

PERM NEWS

The Newsletter of the Oxford Perm Association

October 2012

Young dancers from Perm at the MESH festival in Oxford:

May Wylie on her experience of hosting them, and Mari Prichard on the show they brought to Pegasus Theatre

CRUSH in Oxford

CRUSH, a newly-formed group of youth dancers from Perm took part in the International Youth arts exchange hosted by Pegasus in July. Their participation was made possible by the great generosity of the Oxford Perm Association. This financial support was essential since quite evidently these were not the children of wealthy parents.

I do not presume to be a dance critic: my observations are based on what I observed of the group as participants in the overall festival and as ambassadors for the city of Perm and in these aspects they were superb.

Take their arrival in the UK. Scheduled to arrive at Heathrow at 9.30 pm they cleared customs and emerged at 10.30 pm to a cold, wet and windy London. Despite the lateness of the hour, time differences and grim weather they emerged smiling, and together organised vast amounts of luggage into the minibus. We finally arrived at the youth hostel about midnight so I doubted that they would make the 7am breakfast or the rendezvous in the foyer at 8 am but, needless to say, I was proved wrong. This bright and positive attitude prevailed all the way through the project. Always on time for sessions and taking part in every aspect of the project no matter how exhausting or difficult:



this is how the Perm group conducted themselves.

As has become the custom, I usually take the groups from Perm on a minibus tour of London en route to the airport for their return. This time the tour was a little more problematic, given the Olympics and much of central London being closed for various road races. Quite what the Permians thought of the endless tour of the back streets of west London I cannot imagine. Tower Bridge, however was a comparative oasis of calm and an absolute triumph as a picnic venue due to the Austrian Olympian team having made the area their headquarters. Oompah bands, fans in lederhosen and special Austrian Olympic deckchairs on which to picnic - what more could anyone want?

It seems that the London Eye is a must for Permians. Only then did the young leader of the group say 'I have dreamt of doing this since I came here with you ten years ago as a dancer with Yarmarka'. Such was her modesty that she had not spoken of her connection with Yarmarka, and such was my failing memory that I had not recognised her.

A fitting footnote was provided by the leader of the group from Sisak in Croatia. It seems that members of 'Drive', the Perm group who came last year, danced at a festival in Sisak, and now Crush members are to be invited to a future festival. This, he explained, was not just because of their dancing prowess but because of what he saw as their work ethic and their positivity.

These are some of the enduring qualities and memories of the exchange which make supporting the young people from Perm such an immense pleasure.

May Wylie

Dependence and Independence, Pegasus Theatre, 25 July 2012

A light from a large white lampshade, with tasseled cord, shines down on a black rostrum, an oversized bed on a black stage. A young man and woman are asleep. Waking, they play, amuse and love each other. Then a mobile phone rings, and rings. Eventually the man answers and the woman he is talking to appears from the wings. Anger, the couple fight, and the first woman packs her suitcase. Now to the disco, the world outside, torches, headlights, more noise. Finally a reconciliation, back, just the two of them, to the room with the lampshade, amusing, loving. Then the phone rings.

This was the shape of the superb dance piece that the Crush dance company brought from Perm to Pegasus Theatre as their own contribution to the MESH international youth arts this year. They worked mainly in the contemporary dance idiom, barefoot with superbly supple and fluid movements, and choreography that moved easily from lyrical to the worldly and harsh. All there as well, of course, was what we expect from Russian dancers – discipline, strength, spectacular leaps and lifts – with enough nods in the direction of ballet technique to keep traditionalists happy too.

The company is young – aged from 14 to 23, and their choreographer was dancing the leading female role. The company's leader turned out to have been in a Yarmarka tour to Oxford, and another performer was from the Drive group which was our regular visitor until it disbanded last year when its director retired. Otherwise they were new to us. Like Drive

this company were great ambassadors for Perm, and went on after their Pegasus evening to be enthusiastic contributors to the whole MESH experience, and to the huge joint dance and drama production, based on Aristophanes, which was the finale of an amazing week.

Mari Prichard

Membership notices:

If you are not at present receiving emails from the association and you have an email address please email the Membership Secretary Daniel Scharf at: pause.forthought@googlemail.com

Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome. The submission deadline for the January issue is 31st December but it greatly assists planning if you let the editor know as soon as possible if you plan to submit an item or to discuss an idea you may have: contact David Roulston: [djrouls@btinternet.com](mailto:djrrouls@btinternet.com) tel: 01993 813 215.

