



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter January 2019

Life of Rivers/Rivers of Life

Alison Watt

In October, I visited the Perm Museum of Contemporary Art, which was showing an exhibition with an English title of "Unknown Rivers". The name refers to the 40 less known rivers (other than the Kama) in the Perm region. But the Russian title, "имярек", is laden with layers of meaning: "имярек" derives from the Church Slavonic words (имя рекъ) for calling a name when a given name is to be used in prayer or legal acts, but is used in contemporary Russian as we use 'so-and-so' in English for an unknown name or person. At the same time имя рек, written as two words means "name of rivers". So the word play alludes both to the status of these smaller rivers, whose names are often not known, and, at the same time, to the aim of the exhibition, to draw attention to these rivers, to 'name' them, and to suggest "different aspects of their relationships with citizens"* using visual images, to offer "possibilities of new opportunities"*.

The exhibits were wide ranging, making us question our relationship with and interpretation of our environment. Some of my favourites were an interactive street sculpture that encourages us, through play, to stop throwing rubbish in small rivers; a video of textual land-art being produced on the banks of the Kama, ("между нами вода" - The water lies between us) as part of a museum education project. The work emphasises the "location of the city districts on both banks of the river", but the young artists "when talking about the work, accentuate their desire to emphasise the disunity between different parts of the city and between people: "Is it just the water that lies



between us?"; and an installation entitled "Permian Period" questioning the permanence of cities (and political systems?), and the concept of scientific and technological progress.

Among many contributors was a friend, Yuri Khokhlov, now Chair of the National Society for the Conservation of Nature in the Perm Territory. In the exhibition he was giving a video interview on the "Valleys of the Small Rivers Project". Yuri, together with others, has recently managed to achieve official recognition of small rivers in the Perm region, which means they will gain protection, especially from development along their banks.



But it was as a friend of Yuri's that I was invited to a very different event. This involved clambering up and down slopes, through the forest, jumping over puddles and avoiding mud. But first we had to find the Andronovo Forest; though only 30 minutes drive from the centre of Perm, it doesn't

come up on the GPS. It has recently been designated a "specially protected natural area". It was to celebrate this that the event had been organised. Families were given a quest: to follow a map and discover different points of information before returning to the start for tea, biscuits, prizes and certificates. We took a more leisurely walk through the forest, taking in the view across to the oil refinery (the forest acting as an important air filter and barrier for the city), drinking from a spring where the water sets out on its long journey via the Mulyanka river, to the Kama, down the Volga, before joining the Caspian Sea 1500 kilometres away, admiring the twisted roots of a tree exposed by the erosion of the copper sand (copper being the material used in the very first industrial processes of the region), while excited children rushed passed us with anxious parents in pursuit. It was a cold, overcast, damp day in October, but wonderful to be outside and warmed by exercise.

So, by means of an active, outdoor event we were given a different way of experiencing "different aspects of [the environment's/the rivers'] relationship with citizens" and were also offered "new possibilities of new opportunities"*.

** From the catalogue for the exhibition, Unknown Rivers, curated by Dimitry Pilikin .
Translation by Aleksander Mikhailov*

Reports on Recent and Forthcoming activities

Reports on recent events

The **annual visit of six teachers** from Perm State university took place between 10th and November and 1st December 2018. Andrei Khokhyrakov laid a wreath on behalf of citizens of Perm at the Remembrance Day Ceremony on 11th November. An article in this newsletter tells you more about their activities.

The **Perm Association party for the teachers** took place on Wednesday, 14th November at Rewley House.

The Discussion Group had its sixth meeting in December. Karen presented the topic 'Russian Higher Education' which was preceded by a short introduction. David then chaired a discussion on 'The nature and extent in this country of anti Russia sentiments and behaviour - Is our attitude due to Russia's actions, or are we, 'the west', (largely or partly) responsible?' Background material was produced for both topics. If any members are interested in joining the discussion group, please email David or Karen

Forthcoming Perm Association events

Our **Annual General Meeting** will be held this year on Thursday, 7th March, at 6 p.m. in the Long Room in the Town Hall. We will announce the name of the speaker and the title of his/her talk later. Please put this date in your diary. Write to Karen Hewitt or Alison Watt if you would like to be considered for our Committee or for any of the officer posts. The Association will provide wine and soft drinks, but we would appreciate small donations of finger food and nibbles from members.

Hosts for Russian teachers in May. Karen Hewitt will be directing another course on English Literature for Russian university teachers from 4th to 18th May. We are inviting eleven teachers, so she will be searching for willing hosts who live in Oxford. We already have an active panel, but new prospective hosts are always welcome.

New web site

The Oxford Perm Association is pleased to announce the successful continuation of its new website at <http://www.oxfordperm.org> . Jessica Vlasova welcomes any comments or suggestions you might have about this new site. Also please send any photographs you have of visits to Perm or OPA related events in Oxford to add to our gallery. In order to conform to the new GDPR guidelines regarding publishing photographs, we need the permission of identifiable people. You can ask them, and if they say, 'That's fine', then we can publish your liveliest photos. Website contact: jessica.vlasova@gmail.com

The following two poems are based on a recent visit by the author to Perm

Wooden Gods

Jane Spiro

Mary has the face of a Tartar hunter's wife
after bringing wood in for the fire.

