

# PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Oxford Perm Association

October 2009

## Karavai in Oxford

The Karavai balalaika quartet from Perm enjoyed an extremely busy and varied programme on their visit to Oxford in September, from busking in the city centre to appearing with John Lubbock and the Orchestra of St Johns at the Dorchester Abbey festival.



Their schedule included visits to Bayard's Hill and East Oxford Schools, where they gave concerts and class workshops; these were hugely demanding assignments which placed great demands on finger stamina!

They also gave recitals at Phyllis Court, Henley, St Michael at the Northgate, Wesley Memorial Methodist Church and Wolvercote Village Hall; and performances to Age Concern and the Guideposts Independent Living Centre. At the latter venue, they were greatly moved to be told that one resident with dementia, who rarely responded to anything, was dancing to their music, along with other residents.

The climax of the visit was a concert in the Newman Rooms – a complete sell-out, thanks to twin city contacts, publicity from previous gigs,

contacts with Russians at language schools and media coverage by Radio Oxford and the Oxford Times. The first half of the concert was devoted to Russian music from the 13th to the 21st century. In the second half, the group demonstrated their versatility with a global musical tour-de-force, from Latin America to Italy, and from the Beatles to the theme music from 'Un Homme et une Femme'.

During the concert, Oleg Zgogurin (prima balalaika) introduced his colleagues Anna Talnikova (prima domra), Tatyana Kulikova (alto domra) and Stanislav Yunkind (bass balalaika) – all are distinguished graduates of various music schools. They have made several tours abroad and have recorded a number of CDs.



Their web site - [www.karavai.info/](http://www.karavai.info/) - in both English and Russian - offers the opportunity for fans to send a message of appreciation. How about sending a message from their friends in Oxford?

*Richard Sills*

## Karavai in London

Mari Prichard and I accompanied the Karavai group to London on the 20<sup>th</sup> October. They had a very clear idea of what they wanted to do (a trip on the London Eye) and see. Our itinerary took us from Victoria bus station with a minor detour through St. James' Park via Buckingham palace (which untypically had a cycling event circling around it) to Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament and over Westminster Bridge to the highlight of the day. With a special map, Karavai were pleased to be able to identify key buildings and places in London.

While they were soaring above, Mari and I sussed out the Festival Hall as they had said that they would like to hear live music. When the group came back down to earth, we had a pre-prepared picnic in the little park near the wheel before walking on to the Festival Hall with many stops on the way (as always!) to photograph the various living statues etc. The live music (local children's choirs) was not quite what the group had in mind

so we continued on taking in the outside of the Globe Theatre and Tate Modern. Here we stopped and spent an hour or so individually looking around the main galleries, meeting together for a much needed cup of tea.

A bus ride then to the Tower of London and the Café Rouge for a meal, a chance to relax and enjoy beef bourgignon! Finally, a bus and tube ride back to Victoria via Trafalgar Square, then home, all pretty exhausted by then! Lisa, the translator/interpreter, did the more complicated language exchanges but as the day went on, the musicians spoke more English and we were able to communicate well enough by the end of the day. I think they really appreciated having a day off from playing gigs and concerts and enjoyed the London experience - which they said was very different from other visits to London!

*Rosalyn Roulston*

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## Web site

Readers may recall in our October 2008 newsletter the article on Donald Crawford and the 90th anniversary of Michael Romanov's death by Dr. W. George Krasnow, President of the Russia & America Good Will Association (RAGA web site: [www.raga.org](http://www.raga.org)). George Krasnow lives in the USA and is a native of Perm which he visits regularly. He has drawn our attention to the following web site which contains some very interesting articles on modern Russian politics: <http://www.russiaotherpointsofview.com>

