



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter June 2015

Oxford Perm Association: 20th anniversary celebrations – the visit of Yarmarka

The 20th anniversary celebrations of the Oxford Perm Association began with a visit from the exciting and international recognised folk group from Perm, Yarmarka. Fifteen of them, four musicians, six dancers, two singers, their director, interpreter and organiser arrived together with their instruments and very many brightly coloured and elaborate costumes on a Thursday in April.

During the first weekend of their visit they joined in the activities of the Oxford Folk Festival, taking part in the organised and spontaneous events occurring throughout Oxford including a ceilidh at St Barnabas church and a party at the Fire Station. On the Saturday, Yarmarka, as part of the festival, performed at various locations throughout Oxford. The weather was perfect, warm and sunny, and many passers-by stopped to enjoy the performances. Yarmarka clearly made an impact as the following comment, which we picked up from Facebook, showed (included here with permission).



Today I witnessed something deeply touching on Cornmarket Street, Oxford. A folk dance by Russian dancers and musicians. The divisions and differences bred by politics and media were swept away by the sheer force and beauty of dance, its inclusive embrace, its simplicity. I was close to tears and reminded that we have a duty as human beings to celebrate our differences, share them, not to barricade ourselves behind walls of opinions, opinions, opinions. If you believe in art as a remedy to division come to Oxford and watch Yarmarka dancing on Friday April 24th at 7.30 pm in the Town Hall

Quote circulated on social media from Dan Zappi, Founder and Artistic Director, Oxford World Theatre Company.

The Oxford Perm Association set up stall in Bonn Square selling Russia artefacts. As well as being a perfect place from which to watch Yarmarka perform, it became the focus of many conversations about Yarmarka, Russia, politics, dancing, and the twinning activities of Oxford, which were new to many who stopped to watch and talk.

A member of the Oxford Perm Association described the impression made.

I was absolutely entranced by Yarmarka. The four musicians, two singers and six dancers gave wonderful, varied, poignant and humorous performances that transcended language and which were a joy to eyes, ears and heart. The standard of both music and dancing was stunning and the short performances in Bonn Square were like tasters before the great feast of the Town Hall performance. The dancers really seemed to thoroughly enjoy their performances and their wonderful costumes, their grace, vitality, stamina and gymnastic abilities were a wonder and the rhythms and melodies of the musical accompaniment set ones heart strings vibrating, but with joy. Even thinking about their performance again now conjures up the same feeling.

And many were delighted by Yarmarka's invitation to join in the dancing:

The bright, sunny weather enhanced the vibrant colours of the dancers' costumes and their exuberant, skilful dancing entranced passers-by. The music and vocals introduced an exotic atmosphere into our busy shopping centre. At one point our Russian friends invited members of the public to join them and this made for greater connection between performers and audience. What struck me most forcibly was the sheer joy the dancers brought to a normal Saturday morning in Oxford. The true soul of Russia infused our lives for a short while!

And as another commented

Dancing *with* Yarmarka could be the experience of a lifetime for you and your friends!

In the week that followed Yarmarka gave performances at a number of venues around Oxford. They performed at three primary schools involving around 400 children as well as school staff, some parents and visitors. The children were entranced by the performances, sitting quietly and just mesmerised by the lively music and the brightly coloured costumes. While television may show elaborate and dramatic dancing, seeing this live was something different. It was unlike anything the children had seen before. As one head said to her pupils 'This is an opportunity you may never get again in your life'. Another head wrote to show their appreciation of the visit from Yarmarka. 'The children and staff all thoroughly enjoyed the performance and the children have kept talking about it!'. And Yarmarka themselves enjoyed visiting the schools, their organiser commenting 'Victor and the artists

were especially happy to perform at schools - the reception was VERY warm, the children wouldn't let the dancers go'.

At the Pegasus Theatre, Yarmarka gave a workshop to a group of twelve teenagers. They showed them how the dances they did were put together using a number of more simple routines evolving into something much more complex. The Pegasus dancers gradually gained more and more confidence throughout the workshop and in the end were able to demonstrate considerable skills themselves. This was followed by a performance to a small audience of participants in the workshop, parents and Pegasus staff.

The highlight of the visit was the final concert in the imposing surroundings of the Town Hall.

All the people I got to attend on Friday were amazed at the quality of the singing and dancing and very appreciative of seeing something so very special.

