



PERM NEWS

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter May 2014

Visiting the past in Krasnokamsk

On a rainy Saturday morning during the September 2013 trip to Perm, my host family suggested a visit to Krasnokamsk, a small industrial town to the west of the city, in order to show me a relic of Soviet life - a communal flat.

On arrival, we parked in Prospekt Mira in front of a fast food shop and a down-at-heel furniture store. On looking up, however, we saw that the rather shabby ground floor was part of an impressively well-proportioned five-storey block with curved, art deco corners and elegantly spaced windows. From a high alcove, a statue looked down on us. It was a woman in 1930s dress but holding grapes aloft in a classical pose.

My host Olga explained that the block of flats in front of us, and others down the street, had been built in 1937 to house the families of workers at the relatively new and expanding Kama wood pulp and paper mill, and at the recently-established oil works. The town hadn't existed before 1929 when the swampy land was reclaimed and the paper mill established as part of Stalin's first five-year plan. The first workers' homes had been wooden barracks, some built underground. Consequently, these stone-built flats designed in modernist style by famous Leningrad architects were, in 1937, a source of great pride.

The town's museum, which included the communal flat that we had come to see, was housed in the next block. The entrance sign declared, 'Krasnokamsk, town of the first five-year plan', and featured a Soviet poster of a brawny-armed and overalled worker pulling a lever amidst a



montage of industrial buildings and classical columns. The man depicted was an ‘udarnik’, a respected worker who had heroically exceeded previous production targets.

Inside the museum, a green passageway led us to the communal flat and the three small rooms that had each been occupied by a whole family. Although cramped, these families would have been relatively lucky that there had not been more rooms meaning more occupants to share the limited cooking facilities in the single kitchen. In there, two tiny tables and a little cabinet were where the families would have prepared their food. The sight of a sugar packet, bars of brown laundry soap, bottles and string bags brought back childhood memories for Olga.

Above the kitchen door was the flat’s shared radio. Olga said that people often used the radio as an alarm clock by leaving it turned on so they would be woken by the national anthem at 6.0 a.m. Then there would be gymnastics routines. I imagined earnest citizens touching their toes across the whole land. Then I remembered Eileen Fowler on the Home Service at 6.45 every morning in 1950s Britain. Was that so different? In Olga’s home at least, no-one joined in with the keep fit routine. But one thing she’d enjoyed as a small child was listening to a daily story on the radio in kindergarten, before the mid-day nap. And in the seventies, when English children might have been watching television, she had done embroidery with her grandmother as they listened to the radio together.

Down the corridor, in the first family’s room, a desolate scene of pine trees and snow was pasted to the window, in order to suggest how little there had been in the town in the 1930s. This room, like the other two, contained furniture and household items donated by Krasnokamsk residents who’d searched through their belongings from the past so that the museum could represent Soviet life across three decades. In this 1930s room, on top of a large and very uncomfortable-looking chest that had served as a bed, were two mysterious wooden implements – one like a long rolling pin, the other not much wider but flatter and serrated. The guide explained that together they made up a ‘cold iron’. The item to be ironed was wound tightly round the rolling pin, and then the serrated wooden bar was repeatedly pulled down the length of it. According to the guide, it really did work on creases.

The next room was furnished in the style of the 1950s. Here, a bed doubled up as a sofa and consequently the two pillows in their delicately worked white pillow-slips were plumped up, one on top of the other, to serve as cushions. Next door in the third, 1960s-style room, there was space for a dining table and chairs, and a fridge which would have protected a family’s food from being taken by other kitchen users. The item that stood out for me in this room was a 1960s issue of *Krestyanka*, the magazine for rural women, showing a headscarved peasant woman and a smiling airman, set against a bright blue sky. I later learnt that this publication had been relaunched in 1996 in order to compete with the arrival in Russia of *Elle* and *Good Housekeeping*, among other western women’s magazines. *Krestyanka*’s new-look, glossy front cover, although not featuring a top model, had reflected rural women’s changing aspirations by featuring a pile of shining potatoes under an elegant parasol trimmed with black lace.

