

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

October 2002

Folk Dance Festival

In June, a group of 18 folk dancers and musicians from Perm, together with over 50 from Oxford, Bonn, Leiden and Toruń (Poland), took part in a folk dance festival, entitled "The Unbroken Circle of Dance". The group from Perm, who arrived on Sunday 16th, took part in the Cowley Carnival and performed at St Ebbe's Primary School, an Asian Lunch Club, Bayswater Middle School, John Callie Court and at Blackbird Leys.

The other groups arrived a few days later, on Thursday 20th, and all groups were welcomed by the Lord Mayor in a reception in the Assembly Room of Oxford Town Hall. Next day there was informal dancing in Christchurch Meadow, Westgate Shopping Centre, Cornmarket Street, and near the Kings Arms - during which there were collections for community projects in Leon (Nicaragua) and Perm. The day continued with an afternoon street parade in the city centre; community performances and workshops at Blackbird Leys Community



Centre (Perm), Barton Community Centre (Toruń), and West Oxford Community Centre (Bonn and Leiden); performances at city pubs and hotels, and at the Victoria Arms.

On Saturday 22nd, there were all-day performances in the Town Hall and the city centre; a Grand Finale at the Town Hall; and a well-attended Ceilidh and Supper at the Emperor Ballroom, Rover Sports and Social Club, Cowley. On Sunday 23rd the groups toured the Cotswolds, dancing at Burford Garden Centre (see picture above), Standlake and Bourton on the Water, before having a barbecue and farewell party at Youlbury Scout campsite.

This was a colourful and vibrant series of events, which made a considerable impact in the city and elsewhere in the county, and we are all indebted to May Wylie, International Officer, and to the Oxford International Links Committee for the success of the festival.

Medical services in Perm

In August 2001, Brenda had a problem with gall stones, resulting in an emergency operation in a French hospital, and precluding our planned visit to Perm in September. "Never mind" they said, "it could have been worse. What if it had happened in Russia?"

This year, we tested the implications of this comment. On our fourth day in Perm it was my turn to be struck down - by a kidney stone. What are the odds against that? The pain began on the bus en route to the university where, along with Julia and Edith, Brenda and I met Leah, a teacher in a school for gifted children, and walked to the school. The others went to different English classes, while I stayed in the staff room, waiting for the mysterious pain to subside. It didn't, and after an hour I obviously needed help. A secretary rang Emergency Medical Services and in about five minutes a doctor appeared and rapidly diagnosed a kidney stone that had moved and lodged in the urinary tract. Helena, one of the teachers, spoke excellent English and was able to translate instantly all the medical terms.

The doctor had arrived by ambulance, which took us to hospital where, within 10 minutes, a second doctor confirmed the diagnosis and - blessed relief - ordered a pain-killing injection. In the next couple of hours I had x-rays, an ultrasound scan, and an IVP. The first two showed exactly where the stones were, and the latter revealed that I could not go to the next stage quickly, as they had hoped. The stone had blocked the system and until that was cleared ... It was going to be a long job.

I was in the care of the Head of Urology, who spoke excellent English, and Professor V M Subbotin, very senior in the hospital and a warm, immensely reassuring man. He explained the situation and offered to treat the condition when it settled down. However after a night in hospital it was apparent that it was not going to settle quickly, and we decided to fly back to the UK. Professor Subbotin wrote a prescription for pain-killing and anti-inflammatory drugs which kept everything under perfect control all the way home. We took an Aeroflot flight to Moscow, flew BA to Heathrow and, armed with my Russian x-rays, ultrasound scan pictures and IVP photographs, I presented myself at our local NHS hospital.

So, what are the abiding memories of Perm medical services? Speed, technical ability, a very caring attitude, modern equipment, very high standards of hygiene - and all working together in very dilapidated buildings. It suggests that surroundings matter a lot less than the skills and care of those who work in them. From the technicians to the professor, they were highly professional, effective and people-oriented, and I am grateful to them all.

