



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter October 2015

Visit to Oxford by Karavai Balalaika Quartet

This was Karavai's fourth visit to Oxford and, like good wine, they have got better and better. They played in some wonderful venues, to a wide range of audiences, many of whom had never heard a balalaika being played, nor indeed met a Russian. Both in their playing and demeanour they delighted everyone they met.

There was rapturous applause in the setting of Phyllis Court on the Thames. In the splendour of Bampton church the Rector tried out his O-level Russian to the astonishment of his parishioners. Half of the proceeds of this concert went to help pay for a new roof for the church at Lew: 'Russians to the Rescue of Lew' could have been the headline. Handling the acoustics in Dorchester Abbey proved that Karavai do not need microphones.

They had begun their Oxford performances in the grand venue of St Barnabas in Jericho but, confirming that music is not only played in English churches, Karavai played alongside George Haslam at the Royal British Legion hall in Abingdon, ran a workshop for children in Sutton Courtenay, were received by the Lord Mayor, who is off to Perm this month. They enjoyed wonderful sessions with local musicians and dancers in the Rose and Crown, in Jericho, and held a very late and lively session with the Oxford Fiddle Group in The Chequers. Karavai were much taken with the group's rendering of the Ashokan Farewell, so maybe that will become part of their already wide repertoire.

For their two days off, Karavai were persuaded that Liverpool was the best alternative to their wish to go to



Ireland. As their performances had demonstrated, they are passionate about the Beatles. At modest cost I secured a penthouse, overlooking the Mersey . With careful guidance from Mari Prichard , who is an authority on cheap train tickets, we arrived in Liverpool Lime Street station on one of those rare sunny days when the city looked its best. Karavai were captivated by the river and the grand buildings at the dockside. Quite what they made of the ‘Beatles Magical Bus Tour’, delivered in a strong Scouse accent, I know not, though they observed that ‘The Beatles seemed to have lived in a lot of different houses’. No doubt their erstwhile neighbours also experienced the equivalent of Karavai’s two hour balalaika rehearsal in the penthouse .

The jewel in the crown was their visit to the Cavern. Liverpool is a city where people know each other, or if they don’t, they know someone else who does. With that in mind, I had made a few phone calls and was able to speak to the director of the city’s annual Beatles Festival and he offered them the chance to give a lunchtime recital at the Cavern. To use a Liverpool phrase, which Karavai now know, he was ‘made- up’ with them and they have an invitation to play at the Cavern any time and to take part in the Festival. So their fame is now extending beyond their many fans in Oxford .

May Wylie , formerly International officer Oxford City Council, now ‘roadie’ to Karavai.

Grateful acknowledgements to Andrew Burchett/Oxford City Council and George Haslam for the photographs.

Newsletter and web site

Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome for this Newsletter. The submission deadline for the autumn issue is 15th January 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.

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Forthcoming Events

Our annual **Association Party for the Perm University Teachers** will be held, as usual, in Rewley House, Wellington Square, the home of the Department for Continuing Education. We will meet at 7.30 on Wednesday, 18th November. This is usually a very jolly occasion, and we warmly invite you all to come and meet the teachers.

It has been suggested that we co-operate with other links to have a **'Twinning Stall' at a Christmas Craft Fair** organised at the Town Hall on Saturday, 5th December. We can, presumably, sell there objects from Perm (and Russia) and any of our own crafts inspired by this visit. More information later.

Noyes Fludde: Details of this multi-twinning event with performances on 22nd October at St Mary's Church and 23rd Oct at the Town Hall have been circulated separately to members. Tickets are available from Oxford Playhouse 01865 305305.

Extreme Climate

(Harriet Buckley is studying Russian at Oxford. From February until June this year she was studying for her 'year abroad' at Perm State University. These are extracts from her blog.)

During my five month stay in Perm I experienced temperature extremes at both ends of the scale. When I arrived it was -30 degrees and when I left it was +30. I had gone prepared for the extreme cold: snow boots, a huge coat and a vast array of thermals. But I was not prepared for the heat wave that hit at the end of May. I was assured by all my Russian friends that this was not normal weather for that time of year, something which only confirmed to me that Russians have a similar attitude to the British when it comes to the weather. One thing I have learnt since is never to travel third class on a train when there's a heatwave. Our journey was relatively short – only the 6 hours from Perm to Yekaterinburg – but all the same the heat was unbearable and I genuinely thought I was melting at one point.

