



# PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

**O P A**

Oxford Perm Association Newsletter

September 2021

## **Perm Krai Seen from Space - A Book Review and Some Comments on the Landscape and Environment in Perm Krai**

*Chris Cowley in collaboration with Pavel Sannikov*

Did you know that the area of Perm Krai is larger than England? Or that it boasts 29,000 rivers, two of which are more than 500km long (the Kama and Chusovaya)? Earlier this year, my host in Perm sent me a fascinating book entitled 'Perm Krai Seen from Space' (Пермский Край – Взгляд из Космоса), a popular science book which was published in Russian by Perm State University, and which he had helped to produce. Each page has a stunning satellite photo showing an aspect of the landscape of Perm Krai, along with a photo taken from the ground and a location map.

The book is divided into 5 sections.

### **Mountainous Areas**

Much of Perm Krai (80%) lies at the eastern end of the great Russian plain. The remaining 20% forms the western slopes of the Ural mountains. The highest peaks lie in the north-eastern corner of the krai and are snow-covered for most of the year (Tulymsky Kamen reaches 1469m).

Two-thirds of the area of Perm Krai (both the mountainous areas and parts of the plain) is characterised by karst relief forms: barren rocky ground; sinkholes; underground streams and caves (over 500).



Perm Krai mountains

### **Surface Water – Rivers, Lakes, Reservoirs and Bogs**

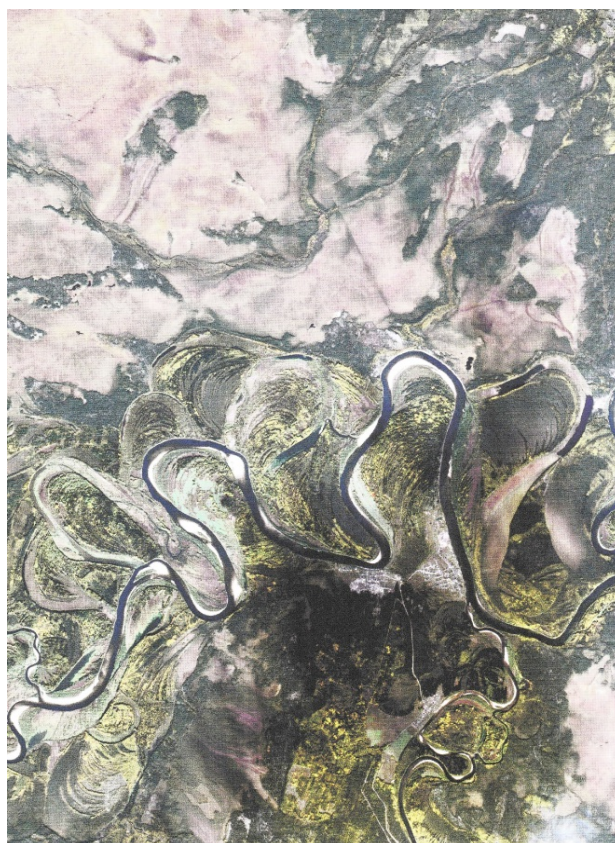
Rivers flow quickly down the slopes of the Urals but move much more slowly in large meanders on the plain, often forming oxbow lakes (старицы or старичные озёра). These lakes are typically shallow, less than 3m deep. Smaller man-made ponds were typically dug

150-200 years ago during the early industrialisation of the area and still remain in the landscape.

The Chusovaya is an interesting river as it originates on the eastern slopes of the Urals, crosses the mountains, and then flows down into the Kama.

The north of the krai is characterised by huge boggy areas, the largest of which is over 800km<sup>2</sup> (over twice the area of the Isle of Wight). Here you will find sphagnum moss (сфагновый мох) and reindeer moss (ягель). Perm Krai's bogs are hugely important for migrating birds, many of which are on the Red List, for example: the Eurasian curlew (евразийский кроншнеп) and the red-throated loon (краснозобая гагара). Birch and pine grow in the sandy soils of the surrounding drier areas: these areas are at high risk of forest fires.

Perm Krai has 3 large reservoirs, all built since WW2, two on the Kama and one on the Kos'va. The largest, constructed in 1954, is just north of the city of Perm, and is fancifully considered to have the shape of a ballet dancer!