Walking back into the flat’s hallway, we examined the communal storage for coats and shoes. The museum guide lifted out a pair of men’s galoshes. I hadn’t seen any since my father wore similar, floppy black rubber overshoes when I was a child. There was also a daintier version with a medium-high, moulded heel, designed to protect more elegant shoes. In shiny black they had the too big but modish look favoured by Minnie Mouse. Galoshes used to be a very practical way of protecting your shoes in rainy Britain. But they must have been even more useful for coping with the slush of the Russian spring thaw, as Mayakovsky claimed in a Rezinotrest galoshes sales poster on which he collaborated with Rodchenko in the 1920s: ‘Rezinotrest,

protector against rain and slush. Without galoshes, Europe is bound to sit and weep’.

When we returned from our day in Krasnokamsk, and having noticed my enthusiasm for the galoshes, Olga showed me a little book of children’s rhymes written by K Chukovsky. In the sequence entitled ‘Telephone’, various animals are making urgent requests over the phone. The elephant needs chocolate for his son, the cold rabbits want gloves, the monkeys want books. The crocodile, through his tears, orders galoshes. The reply is ‘But I sent you two excellent pairs last week’. ‘So you did’, says the crocodile, ‘but we’ve already eaten them, and we’re waiting for you to send us a dozen new, sweet galoshes for our supper.’

The two-week trip to Perm was a marvellous opportunity to live with a Russian family, and my visit to Krasnokamsk gave me a glimpse of Soviet home life too. Back in England with time to google, I found the website of the Krasnokamsk museum (<http://krasnokamskmuseum.ru/5tiletkal.html>) but I also came across a site which vividly brought to life what I’d seen in Krasnokamsk: <http://kommunalka.colgate.edu>. In a series of short videos, social scientist Ilya Utekhin documents his visit, with his two bemused little children, to the St Petersburg communal flat of his childhood. He speaks to the residents he grew up with, and, in one clip, points out the position of his bed in the room he shared with five members of his family. This flat also features in Jonathan Dimbleby’s *Russia: a journey to the heart of a land and its people* (pp71-74). Dimbleby expresses dismay on seeing the cramped and worn conditions in which Utekhin had lived. Utekhin’s own videos, however, convey the warmth he feels towards his old friends, and his affection for the communal home in which he grew up.

Celia Dixie

1924 Sales Poster by Vladimir Mayakovsky. The text says *Rezinotrest is your protector from rain and slush. Without galoshes Europe is bound to sit and weep.*

Oxford Perm Association AGM 13th February 2014 Chair’s Report

The committee met in March, July and October 2013 and in January 2014. Overall attendance at these meetings was very high. We discussed ideas proposed at the AGM in February 2013, and organised events for the forthcoming year. Here is a brief resumé of them.

In March 2013 the International Officer for Perm State University (PSU) came to Oxford for the updating of the Memorandum of Understanding between PSU and Oxford University.

In April I spent two weeks in Perm myself, where I held long discussions with the Mayor and the City’s International Officer about further ways of increasing co-operation between our cities. One morning I visited a centre for experimental art work with children inspired by the ‘Oxford Art Room’.

In June Councillors Colin Cook and Mary Clarkson went to Perm to celebrate the 290th anniversary of the founding of Perm City.

In July and August a group of young biologists and geologists from Oxford University spent six weeks with their counterparts at PSU doing research out in the Urals countryside. We also held our annual Summer garden party, when, fortunately, the weather was hot and dry.

In September another group visited Perm University. Although 8 people signed up to go, 3 of them had to withdraw for urgent health reasons, so it was a smaller group than usual. However, besides their other activities, they were able to visit Chusovoy, the town where we have established a link with two schools. (Articles about this link have appeared in earlier issues of the Newsletter, and an article by Susan Gregory is in this issue.)

Also in September three artists represented Oxford at the Perm Twin Cities Arts Festival: Simon Murison-Bowie, a photographer, (whose photographs of Perm artists were on display at the AGM), Diana Bell, who took her Big Book – in virtual form - to Perm, and the saxophonist, George Haslam who gave us his own version of events in the previous newsletter. These three worked extremely hard during the week-long arts festival, and were impressed by the organisation, hospitality and sheer exuberance of Perm. Meanwhile, Rosie Lawrence, an Oxford undergraduate, spent a term at School number 54. I was also in Perm in September, directing the Oxford Russian Fund on-going big project on contemporary literature.

