyes, *The Times*

"A true gem ... stands out for its humanity, scholarship and captivating prose..." - Michael Broers

*The Red Hotel* is published in the UK by *Headline* and is available in the United States and Canada from *Pegasus Books*.

(This slightly adapted review first appeared on 24 May 2023 in *The Baron* <https://www.thebaron.info>)

## **Overreach: The inside story of Putin's war against Ukraine by Owen Matthews**

(HarperCollins 2022, revised and updated 2023)

Book review by *Sally Richards*

Owen Matthews has written many books about Russia. *Overreach*, his latest, won the 2023 Pushkin House book prize awarded annually for the best non-fiction writing about Russia.

The author describes his book as “a first draft of the history of how the war began - and how the conflict moved from Russia's blitzkrieg through stalemate to Ukrainian counter-offensive”. Matthews, a native Russian speaker, is well placed for this complex task. He is extremely well connected, with sources from across the Russian political, security and business elites as well as critics of the regime. After February 2022 many of his contacts became unwilling to speak on the record and are reported anonymously.

The book's main focus is on Russia and the background to Putin's seemingly irrational and reckless decision to attack Ukraine. It is an immensely complicated and contested story but Matthews succeeds in presenting this in an engaging style. Particularly compelling is the chapter on the immediate impact of the invasion within Russia as the propaganda machine stepped up and thousands of Russians fled. Matthews himself, acting on advice, got his son Nikita out of the country before he could be drafted.

Critical to understanding of the war is the deeply entwined history of Russia and Ukraine. Putin's view of Russians and Ukrainians as 'one people' is flawed, but so is the opposing account by Ukrainian nationalists. Indeed the familial links between the two countries help explain both the origins and uncertainties of conflict, as illustrated by the author's own family history. His mother was born in Kharkov (Kharkiv), the daughter of Boris Bibikov, the Communist Party boss of the vast tractor factory in Kharkov until his arrest in 1937. Like other Ukrainian Communist party leaders, he had spoken out against the policies that led to the tragedy of the Holodomor. The Bibikovs had been part of the Russian ascendancy in Ukraine since the time of Catherine the Great yet did not see themselves as Ukrainians. However, since the recent invasion of Ukraine it is evident that many native Russian speaking Ukrainians no longer perceive their identity as Russian and do not welcome the incorporation of their homeland into Russia.

If any single historical event was the root cause of the invasion of Ukraine, it was the decision of Ukraine in 1991 to pursue independence thereby precipitating the collapse of the USSR - the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century according to Putin. In this context the question of how the ideology of re-creating a Greater Russia by force moved from the extremist fringes to become mainstream Kremlin policy is key and is examined in a chapter on far-right ideologues and strategically located fixers. These include the ultra-nationalist Aleksandr Dugin and Vladislav Surkov, the brilliant political technologist, who was tasked with ensuring that the future of Ukraine would be, like Belarus, firmly within Moscow control. The failure of Kremlin policies in the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk was eventually blamed on Surkov who resigned in 2020.

The continuing failure of the Kremlin's attempts to exert control over successive governments of Ukraine only increased its fears that popular revolutions like those in Ukraine would spread to Russia. By 2022, Putin was relying entirely on the advice of a tiny circle of close advisers for whom such fear and paranoia, about the future of Ukraine and the West's intentions towards Russia, was uppermost in decision making. This inner circle of the siloviki, comprised Putin and just three other men: the ex-KGB chiefs, Nikolai Patrushev and Aleksandr Bortnikov (who was born in Perm) and Sergei Shoigu.

*Overreach* provides a highly informative account of the background to war and of how its costly and disastrous first year unfolded. However, like other well-informed observers, its author is unable to predict how this war will end.

## **Russian Language Meetup Group**

Graham Dane, a member of the OPA, continues to run a monthly Russian Meetup Group Russian/English conversation exchange. This is a great opportunity to practise speaking as you will be put into small groups. It's not essential to speak your second language to a high level as the other people in your breakout group will keep it going. **The next Zoom sessions are on Sunday 29th October and Sunday 19th November at 10am GMT.**

The format is as follows. There are three 30 minute sessions. Participants will be divided into groups (breakout rooms) of about 3 people and will be able to chat for half the time in each language. An announcement will be made when it is time to change language. At 10.30 everybody will come together again for a couple of minutes. The groups will be changed and you will have another chance to use both languages. At 11.00 this will be repeated. Everyone will be together again briefly at 11.30, which is the end of the Zoom session, unless people want to stay and chat as a larger group.

