

# PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Oxford Perm Association

January 2010

## Three Months in Perm: Impressions

As a student of Russian, I recently had the privilege of spending three months of my year abroad working as a “*nositel’ yazyka*”, a language assistant, at Perm State University. I was attached to the Department of English Language and Intercultural Communication at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures. My primary responsibility was to work with first- to third-year students of all the different faculties of the university: students at Russia’s prestigious state universities are required to study a foreign language during the first part of their course. Over the three months I taught around 45 groups of PSU students.



At PSU students are taught in “pairs”, periods of two academic hours. Groups of 10-15 are the norm, although for lectures and some classes several groups are taught together. Generally, I would be invited to talk to groups in English on a one-off basis. The purpose of this was twofold: first, talking to a genuine native speaker would be useful to build fluency and naturalness in conversation; and secondly, being able to ask questions of a British person would

increase the students’ understanding of British culture and our way of life.

Some of the most frequently asked questions were predictable, others were less so. It would be possible to say that I have come to understand my own university better as a result of my experiences in Perm: as soon as students found out that I was from Oxford, I would be asked about all aspects of life in the city, encompassing everything from student rituals to the length of the winter to the exact locations used in the Harry Potter films. Oxford’s tutorial system – which involves less contact time than the system in place at PSU – aroused particular interest, as did the university’s division into colleges and the existence of rituals such as matriculation. When I introduced photographs of the “dreaming spires” and the Radcliffe Camera to the lessons, the city’s architecture was hugely appreciated. Overall, it would be hard to overstate the goodwill towards Oxford University displayed by the students.

Certain aspects of traditional British culture attracted attention, notably the Royal family and, specifically, the Queen. I was surprised when Russians expressed a longing for monarchical government, and groups studying History and Administration were especially interested in the structures of constitutional monarchy. British tea-drinking was discussed almost every time: Russians are aware of our idiosyncratic habit of adding milk to our tea, and classical English literature has created the myth that in Britain people still take tea at precisely four in the afternoon. Universities in Russia have subsidised “buffets”, which sell tea and snacks to

students during the academic day, and it was sometimes necessary to correct the misconception that college bars in Oxford routinely serve pints to students in the breaks between lectures.

There is a strong awareness of certain aspects of British culture among Russian students: the Union Jack is significant in Russian youth culture, British pop music is almost universally popular, and the BBC is highly thought of. Often I came across students who knew more about nineteenth-century English literature than I do.

As far as accommodation is concerned, the Russian student hostel is the cultural equivalent of the Oxford college, and could be said to characterise the Russian student's experience. Since Russian students are allocated housing together with other students from their faculty, their neighbours and their classmates are often the same people. Two to four students live together in a room, fostering a strong community atmosphere, and the close proximity of such a large number of students allows a strong local identity to develop over the four or five years of a student's course of study. Students have a particular sense of pride in their own student hostel,

sometimes cemented by joint excursions and initiations. Often the hostels publish a termly newsletter, which showcases the work of the students of that particular hostel. And, as in the Oxford system, the management of each hostel has a certain degree of independence from the main university administration. But PSU's hostels are larger than any Oxford college – the hostel in which I was staying contained perhaps 750 or more students, spread over nine floors – so students socialise primarily with other students from their own floor. Hostel accommodation is allocated only to students whose families live in other cities, so the several years of hostel life draw together students from towns all over Perm region and beyond.

Ultimately, my most lasting impression from my stay in Perm will be the tremendous hospitality and warmth of so many of the students, teachers, and other Permians whom I met over this all-too-short period, and their genuine goodwill towards Oxford and towards Britain in general, which both reflect the success of previous cultural exchanges and offer much hope for the future.

*John Ellard*

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## Perm celebrations - some personal impressions

There have already been some excellent reports on our visit to Perm for the birthday celebrations in 2008. We thought we would just add a few personal reflections.

