

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

January 2005

AGM - see attached notice, and the item on page 4

The Royal Navy - in Perm!

Not many people know that a contingent of the British Royal Navy was based in Perm. Well, it is true and happened in 1919. The following summary was gleaned from a fascinating article written by Captain Thomas Jameson, Royal Marine Light Infantry in "The True Story of the Royal Navy 1914-1919" published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1996.

The Royal Navy cruiser HMS Kent arrived in Vladivostock in January 1919 to join HMS Suffolk with orders to act as a Naval Mission to assist the Russian Admiral Kolchak who had formed a provisional anti-Bolshevik government at Omsk which ruled from Lake Baikal to the Volga - quite a distance! An intriguing operation was rapidly put in place. A small group of Royal Marines with one 6 inch (the diameter of the shell) gun (this weighed seven tons) and four 12 pounders were landed from HMS Suffolk and mounted on platform trucks to proceed by rail to Omsk. The goal was to form a Russian Naval flotilla at Perm under the command of Admiral Kolchak to operate on the Kama river once the ice had melted. The severe conditions anticipated due to the extreme cold and the fact that they would be fighting in a civil war were made clear to the 63 volunteer Marines. After the Marines had acquired winter clothing from Canadian forces in Vladivostock the train departed on 6th April 1919. The 4,500 miles to Omsk passed smoothly, apart from a few instances where the lines had been cut and had to be rebuilt with spare rails carried for this purpose. The train paused briefly in Omsk and continued on 26th April via Ekaterinburg to Perm, arriving two days later. Perm had been recaptured from the Red army by Czech forces earlier in the year.



The complicated work now began. The 6 inch gun and the other guns had to be manhandled, supports built at the Motovilikha factory in Perm (used to build railway engines) and put aboard a barge (close to the railway) and a Kama paddle steamer tug boat which was normally used to tow barges between Perm and the Caspian Sea. By 7th May the two 'ships', now named after their parent vessels Suffolk and Kent, were fully modified and equipped with the guns and they proceeded southwards down the Kama river with a small White Russian fleet under the overall command of the Russian Captain Fiersdosiff. On 9th May they passed Yelabouga where Admiral Smirnoff's flagship was based.

The next day the Bolshevik flotilla was encountered at the confluence of the Kama and Viatka rivers (over 300 miles south-west of Perm) and an exchange of gunfire ensued. After much fighting over this stretch of river for a couple of weeks, the Bolsheviks eventually forced the two British vessels and their accompanying Russian ships back up the Kama. Fighting continued south of Sarapul but the British and accompanying white Russian vessels were being forced gradually up river past Okhansk so that by 20th June they were only 45 versts south of Perm. Food was rationed and consisted mainly of bear meat, eighteen inch loaves of black bread and potatoes. With the situation deteriorating, the Red Army having reached Kungur and threatening to capture the main railway line, the guns were dismantled and with the help of the Motovilikha factory, described by Captain Jameson in his account as the “Swindon of East Russia”, brought ashore and loaded on to railway trucks again.

On 29th June the Royal Navy train left Perm (just before the Bolshevik army took over the city again), reached Omsk on 29th July and continued to Vladivostock where it arrived on 18th August. HMS Kent was back in Portsmouth by November.

By the way, you can follow the places named on the Kama river using the Multi Map web site www.multimap.com. Click on World Map, then on the area around Perm and keep clicking and moving east, south etc. It is quite fascinating!

David Roulston

Dancing in Perm

In the Easter of 2004 I travelled to Perm with much thanks to the Perm Association and the City Council. I went with Oxford Youth Dance Company in hope of trading dance ideas and technique. As none of us had ever been to Russia we didn't know what to expect. Although travelling on the Trans Siberian railway was an amazing experience in itself, this was nothing to the greeting we received once we arrived in Perm. We had three translators travelling with us at all times with escorts everywhere we performed, and when we went to see performances we were always accommodated in the theatre boxes. We also had the prestigious chance of meeting the dancers afterwards and discussing dance and lifestyles. On top of all this we were staying with a family who treated us with huge generosity when we were home and not dancing. Although they all live in flats and eat very different food the cultural experience and generosity of the people of Perm soon make you forget you are in a different country.

