



PERM NEWS

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter October 2019

Perm 2019

Jill Hind

2019 was the date of my first visit to Perm and indeed to Russia. It was a tremendous experience. Although there are some regular features in the programme, the organizers for the Oxford Perm exchange make a great effort to respond to the particular interests of participants and to access special events happening in Perm at the time.

As an archaeologist I was pleased to be hosted by another and at the weekend Mikhail took me to see his current research excavation site, an Iron Age hillfort at Glyadenovskaya Mountain in Vanyuki. I have dug at similar sites in Oxfordshire and the plan he showed me, based on geotechnical survey data, had the familiar pattern of defences around a multi-stage site. However, this site was covered in forest, very unlike our open downland, and I don't know how they could identify the existence of the fort and then plan and excavate trenches in those conditions. We don't have to deal with the mosquitoes either! Despite the challenges the work has uncovered lots of artefacts, houses and even towers on the defences. On the following day we went into the centre of Perm to a development site where a colleague of Mikhail's



Hillfort excavation



Ice pit

was working. This site seemed very familiar – below the demolished 20th-century building were the remains of a 19th-century house with rubbish, its icehouse etc. in the yard behind. The finds of ceramic vessels and glass bottles also looked very similar to those from Oxford. The stay ended with an

opportunity to handle a selection of typical artefacts from the Perm region, ranging from Palaeolithic axes to medieval metalwork. Again, many things looked familiar, but the later metal objects had a distinctive regional style. It appears that water supply has been studied as little in Russia as it has here and a recording of my lecture on the subject is now gaining viewers on the university system.

On our programme it listed a Gala Concert with music by Russian composers. It wasn't until the organisers were on stage giving, to most of us, an unintelligible, explanation that we discovered that this concert was linked to Perm's ongoing project to erect a memorial to war correspondents. The singers performed against a background of archive footage from World War II, with films like the World War I examples used by Peter Jackson in 'They Shall Not Grow Old'. Although it was an interesting and obviously carefully planned artistic experiment, it did not succeed for everyone. Some of us found that you couldn't really follow both music and film, so dealt with it either by listening with eyes closed or, as in my case, following the action and letting the music just drift. Most agreed that the ballet sequence did not work.



Nizhnyaya Mulyanka River below hillfort site

All the singers were in black and remained in one place, but the dancers in the pas de deux had red costumes and, of course, moved around the stage. Whatever one thought of the overall result the quality of the music and singers was excellent.

A Balalaika Lesson

John Hind

In the curriculum vitae I provided to Perm State University, I must have mentioned that I play the guitar. It was nonetheless a surprise, albeit a very pleasant one, to find that a balalaika lesson was included in my timetable.

Ilya, a second-year student at the Music Faculty, who has been playing the instrument for nine years and is something of a virtuoso, generously gave me two hours of his time to instruct me in the basics of this quintessentially Russian instrument.

He started by giving me a history of the balalaika, which seems to be rather confused. It is probably derived from the round-bodied but otherwise similar domra. One theory is that the domra was banned by the seventeenth century Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich because the jesters () used the instrument to accompany songs mocking the government so the balalaika was invented to appear deliberately very different. However, the round- and the triangular-bodied instruments both seem to go back further than that. In the nineteenth century a young nobleman Vasilii Andreyev heard serfs playing the balalaika and decided to learn it himself. Together with a violin-maker in St Petersburg, Andreyev is responsible for the

family of instruments we know today.

There are six sizes: prima, secunda, alto, tenor, bass and contrabass. The body is triangular with a small sound-hole. The standard instruments all have three strings, the bottom two tuned to the same note and the treble a fourth higher. The bass strings are used as a drone and to play chords while the treble string is used for the melody. Whole orchestras can be built up from the various sizes of balalaika. Today the folk instrument is fretted up to where the neck meets the body at the twelfth fret while an “academical balalaika” has frets extending onto the soundboard like a guitar, perhaps as many as 24 in total.

