



# PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter October 2018

## Chekhov's Gardens *Rosamund Bartlett*

Although Chekhov is best known as a writer, he was also a doctor and a philanthropist, whose humanitarian impulses inspired him to undertake a perilous journey (via Perm) to study one of imperial Russia's most notorious penal colonies on the island of Sakhalin. And he was also an avid gardener, whose happiest hours were spent poring over seed catalogues, planting trees and tending his roses. These were not idle pursuits as far as Chekhov was concerned. 'If it hadn't been for literature, I think I could have been a gardener' he confessed, in a letter towards the end of his life. Chekhov's longing for tranquil green spaces began when he was a young boy. After his father's bankruptcy, when he was a medical student in Moscow and publishing comic stories to help support his family, he lived for the summer months when they could all leave the city and rent a dacha on a country estate. By this point, Chekhov was desperate to have his own garden, a dream he only realised in 1892 when he purchased a run-down property in the village of Melikhovo, south of Moscow. The shabby wooden house full of bedbugs and cockroaches was a far cry from the fabled classical columns of classic Russian novels, but there was plenty of space for a garden, not to mention a cherry orchard. The severity of the Russian climate posed challenges for cultivation, but Chekhov's family had green fingers, and they all pitched in. Before long there were healthy-looking pastures, a thriving vegetable patch, a mass of new saplings and beds full of luscious blooms.

Chekhov's province was trees and flowers. Aided and abetted by his two beloved dachshunds, Bromide and Quinine, who had a habit of digging up the seeds he carefully planted, he rapidly acquired horticultural expertise, and was soon sending peremptory and precise orders to his sister while he was away. The beauties of the Melikhovo garden soon entwined themselves around his writing, finding reflection in his stories and plays. When tuberculosis forced





Chekhov to re-locate to the Crimea in 1898, gardening became an all-consuming passion which took his mind off dying - until he became too ill to bend down and prune. As he wrote in one letter, 'the garden is going to be spectacular. I am planting it myself, with my own hands. I've put in more than a hundred roses alone, all of them the noblest and most elegant varieties, and fifty pyramidal acacias, and lots of camellias, lilies, tuberose, etc.' The garden's 159 different species were all carefully recorded by Chekhov in a special notebook in both Latin and Russian.

In his deep awareness of the part played by the natural environment in our physical and spiritual well-being, Chekhov was ahead of his time, and he led by example. Like Dr Astrov in *Uncle Vanya*, he was an unglamorous *zemstvo* doctor committed to improving public health, which led him to open a clinic in his village for the peasants and offer free treatment. He planted thousands of trees, and, as a man condemned to a short life, used his writing to try to awaken us from our complacency. One need only recall Astrov's warnings about the ecological threats posed by deforestation in his play, or look at the opening lines of his sombre story *Ward No. 6*, where he describes a neglected mental asylum surrounded by burdocks, nettles, and wild hemp which is separated from open fields by a grey

hospital fence studded with nails sticking sharply upwards. Chekhov's healing work as a doctor, writer, gardener and philanthropist, and the growing evidence of the health benefits of gardens, lay behind the creation of [Anton Chekhov's Garden](#) at the 2018 [RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show](#).

A project has been launched by the [Anton Chekhov Foundation](#), a UK charity. Its aim is to create much-needed therapeutic gardens in hospitals and clinics in the UK, Russia and Ukraine. The show garden, designed by Oxford-based [Anna Benn](#) and [Hannah Gardner](#), was inspired by Melikhovo, where Chekhov grew herbs to use as traditional remedies when his supplies of medicine quickly ran out. Its permanent home will be the innovative [Culm Valley Integrated Centre for Health](#) in Devon, led by [Dr Michael Dixon](#) OBE, who is a noted advocate of preventative medicine and non-biomedical intervention. Our dream is for this garden to be a springboard to creating Anton Chekhov's Gardens in Russia, and it would be wonderful if the first could be established in a clinic or hospital in Perm. Anna Benn and I would be very pleased if any interested Oxford Perm Association members would like to explore any potential opportunities and become involved.

