



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь

O P A

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter May 2023

Voices from Russia

Edited by Karen Hewitt

In early April I ran a series of Literature Seminars on Zoom for Russian university teachers of English Literature who had been to Perm in previous years. We discussed three recent stories by English, Welsh and Irish writers. Among the teachers who joined this seminar (from all over Russia) were many who wrote to me personally. They are fluent English speakers who probably do not watch much Russian TV but who read on the internet articles written by Russians, Ukrainians, British, Germans and Americans. They disagree with each other, but they are far better informed than most of the British public – which is understandable. Below are extracts from the letters I received:

(1) You know that many Russians left the country, especially IT specialists who are cosmopolitan. Fortunately, they do not form a very significant group. Now they are outside, but some are coming back or continue to work for Russian companies online.

There are some well-known people here who say bad things about Russia and all of us. It is pretty ugly. The actors, singers who seemed to love their audience now treat it as cattle. I am happy to be in Siberia, at a state university where most people share my views, at least in public.

(2) I seem to be different from the overwhelming majority of my colleagues and, sadly, from all the people I know. The problem of Russia is not that people support the war, they don't. I've made a chilly discovery that they are indifferent and, if not totally so, ready to adapt. It is the way of living which the majority of Russian people (and all my colleagues) opt for. It's a way of creeping slavery. However, it's possible to escape or minimize one's relations with the state. That is what I've chosen. If I stay at a state university I won't be able to avoid doing what is against my conscience [so I've found some private teaching.]

(3) I wanted to write you an answer to your question about worrying about the Ukrainian counter-offensive here. It's quite a difficult thing to talk about. My feelings are probably mixed. On one hand, it would inevitably mean more deaths. Some of the Russian cities will probably be damaged, and this is, of course, horrible. Yet, firstly, our country did that to Ukraine so why should we expect any softer treatment? Besides, I don't think we are threatened in any way by this counter offensive, unlike Moscow, or Rostov, or Belgorod or other cities near the frontline. I am way more worried about how our government will react to all this and what new restrictions and repressions it will roll out. What if they shut all borders? What if they start looking for traitors everywhere or draft everyone? These things are more of stress sources for me personally.

(4) I am shocked with the decision of your government to pass on to Ukraine long-distance (up to 250 km) missiles. I think it is a very-very bad idea which leads to much more victims (and it does not matter what is your attitude to this war in general). It is just a stupid idea which is very far from the means to bring peace.

(5) *This correspondent is from Crimea. She was happy that Crimea had been incorporated into Russia, but from 2014 until the war, she was not cut off from her Ukrainian friends.* Oleg and I both are against the war and all kinds of violence and stay away from all political matters. My first naturally negative reaction was revealed through some posts on Facebook but then I had to remove the comments, being warned by the university authorities against that sort of comments, which could be interpreted as pro-Ukrainian. The whole thing is dreadful! I lost touch with all my friends from Kiev, Vinnitsa (close relatives) and Kharkov who think we are traitors and aggressors, which is not true of course. Some young men left their homes not to be called up. A friend of mine who works online went to Kazakhstan and another one to Istanbul (a Crimean Tatar). A couple of teachers from our Department left for Germany and do not have jobs there. There are some newcomers from Kherson who now work at the university.

(6) The most awful thing is to live without planning your future. In the midst of humanitarian, existential and ecological chaos we witness the world collective mind being unable to change the situation. When everyone turns blind and washes their hands of the situation. Now the world is not suffering for people of Russia and Ukraine. Now they are observing a few political gladiators ... The EU has become another colony of the NATO - vassals who are trembling from fear that Putin will come to their lands. They are ready to sell their people like Zelensky to fulfill the mission assigned for them : to obliterate any trace of Russian identity. I am sorry but this is my truth, I will stick to it as long as my memory of WW2 is alive. Millions of Russian people died then to free the peoples of the Balkan countries who are dismantling monuments to Russian soldiers today.



image: beavers at work in Perm Krai



image: waterfall in Perm Krai

Wonderful Surprise

One day in mid-March, I received a parcel containing a book. Nothing special about that, you might say – but the wonderful surprise was that the book had been sent to me from a contact in Perm! The book had been on a 6-week journey via a third party in Kazakhstan as there is, of course, currently no postal service between the UK and Russia. The parcel which had left Perm contained some Ivan chai, dried mushrooms, perga (bee bread) and other delicacies. Unfortunately, the Kazakh postal authorities refused to send on the food items as they considered them to be incorrectly packaged. Nothing to do with the political situation, simply bureaucratic intransigence.

