



PERM NEWS

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter May 2019

Perm's Most Famous Schoolboy

Martin Spence

One sunny Perm September afternoon in 2016, as I was strolling along Sibirskaya Ulitsa, near the Puppet Theatre, my eye was caught by an unusual statue. It depicted a boy in old-fashioned school uniform, scratching the back of his head, and with a large satchel on the ground between his feet. What puzzled me was that the inscription gave no more than a name -- Ivan Semyonov. The subject of the statue was evidently someone famous enough to require no further introduction, but the name meant nothing to me.

My ignorance was instantly dispelled by the first Perm resident I asked. Ivan Semyonov turned out to be the hero of a famous humorous children's story, published in 1962, by local author Lev Davydychev (1927-1988), who was born in Solikamsk (200 km higher up the Kama) but lived most of his life in Perm. I later visited one of Perm's excellent bookshops and had no difficulty in finding a copy. Having now read the book (in Russian; an English translation may exist, but I have found no trace of one), I can highly recommend it, as well as two films based on it.

The hero of *The Life of Ivan Semyonov* (a shortened version of the humorously lengthy title) is a naughty but lovable boy of about



Statue of Ivan Semyonov by N. Khromov, Perm, erected 2003

eight, who combines a fertile imagination and irrepressible energy with extreme idleness and aversion to any kind of schoolwork, as a consequence of which he is having to repeat his second year of primary school. The story is packed with accounts of Ivan's mischievous escapades, all told in vivid and colloquial language, with plenty of dialogue. In a game of "spies", for example, he escapes his pursuers by sneaking through the open door of a neighbour's flat; there he finds a good hiding place under a bath, but gets jammed behind the pipework and has to be rescued by a plumber.

Ivan's class teacher, in despair at his lack of application, enlists the help of a girl from Class Four, Adelaida, who is to be personally responsible for helping Ivan to mend his ways. Even Adelaida -- despite her steely determination and intimidating physical presence -- initially fails to make any impact. The turning point comes when she threatens that, unless Ivan starts working properly, he will have to be certified as "UO" (an ominous-sounding Russian abbreviation for "mentally retarded") and sent to a special school. At last Ivan realizes the error of his ways and does something about it, battling heroically against the demon of laziness to successfully complete his homework.

A third major character is Ivan's grandmother, who turns out to be partly to blame for Ivan's laziness, because she insists on doing even the simplest tasks for him (dressing him and tying his shoe laces while he eats his breakfast, for example) and objects fiercely to the notion that he is old enough to bear the burden of serious schoolwork. Meanwhile, she plies him constantly with delicious home-cooked food. So the story has a dual moral -- for overprotective grandmothers as well as for idle schoolboys.

In 1966 the Perm Television Film Studio released a highly successful 80-minute film based on Ivan Semyonov (available on [YouTube](#)). It was shot in Perm, with all the children's parts played by pupils from local schools.



First edition of The Life of Ivan Semyonov, Perm, 1962

The acting is excellent, and much of the humour can be appreciated even without understanding the dialogue. The film took first prize at an All-Union Festival of TV Films in Kiev in 1966, after which it was shown repeatedly on central television and sold to numerous foreign countries.

An 18-minute cartoon film inspired by the book had already been made in 1964 by Soyuzmultfilm, the main Soviet animation studio (also available on YouTube). Although this version of the story is obviously very condensed, the cartoon is highly entertaining, switching repeatedly between puppet characters and line drawings to convey the difference between reality and what is going on in Ivan's head.

Thanks to my chance encounter with an enigmatic statue, I have discovered a wonderful children's story whose hero is a household name not only in Perm but also, no doubt, far and wide in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Ivan Semyonov deserves to be better known in Oxford too.

