



# PERM NEWS



The Newsletter of the Oxford Perm Association

February 2014

## My experiences in Perm

My name is Rosie Lawrence. I am a third year student of Russian with Polish at New College, Oxford University. As such, this year is my Year Abroad, the part of our degree as Modern Linguists that gives us the opportunity to improve our language and awareness of the life and culture to which the languages we study belong, by living there for the whole or part of the academic year. Given the aim of the year, I decided to go further afield into Russia than to its capitals, St Petersburg and Moscow, and, on the recommendation of Karen Hewitt, decided to go to Perm, where I was invited to visit Lyceum 8, in the industrial region. Later in the year I go to Krakow, Poland, to study Polish language and culture, before going back to Russia to volunteer on a summer camp for orphans.

There is so much I could say about my time in Perm, my visit to which is certainly one of the best and most memorable experiences of my life. However, I shan't bore you with an account of all I did and my every impression. Instead, I want to tell you about my impression of the Permians, because it is without a doubt to them that I owe thanks for my amazing time in their city. If you are interested in a lengthier account, please do get in touch with me!\*

I was in Perm for three months, so although I had been to Russia twice before in the seven years I have been studying the language, this trip was definitely different to those two previous weeks in St Petersburg. I already knew that hospitality plays a great role in Russian culture, but the generosity of those I met and spent time with in and around Perm was, quite frankly, astounding. From the lady I lived with, a widow and pensioner, who refused to accept any rent from me, to girls I met who invited me into their homes, took time to share their city and lives with me and showed me true friendship and care after a few hours' acquaintance and many more wonderful people, about whom I haven't the time to



tell you. And all this from people often considered in the West to be cold and unsociable!

A major part of hospitality for the Russians is feeding their guests. Nowhere was this more striking than in a village near Osa, where I stayed for one night with a teacher and his wife and young child. Despite having what in Britain would be considered extremely basic living arrangements, with no hot water and not so rarely no water at all, and clearly not having much to spare, they fed me and my two friends generous meals.

The generosity shown to me, practically a complete stranger, like the mother of a friend I made who gave up her ticket to the ballet so that I could go, with no expectation of such kindness or benefit to themselves, was truly humbling. Our society, who so often laud our own values above those of others could certainly learn something from the Permians. I know I could.

I want to thank all of them for a wonderful three months and for the kindness and friendship they showed me. In particular, of course, Ala Milashina, in whose flat I lived, but also importantly to Irina Petrova and her family, for their hard work, kindness and inclusiveness in inviting me into their school, home and city and for going out of their way to allow me to experience so much of it. What a joy to find people with such a genuine interest in and pleasure from cultural and personal exchange. I have shared only a fraction of what I take away from my three months spent in a remarkable city, where I had the pleasure of meeting many remarkable people. I can't wait to visit again.

The first photo shows Yekaterina Petrova, Irina Petrova, Galina Gusarova, myself, Ala Milashina. The second photo shows me and some of my pupils at Lyceum no 8. The 3<sup>rd</sup> photo is me with Ala Milashina with whom I lived.

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*Rosie Lawrence*

### **Perm-Oxford: new experience and opportunities**

Autumn 2013 was very eventful. There were many projects held in our lyceum. They helped me and my students make new friends and benefit from new experiences.

In September the twin-cities festival "Come together!" was held in Perm. Delegations from the twin-cities of Perm came to our city. My students and I were happy to get to know them and the guests from Oxford, take part in the project of Diana Bell, enjoy music at the concerts of George Haslam, visit the exhibition of photographers and meet George Haslam in our lyceum at the festival "All roads lead to Perm", which was organised by members of the European club.

We were lucky to meet Rosie Lawrence, a student of Oxford University, in our lyceum. It was a new and very useful experience for us, for me, my students and Rosie. It was her first visit to Perm and we tried to do our best to help her discover our city, learn a lot about it and the suburbs.

We discussed many problems with Rosie as she was present at English classes. Rosie took part in all the activities put on by the European club, conducted English lessons herself and studied Russian in the Russian language and literature lessons. We celebrated Oxmas, tried English scones and cakes cooked by Rosie. We were happy to have such a friend in our lyceum. But time flew quickly and we had to part. We hope to meet again and we want to thank Karen Hewitt for this lucky chance to make Rosie's acquaintance.