Despite my disappointment at not receiving the food items, which I know I would have greatly enjoyed, the arrival of my book filled me with enormous pleasure and gratitude. It seems almost a miracle that, in these troubled times, a physical object can leave Perm and finish its journey on my bookshelves. My contact went to considerable trouble to send this parcel to me. What touches me is that I can do nothing to reciprocate this gesture for the time being.

However, I think the positive message is that there are people in Perm who want to keep contact with us and who value our friendship. And that is a heartening message for everyone in the Perm Association.

[The author of this article wishes to remain anonymous]

Life in Perm Universities since the beginning of the war

Galina Grigorieva, Associate Professor, Perm State Pedagogical University

Life could not but change in 2022. Any country entering a war faces dramatic changes in all spheres, and all her people and institutions change. To analyse the changes in our University life, I may firstly mention that there appeared an atmosphere of seriousness. Teachers and students have a whole range of previous experiences: some were born in Ukraine or have relatives and friends there, while others are not personally concerned; some are politically-minded and competent in history, while others are quite ignorant; some parted with their loved ones who went to the front, while others are ready to emigrate not to participate. This is why we avoid discussing the things, not to argue or hurt, or touch a nerve. People seem to understand that we should sustain our human treatment towards each other and the business-friendly climate, be cooperative in hard times, irrespective of attitudes and beliefs. The University is not a place for ideological brainwashing or argument. So, the education process remains stable.

Secondly, there appeared a feeling of uncertainty about the future. People's hopes for constructive high-level negotiations and peace vanished soon, and the obvious antagonism made it clear that the tension between the nations will cause changes in their economies. When our students entered the Faculty of Foreign Languages several years ago, they knew that English and other European languages were in demand, and they would find jobs upon graduation. Now the labour market is gradually changing, and uncertainty is in the air.

Besides, because of the sanctions, we are have fewer opportunities for inter-cultural and scientific contacts with American and European universities and enterprises, which seems unreasonable to ordinary teachers and students. The western sanctions are generally regarded here as absurd and of no effect. People of good will understand that those who seek peace should do something to find ways to a dialogue and maintain peace, but not aggravate the confrontation or sow enmity.

However, the idea that education and culture must be superior to politics and several steps ahead of the current situation has been confirmed by the majority of world corporations and our foreign partners, and we are trying to maintain the relationships. Although direct interactions are impossible, the University departments continue having close contacts with their foreign counterparts. The point is that the forms of the interaction have become different, and it took time to find new modes.

To adapt to the new reality, the government and the University administration have taken measures. They support vulnerable groups of students and allocate money from the budget for subsidies on education. They immediately, just in the middle of the academic year, launched new domestic and international educational projects and introduced new foreign languages and cultures into the university curriculum, with the focus on Latin America, Africa and Asia. They also facilitate the best national traditions and innovations in education actively now. The weakest point for the moment is probably the equipment and software for teaching, as rebuilding the logistics and developing this sector of home production takes time.