My thanks also go to Helena, the teacher who went well beyond the bounds of duty by staying with us for hours to translate; to Slava, who took over from her and slept on a bench outside my ward all night, just in case I needed help; and to our hosts Natasha and Volodya, who did everything possible to help.

So, was Brenda lucky to have been ill in France, rather than Perm? I think not. The surroundings were unprepossessing, but the people were first class.

Hugh Nisbet

Two Dogs, a Lift and a Thunderstorm ...

... are just three elements of a trip that took ten year twelve students and two teachers from Cheney School to the eastern edge of Europe. With the assistance of the City Council and a substantial grant from The British Council we travelled to Perm in Russia to take part in an Art summer camp with Russian students.

After a flight to Moscow and overnight in a huge hotel, where we stayed on the twenty-second floor, we had a day's sightseeing in the city. At four in the afternoon we boarded the train for Perm and at three the next afternoon we finally arrived. As honoured guests of the City of Perm we were given a police escort to our camp, an hour and a half drive into the surrounding countryside.

We spent a week at the camp set in the forest and on the banks of the Kama River, which at this point is over a mile wide. We took part in combined art lessons and master classes. We visited the City, attended a civic reception and spent some time with a famous local artist whose studio and gallery are in the penthouse of Perm's tallest building. The building has a very unreliable lift with a tendency to stick between floors!

We gave four television interviews, were featured in the local press, performed a number from "Grease", discovered the joys of the Russian sauna and were caught in the heaviest thunderstorm any of us had experienced, the lightning striking far too close for comfort. Mostly and most importantly we spent a lot of time meeting and talking to our Russian hosts. It was a trip none of us are ever likely to forget.

And if you are wondering about the dogs ... that's another story.

Peter Barker, Cheney School

Ralph Perry

Members of the Perm Association may have read of the sad death of Ralph Perry at the age of 47, after a long illness. Mr Perry was Area Commander for Oxford between 1994 and 1999. The obituary in the Oxford Times referred to him as "one of the finest senior police officers ... a thoroughly modern and intelligent man, who epitomised the best of the service's traditional values." He was "a familiar figure in Oxford's schools and community meetings, relentlessly seeking support for imaginative ways of reducing youth crime." He was "widely regarded as being responsible for improving the relationship between local councils, Oxford's universities and police, boosting the force's reputation in Oxford and its commitment to community policing."

In addition to his management of local policing, Ralph took part in the Know How exchanges run by OCVA. He worked in Perm with the then Head of the Perm City Police, Arkady Kamenev (now the Mayor of Perm). He organised several return visits to Oxford and enabled Arkady to visit the police training college. He was a real supporter of the link in its early days, and it is doubtful that some of the relationships we now enjoy with the authorities in Perm would be so strong if they had not been nurtured by Ralph Perry.

Thanks are due to Liz Brighouse, Derek Holmes and the Oxford Times, for the above information.

Other recent events

Allotments and Dachas Exchange Bidy Hudson and Anna Eden from Oxford visited Perm in the summer.

Youth Art Competition Fifteen students from Cheney School visited Perm in July, to take part in this event.

Igor Volkhin Igor Volkhin, keen canoeist, engaged in research and teaching in Physics at Perm State University, visited Oxford in July and August.

Visit to PSU A group from Oxford visited Perm for two weeks in September, as part of the annual exchange with Perm State University.

Hospice care A consultant and a nurse have recently gone to Perm to work with colleagues on palliative care. There are premises within the hospital in Perm, where cancer patients can be given advice and support; but there is as yet no proper hospice building. The Perm City Council is supportive, and willing to provide funds, once a suitable building can be found. Meanwhile, Perm nurses trained by Oxford hospice specialists are caring for terminally ill patients in their homes. Members of the Perm Association have contributed to this work in the past.

Forthcoming events

Perm State University A group of six academics from Perm State University will be in Oxford from 16 November to 7 December, as part of the annual University exchange.

Party All members of the Perm Association are welcome to attend a party in the Acland Room in Rewley House, at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 20 November, to welcome the group of academics from PSU.