We first heard about the invitation to the Mayor of Oxford and his colleagues at a Perm Association Committee Meeting. The Mayor could not attend so he asked the Perm Association to fill the gap. Ken, being averse to anything which happens at short notice and violently opposed to any kind of multi-tasking, tried to conceal the whole thing from me but was cruelly exposed by the stark realities of Outlook Express. Initially very

reluctant to accept such a radically unexpected change of plans, he became an immovable object (almost!). A democracy of two, of course, requires a special kind of referendum to resolve such a delicate issue. I had the casting vote!

Eventually, minus one or two fingernails, he agreed to go, as long as the arranging of visas and flights did not prove to be too difficult. In the event, this was fairly easy, and the real clincher was that four of our friends in the Perm Association had also decided to go - so we would not be exposed alone to whatever awaited us. A further incentive

was that we realised we would be able to visit our old friends, Misha and Ira Bukharov, who had sold their flat in Perm and bought a house near the airport. They had already been demanding an immediate visit from us to inspect their new purchase.

Why a 285<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration? On the face of it, this seems a rather idiosyncratic idea, but this, of course, is Russia! Enough said. We did subsequently find out that they like to do this every 5 years, and who are we to argue against a 5-yearly vodka-fest. Sufficient to say, any excuse will do. We were taken on tours which went from an erudite exposition of Pasternak and Dr Zhivago in Perm to wading through ankle-deep broken bottles (recycling not an option) at a spectacular firework display in the middle of the night; from an initially formal mayoral reception to a display of hand-made dolls; and finally to an exotic evening boat trip on the Kama River. Interspersed in all of this were some interesting visits to very Permian restaurants. All of this was superbly planned and carried out.

Staying with our Russian family after the celebrations, we visited two dachas owned by their friends and, of course, we experienced one of the other sides of Russia. One of these dachas (which we had visited many times before) is not strictly a dacha at all, but a permanent home without a flush lavatory or running water, but with domestic warmth and hospitality dispensed as ever by Ivan and Anya. There was the usual

feast, including fresh and bottled vegetables all grown on their enormous plot - with, unsurprisingly, not a little vodka. The second visit, spontaneously arranged, was to a weekend dacha owned by friends we had not met before, he a former colonel in the military. Although addressed by Misha with the more formal patronymic, this new Ivan (Fedorovich) appeared to us no more formal than any other person one might meet in the Russian countryside. Nina, the colonel's wife, was wearing a 'Sainsbury's pinnie' as worn by our mothers or grandmothers, but here there was a flush toilet and full plumbing - great hospitality and, guess what, not a little vodka! To us, as Brits, what is so impressive about all this is that, whether relying on the produce from the garden for subsistence or using it as weekend treat, the feel for, and affinity with, the soil of Russia appears to be common to all. Their kitchen gardens are a delight to behold.

Sometimes irresistible forces meeting the objections of immovable objects have a happy outcome. This was such an occasion - we both enjoyed ourselves immensely. We do not see Perm as a paradise with no drawbacks but our affection is constant because of the persisting and, we trust, continuing dissimilarities from our own lives. Vive la difference! (It's OK to throw in some French - Tolstoy created a compelling precedent.)

*Frances (and Ken) Cugnoni*

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## Dates for your diary

### **Annual General Meeting**

The AGM of the Oxford Perm Association will be held on Wednesday 10 February 2010, in the Buttery at Wolfson College, Linton Road. There is parking space in the college and in adjacent streets. Programme:

6.30pm	Drinks and nibbles
7.00pm	AGM
7.30pm	Speaker: Andrew Kahn on "In the Perm Footsteps of Osip Mandelshtam".

### **Future plans**

Plans are under way for Permians to participate in the Oxford Folk Festival in 2010.

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## Night Club Fire in Perm

Following news of the dreadful fire in a night club in Perm, individual OPA members sent messages of sympathy to friends in Perm. Mari Prichard also sent the following message to Mayor Shubin on behalf of the Oxford Perm Association.

