



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь

O P A

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter May 2024

Icon of the Mother of God of Perm by the hand of Joanna Tulloch

I have been interested in icons for about 50 years, since seeing Rublev's Trinity icon during my first trip to Russia, which I won in a Russian poetry-reading competition while I was still a schoolgirl. In 2005 I was invited by the Kholui iconographer Evgeny Grachev to stay at his house in Yuzha for a week and learn to paint an icon with him. The icon that we painted together was that of the Mother of God of the Deesis. I have now painted more than 50 icons, one of the most recent being of the Mother of God of Perm. When I was in Perm in 2019 I visited the bookshop next to the Art Museum and asked about this icon. The lady in charge of the shop gave me a photo of it which provided a model from which to paint a copy myself. Here is the result.



News from Perm *Tatiana Grigorieva (International Officer for Perm City Administration)*

One of the most prominent events so far in 2024 was the the 18th International Ballet Contest ARABESQUE held in April. The contest was founded in Perm in 1988 and is held every other year, being a prestigious competition for mostly young dancers. “Kultura” newspaper, describing the event, called Perm the third ballet “Mecca” after Moscow and S.Petersburg (which is true). This year 71 ballet dancers from 11 countries (Armenia, Brazil, UK, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Turkey, France, Japan, Russia) took part in the Arabesque, plus choreographers who competed in contemporary choreography. 16 Russian cities were represented. Arabesque bears the name of Ekaterina Maksimova, an eminent ballet dancer who was the chair of the jury up to her death and Arabesque-2024 was dedicated to the 85th anniversary of her birth. I always try to attend the opening ceremony including the concert of ex-winners and it was again a pure pleasure. The jury decided not to award the Grand Prix (it has only been awarded four times before). The winners in the senior group were: Svetlana Savelieva (Russia, Mariinsky theatre, St.Petersburg) and Rasmik Manukian from Armenia. Svetlana Savelieva is a pupil of Lyubov Kunakova who was a prima-ballerina of Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre years ago.

Theatre life is very active in Perm. There are many new performances being staged every year and during the last few years Moscow and St. Petersburg theatres have often come on tour to Perm. Famous musicians like Denis Matsuyev, Valery Guergiev and Vladimir Spivakov with their orchestras are also frequent guests in Perm.

On May 9, Perm celebrated Victory Day. There was a traditional parade in October Square and a Celebratory Assembly for Perm citizens in the Soldatov Palace of Culture. There were open air concerts of local performers and interactive events for everyone all over the city. We mustn't forget that Perm was awarded the title of “The City of Labour Valour” in 2020 for heroic labour during the Great Patriotic war. To commemorate it a high obelisk was erected in Karl Marx Square in 2023. The march of the Immortal Regiment in Perm has become a very sincere movement of ordinary people who every year have joined the march, carrying portraits of their fathers, grandparents and relatives who took part in World War II. Last year and this year it was decided, out of concern for safety, to hold it online.

Perm has established a relationship with Minsk and we held an impressive online conference (Telebridge) on April 2 – on the Day of Union between Belarus and Russia. Art schools displayed a beautiful exhibition of paintings “How I See Belarus” and part of it is displayed in the City Hall. In May, a Perm delegation went to China, to the new partner city of Hohhot (Inner Mongolia). A Protocol of Intent was signed and new projects discussed - in education, sports and business. Perm schools have become very active in establishing links with Chinese schools. Demand for learning Chinese is extremely high in Perm and in Russia now.

Perm also maintains links with Russian cities. Mutual visits, exchange of expertise and best practices have proved to be efficient. Perm's partner cities are: Ekaterinburg, Tyumen, Ufa, Kazan, Izhevsk and we expect delegations from Chelyabinsk and Yaroslavl in July. Perm will also host a conference on Urban Public Spaces, organized with the Union of Russian Cities in June. Perm's planned new Campus will include 8 Perm universities. The universities will preserve their present premises and on the new Campus there will be access to most modern educational facilities, social opportunities and infrastructure.