We had two instruments: a prima and an alto (think of them as violin and viola). The first problem I had was trousers that Ilya considered too slippery for me to hold the instrument properly (which seemed to worry him more than me) and then almost everything which is right for the guitar is wrong for the balalaika. I have long nails on the right hand while a balalaika player has short nails on both; classical and flamenco guitarists keep the left thumb behind the neck and balalaika players use the thumb for stopping the strings; the face of a guitar should be vertical but a balalaika’s slopes back and so forth.

Ilya was very pleased with the way I held my fingers parallel to the frets (at least this was the same for both instruments!) and I had a go at Kalinka (what else?) Ilya said he wished his students could learn as much in a week as I had in ten minutes, but I think he was just being polite. He was less pleased when I re-tuned the top string which was flat and driving me nuts. Ilya explained that he had been playing with other instruments which do not have the same temperament (too large a topic to explain here) and it had been tuned to their pitch. Now happily in tune I was idly strumming some triplets in flamenco rasgueo style, when Ilya shouted “Wait! Let me get my phone! Do that again!” and videoed me as he hadn’t seen the technique before. Perhaps he will add it to his own playing. Who knows where it might lead?



Another bash at Kalinka and the two hours had flown by and my lesson was over. Only three strings – must be easy. Don’t you believe it!

With thanks to Ilya for the lesson and to Nadezhda Mokrushina for interpreting.

Balalaikas and domras can both be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkJKwO9OBO4>

Recent and Future Events

Karen Hewitt

Recent Events

The Perm Association held its annual Garden Party where Heather and Martin Haslett once again organised a bookstall for the sale of donated books on Russia and the Russian language. Their efforts and donations raised just over £100 for our funds.

In August about 25 members met to watch the film *The Magnitsky Act – Behind the Scenes*, directed by Andrei Nekrasov. It is a compelling forensic documentary film which has been banned in the United States but widely shown in other countries where it has won international prizes. Because of its controversial reputation, it is freely available on the internet, by the request of its director.

In September, the group who visited Perm as guests of the University were, as usual, kept very busy

during their two weeks. Some of their accounts of what they did appear in this Newsletter and others will appear in the next.

In October, we listened to a talk by the well-known journalist, Mary Dejevsky on 'What is Going on in Russia Today?'. We hope to have a detailed report of the talk in the next issue of Perm News.

As we were going to press, we learnt that one of the Perm Association teams at the Quiz night organised by the Leon Link were the winners of the quiz. Congratulations to all of them!

Future Events

The annual Association Party for the Perm teachers will take place on Wednesday, 13th November at 7.30 at Rewley House.

Richard Sills has promised a talk on the Elizabethan explorer of Russia, Anthony Jenkinson, (date to be announced)

The film by Perm director, Sergei Kachkin, about the Gulag Camp Museum, Perm-36 will be shown by the director on Wednesday, 12th February.

2020 is the twenty-fifth year of the city twinning of Oxford and Perm, and many events are planned throughout the year.

Obituary

AnnThirkell-Smith (1930-2018)

Beryl Knotts

Ann Thirkell-Smith who died in May 2018 was a keen supporter of the Perm link ever since her first visit to Perm with the link group in 2000. She developed a firm bond with her hosts, Galina Yankovskaya and her husband, both historians at Perm University, and she later hosted them and their daughter in Oxford. I too enjoyed the hospitality of Galina's family in Perm, and then they invited us both to join them on holiday with relatives of theirs who lived in Almaty in Kazakhstan. Ann was a librarian by profession, and those members of the Association who were active some years ago will remember Ann with great affection.

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OPA Discussion Group

David Roulston & Karen Hewitt

The Discussion Group met on 10th June with the topic 'Russia and the Internet', led by Jessica Vlasova. This was the first of subjects to be led by a member volunteering to present a topic (as discussed at our March meeting on forward planning) and we were very pleased that Jessica accepted to do this. We hope that more members will follow in future. Karen then led a discussion on 'The current situation in East Ukraine'. Background material was produced for both topics. Members continue to receive by email

copies of topical articles related to current events in Russia and Russia-West politics.

