



# PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter January 2016

## Oxford Goes To Perm

*As readers know, 2015 was a year of celebration for the Oxford Perm Twinning Link – its twentieth anniversary. Celebrations also took place in Perm. In October Oxfordians visited Perm for a variety of cultural, educational and social events. Councillor Bob Price, Leader of Oxford City Council, wrote this account of the official visit which reflects the variety of activities that have taken place over the last twenty years between our cities.*

The Lord Mayor of Oxford, Councillor Rae Humberstone, led a delegation to our Russian twin city of Perm to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the twinning agreement. He was accompanied by the Sheriff of Oxford, Cllr Sajjad Malik, the Leader of the City Council, Cllr Bob Price, the Leader of the Opposition on the County Council, Cllr Liz Brighouse and her husband, Professor Tim Brighouse, Mr Tim Sadler, Executive Director for Communities at the City Council, John Lubbock MBE, Director of the Orchestra of St Johns Smith Square, and Mr Andrew Adams from the Oxford Perm Association.

The delegation had a very busy programme. Professor Brighouse gave two lectures on educational topics at the Perm Teaching Training University and the Centre for Science to large audiences of teachers and educational professionals. Andrew Adams was able to establish new links between journalists in our two cities and also between doctors and medical staff involved in wound healing. Tim Sadler met with Perm City Council housing staff to advise them on a number of important housing management issues that have been causing problems since the transfer of the housing stock to housing companies.

The civic delegation also visited a community centre set up following earlier discussions in Oxford about the Oxford model of community centres, and also the regional Islamic Centre and the Perm mosque to discuss common problems of radicalisation and community integration. The Lord Mayor, Sheriff and Leader took part in a special meeting of the Official Assembly of the University of Perm to mark the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation and the signing of an agreement between the University and the City of Perm. Cllr Price gave a speech to the Assembly, referring



especially to the links that have been established between Perm University and the University of Oxford. He mentioned the recent development of more than thirty annual three month intern places for Oxford students in the departments of Physics, Chemistry and Geology at Perm University.

John Lubbock conducted two superb performances during the week: at the Palace of Culture, he produced Benjamin Britten's 'The Little Sweep' with 25 children from Perm schools before an audience of over 500 school children; and at the very end of the week, he conducted a group of string instrumentalists in a concert of English symphonic music by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Purcell and Britten before an adult audience of nearly 300 people.

The other major event marking the anniversary was the opening of an exhibition in the Perm Art Gallery of photos from Perm's twin cities in the Second World War marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war against Nazi oppression. Members of the Perm Association had managed to dig out all kinds of photos and memorabilia which were included in the exhibition. The Lord Mayor and the Mayor of Perm hosted a big celebration event for the anniversary of the twinning involving many of the groups from Perm that have been involved in our exchanges over the years: from the hospices, organisations that support people with disabilities, music groups, dancers and art groups and academic and teacher exchanges. It was a busy but very successful visit and a fitting celebration of the 20 years of growing links between our two cities.

*Bob Price*

## **Provincial and Backward? The distinctive cultural life of Perm**

*(This account is adapted from an article originally published in Russian Insider. Alexander Mercouris is a writer on international affairs with a special interest in Russia and law. He is a Londoner, but comes from a Greek family much involved in both politics and culture. He visited Perm for the first time last September.)*

When I told some of my Russian friends in Moscow that I had recently visited Perm, the response was a knowing laugh. This cultural arrogance has no justification as became immediately obvious to me as soon as I arrived in Perm.

I visited the Perm art gallery, which is mainly known – unfairly in my opinion – for its collection of the Christian art work of the Komi people. Though this is indeed very striking, it detracts attention from the very fine collection the gallery has gathered of paintings extending back to the eighteenth century and reaching forward to the present day.

The centre-piece of cultural life in Perm is however the Perm State Opera and Ballet Theatre which is housed in a fine neoclassical nineteenth century building that could compete with many in Europe. (It is actually more fit for purpose than the Royal Opera House in London, which was built in the nineteenth century as a result of a private initiative to provide a venue for visiting opera stars from Italy. Its management has struggled to adapt it to the needs of opera and ballet performance ever since.)

Perm's opera is not only extremely fine but under its dynamic Greek-born director, Theodor Currentzis, it has achieved an international reputation for his highly innovative and intense performances of Mozart's operas. Recordings of his versions of the Da Ponte operas have been released, using a specially-trained group of musicians (Music Aeterna) selected by Currentzis from the orchestra of the opera house. These recordings are attracting rave reviews.

I did not attend an opera performance whilst I was in Perm, but I did see the opera house's Perm ballet company perform Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. The Mariinsky (or Kirov) ballet was evacuated to Perm during the Second World War, and the ballet company in Perm follows the St.

