



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

О П А

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter June 2022

Letters from Perm in a time of War

The Oxford Perm Association is not a political organisation, but it cannot ignore the fact and consequences of the war in Ukraine. Many of us have received letters from Perm. They are from our friends who have different views and wish to take up specific points in our discussions. The extracts which follow are all from people who have been to Oxford. The approximate dates are given because we know that some individuals have changed their minds as the weeks have passed. We have kept the letters anonymous, apart from the last one.

1) Early March: I have no arguments to justify the invasion. There were Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yugoslavia...and every time Russian diplomats and officials demanded to stop aggression and start negotiations. I felt respect for them at those times. Now I'm not with my president because he has started the war against those whom we have been calling brothers.

2) Early March: We go on living. We try to be courageous in spite of the fact that the whole world does not hear us, our truth, our pain. We are afraid and this fear makes us acutely feel our national and cultural identity and unite in the face of uncertainty. We do the usual things - studies, students... I even try to write articles. Mum is afraid that we won't be able to get medicine. We managed to make a six-month supply, but then what? We are getting ready to plant potatoes at the dacha, because prices will go up, and we still remember the hungry 1990s and inflation (I used to bring home my salary in a bag). I'm afraid that if things drag on, Petya will be mobilized. My cousin is crying because her son (my nephew) is in the army. My friend is on antidepressants because her son (Russian) couldn't leave Kiev (he has a bakery there), and now the Nazis have them in the basement and won't let them out.

Editor's note. This letter was written in early March. In May our correspondent wanted to add the following comment. Two months ago, when it was hard to control emotions, fear prevented me from thinking clearly. Now the situation has become different. Panic was replaced by courage. No one wants war, but smart people understand that this war was inevitable, that this is not a war with Ukraine.

3) 28th March

To all the people of the Oxford Perm Association:

I appreciate so much you have written the Open Letter to us! Thank you! I found it on social media from Natalia. The support is what we need very much today, because many of us feel embarrassed. I do not understand how it is possible nowadays. How weapon, violence and murder could be an agenda of a regular day. Such things are absolutely unacceptable in modern life. But in our country it is dangerous and reckless to reveal such a point of view in public today, even though almost

everybody in my field of communication thinks the way I do. I even archived my Instagram and Facebook pages as their existence could be treated as crime now.

That's why I stayed in Russia, even when I had job offers from abroad, and some of my friends left abroad. I understand that it is going to be hard in Russia for years or even decades. I stayed to support people here, to help them get through the tough times, to save what we have here for the better times, to keep the potential and not let it disappear, I mean the education and IT community in Perm, which suffered due to the last events. Moreover, I feel the responsibility for my kids' education path, my older son is going to school (which is French + English) in the autumn, and I cannot imagine how I could manage such an education path for my children, that would open up all their creativity, skills and will (freedom of their thoughts) if I move abroad with the family now. Nevertheless, life looks almost the same as 2 months ago here if we omit the wild inflation and lack of some goods. People here are trying to support each other, keep optimism and sense of humour, when they do not think for a while about the deaths, pain and destruction that take place right now in Ukraine. Music helps me, Sting's 'Russians' song is as urgent as it could be nowadays, even though it's written before my birth.

4) What really strikes me is how easily and quickly the film of civilization (humanity? reason?) has disappeared — the [Western] media tells lies, the academic community breaks all the contacts, culture is cancelled, people don't listen to each other, etc. We used to admire the Western culture, but now many people are at a loss. We were constantly told that sports, science, arts, etc. are out of politics — what now? I also have a very strong feeling that many things will have to be restructured and re-assessed, including in the intellectual sphere.

5) It seems to me, that we, students and teachers, all continue to teach and be taught as usual. One example: there was a monthly meeting of our Department and I understood from our talks over cups of tea after the official part that my colleagues are full of sympathy to all victims of the war, especially to the civilians, and they are for ceasing the fire and for negotiations. But one main point should be taken into account: the interests of the people of Donbas who have been the most suffering part of the conflict for 8 years. I am sure many people here think in that direction.

6) *At the beginning of the invasion, OPA members were sent a copy of a letter about the implications and future of the war from a Perm political analyst. These are his sobering and painful thoughts, eleven weeks later, on 9th March.*

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my views on current events. Indeed, a lot has changed and I want to comprehend news and reduce the degree of uncertainty of the future. In a post-truth world, war has proven to be a sobering means of dispelling myths about the end of the history, economics priority over politics, and the invincibility of the world's second army.

I consider important to fix a few key theses, which are only my personal opinion and subjective forecasts. Feel free to spread it as you wish.