Vodka Tasting evening - May 2019

May Wylie

Some people curl up with a cup of cocoa at the end of the week, but the more adventurous Perm link members venture out and drink vodka.....As is now a tradition, teachers visiting Oxford on Karen Hewitt's literature programme were asked to bring a distinctive vodka from their own region and introduce each in turn for tasting. Hence we had eight different exotic flavours from regions as far apart as Karelia, Siberia and

Moscow. All were described in detail although the young man whose vodka defied description gave us a hilarious account of the advertising features on the bottle. Tasting ensued

Renderings of lyrical gentle Russian songs were given by the visiting students. In contrast the ever brilliant Voirrey Carr accompanied by Arne Richards had us singing more boisterous renditions of Russian folk songs in either Russian or English.

The quiz topics were of a wide intellectual (?) range. The colour of Oxford United's away strip, contrasted with the name of Catherine the Great before she became Empress of Russia. Then, for the real quizzers, a question about Diaghlev's impact on English ballet. The confusion about the exact meaning of this question was its most difficult aspect. Perhaps Perm link people don't engage in many pub quizzes, or had by then consumed too much vodka.

As always, the food was plentiful and reflected the Russian hospitality many of us have experienced: much thanks to the team of volunteers who provided an endless flow.

All in all a very jolly way to enjoy Sunday evening now that 'Line of Duty' is temporarily over and, of course, a nice little earner for the Perm Association's coffers.

Book Review

Tony Wood 'Russia without Putin', Verso, 2018

David Roulston

This is a clearly written book which covers the period 1990 to 2018 in Russia. The initial chapters give a brief but adequate history of Putin's life, connections, and career. His years in the KGB in Germany, his return to Leningrad, his time with Anatoly Sobchak (Mayor of St Petersburg), his being promoted in 1997 as head of the President's Main Control Directorate (GKU), then in 1999 appointed Prime Minister under Yeltsin's presidency, finally becoming President in 2000. The Yeltsin years include such topics as the voucher scheme introduced in 1992 whereby a large number of enterprises had been auctioned off and eventually led to private ownership and control by well-placed insiders of the Soviet nomenklatura and managerial elite, with many workers selling their vouchers at a fraction of their face value.

In Chapter 3 the author explains that the 'Soviet mindset still lingers within Society as a whole, a set of assumptions and habits formed by decades of submission to power that supposedly keeps Russians mired in passivity to this day'. He explains the term *homo sovieticus*, popularized by the dissident writer Alexander Zinovieff in the 1980s and used by sociologists, quoting the Economist: 'Putin's continued grip on power shows that *homo sovieticus* was still alive ... and the process of dismantling the Soviet system is far from over'. In the 1990s 'downgrading was the fate of many including those from the 'mass intelligentsia' engineers, technicians 'specialists created by Soviet industrialisation. Basic funding for research in all fields dried up. Spending on science was 2% of the government budget in 2000, one-thirtieth of what it had been in 1990. Thousands of academics and technical personnel became unemployed or continued to work on the minimal or non-existent resources. Some 8000 top-level mathematicians and physicists left the country between 1990 and 1999.

Chapter 4 focuses on opposition in 2011 to President Putin's government, with a new middle class 'becoming sufficiently affluent to assert its yearning for more accountability and less corruption'. Street protests occurred in many cities including Moscow, St Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Murmansk. During this period the growth of internet and blogs grew from 1% of the population in 1999 to 43% in 2010. The reasons for Navalny's protests in 2017 and his Party of Progress are discussed in detail and the author explains that 'the core of Navalny's values popular appeal was his relentless opposition to corruption but this does not in itself amount to a political philosophy, let alone a program. We need to look beyond the Navalny's activism'. Wood talks about a familiar set of recipes from the Party of Progress platform - a digest of the last three decades of conventional western Social and economic policy. If put into practice in Russia, the reforms would likely worsen the situation of millions. There is much in this chapter which merits serious reading in order to gain a fuller understanding of Putins's actions and the situations over which he had little control.