[Rosamund Bartlett](#) is an Oxford-based Chekhov biographer and translator whose campaign to help preserve Chekhov's house in Yalta led to the establishment of the Anton Chekhov Foundation, of which she is a Trustee: [www.antonchekhovfoundation.org](http://www.antonchekhovfoundation.org). The above invited article is based on the author's talk earlier this year.



During my recent visit to Perm, as part of the Oxford Perm exchange, I had requested that I meet with some of the NGOs working in Perm. I was also interested to find out more about how civil society groups work with the local authority. Two meetings were organised, firstly with NGOs involved in working with the elderly and then a meeting in a community centre in the 'Industrialnyi' District of Perm

From my own involvement in working with the NGO sector in parts of the Former SU, I am aware of the evolution of the Non-Governmental or Civil Society sector in Russia. Whilst in Soviet times large NGOs, such as the Red Cross and Children's Societies, existed and other, more local, forms of activity were encouraged through the facility of 'initiative groups' whereby groups, could get support for local projects, since 1991 the sector has grown. Initially, during the turmoil of the 1990s, foreign donors and international NGOs were involved in supporting growth of NGOs, both in terms of humanitarian assistance and also as part of the so-called 'democratisation' agenda. Increasingly, however, the Russian government at all levels has become very active in assisting its growth.

I was invited to meet officials from Perm City Council, including the deputy Mayor Lidiya Korolyova, at the Stakhanovsky Community Centre. I was told that the idea of Community Centres is based on the Oxford experience with such centres. The Stakhanovsky Centre is the largest of the 39 Community Centres in Perm and is one of two such centres which serve the Industrialny Administrative District (population 169,000), which is itself the largest of the 7 districts of Perm. The welcome from the staff and volunteers at the community centre was very warm, and we observed a variety of community activities and NGOs hosted by the centre. There are 160 public associations (NGOs) registered in this District, and a total of 2,338 in Perm.

Although the Russian government is wary about foreign funding of NGOs – introducing the Foreign Agents' Law in 2006 which limits foreign funding for certain types of activities, this does not really affect NGOs working in the social sector. Since 2000, there has been an increase in domestic mechanisms for providing support for the voluntary sector, and NGOs themselves have become more adept at fundraising. Recently the national government has announced that it will be rating each of its regions according to the levels of support given to 'socially oriented' NGOs and social entrepreneurs. Perm city supports its local NGOs through providing information, office space and subcontracting services.

Peoples' attitude to the NGO sector have also evolved since the early 1990s, from initial distrust of non-state activity and concern about tax evasion and corruption to an acceptance that this sector can play an important role. NGOs see themselves as advocates for vulnerable groups rather than in opposition to the state. Attitudes persist in Russia that civil society should support the state and not oppose it or offer an alternative view.

There are new ways for NGOs, and individual citizens, to work with government and influence policy. In 2015 the government launched a national mechanism of citizens' forums which are linked to the operation of the Civic Chamber at national level. Perm city itself initiated ways that citizens can be involved in discussions about local issues and policies. Each district in Perm has two Neighbourhood Associations (NA) which represent the citizens of that district – this is in addition to the district level council with its elected and appointed deputies. NA delegates each represent around 100 flats, and the NAs aim to meet monthly. I was told that 77% of Perm's population is represented through such mechanisms – and it was recognised that such a system has been facilitated by the fact that similar systems existed in Soviet times. There are meetings of the NAs at both district and city level, which organises an annual conference of Perm NAs. In addition delegates are sent to regional level conferences and these feed into the annual National Citizen Forum. The city also organises Round Table discussion groups to discuss particular issues to which members of the NAs and representatives of local NGOs are invited.

In addition to the meeting at the Community Centre, I and other members of the Perm exchange

group, were invited to tea in a new restaurant housed in a renovated warehouse in central Perm. We discussed NGO work with the elderly and compared experiences from Oxford and Perm. Representatives from the Veterans Association, from volunteers working with the elderly and from the Museum of Modern Art, which has a programme to encourage participation of pensioners, told us about their work. And we enjoyed a very fine tea!