On 20th March, a group of twelve OPA members were treated to a ‘show and tell’ of a selection of works from the Ashmolean Museum’s collection of Russian Art, steered by Caroline Palmer, one of the two Print Room Managers. The session focused on the Braikevitch Bequest, which started the collection, now probably the largest assemblage of Russian Art in the UK. Mikhail Braikevitch was a railway engineer from Odessa who became mayor of the city. Although he continued in post after the Revolution, by 1919 he decided to leave Russia, and his art collection, moving to London. In the UK he rebuilt his collection which he bequeathed to the Ashmolean Museum on his death in 1940, because they agreed to keep it together and to display it. Now a selection of his works is placed in a rotating display on the Print Room staircase, using specially designed, Russian-themed frames. Currently drawings by Leonid Pasternak are featured. Since in art terms a drawing is a work on paper, watercolours are included.

Braikevitch’s favourite artist was the St Petersburg-born Konstantin Somov, who was associated with the World of Art (*Mir Iskusstva*) Group. Like many of his contemporaries he also fled to the west after the Revolution, basing himself mainly in Paris. The afternoon began with a selection of his portraits – Braikevitch, a striking pastel of the donor’s daughter, Tatiana, and a self-portrait. This last made a big impact on the group as the artist is shown reflected in the mirror with an additional reflection appearing in its rim on the right-hand side. Many of Somov’s work are painted in an eighteenth-century rococo style, often with a theatrical theme and a number of these were out for us to see, including a whimsical picture of a fruit-eating monkey.

Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes was a prominent part of the early 20th century cultural scene in Europe, coupling avant-garde choreography, costumes and sets. The Ashmolean’s collection includes many examples of designs for these, including a Somov view of Daphnis and Chloe, which features one of his favourite male models, Boris Mikhailovich Snezhkovsky. A selection of these drawings was put out for our group. For some of us it brought back memories of visiting Diaghilev’s house in Perm.

One of the leading artists working for the ballet was Leon Bakst and the display included his ideas for a minor deity, resembling a deep green bird, for 'Narcisse' and Middle Eastern influenced set designs for 'St Sebastian'. There was also a pair of drawings for 'Tsar Sultan' by Yvon Bilibin, one of the Matchmaker and the other a fantasy island set. The richness of colour and materials shown in the working drawings was stunning, leading to speculation of the cost of the finished articles, which must have been a wonderful sight. Diaghilev was known to be habitually short of money.

As a result of Braikevitch's donation, other collectors have been inspired to give Russian art to the Ashmolean, either as individual works or in bulk. An example of the former is a working drawing for the coachman in *Petrushka* by Alexander Benois given by Lady Bonham Carter. The Talbot collection includes programmes and books about ballets which were able to provide more context to some of the works on display. There was a lavishly illustrated programme for the 1914 season at Drury Lane Theatre, showing just how many different productions were presented within a two-month period. It contained a series of costume designs by Benois for 'Emperor's Nightingale', a colour drawing of one of which was also out for us.

To round off the afternoon we reverted to portraits by Bakst and Serov. Although the drawing of Andrey Bely was conventional, Bakst's take on Isadora Duncan was idiosyncratic and amusing. Serov's watercolour of Countess Musin-Pushkin and pastel of Elena Ivanova Roerich took a rather gentler approach.

Finally, there was something different in the form of two landscapes from Benois and Somov. The former painted a sunny Cassis location while the latter produced an atmospheric, cloudy Russian vista.

This was the second group visit to the Ashmolean's collection of Russian art and there is still much more to be explored. It is possible for individuals to visit the Print Room and investigate the material themselves, but pre-booking is advisable as it is a busy venue. We are very grateful to Caroline for sharing her time and expertise with us and for making such a thoughtful selection.



Continental Climate

Karen Hewitt

In April snow often lies on the ground in Perm, blackened and slowly oozing in the afternoon sun. At night time it refreezes along with a detritus of cigarette butts and dog mess. April is certainly the ugliest month for a city living under the extreme Continental climate of the northern Urals. But not this year, as my friend, Boris Proskurnin, explained. April was unnaturally warm. The snow melted, the city cleaning machines got to work, and motorists happily changed their tyres from winter ones to summer ones. Five weeks earlier than normal, the temperature reached 19 degrees or even higher. All the trees suddenly displayed tiny surprised leaves.