In the following chapter the author confronts the popular story of the Drift under Putin towards a Soviet style showdown and highlights the continuity between Putin's role and that of Yeltsin. Wood states that the 'idea that Russia has reverted to hostile Soviet type on the international stage rests on an extraordinarily

one-sided view of what has actually happened since 1990; one that ignores the West's own actions, which have forcefully shaped Russia's decisions.'..... 'including the West's impulse to drive home its advantage through the expansion of NATO, and Russia's growing resentment of that process, as well as its inability to halt or reverse it'. The book explains that 'Russia had by the mid 1990s withdrawn its troops from Eastern Europe the trans Caucasus and Mongolia and virtually shut down its bases in Cuba and Vietnam'. This was one of the 'most stunning demilitarisation processes in history, shedding two thirds of its army and slashing defence spending by 95%' and that 'after 1991 the Russian elite tended to see the country's future as lying either alongside or within the Liberal internationalist block led by the United States'. The author reminds us that post Soviet Russia retained many of its attributes, having a seat on the UN Security Council, a vast nuclear arsenal and although dilapidated, a significant military industrial complex and scientific technical apparatus. Also importantly were cultural factors, a language used extensively outside its new borders - 20 million strong ethnic Russian population - now a diaspora and a literary and artistic patrimony of global renown.

The problems created by US President Clinton of eastward expansion of NATO and continued during Putin's presidency are highlighted with reference to Clinton's Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and his assistant Victoria Nuland (who subsequently became known for her recorded efforts to effect a change of government in Ukraine in 2014). It is explained that Putin pressed (unsuccessfully) for NATO membership and 'described Russians as a part of the Western European culture no matter where our people live in the Far East or the South we are Europeans'.

In Chapter 6 the book explains how by December 2016 Russia once again found itself part of the 'non West' and proceeds to explain the concept of Eurasianism, and its single market and customs union. This chapter also provides succinct economic statistics (GDP, Armed forces) of Russia (9th most populous country in the world) compared to other countries.

This is a compact book (176 pages plus notes and index) and enables the reader to readily gain a good understanding of President Putin's situation before and during his years in power. It provides some guidance as to possible future possible evolution in a rapidly changing world.

An update on the Anton Chekhov garden

Jessica Vlasova

Last July Anna Benn and Rosamund Bartlett gave a talk on the Anton Chekhov garden to Oxford Perm Association members. This was shortly after dismantling the prize-winning garden from the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show. Since then a few of us on the committee have been interested in seeing the garden in its new setting at the Culm Valley Integrated Centre for Health in Devon. I was staying in the area recently and decided to visit it to see if a trip there by members would be feasible, given that the garden is now attached to a working GP surgery.

The garden looks beautiful in its new setting in a secluded spot. Jane Edwards, who heads the group of volunteers maintaining the garden, was kind enough to meet me there to show me the garden and talk about it. There is an active group of volunteers through the Community Life Hub scheme which is based on the NHS idea of 'social prescribing'. Their fundraising projects help to buy benches for their patients and garden equipment etc. You can read more on their [website](#) as well as see a time lapse film of the planting and building of the garden.

As for visiting the garden from Oxford, clearly distance is a factor (it is about 130 miles away) and it would be a long day trip by car although it could be combined with a visit to other gardens open to the public in the area. It is feasible by train and bus, but very long as a day excursion. However, for anyone in the area it is definitely worth visiting and contact details for discussing a visit are available on their site. It is recommended that you visit during the week when you can gain access to the health centre where there is a café and some photographs of the garden exhibited. The garden remains a work in progress so will probably be more settled-in by the end of this summer and even more so next year. They have already held a garden open day and there are plans to have another one in the future. If anyone is planning a visit please let Mari Prichard know on mari.prichard@hcarpenter.co.uk in case a small Oxford Perm Association group visit might be organised. Rosamund Bartlett's article about the garden can be read in the [October 2018 OPA newsletter](#)

Notices to Members

Forthcoming Perm Association events

Karen Hewitt

The Perm Association Garden Party. This year the party will be held on Tuesday, 9th July, at Karen's house. All Association members are warmly invited. The party starts at 5 p.m. Please let Karen know (details in box below) if you plan to attend.