Perm Krai meandering river and bogs

### Typical Landscapes

Over 70% of the area of Perm Krai is forested. This is mostly secondary forest which has regenerated on land previously used for agriculture or timber. Areas of virgin forest, of great natural value, remain in the northeast of the krai, and in steep river valleys.

Above latitude 57° (just south of Perm City) the landscape is characterised by taiga with fir (пихта), pine (сосна), cedar (кедр), silver birch (берёза) and aspen (осина). Warmer parts of this area also have lime (липа), maple (клён), elm (ильм) as well as buckthorn (крушина), hazel (лещина) and spindle (бересклет).

Below latitude 57° is sub-taiga, where a greater variety of pine and broad-leaved trees can be found. Here the main coniferous trees include spruce (ель), fir and pine and much less frequently, cedar and larch (лиственница). Typical broadleaved trees include lime, maple and more rarely hazel and oak (дуб).

The area around Kungur has productive agricultural land, but 'forest steppe' (лесостепь) can be found on steeper slopes where agriculture is not possible. Areas of forest steppe are rich in grasses, including rare species such as feather-grass (ковыль).

In other areas, such as the Komi-Permyak region in the west of the krai, much of the land previously used for agriculture is now being planted for timber production. Agriculture there is now confined to land near roads and villages. This change resulted from the economic disorder

following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Agriculture declined as it failed to yield fast profits, and required investment in infrastructure and equipment, as well as in human skills and expertise. By comparison, timber extraction (вырубка леса or заготовка древесины) provided quick returns, and could be administered remotely from the cities.

### **Destructive Phenomena**

Some destructive phenomena, such as sinkholes (провалы) in karst landscapes occur naturally. Others, such as forest fires and storm-force winds (смерчи), have been exacerbated by human activity: the frequency and intensity of both these phenomena have increased in recent years due to global warming. 2010 was a particularly bad year for forest fires and, as recently as the spring of 2021, Perm Krai experienced its largest forest fire for nearly three decades. Hotter summer temperatures have also resulted in more frequent and more damaging wind storms. Overall, in the last 30 years, forest fires and storm-force winds have destroyed more than 1000km<sup>2</sup> of forest (2.5 times the size of the Isle of Wight).

Other human activity, such as the construction of reservoirs, has led to the erosion of river banks.

### **Effects of Industrial Activity on Nature**

Around 3,000 potential sources of environmental damage have been identified in Perm Krai. Damage has already been caused by:

- Pollution of the air and rivers, as well as slag heaps (породные отвалы), in the Berezinski-Solikamsk region
- Pollution of the Vil'va river from disused coal mines in the Kizelovsk mining area
- Damage to the Bol'shoy Kolchim river as a result of dredging for diamonds
- Pollution from chemical plants, oil refineries and from electricity generation  
Almost 50% of electricity is generated from natural gas. Fuel oil (мазут) and coal is also used, with hydropower only accounting for around 15-20% of electricity generation.
- Air pollution from road transport

### **Protection of the Landscape**

Currently, only a little over 10% of the land of Perm Krai has protected status. Furthermore, the existing network of protected areas does not fully cover the biological, landscape and geographical diversity of the region. As in the UK, however, in order to be effective, protective measures need to be strengthened and more land needs to have protected status.

### **The Future**

Despite the vastness of Perm Krai, human activity is threatening the natural world, as is happening elsewhere. Although the Green lobby is less developed in Russia, the scientific community, local government and ordinary citizens are working to monitor and protect the environment. Recent measures to protect the environment include:

- Legislation to force oil companies to filter their emissions, and make other adaptations to reduce environmental damage
- The Permskaya electricity plant (the biggest plant in the region) has established fish farms to breed thousands of young fish to repopulate the rivers in Perm Krai
- A large new Permskiy national park has recently been established. This combines three big river valleys (Usva, Chusovaya and Vishera) where previously there were only small, unconnected protected areas

However, with an economy which depends on industrial activity, the future is far from certain.



## **My Year in Russia**

*Jessica Vlasova*

In July 2020 I boarded a repatriation flight from London to Moscow to return to the Tver region where I live with my husband. For eleven years I had been dividing my time between Russia and Britain and, at the beginning of the pandemic, I had returned to Oxford to be with my children during lockdown. As I said goodbye I thought I would be back again to see them in the autumn.

