

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

January 2006

The Perm Association's First Film Night

We need a more entertaining regular programme to offer to Perm Association members, said a forward-looking member of the Executive. We could start with a Russian Film Night, said the Chair, remembering a useful contact she had, who might make it happen.

Those of you who came to the resulting event may be surprised that such an overwhelming event started in such an unassuming way. This is to give all Association members the background to the evening, and to invite suggestions for next steps.

The 'useful contact' was James Fry, organizer of an existing Sunday evening film club in Oxford using an excellent venue (Magdalen College auditorium), who was known to be of 'can-do' disposition and to have a taste for foreign-language films. Karen duly negotiated a shared club night in January, with wine, and proceeds also to be shared with the Perm Association. They ordered *Farewell*, a 1981 film about the price paid for progress when an old village in Siberia is to be destroyed in order to build a dam, and its peasant community, locked into ancient ritual, are resettled in a development of faceless apartment blocks. That film was begun by Larissa Shepitko, but when she was killed in a car accident her husband, the director Elem Klimov, completed it. However when the package containing the film was delivered to James and opened the previous week, the distributor turned out to have enclosed the wrong film, and further enquiries then revealed that *Farewell* was available in the West only in a poor pirated copy. With little time to spare Klimov's last film was ordered, and that was what we watched.



Idi i smotri translated as *Come and See* (1985) was therefore for most of us an entirely unexpected experience, and a harrowing one. A teenage boy in Belarus leaves his mother and sister to join the partisans fighting the Nazi occupation in 1943. We see through the boy's eyes, hear through his ears, as he trains in the woods with the charismatic partisan leader, forages for food, and revisits his old home – only to find it empty, his family dead. He then witnesses the wholesale massacre of villagers,

forced into churches and torched, or shot or raped, by Nazis who are the very emblems of brutality and decadence. He sometimes ceases to hear – the soundtrack cuts out – and he acquires the eyes and facial wrinkles of an old man. He carries a gun, but doesn't fire it until the end, at a picture of Hitler, which prompts a seen-backwards run of newsreels tracing the rise of the Nazis back to the birth

of the baby Adolph.

The film ends with the boy unable to shoot the picture of the infant Hitler, text commemorating the fact that over 600 Belarus villages were wiped out in this way by the Nazis, and the sound of the Mozart Requiem finally replacing the Schnittke score that accompanies most of the film. We walked out almost silently, the experience still far too raw to discuss, and only later in the week exchanged emails and comments that suggested that on balance we were glad we'd seen what was clearly one of the most remarkable films made in postwar Russia

Elem Klimov was born in Stalingrad into a communist family - his first name was an acronym of Engels, Lenin and Marx – and he drew on his own childhood for the film. Obituaries written at the time of his death in 2003, and still available on the net, helped make sense of what we'd seen. It was Klimov's last work and testament, apparently a film you can expect Russians to have seen – once. For our eyes, perhaps over-protected, and too gently treated in films like *Schindler's List*, the images of pain and brutality were exceptionally hard, and sometimes the style perplexed – such as the semi-comic portrayal of Nazi officers. But Klimov knew the film was relentless and only just watchable. “Had I included everything I knew and shown the whole truth, even I could not have watched it.”

So that was our first film night. Not what we expected, utterly memorable, but not what you might want too often. So what next? Let me know your suggestions, and we'll see what we can do.

Mari Prichard

Russian New Year

When asked to write about Russian New Year and winter traditions, I felt myself in a kind of spot at first. And do we have any special traditions? Don't we celebrate New Year in the same way as everywhere – eating and drinking and just having fun? We do. But it's possible to distinguish some very special features of the Russian New Year.

While the most loved holiday in Europe is Christmas (according to our stereotypes, at least), in Russia it is undoubtedly New Year, and the culmination of the holiday rush falls on the night from 31st of December to 1st of January. While the main character of winter holidays in Europe and the USA is Santa Claus, in Russian it is *Grandfather Frost (Ded Moroz)*. *Ded Moroz* also has a long white beard and a sack with presents over his shoulder. But, unlike Santa, he always wears a long coat (it can be too cold in a jacket and trousers in winter in Russia) and never flies in a sledge harnessed with reindeer over the sky – his preferences are hiking or taking a troika. And what is most special – Grandfather Frost's assistant is *Snowgirl (Snegurochka)*, his granddaughter – a young kind lady with a fair plait wearing pale blue outer clothing. This couple are definite guests at all New Year parties for children, which are usually organized in places we call “palaces of culture” in the last ten days of December. Children are asked to go there in carnival costumes. So lots of girls - “*snowflakes*”, boys - “*hares*” and different fairy-tale characters encircle the New Year tree and move in a round dance hand in hand.