1. Ukraine has already won the information war and now it is only a matter of time how long the phase of hostilities will last. They are clearly becoming protracted and exhausting within the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. On the territory of Ukraine, for the second time after Chernobyl, a new exclusion zone is being formed - a scorched earth contaminated with radiation of pure violence, where is impossible to lead a normal peaceful life.

2.Despite the gravity of the military battles, victory largely depends on the speed of the American lend-lease and the embargo on the purchase of Russian oil and gas. Are Europeans willing to consciously go for a fall in GDP, price increases, etc.? This is the sacrifice that will have to be made in order to preserve the values of freedom and humanism. I think it will happen.

3.The Russian king turned out to be naked. The main spiritual bond of the regime was destroyed: the Russian victory over fascism was crossed out by the Latin “Z”. The whole world saw that the military machine inherited from the Cold War was rusty and useless in modern conditions. Attempts at nuclear intimidation also failed. And this means the end of fear and hegemony in the post-Soviet space.

4.The collapse of the Russian economy has been launched. The mass exodus of major global brands will reach 100% by the end of the year, small players and shuttles from Asia and China will remain. The BRIC alliance will fall apart. China will not risk its relations with the United States, join the sanctions, establish grey schemes in the Far East and try to strengthen itself in Asia and Africa. According to some forecasts, the fall in the Russian GDP in 2022 will be about 12%. This will negate the economic growth of the last ten years. I believe the collective West is not interested in the collapse of Russia, but aims to achieve such a weakening that will forever eliminate the possibility of its world military and geopolitical influence.

5.For the first time, Russia has a severe shortage of a “light future”. I suppose that the country will stagnate unevenly, production will stop, the standard of living will steadily decline. There will be no famine, since agriculture is relatively developed, plus people will return to country gardens, but all technological industries will sag. Against this background, Ukraine will be admitted to the European Union, although the process will not be easy. Sweden and Finland will join NATO. Russia will disappear from the cultural, cinematic, musical, scientific and aesthetic map of the world, falling into a deeper isolation than Iran. The Russian Orthodox Church will also be cut off from the world. From the conquerors of space, we will turn into apologists for the archaic.

6.The impact of sanctions, of which there are already more than 10 thousand, is beginning to affect the lives of ordinary Russians more and more clearly. Prices in stores are rising, Internet services and applications are closing, the number of vacancies in the labour market is decreasing. I am especially worried about the escape from the country, not so much of IT specialists who can work remotely, but of engineers, doctors and entrepreneurs, who support critical national infrastructures. It is highly likely that the outflow will increase in the autumn.

7.In this regard, the Western world is waiting for a new wave of emigration from Russia. Europe has received several million Ukrainian refugees, but most of them will soon return to rebuild Ukraine. The flow of brains from Russia, especially young ones, can be much higher, reach up to 10 million people and last much longer. This is a serious challenge. But these people, if they receive Western support and an inoculation of freedom, will be able to return to build new Russian democratic institutions. Unfortunately, at the moment, I do not see the modernization forces inside the country, they are either in prison or already in exile. Therefore, domestic reforms will again require a window to Europe. The question is, will Europe leave it open? This remains to be seen.
Sergei P.

Remembering the city where I come from

Sergei Kachkin

*Sergei Kachkin, a Russian documentary film maker, originally from Perm, introduced and showed his film, **Perm-36: Reflexion** (2016) in Oxford in February 2020. This was one of our last events before Covid lockdown. He is currently in Vienna.*

A few years ago I decided that each year I would celebrate my birthday with my mother. This idea came to me after I realized that she was no longer expecting me to return to live in Perm, which I left for Moscow. This year my visit was a special one, because on February 26 I left Moscow for Europe to film my next project. There I took a decision to not return back to Russia and to fly to Vienna where I arrived with one suitcase to start a new life. Staying there for a month I have been constantly thinking that I have to move out from the flat in Moscow and pay a visit to my mother. After a long consideration and talks with colleagues I embarked on a trip to Perm with two changes in Istanbul and Moscow, as direct flights no longer exist.

From 6th-11th April I spent five wonderful days in Perm with my mother. Superficially, neither the city, nor the atmosphere has changed since 24/02. But that was only if one doesn't want to pay attention to details nor has no will to see facts clearly and evaluate the situation soberly. Every time I was in a public space I tried to notice whether the people are the same or something is different now. The first significant detail was the symbol "Z" on the big screen hanging on the wall of the "Iceberg" trade centre located on the crossroads of Popov and Lenina Streets. The symbol popped-up between different advertisements, being shown on a huge TV. Second, what I noticed was the reaction of people I was talking to in the places where I was. In the leather craft workshop where I normally order different beautiful handmade things, the furrier lost a smile on his face when I said that my next order might not happen soon as I was leaving Russia because of Putin. The reaction of ladies in the bureau for translations, where I ordered some personal documents to translate in English, was less harsh and they showed a greater understanding of my decision to live abroad. But I noticed the exhaustion of a young lady who translates the documents, clearly I was not the only customer that day. And everybody demands their work to be done as soon as possible. Then I saw the police patrol of three policemen, they were with their service pistols and dog. This only happens when an event takes place with lots of people in the centre of the city.