Strange to say that I preferred the extreme cold. Snow is a novelty for me as I've only ever experienced the slight sprinkling that we get in the UK. Seeing everything covered in literally feet of snow was amazing. Compacted ice and the struggle of walking on snow was not so amazing. For the first time in my life I went skiing. It was not the ordinary downhill mountain skiing but cross country skiing, a very Russian pastime and, I can now say with confidence, a special skill. I never anticipated that skiing would be my forte but I can honestly say that I won't be rushing back to do it any time soon. I managed to fall over only 4 times in a 4 kilometre course which I regarded as a success, but I definitely won't be the next rising star in British skiing. Being British means that I am well adapted to the fact that it's always cold inside buildings, sometimes even colder inside than outside. This is not a concept that Russians can grasp. I too struggled with the fact that all buildings are heated to what felt like about +30 in winter. My roommate always wore a pair of tiny shorts and a t-shirt in our room, that's how warm it was. Like all sensible British people when going to a cold country I had gone out to Marks and Spencer's and bought lots of thermal vests. I thought I was being prepared. It turned out that all I was doing was setting myself up to sweat ridiculously during all my classes.

I now feel I have experienced the two extremes of Russian weather as well as the thaw period in spring. I was pre-warned by another international student that when all the snow melts in April there are rivers of mud and sludge running across the paths which you have to navigate through. She was right and it made me think that wellington boots would be an excellent export to Russia. It's difficult to say which weather extreme was more difficult to live through. I would be inclined to say the extreme heat, but maybe because it was so unexpected it was more difficult to cope with. It is certain though, that I have a lot of respect for Russians who live through such a harsh six month winter every year.

Harriet Buckley

Visiting Perm for the 70th anniversary of the victory over fascism and the end of the Great Patriotic War

At least three impulses led to my joining the delegation from Oxford to take part in the 70th anniversary celebrations. My wife and I visited Perm five years ago as part of the exchange programme with the University of our twin town. Friends made then had asked me when I was coming back to their city. I was also conscious that at this time of strained relations with Russia that some of its wartime allies, including in the United Kingdom, would not be represented and had barely acknowledged the great sacrifice made by Russia in winning the war: a barely imaginable more than 20 million lives lost. It was also an opportunity to investigate and reflect on my father's role as a tank driver in the Sixth Army seeing service in North Africa, Italy and Austria. At the same time whilst I recognized that the celebrations must have a strong military content I was fearful that there might, in the present climate, be an over-strong military display. My fears proved largely unfounded.

Saturday, 9th May was a punishing but unforgettable day. Karen Hewitt, Councillor Colin Cook and I arrived at 4.30 a.m and had only a few hours' rest before launching into a full day of celebrations. We walked to Oktyabrskaya Square to witness the parade. Our party was led very gently through several barriers to stand with the VIPs, many of them old soldiers bedecked with medals and feted by young people with kisses and bunches of flowers. A large screen showed the strivings and sufferings of the Russian people during the war. There were mass displays of dancing figures, Olympic ceremony style, and at one moment a ballet pas de deux on the platform. There were, of course, marching soldiers but the main weaponry on display were a lorry load of anti-aircraft missiles and a large tank (made in Perm as were many Second World War weapons).

The tenderness shown to the veterans was extended to me. Wearing just a lightish suit on a bright but very cold day I risked hypothermia after standing watching for several hours. I was led back through the crowds and barriers to an ambulance where I was wrapped in a blanket, pumped with warm air and given warm tea. Then we joined a procession of 30,000 people, many bearing placards with portraits of dead relatives.

We had lunch with Mayor Igor Sapko and delegations from Perm's twin cities in Germany and China. The afternoon ended with singing: a very professional rendering of 'Amour' from Carmen by one of the German delegates and an old communist song from the leader of the Chinese group. When Oxford was called on to sing we resorted to 'What shall we do with the drunken sailor?' It was well-received after all the bonhomie, wine and vodka. In the evening we attended a magnificent firework display by the company that did the Sochi Olympics fireworks.

The next morning I contacted my friends the Yasynskies. I was taken to their apartment where slippers awaited me in the hall and the promise of a visit to the dacha including a barbecue and mandatory banya. On Tuesday, Zhenia the young arachnologist who stayed with us nearly 3 years ago fetched me for lunch with her husband Ilya and toddler daughter. They live with Ilya's parents in an apartment in the Industrial area of in the city. Ilya studied psychology but can only find financially rewarding in employment as a worker in the oil industry, necessitating long periods away. We had long lively discussions about aspects of our two countries: employment, politics, housing costs. I told him what I knew of my father's war and we read a poem about him which I had put on the BBC People's War website.

