

# PERM NEWS

The Newsletter of the Oxford Perm Association

September 2011

## Mesh dancers in Oxford

My association with DRIVE, the modern dance group from Perm, goes back almost a decade. Their dancing was invariably technically brilliant and often inspirational, but during this summer exchange project with Pegasus, they surpassed themselves. Perhaps it was the poignancy of knowing that their leader Tatiana Nikitina would be leaving them soon to start a new life in Thailand, or perhaps it the confidence of being once again among old friends in Oxford: whatever the reason they were completely outstanding in every way.

Those who saw their performance 'One more time about Love' will have your own special memories. For me, it was the brilliant take on the naval guards routine and then the enchanting interpretation of the shawl duet. The interplay between individual performance and ensemble work was always of the highest standard. They rounded it off with their various contributions to the collaborative choreography during the finale in the festival's collective performance based on



Gogol's The Government Inspector in the Town Hall. This showcased a heart stopping solo by their lead dancer, Alexsey, who eventually made it to Oxford despite visa problems and hospitalisation in Perm.

Brilliant dancing apart, what the members of DRIVE gave to the festival was total commitment and participation, endlessly showing friendship and kindness to staff and other young people alike. Of course their talents and skills were superb - the outcome of enormously hard work and training - but it was the sharing of those talents and skills and the encouragement they gave to others which reflected the true spirit of a festival. What wonderful ambassadors they were

for Perm and Russia and how well their presence justified the support given by the Oxford Perm Association to help them participate.

Sadly, the young people have decided to disband DRIVE having been unable to find anyone who could succeed Tatiana Nikitana.\* However I am sure I am not alone in hoping that we shall see some if not all of the young people in Oxford again in some guise.

Chekhov wrote ‘There is nothing new in art except talent’ These young people certainly had worked hard to hone and display their talents for our benefit and to set a standard for those at this international festival to emulate.

*May Wylie*

\* last minute update: It has been decided NOT to disband Drive. Tatiana found a choreographer for the group who will do the training and she will continue to direct from abroad for at least one year.

### **Exploring civil society and local government issues in Perm**

I first visited Perm 15 years ago as regional manager for the VSO volunteer program in the Urals. Several images stayed long in my mind: the great view over the Kama River near where the city art gallery still occupies an old church building, meetings with English language and social work teachers at the university, a visit to a children’s home where we later placed volunteers. This year I came back to write a case study on the role of civil society and government in development issues. With the help of Galina Guserova from the Perm-Oxford link I visited a NGO resource centre and local community centre, human rights group Memorial, independent analytical NGO Grany, and the local government department responsible for links with public organizations. On the last of my three days, I traveled two hours northwards to the “Pilorama” festival being held in the former labour camp Perm-36.

People both in and far beyond Perm consider this as one of the friendliest, most innovative regions for civil society. The system of “social orders” has been running for over ten years and NGO representatives play a significant role in designing programs, approving contracts and monitoring the process. However, I did also hear comment that NGOs have got very close to government and was told that the Public Chamber (obschestvennaya palata) system is too formal and not very meaningful.

The Pilorama festival brought national human rights figures – from politicians to rock stars – to Perm-36 (a small set of one-storey shacks behind wooden fences and barbed wire on the edge of the forest). Over 12 thousand people attended over 3 days, the organizers calculated. When I was there it rained heavily, English-style, but this seemingly did not affect the lively discussions held in marquees set up in the camp. One was devoted to a government programme to honour victims of repression; another to Russia and Europe 20 years after perestroika; another to the results of privatization in Perm oblast; others looked at interethnic and civil society issues. The texts are promised on the site [www.perm36.ru](http://www.perm36.ru) .

In Perm region as a whole, some key economic and social problems remain to be solved. A recent United Nations report on human development in Perm krai notes, for example, the problems of half-deserted villages and polluted mono-industrial towns, low life expectancy among men, and that the reduction in the overall population has not yet been reversed.

Whereas in Perm city there are many signs of increasing prosperity and a concern for good governance. For example, over 20 community centres with space for local events, offices and equipment for NGOs have now been opened. Local authority officials referred to UK experience

gained from exchange visits as the model. A recent change which, by contrast, seems to reverse earlier reforms, is the decision to discontinue direct election of the city mayor. Despite a local campaign, the city deputies decided recently to choose him/her themselves.

*Charles Buxton, INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre, Oxford)*  
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CB's book "The Struggle for Civil Society in Central Asia" was recently published by Stylus / Kumarian Press. <http://www.kpbooks.com/Books/BookDetail.aspx?productID=214085> (or simply Google The Struggle for Civil Society in Central Asia Charles Buxton *ed*)

## Forthcoming events

There will be an **Oxford Perm Association** Party at Rewley House on Wednesday, 16th November at 7.30 to welcome the Perm University teachers who will be here this year from 12th November to 3rd December.