For the first time in my dance life we were bombarded with screaming children (and adults) requesting autographs after our performances. This is extremely flattering for a non-professional youth dance company. As well as the super generosity and friendly nature of the people, Perm is a very scenic city running alongside a river which is beautiful especially in winter. The extravagance of the theatres and public services is extremely impressive and it's a joy to perform there. Going to Russia was not only one of the best experiences of my life so far, but also helped hugely in putting dance as a prospect for my career. It is a wonderful place that you will never forget and I would jump at a chance of going again.

Sam Coren

Editor's note. Sam was 15 when he travelled to Perm in 2004 with Oxford Youth Dance.

Humphrey Carpenter

Humphrey Carpenter who died on 4th January was a good friend of the Perm Association. He and Mari Prichard, his wife and our Association secretary, often provided meals for our Perm guests who were always enchanted by the experience. Nearly ten years ago Humphrey and Mari became very friendly with Igor Kirianov, Dean of the History Faculty at Perm who came to Oxford on one of our courses. Subsequently the whole Kirianov family visited Humphrey and Mari on several occasions, and in 2001, Humphrey went to Perm, travelling with me. Our fellow passengers were Russian policemen with pretty gruesome attitudes towards criminals; in no time at all they were discussing their policies with Humphrey, even though he could not speak a word of Russian - and sharing vodka.

We shall greatly miss Humphrey and his willingness to help us and others. We extend our deep sympathy to Mari and her daughters.

Karen Hewitt

A day in the life of a Perm Head Teacher

There is some routine in my day as a school director: it begins early in the morning (at 8 a.m. or sometimes later) and ends late in the evening. It's not because I can't plan my work. The reason is that our school is a very big family; we teach 1406 pupils and 88 teachers work in the school. In order to accommodate them all, the pupils study in two shifts - morning and afternoon. I should know my pupils and my teachers, so I attend their classes in order to know their life from inside and this takes much time.

Three days a week I conduct English lessons, 15 in all. It's very important for me because I like teaching English and I like children. They help me to be in high spirits and feel young. Also I should be a practising director because only by conducting lessons I can better understand all processes that are taking place in the school, to be an up-to-date teacher and to be in good form as a leader. Only doing that I can teach our teachers and inspire them to take part in different innovation activities which are very important in our life. A teacher has no right to stop teaching and learning.

I'm a communicative director, I believe, so every day I have meetings with teachers, parents (if they have questions or suggestions concerning school life), our social partners, administrative authorities and local councillors. I have eight assistants who are responsible for different fields of school life: education, extra activities, modernization of the teaching process, healthcare, teachers' development, etc.

I answer hundreds of calls, study and sign documents, work on a computer, solve economic and financial problems, attend teachers' lessons and analyse them, discuss their problems and help to find the way out, give them advice. I plan my working day but life corrects it. School is a living organism and we can't plan and forecast everything. There are unexpected situations which a director has to solve. My work is difficult but creative. It needs much time and effort, including knowledge of management, it is very good and noble. It's pleasant to see the happy eyes of our pupils, teachers and parents. They inspire me to come to school every morning and do my best because I love them and our school.

Irina Petrova

Editor's note. When Robin Carr went to Perm in September, he spent two weeks in the home of Irina Petrova, Director (Head Teacher) of a school in Perm. It is really three schools in one: a primary school, a 'junior secondary' school, and a special 'Lyceum' rather like a specialised sixth-form for 16-17 year olds. We asked her to write about her day.

Recent events

Academic visitors

Boris and Lyuba Proskurnin visited Oxford in October 2004, and the annual group visit to Oxford by academics from Perm State University took place in November - December. The Perm Association held its traditional party to welcome the group from PSU on 17 November.

Forthcoming events

Ice Sculpture Festival

Catherine Boyd will visit Perm to compete in their Ice Sculpture Festival, with a view to advising Oxford on a similar festival in the future.

Annual General Meeting

The Perm Association AGM will be held on Wednesday 9 February at 6.30 pm. at Wolfson College, followed by an illustrated talk. Good parking available, both in Linton Road and in the college car park. For further details - including a proposed amendment to the constitution - see the enclosed notice.