I was assured as I checked in that I would not be taken to a quarantine centre. On landing in Moscow I discovered this was not the case and, after lots of form filling and a quick hug with my husband who had driven four hours to meet me, I was taken off under police escort to a crumbling Soviet holiday complex, which had been hastily converted into a quarantine centre and where we were due to stay for two weeks. I shared a room with Larissa, who had been turned away at the Italian border and sent back to Moscow on a plane in which she was the only passenger but without her luggage.

Meals were delivered to our rooms which we ate on our beds and my room mate was pleased to discover that if she washed the disposable fork she could use it to comb her hair. In the meantime, my husband was working hard to get me out and on day four, after many phone calls, he was given permission to come and collect me. Back home that evening I developed the first symptoms of covid.

When I had recovered from covid I decided it was time to apply for Russian citizenship as apparently the application process had been simplified. I was advised to stay in Russia until I got citizenship and so, assuming that I would get it by the end of year, I booked a flight back home for Christmas. However I had to cancel that flight when borders between Russia and Britain closed in December. They only reopened at the beginning of June.

In April, wearing a face covering and standing in front of a portrait of the president, I finally took an oath to the Russian federation, got my Russian citizenship and increased the dwindling Russian population by one. I had to hand in my old residency papers which contained my visa so, although I was finally free to leave Russia when the borders reopened, I would not be able to get back into Russia. The form filling and waiting continued as I applied for a Russian international passport which I finally got in July.

In spring we decided it was finally time to move from our remote village. I was surprised to discover that house moving can be a very quick process in Russia. We found a house we wanted to buy in a much larger village nearer Moscow and two weeks later it was ours. What was also surprising were some of the negative responses in Russia to our house move as it seems more unusual to move house simply because you are ready for a change. My husband's aunt had her theory proved that I was a spy as I had clearly been given orders to relocate.

I am used to switching between the two cultures but, when I finally fly into London in a couple of weeks time after spending over a year in Russia, it might take me a bit longer than usual to switch to British mode. Reflecting on the past year in Russia I have spent the longest time with my husband and the longest time away from my children; spent time in a quarantine centre; been ill with covid; got Russian citizenship; lived through temperatures from below -30°C in January to above 30°C in June and July; moved house; spoke more Russian than English and made a jar of marmite last a whole year.

## Past and Future Events

### Past Events

*Karen Hewitt*

Despite the continued restrictions of Covid, which have meant no direct contacts between Perm and Oxford since spring 2020, we have managed an active summer 2021 programme.

In late June Zoom enabled us to invite two specialists from Perm to talk about contemporary issues: Svetlana Zhdanova, Professor of Psychology, gave a talk about the effects of the pandemic in the university, in schools and more generally, from a psychological point of view; Andrei Shikov, a meteorologist in the Geography Faculty of PSU, gave a talk on notable and extreme weather events in Perm Region, and discussed how far they can be attributed to Climate Change.

On 7th July we held our Garden Party. On this occasion the rains poured down just as people arrived, but we were able to use a newly renovated greenhouse. Heather and Martin Haslett once again donated an impressive sum to the Perm Association as a result of selling books on Russian affairs.

‘Oxford and Water’ is part of an online exhibition in Perm about twin city waterways in the twentieth century. Perm and Louisville are also taking part. Nine volunteers from our Association contributed by finding images, making suggestions and preparing captions for this project. We are particularly grateful to Mark Davies, local historian and Oxford Canal specialist, for co-ordinating all the work.

### Future Events

*Karen Hewitt*

On Sunday, 10th October, Karen Hewitt will give a talk on ‘What do Russians think today about the Soviet Union which came to an end thirty years ago?’

We have provisional plans for a traditional November Party and Quiz Night, possibly inviting people from Perm on Zoom; for a Russian film showing; and for a talk by another specialist from Perm.

In November 2021, another Journalists’ Seminar at Perm State University, organised by Vadim Skovorodin (whom many of you know) and Andrew Adams, our OPA member, will take place on Zoom. From the Oxford end, this will be sponsored by the Oxford Perm Association, as in previous years.

Because of Covid and the backlog of visa applications, we are not planning any direct visits to Russia until 2022. If any members are planning earlier visits, please let us know.