"We write to you now on behalf of all the very many people of Oxford who have come to know about the City of Perm, and who have friends there. We wish to offer our sincerest sympathy and condolences to all those who have suffered in the terrible fire which killed those celebrating at the nightclub. We think of the families of those who died and the victims who survived but who will have to undergo many operations, and whose families will share their pain and uncertainty.

People in Oxford listened in distress and horror to the accounts of the accident which were reported round the world. Many of us know Perm well, and have been phoning and writing to our Perm friends to find out more details. Since most of the victims were younger people, some, perhaps, have been to Oxford. We grieve for them all.

Please pass our sympathy and pity to all the families of the victims. Today, on your Day of Mourning, the city of Perm will be in all our minds."

We received this reply from Tatiana Grigorieva, on behalf of Mayor Shubin: it also refers to Mary Clarkson, the Lord Mayor of Oxford, initiating the offer of an Oxford medical team, specialists in treating burns, to go to Perm. On Russian advice they then went to Moscow, where many of the victims most in need of treatment had been taken.

" Thank you and Perm Association very much for your sincere message to Mayor Shubin and people of Perm. It is good to feel that there are friends who can support when misfortune comes.

This is a very hard time for Perm now, we all are depressed. Chief Executive Arkady Kats sent in his resignation and the City Council is now discussing the situation at a special meeting.

Two councillors - Maria Batuyeva and Sergei Titov - have daughters who were affected and they are in a bad state in hospitals now.

Oxford medics flew to Moscow to help Perm patients transported there on Monday, but we have no other details.

Thank you again for your sympathy, it was very important for Perm."

## News of other links

### Bonn

The Oxford Bonn link was very much in evidence at the Christmas market in Bonn from 9 to 20 December. Local Oxford produce was much appreciated by the people of Bonn and many new twinning links were made. It might just turn out to be an annual event.

### Leiden

In September, Colin Cure, Director of Oxfordshire Association for the Blind, together with two friends, undertook a sponsored charity cycle ride from Oxford to Leiden, to raise funds for work with blind and partially sighted people.

The Blackbird Leys Choir took part in the Rapenburg Festival in Leiden. They gave a concert in the Rijksmuseum and also performed in a park.

The Feestkapel Decibel Band from Leiden took part in the Christmas lights celebration in Oxford city centre on 27 November, and also gave a free concert on 28 November at Wolvercote Youth Centre.

### Leon

The Oxford Leon Association and the Oxford Leon Trust are planning to merge as a single organisation to be known as the Oxford Leon Association and Trust.

OLAT is planning a number of fund-raising events in support of projects in Leon: the annual Misa Campesina (folk mass) at Blackfriars in March; a Latin American/Salsa evening on 11 March at the South Oxford Community Centre; and a sponsored swim in May.

### Grenoble

The cabaret on 16 October raised £200, which will go towards funding the 25th anniversary of the Oxford-Grenoble twinning in 2013.

In October a party of Grenoble teachers visited Oxfordshire schools, at the start of a programme of teacher exchanges between the two regions.

The Grenoble band Torivakki, who specialise in Balkan music, will be in Oxford for the Folk Festival, from 16 to 18 April 2010.

East Oxford Community Choir is embarking on a project to sing Mendelssohn's oratorio 'Paulus' with its twin choir ensemble vocal Interlude in Grenoble and Oxford. Since this is a long work, part 1 will be performed this year and part 2 in 2011

EOCC will be visiting Grenoble over the coming Easter, Thursday 1 April to Tuesday 6. Fifty Eurostar/TGV seats are being held at the advantageous fare of 102 pounds return.