Architectural conservation

As a follow-up to Robert Parkinson's visit to Perm (see article in October 2004 edition of the Perm newsletter), Nikolai Belov from Perm will be visiting Oxford in May 2005, as a guest of the Perm Association. He will be in Oxford for about ten days. Any members wishing to invite him to a meal or otherwise entertain him should contact Karen Hewitt.

City Council visit

A group of city councillors from Perm plan to visit Oxford in June-July 2005, to shadow the work of their Oxford city counterparts. Their visit will mark the tenth anniversary of friendship links between the two cities. The visit is timed to coincide with a civic service in Christchurch, to celebrate 60 years of peace in Europe, in line with national celebrations.

Fund-raising function

We plan to hold a fund-raising function on Friday 8 July 2005, to coincide with the visit by the Perm city councillors. This is likely to take the form of a "bring and share" meal, together with a bar, a quiz and an auction.

Bernstein Mass

See item under "OIL", below.

Hockey

Planning has begun for a group of women hockey players from Perm to visit Oxford in 2006.

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.

Oxford International Links

On 27 February the Lord Mayor is holding a charity concert in Oxford Town Hall at 2.30pm in aid of the Asian tsunami appeal.

OIL will be holding an Irish Celebration Evening, to raise funds for Oxford's link activities, at St Aldate's Church Hall in Pembroke Street, from 7.00pm on Friday 11 March. There will be a dinner, with entertainment between courses - a musical interlude, an Irish monologue, a performance by the Doyle Academy of Irish Dance and a sing song. Tickets at £15 are available from May Wylie. Numbers are limited - so book early to avoid disappointment.

Plans are well under way for an international performance of Bernstein's Mass in late October 2005. This will involve the East Oxford Community Choir, singers and musicians from all the twin towns and 16 dancers - 8 from Perm and 8 from Oxford. John Lubbock will not only direct the work, but will visit Bonn and Leiden in the spring to rehearse with the local groups. One or two people from Oxford Youth Dance will visit Perm to work with the Perm dancers prior to their visit.

News of other links

Bonn

A group of 34 pupils and 2 teachers from the Bertoldt Brecht Gesamtschule in Bonn visited Oxford in October 2004, as part of their exchange with Oxford School. A youth group from Barton and Wood Farm enjoyed a successful visit to Bonn, also in October 2004.

A group from the Bonn link spent three days in Berlin, visiting the Reichstag, the Olympic Stadium and the Sans Souci palace at Potsdam, before going on to Dresden, where they visited the opera house, Colditz Castle and the Meissen porcelain factory.

Planning for Bonn week in Oxford, from 25 May to 31 May 2005, is well advanced. The programme will include art exhibitions at the Museum of Oxford and the Exchange Gallery; a civic parade, church service and Lord Mayor's reception (on 26th); a visit to the Botanic Gardens, a youth football tournament, youth theatre performances and gospel choir performances (on 27th); a Burger-fest all day on 27th and 28th in Gloucester Green - with lots of music and dancing on Saturday 28th; and the Lord Mayor's Parade on Monday 30th, with fun events all day in South Park.

Note! Members of all of Oxford's link groups are welcome to join in the celebrations. Further details from May Wylie or from members of the Bonn Link.

Oxford School had a highly successful exchange visit to Bonn in December. A group from Bonn is expected to make a return visit in May.

Grenoble

East Oxford Community Choir, which has a thriving link with the Interlude choir from Grenoble, ran a Fête des Rois celebration, and recruited hosts for the OIL opera project, due to be held in October 2005. They also raised £121 for the Asian tsunami appeal. The next choir exchange will take place in May 2005.

A group from Grenoble will visit Oxford to take part in the next festival of folk music in May 2005.

The Grenoble municipality is seeking advice from Oxford on running an international sports festival in the summer, and will be inviting participation from Oxford and other twin towns.

Leiden

The Leiden Burgomaster, the link officer and twelve other link members from Leiden visited Oxford for the November exchange. They joined their Oxford hosts for the annual dinner and for the Remembrance Day ceremony at the war memorial in St Giles.