Summer Talks. We hope to find one or two speakers for this summer; ideas from members are welcome. We also have plans for a special film showing in October.

Newsletter details

David Roulston

Would all members please note that articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome for this Newsletter. The **submission deadline for the summer issue of Perm News is 21st September** but it is helpful if you let the editor (contact details below) know sooner if you plan to submit an item. Articles should be sent as email attachments preferably in doc or docx format and not exceed about 600 words plus two jpg images, or 800 words maximum with no images. Shorter articles are always welcome. Note that individual permission for publication is now required for any photos which include recognisable people. Readers can browse past newsletters on the web site www.oxfordperm.org. The editor is grateful to Sue Gregory for her invaluable proofreading and general help with each issue of Perm News.

Discussion Group

Karen Hewitt, David Roulston

The Discussion Group met in March starting with a short debate on forward planning. This was followed by the topic 'Exploring the responses of ordinary Russians to the Raising of the Pension Age' led by Karen. David then led a discussion on an article by Alexander Lukin describing how President Clinton's administration in the 1990s provided financial support for Yeltsin's campaigns, and consequently undermined Russia's autonomy and authority. Background material was produced for both topics. The next meeting will be in June. If any members are interested in joining the discussion group, please email David or Karen.

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Oxford International Links (OIL)

Sue Gregory

There are five cities that are already twinned with Oxford (Bonn, Grenoble, Leiden, Leon, Perm) and twinning links with three further cities are being developed.

- **Wroclaw, Poland:** there is already an active Oxford Polish Association. They wish to develop the link with Oxford and Wroclaw Council are supporting this.

- **Padua, Italy:** The Oxford Italian Association is a cultural organisation founded 25 years ago for all interested in Italy. A sub group has been set up to work on plans to twin with Oxford.

- **Ramallah Palestine:** There have been a number of links with Ramallah over the last 15 years, including self-funded visits. In December a successful reception was held in Oxford to celebrate the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Oxford and Ramallah.

Social services for young people in Russia

Anna Balina

(Anna is a student of the social work department at Perm State University, which was established in the 1990s with the help and support of specialists from Oxford. This is her first piece of writing in English. If readers are intrigued by any of the comments in her student survey, do write to the editor and your queries will be sent to Anna.)

The development of the system of social work with young people in Russia requires constant monitoring of the socio-demographic situation and the level of social pressure. Learning about the social problems of British young people and ways to solve these problems allows us to compare the two national systems, and can also contribute to their interaction.

In my opinion, the Russian system of youth policy and social work should refer to the experience of countries such as the UK. The current stage of Russian state youth policy can be characterized as a period of search and accumulation of new socio-political experience. In Russia, 'youth policy' is directed at those aged 14 to 30 years. It is planned by the state, but implemented at local level.

Since 2008, the Federal Agency for youth affairs under the Government of the Russian Federation coordinates and directs the activities of all state and non-government organizations in solving youth problems. Their plans focus on ensuring respect for the rights of young people, guarantees in the field of youth employment, promoting entrepreneurship, supporting young families, supporting talented young people, creating conditions for the harmonious physical and intellectual development of young people; these are particularly important areas of policy.

Social work with young people includes a complex of legal, social and medical, economic, psychological, pedagogical, organizational and preventive information and is organized as a series of special social programmes. Today in Russia there are several Federal target programmes like "Youth of Russia", "Family" and "Children of Russia" and others.

As part of our student research, in April 2018 we conducted a survey to identify the main social problems of Russian youth, and especially the level of awareness of state assistance. The respondents were 67 students of higher and secondary special educational institutions of Perm and Perm region.

The research showed that on the edge of entering adulthood, young people are afraid that they will face problems with housing and employment, and, of course, with finance. These young people are going on their own to achieve success in their careers and family creation because they are distrustful of government services. In fact, they are controversial consumers of public services: young people often express dissatisfaction with the fact that the state cares little about them, but at the same time often neglect the offered assistance. Social services provide information in the application form, that's why it is necessary to improve the information system. Also, it is necessary to transform the image of services to save young people from fear of them.