However, in general the city of Perm was living its usual life, as if nothing had happened, and it made me a bit angry. I said to my brother and sisters when they asked how I'll survive in a foreign country "Please do not worry about me. In fact, I should worry about you, as the economic crisis is just beginning and in a couple of months its effect will be felt much stronger". I didn't want to argue with my close relatives and try to convince them to change their mind about their attitude towards Putin. I just calmly said that our president is a war criminal and I don't want to live in the country where the leader individually takes a decision to attack a neighbouring country. Nobody said anything against my statement; they clearly understood that I was right, I think. They were just scared because of my emigration, and I was upset because of their readiness to continue their life further, as if nothing would happen. Someone said that soon everything will be over and life will return to like it was before. I said "No, our life will never be the same again and this is what angers me as almost everything I have been doing for the last fifteen years has been reset to zero".

***Zuleikha* by Guzel Yakhina**

book review by *Chris Cowley*



This novel was recommended by my Russian teacher, Aleksandra. It was published in Russian as *Зулейха открывает глаза* in 2015: the English translation by Lisa C Hayden appeared in 2019.

Zuleikha is the first novel of Guzel Yakhina, a female author and filmmaker of Tatar origins. The novel opens in a small Tatar village shortly after the Revolution. *Zuleikha* is bullied by both her husband and mother-in-law, but she

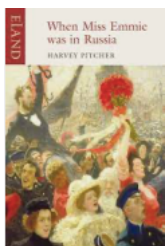
tries to please them and is resigned to the life she has. Her big sadness is the four baby daughters which she lost soon after their births.

Life changes suddenly when *Zuleikha*'s husband is executed by communist soldiers and she is exiled to Siberia along with other Tatar 'kulaks'. Her journey takes her to Kazan by sledge, where the kulaks are imprisoned for several months. There follows a long, arduous train journey into Siberia. She is not sent to a camp – after a tragic boat accident, the group of prisoners she belongs to is simply left to fend for themselves in a remote area, at the beginning of autumn, with one rifle (but limited ammunition) and a few hand tools. Against all the odds the group survives that terrible first winter, and in time a settlement grows up as more prisoners are brought in, and a thriving, self-sufficient community develops.

Despite this description, this is not a harrowing novel to read. At first, *Zuleikha* feels surprise that she is still alive after her husband's death, and she observes the events which happen to her with some astonishment. Her sheltered, Muslim upbringing has not prepared her for the circumstances she finds herself in. Gradually she gains self-confidence and self-belief, and finds the inner strength to take control of her destiny. She gives birth to a son who miraculously survives; she learns to hunt with a rifle and spends time alone in the forest; she initiates a relationship with her husband's murderer and at the end of the novel she has the courage to (well, you'll need to read the book to find out!). An epic read which I wholeheartedly recommend.

***When Miss Emmie was in Russia* by Harvey Pitcher**

book review by *Jonathan Saunders*



The eponymous Miss Emmie Dashwood was the exemplar of a small army of English governesses who invaded Russia in increasing numbers for a century beginning after Napoleon's defeat in 1815. They became a striking example of British 'soft power' centuries before the expression was invented. Not that they had the field to themselves. As the author points out, they were preceded by the French and the Germans. However, so the reader is informed, German was regarded as the "language of commerce", while French had become so ubiquitous amongst not only

the aristocracy who preferred it to Russian but also the nouveaux riches, that by the 1870s English, being less widely spoken, was "in a good position to take over as the fashionable, exclusive language."

However, working in Russia was not for the feeble and faint-hearted. In the early years governesses were obliged to join a cargo vessel that might be bringing the latest fashions and literature to Kronstadt from Tilbury or Edinburgh. According to J.G. Kohl, a German observer, in the 1830s, arrivals were likely to be “exhausted from sea-sickness, saddened from home-sickness and frightened by the bearded Russians” sent to meet them! After an overnight stop in St Petersburg, most would then travel 450 miles by coach or sleigh to Moscow or further afield. Later they would have to battle with the Russian language, not to mention absorb cultural differences.