New Year parties “for adults” also don’t lack special features. Grandfather Frost (one booked in advance by phone or a disguised guest) can turn up in any flat in New Year night as well. But it is more likely that Olivier salad (also known abroad as “Russian” salad) will appear at a festive table. The original recipe of this salad was created in the 1860s by a French cook Lucien Olivier who owned the “Hermitage” restaurant in St. Petersburg. At first it included such ingredients as the meat of hazel-grouse and crabs, calf’s tongue, black caviar. However the recipe has been dramatically transformed by now and almost nothing of its original ingredients – except for cucumbers, boiled eggs, mayonnaise and the very name - has survived through the years. A modern variant of this salad also contains boiled sausage or squid, boiled potato and carrot, green peas and onion – this mixture is almost certain to be a New Year course. Another popular one is “*herrings under fur coat*” – pickled herrings covered with layers of grated potato, carrot, beetroot and mayonnaise. A traditional New Year drink is, of course, champagne. We usually open bottles of it during the President’s speech broadcast on TV. The speech is followed by twelve strokes of the Kremlin chimes and the national anthem. Some of my friends manage to write down their wishes for the next year, burn them and flick the ash into their goblets during the chimes - and drink this “spoiled” champagne to make the wishes come true. What’s funny about the hymn – since a new one appeared not long ago and it has the same melody as the soviet version – is that the old words come to mind more often.

TV plays a really important role on New Year’s Eve not only due to the President and the hymn. Many people spend all the night just sitting at the table, eating, talking and watching a kind of TV-musicals where almost all Russian pop-stars play different characters and sing old songs. There are also some traditional New Year movies. The most popular one is “The irony of fate” or “*S legkim parom!*” shot in 1976. The second part of its title is an expression, which it is polite to say to people after a *banya* (sauna) and now also after having a bath or shower. An approximate translation of it is “Congratulations on having a light steam!” which approximately means “We hope you enjoyed the time”. This movie is actually a love story, but with a rather funny plot that could be a product of soviet humor only. A man, a Moscow resident, drank too much with his friends in a *banya* on December 31 and was mistakenly put into an airplane instead of another one. So in New Year night he finds himself in a flat absolutely identical with his own: the same address, the same-looking house, the same door lock, the same furniture and so on. But in Leningrad and with a woman waiting in *her* flat for her groom! This movie is usually shown by a few channels on December 31. It lasts three or four hours, so not many people (busy with preparations) have seen it from the beginning to the end at once. I discover episodes new for me every year, and even those I can quote by heart bring me pleasure every time.

If the weather is not too cold it’s also possible to switch off the TV, go out and spend the night at a New Year tree place. There are a few such places in Perm, the main one is situated in front of the local Legislative Assembly building. What you can find there are a huge Christmas tree surrounded with an “ice town” (including *gorki* – ice hills to slide down, attractions, a small skating rink and so on), music and lots of people.

The first day of the New Year, many people usually spend sleeping. But it

doesn't mean that winter celebrations and amusements are over. As I've already mentioned, Christmas (falling on 7th of January) is not a widely-celebrated holiday in Russia. I know myself only a few people who go to church on Christmas Eve and nobody who gives presents this day. However it's a good occasion to have a rest, call guests or go out. One more good occasion is the so called Old New Year – the evening of the 13th January which used to be the 31st December in pre-revolutionary Russia.

And for those who like unusual amusements the best period is from 7th (Christmas) to 19th (Epiphany) of January – Christmastide. Lots of customs were connected with this time in old Russia. What has survived through the centuries is fortune-telling. Girls and young women like to gather together in nights of this period and follow old and also modern “recipes” for finding out their future. They do it mostly for fun, but some predictions, according to rumours, come true. For example, my grandmother burning a sheet of paper and watching its shadow on the wall saw a train. Soon she moved from Moscow to Perm. Coincidence? Who knows. On the other hand, a friend of mine has learned only two questions, which numbers she saw using another method – and got a bad exam mark. There are companies that organize special Christmastide “parties” with old customs of fortune-telling, Christmastide games and so on. I also was a participant of such an event in Hohlovka a few years ago and can say that it brings not only fun, but also knowledge of old Russian culture. However, there are so many interesting details and stories connected with Christmastide, that it seems to be the topic for another article.