## **Learning Russian**

*Jessica Vlasova*

If you are thinking of learning Russian here is a list of suggestions, all of which I have used at various stages. They range from the traditional to the digital....

### **The New Penguin Russian Course, A Complete Course for Beginners by Nicholas J Brown**

This is the book that is used on some Russian Beginner courses in English universities and is fast paced but with clear explanations. Each of the 30 chapters has a reading passage, grammar points, exercises with a key and vocabulary lists. However there is no audio accompaniment so not recommended as a stand-alone course.

### **Evening Classes**

Weekly language classes are on offer at:

University of Oxford Department for Continuing Education

<https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/about/weekly-classes>

Oxford University language centre

<https://www.lang.ox.ac.uk>

Russian Language Centre in London

<https://www.russiancentre.co.uk>

### **Individual lessons**

There are Russian teachers in Oxford offering individual lessons. Alternatively you could have lessons on Skype via the Moscow State University (MGU) language centre <https://mgu-russian.com/en/learn/courses> They charge 16 euros for an academic hour of 50 mins

**Language Exchange** <https://www.italki.com/home>

Once you are able to say a few phrases you could consider finding a language partner on Italki. The idea is that you find a native Russian speaker who wants to learn English and talk to each other on Skype. You divide the time between Russian and English conversation. At first it might only be 10 minutes in each language but as you progress you can increase the amount of time spent talking to each other. It is free and there are plenty of tips on their site as to how to set it up, prepare for language exchanges and topics to talk about.

**Duolingo** <https://www.duolingo.com/>

This is a free language learning website with an app for tablets and phones. It has a 'simple to use' design with bite sized lessons and, with over 300 million users, has become the most popular way to learn a language online. It mimics the structure of video games in order to engage its users and is scientifically proven to be effective. It teaches pronunciation, is cleverly designed so that if you make a mistake you are asked the same question a bit later and tracks your achievements.

The downside of Duolingo is it doesn't allow you to see future lessons so you don't know where you are heading. If you are not a beginner you still have to work your way through some of the lower levels. Also, the feature where you can click on the lesson you are on to see grammar notes or skip to the next level can only be accessed if you are using Duolingo on your computer not on the app.

**Russianpod101** <https://www.russianpod101.com>

This is an online language learning program developed by Innovative Language Learning. The aim is for you to hear Russian spoken by native speakers presented in 15 minute lessons. The basic level is free. However, when you register you are offered a free 7 day trial in which you can try out everything on offer with their different subscriptions after which you can stay at basic or upgrade. Depending on which subscription you chose they offer hundreds of audio and video lessons, line by line audio dialogue, voice recording, transcripts of lesson materials, pdf lesson notes, spaced repetition flash cards, podcasts of their lessons, a word bank and grammar notes and progress tracking.

## **Reports on Recent and Forthcoming activities**

### **Past events**

The **Discussion Group** had its fifth meeting in May where we had a wide ranging discussion under the general heading 'Where do we go from here?' including the Skripal affair and the recent Putin election. At our October meeting we had two topics: The Skripal affair and 'Post-cold-war history including NATO expansion and Putin as president' If any members are interested in joining the discussion group, please email David or Karen.

The **summer Garden Party** was held as usual at Karen's house where over thirty members enjoyed once again the pleasure of meeting one another and talking about Oxford Perm twinning and other common interests. A used-book stall was of particular interest, and playing croquet was an added attraction.

The Perm Association attracted over 100 people to the lecture theatre at Rewley House for a fascinating **talk on Chekhov's gardens by Dr. Rosamund Bartlett**, with specialist input on the flowers and other plants by Anna Benn. After the talk (see her article in this newsletter), we raised £460 in donations for the Anton Chekhov Foundation.

In August OIL (Oxford International Links), inspired by the successful visit of the East Oxford United Football Club boys to Perm last year, organised a **Football Tournament for our twin cities and local Oxford clubs**. Perm, Leiden and Bonn sent teams of 12 and 13-year-olds who all spent a week at Hill End Camp, enjoying fine weather, a beautiful site, training with Oxford United trainers and games on Oxford pitches. The Perm boys had the advantage of an extra week before the other teams arrived. Volunteers –



many of them from our Association – provided meals, activities and drivers for the mini-buses.