*David Roulston, Karen Hewitt*

### Oxford Perm Association contact details

Chairman:	Mari Prichard;	tel. 01865 556673	e-mail: <a href="mailto:mari.prichard@hcarpenter.co.uk">mari.prichard@hcarpenter.co.uk</a>
Perm Liaison:	Karen Hewitt;	tel. 01865 515635;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk">karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk</a>
Secretary:	Rosalyn Roulston;	tel. 01993 813215;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:r.roulston@btinternet.com">r.roulston@btinternet.com</a>
Treasurer:	David Roulston;	tel. 01993 813215;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:djrouls@btinternet.com">djrouls@btinternet.com</a>
Membership:	Daniel Scharf;	tel. 01235 531107;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:pause.forthought@gmail.com">pause.forthought@gmail.com</a>
Newsletter:	Richard Sills;	tel. 01865 721644;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:richardsills@btinternet.com">richardsills@btinternet.com</a>
Twinning:	May Wylie;	tel. 01865 252537;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:mwyllie@oxford.gov.uk">mwyllie@oxford.gov.uk</a>
Social Events:	Ann Davis;	tel. 01993 811927;	e-mail: <a href="mailto:annharvarddavis45@hotmail.com">annharvarddavis45@hotmail.com</a>

## Oxford Russia Fund 'Perm Seminar on Contemporary English Literature'

In September 2009 one hundred Russian teachers came for three days to Perm State University. They arrived from sixty-one Russian universities, from Smolensk in the extreme west to Vladivostok in the Far East, from Siberian oil-rich Tyumen to Daghestan, one of the troubled Caucasus states in the south, from Moscow State University to Barnaul State University on the plain to the north of the Altai Mountains where China, Kazakhstan and Russia meet.

Conferences are held all over Russia but very, very few (if any) of them manage to get representatives from so many different parts of this huge country working together as colleagues. That academics and teachers from the provinces should have opportunities for intellectual stimulation, as well as those fortunate people from Moscow and St Petersburg and some of the other big cities where money flows, has been a principle of the Oxford Russia Fund, a British charity devoted to improving higher education in Russia. It is a principle happily adopted by the co-directors of this particular ORF project, Karen Hewitt and Boris Proskurnin.

For this, the fourth of our seminars on Contemporary English Literature, a British team of three specialists who teach or have taught at Oxford University, came to Perm to talk to the Russian teachers about the different novels which are available in the project. After two days of intensive discussion, argument, lectures, workshops, play-readings and much laughter, the Russians were summoned to a room in the depths of the university where 5000 books were waiting for them. Everyone had to take 50 novels with them – sets of 15 copies of three novels, and a few examples of others – so that when they return to their universities they can begin to use them with classes of students.

Some of the participants have been working with ORF donations of novels since 2005; each year we have added universities to the project, while bringing back the experienced enthusiasts who know what it is like to offer demanding contemporary works to students brought up on a diet of Agatha Christie and John Galsworthy. Often it is a

revelation – sometimes an uncomfortable revelation – where teachers and students cannot agree on how to discuss sex, religion, politics and slang as they plunge into novels like *Waterland*, *White Teeth*, *Atonement*, *Nice Work* and *An Experiment in Love*. For, of course, literature is one of the most vivid and immediate ways of confronting difficult and divisive contemporary debates. Later in the year, responses by both teachers and students will be emailed to me, and used as some of the material in *Footpath*, the journal of contemporary English Literature which has been started by seminar participants.

The seminar depends not only on the donations of books, but also on the ORF willingness to pay the full fares of the participants. Readers of this article may think that getting to Perm (by plane and train) is something of a palaver; but nothing compared with the efforts of those who came from Yakutia where reindeer are much more common than humans, or from Birobidzhan near the Chinese border. We had anxious letters from participants asking if we were *really* going to pay them, because they were spending their savings or the university emergency pot in order to get to Perm. Yes, we were, yes, we did, and we stuffed their cases and bags and little trolleys with books which they would never have found in Moscow, let alone their own towns.

At the final banquet where toasts and poems were as abundant as the food, one of the Oxford lecturers proposed a game: 'Imagine that this large room represents Russia – that's north, that's west, and so on. Now go and stand in your geographical position.' Immediately the room was full of both movement and argument – 'no, Krasnoyarsk can't be there if Chita is only one metre away' – and new friends had to shout across dining tables which indicated the thousands of miles between them. The novels, the debates, the emails, websites and seminar journal will ensure that they are not so separated as they were before they arrived in Perm.