The web site for the Oxford Perm Association is: www.oxfordperm-assoc.org. It contains a brief introduction to the city of Perm, the History of the Association and important contact details plus links to related Oxford and Perm web sites. There is a section at www.oxfordperm-assoc.org/members-only which contains all issues of the Newsletter from June 2001 to the present. If members have any comments or suggestions regarding the web site please contact David Roulston at: [djrouls@btinternet.com](mailto:djrrouls@btinternet.com).

What you may have missed during the summer!

In May, the Perm Association held a 'Vodka-tasting evening' at the Town Hall. As well as raising £400 for Perm charities, everyone enjoyed the experience of sampling vodkas from different regions of Russia - with comments from the Russian visitors who provided the surprisingly varied types of their national beverage. For those who wanted a non-alcoholic taster, there was a really interesting variety of fruity cocktails - all drinks combined with delicious Russian-influenced food. We also had a quiz, some music and were able to meet up with old and new friends and acquaintances.

In July, there was yet another opportunity to drink and share food at the Summer supper party which was held at Karen's house - the weather even allowed us to relax together in her beautiful garden! On behalf of the members, I would like to thank Karen for enabling us to get together at what has become a really enjoyable annual event.

Rosalyn Roulston

Forthcoming events

Oxford Perm Association AGM

Wednesday, 20th February 2013 at 6pm. Venue to be announced

Oxford Leon AGM

Thursday 4th October 7.30pm Town Hall, Oxford

Presentations on this year's events and projects that OLAT have funded in Leon, with live link from Nicaragua Via Skype. Our guest is the Chargée d'Affaires from the Embassy and the Lord Mayor of Oxford. All past, present and future members welcome.

Contact Jan Marshall on oxfordleonlink@gmail.com or 01865 728429

Concert of Russian Music

Three of the Oxford Perm Association members sing in the Woodstock Music Society. In our next concert, we are performing Tchaikovsky's 'The Snow Maiden' (in Russian, the soloist is Lucie Spickova) and an arrangement of Mussorgsky's 'St. Nicholas Mass'. This concert will be held at 7.30 in St Mary Magdalene Church, Woodstock on Fri 14th and Sat 15th December. Tickets will be available from mid-November by phoning Gilliane Sills on 01865 721644 or emailing her at: gillianesills@btinternet.com. The cost is in advance/at the door: adults £11/12; concessions £10/£11; students £5/£5.

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Book Review

America: US Foreign Policy Since 1945, and the Imperialism of Ignorance, Alexander A, 2012 Biteback, London

This is a self-proclaimed example of revisionist history, written as introduced by the author: "To my friends in the Conservative Party whose relentless belief to this day that the Cold War arose from the aggressive ambition of the Kremlin, thwarted by the bold response of our American friends. Their refusal to contemplate any other explanation has spurred me on to this, my survey of US foreign policy over the last sixty-five years".

The book is in two parts as Alexander looks at US policy in both the Middle East and during the Cold War to support a view that the US (and its allies) have been involved in military adventures for ulterior purposes whilst keeping its people and allies in ignorance of the true motivation. There is little in our modern world which cannot be attributed to the war

conducted between the US/NATO and The USSR/Warsaw Pact until 1989 (the fall of the Berlin Wall) or 1991 (the dissolution of the Soviet Union). This survey of US foreign policy since 1945 should be of interest to all those concerned about the costs and consequences of this conflict for all sides but particularly those on the 'other' side of the Iron Curtain and the 'third' or developing world and not just the author's friends in political parties.

Western academics might also find something of value from Alexander's findings. In his recent book *The Future of Power*, Joseph Nye claims that the US '...won the Cold War.' And Anthony Howard in his *Lessons of History* states that, '...at the risk of appearing complacent, we can say that we have not done too badly over the last 40 years'. It should be very difficult for the US to take any satisfaction from 'winning' a conflict of its own making and, if we have not done too badly, it might be more of ignorance than complacency which prevents us from acknowledging our part in making things worse for so many others.