In September **eight of our members spent two weeks in Perm as guests of Perm State University**. This was the twenty-ninth annual visit and the sun shone over the Silva River as they all went canoeing.

## **Forthcoming events**

**The Annual Perm Association Party for the teachers from Perm State University** will be held, as usual, at Rewley House, Wellington Square, from 7.30 on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> November. Members are asked to provide some finger food; wine and juice will be provided by the Association.

**Five young dancers from the Panfilov Ballet in Perm will be performing in a special production with Pegasus Theatre** on 10<sup>th</sup> November. The performance, ‘Still We Rise’ is inspired by the suffragette movement.

**11<sup>th</sup> November.** One of the teachers or one of the dancers will lay a wreath at the **War Memorial** on behalf of the people of Perm.

## **New web site**

The Oxford Perm Association is pleased to announce the launch of its new website at <http://www.oxfordperm.org> . We would welcome any comments or suggestions you might have about the site. Also please send any photographs you have of visits to Perm or OPA related events in Oxford to add to our gallery. In order to conform to the new GDPR guidelines regarding publishing photographs, we need the permission of identifiable people. You can ask them, and if they say, ‘That’s fine’, then we can publish your liveliest photos. Website contact: [jessica.vlasova@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.vlasova@gmail.com)

## **Obituaries**

Readers who knew Vivienne Taylor will be shocked to learn of her sudden death in August. Vivienne visited Perm as part of the September group in 2006, and subsequently was much involved with visits of Russian children to London. She came often to our gatherings and in July she was playing croquet at the Garden Party, typically lively, helpful and ready to tackle anything. This will be my memory of her. *Karen Hewitt*

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Derek Summers on 24<sup>th</sup> September. Members will know Derek and Carol well from their regular attendances at Perm events. They may also be familiar with Derek’s poetry, of which two evocative poems were printed in [Perm News January 2012](#) based on a visit to Perm. Our thoughts are with Carol and their family at this sad time. *David Roulston*

## Newsletter details

Would all members please note that articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome for this Newsletter. **The submission deadline for the autumn issue of Perm News is 14<sup>th</sup> January** but it is helpful if you let the editor David Roulston (contact details below) know sooner if you plan to submit an item. Articles should be sent as email attachments preferably in doc or docx format and not exceed about 600 words plus two jpg images, or 800 words maximum with no images. Shorter articles are always welcome. Note that due to the new GDPR legislation, individual permission for publication is required for any photos which include recognisable people. Readers can browse all past newsletters on the web site at [Past Newsletters](#). The editor is grateful to Sue Gregory for her invaluable proofreading and general help with each issue of Perm News.

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## Russia against the rest by Richard Sakwa

*Reviewed by David Roulston*

This book is an authoritative and detailed history of 'Russia and the West' covering the period 1988 to 2017. It is written by the established academic, Professor Richard Sakwa, University of Kent and follows his earlier work 'Frontline Ukraine' reviewed in [Perm News June 2017](#) which is more narrowly focussed and, in the view of this reviewer, somewhat easier to read and digest than this new more comprehensive book. The reader may also find Peter Conradi's book (reviewed in [Perm News October 2017](#)) relevant in this context.

However, this important historical account helps the reader to understand the events which have led to the present impasse between Russia and the West and to comprehend why Russia has taken some recent actions and what is behind some of the US decisions. The eleven chapters cover such areas as: Cold War to Cold Peace, Order without Hegemony, America and Global Leadership, The EU, Europe and Russia, Towards a Post-Western World. Because so many historical events and decisions are covered, the length and detail pose a problem in writing a short review of the work for Perm News. The book includes views and statements by most major players in the period studied. The following extracts are intended to give the reader an overview of the material covered.

