



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь

O P A

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter June 2025

Perm News

Natalia Popova

The last month of spring feels like a special time of year for many reasons. It's the time when days get longer, bleak streets finally turn bright and fresh with greenery, pupils and students finish their academic year. The anticipation of summer is already in the air and you wish to cross this month off the calendar, day by day. May is traditionally rich in festivals and public holidays.

Perm Celebrates May Day 2025



Fireworks over the Kama

On May 1, Perm marked International Workers' Day with vibrant demonstrations, concerts, and family-friendly events. Thousands of residents gathered in the city centre, where trade unions, activists, and cultural groups marched under banners calling for solidarity and social justice. The festivities included live music, food stalls, and performances in parks, creating a festive atmosphere. The holiday emphasised community spirit and springtime renewal, drawing families and visitors alike. The celebration was crowned with magnificent fireworks over the Kama.



Military parade in the city centre

Perm Celebrates 80th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War

Perm honoured the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War with solemn ceremonies, parades, and cultural events. Veterans, officials, and residents gathered at memorials to lay flowers and pay tribute to fallen soldiers. The city hosted a military parade, concerts of wartime songs, and exhibitions showcasing wartime history. A moment of silence was observed to remember the sacrifices of those who fought against fascism. The commemorations highlighted the enduring gratitude for the heroes of the Great Patriotic War.

Perm hosts successful ‘Museum Night 2025’



Installation “Rotunda” at the PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art

On May 17, Perm joined the international ‘Museum Night’ event, with cultural venues across the city opening their doors after hours for special exhibitions, workshops, and performances. Thousands of visitors explored museums, galleries, and art spaces, enjoying interactive displays and themed programs. Highlights included night tours at the Perm Art Gallery and immersive installations at the PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art. The event showcased Perm’s vibrant cultural scene, attracting both locals and tourists. ‘Museum Night’ has become an annual highlight, promoting accessibility to the arts.

Perm Celebrates ‘Last Bell’ for School Graduates



High school graduates in Gorky park

Perm marked the end of the academic year with the traditional ‘Last Bell’ ceremony for high school graduates. Festive events took place across the city on May 24, with students dressed in formal attire, ribbons, and nostalgic Soviet-era school uniforms. The celebrations included speeches from teachers, heartfelt performances, and the symbolic ringing of the bell by first-graders carried by graduating seniors on their shoulders. Many schools organized concerts, photo sessions, and farewell gatherings. Authorities wished students success in their future endeavours, whether in higher education or careers.



I joined the Oxford Perm Association because I was going on a package tour to Moscow and St Petersburg in May 2016 and I heard that they had some interesting talks about Russia. Then in 2017 I was asked if I would like to go on a visit to Perm in a group of 8 to stay in families as guests of Perm University. I immediately said YES, what an opportunity! I was allocated to a young university lecturer, and we began corresponding by email and discovered that we had a lot of common interests and they had very good English, although a scientist.

Our group met up at Heathrow and set off for the 4 hour flight to Moscow, then were met by a young Permian who escorted us to the station. We caught the 11 pm trans-Siberian train for the 900 miles journey east and found our compartments with 4 bunks, clean linen and a coach superintendent who kept the samovar boiling and everything in order in her coach. We slept reasonably well and journeyed on all of the next day, the countryside very flat and passing hundreds of miles of pine forest, marshy in some places and large rivers. It gives you a feeling of how huge Russia is, the biggest country in the world, and we travelled less than a quarter of the way across it. We arrived in Perm 9.40 pm and were met by the welcoming faces of our hosts. I was driven to their flat not far from the station and a lovely meal was laid out for me with pelmeni, a local favourite which is quite like ravioli, jellied meat, Russian salad followed by cake and washed down with lots of vodka, wine and tea! They had a nice, neat two-bedroom flat in a 1950's block. They made me feel very, very welcome, we had a lovely chat! The mother didn't speak English, and I don't speak Russian, nevertheless we seemed to understand each other and used Google translate!

