



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

O P A

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter January 2022

'International Memorial' – the view from Perm

Karen Hewitt

In December 2021 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ordered the 'International Memorial Society' and its regional branches to close because it had violated the 2012 'Foreign Agent' law. The decision has been discussed in Western media and two members of the Oxford Perm Association have asked me for comments and context. Since the Perm-36 Museum devoted to Victims of Political Repression is a major part of this story, I have tried to explain what has happened. This is the first of two articles. The second will appear in our May Newsletter, when we will know more about the ramifications of the Supreme Court decision.

Those of us who have visited Perm since 1996 will have probably been taken to the Perm-36 Gulag Prison Camp which was turned into a Museum devoted to victims of Stalin's political repressions. It is an experience we are not likely to have forgotten.

Most of the prisons in the Gulag system were destroyed during the last years of the Soviet Union and the early years of Yeltsin's rule, but one organisation struggled to preserve the actual buildings of one of the camps so that it could become a physical memory of what had happened to millions of Soviet citizens. The prison camp was known as Perm-36, and the organisation was called 'Memorial'.

'Memorial' was founded in 1989 after Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the concept of 'glasnost' (openness, transparency) to the Soviet Union. The purpose of this new civic organisation was to collect information from the archives and from the families of people who had been repressed in order to build up a detailed account of what had happened. Many volunteers set to work to track down details of everyone who had been imprisoned in one or other of the camps scattered across the country from Europe to the Far East. Over the years, slowly, painfully, and with great ingenuity, 'Memorial' built up a huge archive.

Meanwhile the preserved camp buildings of Perm-36 were transformed into a visitor centre and museum of exhibits from many Gulag sites. It opened in 1996. The centre is by Russian standards fairly accessible: 900 miles from the capital and only 60 from a major provincial city. Those of us who saw Sergei Kachkin's film Perm-36: Reflexion in 2020 know that during the early years of this century, festivals were held at Perm-36 which were popular enough to attract all sorts of non-official groups: environmentalists, artists, internationalists, civil rights groups, along with dancers and musicians. They debated in big tents and argued about everything. The festival was developed and supported by 'Memorial'. Significant funding came from the Perm region authorities.

2014 was the year when Crimea became part of Russia, and fighting broke out in Ukraine. It was also the year when 'Memorial' came into serious conflict with the Russian government. Meetings to solve the crisis were held in Moscow and in other regions, most notably Perm. I was able to attend one such meeting with the Human Rights ombudsman for Perm Region. Funding was a crucial issue. In the 1990s when Russia was close to bankruptcy, support for 'Memorial' had come from international organisations eager to encourage the development of civil society in the new Russia. (This was a time when the Oxford Perm Association was sending money to buy boots for homeless children in Perm.) But from 2000, as the Russian economy grew, people began to prosper and the country recovered its self-respect. By about 2005 our Association was told, with polite gratitude, that Perm City no longer needed our charity; we could work together as equal twin cities. 'Memorial',

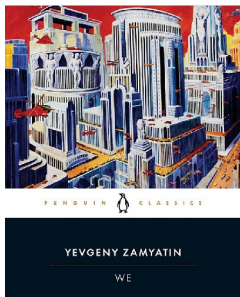
however, continued to be supported by foreign as well as local funding which the Russian government regarded as an anomaly, particularly as the money came from countries which were increasingly hostile to Russia.

Hence, in 2014 when 'the West' was denouncing Russia, 'Memorial' was basically offered a choice: become a state-funded, state-operated organisation or keep your independence at the cost of being registered as a 'foreign agent', funded by mostly unfriendly foreign countries. 'Memorial' chose to keep its independence. The consequences for Perm-36 were immediate. The Museum was taken over by the Regional authorities whose approach to the difficult subject of Soviet history differed from that of 'Memorial'.

However, the organisation 'Perm Memorial' continues to flourish, in a local capacity. They have created travelling exhibitions on the history of political repressions; they visit former GULAG camp sites to put up memorial signs; they advise families searching for information about missing ancestors, and they do all they can to prevent today's Russians from forgetting what happened in the period of Stalin's repressions.

On their website they strongly oppose the decision to close down International Memorial and point out that Perm Memorial is a separate legal entity which cannot be included in the judgement on its International sister organisation.