As we said our goodbyes I was deeply touched when Ilya said 'And thank you for your father.' That war sits deep in the consciousness of Russians of all generations.

Derek Summers

Seeing With The Heart - Visually Impaired Children In Perm

Last year in Perm I visited the Association for the Blind. This Association is nationwide in Russia and the Perm branch is very active. This year I spent several hours in a school for blind and partially sighted children. This gave me great joy as I attended such a school myself in the 50s and 60s.

The students at this school range in age from 6 to 18. The older ones take national examinations when the time comes and then move on to work or further education. It is at this point that they become involved with the Association for the Blind.

The day of our visit to the school was beautiful; warm, sunny and golden with the autumnal scenery surrounding the building. I was accompanied by Olga, a student of English at PSU and this was her first assignment as an interpreter. The school is in the suburbs of Perm and is three storeys high. From the outside it seemed quite imposing but once inside we found it light, airy and spacious. A senior teacher welcomed us, gave us tea and told us something about the school. It is over a hundred years old and is one of three such schools in the Perm Region. There are about 150 pupils, some boarders but mainly day pupils. Blind and partially sighted children are educated together.

We visited a gym class first and later on a judo class. Pupils have won various awards for judo and other sports and it was inspiring to see how the partially sighted pupils helped the blind students to participate fully in the lessons. We spent time looking at art works created by the students and attended an art class. The previous day the class had gone on a nature walk and the teacher was asking them to describe the sounds, smells and feel of the walk, as well as talk about the colours they had seen. They then set about creating a frieze depicting their walk. It was wonderful to see the collaboration. The blind students, assisted by a sighted one, created vivid pictures using coloured plasticine while other pupils used paint to recreate the autumnal landscape.

After lunch we went to a music lesson where a girl was learning piano. We had an interesting conversation about the challenges of reading music with impaired vision. Then we looked at the boarding accommodation and then went to the Miracle Room. The students themselves gave this special room its name. In it small groups of children rest and relax on huge bean bags, listen to evocative music or a story. The lighting is soft and coloured and the atmosphere was wonderful. While we were there there was a group of six eight year olds, all blind. They had been told we were there and asked to meet us. They came up really close and touched us, offering their hands to be held. One little boy, Maxim, put his arms right round my neck and gave me a big hug. A perceptive little girl wanted to know why we were not speaking Russian to each other. I explained that I lived in England which is why I don't speak Russian. I don't think she was too impressed!

Before departing we attended an upper school assembly on the theme of road safety. The theme was presented through music and poetry and afterwards the students went away in groups to work on a quiz on the theme of road safety.

This visit was the highlight of my time in Perm. Olga too found it both moving and inspiring

Susan Clarkson.

Anniversary celebration talks

The series of three talks for the Association's anniversary celebrations were a huge success, both judged by audience numbers and by animated discussions after each talk. For members who were not able to attend (and also as a record of our activities), below are summaries of the talks.

Perm-36 Museum and Gulag History *talk by Dan Healey*

In 1994, Perm-36 was founded as a museum by members of the local branch of the Memorial Society, a national NGO devoted to commemorating the victims of Soviet repression. Unique among Russia's many museums devoted to Soviet forced-labour camps (the "Gulag"), Perm-36 took an original Gulag site and transformed it into a museum and a highly successful international educational centre. It is located 2 hours' drive from the city of Perm'.

In 2014, the museum was in the news as the local authorities seized the property and exhibits from Memorial and reconstituted the site as a "state museum". I visited it with Karen Hewitt and historian Leonid Obukhov of Perm' State University in December 2014 and found one exhibition room locked, although the main hall, offering an excellent history of the camps devised by Dr Obukhov was open, and we mixed with school parties learning about the history of the Gulag. The locked hall contained now-controversial material about Soviet "dissidents" of the 1960s-80s including Ukrainian and Baltic nationalists. They were imprisoned in Perm-36 which remained a "political prison" up to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the current nationalist climate the authorities now see these prisoners as "enemies of Russia" and even "fascists". There are rumours that the exhibits will be replaced with ones celebrating the work of prison guards; the Russian prison service is still a major employer in Perm' Krai.

The state's takeover of this remote museum is part of a trend for the Kremlin to crowd out Memorial and other NGOs from historical interpretation and commemoration of Soviet repression. Until now these civil society groups have created and run the country's main sites of mourning and education independently. The Kremlin and local authorities have announced plans to build a state-sponsored national monument in Moscow and a museum in St Petersburg, and a state museum of the Gulag is due to open in the capital in October 2015. The democratic public spirit that kindled these sites of commemoration in the late 1980s is being challenged by an

“official” interpretation that will probably rob the story of its diversity. Conservative nationalists appear to have decided that by nationalising the infrastructure of memory they can control the story of Soviet repression, and Perm-36 shows how this might be done.

