

# PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

June 2006

## On the trail of Dr Zhivago

Say 'Dr Zhivago' to most English people and an image of Omar Sharif in David Lean's film of 1965 will float into the mind. Spain was the unlikely substitute for Russian landscapes in that film, and nobody on the set would have given a thought to the city of Perm.

In the Soviet Union in 1958 Boris Pasternak's novel outraged the official critics. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize, but the Soviet authorities refused to allow him to travel to the ceremony; two years later he was dead. The novel was banned in Russia and the people of Perm gave no more thought to their place in its story than Omar Sharif and David Lean.

*Dr Zhivago* covers the years of the First World War, of the Revolution in 1917 and of the Civil War which followed as Reds and Whites, Bolsheviks and the old Tsarist supporters fought in ever-increasing confusion across Russia. The novel is not especially critical of the Revolution or the struggling new Soviet government; Yury Zhivago responds to impressions, sensations and lines of poetry far more vividly than to the necessities for survival. What angered the authorities was precisely this obliviousness to the heroic struggle; when Zhivago is evacuated to the Urals with his wife he observes places and small human incidents, many of them rooted in a family past that he does not reject. After a journey of many days their train shuffles into Razvilye, a suburb of Yuryatin. 'And there, on a hill above Razvilye and a mile or two beyond it, stood a large town, the size of a provincial capital. The sun gilded its colours and the distance simplified its lines. It clung to the summit of the hill in tiers, house by house and street by street, with a big church in the middle on the top...'



*The Pushkin Library in Perm*

Nobody crossing the Kama and trundling the last mile into Perm-2 station would recognise this as an account of Perm. But if you start your 'Dr Zhivago' tour at Perm-1, the station two miles upstream beside the Kama you can see what he meant, even today. In 1916 Pasternak had spent some months in Perm which, to his surprise, had been a rejuvenating inspiration to him. He made notes, wrote descriptions, and forty years later used them as a basis for his fictional Yuryatin.

In the final years of the Soviet Union *Dr Zhivago* was published in Russia, but it has taken a long time for the Perm authorities to acknowledge the imaginative links

between the novel and their city. This year, however, is the year of Dr Zhivago. Landmarks in the older parts of the city, a street of battered merchants' houses, the academy for girls, 'Lara's House', the 200-year-old wooden primary school, the Central Library, and the house on the embankment where it is believed that Pasternak himself stayed are now being cleaned, preserved, and brought into a tourist trail. How much is 'true', how many of these buildings Pasternak had in mind we cannot know. Wooden houses rarely survive longer than one hundred years, and most of central Perm is no longer wooden. But in one scene (Chapter 9, sections 10 -13) Zhivago is studying in the Yuryatin public library which is most certainly the Perm Central Library.

For some reason I had never visited this beautiful building (originally a rich man's house, the centre of musical hospitality in Perm). In Pasternak's day it was already the public library, and it has not changed much since then. The beautiful windows in the reading room, the long tables, the landing where they could drink water, the pleasant comfortable atmosphere, the sense (which obviously impressed Pasternak) that this library was used by educated people and by workers and peasants who were educating themselves - all this can be easily imagined in 2006. In these crucial scenes Zhivago sees Lara again, and reflects on her serious and much-loved simplicity. She is cheering people up, simply by being there. I happened to visit the library on a Sunday when it was closed to readers. But the big reading room was being used; an ante-natal group were exercising gently to music played on the piano in the corner; they relaxed - and exercised; and then, being Russian, they returned happily to tea and cakes. Lara would have approved.

*Karen Hewitt*

### **MID SUMMER MADNESS**

Come along to a fun (and fund-raising) evening run by all of Oxford's twinning link organisations and enjoy ...

- Salsa dip and tortillas
- Salsa demo
- Blinis with smoked salmon
- Wein Probe (German wine-tasting)
- Schnitzel und Kartoffeln
- Ratatouille
- Folie de Grenoble
- Leiden apple pancakes
- Leiden entertainment
- Vodka tasting
- Russian dancing
- Raffle

Friday 16 June in St Aldates Parish Centre, from 6.30pm to 10.00pm.  
Tickets (£10, concessions £8, children £5) from May Wylie.