Here is the zoom link to join the language exchange

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84247799935?pwd=c0cxTk92YUFCMEt6eitqMkYvdjRrUT09>

The Meeting ID is 842 4779 9935 and the passcode is 1234

If you haven't already registered, you can do so on the Meetup website at this link

<https://www.meetup.com/meetup-group-ed-russ-eng/>

You can also message Graham if you have any questions [grahamdane@yahoo.com](mailto:grahamdane@yahoo.com)



### Past Events

Nearly 50 people attended the Garden Party in July, including a number of Russian and Ukrainian guests. Serhii Savynskiy, a Ukrainian professional photographer, took some wonderful photos during the afternoon. Photos on page 12 and more on our website <https://www.oxfordperm.org/oxford-gallery>

### Current and Future Events

On Wednesday, 15th November at 2.30 12 members of the Association will be given a guided tour at the Ashmolean Museum of the extensive Russian art which is not normally on display. If there is enough demand we will organise another tour next year.

We are organising a screening of the German-Bikers-In Siberia film which was reviewed by John Hind in the last issue of the Newsletter. Highly entertaining. Date to be announced.

### Non-Association event of interest:

Thursday, 23rd November, a debate at St Edward' school entitled 'Russia and the West. Where do we go from here?' chaired by John Simpson.

We are always grateful to receive letters, stories, comments from friends in Perm. We will always preserve anonymity for such writers unless they specifically ask us to name them.

## **Details of an Oxford International Links (OIL) event**

*Voirrey Carr*

Oxford International Links are working to support May Wylie and John Lubbeck who are looking for ways of raising money to support our Youth Orchestra project which takes place in July 2024. Young people all of grade 8 and above are coming from our twin cities to play with equally talented young people from Oxford.

Our first event is going to be an Autumn Fair at North Oxford Community Hall, Diamond Place, Summertown. All are welcome to come and help by bringing good quality books or children's games/toys and children's clothes, cakes, plants, jam and chutney, crafts, records, bric a brac etc. Please come and support us if you can on the day and tell your friends. Help on stalls or making teas etc. would also be useful.

Date: 28th October 10.30 to 3.30. All help welcome. Contact me if you have any questions. [Voirrey.carr@gmail.com](mailto:Voirrey.carr@gmail.com) Chair of Oxford Bonn Link and Secretary to Oxford International Links and of course also a member of OPA 07798743121 0779743121

## **Fifty Years of Russian Connections**

*David Roulston*

It was when living in Paris in the early 60s that I had my first taste of Russia - the Russian church in rue Daru, Russian restaurants with delicious food. I remember the zakouski (appetizing and varied hors d'oeuvres) in a restaurant off Boulevard Raspail and music (in a Russian restaurant on the Rive Droite with balalaika playing most evenings). My daughters even spent some summer holiday time at a Colonie Russe in Normandy and therefore spoke a few words of Russian long before I did.

It was in 1970 (when I was an academic in Ontario) at a semiconductor conference in Washington DC that I met a Russian scientist who invited me to visit the Ioffe research institute in Leningrad. In 1972 I boarded the Alexander Pushkin sailing from Montreal to Le Havre - an interesting introduction to Russia, where the ship's purser gave Russian lessons (when he was not singing in the cabaret!). It was here, as we crossed the Atlantic, that I learnt Cyrillic script and realized that the Russian language had a large vocabulary of French words. Later that year when living in Paris on sabbatical, I was due to give a series of lectures in India. I was able to plan a short detour and travelled via Berlin to Leningrad where I spent three days at the Astoria Hotel, with a very interesting day (accepting my 1970 invitation) to visit the Ioffe institute discussing the physics of bipolar semiconductor devices. I also had a most enjoyable evening at The Kirov Opera watching Пиковая Дама (Queen of Spades) with a packed audience from, it seemed to me, all strata of society, including military. I was enthralled to be in the USSR, taking crowded trams and walking along bustling streets, meeting researchers in my field (but a sad hotel restaurant with no delicious zakouski and no balalaika music!). Unfortunately, with Intourist changing my flight plans, I had to fly from Leningrad to Moscow with only one night at the National hotel opposite the Kremlin, and no possibility of exploring Moscow before travelling on to Delhi.