Lewis Carroll's Adventures in Russia, and what he found there; or, Alice in Volgaland

Mark Davies

My interest in the Oxford Perm Association commenced in 2018, when it occurred to me that a documentary about the journey which Charles Dodgson (i.e. Lewis Carroll) made to Russia in 1867 might be of considerable interest. The stimulus was the football World Cup, during which England played matches in four of the places which Dodgson visited (Kaliningrad, St Petersburg, Moscow, and Nizhny Novgorod). Having only ever spent about 24 hours in Russia myself, in transit from Nairobi in 1980, I needed to seek informed local opinions about the logic and logistics of making such a documentary, and the name Karen Hewitt was proffered by everyone to whom I spoke! By early 2020, in alliance with OPA member Nina Kruglikova, I had lined up an interested production company, a director, and potential well-known narrator, but since then, of course, any such project has become sadly unimaginable. Or rather, I suppose, *imagining it is possible* still, and the following – the basis of the Zoom talk I gave to the Association in 2021 – may help you to do so.

“We have decided on Moscow! Ambitious for one who has never yet left England,” wrote Charles Dodgson (1832–1898) in his diary on 11 July 1867. The Oxford don had just received his passport. The very next evening he was in Dover, preparing to cross the Channel with his long-standing Oxford friend, Rev. Henry Parry Liddon (1820–1890).

Travelling by train via Calais, Brussels, Cologne, Berlin, and Kaliningrad, the two men reached St Petersburg on 27 July. Dodgson was instantly enthralled, calling the city “one full of wonder and novelty”. On 2 August the two men reached Moscow. Dodgson’s initial impression on arrival was of “bulging gilded domes, in which you see as in a looking-glass distorted pictures of the city”. Is this comment significant? He was already contemplating “a floating idea of writing a sort of sequel to Alice” (which had been published in 1865). His working title became “Behind the Looking-Glass and what Alice saw there”, and it was Liddon who suggested the name which was finally adopted in 1871, that is, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. In view of the sequel’s chess-game theme, it may also be worth noting that Dodgson took with him a travelling chess set. (One such on-the-move game was played against Andrew Muir (1817-1882), cofounder of the famous trading company Muir & Mirrielees, based in St. Petersburg and then Moscow through to 1918.)

On 6 August the two men continued to the most easterly point they reached on their trip, Nizhny Novgorod, some 250-miles from Moscow. It was the time of the “world’s fair”, presumably a massive culture shock for Dodgson, whose only previous experience of in situ foreign tongues and customs had been no farther away than Wales! Finding themselves unexpectedly obliged to spend the night in Nizhny proved to be a bonus: “all the novelties of the day were thrown into the shade by our adventures at sunset,” Dodgson wrote of his first ever experience of a muezzin’s call, emanating from the Tartar Mosque. “It was the strangest, wildest thing you can imagine – ringing through the air over our heads” with “an indescribably sad and ghost-like effect”.

From Nizhny they retraced their route to St Petersburg via Moscow, where a peculiar encounter occurred with Thomas Combe, Superintendent of Oxford University Press (for more about whom perhaps I might direct readers to my newly revised edition of *Alice in Waterland*). At Cronstadt they “got a very good general idea of the ... resources disposable in case of war” before returning through Europe to take the ferry to Dover on 14 September 1867.

All the indications are that Charles Dodgson had had an enjoyable and enlightening European adventure – this short summary necessarily omits numerous amusing and perceptive observations – yet he never again set foot outside Great Britain. He did, however, embark on a different journey soon after, one of the imagination, in beginning work on the sequel to *Wonderland* which would send his heroine on her own travels across the chess board on the other side of her looking-glass.

I long to undertake the Russian part of this journey one day, and also to visit Perm, of course, as part of a wider comprehension of its context. Sadly, I suspect that it’s a longing which will remain unsatisfied for quite some time ...

www.oxfordwaterwalks.co.uk

As an instance of the extraordinary long words which the language contains, he spelt for me the following:

ЗАЩИЩАЮЩИХСЯ

which, written in English letters, is zashtsheeshtshayoushtsheekhhsya: – this alarming word is the genitive plural of a participle, and means "of persons defending themselves."

He proved a very pleasant addition to our party, and he and I had three games of chess in the course of the second day, which it is perhaps as well that I did not record, as they all ended in my defeat.