## News in brief

### *Hospice*

Rosalyn Roulston and her friend and colleague Kathy Warburton returned to Perm in March to do another seminar on Bereavement and Loss for Perm Hospice and the Cancer Information Centre. (See report on pages 4 & 5.)

### *Annual General Meeting*

At the AGM of the Perm Association on 22 February 2006, a new committee was elected, consisting of the previously serving members plus Ann Davies. After the AGM, John Harwood, formerly Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council, gave an amusing talk about his experiences in the early days of the link.

## Dates for your diary

### *Dance visit*

The Doyle Academy of Irish Dance plans to visit Perm in July 2006.

### *Group visit to Perm*

A group from Oxford will visit Perm in September 2006, as part of the annual university exchange.

### *Yarmarka*

The Yarmarka folk music and dance group, who made such an impact on their previous visits, will be returning to Oxford from 24 November to 3 December 2006. They will perform in various locations, including a major event at the Town Hall on Saturday 2 December. Further details will be published in the next newsletter.

## News of Oxford International Links

The City of Oxford hosted a Young Women's hockey festival in April 2006, with the participation of players from Oxford, Leiden, Bonn and Grenoble.

## Oxford International Links - future events

### *Midsummer Madness*

See panel on page 2.

On 24 - 26 November 2006 there will be a multicultural Christmas Market.

Initial planning has begun for a multi-national performance of Carmina Burana in Oxford in late August - early September 2007.

## News of other links

### *Bonn*

Plans are being made for Oxford week in Bonn 2007 which will be the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the link.

### *Grenoble*

The Oxford Grenoble Association has been resurrected, after a period in limbo. Anyone wishing to join should contact Jean Burrell, 59 Bedford Street, Oxford, OX4 1SU.

### Leiden

To celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oxford-Leiden link, a party of over 100 friends from Leiden visited Oxford in March 2006. During the week, there was a formal dinner attended by the two mayors and also performances by a band, dancers and singers from Leiden.

Oxford cyclists cycled to Leiden in May 2006.

Anniversary celebrations will also be held in Leiden on 13 - 15 July 2006, coinciding with events to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of Rembrandt in Leiden in 1606.

### Leon

There will be a sponsored swim in September to raise funds for developments in Leon.

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### Perm Association contact details

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### Cheap Flights

German wings offers competitively priced flight between Birmingham and Cologne, and between Cologne and St Petersburg.

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### The seminar for the Perm Hospice charity trust

Kathy Warburton and I were asked if we could facilitate a second formal seminar for 40 participants in Perm. (We did the first one in 2004 for the hospice there). As well as introducing basic counselling skills, theoretical perspectives on loss and bereavement, risk assessment and working with children, our Perm organisers wanted sessions on looking after themselves - i.e. personal and professional support. We had been brushing up our Russian and found it very helpful to be able to give some instructions and comments in Russian during the seminar - much appreciated by the participants!

In addition and most importantly, we were asked if we would 'train the Russian trainers'. Six of the previous participants had already been disseminating the work we had done but wanted us to provide a more formal training experience for them within this seminar. This accorded with the requirements of the two organisations we had approached to assist with the funding of the seminar - the Victor Zorza Hospice Trust and 'Help the Hospices'. We received a grant of £1,050 from the VZHT towards our travel expenses. We wait to hear whether or not Perm Hospice will receive any funding from HTH to go towards other expenses.

Whilst we gave our services free, our travel, accommodation and subsistence, as well as that for the venue (the Teachers' Centre), delegates and the translator/interpreter, had to be paid for - the total cost of the seminar being about £3,000.

The participants were as follows:

- 7 doctors from Perm and other cities
- 5 nurses from Perm and other cities

- 5 psychologists from Perm
- 1 chaplain from Perm
- 12 hospice volunteers from Perm
- 8 social workers from Perm
- 2 others

Plus Kathy, our translator/interpreter Natasha Dubrovina whom we had worked with before and who is especially sensitive to the work, and myself.

Four people were unable to attend this seminar due to illness or pressure of work. The 36 participants came from a variety of work and volunteer situations - hospices, hospitals and homes for the elderly and orphaned and abandoned children, AIDS victims etc. in and around Perm mostly, but one woman came from Kazakhstan.