Joseph the face of a Sylva fisherman
who has stood many hours in long boots
hoping for carp or perch

Jesus the face of a kungur hunter
up all night stalking the forest
returning at dawn with the pelt of a bear.

Mary Magdalen has the face
of the fisherman's daughter
after carrying water in a barrel home from the well

St. Peter the face of the Tartar logger
who locked the logs together with hand-cut cogs
to make the walls of the hut.

The villagers are at home,
halfway between neighbour and holy trinity,
stamping their face on the gods, and the gods
on the land.

Diaghilev's last day in the family house: 1919

Jane Spiro

On this last day they made a picture of each room
to remember how it was:

the salon
with its upright chairs
like the braced backs of dancers,
dressed in the yellow and lilac of firebirds:
that long lovely swathe of wooden floor;

the dining room
with its white cloth
laid with gold-rimmed bowls and plates
awaiting soup, ready for the talk, laughter,
best cut of beef, red wine of the next day -

held in monochrome memory,
a still life before the change of cloth,
handing over keys, laying them out on the tray
like the limp limbs of a sacrificial bird .

Newsletter details

Would all members please note that articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome for this Newsletter. ***Please consider contributing, as more items would be very welcome and add significantly to the scope and variety of the newsletter.***

The submission deadline for the summer issue of Perm News is 14th May but it is helpful if you let the editor David Roulston (contact details on the next page) 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 all past newsletters since 2001 on the web site at Past Newsletters. The editor is grateful to Sue Gregory for her invaluable proofreading and general help with each issue of Perm News.

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On Drinking In Russia

Karen Hewitt

About 10 years ago I was asked to give an informal talk to Oxford University Rugby Football Club. They had been invited to play some friendly games in Russia. Could I please tell them something about Russian culture? So, on a fine summer's evening I faced eighteen huge young men who, it emerged, had some worries. They knew that Russia was keen to develop the sport but they were not at all sure about the traps which would be laid for them.

'What traps?'

'Well, vodka. We all know they send you under the table with their vodka. So how can we avoid that?'

I told them that the standard vodka on sale in Russia is 40% proof, exactly the same as the bottles of gin, whisky or brandy which they can buy here. But because it is distilled four times, the various other elements in alcoholic fermentation which give you the warning signs that you are drinking too much have been removed. The purification process means that you feel absolutely fine until you suddenly collapse under the table. There is no trap - just keep an eye on how much you drink.

They were dubious. 'What about all those toasts? That's a trap.'

So I tried to explain Russian drinking culture. Vodka in Russia is taken neat, preferably ice-cold and always with something to eat. To drink without eating is to be uncultured and vulgar. (Hence the bewilderment of an educated Russian asked to join an 'English gentleman' to sip whisky on its own.) What you eat can be very simple: a piece of rye bread, a gherkin, a small slice of salt fish. The host makes the first toast, something like 'to our meeting' or 'to friendship', the guests lift their glasses, swallow their vodka, wait briefly for the delicious sensation of its reaching their stomachs, and then eat whatever they have ready. You do not have to swallow huge amounts of vodka; the sensation is as delightful if it is a small swallow. But you do not sip vodka; its taste is minimal, so what you get is not on the tongue but in the body. (In fact, there are significant differences between one brand of vodka and another, but appreciating the differences comes later.) Consequently, even in an informal, family setting, you do not drink your vodka as you would sip wine. You wait for another toast or, if you are simply longing to drink some more and there is still some in your glass, you propose a toast yourself. All this adds to the friendly intimacy and inclusiveness.

However, what I described to the rugby players is already out-of-date. Since Putin, a teetotaler, made strenuous efforts to change the image of the all-Russian male consuming his two bottles of vodka a day to an image of the all-Russian male out hunting with hot tea, Russians have been drinking less. (I'm sure this is not the only reason, but it is certainly one reason.) According to the World Health Organisation, in the last two years consumption of alcohol in Russia has dropped below that in France or Germany. It is heading towards being comparable to consumption in Britain. This is particularly so among young people: the students and young professionals and all the millions who are keen on being 'healthy' will often be teetotalers or drink only wine or beer.

Russia is not yet a serious wine-producing country although the Crimean vineyards are steadily being redeveloped; most decent wines are from abroad and drunk indiscriminately with the sourest foods or the sweetest foods, so the experience is not encouraging. Beer is a different matter; good Russian beers are easily available except in some restaurants where they offer you only Czech or German brands. Special kinds of salted fish and garlic-infused rusks are sold specifically to be eaten with beer which comes bottled or on draught.

The biggest difference of all between Russia today and Russia ten years ago is the wide-spread restriction on alcohol in public places and institutions. In all the city celebrations which I attended last June with Colin Cook, our Oxford Mayor, no alcohol was available until you were inside private homes or rooms for which there was a licence. Among the crowds on the streets or on the university campus, nobody seemed to be waving half-empty bottles around. For the student generation alcohol-free areas are normal; they regard central Oxford on a Saturday night as puzzling and shocking.