Most seem to have adapted well and some became so Russophile that they lived out their days with the families they had become part of. Various factors aided assimilation. Being British afforded a certain cachet: after all, Britain was the dominant power; its success abroad was often attributed to its citizens' capacity for diligence, competence and honesty. Young women who could read, write and organise but came from straitened circumstances were plentiful in Victorian England. They enjoyed a status and life-style they could never have dreamt of in England. All this was before they were remunerated – much more generously than in England!

Researching in the early-1970s, the author found Miss Emmie and half a dozen other sprightly ex-governesses in their eighties and nineties who spoke avidly and fondly of their “best days” in Russia. All were recruited before 1914 and most returned during or shortly after war's end. We are treated to eye-witness accounts of Russia living through its most turbulent era – three revolutions and a world war that claimed millions of lives. No family, however rich and previously secure, was left unscarred by these events. As the revolution deepened, many families headed south – often to the Crimea where they hoped to lie low while the civil war raged elsewhere. The most exciting accounts are found in nail-biting descriptions of governesses with their families on the run usually in overcrowded trains while trying to disguise their roubles and jewellery, if not their revolvers, from criminals and Bolshevik spies.

In the end there was no escape from the revolution. The arrival of 1200 British troops in Archangel to kick start the counter-revolution in the north, exposed all Britons still in Russia. However, governesses who had stayed on escaped relatively lightly. Although a group living in St Andrews hostel for English governesses in Moscow were imprisoned for four months, they were all released except for one who had died of typhus. Thereafter, those who remained did so voluntarily. At least one who arrived in Russia in 1911 stayed on in Tiflis with her family until her death in 1941.

Mary Dejevsky talk

Jessica Vlasova

In February the Oxford Perm Association and guests listened to an informative and fascinating talk on zoom from Mary Dejevsky, former Moscow correspondent, writer and broadcaster on foreign affairs and member of the Valdai discussion group.

In the first half of the talk, Dejevsky discussed the mood and some of the changes taking place in Russia today including the increase of regionalism and the decrease on clamp down of freedoms as a result of the growing role and influence of social media. Dejevsky also talked about *Memorial*, the human rights organisation established during the Soviet Union, which collects information on individual and collective victims of repressions. She described it as one of the most admirable and

necessary organisations in Russia but questioned its reliance on foreign funding which made it vulnerable and mentioned its breach of the foreign agent law, its resulting prosecution and the pending appeal.

In the second half, Dejevsky argued that the deployment of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border is more likely a sign of ‘coercive diplomacy’ than of imminent invasion. [Recent events have given an ironic subtext to her argument about coercive diplomacy.] Russia continues to request an improvement to security arrangements across Europe before Ukraine is granted either de facto or formal NATO membership which could change the balance of power in Europe to Russia’s disadvantage. It wants to stop Ukraine becoming an adversary to NATO, ‘a hostile Western bloc’ by negotiation rather than by invasion. Dejevsky stressed that Russia does recognise Ukraine as an independent sovereign country and, although it has no intention of returning Crimea to Ukraine, has no other plans to expand its territory

Obituaries

Sue Gregory

Sue who died in March was a stalwart, much valued, member of the Perm Association committee during in my time on it, and I remember the good sense and wide experience she contributed. Her professional background in education for the deaf, and her knowledge of special needs more generally led her to work for several years with deaf children in Moscow. In 2009 she first went to Perm with a group, and then again in 2012 on a visit to investigate special needs provision in Perm schools. Her experience was a huge asset when we were collaborating with special schools.

She was a sane and energetic contributor to much more. She was serious and conscientious - dogged when something administrative needed sorting - but also enthusiastic and practical when she could help us with something cultural and fun. We were lucky to have had so much of her time.

Mari Prichard

Elizabeth Teague

Elizabeth who died in May had been a member of the OPA for eight years. Before her retirement she worked on the Russian desk at the Foreign Office, and had travelled quite extensively in the Soviet Union. At the OPA ‘Russian discussion group’ meetings she was always ready to argue from her experience, modestly but firmly – which was good for us all.

Recently she was very supportive of our stance on keeping connections with Perm, and sent us relevant articles and videos to demonstrate the foolishness of severing all cultural ties with Russia. She was a warm and enthusiastic person whose sudden death has saddened those of us who knew her.

Karen Hewitt

Committee Changes

Two new members have joined the committee: Sally Richards who has taken over the role of OIL representative, and Colin Cook, our former Perm representative on the City Council, who can now give us the benefit of his experience more directly. We want to thank Bob Price and Alistair Morris who have resigned from the committee, Alistair because he was elected as a Green councillor for Marston and will be very busy. We congratulate him.