This is particularly the case when considering the victims of this conflict. Before my visit to Perm, I corresponded with Prof Leonid Obuhov at the State University and curator at Perm 36, the camp surviving from the gulag. He simply says that, 'Camp convicts can be regarded as Cold War Victims as the cold war had influence upon the internal policy, weakening and toughening of repressions'. That seems to be a plausible account from the 'second world', and further suffering attributable to the Cold War in the 'third world' is described by Vijay Prashad in *The Darker Nations*.

Alexander's book is written as an antidote to the triumphalism which has been displayed by the west since 1989. This history should lead to a greater understanding as to why the US and its NATO allies are eyed with suspicion, if not antipathy, in countries and by peoples that did not fare so well during the period of war the justification for which Alexander makes appear so shaky.

Daniel Scharf

The GULAG Museum (Perm-36)

David Kadzhaya is a seventeen-year-old in his final year at school in Perm. This account is in his own words, in his own English.

Unfortunately, in our time it has become normal being ignorant about the history of this country. In Russia fewer and fewer kids ask themselves what the USSR was like, who the last Russian Emperor was and other questions concerning the eventful past of our Motherland. "Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it", says the proverb, that is why I would like to talk about one of the most important historical monuments in Russia and Perm region in particular – the "Perm-36" Camp-Museum.

It is widely known that Perm-36 is the only GULAG prison camp remained in Russia. In my opinion it's one of those historical monuments where you can be a part of it, take your time to examine the locations you are interested in, see the artifacts of the prisoners, listen to

atrocious stories of their lives and many other things that create the unique atmosphere of Museum “Perm-36”.

As a history-lover I couldn't lose the opportunity of visiting this museum. My schoolmates and I were very excited about the excursion as any kids of our age would be about such a mystical place as Perm-36. Before the excursion I have heard a couple of details about the destination of the trip from my mum, so I was eager finding out as much as I could, so were my friends.

The way to the museum was big fun, so no one could imagine that after passing the barbed-wire snow-white walls our mood could change, but it did. The excursion started with the high security zone. It justifies the «high security» title. I personally had the impression as if no people had been guarded there, aliens at least. The painful sight and the gloomy thoughts made me remember my mother telling me about my great-grandfather who had been arrested for being just a quarter of an hour late for work in 1939 and who died from lack of food and excess of work in a similar camp somewhere in Siberia. Regrettably almost every family in the Soviet Union has lost their relatives or friends in the GULAG camps. After examining the camp area we passed to the hutments and solitary cells for defaulters that had an emotional impact on me. I couldn't imagine what a prisoner could have done to be confined in one of them.

Before long we appeared in the special treatment zone. Everything there – a punishment detention block, tiny cells, 24-hour control – had been constructed to crush people's will and to make them obedient and tamed. In fact, I was very sorry for the prisoners, who were not murderers or thieves, they were just people who thought and said things they were not supposed to. I find that awful and inhumane though the Soviet regime was based on total control of all spheres of the society.

The rest of the excursion passed in silence. On the way home we didn't talk and laugh. I was trying to concentrate on what I'd seen and heard. My friends were lost in meditation too.

Summing up, I find the museum “Perm-36” to be a monument that is worth seeing by all means, and I strongly recommend everybody to visit it.

David Kadzhaya

Dangerous Passage

Everyone knows that little James Watt looked at the steam coming out of his mother's kettle and was inspired to invent the steam engine. Fewer people know that Nizhny Tagil is an industrial town on the far side of the Urals, the eastern side where rivers flow east to the great Siberian waterways. In this article I want to link the legend and the city in a story of ingenuity and courage.

The Urals are rich in iron ore; when Peter the Great at the end of the seventeenth century lost a major battle and most of his armaments, he decided to develop the minerals of the Urals region so that he could build bigger and better cannon. He was impatient. Small iron works had existed for decades in little Urals forested clearings, using local streams and charcoal; but now the State moved in, focusing particularly on the area around Nizhny Tagil. In the quarries and mines in that locality, the rock can be up to 50% iron ore. Foreign specialists of up-to-date technology were sent to train local ‘masters’ in the skills of smelting iron, purifying iron, and shaping it into bars and (rather lumpy) sheets. But Nizhny Tagil lies on the wrong side of the Urals watershed. How was Peter going to get his precious gun-making material?

