

# PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

October 2004

## Planning, design and conservation in Perm

On my visit to Perm, I was lucky enough to stay with Igor Kirianov, the Dean of the Modern History Faculty at PSU, his wife Marina, and their daughter Olga, who live within walking distance of both the university and the city centre. Igor, Marina and Olga made me feel very much at home, and I thank them for their hospitality and kindness. Olga was also instrumental in helping to arrange many of my professional visits and was an invaluable translator. I was also lucky enough to be able to draw on the translation services of Zhenya, Elle and Dasha, students at PSU and Eugene and Alex from the Pedagogical Institute.

I visited the studio of Nikolai Belov, a leading conservation architect, who works for the Perm Special Scientific Restoration Department. We toured some of his recently completed projects, including the Rotunda in Gorky Park, the Gribushin Mansion, now the Academy of Sciences Club and the Protopopov Mansion, now the offices of a bank. The visual contribution that these restored buildings make to the townscape of Perm is quite remarkable. Belov's methods for conservation and repair of historic buildings serve as examples of how the City could protect more of its historic environment, as and when funds become available.

I next met Valery Chuprakov, the vice Mayor of Perm, and the Head of City Planning and Development. I was told about the City Plan and the drive to improve housing conditions and the physical environment of the metropolitan area. Later that morning, I had a meeting with Vladimir Birukov, also a vice mayor, and the Head of the City Property Department. We discussed the impacts of privatisation and the growth of independent commercial enterprises in the city.

The following day the group visited the open air historic buildings museum at Khokhlovka. The museum is set in a picturesque landscape, and the locations of reconstructed historic buildings have been chosen with great care. The relocated buildings indicate the evolution and development of vernacular timber architecture in the region. The collection includes two churches from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A group of industrial buildings from the Solikamsk salt works had also been conserved, and an enhanced lakeside setting for them was under construction during our visit.

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*The author (left) helping to repair the 1781 bell tower at Khokhlovka*

The following week I met Alexandr Kiselov, a conservation architect in the Regional Centre for Historic Monuments. I learned that the Development Plan for the City recognises zones of conservation, and protection of historic buildings. There are however, fewer than 400 historic monuments in Perm, a city of one million people, and many of these are statues and memorials. (These include a recent Afghan War memorial and the T-34 tank recalling the last world war.) By way of contrast, West Oxfordshire, a district of fewer than 100,000 people, has over 3,000 listed buildings, and over 1,500 Ancient Monuments. Oxford City with a population of about 120,000 has over 1,500 listed buildings. If Perm wished to follow the precedent of its twin city, it should quickly identify and protect many more of its historic buildings and sites.

A few days later, I visited the studio of Sergei Shumarin, a leading exponent of contemporary architecture in Perm, and the Chairman of the House of Architects. On a tour of his recently completed buildings, Shumarin spoke of the need to modernise the City, and he expressed concern that pressures for conservation of historic areas would inhibit development opportunities.

I was invited to dinner one evening by Roman Youshkov, an environmental campaigner and a prominent advocate of the conservation of historic areas in Perm. He told me of the growth of interest in issues connected with environmental sustainability, but that these views were seldom welcomed by developers and the authorities. I told him that such differences of opinion were a routine feature of the planning process in the UK. We also discussed the way in which widespread public consultation on planning proposals in the UK was used to generate public debate, and make a full range of opinions available before decisions were made.

I was also lucky enough to be able to meet Mrs Tatiana Margolina, the Regional Vice-Governor. I expressed to her my opinion that the City and region had a great deal to offer foreign visitors, and that they should not underestimate or undervalue the significance of historic neighbourhoods within the City. However, because of the decay of the original timber buildings, many of these areas had been designated for demolition and redevelopment. I suggested that a conservation-led regeneration strategy similar to those used in Newcastle or Liverpool could help in providing refurbished buildings and would promote tourism.

I visited the Perm Academy of Arts and Architecture twice, the first time with a conservation contractor who was involved in the repair of this important building. A few days later I toured the student studios in company with the new Rector who I later learned is remarkable painter of landscapes, and the head of the architecture department. I was very impressed with both the work of the students and the quality of the teaching at the Academy.