I very rarely go to live performances and am no connoisseur but the town hall performance was so inspirational it will make me look out for other events. Yarmarka, for me, gave a joyous heart-warming experience that was so lovely in itself but also introduced me to new possibilities such that I will pay much more attention to what is coming to the town hall and make me much more likely to go to things in future than I might have before.

At the end of the final concert a certificate of honour was handed to Yarmarka which was signed by the Lord Mayor. This meant a great deal to the group as their interpreter commented.

The final performance at the Town Hall was a triumph. Yarmarka was at the peak of their abilities and performed with a lot of emotions. Oh, so many people came up to them and said the words of deep thanks and other very kind things. It was very pleasant. The hall was full, I guess about 300 people.

And of course - the Certificate of Honour for Yarmarka became the highlight! It was very touching that Oxford evaluated Yarmarka so highly! It is a very high award!

And even the last day was memorable, Yarmarka, hosts and airport drivers joined together for a final lunch. After lunch, Yarmarka gave an impromptu concert, which was simple but moving.

From one member

It was such a wonderful "good bye " party crowned by that singing and playing of instruments which I will remember forever! What an amazing experience to be part of that.

And from Yarmarka themselves

The farewell lunch at your wonderful house became just a charming full stop before our flight.

The success of the visit from Yarmarka was made possible by the very many people who facilitated and supported the activities, in particular May Wylie who worked tirelessly to make it all happen, but also the many hosts, drivers, and providers of meals. Many commented how they themselves had enjoyed being involved.

One of the dancers with Yarmarka was my house guest during their 9 day stay in Oxford. I am trying to put my finger on just why his stay was so pleasant... Like the vast majority of Russians Ivan had lovely good manners... considerate and good humoured. The key ingredient to the ideal guest is an appreciative and curious attitude about one's surroundings, and Ivan was all of that. He was overwhelmed by London and found Oxford truly beautiful. What a pleasure!

Sue Gregory

The 70th Anniversary of Victory Day in Perm

Having studied Russian language and culture at school some 40 years ago but having never visited the country I was intrigued to visit our twin city. I had spent some time last November with the delegation from Perm who were keen to see how the city council interacted with changing and increasingly diverse communities. Now I would have an opportunity to see their issues first hand and compare approaches to working with young people and in cultural development.

The visit was timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of VE Day, referred to in Russia as Victory Day - День Победы. This was an unusual and special time in the Russian Federation and many of the former Soviet Republics and Warsaw pact countries. The commemorations dominated the media and civic life in the lead up to May 9th and the holiday weekend that followed.

I was honoured to be asked to lay a wreath on behalf of the City of Oxford at the remembrance ceremony on Friday 8th at 1100 at Perm's War Memorial. This was much like our remembrance ceremonies but was civic rather than religious led. The memorial itself features a statue depicting Mother Homeland - Мать Родина - supported by the heroes of the front and at home.

The rest of that day I spent visiting youth and cultural services in the city. At the Palace of Youth I was met by a large number of very enthusiastic youngsters who were keen to share ideas about engaging and supporting young people in voluntary action. They had set up a "press conference" style meeting for me which was daunting at first after very little sleep but which I enjoyed very much. The youngsters were obviously well practiced in being able to make a short speech about their work and ask a good related question. Always followed up with a supplementary. It reminded me of Council meetings in Oxford!

My visit to the Palace of Culture demonstrated the vibrant cultural life of Perm with many performance and rehearsal spaces on this day all taken up with Victory Day related song and dance. It struck me at both venues how many people travelled across the city to large good quality venues.

The 9th was dominated by the Victory Day parade which consisted of a moving depiction of Perm in the war performed by local youngsters and a military parade. However, the most impactful part of the parade was the Immortal Legion - photographs of those who suffered in the war being carried by family members. There were 30,000 people in this part of the parade which brought home to me the scale of the loss in Russia and why this was such an



Part of the 30,000 people walking through the streets of Perm carrying family placards in honour of the 'Immortal Legion'.



After Laying a Wreath on behalf of Oxford

important anniversary to Russians. I am pleased that the City of Oxford was present to support our twin city and I know that our presence was much appreciated by those that we met.

Over my short time in Perm I met many people keen to build cultural and youth links with Oxford which I will be following up in the next few months. If I were take one lesson home from Perm about youth and cultural development work it is the impact that a good extraordinarily cheap public transport system can have on participation.