Respondents noted the low level of motivation of young people and lack of interest in active participation in the life of the country. However, this was not true for everyone. Some young people are ready to take an active part in the political life of the society and want to see the representation of a Youth Political Party in the Duma (parliament), as well as state support for youth public organizations. The respondents were interested in the opening of financial assistance services for young people, in particular, assistance to young families in finding housing, in the opening of psychological assistance centers for young people, rehabilitation services for alcoholics and drug addicts or those released from prison.

Another proposal was that the state should pay more attention to developing the internal potential of young people and to providing appropriate leisure activities. But I think such help and the change of the position of young people in society makes no sense without their own commitment and actions to overcome difficulties, therefore, it is necessary to educate young people in active citizenship in Russia (as is done in the UK). Successful social work requires the transformation of the system into something more holistic, understandable and accessible.

A guide to a Russian banya

Jessica Vlasova

A banya is a Russian tradition that is several centuries old. It usually refers to a small wooden building containing a steam room as well as a room to relax in and somewhere to change. It can also describe the process itself - to have a banya. The word used to be translated into English as 'bath house' but this now sounds dated and most visitors to Russia are familiar with the word 'banya' if not the exact details of what it involves

Although a banya is often compared to a sauna, it is much more than that. The main element of the banya is the steam room (parilka) which is heated through a furnace. Unlike in conventional saunas steam is generated when water is splashed onto hot stones, using a long handled ladle, sometimes with essential oils added. High levels of steam cause the body to sweat. Usual steam room temperatures are between 70 ° - 100 ° c. All ages take part and it's not that unusual to see very young children sitting in the steam room.

A traditional massage in the steam room involves a fragrant bundle of birch tree twigs and leaves which are tied together and soaked in water to soften them. The person doing the massage dips them in hot water before bringing the branches down on the body and moving the steam down with it. The secretions from the birch leaves are thought to help rid the skin of toxins and the process of bashing the skin with the branches is meant to increase circulation and open up the pores.

In between visits to the steam room water is used to cool the body down and add contrast. Depending on location and time of year this can be a shower, water from a bucket, a dip in a pond, river or ice hole or a roll in the snow!

It is important to keep rehydrated during relaxation sessions as water is lost from the body in the steam room. The banya is a place to socialise with friends and family and there is usually a small room next to the steam room for eating, drinking and chatting.

A felt hat is worn in the steam room to stop the head from overheating and a cotton sheet is commonly used to cover the body when resting between visits to the steam room as it is cooler than a towel.

As well as the small wooden banya that people build at their dacha, there are larger banyas in the towns open to the public. There are separate sections for men and women with cold plunge pools, massage and other treatments as well as a place to sit and eat and drink.

After the banya there is a phrase that everyone says to each other: *! (s lyogkim parom)*. It translates as something like 'I hope your steam was easy' but essentially means 'I hope you had a good banya'.

A visit to the banya is known to bring health benefits and is also a great way to spend time with family and friends. It is an exhilarating and uniquely Russian experience!



On the fifth international conference "Russian Heritage in the Modern World"

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The fifth international scientific-practical conference “Russian Heritage in the Modern World. Science and education in Russia and the UK: pages of a common history”.

The fifth international scientific conference “Russian Heritage in the Modern World. Science and Education in Russia and the UK: pages of a common history”. The opening ceremony of the event was held at the Russian Embassy in London. The conference has traditionally brought together scientists, journalists, filmmakers, folklorists, local historians and church leaders from different cities in the UK, Ireland and Russia. During the plenary and other sessions, there was an interested exchange of views between the experts on the history of the Russian presence in the UK. Certificates were also awarded to the participants and the winners of the 4th International Children's and Youth Competition of Literary and Artistic Works: “The history of collaboration between Russian and British scientists and educators” also received awards. As part of the cultural program for the participants, an excursion around Oxford was conducted with an emphasis on the historical moments of the famous city connected with Russia