Petersburg rather than the Moscow tradition of ballet. So the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* I saw uses the original choreography made for the ballet by the Leningrad master Leonid Lavrovsky and formerly danced by the great Galina Ulanova. This version of the ballet continues to be performed by the Mariinsky ballet in St. Petersburg and only works if it is danced well and with total conviction.

That was exactly what I saw in the performance in Perm. None of the dancers are known to me, but every part of the performance – including the orchestra – was outstanding, and could compare well with anything I have seen anywhere else. One dance – that of Juliet’s mother following the death of Tybalt – was performed better than I have ever seen.

What was however even more impressive than the performance was the audience. The house was full, as it sometimes is in London. However in London I have become used to attending ballet and opera performances where, with a few solitary exceptions – usually children – the whole audience is over 60. In Perm the greater part of the audience seemed to be under 40, with many of them under 30. It was by some distance the youngest audience for a ballet performance I have ever seen. Moreover it was an audience that was clearly very well educated in what it was seeing, being both properly critical and appreciative in ways that audiences in London today rarely are. To those who might think that it is an audience whose ideas of ballet are frozen in time, I would say that the company’s repertory includes several modern ballets, as well as several ballets by Balanchine. A television screen in the bar showed excerpts of performances of these ballets during the intervals.

Moreover it quickly became clear that interest in the opera and the ballet was not limited to a small group of people in the city, as it tends to be in England. Throughout my visit people were constantly bringing up the subject of the city’s opera and ballet company and of their pride – and interest – in what Currentzis is achieving with the opera company.

Since I was visiting the city whilst the university was hosting an academic conference, I was able to meet with people from all over Russia. It was clear to me that though other Russian cities may not have the good fortune of having their local opera directed by someone like Currentzis, in terms of the general interest in culture Perm is by no means exceptional. Talk of “provincialism” is out of place. On the contrary, far from being cultural backwaters, I would not be surprised if cultural life in the regions is sometimes more intense and dynamic – and better appreciated – than it is in the two capitals.

For example I suspect that the standard of performance of Mozart’s operas in Perm under Currentzis’s direction is now actually higher - or at least more exciting and innovative – in Perm than it is in St. Petersburg or Moscow.

*Alexander Mercouris*

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## Newsletter and web site

Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome for this Newsletter. The submission deadline for the summer issue is 15th May but it greatly assists planning if you let the editor (David Roulston: [djrouts@btinternet.com](mailto:djrouts@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). See also on page 5 in this issue the article on a significant web site addition.

**Hyperlinks.** The editor is now receiving articles with embedded hyperlinks (underlined words). These will be kept in as far as possible since the reader of the paper version will know that if desired the internet can be accessed to retrieve more information from the underlined text using the pdf version.

## Annual General Meeting Thursday - 4th February 2016

The AGM will be held, as last year, in the Long Room at the Town Hall, starting at 6 p.m. on Thursday, 4th February. Drinks will be provided by the Association, but any nibbles that you would like to contribute will be gratefully received (nothing requiring knives and forks). There is no nearby parking, but lots of buses arrive close by.

### **A Childhood During the Leningrad Blockade**

After the official business, we will hear a talk by Larissa Haskell. Larissa was a child during the Leningrad Blockade during the Second World War, and she has vivid memories of that time. So do please make this a date.

## News from other links.

2016 is the seventieth anniversary of the Oxford Leiden link. Planned events include Leiden bands performing in Oxford on 9th July, and a co-operative linking with the 'Alice' weekend from 30th June to 5th July.

2016 is also the 30th anniversary of the Oxford Leon link. There are many activities planned including the traditional performance of the Nicaraguan folk Mass at Blackfriars which will take place in March or in April.

## Noye's Fludde Twinning Event - October 2015

*This is a shortened and adapted version of Voirrey Carr's report which does not say how much effort she herself put into planning, organizing and singing in this huge venture. We want to thank her.*

In October at the Oxford Town Hall 275 children and adults were involved in the performances of Noye's Fludde by Benjamin Britten, including children from four Oxford primary schools. Sample masks made by local artist, Diana Bell (one of our members) were shown to the teachers and wonderful masks for all the different pairs of animals were created.

The large German choir from Ernst Moritz Arndt school in Bonn, the Leiden Youth Symphony Orchestra and four young adult dancers from Perm represented the twin cities. John Lubbock conducted the Orchestra of St John's, while Jake Muffett sang Noye and Voirrey sang

Mrs Noye. Perhaps the most striking performers, given their age and the fact that they had to sing and act, were the six young soloists –the sons and daughters of Noye. The Perm dancers danced the storm as a group, while two of them danced solos as the Raven and the Dove.