The next day, my host took me to the University, we stopped for a coffee in a nice café on the way and had a good chat – my host had travelled outside Russia. I was attached to the International Department of Perm State University and we had a talk with Lyudmila Kadzhaya about the programme and then visited the Museum of the History of Perm State University. We had a tour around the University campus and a tour of the botanical gardens. I thought that there would be a limited display of plants because the climate goes to extremes – warm in the summer and long cold winters, but there was a wide variety of plants, some lasting longer than in the UK and the display in the greenhouses would rival Oxford botanic gardens.

The next day our group of 6 met at the University and we went on an all-day tour to the Architectural and Ethnographic village at Khokhlovka, it took about 2 hours to get there, the roads were good and it was good to see the countryside. Lots of fir trees, some silver birch, a few fields but we didn't see any animals. Lots of wooden buildings have been moved to the folk village – log cabins, a sawmill, farm buildings, a windmill, a watchtower, a salt processing plant (interestingly Perm region in the middle of the continent used to be under the sea!) 2 wooden churches, in a beautiful setting of rolling hills, surrounded by forests. Everything was made of wood – all the buildings, implements, but there were brick stoves against the winter cold – minus 20 in January.

The following day we had a city tour. Perm is a city of about 1 million people, everyone lives in flats and the streets are very wide, 3 lanes in each direction on the main streets, and lots of buses and trams. The cars are good German and French and Japanese cars, less than half are Russian cars. We visited the Armaments Museum – Perm was a closed city in the Cold War period because it manufactured lots of weapons, because useful minerals are mined nearby. On display were intercontinental ballistic missiles, rockets and tanks. We also saw a lovely park on the site of an old copper factory and went to the Art Gallery in a beautiful church with lovely oil paintings and wooden sculptures and interesting twentieth century photos of Yuri Gagarin, Castro and Brezhnev and Khrushchev. In the evening we went to see a wonderful ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* by Asafyev at the Perm Opera and Ballet theatre. Founded in 1870, it is one of the oldest and most prestigious theatres in the country.

On Thursday we had an expedition to the Sylva river, with our guide Igor, a geology lecturer. We were very lucky, the weather was warm and sunny – the weather can vary from 23 degrees to 6 degrees! We travelled in a mini bus for 2 hours to reach the banks of the beautiful river through pine forests. We had a picnic on arrival, then climbed up the peak, and had a view of the trans Siberian



Kungur Ice Caves

railway running along the river banks. We saw goods trains with about 50 or more coaches. Then another picnic of Borscht and sausages and wine and vodka, then paddled a catamaran about 2 hours down river. We were the only people on the river. Then we travelled to the Kungur Ice Caves, and walked along caverns covered in ice with stalagmites, stalactites and further in there were lakes, we were walking for about 2 hours, it was cold but well lit and we saw some amazing grottoes and ice/snow formations. Igor then produced another fantastic picnic, with caviar, meat, cognac, brandy, champagne, fruit, he kept telling us ‘eat, drink, there is no limitation’!

We were required to give three talks to the University students. I decided to give an autobiographical talk related to contemporary social events; I talked about being born above my father’s shop in Notting Hill, West London, the close knit community, my father’s experiences in the war, growing up after the war and the optimism of the Sixties and seeing the Beatles and Rolling Stones live! Life in Dublin and our connection with Donegal and what my three sons are doing, followed by “Greensleeves” and “Londonderry Air” on my treble recorder! It seemed to go down well, some of the students spoke good English and asked questions, some of the Maths students found English more difficult but it seems all are required to know English. We went to the theatre again to see *The Maid of Orleans* opera by Tchaikovsky, another wonderful production. Russians seem to take their culture – especially opera, ballet, poetry and philosophy - seriously, a legacy of the Soviet period which wanted to give everyone the opportunity to experience culture, although within certain limits.