*Karen Hewitt*

## Dates for your diary

### Autumn party

The annual party for Oxford Perm Association members to meet visiting Permian student teachers is to be held at Rewley House, St. John's Street at 7.30pm on 18th November. This is always a fun evening with entertainment, food and drink. Those attending are asked if possible to bring an offering of finger food. This can either be sweet or savoury. It would be helpful if you could let Ann Davis (social co-ordinator) know what food you are bringing. Plates for presentation of the food will be provided.

Tel 01993-811927 or e-mail [annharvarddavis45@hotmail.com](mailto:annharvarddavis45@hotmail.com)

### Perm University Teachers

Six teachers – all female – from Perm State University will be in Oxford from 14 November to 5 December. If you'd like to entertain any of them, please come and meet them at the annual party, or contact them via Karen Hewitt.

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Oxford Perm Association will be held on Wednesday 10 February 2010.

### Future plans

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

## News of other links

### Bonn

May Wylie has booked a stall to sell English produce at the Bonn Christmas market from 9 to 17 December.

### Leiden

The Burgomeister plans to attend the Remembrance Day service in Oxford on Sunday 8 November.

A brass band from Leiden will take part in the Christmas lights celebration in Oxford city centre on Friday 27 November, and also give a free concert on Saturday 28 November at Wolvercote Youth Centre.

### Grenoble

On 2 July 2009 seventeen young people aged between 15 and 18 from Pegasus Theatre's Oxford Youth Theatre Company and Production Company travelled to Grenoble with Yasmin Sidhwa (Head of Arts Education) and Nomi Overall (Technical Youth Arts Worker) to take part in the International Youth Theatre Festival, which this year took 'conflict and reconciliation' as its theme. Bringing together 17 groups from 13 countries, the event presented shows in ten different languages.

## Oxford International Links News

### Carmen

*The following account is reprinted from the newsletter of the Oxford Grenoble Association, by kind permission of Jean Burrell, OGA Secretary.*

Musicians from Leiden, dancers from Oxford and Perm, and singers from Bonn, Grenoble and Oxford joined together in two sizzling performances of Carmen in Oxford Town Hall on 23 and 24 July. By a miracle

wrought by John Lubbock, conductor, and Cecilia Macfarlane, director, this enormously complex show was put together in less than a week – with no sign of frayed nerves and every evidence of enthusiastic good-will on all sides. On the final night, the Town Hall was full to bursting and participants and audience enjoyed a truly electric event.

Bizet's well-known extravaganza about a wilful gypsy temptress and her tragic fate was transposed into a local story of town-and-gown groups, gigs and students – and managed to survive with its dramatic

heart intact. Carmen herself, played by Frida Osterberg – a young Finnish singer with a huge future – having wowed the choir and cast during the week's rehearsals with her scarlet high heels and her sheer exuberance, gave a stunning performance. Her soloist companions were all magnificent, especially as the original Don José contracted swine flu, and his place had to be filled by Justin Lavender, who only knew the part in French and re-learned it in English at three days notice. Local singer Quentin Hayes, playing Escamillo as a cool dude heart-throb in leathers, went out of his way to assist the production, helping to rehearse the choir in a back classroom at Wolvercote Primary School.

Meanwhile, in the main hall, John Lubbock with all his familiar energy and humour teased, cajoled, and brow-beat Leiden's Jeugd Symfonieorkest Rijnstreek into a superb orchestral ensemble, and Cecilia Macfarlane, helped by Tatyana Nikitina from Perm, worked her lyrical magic to meld the dancers in passages of fluidity and grace. Many of the young singers and

players from Europe had been too busy with exams even to look at the music in advance. But somehow everyone managed to learn their notes, steps, leaps, exits and entrances in an unbelievably short space of time.

This was the fourth time an ambitious multitwinned theatrical event of this kind has been brought off in Oxford, comprising over 150 musicians and players of different nationalities, kinds, ages, and standards. The productions have been devised by May Wylie, the City Council's international officer, and are assisted by the committed core of amateurs and professionals who give so much time to the musical life of the city, notably Mel Houldershaw with her East Oxford Community Choir and other helpers and hospitality-providers. These week-long occasions are a joyous expression of music in the community taken to its ultimate extent, across borders, ages, talents and gifts – and among a continually expanding group of international Oxford friends.