EOCC would be delighted to welcome any OGA members or friends who'd like to join them on this trip – deadline for committing to the group train journey is 17 January, though of course it would be possible to decide later and make your own travel arrangements. There will be a social programme arranged and free accommodation with friends in Grenoble

Interlude will be coming to Oxford in May for further performances – possibly accompanied by members of the Alliance Grenoble-Oxford

## Oxford International Links News

OIL is planning a St Patrick's Night celebration on 19th March 2010 at North Oxford Community Association Centre, Diamond Place, Summertown, in aid of Oxford International Links. Irish meal and entertainment which will include the Oxford Fiddle Group. Tickets £10 (£6 for under 16s) from May Wylie at the Town Hall on 01865 252537 or mwylie@oxford.gov.uk

## 'Material interests' in the activities of zemstvo deputies in late 19th-century Perm

*The zemstvo was the body of local self-government, established in Russia in 1862, to manage social and economic spheres of society. Zemstvo assemblies and boards (at provincial and district level) were the main zemstvo institutions.*

The zemstvo became an important factor of political life in the Russian Empire as one of the first institutions of a civil society in the country to be based on elections. The value of zemstvo reform was not only that the new institution contributed to the development of the economy and infrastructure of the regions and the solving of social problems, but that the government recognized the necessity of involving the community for consideration of these questions. Therefore the zemstvo had a certain autonomy.

The basic directions and development of zemstvo activity inevitably depended on the experience and competence of the deputies [elected members], and what is even more important, on the motives guiding those who stood as candidates at the elections to the zemstvo. The motives of deputies to zemstvo activity were sometimes political (deputies could use zemstvo assemblies as a political tribune for the statement of liberal or other ideas) or social-psychological (first of all, the altruism of deputies and their aspiration «to serve society», and also their need for personal self-affirmation, acquisition of authority and status in society). Also motives were connected with estate, profession and what they could acquire by being deputies. All these motives played an important role, were considerable and various. However in this article we will pay closer attention to the material interest of deputies in zemstvo activity. Material interest was essentially own-profit to the deputies; it had different forms and different impacts on zemstvo activities in general.

It's a well known fact that corruption in state institutions in Russia has been very extensive. However the zemstvo as

a body of local self-government formally was considered as an institution independent of the state, and therefore bribery as such in the zemstvo was an exception to the rule. However, the forms of personal gain were rather various.

Not all the population of the Russian Empire could participate in zemstvo activity, but mostly representatives with high property qualification. Therefore activity in the zemstvo of businessmen and large proprietors was an effective way to promote their commercial interests. The offer of Moscow zemstvo deputies to create a bank financed in common by the zemstvo, land owners and businessmen is an example. The deputies couldn't explain how the bank could benefit the zemstvo, but the advantages for the deputies themselves were obvious. (However, liberally-minded deputies opposed this project and it was not carried out.)

Deputies were involved in setting standards for the distribution of zemstvo taxes. Liberal-minded deputies promoted progressive principles of taxation (size of tax depended on size of property). The system when large proprietors paid larger tax than poor people would have been the result. Therefore large proprietors were personally interested in the establishment of reduced tax rates and tried to promote uniform distribution tax norms.

Zemstvo had their own budget, and consequently the potential possibility of illegal use of these funds remained. Many examples of simple embezzlement are in zemstvo history, when shortages were found in zemstvo offices. At the same time a defect of the zemstvo was that responsible persons (such as chairmen of zemstvo boards) spent money from their budget for personal

needs. One such case happened in one of the sessions of the Perm zemstvo in 1880 with I.F. Kitaev, chairman of the district zemstvo board. The scheme of this act is interesting also. He sent money to the post-office as payment for future post services, and the next day he took the money back privately, failing to mention it at the board meeting. Similar situations occurred repeatedly and extended to other areas.

Deputies were repeatedly accused of waste for unforeseen needs. It means that deputies could plunder directly the finances, and also exceed their powers, when expending money for payment of personal expenses and for increasing the comfort of zemstvo sessions. For example, at the nineteenth session of the Perm provincial zemstvo meeting, deputies considered a case of wasted funds from the budget of the Kamyshlovsky district zemstvo. There had been unforeseen and illegal expenditure on travelling and living costs during the session period by some deputies, and also a case of assignment by one of deputies of a higher salary to himself as member of the district board and illegal expenses on drinks and foodstuffs.