Past Events

Members of the Association will know of our dispute with Oxford City Council about the right way to treat the Oxford Perm Twinning during the Russia-Ukraine War. We are sorry that they chose to remove Perm from the list of Twin Cities at entrances to Oxford. We have had a lot of support for our stance from people who are not members of the Association.

In March our AGM was a packed, thoughtful and sober meeting with many moving contributions. We decided to send an Open Letter to Perm which we know was widely read on both official and unofficial sites.

Marina Milman who has been involved with Oxford-Perm for many years is now our official liaison officer for the Perm Twin Cities organisation. She has helped to set up a number of English discussion groups to which our members are contributing. Perm EcoFest This Perm festival was held at the same time as our Platinum Jubilee. We contributed several ideas, two videos and the offer of a talk on Environment and Local Government.

Forthcoming Events

The Perm Association Garden Party. This year the party will be held on Thursday 14th July, at 6 Rawlinson Road, Oxford OX2 6UE. The party starts at 4 p.m. All Association members are warmly invited, and if you have Russian friends whom you would like to bring with you, please do so. Parking is easy; drinks will be provided by the Association, but we would be grateful for contributions to the food. Please let Karen Hewitt know if you can come

Articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome. The submission deadline for the next issue is **6th October** but it is helpful if you let the editor know sooner if you plan to submit an item. Articles should be sent as email attachments preferably in docx format and not exceed about 650 words plus two jpg images, or approximately 850 words with no images. Shorter articles are always welcome. Individual permission for publication is required for photos which include recognisable people. Past newsletters can be seen at www.oxfordperm.org.

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TRUE PARTNERSHIP KNOWS NO BORDERS:

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY MATTERS

Mikhail V. Grabevnik is in the politics faculty in PSU and also works in the International Department.

The first time I was in Oxford almost five years ago, late autumn of 2017. I fell in love at first sight. This love is real, permeated with warmth and light, smiles and glances, support and understanding. This love is not politically coloured but truly humane, love from people to people. This hopeful mood visited me then invariably every time I revisited this city and its academic heart, the University of Oxford. The walls of the colleges seem to feed the romanticism of freedom of thought and freedom of action to everyone who has even been there even passing through. You don't get tired of falling in this kind of love.

For that first visit to Oxford, I am indebted to the Young Scholars Exchange Programme (joint project of University of Oxford and Perm State University), which has served academic and cultural dialogue for more than two decades. At the moment, its implementation has been temporarily suspended, as well as the implementation of several other joint academic and research projects. This also applies to the students and staff exchange programmes and annual summer schools of Perm State University for students of the University of Oxford. All the opportunities are paused for now for both sides of long-term Perm-Oxford partnership. This is not to mention how it became, but to remind how it can be. In order to continue the true partnership with freedoms and possibilities, it is necessary to admit that we need public diplomacy now more than ever.

In 2019, I have been in the United Kingdom with empirical research of public opinion of the UK academic community reflecting the political image of modern Russian Federation as a political scientist. The research is based on sociological and statistical methods and the use of opinion polls, surveys and interviews conducted from June to November 2019 (Oxford, Birmingham, Manchester). The research was aimed mostly to define and shape political image of modern Russian Federation in public opinion of the UK academic community, as well as to indicate the main challenges and obstacles in building the political image of the state.

Despite the variable attitude and perception of political image of Russian Federation, all the respondents (scholars and professors, administrative and teaching staff) are solidly agreed on one crucial point - cultural and academic diplomacy (including the academic mobility of students and teachers) plays a significant role in international relations of modern Britain and Russia. According to the results of the research, 13.3% of respondents believe there is a *very* strong correlation between the political image of the country and the image of the cultural and academic public diplomacy of the Russian state (72.0% of respondents think that there is a strong correlation). The results are not representative in terms of all the cases, but I suppose they are relevant for the case of Oxford-Perm partnership. Its long and productive history is pure example that public diplomacy and grass-roots activities of local and academic communities can build strong ties no matter how many kilometres between them. Public diplomacy matters and its significance is incredibly strong.

The mode of public diplomacy between Oxford and Perm communities, which I am convinced has enriched intellectually, socially, culturally and personally all those involved, regardless of gender, citizenship, ethnicity, language or confession, was built by incredible people, who are innumerable. Thank to all those people we still have true partnership which know no borders – not exclusive partnership of institutions, but inclusive partnership of communities. Thank you, all.

Some photos to remember Perm. To see more photos of Perm go to the gallery page on our website <https://www.oxfordperm.org/perm-gallery>



Horse farm in winter



Harvesting in the Urals



New Year's tree on the esplanade



Mushroom hunt in Perm woods