Image:

An account of Dodgson's encounter on a train with Andrew Muir

Teaching Russian to English students is a challenge. There are the students who have never learned a foreign language, or if they have, it was for a couple of years and they couldn't see the point. There are those who were at school when grammar was a no-no in the English education system. Not knowing a noun from a verb is unhelpful. English adults are terrified of the different alphabet, not least because they want to write everything down. Younger students are more willing to learn through listening first.

Evening class and private students always had a good reason to want to learn Russian. The commonest was "I've visited Russia and want to go again, but next time I'd like to be able to read the names of the stations on the metro" and "I'm about to marry/have recently married a Russian lady". More unusual were: "I collect watches and some have inscriptions in Russian which I'd like to read. By the way, I have learning difficulties", "I'm helping to renovate a children's home in Odessa and provide clothes and toys for the children.", "I help to run a youth exchange which includes students from Russian-speaking countries".

Private students provided extra challenges. I found that some men with Russian fiancées would expect to be able to speak fluently to their fiancée's family after a few lessons. In reality, they would usually give up after about 6 weeks, intending to rely solely on the partner's English. I don't think they had any idea of the hours the fiancée must have spent in study over the years. Some of the pairings worked wonderfully, others were disastrous. The young lady would come over for a visit, meet all the man's friends and family and think they would all be around when she settled here. She'd then come as a bride and find herself completely isolated in normal life.

I had one student who wasn't really interested in learning Russian – he just wanted to talk about his personal problems. It seemed odd, but it was all above board and he paid me. Another man would book lessons then not turn up. In the end, he was the only person I charged in advance.

I was often approached for non-standard jobs. One of these was a young lady with a health problem who wished to take A-level Russian in order to pursue a post-graduate course which required some knowledge of Russian. I taught her through guided self-study. Another was a sixth-former who had lived in a Russian-speaking country, but whose language was "fossilised" at the level she reached when she was 10 years old. Her previous tutor, a native speaker, had not taken into account the English A-level exam requirements. The result was a fail, so I was pleased when she passed on her second attempt.

Warwickshire College started an International Baccalaureate course, for which an "Ab Initio" language had to be provided. The first year it ran, I was asked to teach a student who wanted to learn Chinese, but as there wasn't a Chinese teacher available at no notice, they asked me and persuaded her that Russian would be a good alternative. Her father was less convinced.

I don't think I gave up on anyone, though I did despair of them reaching their aims. The most infuriating was one of the last IB students, who could have done well but refused to work. He approached me after he had failed to get the required marks to ask whether he could retake the IB Russian module. He was very disappointed when I told him that he had missed his only chance.

I enjoyed the challenges of teaching and was always pleased to get positive feedback. My favourite comment was from an evening class student who related that a Russian taxi driver had commented "Вы говорите по-русски как 007!" "You speak Russian like 007!"

Learning Russian is not for sissies

Marianne Talbot

Learning Russian is not for sissies. But I think that might be obvious. After all, one glance at the alphabet shows that there is a steep learning curve from the very beginning. Russian has 33 letters, though two of them are not letters so much as signs, rather like an apostrophe, indicating that the preceding letter must be pronounced in a 'hard' or the 'soft' way. That's right – most Russian letters can be pronounced in two ways, so the idea there are 33 letters is the first thing about learning Russian that is not quite right once you look into it!

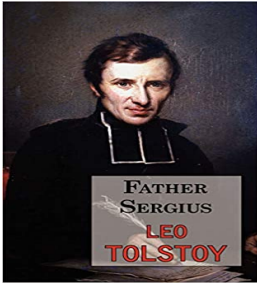
It is not just hardness and softness that will cause an English learner of Russian to stumble at the first hurdle. It is also the 'false friends', letters like P, B and H which all look like straightforward English letters. But then you learn that they are, respectively, pronounced R, V and N. I find that even feeling that I have the alphabet under my belt after two years, I can still be tripped up by these false friends.

But the learner can relax a bit when they learn that, once the alphabet is mastered, pronunciation is relatively straightforward – words are usually pronounced as they are spelled. Even this, though, is not much of a help when faced with words with many syllables – and many Russian words are multi-syllabled. I still need to take a run at words like 'государственный' (state) and 'общежитие' (dormitory), and the difference between 'и' and 'и́' eludes me completely.