Last April, archaeologists helped me to understand how the people of the Urals solved this problem.

During the summer they mined and smelted the iron. When winter came and the hard frosts made it possible to transport heavy loads by sledge, the iron bars, girders and metal sheets were taken by horse-sledge up a winding route for about twenty miles to the pass across the watershed into Permian territory. Then there was another slow journey down to the River Chusovaya near its head waters. Lines of plodding horses with sledges eventually came out of the forests on to open land near the Chusovaya at a point where another small river, the Urka, flowed into it. (At this point the Urka is about the size of the Cherwell, and the Chusovaya about the width of the Isis when the Cherwell joins it, but perhaps twice as deep. And, of course, both rivers were frozen.)

The horses walked along a low embankment surrounding two ‘Harbours’. In the ‘dry harbour’ furthest from the river, dozens of barges had been constructed by a small army of workers. (By the middle of the eighteenth century five hundred such barges were built each year, at different points along the river). During the hard frosts the iron was transferred to the boats and the horses returned to collect more.

Then the workers waited. Slowly the days became warmer, slowly the ice melted in the rivers. As the Urka melted, the water was diverted into the ‘wet harbour’ nearer the Chusovaya. As the remaining ice drifted down the Chusovaya, the workers opened the earth embankment between the dry and the wet harbours. The dry harbour filled and the barges, with forty men and a load of iron, were helped through into the ‘wet harbour’. And here was the difficulty. The water level of the wet harbour was two to three metres above the level of the Chusovaya, although at this dangerous time of year, with melting ice and snow sliding into the Urals river system, water levels were changing all the time. The chief engineer had to decide when the flood waters were high enough to take the barges without destroying them by rogue blocks of ice. At his signal, the workers cut away at the earth barrier which separated the wet harbour from the river, trying to make the slope as smooth as possible before the harbour waters poured into the Chusovaya. The gap they made was perhaps seven metres wide – just enough for each boat to be slid, carefully, out on to the Chusovaya. Even today it would be a tricky operation. If the barges stuck, or slipped, or overbalanced, everything would be lost in the icy waters.

Forty men poled these boats – which were not unlike huge rafts; ten to each of four giant oars. So they set off on their journey down the Chusovaya trying to avoid the great overhanging cliffs where the water swirled and drew the boats into currents that rammed

them against vast limestone rock. Many were battered to pieces in these gorge-like sections of the river. The bargemen had to secure themselves for the night on the muddy icy banks, camping and eating and sheltering from storms and sudden plunges into icy temperatures. If they were lucky, if May was warm and water was calm, they could reach Perm, floating at twenty kilometres an hour, in about seven days. On their way they passed many other rivers which are tributaries of the Chusovaya, and some of these might still be bringing down chunks of ice or sudden swift outpourings of melted snow. Where the Chusovaya flows into the Kama, just upstream from Perm, it is about a mile wide, its waters mingling with the even wider Kama. The boatsmen had to navigate these waters and float round to the Perm docks.

The iron was unloaded and put into much larger barges for the main journey along the Russian waterways. The rafts were broken up and sold as firewood. The men walked back home through the hills and forests of the high Urals. If they had reached Perm safely they were well rewarded. If their boats had foundered and they had lost the iron, they received nothing. And many drowned in this passage to Perm.

From Perm the huge barges turned south down the Kama, and then, near Kazan, up the Volga, and eventually into the system of rivers and canals that brought them to St Petersburg. That journey took several weeks but was usually without complications.

Peter was very pleased with his Urals iron. It was of a much higher quality than the iron that was traditionally smelted in western Russia. He and his successors used it for their armaments and, less enthusiastically, for developing industry. But some was exported, notably to England which was very enthusiastically embracing new technology. With this high-quality iron they could build serious experimental machines. So James Watt set to work, with his mother's kettle in mind, and with iron that had come from Nizhny Tagil on the far side of the Ural mountains.

(Note: Some years ago I made part of this journey paddling on a small catamaran with Alexander Ziryanov and Igor Volkhin. We were fine but the conditions for the bargemen would have been terrifying. I am grateful to Yulia Zaitseva, Alexei Ivanov and local archaeologists for my visit to Nizhny Tagil and to Ust-Urka where the barges were floated off.)

Karen Hewitt.

