

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Oxford Perm Association

February 2011

There's a Tourist on the bus!

We dived up a promising side street in quest of lunch, the alternative being a supermarket sandwich on a bench midst central Perm's traffic fumes. A forebidding door presented itself, massive, solid and studded like the portal to a modern-day castle. Inside, as our eyes acclimatised to the sombre lighting, it dawned on me that Imogen (my daughter) and I were the only two women in the coffee shop. Every other table was occupied by black-suited businessmen, some of whom were smoking exotic gold-ringed and coloured foreign cigarettes. Wedged in the corner was an especially large gentleman holding court. His arms seemed too thick and long for his jacket. "Imogen," I hissed, "it's like a Mafia meeting! But they won't take much notice of us, we're *tourists*."

My direct first exposure to Russia and Russian business was in the early 1990's; around the time that Perm first opened up to Western pioneer Karen Hewitt. Boris Yeltsin had just appointed Yuri Luzhkov as Moscow's mayor (he had been chair of the city government) and as mayor, he was about to embark on his 'enterprise-friendly' crusade. He was first *elected* mayor in 1996 and twice subsequently. Under Luzhkov's policies, Moscow experienced a business and construction boom, which afforded him personally both zenith and nadir because his wife was a major beneficiary and due to controversies surrounding her business dealings Medvedyev sacked him last year.

Sunday flower market in Perm



I set up a CBI (Confederation of British Industry) visit in London for the mayor and his allies and representatives of the joint venture fashion (the Arbat Moscow) and health food (Kiev) businesses of which I was then operations director. Trading with Russia was an eye-opener. On the one hand, it was a financial nightmare. The banking system was volatile and profits had to be repatriated daily. There were unpredictable windfall taxes levied at whim by mayoral edict. Theft (politely called 'shrinkage') was rife and the retail unit had to be guarded by freelance KGB executives. On the other, the Russian partners were smart businessmen. I sat in on a discussion about profit-sharing and I was pretty certain that my chairman was being roundly diddled.

At that stage, I decided to learn rudimentary Russian; I adored the language and made a first, short trip to Moscow, the highlight of which was locating Bulgakov's apartment. I still have pictures of the painted wall by the staircase leading to it. Around twenty years later, I re-visited Patriarch's Ponds following a fortnight in Perm. Having long since ceased to have a business connection with Russia, I am now helping the State University with a study evening on 'anti-crisis management' in companies, as part of their visit in February to Manchester.

Perm's Business

Virtually no-one was buying in the Western-style malls of Perm, home to nearly one million people and stretching 65 miles on the banks of the Kama river east of the Ural mountains in Western Russia. Not a surprise as the upmarket European high-street clothes brands cost two to three times what they would in London. But despite the economic downturn, business was booming behind the deceptively tatty facades of Perm's original Soviet-style department store and shopping complexes on the outskirts.

Russia's 6th largest city, in Perm Region which is around two-thirds the size of the United Kingdom, is one of the

fastest growing because of its economic prosperity due to large amounts of natural resources (minerals, oil and timber) that are present in the region, and (no less important): its location, making Perm a main Russian transportation hub and doorway from Europe to Asia and to Siberia in particular.

All artillery and rocket vehicles, as well as (intercontinental) ballistic rocket launching systems, engines for MiG jetfighters and cannons of all ranges were (and in smaller proportions still are) produced in Perm. The military air traffic is daily evident nowadays.

For much of the population, material norms are visibly below the standard that is commonplace in the UK. Apartments (houses are very rare, other than the weekend and summer dachas, which are pretty basic except for the new 'Disney-like' vernacular espoused by oligarchs) are forbidding from the outside; generally with double or triple-locked metal doors and an inner door – burglary or armed robbery is a risk for the unprepared.