BOOK REVIEW



***WE* by Yevgeny Zamyatin
(Composed 1920/21) Published by Dutton, 1924**

Catherine Cooper

'The Green Wall and the Pink Ticket'

I first came across Zamyatin in a charity bookshop. Where would the High Street be today without them? Imagine that.... a Russian writer who inspired Orwell to write 1984 and Huxley's Brave New World, but whom not many people know about.

My 'pre-loved' book was a collection of his short stories, one of which was entitled 'The Dragons' a race of ferocious men who appear out of the ground with machine guns, uniforms that do not fit properly, ready to kill anyone who steps out of line. Sounds familiar?

Ironically, Zamyatin believed in absolute freedom if creativity was to flourish not only in art and literature, but in everyday life. He hated the autocracy of the Tsarist regime and became a half-hearted Bolshevik. But then discovered that what you wish for, is not always what you get. Consequently, he was denied the freedom to write as he wished to, and, in the end had to ask Stalin for permission to emigrate, which he finally did, with the help of his friend Gorky. He died in poverty in Paris.

After his short stories I then had to send for his classic dystopian novel *We* described by some, as 'the best single work of science fiction yet written' (Ursula K. Le Guin). I am not a fan of science fiction – for one thing I can never believe in the characters or the plot, but *We* (considered to be his masterpiece) depicts a terrifying world where people are only known by a number, no names; where everyone lives in glass apartments, so all your actions are visible to the thought police or 'Guardians'; and where you can only have sex with the blinds down on certain days of the week with your

designated opposite number. In order to participate you need a pink ticket which has to be handed in on the night!

The main protagonist D-503 is a mathematician, builder of the 'Integral', a futuristic spacecraft designed to fly to other planets in order to convert the inhabitants to the marvels of OneState (*We*). On the surface he appears to be the perfect citizen. A fervent admirer of the 'Benefactor' (the leader of OneState) who is as corrupt as you might expect, but who demands complete devotion from the citizens of OneState.

But - as we all know - it's not possible to permanently deny freedom of thought which proved to be the case when D-503 meets 1-330 a 'seductress' who is sly, mysterious and manipulative. She completely captivates him although her behaviour is outrageous for OneState: she drinks, smokes, flirts, has sex with whomever she fancies and introduces him to the delights of a 'new' world. The world of the 'Memphi', a clandestine group set on over-throwing OneState and returning to the world beyond the Green Wall.

He tries to forget her but is he is madly infatuated with her 'white teeth'. He is so obsessed that even his loyalty to the Benefactor is called into question. He decides to follow her and join Memphi, but in the end he cannot take the final step of betraying his comrades, OneState and his creation - the 'Integral' so he denounces her to the State.

By contrast 1-330 remains steadfast to her fellow conspirators. Even under torture she refuses to betray them consequently she is 'etherised'. D-503 is then subjected to the ultimate Operation, the removal of his imagination, thereby rendering him as wholly malleable and 'brainless', as is required to be the perfect citizen of One State.

Zamyatin once described his book as 'his most light-hearted and his most serious work'. At one point he likens 5-003's erotic frenzy for 1-330 to 'Blue sparks' as his trembling got 'faster and faster'. On the serious side, if 1-330 represents Zamyatin's central philosophical idea, the 'individual versus the collective', she has the last word when she asks him, as a mathematician, to name the final number. He objects saying that the number of numbers is infinite, she replies - so is the number of revolutions.

The following two items were submitted in response to the editor's request for articles about members initially taking an interest in Russia before joining the OPA - the country and/or the language - professional or voluntary activities, exchanges, or maybe just interests in Russian literature. We hope that other members will send more articles in this context. Ed.

My First Trip to Russia

Chris Cowley

My first trip to Russia was back in 1969: I was 13 years old and had only been learning Russian for one year at school. Our enterprising Russian teacher took a group of around 12 of us with a couple of other non-Russian speaking teachers as helpers.