### Oxford Perm Association contact details

Position	Name	telephone no.	Email address
Chairman	Karen Hewitt	01865 515635	<a href="mailto:karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk">karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk</a>
Secretary	Anne Harrap	07929981216	<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 Secretary	Liz Wheeler	07891141293	<a href="mailto:wheeler170@btinternet.com">wheeler170@btinternet.com</a>
Newsletter	David Roulston	01865 841641	<a href="mailto:djrrouls@btinternet.com">djrrouls@btinternet.com</a>
Website	Jessica Vlasova	07766 025313	<a href="mailto:jessica.vlasova@gmail.com">jessica.vlasova@gmail.com</a>

### Newsletter

David Roulston

We are very grateful to our members who continue to submit interesting articles for Perm News. Please note that articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome. The submission deadline for the autumn issue of Perm News is **15<sup>th</sup> January** but it is helpful if you let the editor (contact details above) 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 (also as attachments), or approximately 850 words with no images. Shorter articles are always welcome.*** Note that individual permission for publication is required for any photos which include recognisable people. Readers can browse past newsletters on the website [www.oxfordperm.org](http://www.oxfordperm.org). The editor is grateful to Jessica Vlasova for suggestions and invaluable help in proofreading this issue of Perm News.

We are planning to publish articles from members describing their reasons for initially taking an interest in Russia - the country and/or the language. These could be professional or voluntary activities, exchanges, or maybe just interests in Russian literature, or short items on novel/useful ways of learning the language. Please contact the editor if you would like to submit an article or discuss a topic.

### Website

Jessica Vlasova

We have updated our web page with recommended links <https://www.oxfordperm.org/links> to include the following additional sites:

- Perm city main web site (Russian or English)
- Perm twin cities page
- The Great Britain - Russia Society (meetings and magazine articles on Russian culture, history and politics)
- Pushkin House London (focused on exploring Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet culture with frequent talks and events in London)

Please send any photos of visits to Perm or Perm Association events for the website photo gallery to Jessica at [jessica.vlasova@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.vlasova@gmail.com) or to her WhatsApp on 07766 025313. Note that under GDPR rules, individual permission is required for any photos which include recognisable people.

## Perm Archives - Tribute to World War II

*The following was received from Natalia Nefodova, Department of International and Intermunicipal Relations, Administration of the city of Perm.*

The Second World War—the deadliest and most destructive war in history was officially over in September 1945.

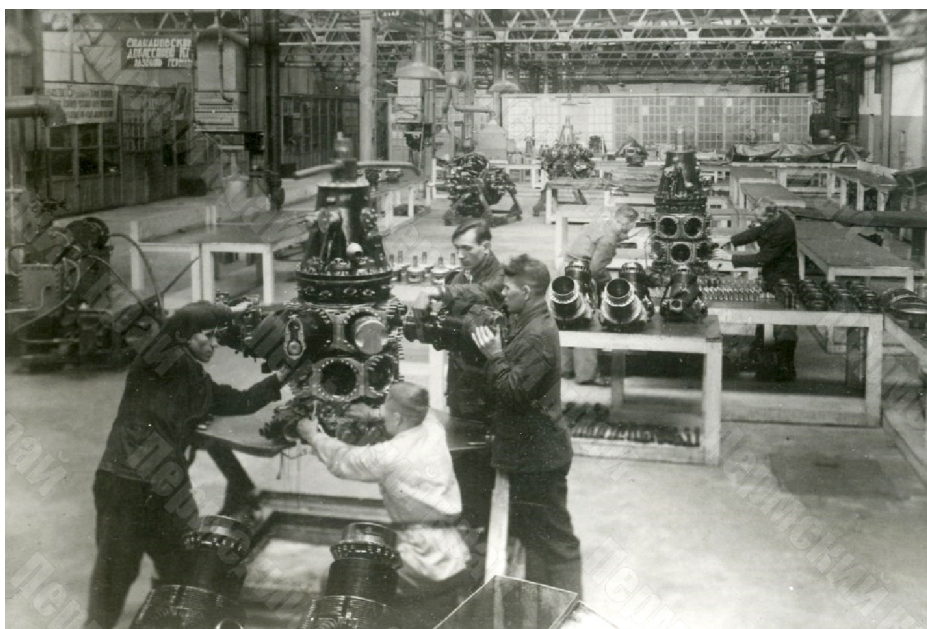
The Perm Archives pay tribute to millions of service members and Home Front workers who helped preserve freedom. Through the digital exhibition "Perm Region, the Land of Labour Valour", the Archives reflect on the legacy and meaning of World War II, bringing audiences photographs, articles, personal stories and memoirs about the feat of Home Front workers in Perm and other towns of the region. The exhibition is in Russian and English.