*Maggie Black*  
*East Oxford Community Choir*

## A child's view of Perm

As a septuagenarian setting off for Perm I found myself muttering *I'm too old for this lark*. This I repeated when lugging a heavy case up and down flights of stairs in the Moscow metro; when clambering into the upper bunk in the Trans-Siberian Express in the middle of the night; when the toilet in the train was closed for nearly an hour as the train travelled through and stopped in urban areas; when I constantly mislaid my important possessions and forgot the number of my bus.

But age, never a constant, becomes even more variable abroad. It started even before we set off when Karen emphasised the need for us to note our hosts' names and addresses before leaving the house on our first day in Perm. (Don't we get our 3- and 4-year-olds to practise saying their full name and repeating their address in case they get lost?) There was even something womb-like about the train as we jogged along in the dark to the rhythmic rattle of the

wheels at a temperature not far from 98.2° F. Arriving at Perm station and waiting to be claimed by my host family I felt like a 10-year-old evacuee.

Although I can speak a little Russian I could seldom express the subtleties. Russian, which has no definite or indefinite article and only rarely uses the verb *to be*, may in any case seem over simplified and *gde twalet* (*where toilet*) is adequate for *where is the toilet?* But when I would have liked to say *That was a delicious meal but I'm afraid I can't manage another crumb*, I had to make do with *Thank you. Very nice*. I was infantilised, reduced to pointing and gesturing, unable to talk about feelings, to share what was important to me.

We wanted to discover all we could about life in Perm, so like a bright 4-year-old I asked all those questions beginning with *how*, *when*, and *where*. I carefully kept emotion out of my voice as I posed the inevitable *why?* as I asked



about the water supply cut off from the whole of Perm University for the second day, or the stark contrast between some beautifully maintained churches, lovely art gallery, impressive regional museum and Pushkin library on the one hand and blocks of flats on the other whose facades to my western eyes looked dilapidated and neglected.

Like a 6-year-old learning to read I figured out words letter by letter, and was sometimes surprised to discover sophisticated expressions, like the shops with French names. *Ile de Beauté* predictably sold beauty products, *Le Bouquiniste* was a second-hand book shop, and a café next to the modern art gallery was called *Le Vernissage*.

But I sometimes reverted to a simple child again when it came to my relationship with my hosts, a generation or more younger. I was mothered and looked after, given picnic lunches and useful advice. I was warned against walking alone in the dark, against *stranger danger*. Was I wearing suitably warm clothes? Did I know how to cross the road? I was drilled in looking left, looking right, and left again. I also took childish pleasure in some of our activities.

As much as paddling our fragile catamaran on a zigzag course down the Silva river, I enjoyed dressing up for the occasion – in life jackets and long wader boots, gloves and a cushion strapped on behind.

However, much enjoyment of the visit to Perm was on an adult and intellectual level. I learned some of the history of Russia, from the time of Ivan the Terrible when Yermak subjugated Siberia to the last remaining GULAG, Perm 36, which only closed in 1987. We were introduced to Perm animal style in the ancient metal figures at the regional museum, and some excellent paintings and interesting carved wooden sculptures in the art gallery. We experienced Russian university education at first hand and several of us visited secondary schools. In all these visits and all our experiences with our host families we were met with warmth, friendship and consideration, qualities which transcend any differences of culture, tradition, and age.

*Jennifer Clapham*



## Kerchevo – the town that once logged

On my recent visit to Perm, I was fortunate enough to be taken by my hosts Sergei Sergeyevich and Natalia Dobrynin for the weekend to Sergei's father's settlement (посёлок - pasyolok) of Kerchevo. This is some 250kms (4-5 hours drive) north of Perm, on the west bank of the great Kama River, upstream of Solikamsk, and accessible mainly by ferry. The father –Sergei Stepanovich – used to have a senior post in the logging company, and was recently re-elected mayor (глава - glava). So he was well placed, and happy to take me around and tell me something of the history of the settlement – despite having worked much of the previous night helping with a terrible fire in the village, in which two of the large traditional wooden houses had been burnt to the ground – despite the efforts of six fire-engines.

I had initially asked if this was a traditional village (деревня - derevnya). But it was explained to me that it was a pasyolok – or settlement - that had been created specifically around a source of employment, logging in this case. A practice quite common during the Soviet era.