There are other complexities too. A relief for the beginner is that word order is unimportant. But the relief is short-lived. Word order is used in English to indicate the functions of the words constituting a sentence. 'John loves Mary' and 'Mary loves John' are different sentences in English because in the first sentence 'John' is the subject and Mary the object, whilst in the second sentence word order indicates that the roles are reversed. In Russian word functions are indicated by cases, and there are six such cases: nominative, genitive, accusative, dative, prepositional and instrumental. The single sentence 'Masha was eating kasha' can be translated in six different ways depending on the emphasis you want: 'Маша ела кашу' (neutral), 'кашу ела маша' (emphasis on who is eating), 'ела Маша кашу' (emphasis on Masha's action) and so on.

Then there is the distressing discovery, at about the beginning of your second year of Russian, that every verb is paired with another verb, the two representing different verb aspects – the imperfective and the perfective. One discovers this quite late because the present and simple past and future tenses are formed from the imperfective and, of course, this is where we start. The perfective is introduced when we need to start distinguishing between incomplete actions (I am eating), and completed ones (I have eaten). Usually (thankfully) there are similarities between the imperfective and the perfective form of the same verb, but sometimes it would be impossible to guess that they are related. 'Говорить' and 'сказать', for example are the imperfective and perfective forms, respectively, of the verb 'to speak'.

So Russian is extremely frustrating at times. It seems to me to be *much* harder than French (the only other language I have tried to learn). But actually I think it is this very complexity that attracts me. I have been learning for two years now and I love it! I take classes with Oxford's Language Centre and Marina, my teacher is demanding but also kind and dedicated. I also use Duolingo, an amazing language-learning app. The five minute lessons drill you on reading, writing, speaking and listening, teaching you Russian in the way you learned English. The lessons are fun and one comes away with a sense of achievement that can even last until the next formal lesson!



Father Sergius, Leo Tolstoy

Book review by *Catherine Cooper*

‘The fault, dear Brutus, lies in ourselves, not in our stars’ (*Julius Caesar*)

Father Sergius, one of Tolstoy’s short stories, portrays a complicated individual who begins his adult life full of possibilities. Rich, brilliant, proud and handsome, the future looks promising for Prince Stepan Kasatsky. He strives to be ‘the best’ in every aspect of his life. No matter how gruelling the task is, he seeks perfection. After graduating from officer training, he soon realises that, even with all his advantages, there are still certain circles that you cannot enter unless you have untold wealth or the right connections. He therefore deliberately courts an aristocratic beauty but then genuinely falls in love with her.

As the wedding day draws near everything seems perfect, until Mary, his future bride, confesses she had previously been the Tsar’s lover. He is shattered. Like Angel Clare, in Hardy’s ‘Tess’, he has the unrealistic idea that his bride must be a virgin. He instantly falls into a towering rage, breaks off the engagement, gives his inheritance to his sister and enters a monastery.

His deep faith sustains him for a while but, as always, his need to be the most industrious, the most abstemious, the most obedient rules him. Alongside this, his dislike of the Abbot and his inability to control his feelings of lust – which still occur however much he resists, results in him requesting to leave the monastery to become a hermit. His wish is granted and so for the next 13 years he lives a life of virtual seclusion.

It is during this time that his isolation is disturbed by a party of revellers taking a trip. One in particular a rich widow seeks to discover if she can tempt the now famous ‘Father Sergius’. She insists on being left near his cell and refuses to leave until he lets her in from the freezing cold, which he finally does. But in so doing his feelings of lust return resulting in him chopping off the end of his finger to counter his feelings. She is so impressed she decides to change her life as a result.

As the years pass his fame spreads resulting in people bringing the sick to be healed. His vanity is rewarded. The Church even builds a hostelry close to his hermit’s cell. This results in him neglecting his own spiritual life which leaves him feeling empty. But once again temptation visits him in the form of a young woman whose father begs him to ‘cure’ her. He agrees to see her. She is determined to entice him. As a result his lust overcomes him and he yields to temptation. The next day he resolves to leave and become a peasant. He even renounces God.