Deputies could appropriate not only money resources. Any property of the

zemstvo could be usurped too, including agricultural stock and bread from spare shops. N.E. Filippov, employee of the Solikamsk zemstvo, tried to explain the waste of zemstvo property, including agricultural accessories.

There was no special supervising organization independent of the zemstvo; therefore frequently it was not possible for investigatory committees to find out the various abuses in the zemstvo. A report specified that financial documents were created randomly and «there was no possibility to use such documents to check up who and how many people had given out money from Board funds».

Thus, it was possible for dishonest representatives of the zemstvo to use variously their position at the zemstvo in their personal interests. Some deputies attempted to give their actions lawful forms when arranging lower tax rates for similar social classes, other deputies illegally spent zemstvo funds. The prevalence of such corrupt activities of deputies in the provincial zemstvo does not mean material interests were the chief motivation for becoming zemstvo deputies; however, it accurately shows the immaturity of this first institution of civil society in Imperial Russia.

*Nadezhda Gorbacheva*

*Nadezhda was one of the teachers from Perm who came to Oxford in 2008. During the past year she has completed her 'kandidat' dissertation which is approximately equivalent to a PhD. It investigated the activities of the Perm zemstvo. The above extract may remind readers of some of the activities of our own elected 'deputies'.*

## A Library for the Oxford Perm Association?

Over the years I have collected a fair number of books on Russia which may be of interest to members of the Oxford Perm Association. I have the standard histories, several of the works of Orlando Figes, scholarly studies written by bemused observers of the Soviet Union, and a year-on-year collection of books written about each stage of Perestroika, the collapse of the USSR,

the Yeltsin and then the Putin years. This section is not systematic, and no doubt many of you have many books missing from my shelves.

About three hundred of my books – by far the largest part – are translations of Russian literature from Pushkin to the present day. Many of these are the great classics in a variety of versions, but I also have a good library of Soviet fiction, much

of it in appalling but fascinating translations by conscientious Soviet Russians. Not having been near Britain, they obviously pondered over dictionaries and took a literal but distinctively-coloured view of our world while conveying the incomprehensible marvels of their own. Some writers such as Victor Astafiev and Vassily Shukshin have survived this treatment.

Former member of the Association, John Goto, presented me with his own beautiful multi-volume edition of *Art of the Peoples of the Soviet Union*, which is lavishly illustrated. As an addition to this survey, I have individual volumes produced by provincial art galleries from many Russian cities, and an assortment of books on Russian photography, film and architecture.

Like many of you, I also have a special Perm collection, including the beautiful volume illustrating the city's unique collection of 'wooden gods' (Permiak wooden religious sculptures that seem to me the greatest of Perm's many treasures).

Finally I have an assortment of Russian texts edited for students; they are ideal for those who have moved from basic grammar to reading real Russian.

Of course this collection of a few hundred volumes cannot rival the major university libraries, but it occurs to me that there may be members of the Perm Association who would like to borrow these books – and others who have their own collections that they would be happy to share. For example, I have very few books on St Petersburg; I've been concentrating on the provinces. Some of you may be able to fill in the gaps.

So I have two suggestions:

(1) Anyone who wants to borrow any of my books is welcome to come to 6 Rawlinson Road and look through them. You can phone or email me to find out whether I have what you are looking for. (2) Anyone who would be happy to lend books from their collection can let me know more-or-less what they have, and I can then pass on this information to would-be borrowers when I cannot provide what they need.

This is a tentative proposal. If it can be improved, expanded, or taken over by someone with more knowledge of lending libraries, please let me know!

*Karen Hewitt*

Oxford and Perm in winter – but which is which?



*Photos by Natasha Koriukina (Perm) and Joan Bellinger (Oxford). Answer below (in Russian).*

*Оксфорд направо, Пермь налево*