

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

June 2008

UNIVERSITY EXCHANGE

On 15 May 2008 John Hood, Vice Chancellor of Oxford University and Vladimir Malanin, Rector of Perm State University, signed a Memorandum of Agreement between the two universities.



The original link between Oxford and Perm was a university exchange, and the two universities have worked together on many projects over the years. Specific agreements were signed in the 1990s, and then in 2000 Rector Malanin signed an agreement with Vice-Chancellor Colin Lucas. This year, having been satisfied that the links with Perm were both wide and deep, the administration of Oxford University arranged a short ceremony for the signing of the new Memorandum of Understanding.

Standing: Heather Bell, International Development Officer, Oxford University; Svetlana Tkacheva, International Officer, Perm State University; Karen Hewitt, Academic Exchange Officer, St Antony's Russian Studies Centre and Honorary Professor of PSU. Seated: Rector Malanin; Vice Chancellor Hood.

КЛУБ ПРИВЕТ - KLUB PRIVYET

PERM AND MOZYR, BELARUS – AN UNLIKELY ROLE MODEL ?

It started when my parents took me to see the Soviet Army Ensemble in the Festival Hall in the 1950s and I was captivated by the verve, rhythm and energy of those songs and dances – to say nothing of those fabulous Russian basses. I started to read up Russian history and culture; fascinated by its sheer geographical scale and the ambivalence that this induces in her attitudes to east and west – and enthralled by the epic of 1812 and its consequences. Much later I had the time to start learning Russian and discovering its joyous complexities –



conveyed with the infectious enthusiasm of our teacher from Belarus, Larisa Alexandrovna, who teaches at the Language Centre, Bath University. She organised a marvellous week for us in St Petersburg and subsequently proposed to take a group of us for intensive language learning and visits to her home town and University of Mozyr in the Gomel region, SE Belarus.

It was about then that I got to know Karen Hewitt and started to hear about the success of the Perm Association. I joined up, attended the AGM, and even signed up to join the visit there last year. I must give credit and warm thanks to Karen for her kindness in introducing me to the Association, welcoming me to its events and sparing time to talk to Larisa and me about the history and nature of Oxford's link with Perm. While Karen was clear that what she and you have done could not be directly replicated elsewhere – because of the particular circumstances of your history – we felt that the link did provide a role model of what we wanted to achieve and there were useful lessons that we could learn from your experience.

We greatly enjoyed our 12 days in Belarus. We stayed in a small hotel – run by Elena Petrovna to raise funds for her dance group (a story for another day) but were hosted by local families – who could not have made us more welcome. One of many highlights was our meeting with the staff and students of Larisa's *alma mater* the pedagogical University of Mozyr. Again we could not have been made more welcome, and were very impressed by both the enthusiasm of the staff and the excellent English of the students. Struck by the students' wish to get more experience of speaking with native English speakers and the staff recognition of their need for more resources, the idea of an exchange scheme was born.

So where are we now and what is *Клуб Привет* (Klub Privyet or Welcome Club)? Klub Privyet is the organisation we have set up to get a link going between the Bath area and Mozyr. Our first objective is to organise a visit by Mozyr students and young teachers to the UK. Building on your example – and good linking practice – we are keen on reciprocity. In exchange for us helping to subsidise the students' visit here, families in Mozyr will undertake to host visitors from the UK.

We started by getting a strong written statement of support from the Language Faculty, Mozyr University. We have subsequently got the enthusiastic support of the Head of the English and Foreign Languages Centre, University of Bath, and have the support of the Head of International School Issues of Wiltshire County Council LEA who has offered to help us find placements for the incoming student teachers. The UK One World Linking Association (UKOWLA) has been supportive with advice; as has the local Charities Information Bureau. Our initiative has been welcomed by the Bath International Forum, under the City Council, which oversees the various international links that Bath enjoys. Most recently we have just heard that the new Mayor of Mozyr is supportive of what we are doing, and the University is looking into setting up an International Friendship Club (KID) to support their end of the link. Both very positive movements that we will be following up.

We are now looking into technical issues such as visas for incoming visitors – an increasingly difficult area; and are starting on fund-raising; both locally and from trusts etc. The British Council is supportive of what we are doing, and acknowledges the need, but regrettably – and to my mind somewhat oddly – says that it currently has no mechanism to help us. We will continue to pursue that and other avenues.

So – a big Thank You – Спасибо Большое ! – from Klub Privyet to the Perm Association for your inspiring example, and help and advice so far. If you would like to know more – or have more wisdom to impart – do contact me.