Tim Sadler, Executive Director for Community Services, Oxford City Council

Newsletter and web site

Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome for this Newsletter. The submission **deadline for the autumn issue is 18th Sept** but it greatly assists planning if you let the editor (David Roulston: [djrouls@btinternet.com](mailto:djrrouls@btinternet.com)) know if you plan to submit an item or to discuss an idea for the newsletter or web site www.oxfordperm-assoc.org.

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OXFORD PERM 2015 Our Twentieth Anniversary Year

The Oxford Perm Association invites members and others to three talks on art, history and contemporary society in Russia. Please put these dates in your diary.

THE PAINTINGS OF LEONID PASTERNAK

Friday, 19th June – 5.00 to 6.30 p.m.

At: Rewley House, Wellington Square (Department for Continuing Education)

Speaker: Ann Pasternak-Slater

Ann Pasternak-Slater will give an illustrated talk on the paintings of her grandfather, Leonid Pasternak, one of the first Russian impressionists.

PERM-36 MUSEUM AND GULAG HISTORY

Friday, 26 June 2015 - 5:00pm to 6:30pm

Venue: Nissan Lecture Theatre, St Antony's College.

Speaker: Dan Healey, Professor of Russian History, University of Oxford.

Dan Healey visited Perm-36, the Gulag camp-museum in December last year, and is a specialist on the history of the Gulag, (the system of political prisoner camps in the USSR).

‘WHAT IS GOING ON IN RUSSIA?’

VIEWS AND VALUES OF ORDINARY RUSSIANS

Thursday, 2nd July 2015 6.30-8.00 p.m.

At: Rewley House, Wellington Square (Department for Continuing Education)

Speaker: Karen Hewitt MBE

Karen will be drawing on the views of Russians from more than thirty cities to discuss their ideas about the Ukrainian crisis, sanctions, and their own country.

There will be wine and light refreshments after each talk.

All talks are free to the public. All are welcome

SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

This year our Garden Party will be held at 6 Rawlinson Road on Wednesday, 8th July starting at 5 p.m. All Oxford Perm Association members are invited and are welcome to bring guests. Please let us know if you intend to come. The Association is providing wine and fruit juices; contributions of suitable ‘finger food’ will be greatly appreciated. Parking is available in Rawlinson Road.

Advance notice of other events

As part of our anniversary celebrations, we have again invited the popular and highly skilled **balalaika quartet, 'Karavai' from Perm** to spend a week in Oxford in September. The group will be playing at various concerts and details will be announced as soon as possible (visit our web site www.oxfordperm-assoc.org). Meanwhile, please put a date in your diary – **11th September – when Karavai will be playing at St Barnabas Church.**

A production of Noyes Fludde - organised by Oxford International Links (i.e. a joint twin cities project) - is now fixed for **22nd and 23rd October**. More details to follow.

A story from Ukraine

The young man in Perm who had come in out of the wet April snow to talk to me was slightly built and seemed physically awkward, not quite sure of his body, like many twenty-year-olds. Yet last July, in the main square of his little Ukrainian town, Andrei with his friends was practising breakdancing, a variety of street acrobatics requiring feats of balance and strength. It was sunny and peaceful; people sat around the edges of the square or wandered among the kiosks and stalls selling ice-cream and fruit. Andrei says the first thing he remembers was the noise; he didn't see people firing but suddenly things were flying through the air, a confused volley of objects that in a few slow seconds they identified as bullets. They stood still, shocked, and then they ran – first to a sheltered basement area behind the kiosks, along with everyone else in the square, and later, when the firing stopped, to their homes. The inhabitants of Andrei's block of flats spent days on and off in the basement, listening to the sound of guns and not knowing what was happening.

"So who were they firing at?"

'Nobody could understand. We knew they must be the Ukrainian army or one of their militias because our town (of 15000 inhabitants) is not far from Donetsk where they had been fighting the local people for nearly two months. But there was nobody to attack in our town. Nobody fired back.'

'What happened then?'

'For two weeks they went on firing, mostly at the edges of the town. They destroyed buildings. I don't know why, but maybe because they wanted people to run away so that they could steal things. I think people were killed. After two weeks the Donetsk People's Republic militia came to fight back, but by that time my parents and I had left in our car for Donetsk. We thought it might be safer.'

'So who did you support in this conflict?'

Andrei shrugged. 'We live in Donetsk region, just 12 miles from the city, and we just wanted to go on speaking Russian and living as usual. But people in Western Ukraine influenced new government which was against Eastern Ukraine. I don't know why they were against us. So Donetsk people wanted more separation from angry government and tried to defend themselves against Ukrainian army. Then they developed some military sections and captured weapons from the army. But when we were dancing in the square Donetsk fighters were not in my town.'