At the annual harvest auction and supper evening, members raised £351 for the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Link members plan to visit Leiden in early May, to coincide with Dutch Remembrance Day.

Following the successful visit to Bonn, a youth group from Barton and Wood Farm will visit Leiden in mid-April.

Leon

The Leon link will be holding a Nicaraguan Day on Friday 25 February, from 4.00pm in the Assembly Room at the Town Hall. The events begin with stalls, an exhibition and café-bar, followed by salsa lessons from 5.30pm to 7.00pm, and a salsa dance from 7.00pm to 10.30pm. Tickets (£5 for the lessons, £6 for the dance) from May Wylie.

The annual Misa Campesina (Nicaraguan Peasant Mass) will be held at 11.15am on Sunday 6 March at Blackfriars, 64 St Giles, Oxford.

On 16 September, Quentin Hayes will again give a recital in aid of the Leon link.

Oxford memories

Teaching English in Perm is a life of being constantly on the look-out for sources of information about Britain. What we have is like a badly done puzzle, where the bits don't make up a proper picture. This autumn I took part in the Perm-Oxford university programme. I could foresee this would be a firework of impressions, and I was determined to find out the facts, to understand the atmosphere and put the puzzle right.

The fact-finding was provided for me in large quantities. I went to the Crown Courts, I heard people talk about the environment and how they design whole new housing estates. And it's not the information itself that matters (although it does), but the way it all connected with reality, with the life of the country and individual people, and how I could see one through the other, and feel it breathe. For example, I had known things about the British Parliament before, it is something you always have to read (rather boring) texts about in school and university textbooks. But a full understanding of its role didn't come until Karen's seminar, the short story about an MP who had to step down because of an affair that had come out and the TODAY programme on BBC Radio 4 which told an absolutely similar story that was just happening. And, of course, the visit to the Parliament to attend the session from the visitors' gallery, improved by the view of an MP sitting on the front bench at the Parliamentary session with his feet on the table, displaying fiery red socks.

One of my major enjoyments was walking the streets of Oxford. Cowley Road was amazing. I loved its eclecticism, its little shops and restaurants and the diversity of people in it. I never ever took the bus to or from my hosts' house for fear of missing something exciting in this street. I soon learned the sequence of buildings and mainly observed the people: the Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, dressed-up students, schoolchildren, uniformed bus drivers. Heaps of empty bottles in people's gardens after a Friday night. Chained remains of bicycles. An elderly gentleman in full Scottish gear mounting a bus. A huge but quiet queue of punk youths all in leather and metal waiting for admission to a concert.

The notion of 'English Humour' is as wrapped in mystery in Russia as is the 'Russian Soul' elsewhere in the world. The major opinion of those who have only read translations or seen the 'Mr Bean' show is that it is incomprehensible. But I saw the real thing. The evening with the Davis family was like visiting a comic show, as the whole family of four seem to embody this top quality humour. Then there were the Oxford - London coach drivers. The first time I was travelling back from London, absolutely exhausted, the coach driver kept me awake by saying the usual coach-driver things in a very funny way, like 'And when you thought your day couldn't get more exciting, here's - Headington Shops!!!' The next time I took a coach to London the driver suddenly pulled to the side of the road, stopped and said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I'm afraid we've broken down.' And then, enjoying the dismay this produced, he started the engine again and said, 'No we haven't!' and drove on.

And here are some miscellaneous glimpses. The smile. When you meet somebody's eyes, they don't look aside as though they didn't see you, but smile. Not the broad Hollywood smile, but just a normal human one.

The Remembrance Day ceremony. I walked up Cornmarket and saw veterans gathering on the corner. This was a splendid sight: neat uniforms, white hair, gleaming medals, and all sharing the same proud and elated look. And this is what really unites Oxford and Perm, this veterans' parade, although we have it on the other side of the year, on May 9.

Bunches of incredibly smart young men in black tie, or even tails, with white shirts and shiny boots, flooding the streets and pubs in the evenings. This is a sight to warm a female heart.