Later that day I was invited to a round table meeting at the House of Architects. I was able to describe UK principles of balancing the conservation of the historic environment with promoting good modern design. I described the ways in which these two forces can be seen as complementary and not in opposition to each other. I promised to have some of the UK documents on sustainable development and conservation translated and to pass these on to my professional contacts. I look forward to further opportunities to continue these discussions.

*Robert Parkinson*

Editor's notes.

Part of the cost of Robert's visit came from the balance of a fund raised by people in Witney to provide help to Russians. The Perm Association now hopes to invite someone involved in planning and conservation in Perm to visit Oxford to look at our conservation methods.

## Recent events

### International Youth Sports Festival

A team of young floor gymnasts from Perm took part in the International Youth Sports Festival in July. Their lively mixture of gymnastics and ballet was enthusiastically applauded by all the teams from Oxford and Oxford's twin cities. Each national group presented a different sport which they had to teach to the other groups during the week. By the Friday, even the hefty ice-hockey players were balancing and spinning with scarves furling and unfurling in their hands as they learnt just how difficult the Perm sport was. The week was thoroughly enjoyable, and May Wylie, who organized the whole event, called upon members of the Perm Association to help feed over a hundred hungry young people one summer's evening.

### Perm Association Garden Party

A Garden Party - cum - barbecue was held on Wednesday 4 August at Richard and Gilliane Sills' home to welcome Olga Kirianova, our newsletter correspondent in Perm, who (accompanied by her mother Marina) was in Oxford for a two-week work-training placement with the Oxford Times.

### September 2004 visit to Perm

A group of six people from Oxford visited Perm as part of the annual exchange with Perm State University. See articles on pages 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6.

## Forthcoming events

### Academic visitors

Boris and Lyuba Proskurnin are currently visiting Oxford - Lyuba until 24 October and Boris until 7 November. Boris is doing research on George Eliot.

The annual group visit to Oxford by academics from Perm State University will take place from 13 November to 4 December.

### Perm Association Party

The traditional party to welcome the group from PSU will be held in the Acland Room at Rewley House at 7.30pm on Wednesday 17 November (Rewley House is in St John Street, almost at the junction with Wellington Square). Wine, refreshments, and entertainment from Oxford and Perm. This is your opportunity to meet teachers from Perm University and other Perm visitors to Oxford, and, if you wish, to arrange further meetings with our guests.

### A flavour of Russia in your home?

Philip Clayton would like to auction, for the benefit of the Perm Association, a beautiful Russian tea set in white, blue and gold. More details from Philip or from Karen. It will be auctioned at the Perm Party if no-one makes an appropriate offer before then.

### The Art of the Russian Lacquer Miniature

There is a selling exhibition at the Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock until 21 November - admission free, open 10.00 am - 5.00 pm Monday to Saturday, 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm on Sundays. Cherry Gilchrist will be giving a lecture "Land of the Firebird: Legends and Fairy Tales in Russian Lacquer Miniatures" - at 7.00 pm on 27 October, tickets £5, telephone 01993 814111.

### Annual General Meeting

The Perm Association AGM will be held on Wednesday 9 February at 6.00 pm. at Wolfson College, followed by an illustrated talk. Good parking available.

## Oxford International Links

The international youth sports festival in July 2004 (see item above) involved 150 young people from Leiden, Bonn, Perm, Grenoble, Toruń and Oxford.

Initial planning is under way for an international performance of Bernstein's Mass in October 2005. This would involve the East Oxford Community Choir, Interlude (from Grenoble), the Bonn Youth Choir, an orchestra from Leiden, Oxford Youth Dance and Perm Contemporary Dance, with soloists from all the twin towns. John Lubbock has agreed to direct the work.

## News of other links

### Bonn

An exchange between Oxford School and the Bertoldt Brecht School in Bonn will take place in October 2004. A youth group from Barton and Wood Farm is visiting Bonn in late October 2004.

Initial planning is under way for Bonn week in Oxford from 25 May to 1 June 2005. It is hoped that the programme will include an art exhibition, church service, youth theatre performance, Burgerfest, barbecue and barn dance, and punting with a picnic lunch.

A group of artists from Bonn hopes to exhibit in Oxford in 2005.