On Guy Fawkes night, Mayor Sapko of Perm and his daughter spent a memorable day here – memorable for many members of the association who took them round from one important event to the next, finishing up with an extremely jolly dinner at St Catherine's college.

Then we had our annual visit from the Perm University teachers who followed the usual intensive three-week course, and celebrated their visit with our traditional party where large numbers of people turned up – easily a record number – and where, I hope, a good time was had by all.

Karen Hewitt

From the Oxford International Links Representative

The following is a report presented at our AGM on Feb 13th 2014

Oxford International Links (or OIL for short) is a committee composed of up to 3 representatives from each of the links, Bonn, Leiden, Grenoble, Leon (Nicaragua) and Perm as well as Oxford City Councillors. Its purpose is to provide a means of communication between the links, to facilitate co-operation between the links on big events and to create a voice on Oxford City Council. It also plays an important role in apportioning the City Council grant of around £5,000 between the links either separately or together for combined events.

This year that has just gone by has been an exceptionally difficult year. In 2013 the OIL committee began to feel that it was being sidelined owing to a proposal that the City Council should take over OIL's grant apportioning functions, thus reducing the OIL committee to a pointless talking shop. OIL also felt that, under pressure from many quarters and in pursuit of other priorities, the City Council was seeking to enmesh OIL in unnecessary and inappropriate bureaucracy, was in danger of losing sight of the importance of twinning, and worst of all, that this neglect of twinning might actually damage Oxford's relationships with our twin cities. In the face of these challenges, I am happy to say that OIL has become much more pro-active. Most importantly, it has re-established its role as the grant-apportioning body for the links, it has appointed its own secretary and is no longer reliant on secretarial help from other sources, it has set up a planning sub-committee to map out a 3-year plan, it will play a bigger role in advancing ideas for combined events and it will provide momentum to the grant funding process that should make those events more feasible.

A lot of discussion has already taken place about the 3-year plan and the main ideas are:

- 2014 Grenoble event. 25 Apr - 3 May Alps & Spires.
Already planned, funded and under way.
MESH – Pegasus event. Combined youth dance and drama. End July
OSJ (the Orchestra of St John's Smiths Square) major event, alternatively either in 2014 or 2015
- 2015 20th Anniversary of the PERM Link.
3-choir tour to Bonn (including the Headington Singers).
- 2016 70th Anniversary of the Leiden link.
An Olympics sports link.

In all this, OIL has received the help and support of a number of councillors, particularly the leader of the Council, Councillor Bob Price and also Councillor Colin Cook, and I cannot stress too much that we are extremely grateful to these councillors. It is also good news that the terms and conditions for use of the Town Hall are being protected and that links will still have access to free use of Town Hall rooms at certain agreed times.

Another development is that OIL has decided to commission two pop-up banners to help us to publicise twinning. These banners will contain the logos of all the city links together with the flag of their country and will be available to all links to publicise events to the general public. All the links were asked to provide logos for these banners but we did not have a proper logo of our own and had simply been using the Perm crest, the bear with the yellow book on a red ground. Our committee therefore set to work and have produced our new logo.

It comes with the following little story:

The Ox, steeped in his traditions and Oxford blue, stumbling over a thoroughly water-logged meadow, perceives a possibly somewhat alarming red mass from the east, but he is re-assured, inspired, energised and his mood totally uplifted when he meets this exceptionally friendly white bear with a large yellow book of wisdom and knowledge on his back and illuminated by the star of the east. The bear offers his paw in friendship, to which the Ox responds by raising his hoof and he resolves thereafter to take a proper and fitting interest in Russian culture and language.

Robin Carr

The new logo designed by Robin Carr appears on the masthead of this issue of Perm News. ed.

Forthcoming Events

SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

This year our Garden Party will be held at 6 Rawlinson Road on Wednesday, 9th July starting at 5 p.m. All Oxford Perm Association members are invited and are welcome to bring guests. Please let us know if you intend to come. The Association is providing wine and fruit juices; contributions of suitable 'finger food' will be greatly appreciated. Parking is available in Rawlinson Road.