Dan Healey

Professor of Modern Russian History, St Antony's College, Oxford

‘What is going on in Russia?’ The views and values of ordinary Russians

talk by Karen Hewitt

Karen Hewitt explained that the talk would be largely about the current Ukrainian crisis in the context of Russian perceptions of events. As an introduction, she outlined the experiences of Russians during the late Soviet period, perestroika, the nineties of the last century under Yeltsin and the era of Putin. Putin was seen by Russians as a strong leader who restored stability, presided over increasing prosperity, both personal and public, and gave them a significant voice in the world in contrast to their humiliation in the nineties.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine in February 2014 the version of events put forward by Western media has been almost the opposite of the version put forward by Russian media. Karen has been collecting opinions from ordinary Russians since March 2014, and responses to a questionnaire (about 70 answers) since May 2015. These answers came not just from Perm but from Arkhangelsk, Barnaul, Belgorod, Blagoveshensk, Chelyabinsk, Chita, Khabarovsk, Kolomna, Krasnodar, Kurgan, Kursk, Magnitogorsk, Moscow, Naberezhny Chelny, Novgorod, Omsk, Piatigorsk, Rostov-on-Don, Samara, St Petersburg, Tomsk, Tula, Tver, Ulan-Ude, Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg

Her correspondents answered questions on the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation (most supported this move), on whether Russia should try to annexe the Donbass Region (almost everyone opposed this), on the role of the Russia military and on the effect of US and EU sanctions imposed on Russia. Answers emphasised the closeness of Russia and Ukraine, analogous to the closeness of Scotland, Wales and Ireland to England. The relationship is intimate, with millions marrying across the borders, painful at times and inescapable. The other theme was the prevalence of double-standards by Western powers in their evaluation of Russian responses.

Later questions concerned the relationship between the Russian state and the Orthodox Church, how best to remember ‘Victory Over Fascism’, and whether Russia has changed for better or worse. Most of those who answered the final question were thoughtfully optimistic about Russia now and about its future path.

Karen Hewitt (A full transcript of this talk can be sent to any reader on request)

The Paintings of Leonid Pasternak *talk by Ann Pasternak-Slater*

On the 2nd of July 2015 the Oxford-Perm Association was privileged to host a talk at Rewley House by historian Ann Pasternak-Slater, Oxford academic and niece of Boris Pasternak and granddaughter of Leonid Pasternak, renowned Russian Impressionist. Unknown to many, hidden away in a secluded North Oxford street, is a very special museum which is full of not only beautiful paintings but holds an historical record of a fascinating family.

That July evening we were treated to a remarkable account of the lives of this family - the Pasternaks. Leonid Pasternak was one of the first Russian painters to identify with the Impressionist movement. As well as painting landscapes (his circle included painters Levitan and Nesterov among others) he painted the portraits of many famous writers and musicians. His most famous “subject” was arguably Tolstoy who was a family friend. He painted Tolstoy at home in Yasnaya Polyana where he was often a guest, as well as painting the writer on his deathbed. Leonid did illustrations for *War and Peace*, and *Resurrection*. He also did many notable drawings and paintings of his own family, his sons Boris and Alexander and their sisters Lydia and Josephine.



Under a Lamp (Leo Tolstoy in a family circle)



Un-named

Ann Pasternak-Slater filled her talk with anecdotes about her family, stories of her uncle Boris's life, of her mother Lydia who translated Boris's poetry and her grandmother Rosa Kaufman Pasternak who was a concert pianist and associated with many great names in the world of Russian music. Ann Pasternak-Slater showed a wonderful collection of slides which included a great variety of work, from large colourful landscapes to tiny exquisitely drawn sketches of only a few strokes.

The real treat for me as an art enthusiast came a few days later when I visited the Pasternak Trust museum to see the works in the Oxford house where Leonid himself painted in his later years. What I found the most moving were the beautiful portraits of the Pasternak children, in oils and pen and ink, so lifelike and giving us a real feeling for this very close family and also the copy of Tolstoy's “*Resurrection*”, filled with so many beautiful illustrations which brought to life Tolstoy's characters and themes in a way that only a close contemporary of Tolstoy's could have done. The pictures above give the reader an idea of Leonid Pasternak's paintings (from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Pasternak)

Dana Wentworth