We arranged to meet the six Russian trainers for three hours two days before the seminar started which gave us time to fine-tune the training. At this meeting, we discussed what they wanted from the seminar, their role, the 'Dos and Don'ts' of group work and a resume of the basic counselling skills. It was agreed that they would be group leaders for the six smaller groups within the main seminar group and that they would feed back and facilitate some of the sessions for the whole group. We found that this arrangement worked to everyone's advantage.

After registration at 9.30, the seminar ran from 10.00 until 17.00 hours with a coffee break in the morning and an hour for lunch between 14.00 and 15.00 hours which enabled us all to 'network' informally in a local restaurant. At the end of each day, after a cup of tea and cakes, we spent an hour with the trainers evaluating the day, discussing any problems they had and going through the next day's training in terms of their involvement and responsibilities. We found that they gained greatly in confidence and were a huge asset to us in the organisation of paired work within the group, maintaining group cohesion, 'looking after' individuals who were finding some of the work emotionally painful and of course, enabling the participants to talk more freely in Russian, feeding back to us as and when appropriate and necessary.

This meant that we were able to do more in-depth work and cover more sensitive issues (such as suicide, depression and personal issues) more easily. The participants tackled the skills work and other exercises (role plays, sharing experiences, creative activities etc) with great enthusiasm, seeming really to enjoy working in new ways, particularly those relating to working creatively with children.

While we were in Perm, a press statement was made about our visit and we were interviewed for local and national television about our work, the purpose of the Seminar and the work of hospices. The participants told us that the programmes did go out and we have a copy of one of the filming sessions. It would seem that Perm Hospice and its events have a high profile in the vast region of Perm and both Perm Hospice and the Cancer Information Centre have become 'Centres of Excellence' for palliative care in spite of the poverty of the building and resources.

In the breaks and at the end of each day, we received heartfelt thanks and appreciation from the trainers and participants for the work that we were doing with them. They felt that they would be able to make significant professional and personal changes in their lives as a result of attending the seminar. For us both, it was a humbling experience to be appreciated and given so much. The Russians' resilience, courage and dedication to their work (often in very difficult circumstances) made it seem like a privilege to work with them and a life-enhancing experience for us.

*Rosalyn Roulston*

## Some changes in the last ten years

These brief reflections are based on some of the changes I have noticed in the last ten years in the city of Perm.

I have also visited Moscow, but it is Perm that provides the better continuity (more visits), in that I have stayed in the same home, and been invited in the same way, by Perm State University, and have followed a somewhat similar programme in terms of teaching at the School and University. The simple points are set out, and then perhaps a brief conclusion.

Travel. Whilst the roads have improved enormously, including a major new road north to Solikamsk from Perm, and roads in the city. I have the feeling that the Kama train has lost something of its prestige; on the other hand Sheremetev Airport in Moscow has changed from horrid to the acceptable.

Shops. Again this has changed beyond all recognition. There are now big supermarkets, through to the very large one in the middle of Perm, the old methods of transaction, going back and forward between the counter and the cash till have changed (except in the big china store in Moscow). The abacus seems now to be rare, and the shops have a western look. You can see what a shop sells, and the quality of goods has improved enormously in terms of range; on the other hand, some of the old Soviet goods were extremely well made, and one wonders whether their modern counterparts will survive as long.

Students. The approach of the students has changed enormously. It used to be very difficult to get anyone to speak, even answering quite simple questions, still less discuss. I am sure this is for the best. On the other hand, I understand that some of the students are perhaps not as academically qualified for a university education, and there is certainly a large swing from what one might call hard sciences and hard subjects to those with an obvious commercial monetary application. While there was clearly a need to learn some of the skills necessary for a market economy, I fear that this has gone too far and that there will be a price to pay in the future. The equipment in both schools and university has improved considerably, from the days when I had to borrow chalk from the school, because the University didn't seem to have any. There has been a huge expansion in Institute work, a little of which I have seen

Recently, particularly on this year's visit, I have been most impressed by the quality of thinking, care, and presentation of the student essays, particularly bearing in mind the very short time given for them to be prepared. Sadly, whereas when I first went, all the girls, but not usually the boys, were very smartly dressed, this has been rather lost, and customary western informality (sloppiness) has replaced it for many. It is difficult to be sure of the real underlying trends, certainly in Perm, and I know in Moscow, there is a lot more money for cars, better cars, and better flats, but these seem to be the preserve of quite a small proportion of the population, often younger people, and it leaves behind the unseen poverty and struggle. Some are really very poor, many have to struggle, the old, the sick, the poor. The social balance has not yet been achieved, and the Welfare State of Soviet times that with all its imperfections, did provide cradle to grave care, has been lost and not replaced adequately. This applies not only to the very poor, but to the healthy, and also to those on pensions where they have been reduced or undermined. In Perm there is a very strong movement against this currently happening.