Conversely, the cultural and educational life is rich, varied and relatively accessible to the middle classes. Nevertheless, it is common to have two or more jobs in order to make ends meet. Many Russians still mistrust the banking system and are unable or unwilling to pay the high charges levied on loans for cars and domestic purchases. Sale and exchange of goods is tolerated and sometimes encouraged outside of the regular consumer channels. For instance, buckets of garden produce such as cranberries or other food staples like pies and snacks are traded from railway platforms and on the train at major stops. On Sundays, grandparents with glorious flowers grown at the dacha are allowed to display them for sale in public places. Hand-to-mouth goes hand-in-hand with an entrepreneurial tradition and spirit.

There is a surfeit of higher education provision in Perm region and the private universities which exist have struggled with income stream and quality during the

recession. The State University struck me as very enterprising. The staff in the economics faculty (where I lectured) had a surprising amount of autonomy and moved fast to bring in a senior regional government speaker who had experience of my current world (transforming organisations) and was formerly a big wheel in an international company.

One striking difference in approach to business was the apparent confidence placed in the State to tackle unemployment and falling production indices by pulling the appropriate levers. Prime Minister Putin's command-and-control approach certainly has a substantial fan base amongst a wide cross-section of Russian citizens. (They may be right.)

Even now, tourists are a novelty – witness the bus conductress who asked me in hushed tones whether I was, 'a *Tourist*' then told the rest of the bus and the photographers who catalogued our trips. As for Perm's underbelly, when I got back home, I read Le Carré's latest novel 'Our Kind of Traitor' with its heavy Mafia overtones. The book's central character comes from ... Perm and the author credits Federico Varese for his detailed insight into 'The Russian Mafia: Private Protection in a New Market Economy'. This fascinating study is (as you guessed) based on ... Perm.

Christine Elliott

Perm

In Perm, there is a park by the Opera House. When I was little, growing up in Perm, it seemed to be very big to me. It has small winding paths. I used to live very close by it and I spent a lot of time there.

I liked to spend long summer evenings just playing with my friends or riding my bicycle across the tiny paths. When it was time to go home I tried to get lost on purpose just to spend more time with my friends. We also enjoyed playing a game where we pretended that we were really cool witches with super powers. It was such fun!!!

One time, in the summer my friends and I decided to have a picnic. We had lollypops, bread and juice, that we had encouraged our parents to buy. Passersby were looking at us as if we were foreign, because it's not normal to have picnics in a park in Russia.

In the park, closer to the tram lines, there are lots of pigeons. We used to feed them bits of crackers, they always ate them happily!

In winter there were lots of ice sculptures built by the city. I loved just wandering around looking at them. The sculptures were made of ice with little colourful lights inside the ice. It looked shimmering especially in the dark - as if the Northern lights were trapped inside them!!!

Inside the park there is a disused fountain. We pretended it was an ancient ruin and used to climb in and out finding little stones like archaeologists.

I would love to come back to the park again and bring my little brother with me.

Masha Hewitt

Dates for your diary

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Oxford Perm Association will be held on Wednesday 23 February at the new Pegasus Theatre at the Iffley Road end of Magdalen Road.

- 6.30pm for a welcome drink, followed by the AGM at 6.45pm
- 7.30pm: light refreshments
- 8.00pm: performance by young people who visited Perm in 2010

Guests interested in the performance, or in Pegasus theatre, are welcome.

Free parking on/near Iffley Rd, or city bus 3 or 4a,b,c to Magdalen Rd corner.

RSVP (for catering) to mari.prichard@hcarpenter.co.uk tel 01865 556673.

A Bite at the Opera

An opera night at the Town Hall to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Leon link, on Friday 4 March 2011 at 7.30pm. Former Covent Garden principal Quentin Hayes (Escamillo in last year's *Twin City Carmen*) brings a group of his friends to sing highlights from the opera repertoire. Tickets include a welcome drink on arrival and an interval meal (from Fosters, the Town Hall's regular catering company). Tickets from Caroline Williams at the Town Hall. Email cjwilliams@oxford.gov.uk or phone 01865 252264. If you add 'Oxford Perm Association' to your booking information, and let Mari know your names, we can have tables for Perm members. Email mari.prichard@hcarpenter.co.uk or phone/text 07768 908341.