It was a huge adventure, particularly as I'd only travelled abroad to France and Spain before. The outward journey was by train through Belgium, West and East Germany and Poland. I remember being woken up several times at night as we made our way through the multiple checkpoints in Berlin. At the same time, any items of food we had with us were confiscated. At the Polish border, there was a very lengthy stop at Brest-Litovsk for the train wheels to be changed to the wider Russian gauge (and for passport formalities at the same time). We had to stay in our carriage, looking out at our first Soviet posters and listening to the sound of hammering underneath the train: we were, of course, not allowed to use the toilet at this time!

As far as I remember, we spent around 3 days in Moscow and 4 in Leningrad, flying between the two cities. We were shown many of the sites that are on the tourist trail nowadays – but without going inside any churches. I have no recollection of being shown any Russian art or craft, although we were shown the state rooms in the Hermitage – a rather strange choice for Soviet times.

In Red Square, we were taken straight to the front of the long queue at Lenin's mausoleum. Inside, we filed past Lenin quite quickly as no one was allowed to pause. One of the boys in our group was barked at by the guards for having his hands in his pockets.

One day we were taken to the 'House of Friendship' to meet a group of Russian school children, the girls all in blue, with red kerchiefs and plaits with large ribbons. They were as curious about us as we were about them, but our limited knowledge of each others' language made communication difficult. Our contribution to 'international friendship' was teaching them the Hokey Cokey!

We had a lot of fun with the fountains in the gardens of Peterhof, which spring up unexpectedly at random times. From there we returned to Leningrad by hydrofoil which was state-of-the-art transport in 1969.

The food was not wonderful – undercooked boiled eggs for breakfast. At one meal, I had some kind of soup containing a lump of fatty gristle which I left in the bottom of my bowl. I was hugely embarrassed when the waitress loudly castigated me for leaving this morsel: I can only imagine that meat was in short supply at that time, and she thought I was being fussy and wasteful.

I was in Moscow at the time of the first moon landing. We were well aware of the date and at breakfast the following morning our teacher asked the waitress if the landing had actually happened. She was aware that it had but didn't know any further details. Later that day, I bought a copy of Pravda announcing the moon landing; a copy which I still have.

Inevitably, we were taken to the Beryozka (foreign currency) shop. Prices must have been very reasonable as we all bought multiple items: balalaikas, guitars with seven strings, samovars, amber jewellery, matryoshkas. Goodness knows how we managed to get everything home! I also bought a couple of Soviet posters which adorned my walls throughout my school and university years.

We returned to London by boat from Leningrad, with stop-offs at Helsinki and Copenhagen where we had some hours to walk around. Sailing into Helsinki in the morning light through the archipelago of small islands was particularly memorable. This was a very enjoyable way to finish the trip: perhaps we could explore this as an option for one of our trips.

The Soviet Union seemed hugely exotic and intriguing: wide boulevards with almost no private cars; socialist propaganda but no advertisements; people approaching us for biros; elderly women cleaning the streets; tea, sweetened with jam, served in glasses with lids; the splendour of the underground stations in both cities; ornate buildings in Leningrad, painted in pastel colours; shabby apartment blocks in the suburbs by contrast; having to wear large cloth overshoes in the Hermitage; seeing and hearing Russian as a living language for the first time.

For me, this trip was the start of my fascination with Russia and it is no exaggeration to say that it set the course of my adult life. I subsequently spent 3 months in Voronezh on a student placement and, in 1982, travelled the full length of the Trans-Siberian railway from Nakhodka to Moscow. More recent trips have been to St Petersburg and Novgorod as well as the Perm exchange in 2019.

Why care about Russia?

Daniel Scharf

My interest in the USSR, Russia and Perm stems from my trade as a town planner and becoming aware that the Cold War air base at Upper Heyford had just been vacated by the United States Air Force and a wing of 70 F111 fighter bombers. The 1200 acres seemed to represent an ideal opportunity to set out and juxtapose Cold War stories from first, second and third worlds from 1917

to at least 1994, and the Oxford Trust for Contemporary History was set up to campaign for this outcome. Barely a week has passed in the last 26 years (and counting) when I have not added to the saga of how this pre-eminent site from the Cold War, the defining 'event' of the last hundred years, could be used for heritage purposes. What began as a campaign to prevent inappropriate changes to the Cold War landscape, with a view to establishing an instructional monument, moved into creating a record of the disinterest in Cold War heritage and how the physical remains have been diluted, destroyed, cleansed and denied to the public.