One has the feeling that there are some strong underlying tensions that will emerge clearly sooner or later.

On a positive aspect, the Church is thriving, certainly the buildings, and I suspect that it is increasingly able to play a part in society. Perhaps this contrasts a little bit with the cultural side of life, with some of the wider interests provided for youngsters, particularly in the afternoons, at very modest cost, having now been undermined, and again one wonders what this bodes for the future. On the other hand, its very encouraging to see that Lukoil and others have restored the Opera House. No government in any country can achieve everything, but a better framework can be provided, and I have a strong feeling that one of the biggest weaknesses of Russia at present is that the rule of law has not been adequately established, either in its formal sense, or in the shortage of judges, their low pay, the focus on the commercial world rather than the rights of all the people, particularly the poorer ones. All of this is bound to create tension, and while the Russian people have a reputation for being very patient, it does not bode well in this particular respect. I have met several Russian people, who said of the National Government "in Russia we need a strong government, we are a large country, and we have always needed strong government. They went on to say that Mr Putin was weak, some said he was in the KGB or other. This was explained by pointing out, in the speaker's opinion, the following weaknesses:

1. The failure to collect tax properly.
2. As a consequence, the grave inadequacies of what we would call the welfare state, the social protection policy, particularly for the elderly and the sick.
3. The power of the Mafia.
4. A police force that is strong, but self serving.

I am not in a position to say how fair this is and other people were clearly Putin supporters, and to put it in balance, it must be said that it seems that the regional government and the city government in Perm are strong, and are achieving at any rate a good number of the requirements. To conclude, my experiences of Russia have been very happy ones. I remember in 1995 reflecting that the fall of the Soviet Union created a vacuum and inevitably much from the West would rush in, material goods, western ideas and values. It seemed that the critical factor was how much discrimination the Russian people used in what they accepted and adopted (sometimes adapted) and what was rejected as unhelpful. Probably some desires are still being worked out. There are many very real strengths, the generosity of spirit, the hospitality of the people, the resourcefulness and the endurance they have, their creative talents, science, engineering, music, plants and the arts, and the sense of humour. These will win through, but perhaps not without suffering and difficulties.

*Philip Clayton*

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## Perm in Winter

Most Oxford visitors to Perm go in September, and may have the good fortune to enjoy an Indian summer – or <zolotaya osen'> (golden autumn) – with clear air, dry weather, moderate temperatures and a golden flush on the silver birches.

Winter is very different, and visitors from England need to be well prepared. Winter clothing is not needed indoors, as Russian apartments are well heated. But warm outer clothing is a must. Waits at bus stops are shorter than back home – but standing for even 5 or 10 minutes can be a trial, if you're not well protected against the cold. Hat, gloves and a long overcoat are de rigueur – and can all be discarded when going indoors, as restaurants and museums are well equipped with cloakroom facilities.



The compensations are many and varied. The frozen Kama River; snow on the trees; icicles hanging from the roofs of old wooden buildings; waxwings feeding on the berries of rowan trees on city streets.



Life in the countryside – snow-covered roads and tracks, dachas lying snug in a white wasteland; and above all the view of Belogorsk – showing only in winter why it is called the White Mountain.



Then there are the winter activities – as either spectator or participant: ice skating beside Gorky Park; cross-country skiing in the city parks; downhill skiing on slopes above the frozen river; and of course the annual snow and ice sculptures in Gorky Park and near the Regional Administration.

No need to take lots of winter sports luggage – all skiing and skating equipment can be hired – and it's good quality gear with modern safety bindings.

A cautionary word - if you inquire about the temperature in winter, Russians will tell you it's "15" or "17" or "20", or whatever. They don't waste breath adding a "minus" in front – it's just assumed!

Postscript. During our 19-day trip to Russia in February 2006, we experienced temperatures down to minus 20 – but not a flake of snow fell during the whole period. We had to return to Oxford to experience a brief snowfall!

*Richard Sills*