Ice Carvers A group of ice carvers from Brookes University plans to visit Perm in February 2003.

AGM The Annual General Meeting of the Perm Association will be held at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 5 February 2003, in Oxford Town Hall.

Tours in Perm Region One of the young teachers from PSU who visited Oxford last November is working for a tourist agency in Perm. Anyone interested in the possibility of a river trip, or other expedition, in the Perm region, can contact him via Karen Hewitt.

Youth Theatre Oxford International Links Committee plans to organise a Youth Theatre Festival in Oxford in July 2003, involving groups from all Oxford's twin towns. A group from Perm will come as guests of Cheney School and the Pegasus Youth Theatre, which itself plans to visit Perm in 2004.

Jenny Lewis

On the next page, there is an account of Jenny Lewis's recent visit to Perm. Jenny is a prize-winning poet and playwright who lives in Oxford. She was included in *Oxford Poets 2000*, published by Carcanet. Her poetry sequence *How I became an Amazon* has been adapted for the stage and performed widely, including in Oxford, Cambridge, London, San Francisco, and on BBC Radio 4 and the World Service. She has had a regular poetry programme on BBC Thames Valley Radio and has performed her work at many festivals and venues throughout the UK. Her new play, *Map of Stars*, about astronomy and world mythology, written for the Pegasus Theatre, was premiered in March 2002.

The poem below is just one from the sequence *How I became an Amazon*, first published in 1996, and re-published in a bilingual version in Perm in 2002. It is impossible to capture in one poem the spirit of the whole work, which is told in three voices - those of the Amazon Oreythia, of her father the Shaman; and of the Modern Woman. This is one by the Modern Woman.

Mother

What I need is a warm, living goddess
to pray to, not a dark, forbidding father
or some poor, dead man nailed to a tree
and joined with me in being a victim.

Where is she? My tall, long-limbed,
golden-haired, beautiful mother
who smelled of chiffon scarves and the
Elizabeth Arden face powder she kept
in a cut glass bowl on the dressing table
under a huge blue powder puff.

Each day she set her morning face
towards the world of business
where she daily matched the tasks
of Heracles, on the third floor
of a small, suburban department store.

And as she toiled among the fashion suits
and knitwear we took turns to tend her shrine,
polishing her mirrors and dressing table;
spending inordinate hours arranging
and re-arranging the little glass and china

animals on her mantelpiece; setting vases
of freesias and lilies-of-the-valley carefully
on the newly shined surface of her bedside
table, loving her quietly in her absence.

Her memory still lives—vivid and powerful;
humming the vibrant energies of generations
of mothers. The ancestor force, oceanic
and mountainous, yet fine as grass ends
feeling the sky with delicate fingers,
blindly sensing the right way forward.

A poet in Perm

Three weeks ago, I woke up in Perm to find myself something of a celebrity. I was on the morning and evening news, popped up in chat shows and news clips over the following fortnight and was guest of honour at a poetry and dance performance of *The Snow Maiden* at the Prozus Theatre. This is how it happened.

In 1997, through organising the Twin City Literature Festival for Southern Arts and the Oxfordshire Library Service, I met Robert Belov from Perm and his wife, Natasha Dubrovina who is a translator. I had just had a long poetry sequence published by Iron Press – *When I Became an Amazon* – which linked the experience of a modern woman who has suffered breast cancer and mastectomy with a one-breasted Iron Age Scythian warrior – the Amazon, Oreythia.

Natasha loved the book and translated it into Russian. It was re-illustrated by a gifted young Permian, Lyuba Chulakova, and was the first bilingual title to be published by Natasha's newly-launched publishing company, Bilingua.

My new Russian audience identified strongly with the text and applauded my attempt to write an 'epic for women'. One reason for the high level of interest is that graves of fighting women found in Southern Russia are thought to have been Amazons. Another is that the recent, more open, cultural climate has led to a huge thirst for art including literature and poetry.