On his travels he remembers his cousin Pashenka, someone he had teased unmercifully as a child. He decides to visit her, as he had heard she was now living in poverty. He tramps for miles until he comes to the village where she lives caring for her daughter, weak son-in-law and grandchildren. In order to do this she has to teach music to keep the family alive. Father Sergius begs from her. She is poor, humble, and only just managing to keep her head above water, but, she still gives Sergius food and what little money she has. At this point he finally realises that his whole life has been wasted seeking human praise. Now he sees that he did not find God as a priest, but in showing love and human kindness without thought of reward. For expressing his views in this way Tolstoy was excommunicated by the Russian Church.

972 Breakdowns

Film review by *John Hind*

Five new German art graduates from Halle on Saale, three female and two male, decide to embark upon an overland trip to New York. Since most of the distance will be in Russia and because they have limited funds they decide to use that most iconic of Russian vehicles: the Ural motorcycle and sidecar combination. Thus they purchase four Soviet-era, German registered, Ural outfits. The advantage of choosing Urals would be the availability of spares; the disadvantage would be their necessity! Their first breakdowns occur while they are still in Germany. If they know little about motorcycles now, they will learn over the next two-and-a-half years, but the film is not really about motorbikes, it's about the journey they made and the people they met.

The film opens with them in Georgia. They then travel through Russia, Mongolia and Russia again to the Bering Strait via the infamous Road of Bones. Their trip on the Kolyma River will resonate particularly with anyone who enjoyed the wonderful day out with Igor on the River Sylva on the last Perm exchange. The willing assistance, friendship and hospitality of the Russian people really comes across in the film.

The footage, mostly covering the journey through Russia, was shot by one of the travellers and the film was made under a professional director on their return. The sound quality is not always very good and even if you know the languages, the sub-titles are helpful. There are versions with English or German commentary and subtitles can be selected in a wide range of languages including Russian. Two of the party could speak some Russian and the dialogue is mainly in German, English and Russian as well as some Georgian and Mongolian. I loved the film and it is an important document about visiting a Russia which, for the foreseeable future, is out of reach.

[2021, U-cert, 110 minutes, Directed by Daniel von Rüdiger]



image: a scene from the film '972 Breakdowns'

Association News

Past Events

Our AGM was held on Thursday, 23rd February. All current members of the committee agreed to continue serving (though one or two are keen to stand down). After the official business, Alex Pravda gave a talk on ‘**The Russian Domestic Dimension of the War in Ukraine**’ followed by Questions and Answers. The AGM was well attended by about 40 members.

Nina Kruglikova took two groups of members on walks that explored Russian connections with Oxford. We visited several colleges, noted details of the streets which we had failed to observe before, and listened to stories and anecdotes packed with surprising information. You can read a fuller report on page 14.

Our seminars for PSU students have resumed, and now we are providing Zoom seminars for students at the Perm Pedagogical University as well. Colin Cook recorded two interviews – one with a GP and one with an Election Officer in which they explained the nature of their work for Perm students.

Future Events

Our annual Garden Party will be on Wednesday 12th July at 6 Rawlinson Road, starting at 5 p.m.

We hope to find a media site where we can engage in a serious discussion of the role of City Twinning in the development of civic involvement around the world.

The inaugural meeting of an Oxford Kharkiv Association has taken place. OPA is considering ways of co-operating with this new group.

Newsletter

Articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome. Articles should be sent as email attachments and can be up to about 800 words. 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. The editor is grateful to Marcus Ferrar for help with proofreading.

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Russian 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 18 June and Sunday 30 July at 10:00 BST.**

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



How Perm lives between Victory Day and the anniversary of the city

A citizen of Perm

The story of a city resident about what is happening and not happening right now: official celebrations, cancelled concerts, new signs in stores and a new system for restaurateurs

Victory Day

Recently, the 78th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War was celebrated in Perm. There was almost everything that has happened in recent years - laying flowers at monuments, honouring of veterans, a parade of military equipment, gala concerts, war songs, fireworks.