MESH

The Mesh International Youth Arts Festival produced by Pegasus Theatre brings together 150 young people to Oxford, UK and will run from 23rd July to 2nd August 2014. There are 60 young people from the UK and 90 young people from Russia, Croatia, Lithuania, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Thailand.

The Perm Dance Company are performing 'A Great Little Prince' at Pegasus Theatre on Wednesday 30th July 4.30pm and 8.30pm.

The Grand Debate open to both participants and the general public, will focus on Cultural Diversity. There will be a panel of writers, academics and young people speaking followed by facilitated group discussions at St Stephen's Church, Iffley Road on Sunday 27th July 1.30 - 3.30pm.

A huge finale performance and street procession and show will be a new interpretation of the ancient Beowulf epic poem, called 'Beowulf and Grendel' in Oxford City Centre from 5-6pm followed by the performance at Oxford Town Hall at 7pm on Friday 1st August 2014.

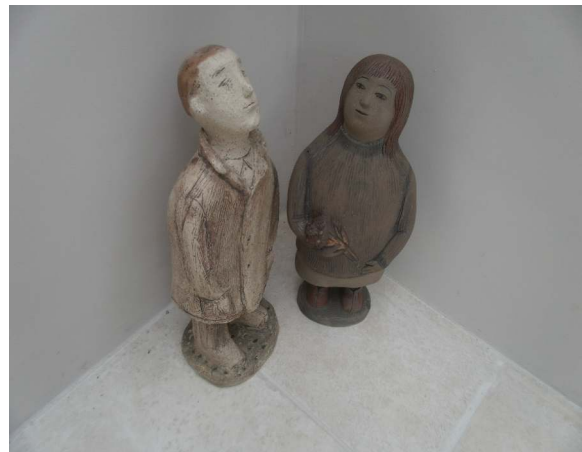
Being part of an International Youth Exchange helps to open the young people's eyes to Global issues making them open to Intercultural understanding and giving them a chance to share, create and connect with other young people from around the world. Our theme for Mesh is linked to UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and summarised by the statement - "The cultural wealth of the world is its diversity in dialogue".

Above from notes supplied by Yasmin Sidhwa, Head of Creative Learning, Pegasus Theatre

A girlfriend for Boris!

In the Autumn of 2013, two Permian ceramicists Inna Rogova and Natasha Korchemkina came to Oxford, worked in a temporary studio for two weeks and mounted an exhibition of their work at 'The Old Fire Station'. David and I went to the Private View and I fell in love with one of the smaller pieces - an enigmatic, contemplative standing figure, biscuit-fired, about 28 cm high, created by Inna.

Once home, Boris seemed lonely, yearning for a girlfriend. Through Diana Bell (who had initiated the contact), I commissioned Inna to create a girlfriend for Boris. I sent her a photo of him and in due course I received the new piece. She is perfect! We all loved her instantly and Ludmilla seemed the right name for her. I now wonder if I should change his name to Russlan, as the first Opera I ever performed in was 'Russlan and Ludmilla'! Anyway, we are all happily settled in our new home and they will live happily ever after!



Rosalyn Roulston

Amsterdam exhibition of Perm Prison photos

Members may recall the report in the January 2012 issue on “Russian Prison Theatre” exhibition at Pushkin House in Bloomsbury ” (available on the our web site under ‘Newsletters’). It consisted of a fascinating collection of photographs by Sebastian Lister and Sergey Ponomarev illustrating life in Prison Colony 29, Perm

Sebastian Lister was recently invited to include his work as a finalist in an exhibition in the Open Borders Festival in Amsterdam from 22nd April to 1st May this year. Members may like to see more of his work on <http://sebastianlister.blogspot.co.uk>.



Information supplied to Perm News via email from Sebastian Lister

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Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome. The submission deadline for the autumn issue is 15th September but it greatly assists planning if you let the editor (David Roulston: djrouls@btinternet.com) know if you plan to submit an item or to discuss an idea for the newsletter or web site www.oxfordperm-assoc.org.

Extracts from letters of appreciation of Karen Hewitt's achievements submitted for her MBE award

As reported in the February Perm News, Karen Hewitt was awarded an MBE earlier this year. We think that readers may be interested in some of the comments made in support. Below is a selected extract from different letters.