So what should I have recommended to those nervous Rugby players? Ice-cold vodka with Russian friends or – a genuine Perm drink - unfiltered draught wheat beer which is delicious, distinctive and cultured. What more could you want?

Journalists without Borders *Vadim Skvorodin, Editor of Business Class Perm.*

Alongside the official twinning relationships between Oxford and Perm are professional-to-professional contacts. Luke Sproule, previously the Features Editor of The Oxford Times who supported the exchange of articles with Perm's Business Class and who is now an editor for the BBC in Belfast, has kept up his links with the Perm journal since leaving Oxford. At the end of November 2018, Luke took on the starring role in a Skype seminar organised by Business Class together with Perm University for students from the Faculty of Journalism and for reporters working in Perm's media organisations.

Not all of the main problems which confront the media today could be covered in the space of a little over an hour but, amongst many other points, the discussion considered how readers' preferences are changing, what roles social media are now playing and whether the mass media should require payment for access to content. The media in Russia and Britain have much in common but there are still significant differences; for example, in Russia there are hardly any publications left which use a paywall while in Britain experiments with paywalls continue. The life of the local media is very different: whilst in Europe media organisations in various cities are consolidating or bringing their business structures into a single unit, in Russia up to now, local media have found sufficient independent resources to survive competition with the internet.

There is much which is similar in the picture of local town mass media: reports on important events and on court cases and similar subjects are common to both countries, but in Russia there are very few political columns and little value attributed to stories about the daily lives of ordinary people and the doings of local associations.

The Perm students were particularly interested in how the British mass media carries out fact checking. According to Luke Sproule a lot depends upon the scale of the media organisation; smaller sites trying to be the first to publish news have to be prepared to sacrifice extensive fact checking. It is only the giant organisations like the BBC which can allocate significant time to checking information as the reader (or viewer) expects them to deliver reliable news.

The next symposium on current and future journalism between colleagues from Perm and Oxford will be a “live” face to face meeting of British and Russian journalists in Perm in March 2019.

The above article was translated by Andrew Adams.

What we discovered in Oxford

The following is extracted by Karen Hewitt from a more complete version by visiting scholars to Oxford from Perm State University: *Tatyana Konyayeva, Anisya Lyadova, Daria Pavlova, Lyubava Puzyryova, Vera Sukhanovskaya, Andrei Khokhryakov*

Readers will know that the teachers from Perm State University who spent three weeks in Oxford in November 2018 were a youthful and articulate group. Here are some of their impressions of the visit.

‘The course provided a unique opportunity to become an ordinary UK resident for three weeks. We’ve been communicating with people from various fields of occupation, cultural and social background.

This certainly pushed our boundaries of appreciation, as we did realize the British live and think in a completely different way! I was lucky to visit the Brain and Cognition Lab at the Oxford Centre for Human Brain Activity; talking to the Lab staff became a valuable experience.’

‘The significance and relevance of the Remembrance Day have become a revelation for me. I



believe we have the same feeling about the Victory Day, which is about the end of WWII. All across Britain, the names of those killed in action or mortally wounded, are remembered at church services, schools, work places and home. To show compassion, British people wear the red poppy pins. Patrick, a student, who gave us a tour of Oxford, wore a poppy, knitted by his grandmother.'

'I was lucky to visit the medieval fair in a XI century castle in Ludlow! The knights in armour at the entrance, a monk at the ticket office, wizards, storytellers, a villain and a hero participating in a real tournament, a historical battle reconstruction, and of course, local crafts and food! The most striking thing is that this is how it used to be centuries ago! And, it was not a foreign tourists' attraction, but rather the way the British people entertain themselves. I really enjoyed this trip with my host family.'

'It's been a cultural exchange, an opportunity to understand traditions. I was taught to cook a traditional English breakfast, or choose the right cheese at the market... In return, I taught my English family to cook borsch and pancakes, brew sandthorn and ginger tea. Together we watched British TV shows, walked around the city centre, met between my classes to visit a museum, or went to a public lecture.

The programme offered a chance to walk across the English countryside, a 7-mile route in the Chiltern Hills. Seeing sheep and cows and horses grazing in the fields, walking across the hills, stepping into the woods was something special. I admire the way the British people follow simple but effective steps to preserve their natural resources, let it be sometimes difficult. Not only did our guides Chris and David lead our way, they also did their best to explain the life in modern Britain. At the end of the evening we enjoyed a real Welsh-style tea party with Mari and her cat called Pushkina!'



For Oxford student readers: A new step in Oxford-Perm relationships will be a summer school at PSU with an emphasis on arts. The Museum of History of Perm University, the Department of Public Relations and the Department of International Relations have prepared a proposal for Oxford University students to apply for a 6 week internship in July-August 2019. Internship students will assist at describing the collections of Antiquity, Ancient Egypt and Middle Ages, as well as get acquainted with other museums in Perm.

The complete version by the visiting scholars from Perm State University may be seen on the [PSU web site](#)