In chapter 1 the reader is reminded of the speech in December 1991 marking Gorbachev's resignation and the disintegration of the Soviet Union that President Bush three times described the event as a 'victory' of the American people and values. Some aspects of the deleterious effects of NATO enlargement are then outlined and the views are given of well known statesmen such as Henry Kissinger on how Russia should be treated in the early years. The effect on Russian leaders of NATO enlargement is explained as is the view of William Perry, who led the Pentagon between 1994 and 1997, and who argued that the hostility between Russia and the US was in part provoked by Washington's contemptuous treatment of Russia's security concerns after the Cold War.

The early years include details (chapter 2) of the effect on President Yeltsin of the NATO intervention in Bosnia on 1995 and the NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo in 1999 without a UN mandate. The reader is reminded in chapter 3 that at the April 2008 Bucharest NATO summit, Georgia and Ukraine were promised eventual NATO membership. One of the indirect consequences of this was the bombardment by Georgian President Sakashvili of South Ossetia in August 2008 and the retaliation by Russia, with the EU fact-finding commission headed by Heidi Tagliavini reporting later that Georgia enforcers started full scale hostilities.

In chapter 4, the author recounts the abrogation of the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty by George W Bush in June 2002, followed in 2007 by Bush's announcement of plans to install a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system in Poland and the Czech Republic and the effect on Russia US relations. Sakwa explains that Putin has resisted the path of outright revisionism and his foreign policy has been 'reactionary' in both senses of the word. Russia has reacted to every significant event in world politics, asserting its point of view even when, typically, its view was not welcomed.

The author uses the statements of some knowledgeable diplomats to inform readers. Ex US ambassador to Moscow Jack Matlock is quoted with reference to the BMD system: 'too many American politicians looked at the end of the Cold War as if it were a quasi-military victory rather than a negotiated outcome that benefited both sides'. In chapter 6 the UK ex Ambassador to Moscow Tony Brenton is quoted saying that western policy was built on false premises: first, that Russia is a revanchist state; second, that economic sanctions can stop Russia 'with sanctions deployed six times since the Second World War and they never worked'.

In the later chapters, Sakwa expands upon the Russian grievances mentioned briefly earlier in his book. These include US abrogation of the ABM treaty, the war in Iraq, alleged sponsorship of regime change in Russia's neighborhood through so called colour revolutions, the fact that the USSR supported the west in the First Gulf War of 1991 in response to Iraq seizure of Kuwait in August 1991, the fact that the USSR and Russia worked with the west to achieve the peaceful reunification of Germany.

In the concluding chapter the author explains that 'for Russia, the hitherto foundational principle of integration into a transformed western Community accompanied by the creation of some sort of Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok was over, at least for this generation'. He concludes that international relations today are more perilous than at any time since 1989.

This reviewer thoroughly recommends this book to any person wishing to acquire a deeper understanding of relations between Russia and 'the West' or as a reference book for the complex array of historical facts covered since the end of the Cold War to the present day.

## **Some recent Extracts from our twin city - Perm Oxford news**

Galina Gusarova 4 September at 04:59

На Красной площади выступил Имперский юношеский оркестр из Великобритании

С 24 августа по 2 сентября в Москве прошёл Международный военно-музыкальный фестиваль «Спасская башня». За десять дней на Красной площади выступили военно-музыкальные коллективы из многих стран.

Имперский юношеский оркестр города Брентвуд, являющийся одним из самых успешных юношеских марширующих оркестров Великобритании, в фестивале «Спасская башня» принял участие во второй раз. «Мы рады вернуться в Россию». Дети испытали настоящее наслаждение от этой поездки, она оставила у ребят массу приятных воспоминаний», — отметил дирижер оркестра Джонпол Виндхэм.

Оркестр из Брентвуда завершил своё выступление на Международном военно-музыкальном фестивале «Спасская башня», исполнив «Полюшко-поле» русского композитора Льва Книппера.



The Imperial Youth Orchestra from Great Britain performed on Red Square

From August 24 to September 2, Moscow hosted the International Military Music Festival Spasskaya Tower. For ten days, military musical groups from many countries performed on Red Square. The Imperial Youth Orchestra of Brentwood, one of the most successful youth marching bands in the UK, took part in the festival "Spasskaya Tower" for the second time. "We are happy to return to Russia." The children were really pleased with this trip, leaving a lot of pleasant memories for them, "said the conductor of the orchestra Jonpole Wyndham.