The next discussion group meeting will be in October/November. If any members are interested in joining the discussion, please email or phone David or Karen.

Georgia on my Mind

Catherine Cooper

About four years ago I was part of a small group that went to Perm in September. My host at that time was Olga Putina, an English teacher at Perm University. We have stayed in touch ever since and she has helped to facilitate numerous tours for me since then to Sochi, the Tatarstan towns and this year, at her suggestion, I visited Tbilisi, Georgia.

Georgia has a rich history stretching back to ancient times when it was first conquered by the Persians. Legend has it that Tbilisi was founded as early as the 5th Century. However, more recent archaeological studies have revealed that Tbilisi was settled as early as the 4th Century. Under Russian rule from 1801-1917 it was called Tiflis. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union the country experienced instability ending in the Rose Revolution.

Since 2003 Tbilisi has experienced more stability, an improving economy and a booming tourist industry. I was to become part of that. One of my most enduring memories is of its many monasteries with their beautiful frescoes. Georgian churches are quite different to Russian churches. They are simpler with very small windows and dark interiors where the gold icons shine with a brilliance that is quite magical. Georgian singing, too, is very beautiful. They believe in the harmony of male voices singing together.

My hotel was located in the old town. As it is built on the rock overlooking the river, I had stunning views. On my first day my guide took me on a 'walkabout' around Tbilisi to visit the new bridge built by the Italian architect Michele De Lucchi. Named the 'Bridge of Peace' it is made of curvy steel, shaped like a bow. At night it is illuminated with hundreds of LED lights which shimmer over the Kura River. It remains controversial. Many residents consider its modernistic style out of place with such a beautiful old town.

Tbilisi is full of things to do. You can visit the bazaars and buy black tea, Georgian sweets, not to mention 'funny' Georgian hats named 'papakha'. They are part of the tradition of the Georgian shepherd but to me they looked like a long haired dish 'mop'.

There are restaurants everywhere. Georgians like their food which is very good. They are especially proud of their bread and Georgian bakeries still use the old tradition methods. The Khachapuri, remains the breakfast dish to beat any full English. A wonderful blend of soft Georgian bread with flavourful cheese and a runny egg sitting in the middle. I was shown me how to use my fork to mix the egg into the bread – delicious, hot and scrumptious. As I love fish I regularly had fried trout with pomegranate juice. Pomegranate, figs, raspberries and oranges are freshly squeezed and can be bought as you walk along the streets.

Georgian wine is, of course, famous all over the world and I made the most of my time there by sampling it most evenings. They also make their own brandy called 'chacha' and you can buy it locally. It is sometimes referred to as 'vine vodka' and is more expensive depending on vintage.

Georgia is famous for its cobblestone streets. Georgian houses still retain the wooden verandas which allow the residents to enjoy the cool air in the evenings. Not far from my hotel there was a whole street devoted to restaurants selling food and Shiska (the waterpipe). As I walked quickly through it I felt like

Alice with smoke rings following me.

More than a third of the country is covered by forest and brush. Long rows of eucalyptus trees line the country roads and the forest include oak, chestnut, beech and alder as well as the Caucasian fir, ash, linden, apple and pear trees.

I visited the Hamman and had a personal 'scrub'. Followed by half an hour in the hot and cold baths. At first I thought I could never stand the cold one but, after a time, I preferred it to the hot. That night I slept soundly.

I spent one whole day visiting Gori to see Stalin's birthplace and his train. Fascinating. I also visited the wine region of Kakheti; Vardzia, a sprawling mass of caves dating back to the 12th Century. Simply stunning. I was lucky enough to see Khinkali being made in a small kitchen restaurant. First the dough is made, then cut out in round circles which are then filled with freshly cooked ground beef or pork, red pepper flakes, butter and garlic. Delicious. They resemble white onions and come out of the kitchen literally in a cloud of steam. Best left for two minutes before biting the end off and sucking out the truly hot steaming juice inside. No knives and forks needed!

Georgia will forever remain 'on my mind'.

Perm Again!