Karavai are visiting Oxford in April. The Oxford Perm Association will promote a concert at the Newman Rooms in St Aldate's at 7.30pm on Friday 8 April. Other performances will include a concert at Pegasus Theatre at 7.30pm on Saturday 9 April; a lunchtime concert at the Bonn Square Baptist Church on Tuesday 12 April; and performances at the Oxford Folk Festival on Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 April.

Summer garden party at 6 Rawlinson Road: 5.00 – 8.00pm on Thursday 14 July. "Bring-and-share" food.

International YouthTheatre Festival will take place from 20 July, with a finale on 29 July.

News of other links

Bonn

Oxford's Bonn Week celebrations will take place from 1 to 5 June.

The East Oxford Community Choir will visit Bonn and Cologne from 4 to 9 July.

Grenoble

The East Oxford Community Choir will give a concert in Grenoble on 23 April. Their partner choir, Interlude, will be in Oxford from 2 to 5 June.

Leiden

Oxfordians will be in Leiden in early May for their Remembrance Day.

The Toonkunst Orchestra will visit Oxford from 23 to 26 June.

The East Oxford Community Choir will visit Leiden from 16 to 19 September.

Leon

See above item on "A Bite at the Opera".

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Two most unexpected experiences in Britain

I could speak for days about how impressed I was by our visit to Oxford. I had dreamed of coming to Britain since my first year at school. My dream was to come true and I knew that the time in Oxford would be the time of my life; I was prepared for loads of positive emotions. And the trip proved to be amazing, which wasn't something unexpected.

However, one negative thing I had been prepared for as well, which was food. About 20 people from all over the world had warned me about "terrible British food", so I brought two kilos of porridge with me anticipating hungry mornings and evenings. I never needed this porridge because the meals turned out to be the best I'd had in my life! I can't remember when we were not happy about the food anywhere – at my hosts' home, or in Rewley House, or even in the pub it was always wonderful. Delicious food became the greatest good news as this was one positive thing I hadn't been ready for. My hosts, Carol and Derek, promised to use my porridge to repair the walls in their house.

Concerning the biggest disappointment I can say that the first time I saw the quiz it

was prepared and performed by Karen, so no wonder it was very exciting and I and Julia decided we had to take part in a real pub quiz night. One Tuesday night we came to a pub and were waiting for a fascinating experience, also regarding it as a chance to meet somebody new and to see how young people actually spend leisure time. When it all began, we realized we were not going to speak to anybody but each other, as everyone had come with their own team. They were all drinking and talking and we could hardly hear the questions. The worst thing was we didn't know answers to any questions that we could hear... Very often we also couldn't understand the question because of some tricky words... We left the pub as quickly as possible and decided never to go there again.

I still miss British food, especially Derek's chicken casserole. For pub quizzes one should probably be a person with better English!

Tanya Trofimova (PSU teacher 2010)

Food Question

I like England and English, and the English, and even the English-like.

It is probably due to my being an English teacher, or partly to my interest in English literature and arts. I really don't know. But I definitely feel sincere respect for it. All is impeccable but one - English food. It is criticized and scorned almost everywhere. They say it is unimaginable, boring, and tasteless. If you ask the Russians to name some typically English dishes, they will

possibly mention fish and chips, pudding, beefsteak, bacon and eggs, the most enlightened would recollect cheese "with a faint odour of melons" that "makes too much of itself", and that "you have to put up with". It is a disappointing criticism – but not true.

In order to test and undermine this opinion I had to use a "trial-and-error method".

On the way to Norreys Avenue, the host family's place I was staying at in Oxford, I

would pass by “Tesco” and often drop in either to get warm or to buy something unusual, really English, for a snack, for example, mince pies (wonder of wonders, they were sweet. In Russia we have them with meat), some Stilton (with apricots! I had thought it to be blue and very strong-flavoured), some sandwiches, but once it was *Devon clotted cream*. Having expected to find it tasty and exquisite, it turned out to be absolutely insipid. I would have immediately got rid of it being in the dark about its value, but luckily at that very moment Margaret, my hostess, came in and saw me eating it like some common yogurt. Perhaps my face conveyed everything to her; she comforted me saying “You definitely have to taste some cream tea”. Even now I have my mouth watering at the thought of the perfect cup of tea accompanied by scones, with clotted cream and strawberry jam, and of course, the good company of Margaret and Vanya, that is always the best part of any mealtime.