Karen Hewitt's early contact with Russian universities led her to see that Russians' understanding of modern Britain, its people and culture, was in desperate need of updating. Her twice yearly exchange programmes consist of lectures on British literature, our civil society, the NHS, law, volunteer culture to name but a few. With Karen, the Russians attend the House of Commons for Prime Minister's Question Time, the law courts in Oxford, walks in the countryside with environmentalists, all the while conducting lively discussion of political and general issues. She is unstinting in her energy and hospitality toward these visitors.....

She also saw that British curiosity about post-Soviet Russia provided the ideal opportunity for exchange, for activities that broadened understanding by creating projects in which Russian and British academics and, subsequently, other professionals and young people worked together. Based on that insight, and with creativity, persistence and huge energy, she has developed projects and exchanges which have broadened the experience of hundreds of Oxfordshire people, in their work or as volunteers.....

I know Karen as a teacher, enthusiastic and thoughtful, and a scholar writing for the academic journal *Voprosy Literaturny* that I edit. Her comment on contemporary British writing and on George Eliot as the best (at least, most admired in her own country) English Victorian novelist was appreciated by Russian academia. Karen's effort coincided with the new period in Russian history when people began to learn what it means to tolerate other views different from their own, to show more respect in disagreement but to be firm in their argument. In this respect Karen came as an embodiment of the true British character and displayed a personality full of vigour and fascination.....

Mention should be also made of the tours, which Professor Karen Hewitt makes to various universities involved in the Perm seminars. The lecturers and talks she gives during these visits are a very informative and stimulating. They encourage a deeper study of the British literature and culture and contribute to raising the standards of teaching literature at secondary and tertiary levels.....

Of great value for everyone engaged in British studies are Prof Karen Hewitt's books, especially her "Understanding Britain Today", which gives exhaustive information on practically every sphere of present-day Britain's life. Her books are a wealth of information for all those who want to be introduced to the study of Britain and its centuries-old culture.

The above extracts compiled by Cynthia Watson

Russian citizens on the annexation of Crimea

We asked the current visiting group of Russian literature teachers taking Karen Hewitt's course their thoughts on recent events in Crimea. Here are three contributions.

Russian society is split into three unequal groups.

The first group, which is actually quite big but not the biggest, think that the Russian government and Vladimir Putin didn't have the right to interfere into the home affairs of Ukraine, even though historically Crimea belonged to Russia. They say that it was a huge mistake to let the Crimeans join Russia and that the consequences of what happened might be very painful and unpredictable.

The second group is proportionally the smallest and these people feel indifferent towards anything that excludes their own comfort.

The third group, the biggest, consider that Crimea has been transferred to Russia according to the Referendum and feel very positive about it. Since I belong to this numerous group, I can express the common feelings about Crimea. We speak a lot about democracy and free will of people. What happened in Crimea represents all this in action. People unanimously decided how to live further when they saw their new illegitimate government unable to cope with the situation. The facts are the following:

80% of the population of Crimea speak Russian as their mother tongue;

half of the population are ethnically Russian;

there are strong historical, cultural and economic links with Russia;

there are many mixed marriages with families and relatives in both countries;

It is certainly a big challenge for Russia to restore the infrastructure of Crimea and smoothly introduce a new constituent region into the state. Understanding all this and facing the challenge the Russians are ready to 'tighten their belts' and sacrifice some of the 'surpluses' to share with the Crimeans.

It's easiest to say 'None of my business' and get down to the daily routines, but we build our future today. People of Crimea have determined their future. Whether it is a right or wrong choice time will show. At least, I do hope for the best.

Lyuda K.

First of all I should say that Russia is always in the centre of information wars. The situation with Crimea is not an exception. Putin's decision to unite Russia and Crimea saved many lives; moreover people wanted it and they voted for it. And from my point of view it was a sound decision to make.

Ekaterina K.

Accepting Crimea as part of the Russian Federation was an urgent matter caused by geopolitical reasons. NATO expansion to the east is seen as threatening by Russians. An access to the Black Sea from Crimea is strategically too important to lose in case Ukraine gets under total American or western influence. Historically Crimea is seen by Russians as a part of the country lost on the ridiculous whim of Khrushchev. Losing Crimea means loss of the Black Sea Fleet. It is unallowable. In all other respects getting Crimea back is a great financial burden with lots of negative implications for common taxpayers in Russia. I am personally not planning going on holiday there despite all the propaganda of "wonderful" resorts and necessity to support population in Crimea. To my mind we have lots of uncertainties in store for us caused by this acquisition.