The exhibition focuses on those industrial centres of the Perm region, whose citizens took the initiative to award their city at the federal level with the title "City of Labour Valour" for their heroic work during the Great Patriotic War and their great contribution to the Victory. The city of Perm was one of these and was given this title in 2020.

Learn with us wherever you are.

<http://www.permarchive.ru/doblest/en/index.html>

*Readers interested in this topic can use the above link for many more details. ed*



## Perm twin cities newsletter summary

*Jessica Vlasova*

‘Информационный вестник’ is the Perm twin cities newsletter. Below is a short summary of the articles in the April 2021 edition. The newsletter is in pdf format and can be read on our website [here](#).

In April Perm held its annual twin cities day celebration. Perm became involved in the twinning movement 30 years ago. Its twin cities are Amnéville, Louisville, Oxford, Qingdao, Duisburg and Agrigento.

In February Perm hosted an online conference with Qingdao to discuss trade. It was attended by over a hundred government and business representatives from Russian and China.

In February an online meeting of specialists was held to discuss the joint Perm Oxford project ‘Prevention and treatment of diabetic foot syndrome’. Valentina Volegova, Professor Valerie Edwards-Jones and Richard Lee all took part.

Summer internships for foreign students, organised by Perm university since 2012, received a record number of applicants this year including from Oxford University. In addition to the academic programme, students are offered an extensive cultural programme.

Louisville was involved, among other things, in an online meeting with women leaders from Perm to coincide with International Women’s Day. Louisville hosted its annual restaurant week in February, when cafes and restaurants offer customers new dishes with part of the funds going to charity.

‘Perm-Duisburg: City on the River in the XX century’ is now on the Perm’s State Archives. ‘Ars Vivendi’, a centre for people with disabilities set up in Perm in 2018, has started free painting courses in their workshops.

Perm hosted the third regional competition for translation from English into Russian in honour of the 25th anniversary of twinning with Oxford. Karen Hewitt chose three texts from contemporary British literature, which had not already been translated, into Russian and over 300 students took part.

In February Chinese New Year was celebrated in Perm which also involved Perm’s Chinese and Korean community and online participants from Perm’s twin city Qingdao in China.

Oxford’s annual dance festival took place online in 2020. The success of this inspired Oxford to organise another dance project with its twin cities called ‘Spring Awakening’. Choreographed dances took place in the open air so that viewers could see different locations in the twin cities. The Perm dancers deserve a special mention for doing their performance in -20°



## BOOK REVIEWS

### **‘Between Two Fires’ by Joshua Yaffa (Granta 2020)**

*Bob Price*



Joshua Yaffa is a correspondent for the New Yorker in Moscow, where he has lived since 2011. This is a superbly written book about Putin’s Russia, illustrating how contemporary Russians come to terms with the state system that has been established over the two decades of Putin’s rule.

The book consists of seven self-contained accounts of how talented men and women manage the compromises and ambiguities that are involved in managing the competing pressures of their personal aspirations and principles, and the requirement of the political and security system within which they are operating. Each of the chapters is based on long interviews and often a detailed personal acquaintance with the people about whom Yaffa is writing. The historical context, and the evolution of the central character in each chapter as they navigate their way through the twists and turns of post -Yeltsin Russian politics, provides a fascinating picture of how these people have made compromises and pragmatic adjustments to their own personal moral codes and philosophies to come to terms with the realities of state power.

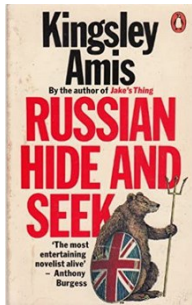
The seven chapters cover a very wide range of personalities and provide a rich portrait of the country. The first chapter is about Konstantin Ernst, the Director of the Channel One TV network. It provides a sympathetic and very telling picture of a man with a strong artistic vision of how TV can make a impact on people, and who has accepted throughout a long period in control of the network that to exercise that general impact, he has to accept the constraints imposed by political messaging from the Kremlin. Subsequent chapters focus on Heda Saratova, a Chechnyan woman who rose to prominence through her work with Memorial, a human rights organisation, and who was later closely associated with the Kadyrov regime in Chechnya in providing support to bring home Chechen fighters from the Middle East; Pavel Adelgeim, an Orthodox priest who was prominent in questioning the Church’s direction under Patriarch Kirill; Oleg Zubkov, a wealthy zoo owner in the Crimea who was a strong supporter of the Russian annexation but encountered hostility from the new administration because of his wealth and land ownership; Victor Shmyrov and Leonid Obukhov, co-founders of Perm-36, the former camp in the Perm triangle that became a museum of ‘resistance to unfreedom’; Elizaveta Glinka, a doctor who was prominent in leading humanitarian action in the Donbass region during the war between separatists and the Ukrainian army: and Kirill Serebrennikov, the Director of the Bolshoi, and the events leading up to his arrest.