Girl fashions. Scarves, ponchos, moonboots or sandals. They have very short skirts and no tights, and this with 7 degrees Centigrade, which is no summer at all. The question is: which one here comes from the Urals?! Even Asian women, who, by our standards, should be the least hardy ones, stick to their traditional costumes, summer fabrics and sandals with their feet bare.

Joggers. Lots of people seem to enjoy jogging, and I quite understand them. But what beats me is joggers in the middle of a freezing drizzle, when all normal people keep to their warm cosy house. What is more, they seem to enjoy displaying their fine leg muscles, or how can you account for their flimsy outfit? Or do they use the drizzle as a natural cooling system?

Local drunkards sitting on a bench at Carfax, one of them yelling something in a hoarse voice. When I took a closer look the yeller turned out to be a grey-haired elderly woman.

And something quite different: a small boy sitting on the floor in Woolworth's in Witney, biting his shoe. The mother didn't seem too surprised, just called him, and he rose reluctantly and followed her.

This was a trip full of invaluable experience. I knew that we are similar in many ways, and I was comforted to see that we were also different in many ways. So there's always a reserve to discover and wonder about.

Tanya Gulyaeva

Tanya visited Oxford on the Perm-Oxford universities exchange in November-December 2004.

Making Waves - in Perm and beyond

I went with a colleague to do a three day seminar in Perm on 'Loss and Bereavement' last year (see article in Perm News, July 2004) and I thought members might be interested to hear what has come out of it.

Firstly, how the 20,000 roubles (£450) that I raised in Bladon was spent by Perm Hospice. They were able to purchase a wheelchair, a bedside table, a new TV and radio for the day room, a kettle, blender and a microwave oven for the kitchen - with receipts and photos to prove it! It is to be hoped that we shall be able to continue to offer support.

Secondly, there seems to have been considerable dissemination of the contents and materials of the seminar. A follow-up meeting was held in July then a meeting was held for local health professionals on 'Russian experience in bereavement support'. Following this, in Novosibirsk, three sessions were given for hospice staff, undertakers and crematoria staff. In Ulyanovsk, seminar participants held conferences for doctors and nurses of the hospice as well as for psychologists working in local schools and hospitals. Now they are apparently planning a series of classes in communication skills for local educators and medical people.

The Victor Zorza Hospice Trust who paid for our travel expenses are delighted about this; it is so good that a relatively small input on our part can have such far-reaching results and effects. I guess it will not be too long before I return to Perm again!

Rosalyn Roulston

Entertaining a Russian visitor

Ed. Whenever visitors from Perm come to Oxford, members of the Perm Association are encouraged to invite them out - to a meal or to an outing around Oxford or further afield. The annual party to welcome the university exchange group in November offers an admirable opportunity to strike up a conversation and arrange to entertain a visitor. Gilia Slocock describes such an encounter.

In November I took one of our recent Perm visitors out for a day near the end of her stay in Oxford. Katya was a recently graduated geologist, and I discovered at the party at Rewley House that she had visited the Kola peninsula in Arctic Russia. I had also been there on a mineral hunt with the Natural History Museum, as it has a unique mineral 'population'; so we realised that we should have a lot to talk about, as far as her English would take us.

We went to the Rain Forest exhibition at Hermitage on the Downs. I had taken Igor there one summer, and he was fascinated; in winter it is less interesting and Katya had already seen the greenhouses in the Botanic Garden, but there are tiny monkeys and some exotic birds. We then called in to see an elderly cousin of mine to whom I needed to return a document, so she saw a retirement home; and then we went to Ewelme, which to me is quintessential England. The effect it has on me is rather like that of the centre of the Kremlin cathedrals on one of my young guides in Moscow; she stamped her foot and declared: 'This is the hearrrt of Russia'.

Katya and I ate our picnic at Swyncombe, then came home, and skipped through the University Museum, the Pitt Rivers and the Ashmolean. Too much, but better than not enough, and a taster of what there is. She is a very impressive young woman, and I hope it will be possible for her to come again.

Gilia Slocock

The rough cut diamond that is Perm A midwife's view

Robin Carr's article in the Perm News of October 2004 is a hard one to beat. His "*A first timer's visit to Perm*" was so beautifully written from the heart of a person sensitive to the people of Perm, to their way of life and to the personal relationships we struck up during our stay in September. My own interest focused on the health and social aspects of Permian life, hence this article, warts and all.