*Irina Petrova, Headmistress Lyceum 8*

## Going North

Going north of England through Lake District is the best memory of my first visit in UK. John and Rosemary Page invited me to go with them to their son house near Keswick. We were going through very spectacular views and places. We had visited Castlerigg, Windermere Lake, slate shop near slate mine, near-fallen rock, Keswick and its Saturday market, one restaurant in a valley between mountains. I had made many pictures of mountains and mirror-lakes that would become my laptop-desktop-pictures. That atmosphere and all these impressions would stay in my mind for a very long time further. Thank you all for it. Thank you, Britain!

*Anatoly Melentev*



## Visit to Anatoly's home

Each part of my visit to Perm in September 2013 was memorable, and for all the right reasons, so it is hard to choose one event to highlight. I had the good fortune to stay with Anatoly and Katya Melentev, and during my two short weeks there was introduced to most of the family.

The visit to Anatoly's maternal grandparents had had to be put off a couple of times, but on the third attempt we made it. We caught the bus, but travelled only a couple of stops before getting off, still in the city among blocks of flats. We crossed the road to a little row of eight red-brick terraced houses, 'two up and two down'. We stepped carefully in the dark up a short garden path, and there were grandfather and grandmother waiting to welcome us to the house they had built themselves, a privilege earned during the Soviet era. Indoors there was sturdy wooden furnishing, crafted by grandfather over 50 years, and the living room was light and bright with textiles and ornaments and decorated ceramics. A large round table was set out for a feast, but first there was something Anatoly wanted me to see. I was led up the wooden staircase to the study, past the book-lined bedroom that looked like a library. Anatoly explained that not so far back in the family there had been a priest, a learned man.

We moved into the study where grandmother had put out four thick files of manuscript for me to see. These were a full transcript of her father's war time diaries. She showed me the originals, stained and damaged, pencil-written and not easy to decipher. There were letters too, and drawings and documents. She had drawn maps to show the astonishing journeys made by the troops. The writing was meticulous and each page beautifully composed so that the books were a work of art, reminding me of a Wainwright fell guide. Anatoly said his grandmother had received accolades for her draughtsmanship in the electronics factory where she had worked, and I was not surprised. It was just as well that I could not read Russian as I would never have wanted to leave. Having just read 'A Woman in Berlin' I was fascinated by what happened at the end of the war, when the troops were scattered throughout Germany. Anatoly's great grandfather made journey after journey to gather them up and escort them back to the part of the USSR they came from.

We moved on to the feasting, and the giving of presents, and the evening finished merrily but all too soon. It amazes me to think of this fascinating piece of history in a small house in Perm.

*Rosemary Page*

*Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome.* The submission deadline for the spring issue is 15<sup>th</sup> May 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](http://www.oxfordperm-assoc.org).

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## Past and future events

### Visit of Mayor Igor Sapko 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

Igor Sapko, the Mayor of Perm paid a lightning visit to Oxford on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Arriving at midday, he was met first by Richard and Gilliane Sills who then passed him on to Mayor Dee Sinclair, Councillors Bob Price and Colin Cook. He was then conducted on a tour of the Ashmolean by Robin Carr and Diana Bell. After that he was taken to meet officials of Oxford County Council by David Taylor, and thence to a dinner at St Catherine's College. The Mayor was accompanied by his extremely talented daughter who acted as interpreter. The visit concluded when the Mayor returned to London on the 10pm coach.

The Mayor has let it be known that he felt his day in Oxford had been extremely positive and that he had been made very welcome.

### Perm Teachers in Oxford

The annual visit of teachers from Perm State University took place as usual. They attended the Remembrance Day service in St Giles and took part in the wreath laying ceremony. The following Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> November, a party at Rewley House to welcome them was particularly well attended and many friendly links were formed.

### Perm Visitors to Oxford

Two academic visitors will be coming to Oxford in March to undertake research in Plant Biology and English Literature respectively. The latter is actually Boris Proskurnin, who has known Karen Hewitt for more than 30 years and who inspired her to visit Perm for the first time back in the 80's when it was a city virtually closed to non-Russian visitors.

### Garden Party

The date for the Garden Party at 6 Rawlinson Road is now fixed for Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> July from 5pm. All recipients of this report are welcome to attend. Further notice will be provided nearer the time.

*Robin Carr*

## **OXFORD PERM ASSOCIATION AGM**

We give advance notice of the AGM which will be held this year on Thursday, 13th February starting at 6 p.m.

The meeting will be held in the Long Room, downstairs at the Oxford Town Hall, in St Aldate's.