And then, as April turned into May, the temperature suddenly dropped by 20 degrees. Permians were hit by a vicious snowstorm in which driving with summer tyres on either family cars or big lorries was dangerous. Still, this was hardly news in the world beyond the Urals. What shocked Russians was that the blizzard brought a passenger train crossing the Urals to a halt – and hence all the other trains behind it. It seems that this sudden snow clung to the electricity wires to a depth which prevented the engine from making proper contact with its power source. In normal winter weather and much more stringent conditions, every engineer working on the railway knows how to keep the trains moving. The Trans-Siberian railway line (and all the branch lines feeding into it) is the economic lifeline of the country. Huge freight trains, following one after the other, bring the oil, the gas, the minerals, the food, the fertilisers from Siberia and the Urals to big distribution points in European Russia. The system is extraordinarily efficient because it has to be. The crossing from Yekaterinburg to Perm includes a section high up above a gorge with the Silva River flowing through it; Oxford canoeists on the river may remember watching the trains negotiating this section; it is how Siberia connects with Moscow and Europe.

But the sudden snowstorm at the beginning of May actually stopped this passenger train. On the train was – among other passengers – the internationally famous conductor, Valery Gergiev, director of the Marinsky Theatre in St Petersburg and (since last December) also of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. He and his Marinsky orchestra had been touring in Siberia and had, the previous evening, given a concert in Yekaterinburg in the eastern Urals. Now he was on his way to Perm. Or not on his way. Nothing moved for an unprecedented seven hours while all the freight trains lined up behind the blockage. I do not know how the orchestra amused themselves. Perhaps they gave an impromptu concert to the other passengers. I do know that they were scheduled to perform in Perm in the early afternoon. Perm, as you know, is a very musical city, and of course the main concert hall was packed out. The audience waited. The train, with power restored at last, proceeded as fast as it could down to the Kama plain, followed steadily by all the freight trains and any other passenger trains. Russia's lifeline was reconnected; people were not going to starve or freeze; music mattered; and at last, at nine o'clock in the evening, Gergiev mounted the podium and bowed to a crowded and attentive audience in Perm.

The theme of the 2024 Perm Regional Translation Competition was 'Treasures of My Land'. It was the 8th translation competition held in Perm. The organisers of this event were the Faculty of Modern Foreign Languages at PSU, Perm Regional Library (Perm State Regional University Library named after A.M. Gorky) and PELTA (Perm English Language Teacher Association). This year the extracts and short poems were all devoted to Perm and the 300th Anniversary of the city. School children and students translated from Russian into various foreign languages. 340 translations from Russian into English were submitted and 68 entries were selected for the second stage. Svetlana Polyakova, Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Intercultural Communication at Perm State University, was on the team selecting the best entries. At her request a small jury of OPA members was formed to help judge the final entries from Russian into English. The jury consisted of Robin Carr, Richard Sills, Della Thompson and me. The jury was given a poem *Деревянная Пермь* and a short prose text *Дом на набережной* with a few of the best English translations and asked to select their favourite three for each.

Below are the original poem and text with the translations into English that won first prize.

Деревянная Пермь

А. Решетов

Деревянная Пермь,
первозданная Пермь,
Где твои терема
и часовни теперь?
На крылечко тесовое
уж не шагнешь
И Отечества «сладостный дым»
не вдохнешь...
Деревянная Пермь, ты в себе
не вольна,
Ты на снос власть имущими
обречена.
Худо дереву стало!
Бетонная тьма
Сокрушает, теснит наших
предков дома.
И на весь этот ужас,
на весь этот ад
Деревянные боги
печально глядят.
И мне кажется, что в этой
битве времен
И над ними безумный
топор занесен.

1st place: Iliia Khirivimsky, 1st year postgraduate,
Faculty of Modern Foreign Languages and
Literature, Perm State University

Perm that's made out of wood

Perm that's made out of wood
And thus, once was pristine
Where are tower of yours
And the chapels we've seen?

I will no longer stand on an
Old timber porch
Smell the scent of that bittersweet
Fatherland's smoke

Perm, that's made out of wood, you were robbed
Of your will
You were destined to doom by those
Who power wield

Wooden planks screech aloud!
Between rocks and concrete
They're besieging and crushing what
Forefathers've built

And it looks so horrific
It all seems like hell
Wooden statues of deities
Gaze downwards, unwell

I believe, in this grandiose
Battle of times
They are next to fall prey, hatchet's ready
To strike.