Olga Kirianova

Annual Subscriptions

Please note that all membership subscriptions were due on 1st January. Members who have already paid should have received their Membership Card with this newsletter (or already have one valid to December 2006). Thanks to all of you who pay by bank standing order since this greatly simplifies our book keeping. If you would like a standing order form, please phone 01993 813215 and we will post it to you. For those of you who prefer to pay by cheque, if not already sent, please write your cheque for £8 per member, made out to “Perm Association”) and post it to:

David Roulston, Membership Secretary, 6 Heath Lane, Bladon, OX20 1SB

Perm Association contact details

Chairman:	Karen Hewitt;	tel. 01865 515635; e-mail: karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk
Secretary:	Mari Prichard;	tel. 01865 556673; e-mail: mari.prichard@hcarpenter.co.uk
Treasurer:	Rosalyn Roulston;	tel. 01993 813215; e-mail: Rosalynroulston@aol.com
Membership:	David Roulston;	tel. 01993 813215; e-mail: DJRouls@aol.com
Newsletter:	Richard Sills;	tel. 01865 721644; e-mail: richardsills@btinternet.com

News in brief

University exchange

A group of teachers from Perm State University visited Oxford in November and December 2005, as part of the annual university exchange.

Russian films

The first of a new series of Russian films was shown on 15 January at the Magdalen College auditorium. Instead of the planned showing of "Farewell", which was unobtainable, we saw a film by Elem Klimov, "Come and See", a harrowing story of partisan action and Nazi brutality in Belorus during the second world war.

Dates for your diary

Hospice

Rosalyn Roulston and her friend and colleague Kathy Warburton are returning to Perm at the end of March to do another seminar on Bereavement and Loss for Perm Hospice and the Cancer Information Centre. This time, it is a four-day seminar involving some previous participants in the training as facilitators so that the work can be disseminated further afield in Russia. Rosalyn will be holding a coffee morning and 'Bring and Buy' sale to raise money to purchase more much-needed things for the Hospice on Thursday, 16th February from 10.30 to 12.30 at 6 Heath Lane, Bladon (tel: 01993 813215). Please do come and support this!

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Perm Association will be held at 6.15pm on Wednesday 22 February 2006, in the Buttery at Wolfson College. In addition to the standard AGM agenda, John Harwood will give a talk. In his former role as Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council, John played a key role during the first part of the ten-year link between Perm Region and Oxfordshire. He will be sharing his many anecdotes and amusing personal experiences as well as more serious assessments of the past and future of the link. Wolfson College is situated in Linton Road (off Banbury Road); ample parking is available in the college (turn right at college entrance), or there is plenty of parking space on Linton Road).

Perm - City of Culture

The City of Perm has been designated a City of Culture for the year 2006, by the Volga Region into which it was placed at the last reshuffle of local government boundaries. The city administration will be mounting a cultural festival in June 2006, and it is hoped that this will involve some Oxford participation.

Dance visit

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

Group visit to Perm

Forms are now available for anyone who would like to go on the group visit to Perm in September 2006. Please contact Karen Hewitt.

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 future newsletters.

News of Oxford International Links

Bernstein Mass

An international performance of Bernstein's Mass took place on 28 & 29 October 2005 in Oxford Town Hall. This was a stunning event involving singers - adults and children - from Bonn, the 'Interlude' choir from Grenoble, the East Oxford Community Choir, the Leiden Youth Orchestra, Oxford Youth Dance and two groups of dancers from Perm. The success of the event was due in large measure to the efforts of Mel Houldershaw of the East Oxford Community Choir, Cecilia Macfarlane, who coordinated the preparation of the Oxford and Perm dancers, John Lubbock who conducted the performance - and of course May Wylie who put in a huge amount of work as project coordinator.

Oxford International Links - future events

The City of Oxford will host a Young Women's hockey festival on 7 - 9 April 2006, with the participation of 20 players from Oxford, Leiden, Perm, Bonn and Grenoble. Anyone willing to offer B&B accommodation to these young players is asked to contact May Wylie at the Town Hall.

Youth bands from the twin towns may be invited to take part in the Cowley Road Carnival in June 2006.

On 24 - 26 November 2006 there will be a multicultural Christmas Market, hopefully in Broad Street.

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

Oxford School hosted an exchange group from Bonn in January 2006.

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

Grenoble

A Fete des Rois celebration was held on January 6th in the Town Hall - an excellent event which raised over £280. Many thanks to the singers from the East Oxford Community Choir - and to Don Rouse for setting the tone with his energetic dancing.

Leiden

In September 2005 a group of cyclists rode from Leiden to Oxford - in one day! Oxford cyclists plan to make a reciprocal journey to Leiden in May 2006 - though not in one day! The Lord Mayor may be one of the cyclists.

A group of 80 schoolchildren from Leiden visited Oxford in October 2005.

A delegation from Leiden visited Oxford in November for the annual dinner and Remembrance Day commemoration.

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Oxford-Leiden link, a party of over 100 friends from Leiden will visit Oxford from 23 to 27 March 2006. During the week, there will be performances by a band, dancers and singers from Leiden. More than 4000 Dutch hyacinths are being planted outside the ice-rink, and it is hoped that they will be in bloom by then.