The difference is that the authorities did not allow the "Immortal Regiment" march to be held. This is a mass procession of people with portraits of veteran relatives. Despite the ban on May 9, in the centre of Perm, one could meet people walking with portraits of their loved ones. The city esplanade was attended by young people in military uniform. Many residents took pictures with them. Special photo zones were organized on the Kama embankment. For example, girls could try on a nurse's tunic and take pictures in the scenery of a military hospital. Also on the embankment was a mobile point for recruiting contracts for military service which had opened in April.

How Perm survived the departure of foreign brands

In 2022, popular foreign fashion brands closed their stores in Perm. Among them are H&M, Uniqlo, Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Oysho, Pull & Bear, Nike, Helly Hansen. Their premises in shopping centers are gradually occupied by domestic and Turkish brands. Perm residents are "lucky" - there has never been an IKEA in the city, so there is no need to think about how to replace it. Moreover, Leroy Merlin remains open and a second hypermarket of this chain is being built in Perm. This happens in "silence mode" - the Ministry of Economy urges the media not to write news about this investment project. The situation is similar with the opening of the five-star Radisson hotel in Perm. The operator did not seem to refuse cooperation, but in publications about the construction of a building for a hotel, the authorities ask the brand not to be mentioned.

The automotive market is largely reoriented to Chinese brands. Even in Perm, Moskvich cars began to be sold. This brand was distributed in the USSR. Until last spring, the plant in Moscow belonged to the Renault Group. After that, the authorities bought it out and "Back in the USSR" happened in the production of cars. Parallel imports work, so the news about the withdrawal of a foreign company from the Russian market is not always followed by the impossibility of buying the goods.

Perm's bars

Every year restaurants and cafes are shut down in Perm, and new projects are opened in their place. This rotation continues to this day. Recently, more establishments of Georgian cuisine began to open. Mostly it was bars that were shut down.

Local publications wrote how pubs and bars are trying to cope with the shortage of imported beer including English beer. If earlier the owners of Permian bars personally knew many brewers from Foggy Albion and visited them, that's now in the past. Importers have managed to arrange supplies from one or two English breweries, but they primarily cover the needs of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the rest going to the provinces. Moreover, these sales are carried out in a new way: suppliers report what kind of beer is left, the bar makes a request, and importers get in touch when it's their turn to receive a delivery.

Against the background of rising prices, Perm's cafes and restaurants revenues are growing, but expenses are rising along with them. The competition between establishments has grown, mostly because there are fewer people who go to catering establishments. The fall in real incomes of the population and the massive departure of people abroad in recent years also played a role. But this does not mean that bars and restaurants in Perm are empty. The popular establishments are still crowded.

Changes in entertainment

Cinemas in Perm continue to show world blockbusters. For example, now there is a new *Guardians of the Galaxy*. A couple of months ago, two large cinemas were closed in Perm, now there are five left. Fortunately, there are wonderful theatres in Perm, which still fill up. There are also disappointments - the Perm Theatre for Young Spectators decided to cancel the performance of the play "Goodbye to Berlin!". This happened after one viewer noticed propaganda of homosexuality in the production and caused a scandal. The performance had run for three years and received positive reviews.

Recently, several concerts have been cancelled in Perm. The stop list includes artists who publicly speak out against the war in Ukraine. Books by "foreign agent" authors are now sold wrapped in tape. Apparently, so that a casual buyer, scrolling through it, does not fall under foreign influence. Many foreign authors have been banned from selling books in Russia, and many locals have been recognized as foreign agents. The result is fewer young readers, book market participants note. In one of the large chains of stores, the most popular books among Permians in 2023 were named. In the first place is a book about psychology called "Tenderly to yourself." The next few positions in the ranking are manga (Japanese comics).

Recently, the popularity of historical literature has increased. The leaders of this category are the book by journalist Anne Applebaum *Gulag: A History*, as well as *The German War: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945* by Nicholas Stargardt, professor of history at Oxford University.