Natalia B.

A visit to Perm and Chusovoy April 2014

I was fortunate to visit Perm and Chusovoy in April, partly to get to know more about the two schools with which the Oxford Perm Association has established a link over the past two years, and also to explore an interest of my own in the educational and other provision for disabled children in the Perm region.

School 5 in Chusovoy where I stayed initially is a large, light and airy well-resourced building with many facilities for the education of its 500 pupils aged 15-19 years. The school offers academic courses as a preparation for university entrance as well as a range of vocational courses. I spent four nights there in the accommodation for visiting teachers, though I was the only one staying at that time. This was somewhat daunting the first night as I had the whole very large building to myself apart from the security officer, but was fine as I became familiar with the place and surroundings.

I got to know a number of the staff and pupils, all of whom made me feel welcome and some of whom enjoyed the opportunity to practice their English skills. This in turn gave me the chance to find out more about the school! All the pupils I spoke to felt themselves fortunate to be at that particular school and enjoy its facilities. The school was open every week day from eight in the morning until six in the evening and was also open Saturday mornings. Pupils attended school either mornings or afternoons. For the part of the day when they were not at school, many of them went to other institutions for specialist or additional classes in areas such as music, sports or English. The staff seemed to feel this worked well for pupils but some of them seemed to have a very heavy work load. There were also complaints, as in the UK, about the amount of administration and form filling they were required to do which detracted from the time spent teaching.

Regular readers of this newsletter will know that the Oxford Perm Association has a particular interest in a project of School 5, which is their involvement with some of the pupils from School 15, a school for disabled pupils also in Chusovoy. Activities have included inviting some pupils from School 15 to School 5 and arranging entertainments for them, and also a joint trip to Perm Zoo. We have supported these initiatives through funding to help with travel costs involved.

While I was there an activity was arranged for the Saturday morning and a group of younger pupils from School 15 came for the event with a loose Paralympics theme. It started with a performance in the tradition of 'opening ceremonies' and then continued with games set up in various classrooms while the children moved between the different rooms. Each pupil from School 15 was accompanied by a pupil from School 5 who encouraged them in the various activities, many of which resembled party games that would be familiar to us all; passing a ball back through their team or racing to flap a paper frog into a bowl. Much fun was had by all. It was difficult to establish out how many School 5 pupils were involved in the project with School 15 as there seemed to be a small group who were very active, but many others who had loose connections with this activity. For example; some hairdressing students had styled hair for some of the performers in the opening show.

Talking to the pupils of School 5, it seems that this project was part of their programme of community activities. Their aim seemed simply to give their visitors a good time. They felt they learnt a great deal about how difficult life was for disabled pupils.

It has to be appreciated how very innovative this project is in a society where links between able-bodied and disabled pupils are limited. While there is a national programme of inclusion and comprehensive legislation has been passed, implementation has been very slow and almost non-existent in many places. Very many able-bodied children will never have met a disabled child let alone been involved in planning a day of group activities.

I was interested to visit School 15 and find out more about the pupils. Compared with School 5, School 15 is situated in an old and deteriorating building although the staff have done much to make the teaching rooms cheerful and welcoming. Going around the school it was initially difficult to comprehend what brought this seemingly mixed group of children to that school. Some had learning difficulties, while others were being taught in a way comparable with that in mainstream schools. There were only few children with physical disabilities and they had relatively mild problems.

When I asked about the children, it was explained that School 15 is a school for children with medical needs, who may need the attention of a doctor, and in fact there were two doctors on the staff. These could be children with a number of conditions including diabetes and asthma. Also at times there were children who were terminally ill which, as they pointed out, could be very difficult for both the pupils and the staff. I wondered if the school was similar in some ways to the schools for delicate children that existed in the UK in the 50s and 60s though now virtually all of these children would be in mainstream schools.