I stayed in an old three-roomed apartment - typical of the communist era. It housed a young lecturer from Perm State University, his wife, his 9 month old son and his 80 year old grandfather (ex Russian Army colonel). Restricted space is typical of Permian accommodation. Russian professors and teachers are held in high regard by their international peers yet they are among the worst victims of economic hardship and their government salaries are around £60 per month!

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has been struggling to shed the legacy of communism. Despite progress in establishing a new political order and a market economy - much still needs to be done. Many with low paid jobs get by growing food at their dachas and bartering goods and services. Generally, citizen health has deteriorated rapidly in the recent years. Long term factors affecting the health of the nation and budget cuts in fund allocation account for much of the decline. Additionally, the pharmaceutical and medical supply industries are unable to cope with the demands placed upon them. However, all is not doom and gloom! High oil prices and low inflation give a rising GDP. Hypermarkets and modern fashion wear are starting to appear but most cannot afford to purchase from these outlets.

After arrival in Perm, we were given our programme for the next two weeks. We all followed an interesting cultural programme but my specific timetable included visits to general hospitals, maternity units, the medical academy and a secondary school.

At the medical academy, I found out that there is a surplus of doctors in Russia. Yet medical students flock to the academy notwithstanding entry being very competitive. The students told me they were looking to the day when they would be free to leave Russia and practise abroad where they could command larger salaries.

The population of Russia has dropped 0.3% since 1990. Most couples can only afford to feed, clothe and educate one child. Life expectancy for men is 61 years and 73 years for women. Approximately 1% of central government expenditure is allocated to health. There is no government primary health care (GPs) in Perm. A visit to a state hospital is to be avoided if possible. The Moscow government has indicated it wishes to develop community geriatric and paediatric services. Infant mortality in the first year of life (generally a guide to the quality of health care services during pregnancy and child birth) is approximately 8 times greater than that of the UK.

Medicines (apart from some given in hospital) have to be paid for. Students told me many people shunned the pills and potions of orthodox medicine. Try some of these home cures! Use sap from fir trees for cuts and grazes; eat bark from pine trees for abdominal pain; gargle in birch tree extract for toothache; mix 100gm of vodka with black pepper and drink slowly for cold weather coughs; rub the previous mixture into the head to cure baldness; put grass juice into the ear to cure deafness; use urine as a good wash for skin infections. The students in turn questioned me about the NHS and were most interested in photographs of Oxford and the John Radcliffe Hospital.

I visited a hospital near the city centre. I expected to see the work of midwives in maternity departments. Instead, I was ushered into the Chief Medical Officer's office. He insisted on showing me round the general hospital. The crumbling building had uneven floors, damaged walls and missing glass in the windows (winter temperatures of minus 30°C were only a few weeks away!). Equipment reflected that of the NHS in the 1950s. Central sterile supplies or a national blood transfusion service did not exist. Old iron bedsteads with wire bases were installed; one inch thick mattresses were covered with thin blankets - but no sheets. Uncovered metal bedpans sat under each bed. I was told that many machines provided during the communist era had broken down and spare parts were unavailable.

On a positive note, doctors and nurses were extremely kind to patients and eager to answer my questions. Lunch was unique. The chief surgeon had a primus stove in the doctors' common room

and was frying minnows caught the day before in the Sylva River. The other doctors and I joined him at lunch and scooped fish from pan to mouth with bread. Quite a party! I never did get to talk to midwives that day.

Thank you, Sasha, for taking me to Maternity Hospital Number 21 and for translating. This hospital, more modern than the city centre hospital some 20km away, was quite different. I was quickly introduced to the head midwife and her team. She was charming but down to earth. She shared many of the frustrations we in the NHS endure. Midwifery training was a 3-year college based course with a total of five weeks practical training in hospital. There were no planned home births as midwives did not practise outside of hospitals. Practice was non evidence based - driven by doctors who told midwives exactly what to do. The midwives were highly educated and committed to the welfare of women but were very poorly paid. They had heard how reliant on technology more developed countries had become but were determined to keep their own practice physiologically normal in labour.