Susan Clarkson

While living in Oxford I visited Oxford's Russian twin city, Perm. Perm is in the Ural region and is the most eastern city in Europe. The River Kama runs through it and the promenades along the riverbank provide walking places and recreational spaces for the citizens. This year I visited Perm for the fifth time; this time on my own. The original plan was to stay with a native Russian speaker in order to improve my Russian. This did not happen as my host became ill and was unable to receive me. Instead, I booked in at a hotel in the centre of the city and a good friend from Perm State University arranged for me to have Russian conversation sessions each day, combining these with walks around the city. My companions were all teachers of Russian as a foreign language and all worked at PSU.

These sessions with the friendly and helpful tutors were really enjoyable, especially as the weather, apart from one day, was absolutely gorgeous. On the one very rainy day it was a national holiday, the Day of Russia. In Perm they made this a double celebration by calling it the Day of Perm. Despite the rain there was a lovely carnival atmosphere and I felt it was a real treat to be part of such a celebration.

As well as walking, talking, drinking coffee et cetera, I was delighted to go to the ballet and the opera as well as to an orchestral concert of French music. The opera, "Cinderella" was also in French. The two one act ballets were modern versions of "Scheherazade" and "Petrushka". The ballet and opera theatre was about two minutes walk away from my hotel.

The hotel was lovely and very comfortable but the best thing about it was that you had to go through a small coffee shop to get to reception. I had coffee there every day and received friendly attention from the two women who worked there. They were very patient with my halting Russian and took an interest in me and my friends when they came to meet me.

I think the best thing about this visit to Perm was the time I was able to spend with good friends. I had met them all on previous visits and really enjoyed our time together. Lyudmila had arranged my whole visit and it was she who accompanied me to the opera. We also went for a walk and had supper before the performance. I spent quite a lot of time with my friend Veronika and her family, visiting exhibitions in

the local art gallery and various monuments. On one of the Saturdays I spent the afternoon with Danil and his friend Alexei. Danil is married to Olga and I have stayed with them on three previous visits to Perm as they both worked at the University. Now they have two children and I spent a delightful morning with Olga and the two little ones.

During time spent with these friends we spoke English, apart from with Olga and the children. Because we were speaking in English and all my friends speak excellent English, we were able to discuss serious subjects like politics, religion and the state of the two countries..

I think it is really important to keep up these contacts with ordinary people from a country which is so often treated with suspicion in the West. I do feel really privileged to have Russian friends in Perm, friends with whom I can share stories about our lives and hopes for ourselves and our countries

Volunteering and Youth in Russia

Elena Polyakova

(Ivanovo State University Elena was the guitarist at the Vodka Tasting Party earlier this year.)

As a university teacher, in recent years I've seen more and more students taking part in various volunteer activities in my hometown, Ivanovo. I talked to some of them and asked what they do and why they consider it important. Natalia, a first-year student of Ivanovo State University, told me about Ivanovo Volunteer Centre, which is a member of Russian Association of Volunteer Centres. The Centre works in five areas: social (helping the elderly and children in children's homes), animal care (collecting food for animal shelters), cultural, media coverage and event management. For example, on April 19-22, the so called Dobroden' (The Day of Goodness) was held in Ivanovo region. Volunteers did various things for the city and its people. They cleared up litter in parks and alleys (as one of the students explained it: 'We have PE lessons in the park, and we don't like litter all over the place so we decided to go and clear it up.') Activists of a folk ensemble taught schoolchildren some Russian folk dances, and students of Ivanovo Art College showed children how to draw and helped them to create picture cards which later were given to the veterans on Victory Day. My student Natalia says: 'I want to help people who need help, and I don't ask for anything in return, I only want to give positive emotions to people. It feels really good. It's important personal experience and it also helps you to meet new interesting and enthusiastic people.'