In 1995 English Heritage said that the site could not be designated an "historic battlefield" as nothing happened on the ground; unsurprising for an airfield that would have been turned to dust if the threat Mutually Assured Destruction became a reality. EH also wished me well with my attempts to protect the heritage. The Chancellor of Oxford University was equally helpful. Roy Jenkins, himself the biographer of Churchill, Truman and Roosevelt said that the support of a 'strong historian' was needed before the University could lend support to a Cold War heritage site at Upper Heyford. Successive wardens of St Antony's; Dahrendorf, Goulding and Macmillan turned down the chance of being involved. I was learning the disdain and distrust that (some) academics hold for heritage.

In 2006 I took the opportunity to visit Perm with the express intention of digging into the USSR/Russian side of the Cold War story. A display of military hardware in Perm included what I took to be a claim that it was responsible for launching the missile that had shot down a U2 spy plane. I had since become friendly with Gary Powers Junior who was setting up a Cold War Museum in the US. He told me that it was in fact from Sverdlovsk that the missile had been fired. In an exchange with Leonid Obukhov, history professor at Perm State University and co-founder of Perm-36, he regarded this as a Cold War heritage site, repression and correction being caused by the confrontation with the West. Attempts to collaborate with Perm 36 have not so far produced any materials to be displayed at Upper Heyford to juxtapose with those from the US/UK.

By 2008 I gave up the idea of attracting the attention of historians and enrolled for the Masters in Public History at Ruskin College. Relying on my dissertation, "Who cares about the Cold War: Using the former RAF Upper Heyford as a touchstone" I taught a class "What remains from the Cold War" at the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education

While the landowners (a consortium of housebuilders) sought planning permission I carried out my own heritage projects; coach trips with lectures in the briefing room, the Path of MADness, walking the Nato runway on Holocaust Memorial Day where thoughts are turned to the nuclear holocaust. And Russian visitors are often the most grateful and intrigued by visits around the site designed and equipped to kill them.

The physical remains at Upper Heyford are accepted by the authorities as the best preserved in the UK from the Cold War, the defining 'event' of the last hundred years. The fact that all other Cold War sites have been more damaged means that Upper Heyford might still emerge as the best candidate for World Heritage Site status as part of a 'transnational site'. Displays at Upper Heyford could explain how the Cold War started and why it has continued. The 2016 Culture White Paper described how the public favour heritage sites and museums as ways to access history. Were Cold War history seen as important, the potential of Upper Heyford might still be realized – and even confirm my hopes that a greater understanding by the public about the Cold War could make a difference to our relations with Russia.

Past and Future Events

Past events

Covid continues to restrict our plans. The online exhibition on Cities and Water is available on our website www.oxfordperm.org

On 10th October 2021, Karen Hewitt gave a talk on ‘What do Russians think today about the Soviet Union which came to an end thirty years ago?’

The Journalism Seminar which was to have taken place in November 2021 has had to be postponed.

Future Events

Mary Dejevsky, the well-known journalist who specialises in Russia, will be talking to the Association on Wednesday, 2nd February at 5p.m. on Zoom.

Our AGM will be held in late February or early March, probably on a Wednesday.

Perm City is keen to co-operate with us on an Environmental Project and a Neighbourhood Association project.

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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 **15th May 2022** 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. The editor is grateful to Jessica Vlasova for her invaluable help in proofreading this issue of Perm News.

Please note the editor's request on page 3 requesting articles about members taking an interest in Russia before joining OPA.

Website

Jessica Vlasova

Please send any photos of visits to Perm or Perm Association events for the website photo gallery to Jessica at 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.

