

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

January 2008

My impressions about trips to Great Britain

In childhood when I was the small schoolboy, I knew that Great Britain is an island. And the people living there possess the island psychologies. Great Britain versus the entire world. These words always were for me a riddle. It is necessary to note, that I studied at a very good school with the profound studying English language. Of course our teachers tried to create a positive image of your country. But it was very difficult, because in the sixties and seventies, we had the heat of cold war. My impressions about Great Britain were very naive. In my memory it was a picture of patchwork English fields and illustrations to Jerome K. Jerome's book "Three men in the boat to say nothing of the dog". Certainly, we learned about political system of Great Britain, told about London and so on. But our teachers had never been in your country and for them it was *terra incognita*, therefore they could not create a real image of the country in my mind. However, it was not their problem.

We studied English language as a language of the potential enemy and, in case of war, so that we could become military translators. In closed-for-foreigner's Perm city English language at this time was a dead language, like Latin. In the university the situation was similar. I remember, how one lieutenant colonel on university military department absolutely seriously approved that one refuelling of soviet armored troop-carrier is enough for speeding up The Strait of Dover. I wanted to ask: 'and what about the British fleet one of the biggest in the world? Will it look indifferently as a mass of the Soviet infantrymen forces passage and lands on a sandy beach? And how shall we rise on high cretaceous rocks on our armored troop-carriers?' However I was silent. At this time such question was absolutely inappropriate and even unpatriotic and most of all anti-Soviet. Of course the days of Stalin totalitarianism had finished and I would be not planted in prison, but everybody would think that I am mad. Everybody knows that 'From taiga up to the British seas the Red Army is stronger.' These are lines from a popular song of those years.



Portsmouth harbour and Spinnaker Tower (see page 2)

Fortunately all this has the end. In our country perestroika began. The Iron Curtain failed, and I fortunately visited Great Britain four times. It was very useful trips. In my first visit I was amazed how creatively Englishmen are working. In the Soviet Union work was usually associated with heavy, monotonous processes. Many people tried somehow to

use cunning, be late, to not make the task in time, in general to be unobliging. This attitude very often was profitable, nobody will give you this work once again, but the salary will be completely paid. In Oxford I have seen, that it is possible to receive such pleasure from creative work. No minute late and do your business up to the end – these slogans were in my mind after the first visit to Oxford for language practice in 1994. I expanded my lexicon and on the second week began speaking English without the translator in a head. It was the first step of immersing in the language environment.

Second time in 2003 I have the individual program in Oxford. This trip was perfectly organized. I do academic research in Bodleian library, have trips to the country side and meet with numerous friends. At this time the economic situation in Russia changed to better we see light in the end of the tunnel. For the first time we realized, that the worst times already behind, and we become a part of the Europe too.

Then on economic rise in Russia, our country began to become richer so we start the Russian national educational programme and as in the days of Peter the Great sent our university teachers to Europe for study. So in May 2007 I was in red brick University of Reading. Our group of 13 persons dealt with computer courses. Before this trip we have passed rates of the profound studying of English language. We were offered textbook *Total English*. Of course all of us were laughing about the title. *Total English* contains only 10 topics! But never the less it was good practice 150 school hours (45 minutes) during two semesters. In the end of these courses we have a surprise. Our teachers throw away all the useless programmes and we study academic English using their own original programmes. So in Reading it was very useful practice both in computers and in English language.

Most of all I realized some of my dreams and have followed the track from Reading through the Thames pass to Henley on Thames. Next day I travel through the old Roman road to Wallingford. In total I do 75 kilometers for two days.

After first three trips I had a firm impression, that Great Britain is very big and densely populated country. I could not realize that it is island. In same impression had the majority of my friends ever been in Great Britain. And it is not surprising. Many inhabitants of Perm region and central Russia see the sea very seldom. Since childhood we know, that you can travel from Perm to any direction very far and very long for example for two days to Black sea and for five days to Pacific Ocean. Therefore on the fourth visit it was very interesting to me to have a look to the sea surrounding Great Britain. And, owing to diligence of my English friends, my dream realized! Karen Hewitt perfectly organized the programme of my visit in Great Britain. For the first time I have seen the present cretaceous rocks in Bournemouth area, have crossed a gulf on the ferry, sailed in passage Solent, have seen the military ships and aircraft carriers. Especially I was amazed with intensity of movement of big ferries, ships and uncountable quantity of sailing vessels on an output from a bay of Portsmouth. And panorama of the English Channel from the height of the Spinnaker Tower impressed me deeply!