### Grenoble

Teachers from Oxford School made a highly successful planning visit to Grenoble. Youth exchanges and placements with the Grenoble Water Company were set up.

### Leiden

The Doyle Academy of Irish Dance visited Leiden in early October 2004 and took part in the annual Leiden youth parade. They gave performances to massive crowds in the Town Square.

## A Perm Visit with a Difference

As this year's visit to Perm was the third for Frances and me, our hosts (with whom we have stayed on all three occasions) decided to lay on a couple of diversions from the main programme. In the event these turned out to account for six days, almost half the total time we were in Russia, so it was for us a Perm visit with a difference.

The first trip was to Ekaterinburg, about 360 kilometres by car along what, to put it mildly, were some very exciting roads. Once across the border and leaving the Perm Region for the Sverdlovsk Region, the traveller soon has to contend with a road which can only be described as an assault course on wheels. Stretches of relatively good surface are frequently followed, without warning, by pot holes which are so bad that vehicles often take to the slightly less bumpy strips of hard-standing along the sides of the road - or else drive on the left if that appears to offer a better ride, swerving only at the last minute to avoid traffic coming the other way. After this excitement Ekaterinburg itself seems almost tame in comparison, but it has a lot to offer. We were taken to various forms of theatre/circus on each of the three evenings we were there, but perhaps the most memorable part of the visit was to stand on the spot where the tsar and his family were murdered after the revolution and then to visit the mine shaft where the bodies were taken to be disposed of. Both are now religious sites, the former, to my surprise, right in the middle of the city and the latter a few miles outside. After the house, in the cellar of which the executions took place, was razed by the Soviet authorities, the site was just left for years as a bare piece of ground. The 'Church on Blood' which now stands there was finished only two years ago. Ganina Yama, the second site, now has a monastery and seven temples but the old mineshaft can still be seen. For future Perm visitors, if you can get there, Ekaterinburg is worth a visit. We were told that there is a good train service from Perm, including the option of two overnight sleeper trips with a whole day in between, thus solving the accommodation problem.

Our second trip was to the north - slightly better roads but less sophistication. We visited Solikamsk, Cherdyn and Nyrob and a seemingly endless stream of churches and museums in each. There was one overnight stop - in a Russian rural hotel - and this in itself was quite an experience. I offered to pay for our room but Misha would not let me. In answer to my enquiry, he would only say with a mischievous smile that it was 'very expensive'.

At Nyrob, the farthest point north on this trip, we were told that no Englishmen had ever been there before. This, I am sure, was a piece of dramatic licence, but there is no denying that it was extremely remote and could boast a couple of very spartan-looking working prisons which evoked visions of the old gulags so beloved of Comrade Stalin. 'Only real criminals in there now', Misha assured us.

*Ken Cugnoni*

## **A first-timer's Visit to Perm**

It would be unusual if first-timers to Perm were not somewhat apprehensive. They are going to a place entirely unknown to them except through pictures and the most general descriptions. They worry about the facilities and have heard the odd comment about possible mud and dirt. The natural instinct of those who have been before is to offer entertaining stories about the canoeing, the sightseeing, the ballet and opera, the layout and nomenclature of the streets, the literary and artistic associations and the state of preservation of the older buildings. Those who have been to Perm are naturally eager to focus on the variety and interest of the city and are anxious for others to share their experience.

But a first-timer who keeps any kind of diary or daily commentary may recall his arrival in Perm. Having travelled 2 days and 5,000 kilometres including a 20-hour train journey (which for many English people is very long), without knowing where he will be staying, to then travel through streets that are dimly lit and lined with mud, dust and weeds, to see chaotic traffic, consisting of dirty old cars, ancient second-hand buses rattling over massive potholes, lorries worthy of a World War II museum, belching diesel, monolithic blocks of flats faced with huge ugly slabs of pink and grey concrete, naked brickwork held together with crude gobs of unpointed cement and often not laid entirely straight, and every building except the very newest, scarred with crumbling facework, or streaked with brown rusty stains from the rickety iron balconies - all this is a culture shock of colossal proportions.