'So after several days not knowing what was going on, you drove to Donetsk?'

'Yes. We were there for two days in this huge city, but there was fighting in some suburbs and near the airport, and we wanted to return home. But during those days the road to our town was destroyed so we could not get back. We decided to drive to Russia.'

'Was that easy?' (From the centre of Donetsk to the Russia border is about 45 miles.)

‘Near the border we saw real fighting between Donetsk people and Ukrainian army. That was very frightening. Then we crossed the border with many other people, and we were taken to a village near Rostov-on-Don.’

In the village they were interviewed by Russian social service officers. Andrei had been a student at the local technical college studying aircraft mechanics. His father was a miner, his mother a teacher of English. They had no family connections in Russia. After a few days of interviews they were advised to go to Perm where they would be offered accommodation and jobs. So the family were given tickets and flew to Perm in their summer clothes, carrying almost nothing with them.

Many refugees from Ukraine went to stay with relatives in Russia, but for those like Andrei’s family, the Russian Government organised a special Federal programme. The Ukrainians were found places to live, often in hostels or empty homes, and given food and about 700 roubles a day for three months – time to get settled into a job and start earning money. In Andrei’s case the family’s clothes were totally inadequate for the Perm climate, but besides the Federal programme many local citizens donated clothes and money and household goods. When I spoke to him, Andrei had been in Perm for eight months. They now lived in a flat and paid rent because his father and he worked in a factory while his mother had found teaching jobs. Perm people were ‘decent’.

I asked him about his home town. He was worried about his grandparents who had stayed behind during the fighting and afterwards when it became clear that their town would stay on the Ukrainian side of the border, not in the break-away Donetsk region.

‘For months they did not have water, gas or electricity. They could sometimes get water from a pump in the street. They lived on the vegetables they grew because there was very little in the shops.’

I was puzzled. ‘If your home is in Ukrainian territory, no longer in the fighting area, why didn’t the authorities restore the water and electricity. It was their responsibility – and they had destroyed it in the first place.’

Andrei is also puzzled. ‘I don’t know why they did nothing. They forgot about our town. Now – after 9 months – my grandparents have water and sometimes they have electricity. Maybe the Ukrainian government did not want to send any food to our shops in case the people took the food to Donetsk. But I think in Donetsk they have organised food – and it is dangerous to cross no-man’s-land. My grandparents were hungry.’

I asked him – as I asked everyone – if he had any evidence of Russian military involvement in the fighting.

‘I saw nothing when I was in the village near Rostov. I saw nothing. Nobody knows. They discuss but they do not know, so there are many opinions.’

And then he returned to the image that haunted him, and which he described over and over again. ‘We were dancing in the square and suddenly there were things flying around us. We did not know what they were and we stopped – to look..’ He shakes his head. ‘We looked and waved our arms. And then we understood. We ran.’

Note: Because Ukrainian refugees like Andrei were dealt with by a Russian Federal programme, Perm City Council could not give me details of the number of refugees in Perm. Last summer several thousand arrived; those with an agricultural background were sent to villages while the miners were found jobs in the factories. The flow of refugees diminished sharply in the autumn (those who wanted to leave had mostly left, and the fighting slowed down). The council’s view is that most Ukrainians in Perm who arrived from Eastern Ukraine are now settled in jobs, with homes, and are no longer categorised as emergencies.

Andrei is not the young man’s real name. He spoke freely enough after a little encouragement, but subsequently asked not to be identified. I think he felt that speaking to a representative of an unfriendly country might lead to harassment of his grandparents. I am

grateful to him and to the student who found him and helped me to talk to him.

Karen Hewitt

People's diplomacy: from Perm with love

The Yarmarka concert in the Town Hall (see page 3) was a great success. It was emotional, professional and thoughtful. Yarmarka told us the story of the Russian dance, music and some old Russian village traditions without saying a word: they danced, played the instruments and sang. We said "good bye" to Yarmarka, who became our friends, the next day. I wrote to them a couple of weeks later asking if they wanted to share their thoughts and emotions with the readers of this newsletter. Here is what I received.