The AGM of the **Oxford Perm Association** is planned for the evening of Wed 15<sup>th</sup> February - time and place to be announced.

**Russian Prison Theatre - A Photographic Journal** at Pushkin House, 5A Bloomsbury Sq, London from Fri 16<sup>th</sup> Sept to Fri 7<sup>th</sup> Oct. British theatre director Alex Dower worked in Perm Prison Colony 29 in 2009 where under his direction prisoners performed stage versions of short stories by Anton Chekhov, Isaac Babel and prisoner Albert Sadrutdinov. Leading photographers Sebastian Lister (British) and Sergey Ponomarev (Russian) made a photographic record of the event which forms the subject of this exhibition. tel: 020 7269 9770 or web site: [www.pushkinhouse.org/en](http://www.pushkinhouse.org/en)

## Oxford International Links

Information on a **Fair Trade Seminar** at the Oxford Town Hall on the 10<sup>th</sup> November is given on the following site, where booking is also available: <http://oxfordfairtrade.eventbrite.com> Places are limited so please book soon to avoid disappointment. This seminar is part of a broader partnership project 'Networking in Europe: Local Governments Meet the Millennium Development Goals' with the City of Bonn (Germany), City of Potsdam (Germany), Climate Alliance of European Cities with Indigenous Rainforest Peoples (Germany), Climate Alliance (Austria), Reflex (Hungary) and Villach (Austria). Contact Rachel Capell at 01865 52537 for more information.

**The Oxford-Leiden Link**, which celebrates its 65th anniversary this year, will be welcoming a small Dutch party to Oxford for the weekend of November 11/12. The programme will include the annual dinner and attendance at the Remembrance Day service in St Giles, at which the Burgomaster, Henri Lenferink, will as usual lay the Link's wreath. We also expect the Leiden Youth Orchestra to be in Oxford in December when the East Oxford Choir and a choir from Bonn take part in a weekend of music.

Rigodons et Traditions from **Grenoble** will be in Oxford hosted by Oxford Fiddlers 29th Oct – 1st Nov – details to be announced. Contact Jean Burrell tel 249062 for information and offers of accomodation

The **Bonn Link** hopes to repeat its participation with a stall in the Bonn Christmas Market, as last year, which proved a great success: 28th Nov to 5th Dec. The Anglo-German Club, which is part of the Bonn Link, has a Christmas Market shopping trip to Bonn in December, and a Christmas Dance on 10th December at the Northcourt Centre, Abingdon.

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### Book Reviews

**The Dead Hand: Reagan, Gorbachev and the untold story of the cold war arms race :**  
**David E Hoffman** Icon Books pp 483 £20

Although you will not find Perm in the index, on page 394 of this book there is an account of a tour undertaken in 1991 by retired US army general William F Burns organised by the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate the potential of converting disused former Soviet defense factories for civilian purposes. On a freezing winter's day he visited a factory in the 'remote industrial city of Perm' and watched workers in outdoor winter clothes manning a conveyor moving bicycle parts, 'that used to hold 203mm artillery projectiles'. The conversation with the factory manager elicited the information that the bicycles, which resembled the one he owned in 1940, were to be sold for the production cost of 380 rubles, without any conception that the price should have an element for profit and investment. This was indicative of the problems to be faced in the transition from a cold war military biased and command economy to one which would need to face up to global competition. This difficulty of managing change would be one of the explanations offered for the the main theme of the book, the clinging on by Russia to elements of the arms industry which were made illegal through treaties on chemical and biological warfare. The author tells us what is known about the state of nuclear arms (e.g. that Russia still has 23,000 warheads, closely matched by the NATO countries) but his abiding concern is the level of secrecy which surrounds the storage and destruction of biological and chemical weapons mostly located east of the Urals. This is not a book which reflects well on the Soviet Union or on Russia, and the casual way in which weapons of mass destruction are treated (which also applies to the West) is, in Le Carre's words, "Terrifying".

*Daniel Scharf*

**Boris Pasternak: Family Correspondence 1921-1960.**  
**Translated by Nicolas Pasternak Slater.** Published by  
Stanford, California, USA, Hoover Institution Press, 2010.



Visitors to Perm learn of Boris Pasternak's links with the city. He spent some time in the area in 1916 to 1917 and visited Perm, which is reputed to be the basis for the town of Yuryatin, featured in *Dr Zhivago*.

Boris Pasternak's parents, Leonid and Rosalia, and his sisters Josephine and Lydia, left the USSR for Germany in the 1921. The family later went to England and settled in Oxford in 1938, made possible by Lydia's marriage to Eliot Slater. Boris and his brother Alexander remained in USSR throughout.