The weekend was spent with our host families. We visited my host's relations, who were well educated and spoke English. On the Sunday we drove to Belogorsky Monastery and church, set on a high hill outside Perm in lovely countryside. The church was built in 1917 had been ruined in Stalinist times but since '92 had been lovingly and expensively restored and there were a lot of worshippers, lighting candles and revering the icons. We had lunch in the monastery refectory. In all the churches that I visited there was an icon of the murdered Tsar and Tsarina and their five children with haloes around their heads, they are venerated as saints. I was struck by the resurgence of religion in Russia and the extravagant restoration of many churches. Nearly all the women I met were wearing crucifixes. I asked how could there be such a resurgence after religion was suppressed for seventy years and was told that religion was kept alive in their homes. In the evening my host took me to the theatre to see the ballet Don Quixote which was wonderful, very colourful, a real treat! The audience was very appreciative and there were lots of little girls beautifully dressed, budding ballerinas!

One highlight was a trip to see a choir at an old people's club – they had all worked at the armaments factory and had been singing together for forty years. They dressed in national costume, were accompanied by an accordionist and sang folk songs from the heart with gusto! This was followed by a tea with masses of cakes, Russians are extremely generous and hospitable and really do seem to have a sweet tooth! We had a tour of the Churches of Perm. We also visited a Merchant's House Museum on the banks of the river Kama, then another visit to the Opera – *The Tsar's Bride* by Rimsky Korsakov, another wonderful production with lovely costumes and scenery – amazing how they change the scenery each night for the different productions.

We then went in a minibus to Troitsa, a village about an hour away, to see Vasily Karminsky's house – all wooden. He had an amazing life, was born towards the end of the 19th Century and became a journalist, poet and revolutionary, pilot and inventor. We then travelled back to Perm and visited the house of Sergei Diaghilev with very interesting pictures, paintings and furniture. It is now a ballet school and some of the students gave us a tour of the rooms and spoke very good English. In the evening we saw another wonderful ballet – *Le Corsaire* by Adam, again very colourful costumes and scenery and beautiful dancing.

I had another wonderful meal with my hosts and two friends who spoke good English. We had a brilliant conversation, it was like something from a Dostoyevsky novel. It was interesting to hear how international the university is –they have medical students from India. Russians seem big on philosophy – a legacy of Soviet days when they had to study Marxism.

On our last evening we all went out to a Ukrainian restaurant with our hosts and had a wonderful evening and toasted them for their very warm and generous hospitality. I will always remember how kind and generous my host and their family were to me. This has been a marvellous experience, international friendship is such a great thing! It was lovely meeting up with my young host and the young teachers when they came to Oxford and introducing my host to my family.

The above was written on my return from Perm in 2017 and obviously so much has changed since then, it is very sad that these very worthwhile exchange visits can no longer take place. I'm pleased to still be in touch with my host and we hope to see each other again one day.

9th May 2025

Karen Hewitt

In 2016 I was in Perm with a small official group from Oxford to take part in the celebration of 9th May, 'Victory over Fascism' day. It was a local affair, with dancers at least as visible as the military, a single Perm-built tank on display which reached Berlin in 1945 (greeted affectionately by the crowd for its annual appearance) and a quiet, dignified procession of ordinary families carrying photos of family members killed in the war.

This year I was invited to attend the ceremony at the Soviet War Memorial in the grounds of the Imperial War Museum. The Ambassadors of several former Soviet countries laid wreaths, and some dozens of Russians gathered to lay their own flowers. The ceremony was marred by several young Ukrainians with big flags who had come to protest about the current war. Of course they have the right to express anger and bitterness, but their shouting (from just behind the Russians) loudly interrupted a memorial ceremony for another war in which, no doubt, their grandparents and great-grandparents took part. The Russians sang traditional songs, but were enticed into a shouting match. One OPA member, Sergei Vlasov, tried to change the tone by offering Russian sweets to the Ukrainians but (sadly but not surprisingly) his efforts were rejected. War's vileness in tiny symbols.

italki

Marianne Talbot

I have been learning Russian for a while. But I am no better at speaking it than I was when I started. This has happened before. By the time I left school, after 7 years of French lessons, I could read and understand French quite well. But I couldn't speak it to save my life! This was partly the result of the way languages were taught: in the 1960s this didn't involve any actual conversation! It was also partly my fault. I prefer to do only things I can do well and that doesn't include speaking another language. This lack of confidence (not apparent in any other part of my life!) manifests itself with respect to Russian as well as French.