Geoffrey Findlay, Vice Chairman, Klub Privyet

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Dates for your diary

Perm City Event

A group from Oxford will visit Perm in mid-June, to take part in the Perm Jubilee Celebrations and to mark the establishment of a twinning link between Perm and Duisburg, Germany.

Garden party

Karen Hewitt will host a Perm Association garden party at 6 Rawlinson Road on Wednesday 16 July 2008, from 6.30 to 10.00pm. Drinks will be provided. It would be helpful if members could bring a dish – and let Ann Davis know what they plan to bring. On-street parking available.

Pavlova Quintet

On 6 August there will be a recital in the Newman Rooms, Rose Place, Oxford, by the Pavlova Quintet from Oxford and a quintet from Perm. The Pavlova Quintet also hopes to visit Perm in 2009.

Literature course

Starting on 30 September, from 7.30 to 9.30pm, Karen Hewitt is running a course at Rewley House on Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and Dostoevsky's *The Devils*.

Exchange visit to Perm

The annual group visit to Perm, under the auspices of the University of Oxford and Perm State University, will take place between 13 and 28 September 2008. Further details from Karen Hewitt.

Oxford Association in Perm

A group from the Association will visit Oxford in October. Fourteen community centres are to be set up in Perm, and the Permians want to visit community centres and voluntary organisations in Oxford, to see how we do things. They will need accommodation, so anyone willing to offer hospitality should contact May Wylie.

Permians in Oxford

The group of university teachers on the annual exchange will arrive in Oxford on about 15 November. The traditional welcoming party will be held on Wednesday 19 November.

Future plans

Plans are under way for Oxford Fiddlers to visit Perm in 2009; and for Permians to participate in the Oxford Folk Festival in 2010.

Perm Association contact details

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Celebration mugs

Philip Clayton has designed some special Oxford-Perm mugs. They are made of fine china with a gilt rim, with, on one side, little medallions of English cathedrals, and on the other side, medallions of Russian churches, most from Perm region. Around the top is a frieze of alternating ox heads and bear heads. These mugs cost £5 with profits going to the Perm Association. They would make ideal gifts for your Russian (and English) friends.

Oxford International Links News

Band Festival

A Band Festival for all Oxford's twin towns will be held during the first weekend in August 2008. John Lubbock will direct, and there will be a grand finale with all the bands playing Vaughan Williams' English Folk Song Suite at 7.00pm in the Newman Rooms, Rose Place, Oxford. This will be followed by a ceilidh. Free entry to all.

Flood Management Seminar

It is hoped that a seminar for all the twin towns on Flood Risk Management will be held on 6-9 November 2008, culminating with all the delegates from Oxford, Leiden, Bonn, Grenoble, Perm and Torun taking part in the annual Remembrance Day parade and service.

News of other links

Bonn

A very successful exchange with mentally handicapped people from Bonn has just taken place. Future exchanges of this nature are being planned.

A Bonn school group will visit Oxford in mid-June.

It is hoped that the Pavlova Wind Quintet will visit Bonn to play on Unity Day, 3rd October.

Initial planning is under way for Bonn Week in Oxford, in May 2009. The Bonn link is actively seeking fresh partner organisations, to take part in exchange visits.

Grenoble

Dancers and musicians from the "Rigodons et Tradition" group from Grenoble performed at the Oxford Folk festival in April.

The Grenoble choral group "Interlude" visited Oxford to sing in two concerts with the East Oxford Community Choir in May.

In October, an Oxford delegation will visit Grenoble on the occasion of the British Weeks, held to celebrate 20 years of the twinning link. Planned events include an exhibition by Oxford artists, an exchange between farmers from the two areas and a concert to include Oxford's Pavlova Quintet and works by Oxford and Grenoble musicians.

The French Circle continues to meet on the third Wednesday of every month, offering the opportunity to hear and speak French.

Leiden

A choir from Leiden will perform with the Blackbird Leys Choir in Wesley Memorial Hall on Saturday 7 June at 7.30pm. Tickets from Don Rouse, tel. 01993 850297.

A veterans hockey team from Leiden will play against local Oxford sides on 7 / 8 June on the Oxford Brookes all-weather pitches at Cheney Lane, Oxford.

Leon

The annual *Misa Campesina* – Nicaraguan peasant mass – raised £300 to support the Association's funds for Leon.

How to become a tourist guide

In Russia, as in Britain, the universities are now providing many practical courses for students who shun the traditional disciplines. A favourite in Russia for the last ten years has been 'Tourism', a curious off-shoot of Geography. The students working for a diploma in tourism are almost all fee-paying, which implies that they or their parents have decided this is an option with good prospects in a future, richer Russia. Igor Volkhin, experimental physicist and canoeing instructor to many Oxfordians, has the job of teaching these students some of the realities of life. In April I spent a day with him, another teacher and a group of first-year students, finding out how to be a tourist guide.