Boris Pasternak was a prodigious letter writer and four out of the ten volumes of the complete Russian edition of his works are letters. The letters in this volume cover many aspects of his life, his travels, his health, his immediate family and strains in his first marriage, his friends, and his relationship with a number of artists.

Nicolas Slater, the son of Lydia, has done a great service in putting together this edited collection of letters. It is not simply the translation itself, but the fact that he can supply the details necessary to allow us to read between the lines of the letters, essential as Pasternak was writing at a time when much could not be expressed directly because of the situation in the USSR. Letters were censored and expression of certain ideas or descriptions of events could lead to the most severest of penalties for the writer. For example, in writing of the execution of Vladimir Sillov, Pasternak talks of his death 'from the same illness as the late Liza's first husband' and we learn from the commentary that the husband of Leonid's niece Liza was executed by firing squad. In another letter, written at a time when Pasternak was under immense pressure because of his refusal to sign a petition calling for the execution of Zinoviev, he simply says 'Don't be surprised either at my silence or at my unproductiveness....or anything at all. All this is due to the peculiar nature of our life, which is impossible to describe at such a distance. Oh, these distances'

A remarkable book for the insights it gives into Boris Pasternak and life in the Soviet Union during this period.

*Susan Gregory*

### **Multi-lingual Russia – and a tale of two languages.**

Two Russian teachers of English at university recently stayed with me while taking one of Karen Hewitt's courses at Rewley House. One of them, Elena, came from Novgorod, the other, Lena, from Chelyabinsk in the Urals south of Perm.

In the course of conversation it emerged that Lena was Bashkir, born in Bashkortostan (sometimes called Bashkiria), an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation adjacent to Perm Region. Lena spoke the Bashkir language (she called it Bashkirski) which is the co-official language with Russian there, but is spoken by many other Bashkirs in other republics. She now

lives in nearby Chelyabinsk, a majority Russian city and region with sizable Bashkir and Tartar minorities. She works in Russian but much of her social and family life is conducted in Bashkir and it's the only language she speaks with her grandmother.

You'll know from my surname, and from my accent if you've heard me at meetings, that I'm Welsh. This is complicated by the fact that I was born and brought up in London where I spoke both Welsh and English - to my parents, and within the active Welsh chapel, church and cultural scene there. On visits to Wales I spoke Welsh almost exclusively. So I grew up interested in other bilingual experiences, as well as in the various shades of nationalism that may accompany them.

Going to Perm in the 1990s made me realise that we were far enough from the historic Russian heartland for there to be questions I would want to ask any indigenous non-Russians, but it wasn't easy to find them. There were two Tartar children in one school class I visited: I had the impression that the teacher pointed them out to prove that it wasn't an elite school. A university teacher said that her husband's high forehead showed that his ancestors were Komi Permyak. A huge mosque in the city was being restored by devoted volunteers, but the one we met seemed to be from a southern republic; it was only later that I learnt that the most northerly indigenous Muslim community in Russia lived a short way outside Perm. And I wanted to check how far the assumptions about language dominance that I grew up sensing in English friends were also present, about Russian, among our host community in Perm.

So here I was with two visitors, Lena from an ethnic minority and Elena from the Russian heartland, both in my house at the same time. I had to jump at the chance, and over chocolate and an old cassette recorder I asked some of my questions.

**MP:** What do you now say is your nationality?

**Lena:** I would say I was Bashkir. For official purposes, such as passport, I'm Russian. But in Chelyabinsk region, if I'm asked, I say Bashkir. I don't look Russian. I don't have the Slavonic appearance.

**Elena:** I consider myself Russian. I identify myself as Russian though my father's roots are not fully Russian. On my father's side my grandmother was partly Ukrainian and partly Jewish; my grandfather was either French or Czech - we can't say for sure. But it seems to me that it doesn't matter now.

**Lena:** We had old USSR passports and my mum's and my dad's had Bashkir written in them, but not now. Abroad I say I am from the Russian Federation, but if people ask if I'm maybe from Japan or China, and if they're interested, I say we're a multinational country. In Soviet times it was different.

**MP:** What languages did you learn at school and university?

**Lena:** My father is an army officer and he was sent to Georgia. I started school there and learnt to speak Russian. I also spoke the Bashkir language with my grandparents. In the second grade we had to learn Georgian, but then my father was posted to Germany and my mother decided to go back to Bashkortostan. We learnt Russian, but I had to start to speak Bashkir in school, and learn other school subjects in Bashkir, so for a time it was difficult for me, because I'd only spoken Bashkir to my grandmother. Then my father came back from Germany and we moved to Chelyabinsk when I was eight, and from then on I was taught everything in Russian. In the Bashkir areas in Chelyabinsk Region Bashkir is taught, but other subjects are in Russian. The next language I learnt was English and when I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> form I started studying it properly. When I entered university I decided to study English and Turkish, because Bashkir is a Turkic language and the grammar is very similar. We had Russian students and two Tartar students studying



Turkish and it was very hard for the Russians but easy for us. We used to be able to study Bashkir at Chelyabinsk University, supported by the Bashkortostan Republic, but it's now closed; you can still study Bashkir elsewhere.