I mentioned this to Jessica. She told me that she has regular conversations with a native Russian speaker on italki (<https://www.italki.com/>). Beginners, she assured me, are as welcome on italki as fluent speakers like herself. I tried it and loved it.

On italki you choose your teacher from a huge number of profiles. Some are professional teachers, other community teachers. All give their qualifications and experience on their profiles. Having chosen a teacher, you start with a trial lesson. This is very useful: it is only by trying a teacher that you can determine your compatibility. Teachers set out on their profiles how much they charge, and you can usually choose how long you would like your lessons to be, and what you would like to concentrate on.

I chose a lovely teacher called 'Daria' who came recommended by Jessica. I also chose a lesson duration of 45 minutes, which I found quite testing, but also short enough to be manageable. I was slightly taken aback by some of Daria's assumptions about my technical ability (based, I think, on my age – Daria herself is in her twenties), but conversation with her was delightful. After every class she sent me a list of new vocabulary and grammar and tried to incorporate this into our next class.

I loved the flexibility of italki – you really do feel in charge of your own learning. If one-to-one conversation is too much for you, you can opt for group sessions too. I really recommend italki if you too would like to speak Russian better than you do.

Past events

On 11th March we held our AGM in the North Oxford Association Community Centre. After the official business, Carole Richardson gave an illustrated talk on the holiday she and our Treasurer, Chris Cowley, had in Uzbekistan.

On 21st March some 25 members listened to a talk by Richard Sills, entitled ‘Russia: Empire Builder or Victim?’

On 9th May, ‘Victory Against Fascism’ day, four members of the Association went to the ceremony at the Soviet War Memorial in the grounds of Imperial War Museum, and laid flowers.

On 25th May members enjoyed a screening of the Soviet film, ‘Walking the streets of Moscow’.



Future Events

Our annual Garden Party will be on Wednesday, 9th July, starting at 5 p.m. at 6 Rawlinson Road. Members are asked to contribute an item to the food. The Association will pay for drinks.

On Sunday, 28th September 2025, Rosamund Bartlett will give a talk on ‘Chekhov, Tchaikovsky and Levitan: links between the writer, the composer and the painter.

This will be held at the North Oxford Association Community Centre from 3 p.m.

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Russian Language Meetup Group

Graham Dane, a member of the OPA, continues to run a monthly Russian Meetup Russian/English conversation exchange. This is a great opportunity to practise speaking as you will be put into small groups. **The next zoom session is on 22nd June at 10am GMT.**

Link to join the language exchange:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84247799935?pwd=c0cxTk92YUFCMEt6eitqMkYvdjRrUT09>

The Meeting ID is 842 4779 9935 and the passcode is 1234

Register on the Meetup website here: <https://www.meetup.com/meetup-group-ed-russ-eng/>

Systems Thinking Classes at Perm State University part 2

anonymous

You might have read my earlier article on the ‘systems thinking’ classes at Perm State university in Perm News October 2023. I would like to share my thoughts on the students in Russia nowadays according to my own experience and observations.

When I was a student, I used to attend all the classes I had and do all the homework. So did my classmates too. That was a kind of informal baseline, which is written in the university charter. But now I see less than half of the full list in my classes and students tell me that the situation I have is better than in other classes. Although I’m starting to notice that even if a student is in the class that doesn’t mean that he or she is involved in the process and trying to understand what is going on. He or she might struggle with sleep or be glued to their smartphone even when its group work time in the classroom. So that pushes me to find ways to involve and guide students through the course. To do that I try to tie their individual marks to their group work results and mistakes, as well as to tie their individual marks to their attendance.

Moreover, I’m trying not to just teach the theory classes but to communicate with the class and practice the knowledge part in spontaneous small groups using flip charts, stickers and markers and not to give the students the opportunity to be disengaged. The practice classes go deeper but in more established groups so they can build stronger connections inside the groups and support each other.

Of course, this approach is not a silver bullet but the good thing is that there are always several students who are doing their best to gain as much knowledge as they can, no matter what the approach is. The results of such an approach is a better understanding of the ‘systems thinking’ in a way of respect to the students without pushing them. I believe it also shows the students that this type of education is respectful and engaging. And I can see this is increasing the trust between the teacher and the students, which helps the students to construct their relationship with the world.