Here are two comments from the audience

*Last night was superb - we were in the gallery so had a bird's eye view. It always makes us cry. Thank you so much! The Russian dancers were superb - so were the singers - and all the children - and the musicians.*

*I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed Noyes Fludde on Friday night. It was lively and engaging with never a dull moment. What came across in particular was the enjoyment of the performers (as well as the audience) and the feeling that a group of people had worked hard together and achieved something of which they could be proud. It illustrated perfectly the importance and significance of twinning.*

*Voirrey Carr*

## **Our new Project – Oxford Journalists and Perm Journalism**

Four or five years ago Andrew Adams and Karen Hewitt tried to set up an exchange of journalists between our two cities, and of articles to be published in the local papers of Oxford and Perm. The Perm side were interested, but at that point the Oxford Mail/Times was not willing to take part.

In October last year Andrew went to Perm and spoke to several editors and journalists who were keen to try again. They produced a series of short articles on small Perm businesses; Andrew himself wrote an article about a small Oxford business. You can already read them on the Association's website <http://www.oxfordperm-assoc.org> in the Section 'Window on Oxford, Postcard from Perm'.

However it was always our intention to offer this material to the wider public, and very recently Andrew has persuaded David Duffy, Deputy Editor of the Oxford Times to publish the Perm articles in 'Oxfordshire Limited Edition' or 'inbusiness'. These colour supplements to the Oxford Times each appear once a month. This step is crucial in another way. Publication of Perm articles in the Oxford press will ensure publication of Oxford articles in the Perm press.

Our idea is that this should be a community initiative, with young journalists (and the not-so-young, too) providing articles on interesting, original and entertaining aspects of life in Oxford and Oxfordshire. The readership would be Russians in a city of a million people, most of whom will have little knowledge of Britain and less of Oxford. In Perm they are ready to take articles of up to 1600 words.

So if you are reading this, go and explore Oxford, talk to your friends, write an article yourself or – even better – persuade a young eager journalist to do so. If we accept the article it will be translated in Perm and checked by a professional Oxford editor before being published in one of two or three substantial Perm newspapers or journals.

If this scheme is a success, we want to develop an exchange of journalists between the cities, which would offer great opportunities to enterprising young journalists in Oxford. Please pass the word around!

*Karen Hewitt*

## Climbing to the top of Magdalen Tower as one of the brightest impressions of Oxford tour

This is a short story about seven Russian university teachers from Perm who spent their first Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2015, in Oxford in the company of three university students – Walker Thompson, Leo House and Harriet Buckley. As all these Oxford students study Russian, they are interested in Russian culture and communication with native speakers. Vice versa, the Russians were eager to speak English, to explore Oxford and to learn some new information about it. So, their first meeting was outside the Royal Oak pub and went on during a nice traditional English lunch inside. They were lucky to hit it off right from the start, discussing English and Russian weather and climate, architecture, customs and traditions, humour and slang. Next, the pedestrian tour round Oxford began. English students appeared to be excellent guides! For several hours the Perm teachers were walking along beautiful old Oxford streets, saw many famous buildings belonging to the colleges and, of course, asked many questions and took plenty of photos. But, undoubtedly, the most extraordinary thing they did was climbing to the top of Magdalen Tower.



It is necessary to note here, that the Perm teachers had no idea about Magdalen Tower and of Magdalen College before the visit. In fact it is absolutely impossible for ordinary visitors to climb Magdalen Tower. Only members of Magdalen College are allowed to do this for some special occasions and they have to get a document for this. Walker Tompson, a student of Magdalen, was the person who did all those magic things: got the document, took all the people through the porter's lodge, got the huge iron ancient key and unlocked that mysterious door of the tower. It was so unusual and exciting to go up a very old narrow and steep winding staircase, helping each other, laughing and taking photos!

The view of Oxford from Magdalen Tower was breathtaking: beautiful old buildings of colleges, green parks and lawns, numerous narrow streets with red double-decker buses, bridges across the river and the nearby botanic garden looking like a labyrinth. For several minutes one could hear only breaths and exclamations of admiration. Then there was a sequence of questions and answers, lots of laughter and again posing and taking photos and selfies!



This is the end of the story of the first acquaintance of seven Russian teachers with Oxford and three Oxford students. For sure, it was very productive, because it appeared to be not only informative and educational, but extremely entertaining and fascinating. Russians were lucky and privileged to get to know Oxford from the inside and to enjoy its bird's-eye perspective from Magdalen Tower. They also gained new English friends.

Finally, we hope this one-day Oxford tour with climbing Magdalen Tower will become a good tradition and an obligatory part of the educational programme for the next generation as the best way to get to know Oxford from different angles.

*Olga Putina*