As we waited for the bus on the shining steps of the new university building, one of the boys managed to spill a couple of sandwiches and a large bottle of tomato ketchup. He made half-hearted efforts to clear up the sandwiches but abandoned the ketchup as the bus arrived.

Igor asked me for my first impressions and was disconcerted when I pointed to the large red sticky patch which we were leaving behind us. Instantly the boy was marched back to the steps, where he and Igor (Igor much more vigorously) scrubbed at the patch with bits of paper. When they returned, all twenty-five students on the bus had to sit up and listen to a lecture on litter and thoughtlessness, vices, we were told, which were unknown in the West.

Our first stop was at a super-market meat warehouse. The students had calculated that this was the cheapest way of buying meat for shashliki (kebabs) for their hypothetical clients. Unfortunately, although they had asked for the meat to be ready at 10.00 am, nobody had checked the order; we sat in the bus until 10.45. But these minutes outside the warehouse were not wasted. The other teacher started telling us the complicated life story of a twentieth century poet, Vassily Kamensky, one of the 'Futurists'. Between episodes she read fervently from some of his better-known poems while some students listened. A girl read an essay on Mayakovsky, the most famous Futurist. More students listened. Then we set off again, stopping only to pick up much more food, freshly prepared, from Igor's mother.

More than an hour later we arrived at a village where the Sylva River enters the Kama. A chilly wind skittered up the village street, so we huddled into the largest building, a weird wooden house owned in his later years by this very poet, Kamensky. One section was arranged as a museum with some of his poetic installations set up in cases, while others were illuminated round the walls. The 'poems' were explained by a guide; to me they seemed banal like most concrete poetry, but many of the students were impressed and begged me to be impressed too. We all admired the upstairs room where he worked while looking out at the huge curve of the river seen from windows facing three directions.

On the banks of the Kama – or was it still the Sylva? – immediately below the village, Igor ordered the students to set up camp. Eight of them were to put up a shelter in case it rained, others were to prepare salads and shashliki, and a third group had to light fires and start cooking. Two Armenian boys knew what they were doing; most of the others stood around amiably bewildered. Three fires were eventually persuaded to burn, though hardly according to Igor's birchbark and axe standards, for the students had brought their own wood and bundles of newspaper. The large fly-sheet ballooned and flapped in all directions but did not actually fly away. Three helpful girls and the teacher started skewering the meat. That left perhaps eight girls who had no intention of doing anything except parading for the local boys. I do not know what they had been instructed to wear, but one of the girls wore fashion-boots and carried a large handbag labelled 'Prada', while her friend wrapped herself in a luxurious coat. Three other girls struggled on high heels among the clutter, ashes and broken glass of a Russian picnic site.

These girls were very friendly. They cared little for villages but they were ready to speak English and find out about my entire life. They explained that they had chosen

'Tourism' because they liked the idea of travel abroad and lying on beaches. When I asked them how clearing up rubbish on the banks of the Kama fitted in with this dream they laughed, quite untroubled, and asked how much it cost to buy your way into Oxford University.

Igor came round with bread and cucumbers and beer while the boys handed out delicious kebabs cooked by the Armenians. And then we were being asked to celebrate the eighteenth birthday of one of the rich girls. She had somehow smuggled crates of champagne and boxes of chocolates into the bus, and now they were stacked under the fly sheet. We sang 'Happy Birthday', drank champagne, and all became very affectionate. The local men arrived with their fishing equipment – they were still banging holes in the ice – offered beer, accepted champagne and told stories about village parties. The Prada girl helped to put up a tent – well, she held a guy rope.



On the way home I had to give a short lecture on English tourism. Inspired by the champagne I decided to give it in Russian, but I had not delved very far into cultural differences before there were shouts from the back – the drinks meant an urgent need for toilets. So the bus slithered to a stop, everyone lumbered off into the forest, and then I resumed my lecture. 'The problem', I said 'is that British visitors will expect less simple facilities...'

'No,' said Igor, and told me of various scenes he had observed in the twilight on the banks of the Thames near Wallingford. I began to wonder about his earlier lecture on the virtues of the West.

'In the summer we will go on a seven-day excursion walking deep into the Urals', said Igor. 'This will teach them to live.' For a moment, looking at the girls, my imagination boggled. And then I thought of their cheerful acceptance of each other, their shambling co-operation, their affectionate concern, and I thought that perhaps he was right.

Karen Hewitt