Note: Visitors to the Perm-36 Gulag Museum will have passed close to Chusovoy and the Chusovaya river. Ed

White Nights, Perm

Marie and I were invited to Perm to take part in the White Nights Arts Festival which runs for the whole of June in the centre of the city. Perm has been losing its young population and the thinking behind the festival is to bring International Art to the city and make it a vibrant and exciting place to be.

The festival was very international. There were jazz musicians from Perm playing with a musician from Madagascar; an amazing Italian theatrical performance with enormous helium balloons shaped like animals; opera singers from Perm and the orchestra of Perm conducted by Shirakov, one of Russia's most famous conductors who was playing his first outdoor concert. There was also a ballet performance on the outdoor stage and one evening a troupe of drummers were hoisted up on an enormous crane and played their drums hanging in the white night sky while an acrobat performed.

The festival was open every day from midday until 11pm and there was something for everyone. There were craft workers selling wooden articles, embroidery, toys, a stall from Zimbabwe, a blacksmith, a portrait artist and a puppeteer. Specialities of the region include articles made from birch bark including bags, bangles, boxes and bracelets. The latter were being made as a good luck bracelet with a design stamped into the soft bark and then dipped in boiling water to make them curl. There was food and drink for everyone, exhibitions and lots of things for children to do including painting, clay work, a sandpit, puzzles and toy making. All around the edge of the site were large sand sculptures which had been created at the beginning of the festival, each in response to a famous literary quotation. Amazingly they survived several torrential storms.

Our participation in the festival was to make a two metre high sculpture in clay which was to be fired in situ. Marie is a ceramic artist and I am a sculptor, but for both of us this was a new experience. Our hosts had arranged for us to stay in an apartment which was in a block of flats fifteen minutes walk from the site. Each day we worked on our sculpture, often until 10pm and were given lunch and dinner at a local restaurant. The temperature varied from 25 to 30 degrees interspersed with enormous dramatic thunderstorms which turned the streets into rivers in 15 minutes.

We were working alongside ceramic artists from Perm and the Ukraine who were incredibly supportive. We had been asked to make an angel, as this was the theme of the festival and we planned that our angel would be a messenger or prophet. On it was written in English and in Russian – 'We bring you a message'. Each sculpture was built on top of a brick fire box which was stoked with chopped birch to reach a temperature of about 1000C over twelve hours. This had to be done very slowly at first for about four hours until the sculpture had completely dried out. Then the stoking was increased to reach the temperature. A huge crowd of people gathered to watch the final unwrapping. We were able to experience the first two angels being fired, as our sculpture, together with a beautiful angel by a Perm artist, was fired a week later.

We were very lucky to be invited to the Perm State Theatre for a performance of the opera Eugene Onegin by Tchaikovsky. Also we saw the Perm ballet in the inaugural performance of Stravinsky's 'The Wedding' and 'Petrouchka'. The theatre built in 1830 has a splendid ornate red and gold interior. Both performances were fantastic and very well received. We felt honoured to be there and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

In between our work we managed a visit to the Perm State Museum where our hosts kindly arranged an interpreter to help us understand the exhibition. We were particularly impressed by the early metal work of the Perm animal period. We also visited the Perm State Art



Gallery where there is a special collection of wooden religious figures and icons expressing a calm spirituality.

After our sculptures had been fired we just had time for a short visit to the Modern Art Gallery which stands on the banks of the Kama river. There was an extremely interesting exhibition of contemporary art from Kazakhstan which couldn't have been shown in Russia before and showed a different view from the state propaganda.

Finally on our last day our hosts kindly took us to the Ethnographic Museum situated about sixty kilometres outside Perm. Traditional wooden buildings have been moved from their original sites all over the country and reconstructed in this beautiful open air museum. The buildings were cleverly constructed of huge logs, often ornately carved and the wooden churches have exquisite wooden tiled minarets.

Afterwards we were invited to tea with members of the Perm/Oxford Society. It was a pleasure to meet all these people who support Perm/Oxford exchanges and to hear all about their work. We were asked what impression of Perm we took away with us and both of us agreed that it was the kindness and warm friendship of everyone we met. The project was a very exciting exchange for us and now we look forward to hosting the two artists from Perm when they exhibit at the Old Fire Station in September.

Diana Bell