Another discovery was *marmite*, this “love it or hate it” product. It was Margaret who offered me to taste something really very

good. I first had it as it is a sticky, dark brown paste, extremely salty. Yuck! Again I was patiently being explained that marmite is traditionally eaten as a savoury spread on a toast thinly with butter or margarine. That was quite another matter! I even brought a jar of marmite to Russia.

I can really make a short story much longer because those were only a few episodes of my discovering England. I keep saying to my friends who still follow the stereotype of tasteless English cuisine that dishes made with quality local ingredients, when fresh, are full of flavour that British haven’t had to invent sauces to disguise their natural taste. Just think how it sounds “shepherd’s pie”, “steak and kidney pie”, Sunday roast, Yorkshire pudding, and ... “Irish stew, which was a great success”. It is a poem. The question is who cooks and how.

Real English cooking is sure to be found at home. I have found it out myself.

Lyudmila Kazhdaya

About three unforgettable weeks...

Three weeks of our stay in Oxford were unforgettable and very bright! England met us with quite comfortable and sunny weather. When we arrived in Oxford I noticed a variety of leaves of different colours on the trees. After leaving Perm it was unusual to see this, because it seemed to me as if it is a continuing of golden autumn in the middle of November.

Walking down the streets of Oxford you could notice small, accurate houses and cottages, a lot of great colleges with picturesque grounds, and at the same time small shops, cafes and pubs. This not-very-big and wonderful city has its own mood, unique style and, of course, its own rich history, which is solicitously preserved by the citizens of Oxford. I remember well the day, when together with my friends from our group we went to a tower in order to have a look at Oxford from a bird’s-eye view. It was a brilliant sunny day! All the buildings we saw could easily draw a picture of today’s Oxford in our minds. We saw buildings of different ages and epochs but perfectly combined with each other at the same time: some of them – with sharp steeples, others – with beautiful

modeling. This view could take your breath away!

Close to the centre of Oxford, Rewley House is situated. There we had our lectures and seminars, meetings with new and very interesting intelligent people. From these occupations we learned a lot about the education system of Great Britain, about how English law works and what the peculiarities of the national health system are. We also had talks about British families and social issues, environmental problems, the work of the Samaritans and some other things.

I should say that the whole timetable (programme of our visit) was not just well-organized, it was excellently organized. Everything was so well-planned and logically structured. As a result, all the members of our group have acquired new knowledge; have learned a lot about Britain (England, in particular), people’s way of life, their culture and interests. As far as we lived in families we could feel and see the way British people live. As for me, I liked it very much. I liked the tradition to have supper with candles; I also liked original recipes of English cuisine. I liked people’s hospitality and kindness. The

idea to instill several English traditions into Russian way of life appeared in my mind.

I am sure everybody from our group has now got friends in Oxford and we are all very happy about this. With some people we got acquainted in Russia (in Perm), with others we met in England (in Oxford).

Thanks to our friends and all the people from the Oxford Perm Association we had an

opportunity to visit England and its places of interest. We were in Oxford for three weeks: on the one hand it is not a long period of time, but on the other hand it will remain a very significant period of our life, undoubtedly.

Olga Vagina (teacher of law)

The Russian Doctors' Diary (September 5th - 12th 2010)

Dr. Anna Yagodina (Doctor in HIV and infectious diseases), her mother Irina Serova (Professor of Philosophy and health issues), and Dr. Lera Vedernikova (Doctor and Psychologist and daughter of Dr. Natalya Pereverseva who founded the Perm Hospice). Not only did they want to visit centres connected with HIV/infectious diseases and hospice care but they also wanted to ask about the possibility of people coming to Perm to give seminars and workshops. I was to accompany them on most of the visits.

Sunday

They arrived on time at Heathrow having never been to England before. We walked in Blenheim Park in the afternoon, a snow-less treat!