The meeting will begin with official business and socialising, and will be followed by an illustrated talk about the schools in Chusovoy in Perm Region given by Dana Wentworth and other members of the group who visited Chusovoy last September.

As usual there will be wine and soft drinks, and since we shall be catering for ourselves members are invited to contribute suitable finger food if they can. It promises to be quite an active AGM so we hope that many of you will be able to come.

Buses in all directions leave from outside or not far from the Town Hall, and there is parking in the nearby Westgate multi-storey car park in Norfolk street (£6.10 for 3 hours).

## **2014 UK-Russia Year of Culture**

An agreement on the UK-Russia Year of Culture was signed by the Foreign Secretary and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov during talks in London in March 2013. We hope to use the YoC to promote English language tuition in Russia, strengthen the role and status of the British Council in Russian eyes and promote tourism and growth in the UK to the lucrative Russian market.

The Year of Culture will have a significant arts and creative industries programme as well as projects and events in education, science and language. The majority of events will take place in Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg but there will be a significant digital programme delivered through a dedicated website and social media channels. The Year will be launched in Moscow in February or early March 2014 and the closing event will take place in London during the Science Museum's Cosmonauts exhibition on the Russian space programme in November.

The UK's programme will be funded from a variety of sources including private sector sponsorship and commercial tours as well as an expanded British Council programme. It will include capacity-building and education programmes, will have a strong theme of mutuality and collaboration and will create a platform for building new relationships for British business as well as the arts and education.

### **The Organising Committee**

The Organising Committee is formed of key UK and Russian figures. President Putin has appointed Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets as the Russian Co-Chair. The coordinator on the Russian side is Mikhail Shvydkoy, President Putin's Special Envoy for International Cultural Co-operation. Baroness D'Souza is the British co-chair. Shvydkoy's British counterpart is Martin Davidson, CEO of the British Council (BC). The BC is responsible for designing, developing and managing the UK's programme in Russia.

The Committee met for the first time in the UK in November 2013. It will meet twice more before the end of 2014 with the next meeting scheduled in Moscow in April. The Committee's primary responsibility is to review and approve the programmes in each country.

Baroness D'Souza's leadership of the UK Organising Committee demonstrates a high level of UK commitment to the Year of Culture. UK Ministers also sitting on the committee include Minister Lidington (FCO), Minister Vaizey (DCMS) and Minister Willetts (BIS). Senior figures from the culture, education and science sectors take up the remaining seats on the committee on the UK side.

The **website for the Year** is now live at <http://ukrussia2014.ru/en/> with further information on some of the key events scheduled to take place.

## **A response to the Foreign Office statement on the UK-Russia Year of Culture.**

I notice sadly that the activities highlighted in the statement are 'English language tuition - almost certainly 'business English' which is a horrible notion, and 'promoting tourism' for ugly-rich Russians. Moreover the British contributors don't envisage going anywhere other than Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg – the equivalent of visiting London, Oxford, and one trip to Manchester.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we in this case imitated the French? Their Ambassador goes out to provincial cities and listens to concerts and encourages French music and exhibitions of French art. Their Voltaire Institute really believes in French CULTURE. We in Britain have a great culture and fantastic free museums, but become coy and philistine when we should be celebrating them. Imagine what we could do if we let our minds run on what Russians would enjoy. We have plenty of good British art from the period when the Iron Curtain made cultural exchanges almost impossible. So they know nothing (for example) of the lovely, witty, intimate landscape painting to be found in dozens of our provincial galleries. The Russians sent us a wonderful exhibition of landscape painting a few years ago. But what do Russians know of our landscape painting?

We do have excellent literature which we seem to have no notion of encouraging other people to enjoy. (The British Council broke up its libraries of contemporary fiction and spent the money on 'Business English' books.)

What about our music? How about a cathedral choir touring Russia? and an orchestra - and NOT to Moscow and St Petersburg (or put them last) but to other music-loving cities of Russia. I have heard celebrations of 'English music' by Russian orchestras which are embarrassingly bad, not because the orchestras are embarrassingly bad, but because the players, the conductors and the audience don't know this music or how it should be performed. (I'm talking about Vaughan Williams and Holst and Britten, not something strange and exotic.) Why not give audiences the chance to hear British music played properly?

What about our films? They all know American films, but very little of English films. They have seen 'The King's Speech' and quantities of BBC period dramas. But our genius for the detailed, zany, off-beat film would be understood in Russia much more naturally than in the USA. It's much closer to their sense of humour.