The trip to the Snowdonia national park was very impressive too. In previous visits I see only hills and now I see mountains. So I realized that England have whole highland. Not England but Wales will say the local residents. And you understand, that Great Britain also multinational country. From the tops I managed to see the sea in several directions. Here I really understand, that the Great Britain is an island.

It is difficult for Russian to understand character of Englishmen. My short experience of stay in this country prompts that very important feature is the opportunity of choice. Englishmen choose always and everywhere. Even to the top of Snowdon they use different ways: one of them two or three kilometers of scrambling through Crib Goch Ridge for the most experienced. After the first look to the narrow crest my verdict was: I would never send my first year students here. We notice that if you fall there you will fly down approximately 300 metres in one and 400 metres in other side. To my horror some

of crazy English sportsmen jumped through this narrow crest (from 30 centimeter up to 1 meter in width). Adventurers more than Russian I thought. But when I start moving along I immediately felt that all stones are fixed on the places. Hundred thousand rock-climbers which have been here before me have dumped all unstable stones. And now if it is no strong wind you can move absolutely safely. Nevertheless my instinct of self-preservation has not allowed my jumping from a stone to another and I scramble in traditional manner. Near the top fog fall down. And suddenly under our legs we heard hooter of locomotive. It was another possibility to reach the top in a small train. It is the simplest, but also the most expensive way. The majority of travellers used the third way, the footpath to the top paved by steps. I was shocked that stones for a footpath were delivered in mountains by helicopters in order to protect natural view of mountains.



Igor Volkhin on Crib Goch, Snowdon

Such variety is not traditional for Russians. Usually, if you go from one settlement to another through Russian taiga you can use only one road. Many English tourists do not understand why Perm region is so limited in tracking and we prefer canoeing. But after the first visiting to taiga they quickly realize the situation. I think that Russian conservatism is possibly based on limitation of free choice. For us 100 kilometres is not a distance, 100 years is not a time and 100 thousand is not a money. Long Russian winters, and necessity of hard work in short summertime have generated typical features of the Russian person. He is very long waiting, but then, having woken up from hibernation, solves problems quickly and considerably. Englishmen, to my opinion, are more pedantic and solve problems easily and without haste. In some sense our cultures are complementary and possibility to adopt experience is very important to each other.

So it was unique possibility to do the academic research in Oxford library. To work with the books on the open shelves without harrising that is a dream of many Russian teachers. And, at last, twice, on first and on last day of my stay in Oxford I saw dreams in English. Probably the quantity of language practice has passed into quality and I managed to plunge into the language medium on one more level.

I express sincere gratitude to all my friends in Great Britain for an exclusive possibility to conduct the academic work and to travel across Great Britain. Many thanks and we are always glad to accept our old and new English friends in Perm.

Igor Volkhin, Perm State University

Dates for your diary

Seminars at St Antony's College

This term's topics are on the theme of "Popular Culture in Russia". Seminars are held on Mondays at 5.00 pm at St Antony's College. Remaining dates are February 4, 11, 18, 25 and March 3. Talks are at 5.00pm in the Nissan Lecture Theatre.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Perm Association will be held on Wednesday 13 February 2008, from 6.30 to 8.30pm, at Wolfson College, Linton Road, Oxford. We have invited Judy Pallot to give a talk on 'Women prisoners in Russia'. Food, wine and soft drinks.

Celebration mugs

Philip Clayton has designed some special Oxford-Perm mugs. They are made of fine china with a gilt rim, with, on one side, little medallions of English cathedrals, and on the other side, medallions of Russian churches, most from Perm region. Around the top is a frieze of alternating ox heads and bear heads. These mugs cost £5 with profits going to the Perm Association. They would make ideal gifts for your Russian (and English) friends. Philip will be selling them at the AGM.

Garden party

Karen Hewitt will host a Perm Association garden party at 6 Rawlinson Road on Wednesday 16 July 2008.

Pavlova Quintet

On 6 August there will be a recital in the Holywell Music Room, by the Pavlova Quintet from Oxford and a quintet from Perm. Further details to follow. The Pavlova Quintet also hopes to visit Perm in the autumn.

Exchange visit to Perm

The annual group visit to Perm, under the auspices of the University of Oxford and Perm State University, will take place between 13 and 28 September 2008. Further details from Karen Hewitt.