Alexey Polyakov – the dancer and the choreographer:

"Firstly, I really liked the architecture of Oxford with its numerous colleges, chapels, towers and spires; its narrow streets. The architecture no doubt reflects the whole history of Oxford. I noticed how Oxford loves red: red phone boxes, red buses. Secondly: I like the traditional English meals we were treated with in various Oxford pubs. Russians often miss Russian cuisine when abroad: Oxford was a nice exception, the food was great! Thirdly (and most importantly) we were surrounded by the lovely caring people for the whole duration of our visit. A big thank you for the wonderful memories we will keep about this beautiful country, about the fascinating Oxford!!!! Exchanges like this are necessary. They bring people together, they interlink the two cultures. Art and culture without limitations between Oxford and Perm."

Nikolay Gorodilov – the leader of the orchestra, the balalaika player:

"I really noticed how hospitable and friendly were the people of Oxford. I enjoyed living in an English family, and observing their customs, their way of living. I found it interesting to join in with the English musicians and to play together in the pubs. The architecture and the nature of Oxford are beautiful. Exchanges like this are very important to develop twinning relationship".

Alexandr Ustkachintsev – the domra player

"It was my first visit to the UK. I was impressed by the size of Heathrow. It was very interesting staying with the family to see how they live. The number of bicycles in Oxford is huge! It was very nice participating in the national Celtic party where we learnt the national dances. As a musician I really liked the sessions in the pubs. It is a shame we couldn't stay for a bit longer to get to know the other musicians a bit more. Exchanges like this are key. They strengthen international connection at different levels."

Yekaterina Permyakova and Alfiya Aglamzyanova – the singers.

"We liked the architecture of Oxford, it is unique. We were fascinated by the trip to London, where in one day we saw so much!!! We liked the English pubs: the food, the drinks, the atmosphere – it is very cosy. The concerts in schools were very emotional. Oh, yes, we nearly forgot: double-decker buses are great! We think exchanges like this help us learn about the culture of other countries."

Olga Lavrova – the director of Yarmarka

"This was my third trip to Oxford. Every time it feels like you wake up in a fairy tale. This time we were also incredibly lucky with the weather. The colours and the smells of nature were wonderful. The visit was very well organised which allowed us to both work and have some time to look around. I think I can speak for everyone when I say we were all extremely

lucky to have visited Oxford this year. We are grateful to our hosts, who we all (secretly) called our parents – this is how kind and caring they were to us. I want to say special thank you to the 3 people who organised the visit: May, Sue and Ksenia. Ksenia gave us a wonderful trip to London! As my host (Ron) said, in one day we managed to see more in London than he did in his whole life! There are too many impressions – all of which are wonderful. Exchanges like this are necessary. It really helps people to understand each other better and to learn from each other. Many many thanks!”

Victor Kuzminov – artistic director of Yarmarka:

“Last time I was in Oxford 10 years ago. My impressions this time are almost the same as when I first went. It is great to know that you are going to a faraway place, where you have friends and people who appreciate what you do. The main thing of course is the people who invited us, who organised the visit and who were so attentive and caring. I first discovered the joys of visiting Oxford in 2002. I discovered the architecture, the streets, the houses, the Oxford colleges. This time I was excited to arrive in this atmosphere I so enjoyed before. During this trip, we really felt that interacting with the children in schools and other citizens of Oxford, got us closer together: the mentality, the culture, and the soul of each other. All of the dancers, singers and musicians of Yarmarka tried to give back as much warmth and emotions to the audience as they could whilst performing in Oxford. We are exactly the same as you and therefore we feel comfortable around each other! If I was asked the question: “Do we need exchanges like this?” I would say: “Yes!” Why? Because this is what I call people’s democracy; it gets the nations closer together, it helps us understand each other. Thanks to the Oxford-Perm Association people from both Oxford and Perm have this unique opportunity to interact and enjoy each other’s company. Arts don’t require translation or commentaries, they just connect people”.



There, I have translated them all without any changes. There is not much to add, except one quote from another little Permian who happens to live in Oxford. My son Kiril is 7. He has a Russian granny and grandpa who live in Perm and an English granny who lives in Oxford. We took Kiril to the concert in the Town Hall. He watched it all with his eyes wide open. He was fascinated by the dance and the music. When the concert was over he said: “Do you know what I liked most of all: it was the fingers of the man who played bayan*. They were running up and down so fast, like spiders on a hot frying pan!”. I am grateful to Yarmarka for what they shared with Kiril and all of us: their warmth, their talent and a little part of the rich Russian culture.

*The bayan is the Russian button accordion

Ksenia Hewitt