The striking feature of this book is that it sets out to understand the pressures that are exerted in many ways on individuals as they seek to achieve their personal goals and aspirations. What leads them in some cases to cooperate with the State powers, and in others to find compromises and ways round the system. And what the consequences are of both cooperation and compromise, as well as outright refusal to bend to the pressures that are brought to bear on them.

The excerpts from the reviews of the book sum it up very well: ‘Measured, clever, well researched and superbly written’ ( The Guardian ); ‘Few journalists have penetrated so deep and with so much nuance into the moral ambiguities of Russia’.

## Russian Hide and Seek by Kingsley Amis (Penguin, 1980)

*Jonathan Saunders*



Although Amis was a member of the CPGB for eleven years until 1956, in later years he drifted to the right politically. By the time he wrote this book (1979-80), two things seem to have been uppermost in his mind. Firstly, he thought Britain was becoming ungovernable thanks to trades unions and strikes – it was the beginning of the era that would culminate in the miners' strike.

Secondly, according to Amis's narrative, the Russian military were perfectly capable of “pacifying”, i.e. conquering, this disunited kingdom. Why not commingle these two fears, held at that time by many conservative English, and titillate their russophobic instincts?

In fact the novel is set fifty years later after the “Pacification” – in 2030 – though it takes some time to work this out because the chief forms of transport appear to be horses and carts. I was quite beguiled by the descriptions of a pastoral landscape until I realised that Amis was obliquely taking pot shots at the Russians whom he clearly considers to be 'backward' and quite capable of dragging the long-suffering Brits back into the 18th century. Despite this disdain for Russians, he (inadvertently?) pays Russian language teachers a huge compliment: they have managed to teach the English population Russian so well that most English prefer to speak Russian – at least to Russians and often amongst themselves!

Much of the plot is involved with the antics of the young Ensign, Alexander Petrovsky, who is the son of the local commissioner and thus the nearest thing to local Russian aristocracy. He is an accomplished horseman, popular with his troops and fellow officers though feared when he loses his temper, as we discover on several occasions. He is also a dedicated seducer: both of eligible young English women and bored, married, Russian matrons. For a while it seems likely that we are in for a glorified romp of this young rake's progress. Indeed, carnal relations were always an important admix of one of Britain's most popular, if not distinguished, post-war authors.

However, we eventually find out that there are more or less official plans to re-introduce 'English' culture to the English. Seen through the novel's microcosm of rural Northamptonshire, this includes a full-blown Anglican church service including hymns with organ accompaniment together with a sermon, led by the 80-year-old vicar who became a priest before the Pacification. Another highlight is a production of *Romeo and Juliet* by a long-forgotten English playwright, a certain William Shakespeare. Alas, in both cases the performance fails to meet the expectations of the mainly English audience leading in the first to a near-empty church (by the end) and to a riot in the theatre in the second.

The other significant plot development is a conspiracy to overthrow the Russian military bureaucracy in charge and literally “restore England to the English”. Alexander, who has spent most of his short life in England and loves its women and its countryside, joins the “revolutionaries”. He sees many enticing possibilities for himself in the aftermath. Theodore, who recruits Alexander, is much more idealistic. Without giving away the novel's ending, I can say that its conclusion reminded me more of 1984 than John Wayne.

Although there is a line of Russophobia running throughout this novel, I would nonetheless recommend Oxford Perm members to read it. Apart from being a good read, it enables us to understand better how literature (admittedly not very highbrow) was utilised by Cold Warmongers. Some readers may ponder how little has changed over the last forty years; all of us will probably agree on the need for building better relations between our two countries.