Membership subscriptions for 2008 were due on 1st January. If you do not pay by bank standing order and have not already paid, would you please send your cheque for £8 per member to: Cynthia Styles, Membership Secretary, Perm Association, 1 Carey Close, North Oxford, OX2 8HX.

If you have a friend who is interested in joining, please let Cynthia know and she will send a leaflet containing an application form and a description of the association.

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Oxford International Links News

Oxfam Fair

OIL ran stalls at the Oxfam One World Fair in the Town Hall on 17 November, the Broad Street Christmas Fair and Lights Ceremony on 24 November and the Green Fair on 8 December, netting over £700 for OIL projects and also raising the profile of the links.

St Patrick's Night

There will be an OIL fundraising "St Patrick's Night" event at North Oxford Community Association Hall, Diamond Place, Summertown, at 7.30pm on Friday 14th March 2008. Tickets, to include a meal, Oxford Fiddlers Group and Irish entertainment, at £10 (£6 for under-16s), from May Wylie at Oxford Town Hall.

Band Festival

A Band Festival for all the twin towns will be held during the first weekend in August 2008. John Lubbock will direct, and there will be a grand finale with all the bands playing together.

Flood Management Seminar

A seminar for all twin towns on Flood Risk Management will be held on 6-9 November 2008, culminating with all the delegates from Oxford, Leiden, Bonn, Grenoble, Perm and Torun taking part in the annual Remembrance Day parade and service.

News of other links

Bonn

A group of about 80 people, from six different groups, visited Bonn in October for celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the Oxford-Bonn link. It was a first visit to Bonn for the Oxford Fiddlers Group.

There is now an Oxford-Bonn Fire Service link, and one young fire officer will be visiting Oxford in February 2008 as part of a course.

The 2008 Bonn Karneval will take place during the first weekend in February.

Grenoble

The Oxford Grenoble Association is about to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the link with Grenoble.

Leiden

An official delegation of 20 Leiden Aldermen and officers attended a seminar in Oxford on 'Changes in the Labour Market' and then took part in the annual Remembrance Day ceremony in St Giles on Sunday 11 November.

Leon

The Leon link has a new web site: www.oxleonlink.org

The annual Misa Campesina (Nicaraguan peasant mass) will be held at Blackfriars at 11.15am on Sunday 2 March. The organisers are always happy to welcome new singers and instrumentalists to take part in this event. The Latin American rhythms are exciting and quite challenging! Rehearsals are in Blackfriars at 10.00am on Saturdays 2 February and 1 March.

Golden Hands

I went for a weekend to listen to Shostakovich. I also heard a talk about Russia Today. It was intriguing and I was hooked!.

So I went to Perm. I went with considerable trepidation, and returned two weeks later enriched with a wealth of experiences.

The most uplifting was meeting Ludmila. Here, in England, I am involved with a group of people who do patchwork and quilting. So I was particularly pleased, before leaving, to read, in the newsletter, about a group of quilters in Perm.

In common with quilters the world over I am a fabric-holic so, I raided my store and took a number of fabrics with me to give to the group in Perm. I had some difficulty finding the patchworkers but with only two days left, Nina my hostess managed to arrange something. It was a tea party! It was held in Ludmila's apartment which was full of her work. She had taught the women in Perm, including those in the Disabled Society, to do patchwork.

I have been to many exhibitions of patchwork and quilting. People do exquisite work. Usually they make bedspreads, cushion covers and wall hangings.

Ludmila's work was different. She made clothes! She made national costumes, all hand sewn – not just dresses but hats as well! She used a pattern for these called 'log-cabin'. This style with its clear lines, abundance of beautifully matched fabrics and its very traditional heritage was perfect for national costumes.

She had also used a technique called 'crazy patchwork'. She had used silks and satins and embroidery as others had. But most people use it to create a wall-hanging or a cushion cover. Not Ludmila! She used it to make an elegant jacket and a saucy little hat.

The most poignant work was a tryptich - three cushion covers she had created, in a style of her own, to illustrate her life. The first was brightly coloured and vibrant and represented her youth. The second had lovely colours but was quieter to show how she had been in middle age. The last was stark and dark with only a little light in the middle. She talked about the last one. It was made when she became ill. The small amount of light represented a little hope.

She was vivacious and delightful. She was a great host and she loved my fabrics. We drank tea and wine and ate fruit and cakes. We made long speeches and toasts. We took photos. And we laughed and had fun.