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

The Misa Campesina - the Nicaraguan peasant mass - will be held in Blackfriars in St Giles in early March. Singers and musicians are most welcome. Please contact Judith Condor Vidal on 01865 559813 for further details.

'Would you take a child?'

Everyone has heard of the horrendous conditions in some of the children's homes and orphanages in the countries of Eastern Europe - including Russia. Recently an article in *The Guardian* told us that in some of the most hard-pressed Russian children's homes, only a few pence a day were spent on each child. In Perm Region the homes I have visited are certainly more comfortable - and kindly - than these articles describe, with plenty of noisy tumbling and playing, pets, games, and typically Russian shambling routines that the primary school children obviously enjoy. Most of these children have no-one except perhaps a frail grandmother or alcoholic parents from whom they have been taken; their only home is the children's home. All too often they do not even meet the local children because they attend a separate school attached to their institution.

Over the last six years, Perm Region has begun to build up a network of foster homes and of adoptive parents. The policy has had to counter resistance and disapproval in Russia where even childless couples rarely contemplate adoption, on the grounds that any child who lands up in a children's home must have bad genes and bad instincts. However, increasing numbers of foster parents and adoptive parents are being found in Perm's villages. By the standards of the city, villagers are poor with tiny cash incomes and few basic facilities. From their own point of view, villagers live in wooden houses that can absorb children more easily than city flats; they have land where they must cultivate food and animals that need looking after; villages with an aging population need children; the state payment to foster families is significant wealth for the poor; and where there are young families, three or four children is the norm rather than one child.

So one couple with, say, two children of their own, offer to look after a child from one of the city 'homes'. Social workers from the home visit the family regularly, to observe how Vanya or Lena integrates into a village life that will certainly include helping to care for the family's cow and pig and chickens, and perhaps their two or three sheep. Village children are also expected to work in the garden which supplies the vegetables and fruit, and to chop wood, carry water from wells, dig pits, clear streams, collect berries and mushrooms, and make sure that they get to school despite spring floods, summer dust, and hard-packed snow and ice in winter. In fact these can be the ingredients for a very happy and exhilarating childhood if the foster family and young Vanya or Lena take to each other. When that happens, other families in the village often decide that they, too, would like to take a child. Now, some villages in Perm Region have up to a dozen adopted or fostered children in seven or eight different families.

I have watched prospective foster-parents from one of these villages waiting to be assessed and approved in the big city. They were obviously nervous, shy of their surroundings, and very excited. The social workers used to worry that a family's own children might be ostentatiously favoured over the adopted child, but they say that the problem is usually short-term. Instead they remembered the foster-mother who kept praising her foster-child who worked hard at his lessons unlike her own child. She was immune to their suggestions that she should be tactful; tact was not part of how she lived. So they persuaded the foster-son to help his new brother with his lessons, in return for practical lessons in village survival from a child's point of view. The mother was amazed at her son's sudden improvement at school, and, three years later, her two teenage boys are adamant that they do not want to be separated. These villages with multiple adoptions are a slow but vital step in changing Russian cultural attitudes to adoption.

Karen Hewitt

A Permian in the Perm Association

When my never-ending natural curiosity brought me from Perm to England eight years ago I never thought that one day I would become the first member from Perm of the British side of the Perm-Oxford Association. I am very happy and proud to join you – the circle of people who are interested in Russian life, culture, history, who love my native home-city Perm and try to make the life of Permians better and build strong connections between our people and cultures.



I was born in Perm and lived there my whole life until moving to England. In Perm I graduated from the Medical School, worked as a gastroenterologist in the municipal hospital N2 and as a lecturer in Perm Medical Academy, completed my PhD in new methods of treatment of peptic ulcer. From Perm I moved to the UK where after the thrills and pleasures of working in the NHS I joined my husband in his training business.

Interestingly, our family in a way is a Perm-Oxford Association of its own: my husband Paul graduated from Corpus Christi College of Oxford University and it was just logical that we got married in a beautiful Russian Orthodox Church ceremony in Corpus Christi Chapel. Sasha, our son, who can speak both English and Russian brilliantly, has been to Perm several times visiting his grandparents and he likes Perm a lot, – particularly, the zoo and circus as well as the picturesque banks of the river Kama. Paul's impressions of Perm are more diverse – maybe he will share them with you one day.

With all this we felt that joining the Oxford-Perm Association was an inevitable step for us and furthermore we are planning to move to the Oxford area from Sussex in the near future.

I still have family and friends living in Perm. With my Perm connections, knowledge of English and Russian (both everyday and medical), vast library of Russian books, videos and DVDs I will be happy to help any of you who are planning to visit Perm, or are working on any Perm-related projects.



Please feel free to contact me on juliabudnik@hotmail.com . Best of luck in your wonderful job and looking forward to meeting you all ...

Julia Budnik-Grantham