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‘The Treasures of My Land Translation Competition: Discovering Perm’s Literary Heritage’ was a new regional initiative in Perm Krai aimed at engaging both Russian and foreign students and school children in translation and promoting local literary heritage. The competition was organized through a collaborative effort by the Perm English Language Teachers’ Association (PELTA), the Faculty of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures and its Student Scientific Society at Perm State University, the Department of Literature in the Languages of the World at the Perm Regional Gorky Library. The competition aimed to engage students, educators, and enthusiasts in translating and interpreting literary works that reflect the essence of our region. The project is very important for cultivating intercultural understanding and fostering language proficiency within the region. This year saw remarkable engagement. Entries were submitted from 30 schools in Perm, 17 schools across Permsky Krai, 6 community colleges and 6 universities and institutes. The jury comprised 21 teachers from schools and institutes in Perm, 27 graduates and postgraduates, 32 final-year students and four foreign experts from the USA, Scotland, and England (including members of the OPA). By focusing on Perm's literary gems, we sought to bridge cultural gaps and introduce these works to a wider audience.



Closing ceremony in March at the Regional Library

Participants were challenged to translate three passages from Russian into English and three passages from English into Russian. This year’s selection focused on excerpts from literary works that vividly depict the unique landscapes and cultural heritage of the Northern Perm region. The competition garnered significant participation, receiving a total of 545 translation submissions from 369 participants.

The following texts were included which offer glimpses into Perm’s landscapes, history, and culture through vivid storytelling:

Vladimir Sokolovsky's ‘Облако, золотая полянка’ (Cloud, Golden Meadow)

Yuri Aslanyan's ‘Территория бога’ (God’s Territory)

Arkady Perventsev's ‘Город на Каме’ (City on Kama)

Carole Richardson’s ‘Journey to the North of Perm Krai’

William Brumfield’s ‘Cherdyn: In the Shadows of the Romanovs’ and ‘Solikamsk: Exploring an Architectural Treasure on the Kama River.’

However, while our competition achieved great success, we identified some challenges including overuse of AI tools by participants in translation processes. This highlighted the need for balancing technology with human creativity and linguistic expertise.

Looking ahead, we envision exciting initiatives which could be realized at the inter-regional or all-Russia level such as: ‘Voices of My Land: Folk Stories, Legends, and Myths’: ‘Treasures of My Land: Russian-English Translations’: ‘Treasures of My Land: Great Teachers’. These projects would aim to further explore and celebrate our region’s rich heritage.

In conclusion, our project ‘The Treasures of My Land Translation Competition’ has been a testament to the power of literature in connecting people across generations and borders. It has inspired hundreds to delve into Perm’s literary treasures while fostering a sense of pride in our cultural identity.

Below is one of the texts for translation from Russian into English with a translation by Iliia Khirivimski, a Master’s student in Digital Pedagogy, who won first prize.

Vladimir Sokolovsky's ‘Облако, золотая полянка’:

И вдруг слышу: кто-то хихикает, словно скрипит. Поднял голову, гляжу: на островке, напротив меня, мужичок сидит. Я его сразу узнал: на днях в хозяйственном магазине встретил, когда зашел поглядеть мышеловку для дедова обихода: мыши бегают, проклятые, под полом, щекочут его — кряхтит, чешется старина. А этот мужик пять приборов для очищения воды под названием «Родник» покупал. И вот сидит теперь напротив меня и смеется себе. И ни удочки у него, ни лодки. Как же он, думаю, на остров-то перебрался? Однако вида не подал и спросил вежливо:

- Здравствуйте. Как улов?

Похихикал он, на воду пальцем показал и говорит:

- Цып-цып, куть-куть, ах вы, окаянные...

Человек как человек вроде. Лысоват. Волосы рыжие. Рубашка синяя, в полоску. Серый простенький костюм, плетёнки на босу ногу.