This brief experience of Russia triggered a life long interest, rekindled in 1991, when at my university in Canada I received a letter from an academic in Moscow. He had authored a book based on his research which overlapped with one of mine, and enquired if he could come and visit. I invited him for eight months to join my group and soon discovered that not only was he an expert on semiconductor device physics but he played the guitar, singing lovely Russian folk songs. We agreed that we would continue working together. He returned to Moscow and came back with his wife and daughter. Alexei and Ira became the best of friends, with musical evenings at my Ontario home, where I was captivated by the couple singing duets to his guitar accompaniment.

We travelled abroad together giving papers and seminars including in Russia. Once our work was over, I was given personal tours of the vibrant cities of Moscow and St Petersburg (taking the overnight train and thinking of Anna Karenina), and hosted by friends of Ira in their apartments. I found everyone incredibly kind and welcoming and Russia so full of fascinating art galleries and museums (including of course the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and Hermitage in St Petersburg), historic palaces, music (Giselle at the Bolshoi). I was smitten with this country, its history, its people, its music, its literature.

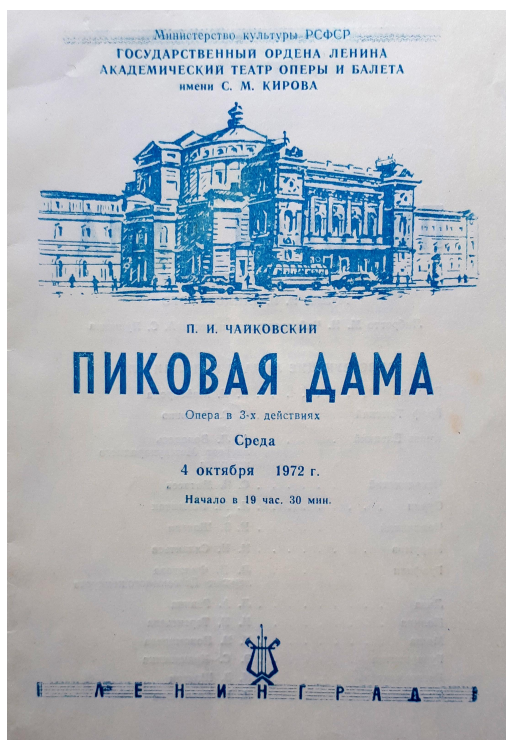
In 1996 I took early retirement and returned to Oxford where I had been a visiting academic for several years. I soon heard about the Perm Association, which my wife Rosalyn and I joined in about 1999. The rest is history and, as well as Perm, we have enjoyed several visits to Moscow and St Petersburg, and a wonderful day in Yasnaya Polyana (where in one room I was reminded of the pictures in Park Town and the lovely painting by Leonid Pasternak of Tolstoy under the soft yellow glow of a nearby table lamp).

I enjoy finding Russian connections in Britain and recently visited the simple grave of Arthur Ransome and Evgenia, his wife (Trotsky's secretary Evgenia Shelepina, whom Ransome first met at the Smolny building during the revolution), in a remote village churchyard in Rusland (!) between Coniston and Windermere.

I have so many wonderful memories of my various Russian connections but apart from the OPA, my only remaining contact with Russia is very pleasurable and interesting conversation every week with my friendly Italki correspondent in Moscow, breaking into French when we encounter problems with English or Russian.



David and Alexei Bipole seminar, Moscow 1966



Kirov Opera programme for Queen of Hearts, 1972

## Annual OPA garden party, Oxford

Thank you to Serhii Savynskiy for taking the photos and allowing us to publish them in this newsletter and on the website.