An impressive feature of School 15 was the education they provided for pupils who, through illness or physical disability, could not attend the school. It was apparent that the school environment was not suitable for those with significant mobility problems. Teachers used Skype to teach these pupils individually. Funds had to be raised to provide the home equipment as when a pupil finally left school, they were allowed to keep it. At the time I was there, eight pupils were being educated in this way. I spoke with two of the boys educated at home and both were able to carry out a simple conversation in English. I discovered that one never left the apartment where he lived.

Parental choice was important in children being placed at School 15 and the parents had a significant role in this decision. If they wished, their child could go to a mainstream school. Some pupils were moved, sometimes more than once, to try mainstream and if it did not seem to work, to return to School 15. However, in order to go to mainstream schools the pupils had to be able to cope with the school and the school environment, and there seemed to be no obligations on the part of the school to adapt to meet the needs of the child. The staff that I talked to at School 15 seemed to feel that most pupils' needs could be best met by staying at that school.

In fact, in all the schools and other institutions I visited in Chusovoy the impression given by staff was that they felt that the special educational needs of pupils with disabilities are best met in specialist schools. This would not be the case in the UK. There were certainly some pupils in schools that I visited (a school for children with learning difficulties and one for pupils with emotional and behaviour issues) that in the UK would have been in mainstream schools. Also in the school for those pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties there was no plan to prepare them for a move back into mainstream education but once placed it was expected that they would be there for the whole of their secondary age school career.

I think it is clear that there are certain aspects of life in Chusovoy that are different from life in UK and these factors may well influence the provision for pupil with special educational needs. Pupils with mobility problems and pupils with learning difficulties may often need accompanying to and from school. However, the weather means that travel to and from school usually takes place in snowy conditions as there can be snow and temperatures below freezing for 7- 8 months of the year. In this context it was interesting to note that, unlike the UK, schools are extremely rarely closed because of bad weather. Distances too make travel more demanding as schools in Chusovoy serve many villages and cover a very large area. In addition, many of the school premises are older and were not built to meet the needs of anyone with a disability. I was surprised though that School 5, which was only built in 2008, did not have a lift. The school is on three floors and one could easily have been accommodated.

Inclusion of disabled pupils in mainstream schools became a theme of the discussions I had with two groups of students training to be social workers at two of the Universities in Perm. Professional social work is a relatively new profession in Russia, it was only established in 1991, and there have only been university courses since 2008. I formed the impression that it was seen as poor relation of other professions, dealing as it does with the disadvantaged in society.



The students were very interested to hear about provision for disabled children in the UK. In the Perm region social workers are the main professionals to be involved with these children and their families although much of their work relates to the benefits system. In general the students were surprised and suspicious about bringing disabled and able-bodied children together especially in the education context. Their concern was for the welfare of the disabled pupils who they felt would be teased and bullied, but also they felt that they could disrupt the education of able-bodied pupils. They also suspected such a policy could be more to do with saving money than educational aims.

Some students had been involved in projects with disabled and able-bodied children, usually at summer camps often arranged and supported by charities. In this context they had often experienced problems, although as the discussion continued it seemed that many of these could be due to lack of preparation and lack of planning.

Discussions became wide ranging and some remained pessimistic that anything could change in Perm while others started to think in terms of the various problems to be solved and how they might go about this. Some even offered examples of situations that had worked. One knew of a pupil with a moderate physical disability such that she could not easily climb stairs. She had coped at primary school but when it came time to go to secondary school it was planned for her to go away to a school for the physically disabled. However her friends from primary school went to the secondary school and asked that she be allowed to attend and eventually it was arranged that all her lessons should be on the ground floor.

Overall there were very thoughtful and lively discussions. One idea that was considered was that in Russia, able-bodied children are less likely come into contact with disabled children leading to feelings of uncertainty of the unknown which itself could make the situation more difficult. It would be difficult to draw many conclusions, and I have to admit that at the end of the sessions, even with the help of an interpreter, I often became a bystander.

It is a visit which triggered many ideas and gave me much food for thought. I would like to thank all those who helped arrange this visit, my hosts, the institutions, teachers and children who welcomed me, and the many people who talked to me and answered my questions

Please note that this account is a personal one, based on the impressions I gained and what I saw and heard. I have tried as far as possible to check the information I was given, but the responsibility for the views expressed is mine.

Susan Gregory