Summary of articles from Perm Twin Cities newsletter *Jessica Vlasova*

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

1. The Russian-German Twin Cities conference ‘Strengthening municipal and regional ties - the expansion of horizons’ was held in Kaluga. The Perm delegation was headed by Viktor Ageev.
2. Perm Mayor Aleksey Demkin attended a meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Municipalities Committee (OKMO) on international inter-municipal cooperation. He talked about the successful interaction between Perm and its twin cities and on the increase in activity in many areas such as ecology, archive work and youth policy. OKMO President Viktor Kidyaev noted that Perm is well known for its extensive international relations.
3. Perm took part in the Twin Cities World Day celebrations. The hand made quilts which Perm and Oxford had exchanged during the 25th anniversary celebrations were on display and dancers demonstrated their Morris dancing skills which they had learnt from Oxford. Awards were presented to Elena Moshchanskaya, Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages, Linguistics and Translation, PNRPU and Vadim Skovorodin, Chief Editor of Business Class newspaper for their role in maintaining strong links with other twin cities.
4. The quilt was handmade in Oxford to celebrate 25 year twinning between Oxford and Perm and depicts many sights and symbols associated with Oxford. (a full list of everything depicted on the quilt is listed).
5. Several school children from Gymnasium no. 2 passed the Chinese language exam (HSK) and four received scholarships to university in Qingdao (Perm’s twin town). An online event was hosted for the 20th anniversary of the signing of the treaty of friendship and cooperation between Russia and China.
6. Bennett Knox, parks administrator in Louisville, discusses local environmental projects in his town, collaborative environmental projects with Perm and how he became interested in Russia.
7. Russian Consul General in Palermo met the mayor of Agrigento to discuss the development of relations between the two cities.
8. In 2020 teams from Perm and Duisburg took part in the 4th Youth Forum in Kaluga. The theme was ‘Digitalisation as a chance to collaborate’.

Far-Away Land for a Far-Away Lander

Varvara Biachkova

My favourite version of the translation of “Perm” is “Far-Away Land” (“Pera Maa”). Last summer I explored the north of Perm Krai to the Farthest-away land – the mysterious and majestic city of Cherdyn. Once the capital of the Permian land, Cherdyn in my mind was always connected with forests and treasures, and I was right.

Cherdyn still bears itself with amazing pride and dignity of the former capital. At the same time, great views of the northern forests and Polud mountain from any of the seven hills of Cherdyn (or from the top of the tower of the Voskresenskiy Cathedral) make you feel the harmony between nature

and Cherdyn which is supported by the sculpture of the great elk, which welcomes guests in the centre.

The treasures of Cherdyn are numerous. The local museum has lots of surprises from rare icons to an embroidery made of hair, and so do elegant churches from tiny to the majestic Ioanno-Bogoslovskiy Monastery, the cradle of Permian Christianity. Another treasure is the legacy of the people of Cherdyn: from 85 brave warriors who died defending their fortress from the Tatars to Perm State University professor Georgiy N. Chagin who did so much for the history and glory of Cherdyn.

Or there is another story, carefully preserved in the settlement of Nyrob, 41 km north from Cherdyn. The road from Nyrob to Cherdyn is quite long and not very smooth, although the people of Nyrob are trying to keep in touch. There is a bus to Perm and even a local enthusiast with his own bus who used to “give a lift” from Nyrob to the Black Sea.

Nyrob’s main places of interest are connected with 1601 when a strong, handsome man (a real Russian “bogatyry”) was brought from Moscow in chains, just like a bear. It was a nobleman Mikhail Romanov whose family quarrelled with the Tsar Boris Godunov. Mikhail spent almost a year in Nyrob not even in prison, but in the pit. Little children used to come to play near the pit and “accidentally” threw there something he could eat, despite the serious trouble their parents got into for their help. The prisoner died and never knew that his young nephew (also Mikhail Romanov)

was to become a new Russian Tsar and start a new dynasty, but the Romanovs always remembered the kindness of the people of Nyrob. Now the Nyrob Prisoner’s “magical” chains are kept in the local museum and the pit is reconstructed with a small chapel around it. Everyone can go down and give their respect to Mikhail Romanov. It’s amazing, but despite this tragic story, I found nothing sad and gloomy about the place. Nature, the beautiful Nikolskaya and Bogoyavlenskaya churches, enthusiastic and friendly local people make you smile, enjoy life and value its treasures. Could it be Mikhail Romanov’s spirit that still helps the children of those who were kind to him?



Cherdyn



Elk Statue in Cherdyn



Museum at Nyrob

Varvara teaches at Perm State University and came to Oxford with the PSU teachers’ group in 2011