Alas we are philistines, aren't we? We are told firmly, 'funded by private sector sponsorship and commercial tours' because we seem to be embarrassed by the idea of the state celebrating Culture. Can you imagine the French or the Italians or the Germans saying 'It will include capacity-building

and education programmes'? What on earth does that mean? Why not - 'we will have art and music and drama for young people' which would make instant sense in a country with many specially-built 'theatres for young spectators'. But no! Culture is only worthwhile if it 'creates a platform for building new relationships for British business.'

It is possible to write a statement which does not put business in the centre of everything, but not, it seems, in Official Britain.

*Karen Hewitt*

### **Karen Hewitt's New Year's Honour**

We are delighted to give you the news that Karen received an honour in this year's list, published on New Year's Eve in these words:

**New Year honours 2014**

**ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

**DIPLOMATIC SERVICE AND OVERSEAS LIST**

**MBE**

**Mrs Karen Rutherford Hewitt. Tutor, Oxford University Department for Continuing Education. For services to building academic and cultural understanding between the UK and Russia.**

The nomination was initiated by Perm Association member Cynthia Watson. While knowing that Karen was not the sort of person to give any thought to an honour, Cynthia still felt that she and her work deserved the recognition. And for all her reluctance, Karen was certainly touched that the idea should have arisen spontaneously from a member of the Perm Association. Her words, when it was announced, were 'now I have it ... it reminds me of all the other people in Russia and in Britain who have helped me, so I can think of it as a joint award'.

The nomination process is now accessible and clear, but it still required a lot of clear-thinking and hard work to assemble the required evidence, including letters of support from Karen's colleagues and collaborators in the UK and Russia. So Cynthia should be congratulated for the nomination's success, as should everyone who helped her, including Daniel Sharf our Membership Secretary, and all those who wrote letters of support.

We know that Association members will want to join with the committee in congratulating Karen, and we shall make sure that there is an opportunity to do that in person at the AGM

### **The Russian Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Art Biennale**

As some readers of the Newsletter may know, I'm a mature, slow, art student at Oxford Brookes University, one of the joys of which is the chance to join the much younger undergraduates on the annual art trip. Last autumn it was to Venice for the Biennale. Of course we were told to do our best to prepare, to read the online catalogue and fix on things not to miss. But the prospect of 88

permanent or temporary national ‘pavilions’ filling the Giardini, the Arsenale and many churches and other venues around the whole city was too daunting, and of course we ended up just following our noses. So on one of the main paths in the Giardini I found the Russian flag flying outside a mini palazzo. (*Illustration 1.*)



What my photograph does not show is that there was a ground floor side door. With tired feet I chose it, and found it marked ‘for women only’. We were told we must take and open a transparent umbrella, for safety, and then walk through into a grey space surrounded by a first floor balcony. The rain was gold coins, poured down on us from some point just below the high glass ceiling, past watchers on a circular first floor balcony. (*Illustration 2.*)



Signs told us to pick up the coins and deposit them in the bucket behind us. We really must: the continuation of the process required it. Periodically the bucket was rope-hauled through the ceiling to an upper floor. As we left this quiet women-only level we gave back our umbrellas, and went to find out more by climbing the outside staircase.

At the top a brass plate gave the names of the architects for the 1914 building (Alexey Shchusev) and its 2010 restoration (Clemente di Thiene), and the sponsor (Alfa-Bank). In the first room a ladder led to a rafter, on which a besuited man perched on a saddle, occasionally eating peanuts and dropping the shells onto our floor below. (*Illustration 3.*)



Coins from the hauled-up bucket were tipped onto a narrow conveyor leading to the roof, to be poured down again past the spectators looking down at the women from their padded kneeler behind the rail of the balcony. A wall inscription began in the room with the man on the rafter and finished in the next. A white rose bloomed in a commode, or chair of punishment. (*Illustration 4.*)

Only when we went back to leave did we face the sign with the title *Danaë*, the name of the artist, Vadim Zakharov, and something about him (born in Dushanbe in 1959) and the work – demonstrating ‘to a society that no longer believes in myth’ the importance of the Danaë myth’s personification of human lust and greed and the corrupting influence of money. The complete two-room inscription reads: ‘Gentlemen, time has come to confess our Rudeness, Lust, Narcissism, Demagoguery, Falsehood, Banality and ... Greed, Cynicism, Robbery, Speculation, Wastefulness, Gluttony, Seduction, Envy and Stupidity.’