His sense of shock will then be all the more increased as his family take him to their flat. He will be led into a dingy, dirty foyer, and then up in a lift. (The odds are it may be working). Next the hosts will open a heavy iron door with multiple locks, leading into a pitch-black unlit lobby about 5 foot square, and then open another massive iron door leading into the flat itself. The iron doors themselves convey a message about the dark forces and fear outside from which the family must needs protect itself.

Once inside, our visitor will notice that the flat is clean and comfortable but it will be relatively small, possibly with only one or two bedrooms, and our first-timer may discover that the hosts have had to vacate the master bedroom and are camping in the living room. Our visitor then receives the final shock which vastly increases the impact of what he has seen so far. The likelihood is that he will discover that he is amongst the loveliest, most hospitable, kindest people he has ever met, who go to unbelievable lengths to reassure him and make him feel comfortable, who strain to see that his every moment is filled, who show him all their photo albums, books, curios and souvenirs, who include him in the very weft of their family life and ply him with dishes of astonishing variety and colour from the very simplest and most natural ingredients. The vodka flows, the songs pour forth verse after verse, there is laughter and warmth late into the night.

There soon comes a point when our first-timer will have realised that he can identify with his host family almost completely. A strong bond of affection and respect is created at an early stage. Our visitor is left thinking, how can these kind, loving, industrious, cultured, highly-educated people, so uncannily like himself, be living in such difficult conditions, so philosophically, and yet still manage to find such joy and happiness in their lives.

Our visitor's problem resides in the difficulty of reconciling these gigantic contrasts. Many people have been to countries where the conditions are far worse than in Russia and they will have read accounts of what they are likely to find. But we know that Russia is an advanced country, that can increasingly be considered to be modern and not some far away lunar outpost. We simply do not expect our kind hosts to be living in such constrained circumstances. Our way of life that we take so for granted in the West seems all of a sudden to be very highly and in some sense, undeservedly, privileged. Our great concerns and worries in our daily lives back in England, gnawing questions of whether we can afford to move

house or build that extension suddenly seem to be matters of the most utter triviality.

All this can give rise to an emotional turmoil and sense of shock which make the first two or three days very difficult to get through. But after these days, most people settle down and find a new equilibrium. Their hosts' continuing and deepening hospitality quickly soothes away any concern, and the busy programme of the day moves their attention to the tourist sights, the culture and history of the city of Perm and to the interest, variety and sheer beauty of the Prikamye region.

So let us reflect on what might be the best plan to help our first-timer get through this initial shock. He must know that he is in for a difficult first two days, but he can be reassured that he will work through it, calmer waters really do lie ahead, that he will be coming back with jolly travellers' tales to trade with the best, but above all that he will have made many dear and lasting friendships. He will have drawn enormous strength and inspiration from the philosophical stoicism, kindness and love that he has received from his hosts and will quite possibly have had the richest, deepest, most moving experience of his life. He will be able to say to his friends, "If you haven't been to Perm, you haven't lived."

When I joined the Perm Association it seemed like a very pleasant society where I could attend nice dinners, meet Russians with varying degrees of English, hear them sing Russian songs and generally listen to entertaining stories from those who had been to Perm. I now realise that in the Perm Association as it exists in Oxford I had merely seen the smoke. In Perm itself, I think I found the fire.

*Robin Carr*

#### **Perm Association contact details**

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#### **Perm Guide**

The draft guide now runs to over 40 pages. Anyone visiting Perm is welcome to request a copy from Richard Sills (e-mail richardsills@btinternet.com or telephone 01865 721644) - and is invited to suggest additions or amendments, and to contribute photographs.

#### **Note from the Membership Secretary**

It would be appreciated if all members with email could send their email addresses to me at: [djrouls@aol.com](mailto:djrrouls@aol.com) This will help in maintaining communications about events where it is not always possible or convenient to use the post.

All paid up members should have received a membership card with the last issue of the Newsletter. If you have not received one, please email me at the above address or telephone: 01993 813 215 so that our records can be corrected. It is hoped that the introduction of the Membership Card will in future avoid confusion about who has paid or not paid their subscriptions. We have at least one unidentified payment at present which we would very much like to associate with a name!

Thank you for your cooperation. David Roulston, Membership Secretary.