After we left, and were in the street, the other women were able to tell me that Ludmila had had a late diagnosis of cancer and was terminally ill. So difficult to believe.

Just before Christmas I was asked to support her nomination for a Master award at the Perm annual Festival for Women. I was very happy to do this as her work was both innovative and exquisite. Sadly, as I set out to write this article, I heard that Ludmila had died. A few days before her death she learnt that she had won The Perm Women's 'Golden Hands' award.



Jenifer Newman

Linking for Life!

Ksenia Trosheva from Perm State University married Adrian Hewitt on 15th December 2007. Adrian is Karen Hewitt's stepson. He met Ksenia when he gave a talk on environmental problems to the Perm teacher's group in November 2005. Subsequently he visited Perm and wrote an article for this newsletter on environmental issues in Russia. Many people will have met Ksenia who used to teach English at PSU because she helped to organise the programme for the three most recent September groups who have been to Perm.

Ksenia is now living with Adrian and with her daughter Masha, aged seven, from a previous marriage, in London. She intends to keep in touch with Perm University, and is looking for any part-time work (translations, brief stints as an interpreter, advisor on Russian life and culture, etc.) If any member of the Association has any suitable work they would like Ksenia to do, please contact her on <ksenyatrosheva@rambler.ru> (the spelling is an alternative spelling of her name) or contact Karen Hewitt at <karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk>

A Perm Village

Having grown up in a village in Devon I have always been fascinated by descriptions of villages and village life provided by Russian classical literature. Examples are the agricultural exploits of Levin in Anna Karenina and, to give just two examples of lesser known works, The Life of Arsenev by Bunin and The Business of the Artamanovs by Gorky.

It is a small step from that to becoming consumed with curiosity with regard to the state of Russian villages today and the sort of life which goes on in them. Like me you will probably have had the frustrating experience of speeding along main roads or railway lines with crooked signposts pointing to inland villages only a few miles away but to the casual visitor utterly out of sight and unobtainable.

The BBC has recently produced a number of reports on this subject but there is nothing like first hand knowledge [especially where all things Russian are concerned !] and that is why I was delighted when on my third visit to Perm in September of this year by the courtesy and great kindness of two professors from Perm University I was conveyed to a small village quite a few miles outside Perm where one of them had grown up and where there still lived one of her elderly relations.

After travelling many miles from the city the highway gave way to a muddy dirt road which in places was only passable as a result of the extreme skill of the driver [the husband of one of my friends].

The house appears as a typical Russian house with triangular shaped roof sitting on four windows facing the 'street' and divided from it by the usual wicket fence. What first caught my eye was a sizeable stack of hay stored beside the house, an early indication that the house and its surroundings amount effectively to a very small farm or what we used to call a 'small holding'.

We were welcomed with great courtesy by my hostess, an elderly lady who still lives in the village house where she came as a bride. She lives alone and my first impressions, which I had no cause later to alter, were of a woman of robust health and great force of character. As we inspected her domain it became clear that she ekes out a precarious living by a system of subsistence farming.

Her chief sources of support are her goats and her very large vegetable garden. Although it was not the season to expect much sign of growth she had recently lifted a large crop of potatoes, stored against the winter.

The house consists of effectively one room with a sort of back house at the back but there is another conjoined part of the house which by its appearance and contents could be described as a barn. In the middle of the room is the familiar stove from which she prepared us some very appetising soup.



A village house owned by dachniki in the Perm region

After lunch she took us for a walk past what had previously been the pastures of the collective farm down to the river. Many people she explained had left the village in recent times to emigrate to places as far off as America. Many of the houses were empty with overgrown gardens. Many were occupied by dachniki who only visited at week ends and , as she commented scornfully, let their gardens go to ruin. The pastures of the former collective farm lie empty and uncultivated for as she explained no one owns the land so no one tills it. Our path led to the river which makes a sweeping curve as it leaves the village so that it appears as a lake of incredible beauty in the incredibly beautiful Russian countryside.

On the way back to Perm the traffic coming towards us was almost continuous. When I asked where they were all going I was told they were the previously referred to dachniki going to their villages for the week end. I wondered if they were aware of the question which they had inspired my hostess to put to me – ‘how can there be any future for the country if people don’t till their vegetable gardens’?

I have heard much less sensible questions emanate from much higher authority

Harold Burnett