Monday

I gave them porridge for breakfast (so Russian!) We met Chris Conlon, the Consultant on John Warin Ward at the Churchill hospital. Useful medical input from Chris - the most important information being that fewer HIV patients are seen on the ward nowadays as they are diagnosed and treated earlier. They had never seen anything like this hospital building before (the new part is pretty impressive) but did not understand why there was a red star on the top of the Christmas tree, as in Russia a red star is a communist symbol. Amazed by the wig shop, cafes, friendly volunteers, interesting paintings.

Then on to the Terence Higgins Trust in Oxford. This national organisation is in an interesting old building and the people we met there were from all over the world. The Trust works with emotional, social, practical and stigma issues, particularly immigration. Given a pile of useful information booklets. After this, we had a brief tour of the University

area and the shopping streets which they found very exciting.

Tuesday

Very interested to have lunch at Mari Prichard's house and meet her and Dr. Liz Greenhall who told them about sexual health issues in school and the problems of the organization of this subject in the UK. They then met Kseniya Hewitt - and were pleased to be able to talk Russian! Ann Davis met them there and took them to the Maternity department at the JR. Apparently they learned a lot about the ways that HIV mothers are regarded and treated in England, for example they are not segregated, have a Caesarean delivery and do not breast-feed their babies. Ann took them back to her house for supper.

Wednesday

Left very early for London as they wanted to see the Tower before going on to the Mildmay HIV/AIDS Hospital. We experienced a lot of different transport that day and saw some key places in London en passant. At the Mildmay, the emphasis is on rehabilitation - both physical and social. Very impressive facilities and only ten per cent of patients are now receiving palliative care. The manager said they have funding for extending their work to Russia which is very good news. (The Mildmay already has a link with Asbest in Russia).

Thursday

Sobell House has changed a lot in the last ten years - even I did not know my way around! It was so good to meet Dr. Mary Miller (she is now the Medical Director) because Lera's mother met her when she visited the Hospice in 1992. Mary was able to answer questions about hospice care, both medical and social. We were amazed to learn that the eight Sobell Charity shops in Oxford raise £400,000 a year!

A highlight for us all was meeting with Bob Heath the Music Therapist. Bob asked Irina to sing a traditional Russian song and Lera and Anna were able to have a 'taste' of how music therapy works; it was very interesting experience. Bob said that he would really like to go to Russia to run a seminar.

We had an opportunity to shop and sightsee in the afternoon before they went on to Kathy's home in the evening for a Christmas dinner (she went to Perm with me to do the seminars).

Friday

Went to the Maggie's Centre (the Cancer Information Centre). Passed the Lymphodaema Clinic on the way and had a very useful, unscheduled talk with the Manager there; the Doctors said that they do not know how best to treat this problem in Perm. Lots more helpful information, ideas and samples from the Lymphodaema Clinic and the Maggie's Centre. Went on to the Town Hall where they exchanged gifts between Tatiana Grigorieva and Rachel Capell, then on to have tea with Philip Clayton (whom they had met in Perm). He welcomed them in the Russian tradition with salt and bread. In the evening, they came to the concert that I was singing in at Woodstock Church.

Saturday

A free day! More sightseeing and shopping for souvenirs - on their own in Oxford as they were getting to know it quite well! They visited the museum of the History of Science. Irina was impressed by this experience as she delivers a course of lectures named "The history and philosophy of science". They had sensibly brought extra bags for the packing, anticipating gifts, souvenirs and information! Anna bought a wooden box in the form of an elephant for her scientific advisor as there is a belief that the elephant will bring happiness to the home. Then on to a meal with Voirrey and Robin which they much enjoyed.

Sunday

I saw them off at the Park and Ride. In the afternoon they walked around the centre of London, were very impressed by London's atmosphere, its beautiful squares, palaces and churches. They wrote to me in their letter that they were very grateful to the Oxford Perm Association for the organization of this visit. But I think we all learned much from the experience and it was a privilege for me to share their impressions and experiences.

Rosalyn Roulston