Unfortunately, many midwives, tempted by higher paid jobs, have walked away from the profession. The number of midwives in Russia has dropped 85,000 to 60,000 in the last three to four years. The maternal death rate is six times that of the UK. The main cause of death being infection and haemorrhage associated with prolonged labour. Against this background, and on my return to Oxford, I was delighted when the Perm Association granted money to purchase five mini models of babies and pelvises to help with teaching the mechanics of labour to the midwives in Perm. This gift has arrived at Hospital 21 and they are extremely grateful.

We visited many churches during our cultural programme. At the Kostyol (Catholic Church), I met two nuns of the Sister Teresa of Calcutta Order. They invited me to see the work of the Caritas charitable organisation which offers support to those in need - regardless of their religious faith. They attempt to rehabilitate alcoholics and drug users. They support women suffering domestic violence and unsupported pregnancies. It is said that there are over 14,000 domestic violence deaths in Russia each year! Many women are tied to their husbands financially. Social prejudices make women endure so much. They have no places of refuge. Russia is presently estimated to have 13 pregnancy terminations per 10 live births - the highest abortion rate in Europe outside of Romania.

Russia benefits from what is arguably the Soviet Union's greatest achievement - education. My visit to a secondary school of 1500 pupils was a joy. The children were courteous and eager to learn. Their English accent was excellent - they had never been taught by a native English speaker! I spent an hour in each of three classes. I showed and discussed pictures of my Oxfordshire village, my hospital and my family. I visited the school health department where three doctors and two assistants monitored the health and development of all pupils. Growth was measured annually by drawing around each youngster's feet; parameters were then recorded on individual growth charts. All immunisations were given at school - without charge. Parental consent was not required!

Well, my time in Perm passed too quickly. There was so much to absorb and savour. I talked most nights into the early hours with my host family - a large English/Russian dictionary between us. They were so positive in outlook despite their day to day living conditions. They were sure Russia, however slowly, would one day become a great nation. It is a country with much beauty and a bright and capable people.

Oxford, keep up these important ties. Shine light upon the facets of this rough cut diamond called Perm and see the reflected picture of true Russia and its people.

Ann Davis

Perm shields and flag



The Perm Regional web site (www.perm.ru) carries descriptions in Russian of the municipal and regional shields and flag. The following descriptions are in plain English, rather than the language of heraldry, for the sake of those of us who do not know our argente from our ermine. The Perm City coat of arms (see left) is described thus. On a dark red field, a silver walking bear, carrying on its back a golden gospel, and at the top of the shield a silver cross. This all signifies, firstly, the wild ways of the local inhabitants and, secondly, their enlightenment through the acceptance of Christianity.

The coat of arms of the Perm Region (see page 1) also shows a silver walking bear carrying a bible in a golden case, surmounted by an eight-pointed cross, with a royal crown above the shield.

The flag of the Perm Region (see right) is a rectangle divided by a white cross into four equal rectangles, the upper ones being red and blue, the lower ones blue and red. The white cross measures a quarter of the width and one sixth of the length of the flag. In the centre of the cross is the coat of arms of the Perm Region, its height being two fifths of the width of the flag. The proportion of the width to the length of the flag is 2:3.

The white cross is the cross of St George, the patron saint of Russia. The colours of the flag represent the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants of the region and also reflect the colours of the flag of the Russian Federation. White is a symbol of purity and goodness and reflects the peaceful way of life of the people of the region. Blue represents beauty, gentleness and the warmth of human relations and symbolises the vast waters of the Kama and the countless rivers and lakes of the region. Red is a symbol of the bravery, courage and fearlessness of the people of the region.



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Note from the Membership Secretary

Membership payments are now due. Would all members please note that membership fees are due on 1st January. The amount was increased from £5 to £8 per year in 2003. If you have not already altered your direct debit instructions to your bank, please do so. If not using Direct Debit, cheque payments to "Perm Association" should be mailed to: David Roulston, Membership Secretary, 6 Heath Lane, Bladon, Oxon, OX20 1SB

It would be appreciated if all members with email could send their email addresses to me at: djrouls@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. 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.