One of the most moving events was a visit to the Cancer Information Centre where I was shocked to learn that cancer has been a taboo subject in Russia, sometimes leading to divorce and ostracism. Had I known this beforehand, I should have been less confident about speaking so freely on prime-time TV about my own experience! Yet I'm so glad I did as it opened the whole issue up for debate. The response of the women at the Cancer Centre, and in the audience at the Gorky Library Presentation and the Bibliosphere Bookshop was simply 'Thank you for writing this book.'

This month, the whole sequence will be broadcast on Perm Radio. We are also hoping for a stage production in the near future. Through meeting a poet and journalist who works for a Moscow newspaper, extracts of the *Amazon* will be published in a Moscow journal. In return, I shall send translations of poetry by young Russian poets to poetry magazines and journals in Britain. So the links between Perm/ Russia and Oxford will be strengthened.

My trip to Perm exceeded my wildest expectations, but as if this wasn't enough, my son, Edward, who came with me in the party organised by Karen Hewitt, also had a magical time. He made good friends with some musicians at Radio Nostalgie and spent time writing songs for a concert. A recent graduate in English and Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia, he is now in talks with Perm Technical University on the possibility of returning for a month in March to deliver a course of classes on the use of English in contemporary social contexts. As you might have guessed, neither of us can wait to go back!

Jenny Lewis

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Current membership rates

Individuals: £8.00
Organisations: £16.00

I/we wish to join the Perm Association

DATE:

NAME:

ORGANISATION (if any):

ADDRESS:

.....

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.....POSTCODE:

Affiliation fee £

Donation £

Total £

(Cheques payable to the "Perm Association")

For more information on membership contact the Treasurer

Tom Meinhard
22 St John Street
Oxford
OX1 2LQ
Tel: 01865 557615



News of other links

Bonn Plans are afoot for Oxford Week in Bonn, 26 May - 1 June 2003. Anyone interested in taking part and/or finding a partner group in Bonn should contact May Wylie.

Bonn and Leiden It is hoped that Oxfordshire Youth Orchestra will visit both Bonn and Leiden in August 2003; that singers from Bonn will team up with Oxford and Leiden orchestras for Oxford Week in Bonn next year - and even that all the orchestras will hold a joint festival in Perm!

Leiden Recent visitors to Oxford include a girls' hockey team from Leiderdorp; the WW band from Leiden; and six artists from Leiden, working at the Magdalen Street studios. The Leiden link is due to hold its annual dinner on 9 November, when friends from Leiden will be in Oxford for the Remembrance weekend.

Grenoble In July the Cap and Stocking Players represented Oxford at the *Rencontres* (Grenoble International Youth Theatre Festival). The Oxford-Grenoble Association will be holding a wine and cheese party in Wolfson College, at 7.30 pm on 29 October, as a follow-up to the highly successful visit to Grenoble in May. The OGA will hold its Annual Dinner on Friday 7 February 2003, at Oxford Brookes University. The French Circle has a full programme of meetings on the third Wednesday of each month.

Leon There will be a Nicaraguan Evening—with music, food and entertainment - on 2 November at Lake Street Community Centre. Tickets (family £10, waged £5, unwaged £3, children £2.50) from Jane Mercer (tel. 01865 246608) or May Wylie (tel. 01865 252537).

OIL Don Rouse has been re-elected as Chairman of the Oxford International Links Committee, and City Councillor Beryl Keen has been elected vice-chairman. OIL hopes to arrange an international youth sports event in 2004, and is looking for ideas from people with experience of organising sporting events.

Tom Meinhard

Tom, who has been the Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the Perm Association for the past three years, feels that the time has come to stand down. When he took on the role, there were fewer than 30 members and the Association's funds totalled about £300. As he prepares to leave office, membership stands at well over 70, and there is about £3000 in the bank. That is a splendid achievement, and we extend our warmest thanks to Tom for his work. Tom feels that there is much for the Association to do in the coming years, particularly in raising our awareness of needs in Perm City and Region, and in allocating funds to worthy causes. Not everything can be done by members of the committee, and we need members to put forward their ideas for suitable activities in Oxford and suggestions for assistance to our friends in Russia.

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