The city is preparing to celebrate its birthday

On June 12, Perm will celebrate its 300th anniversary. Major construction projects are timed to coincide with the anniversary date - a new building for the Perm Art Gallery, a large sports arena, a new infectious diseases hospital, a regional music school and others. Several major transport interchanges are being reconstructed, roads and building facades and pavements are being repaired. A month before city day, work is in full swing, and Permians sit in traffic jams in the morning and evening. Previously, if buses were delayed, a passenger might express their dissatisfaction with the conductor. Now in the Perm public transport there is a self-pay honesty system. Most pay, some risk heavy fines. But both of them are now driving in silence. It becomes scary to talk about any topic.

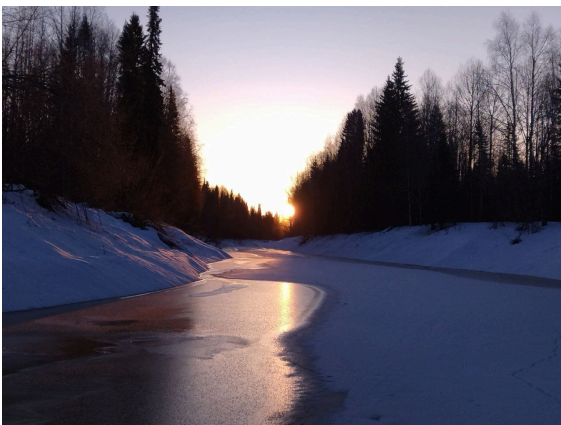


image: dawn in Perm Krai

It's hard to imagine there could be a connection between a pizza restaurant and Peter the Great. However Pizza Express, in the centre of Oxford, is on the site of the Golden Cross Inn where the tsar of Russia stayed while visiting Oxford in 1698. Even though he visited incognito he would have attracted attention with his large entourage. He visited the chapel at Trinity College before heading to Greenwich in London. This is one of many facts Nina Kruglikova shared on her Russian walking tours of Oxford which she ran for members of the Oxford Perm Association in March. I joined her on one of them to learn about Russian connections in Oxford.

In 1814, another Russian tsar, Alexander the First, visited Oxford. A banquet was held in the Radcliffe Camera to celebrate the Russian victory over Napoleon. The tsar stayed at Merton College which we visited and where we saw the giant Siberian vase in the college chapel and a double-headed eagle in a stained glass window both presents from the tsar.

Our tour also included a visit to University College where Prince Felix Yusupov was a student (1909-1912) and where he held lavish parties. He is now known as one of the people who attempted to poison Rasputin, a friend of the family of the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra. Rasputin died at Yusupov's home in St Petersburg. Rasputin's attempted poisoning failed so he was shot and thrown in the Neva river.

In All Souls college we saw a plaque to Isiah Berlin, a former fellow of the college and philosopher, who helped lobby for the poet Akhmatova and writer Brodsky to be awarded honorary degrees. Other well known Russians who received honorary degrees from Oxford University were the chemist and creator of the periodic table of elements Mendeleev; the children's writer Chukovsky; the Soviet nuclear physicist and human rights activist Sakharov; the poet Zhukovsky and the writer Turgenev. Degrees in literature didn't exist at Oxford in the 19th century so Turgenev was awarded a degree in Common Law as his collection of stories 'The Hunter's Sketches' was thought to have influenced Tsar Alexander II decisions to abolish serfdom in 1861.



image: members of OPA in Merton chapel in front of the Siberian vase presented by Alexander I

At Brasenose College, we learnt about a former student Alexander Obolensky, a member of a Russian aristocrat family, who played rugby for England, received British citizenship and died while serving in the second world war.

Nina also told us about Russian art collections in Oxford including one at Christ Church college, a large collection of 20th century Russian art in the Ashmolean museum, which has never been exhibited and the artist Leonid Pasternak's collection of paintings and drawings exhibited in his previous family home in Park Town.