It was a hugely dramatic installation, and participating in it indeed felt a political and sad action. It was also both blatant and enigmatic, and shockingly elegant. And what did the critics say? For instance Laura Cumming in the Observer, 2 June 2013:

‘You could break the system by refusing to put the coins in the middleman’s bucket, but that would bring an end to the spectacle in which all the art-worlders at the biennale have become willing stooges, picking the money from the floor.’

Vadim Zakharov is a brave and ingenious artist who worked underground in Moscow for decades; his startlingly powerful drama clearly centres on Putin's regime. But it carries many other levels of metaphor too, some of them piquantly lost on this audience.'

The organizers of the installation were the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and Stella Art Foundation, Moscow, with the support of the Russian Mercury Group of companies. If you are curious to know more here's a selection of web pages, the first a walk through the pavilion on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCCSls6SERw>

<http://www.ruspavilion.ru/en-2013/about/>

The Observer review is on <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jun/02/55th-venice-biennale-review>

Vadim Zakharov has his own web pages on the Moscow Conceptualism site:

<http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/page?id=166&lang=en>

*Mari Prichard*

## **My Perm – A Sentimental Journey: The Art Gallery**

When I was growing up, the spire of the art gallery still dominated Perm's skyline. It was particularly impressive as you were approaching Perm from the west by train, crossed the river Kama by the railway bridge and saw the city for the first time thinly spread along the east bank of the magnificent river. The view wouldn't have been anything exceptional if it wasn't for a perfectly situated building of the former Cathedral with its slender tall bell-tower placed so elegantly on the high hill over the river, that it drew your eyes to itself in the most irresistible way. Nowadays Perm's skyline is filled with all kinds of tall buildings, crowding together, competing for domination - ironically reflecting the desire to show off and shadow the rivals that haunts the certain type of men who commission them. Most of these new monstrosities are quite hideous, with their tops often finishing in pyramids as homage to the times when Perm's urban architecture was reflecting a popular belief in magical powers of these Egyptian geometrical constructions.

Amongst the present-day giants the spire of the Cathedral looks like Cinderella surrounded by ugly sisters, grown far too big for their own good; but the size is not all that matters – happily situated and eternally beautiful it remains dear to the heart of every Permian as the instantly recognisable symbol of the city.

The Cathedral was laid in 1798 and fully completed by 1820. The full name of it is the Cathedral of Transfiguration of Our Saviour, but as for decades the complex of buildings served as the Museum of Local History and the Fine Art Gallery, everybody in Perm refers to it simply as "The Gallery". The building is now officially returned to the Russian Orthodox Church and the museum has already

vacated its former premises, but the gallery for now remains in its familiar place.

I don't know whether it was the same for every child, or whether I was different, but in my early years a visit to the Gallery was always a very special occasion indeed. I loved the hushed silence of the exhibition halls; golden light suspended in the air; the people from other times and places, long gone, but still looking at me from their heavy frames, faces glowing from within.

On this visit I wanted to show the Gallery to my son, but secretly, I guess, I just wanted to see it again. With the mixture of excitement and apprehension (what if everything has changed?) I was leading my son up the concrete steps to the substantial metal doors – the unfortunate feature of the most of Perm's official buildings and private flats. We crossed the doorstep and – it was like stepping back in time. Don't get me wrong, the Gallery has definitely moved on with times, there are computer monitors in every room, where at a touch of a screen you can read everything there is worth reading about every artist and painting on display. But – in essentials – the gallery had not changed at all.

All the paintings were the same, intimately familiar to my eyes, they were still placed at the same exact spots as I remembered and had just the same effect on me. Beautiful luminescent Bryullov's young lady, drawing you in with her relaxed unassuming look; two stunning girls – Perovskiys' sisters, frozen in their innocence, unaware of the turbulent life ahead of them, that will, for one of them, end on the gallows; sultry and steamy (in more than one way!) Roman Baths that never failed to attract the boys' stealthy glances and to cause the girls an embarrassment...

They were all there, true to my memory, striking, unfaded and ... comforting.

It is unfortunate that the vast part of the Russian fine art remains relatively unknown to the western viewer. Perm Gallery displays only a small cross-section of it, but its quality is exquisite. So, if you are visiting Perm in the near future, do try to go and see the gems of the collection in their magical surroundings. It will not stay there for much longer.

*Julia Budnik-Grantham*

