

Sketches From a Quaker's Moscow Journal, by Patricia Cockrell

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a Quaker's
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PATRICIA COCKRELL

‘There is often an immediacy about the situations of which Patricia writes... one reads on eager to learn of the next stages.’ | Photo: Book cover of *Sketches From a Quaker's Moscow Journal*, by Patricia Cockrell

n stark contrast to how it seems today, in the 1990s civil society in Russia was opening up. This meant it became possible to set up Friends House Moscow, with support from British and American Friends. It drew together those in Russia interested in Quakers, supported advice work for conscientious objectors, and launched Alternatives to Violence programmes and other innovative projects.

Patricia Cockrell spent a decade at the centre of all this, developing in particular the purpose and practice of hospices in a country where these were barely known. Patricia's ability to speak Russian, her tenaciousness, stamina and willingness to cope with the practical problems of daily life (as well as the weather and travel) were all needed. Finding people who shared her aims, and developing their capacities for leadership, were a major part of what she did.

This is a very readable book. It reproduces some of the articles and journal letters which Patricia wrote at that time. It is brought to life with many little details of meetings, meals and travels. There is often an immediacy about the situations of which she writes. She does not know the outcome of any particular event at the point of writing, and one reads on eager to learn of the next stages. There are endless frustrations as she negotiates the bureaucracy of Russian government departments and hospitals, matched in due course by those of the European Union when she successfully applies for grants for establishing a hospice. But today palliative care, in and out of hospices, is part of the national medical system in Russia.

Patricia and her husband (who is also a Russian speaker) were closely involved in twinning their then home city of Exeter with Yaroslavl, a city of similar size about 250km north of Moscow. This followed her success, after many years of trying, of establishing UK-Russia school exchanges. These finally became possible in 1988 under Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost. Appointed to represent Quakers in Russia, Patricia left her job as teacher of Russian and took up this new phase. This is an account of where the strength of her concern for living out her Quaker faith took her. I'm glad it can be known and felt by others.

Profits from the sale of the book will be donated to Friends House Moscow, which continues – in today’s far from easy circumstances – to be a base for Quaker interests.