**Elena:** I learnt English at school, then German at University.

**MP:** What is the attitude of young Bashkirs to their language?

**Lena:** I was surprised that some young people from the Bashkir areas of Chelyabinsk Region only speak Russian, don't think it necessary to speak Bashkir at all. They just want to learn English. Some prefer to speak Russian but if you speak to them in Bashkir they will. My younger cousins understand Bashkir but don't speak it. We have a union of young Bashkirs and my friend teaches Bashkir to young people who don't speak the language but want to. In Bashkortostan they have the news and other Bashkir television programmes on their own television channel. In Chelyabinsk you can get those programmes via satellite, or Bashkir radio.

**MP:** What about religion. Does that go with language?

**Lena:** For Bashkirs the only religion is Islam. Language and religion are connected. Young Bashkirs don't think about this - they go to parties with alcohol. Sometimes we rent a big nightclub for parties for young Bashkir people; our parties say on the ticket 'no alcohol' but sometimes people drink before the party, and sometimes we just don't let them in. We celebrate the festivals, and sometimes wear national costume. But the relationships, helping other Bashkirs, aren't as strong as they used to be.

**MP:** Do you meet people from ethnic minorities in Novgorod?

**Elena:** In the Communist period we had the policy of bringing everyone together in one big family of nationalities. In Novgorod region there is at least one settlement of people from Uzbekistan. Later on other people arrived, such as Armenians.

**MP:** Did you think of them as Russians?

**Elena:** No, they didn't look like Russians.

**Lena:** We are all citizens of Russia, but not Russian

**Elena:** The Armenians don't pretend to be Russian but they do speak Russian very well and try to assimilate. Now we have other nationalities coming and they seem like strangers. It seems to me that like English people we have always been a little bit snobbish towards minorities. We look at them as our younger brothers, though we are quite aware that some of these cultures are ancient. To be imperious is the feature which is similar in us both. But we all understand that there is good and bad in Russian and other nationalities. We have our extremists - our skinheads as you have here, but they are the minority.

[This interview has confirmed for me that there are, at least on the surface, many issues shared by Welsh and Bashkir. I recognise similarities of language policy in schools, and that television and higher education are seen as crucial to the language's future. I also, later, found out that just as in the Welsh semi-autonomous state, the named nationality isn't in the majority: in 2002, 36.3% in Bashkortistan were Russians, 29.8% Bashkir and the remainder Tartar and other smaller minorities. So what about the future? The efforts of the last few years have given Welsh a better chance of survival but we can't predict, any

more than we can, ultimately, even for English. I finish by asking Lena the question that probably haunts us both.]

**MP:** Will Bashkir survive?

**Lena:** The language is surviving but I think some time in the future it will disappear because parents prefer their children to be taught Russian and English, because they think Bashkir is not necessary.

**Elena:** If you had to choose which language would you prefer?

**Lena:** I prefer to speak both languages.

*Mari Prichard*

### **Miscellaneous items**

The following extract is from the RAGA web site [www.raga.org](http://www.raga.org) by Dr. Vladislav Krasnov. Readers may recall the article by him in our October 2008 Newsletter about Donald and Rosemary Crawford's book, Michael and Natasha: The Life and Love of Emperor Michael II, the last of the Romanov tsars."

On Tuesday August 9 there was presentation of my book *Пермский крест: Михаил Романов* (The Permian Cross: Michael Romanov) at the Perm Regional Library

On Friday August 12, on behalf of my friend and RAGA associate Jon Utley, I donated two documentary video films made by a Boston College team about Soviet GULAG. The gift was given to Museum of Political Repression "Perm-36", and the ceremony took place in the American Corner of the same Perm Regional Library which also got a copy.

My book's contention is that the true last Czar of Russia was not Nicholas II, but his younger brother Mikhail (Michael) Aleksandrovich in whose favor Nicholas II had abdicated. Mikhail "ruled" but one day during which he deferred the assumption of power until after the Russian people decided on a form of government via universal election to Constituent Assembly. Suffering a crushing defeat in the election, Lenin's Bolsheviks forcibly dissolved the Assembly and never again put "Soviet power" to the test of general election.

*Vladislav Krasnov*

### **Note to members of the Oxford Perm Association**

This is *your* newsletter. If you have any suggestions for articles which you would like to submit, recommendations for articles, or comments you wish to make, please contact the editor David Roulston (email: [djrouls@btinternet.com](mailto:djrouls@btinternet.com), tel: 01993 813 215). The next issue is due in January 2012 so submissions please by 15<sup>th</sup> December.