Besides, there's another organization in Russia called 'Culture Patrol', and there's a branch in Ivanovo. They organize conferences, workshops and seminars at which they discuss some important issues such as preservations of wooden buildings in Ivanovo region and making the city clean. Ivanovo Culture Patrol (like Ivanovo Volunteer Centre) has its website and groups in social networks, and they write about interesting places and buildings in Ivanovo, their history and significance. Besides, they help organize the annual festival "Hobbies and Interests" where people share their passion for various activities like dancing, singing, learning foreign languages, handicrafts, photography and many other exciting things. A colleague of mine is a member of this 'Culture Patrol' as well as some of the students of our faculty.

Some of my friends have joined the organization called 'No. More. Litter.' Its members take part in clearing up litter in the city and promote such issues as litter sorting and recycling (which are both problematic in Ivanovo), eco-transport and eco-festivals.

And I think it's really good that a lot of students and schoolchildren are becoming members of such volunteer organizations. I was happy when one day my daughter came up to me and said, 'Mum, I want to be a volunteer and help people.' And I have a feeling that there are quite a lot of people in my city who feel the same way

The Tatar and Russian parts of the village are separated by the Byrma river. Our local guide was Valentina, an ethnic Russian married to a Tatar.

The economy is based on agriculture, including dairy production and bee-keeping. We were told the village had a herd of several hundred dairy cattle - but we didn't see them! I also spotted some 'nodding donkeys' near the village and was told that oil drilling also supplements their income.

Our first visit was to the small mosque, housed in a building that had once served as the village school and teacher's house. The main room was bedecked in floral carpets and wall-hangings and was heated by a small stove. The men and women were separated by a net curtain. Mullah Rustan, in bright green robes, was on hand to answer our questions. We were told that there were several hundred muslims in Byrma, most of whom are elderly. However, the mosque could only have accommodated a small fraction of this number so prayers are broadcast by loudspeaker throughout the village.

Next we were taken to the modern school building, which also houses a small museum. The school takes children from the ages of 7 to 18 and currently has just over 100 pupils. Standards are high and many children go on to University - with the result that they leave the village for Kazan and other cities in Tatarstan.

The museum had a range of domestic and agriculture equipment. It also had some interesting historic decorative towels and headgear for both men and women, as well as several items of jewellery. We were told that the Tatars have bright colourful costumes which they wear for their festivals, but we had no opportunity to see any contemporary craftwork. Display boards celebrated the stories of men from the village who had fought in the Second World War.

Following this visit, we were treated to a superb lunch in Valentina's kitchen with an array of local dishes: cabbage soup; pelmeni; pirozhki, cakes, honeycomb from Valentina's own beehives and chak chak (a Tatar speciality). To drink we had Ivan Chai which we were surprised to discover is based on the dried leaves of rosebay willowherb, with the addition of other dried herbs depending on availability and taste.

Once we had eaten our fill, we invited to make our own chak chak using the following recipe:

- Take two eggs and beat them with salt, a teaspoon of smetana and a teaspoon of cognac
- Mix with a cup (approx.) of flour and knead into a dough
- Meanwhile mix together sugar and honey until fully dissolved
- Roll the dough into thin sausage shapes and cut into rough triangles
- Deep fry the triangles until golden brown
- Mix into the sugar / honey mixture

The chak chak we made was wrapped in foil for us to take away to enjoy on our long train journey the following day.



Web Site

Jessica Vlasova

Visit the Perm Association website to read the recently updated history on the twinning links between Oxford and Perm at <https://www.oxfordperm.org>. Also please send any photos of visits to Perm or related events for the website photo gallery to jessica.vlasova@gmail.com. Note that under GDPR rules, individual permission is required for any photos which include recognisable people.

Perm News articles available on the OPA Web Site

You can search for any article in [Past Newsletters](#) by entering key words for either name, author or title, etc. in your Find box. How to make the find box appear will vary according to which computer or phone you are using. Once the Find box appears on your screen, type in enough letters of a key word and the relevant issue of Perm News will be highlighted. You can then open that issue to read the required article.

Newsletter information

David Roulston

Would all members please note that articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome for this Newsletter. The **submission deadline for the winter issue of Perm News is 15th January** 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.



Celebration: Perm group wins in the Leon Link Quiz Night (see Recent Events)