And then I heard it: a little giggle, akin to a screech. I raised my head to see an island and an old fellow sitting there. I could tell who he was that instant: it was the man I saw in a local household goods shop while I was looking to get a mousetrap for granddad’s household: there were a lot of damned mice making their way and running around under the floor boards, tickling him – the old fellow huffed and puffed, as he was scratching an itch. I saw this man there, buying five water purifiers called “Fresh Spring”. Now, same man was sitting right in front of me and giggling under his nose. No fishing rod, no boat in sight. “How in the world”, I wondered “has he gotten to this island”? I decided to keep it to myself and asked rather politely:

“Hello there, did you catch any?”

Once again, I heard him giggle and watched him point his finger at the water as he said:

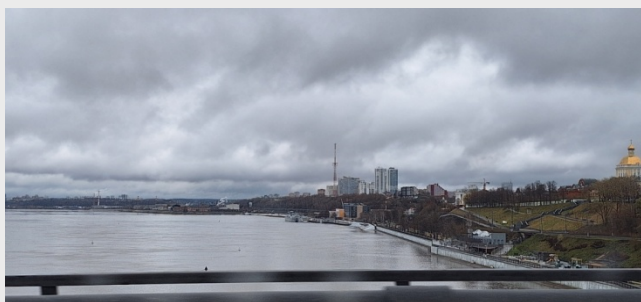
“Chick-chick, cluck-cluck, oh, you cursed...”

The fellow seemed like any other ordinary ageing man. Balding. Red haired. In a blue shirt with white stripes. Simple grey clothing on him with bare feet beneath woven sandals.

Visiting the city where I come from

Sergei Kachkin

There has always been a certain joy in returning home to my mother. This sentiment held true during my years in Moscow and remains unchanged now that I live in Vienna. It is regrettable that I cannot make this journey as often as I would like, due to the greater distance to be travelled and the absence of direct flights. Interestingly, the last time I wrote about a visit to my hometown was precisely three years ago! Since then, my perceptions of Russia, Europe, the United States, and the world as a whole have evolved. I have grown more reserved in my evaluation of my own country while becoming more demanding of Europe, which I now perceive and feel about differently, having lived in Austria and travelled to neighbouring countries. Perhaps this shift is linked to my personal tendency to critically analyse my everyday surroundings while idealising and even glorifying what lies further away. In any case, I was delighted to find myself back in Perm!



Upon my arrival, Perm greeted me with inclement weather. A light drizzle fell from the grey, heavy clouds looming over the city, accompanied by a gentle, cool breeze. The following day, however, the weather took a dramatic turn for the worse conjuring up a full-blown snowstorm and blanketing the city in thirty centimetres of snow within a single day. Yet, this surprise did not dampen my spirits; rather, it amused me, as snow in Perm has been known to fall even in June! I did find myself rushing out to purchase an umbrella while walking through the city, hoping to shield myself from the elements and avoid turning into a snowman. My mood was further lifted by how swiftly I managed to handle getting some official papers; Austrian bureaucracy does not operate so efficiently.



Before long, the snow melted as though it had never fallen, and the spring sun began to shine, prompting the locals to swap their coats and jackets for summer wear. The city, much like the entire country, was preparing to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Victory Day. I sensed that the people of Perm—this time, my only visit was to this city—had come to terms with their new reality: its confrontation with the West. The impending celebration seemed to instil a sense of confidence about the future. I noticed that over the past year, the city had been transformed; there was a palpable dynamism in the air. New shops and cafes had sprung up, construction sites for residential buildings were bustling with activity, and many previously unfinished structures were now home to new residents. The service industry was thriving, and it seemed that only the lazy would refrain from praising the convenience of the banking system. Internet access was affordable and widespread, making it available nearly everywhere.



Of course, the most important aspect of Perm for me is my family and loved ones. They are the reason that I long to return home. Yet, there are places I visit every time I come back—the banks of the Kama River in Verkhnyaya Kurya and the pine forest nearby. As a child, I would spend countless hours by the river and in the woods. Perhaps it is this childhood nostalgia that subconsciously draws me back. Even now, as I plan my next trip to Perm, I envision myself cycling through the forest and admiring the sunset while strolling along the riverbank.



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River Kama Embankment