The Brentwood Orchestra completed its performance at the International Military Music Festival "Spasskaya Tower", performing "Polyushko-pole" by the Russian composer Lev Knipper.

Galina Gusarova 9 June at 04:29  
О встрече А.В.Яковенко с Э.Бриггсом

6 июня, в День русского языка, отмечаемый в день рождения А.С.Пушкина, Посол России в Великобритании А.В.Яковенко встретился с известным британским русистом профессором Энтони Бриггсом. Посол вручил учёному личную благодарность за многолетний труд по исследованию русского языка и литературы и вклад в литературный перевод. Э.Бриггс - автор биографий А.С.Пушкина, Л.Н.Толстого, Ф.М.Достоевского, П.И.Чайковского, он перевёл на английский язык ряд произведений русской классической литературы, включая романы «Война и мир» и «Евгений Онегин».

The meeting of Alexander Yakovenko with E. Briggs

On June 6, the Day of the Russian language, celebrated on the birthday of Alexander Pushkin, the Russian Ambassador to Great Britain Alexander Yakovenko met with the famous British scholar Professor Anthony Briggs. The Ambassador presented the academic with personal gratitude for his many years of research into the Russian language and literature and his contribution to literary translation. E. Briggs - the author of biographies of Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, F. M. Dostoyevsky, P. Tchaikovsky, translated into English a number of works of Russian classical literature, including the novels "War and Peace" and " Eugene Onegin"

## **PERM: A FASCINATING FEAST OF OPERA AND BALLET** *Marcus Ferrar*

If you travel to the edge of the Urals, you don't necessarily expect that your most memorable experience will be world-class ballet and opera. I am not a great fan of either genre, but in my two-week exchange visit to Perm in September I came away thrilled by some truly moving performances.

First, I pay a visit to the Perm Ballet School, enabled by our host's ballet dancer fiancé, who graduated there. At once, I feel the passionate devotion to a vocation and the disciplined pursuit of excellence. I understand why when I realise that the school was founded in 1945 by dancers evacuated from besieged Leningrad (St. Petersburg) in World War II.

That explains why the corps de ballet in the



performance of *Don Quixote* I saw was so perfectly harmonised. Perm follows St Petersburg's Maryinsky tradition of dancing exactly and all together, to an extent hardly any other ensembles attain. It brought back memories of seeing Leningrad's Kirov Ballet in the West during the Cold War. Together with the exuberant dancing of the soloists and the sumptuous costumes and stage setting, it was a performance I would want to see even if I went to a ballet only every ten years.

The first head of the Perm ballet school, Ekaterina Heidenreich, spent a year in a Gulag during the Stalinist years for voicing bold opinions. The school displays a newspaper reporting her arrest, with forbidding police photos. She was freed after high-placed friends interceded.

I take a peek into a class, which contains not only Russians but Mongolians, Chinese and Japanese, reminding me that Perm is on the road to the Far East. In corridors outside, pupils rest. Or rather they contort themselves into amazing shapes to keep supple. To my untutored eye they are extra-terrestrials.

Perm is not a place to see experimental staging. In the opera *Prince Igor* by Borodin, the décor faithfully depicts the time of Russians' ancient struggle to assert themselves against Mongols in the east. Interestingly the opera is about a Russian defeat and mixes patriotism with villainy, yearning for freedom and magnanimity by a victorious enemy. It sets you thinking about Russian history: in a programme note, conductor Valery Platonov commented that 300 years of Mongolian control had shaped Russian selfhood, and are "the root of our unrestrained corruption and the source of eternal Russian turmoil."

Ten years ago, opera was out of favour in Perm, and ballet tickets included a free performance of opera to draw in audiences. Now both genres attract full houses, and the theatre-goers trailing in from ramshackle

Communist blocs and broken roads in the suburbs are smart and fashionable.

I was treated also to *Sleeping Beauty* and *Eugene Onegin*, and was happy to indulge to the full. Back in England, for a long time I shall feel no need to struggle for expensive tickets at Covent Garden.