Kerchevo was founded in 1932, and Sergei gave me a leaflet published in 1982 celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Its grainy photos even now give some idea of the huge scale of its operation. Known as the “Kerchovsky Floating Road; the factory giant on water” (Керчевский Сплавной Рейд. Завод - Гигант на Воде). At the height of its operation it was employing some 5,000 people –men and women as the leaflet's photos show. At that time the settlement's population was around 10,000. It is now down to 2,000. Timber was harvested from the forests upstream, sawn into even lengths of logs (3-4 metres) and assembled into great rafts to be floated downstream with the help of tugs. The leaflet shows the huge scale of the operation, with the rafts nearly filling the mighty Kama river; and men and women doing the hard physical work of assembling the rafts. I was told that it was the second largest in the world; second only to Canada.

The settlement was laid out on a neat grid pattern of streets, with wooden houses modern for the time, and from what I saw, in general quite large and well-appointed. Each with its own productive vegetable garden (огород –ogorod) – not to be confused with

the Russian ‘сад’ which is more decorative. Beneath the kitchen floor was the essential подвал - podval – the cellar for storing the pickled and preserved vegetables and fruit essential to get through the winter. And, if you were lucky as I was, the traditional Russian wooden banya (баня) at the end of the garden, which I experienced for the first time, and found most refreshing. It also allowed me to use an expression I had been taught by my Russian teacher in England but thought I would never use: namely “С лёгким паром ! “ - literally “With a light steam !” or as we might say “Had a good steaming !” And you say it to someone who has just come out of the banya and is looking pink and contented !

With such a large population, and given its remoteness, the settlement provided for people's needs. There were numerous shops, selling all the necessities; a hospital and sanatorium; schools, a kindergarten, sports stadium, police station and a big social club. Many of these are still there and operating; but some looking rather tired. As recently as 1993 though a large new secondary school had been built – at Sergei Stepanovich's instigation, which he proudly showed me; and the children's kindergarten (детский сад – detsky sat) clearly well used and very smart and tidy, with attractive well equipped play-rooms, and the small children's beds upstairs in neat rows of pink and blue; and the garden itself full of brightly painted playground toys.

I had seen no sign of shops until Sergei took me into one large house, with just a person's name over the door, which turned out inside to be well stocked with everything from furniture to ballpoint pens; and another with foodstuffs of all sorts, and drink – with a good selection of vodkas. I guess rather like English village shops in the past, they do not expect many visitors from elsewhere, and all the locals know where the shops are, so there is little need to advertise.

The main roads through the settlement were generally not bad, but the side ones – they admitted readily – could be badly potholed, and I guess must be hardly usable in spring when the snows melt. The climate there is typically Russian continental extreme, and I could not resist taking a photograph of the Dobrynins' thermometer on



their porch, which ran from +50° to -50°C with zero in the dead centre.

Sergei himself felt that the village settlement was – in his words – dying. With the great logging operations now gone, there can be little employment in the village; so the young folk seek employment in the nearest big towns such as Solikamsk – still with huge industrial scale salt mines, and a number of very fine Russian Orthodox churches and Cathedral, and Berezniki; or Perm, where my host Sergei Sergeyevich had moved to.

The most wistful sights were inevitably the rusting remains of the great saw mills, and cranes, now idle, where once must have been hives of activity. And for me, the great steel hawsers on the beaches of the wide and lovely Kama, which would have tethered the mighty rafts of pine and spruce logs assembled by hand, to be floated down-

stream for transport to many parts of the then Soviet Union.

But the settlement's life does go on. On the day we had to leave it was in fact 'Foresters' Day' (День Лесников – den' lesnikov), celebrating the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kerchevo's founding, and Sergei showed me the congratulatory poster in his name. The settlement no doubt will find a future in time. Who knows whether the timber trade will become economical again, or there might even be a new destiny in tourism. I for one would be very ready to return to the lovely meadows and forest where I joined my hosts the young Dobrynins Sergei, Natasha, Nikita (8) and Misha (2) to stroll and gather mushrooms – the classic Russian love, and for me a great memory.

*Geoffrey Findlay*