Дом на Набережной Б.Л. Зуф. (Russian original)

Дом рос в высоту обилием колонн, окнами-арками, похожими на глаза, застывшими в изумлении, затейливой лепниной, напоминающей видения садов Семирамиды, и каменными вазами в палисаднике, хранящими воспоминания о летних цветах, недостижимых взору обывателя, спускающегося под гору к железнодорожному вокзалу. Дом жил в ожидании бала, и потому на лестнице, ведущей к входной двери, мог оступиться градоначальник, сломать каблук провинциальная Золушка и обронить платок, предварительно хорошо высморкавшись, заглазевшийся чиновник. Дом пароходчика Мешкова знал а Перми всякий.

1st place: Polina Pachina, 2nd year student, Humanities Department, Perm National Research Polytechnic University

House on the Embankment (Polina Pachina's English translation)

The house rose upwards with an abundance of columns, arched windows resembling eyes frozen in astonishment, intricate stucco reminiscent of the visions of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and stone vases in the front garden that kept the memories of summer flowers unattainable for the eyes of an average person descending the hill to the train station. The house lived in anticipation of a ball, and so the staircase leading to the entrance could witness the mayor stumbling, a provincial Cinderella breaking a heel, and an official dropping his handkerchief after a good blow of his nose, being lost in contemplation. Everyone in Perm knew the house of the steamship captain Meshkov.

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Association News

Karen Hewitt

Past Events

We held our AGM on 27th February in the Town Hall. 35 members attended. After the reports and election of officers, Marcus Ferrar gave a talk on 'Cold War Reporter Behind the Iron Curtain'. Thanks to John and Jill Hind, and to Colin Cook, we held a film screening of a German documentary about travelling on Russian motorbikes through Siberia. It was made in a very satisfactory way.

Jessica Vlasova arranged a second visit to the Ashmolean to view more special collections of Russian art. See report on pages 3 and 4.

A visit to the Russian Orthodox Church in Marston where Father Stephen Platt talked to us about the history of the Church and Orthodox theology. He also arranged for part of his choir to sing parts of the Orthodox litany in Old Church Slavonic. See report on pages 11 and 12.

Future events

On 28th May Father Platt will talk about the co-operation of the Russian and Ukrainian communities in Oxford since the Russian invasion. This will be at 6 Rawlinson Road at 5.30.

On Sunday 2nd June, Philip Bullock will talk about 'The Politics of Russian Music' in the North Oxford Association Community Centre at 3.30. The talk will be open to the public. Please encourage people to come.

Our Annual Garden Party will be held at 6 Rawlinson Road, OX2 6UE on Wednesday, 10th July from 5.00 p.m. The party is for members and their guests. **A new idea: it would be fun if those coming could contribute a traditional Russian dish to our refreshments.** (If you can't manage that, then something else would be appreciated.)

On 13th July in the Town Hall there will be a performance of Carmina Burana by young musicians from some of Oxford's twin cities, with the special participation of a young pianist representing Perm. Please contact Karen Hewitt for tickets.

The OPA has already recruited 8 members who will share a Perm Table at a fund-raising dinner for the Concert on 13th July. This will be on Saturday, 8th June, and we are now asked to find more people for an 'International Table'. The dinner, at the Coach House, Headington Quarry, will be a very cheerful evening where you can meet OPA members and members of other twinnings. If you would like a seat, contact Sally Richards. (See committee members in the list below.)

Note for members

We are always grateful to receive letters, stories, comments from friends in Perm. We will always preserve anonymity for such writers unless they specifically ask us to name them.

Alexandra Ash

Alexandra, a much-loved teacher of Russian to at least twelve members of the Association, died in April, in her early forties, of cancer. She was enthusiastic, inspiring and wondrously articulate in speaking clear Russian, so that her students found they could understand her to a much high level than they had thought possible. She was also a brave woman who coped with many cycles of chemotherapy, and was still insisting on lessons during her last days in a Moscow hospital. She is greatly missed by those of us who were lucky enough to be her students.

The Edinburgh International Russian conversation group

Graham Dane

The next zoom Russian/English language exchanges will be on Sunday 23rd June & Sunday 21st July from 10am -11.30am. You can access the meetings from the following link:

<https://us0web.zoom.us/j/84247799935/pwd=c0cxTk92YUFCME16eitqMkyvdjRrUT09>

Meeting ID:84247799935 Pass Code: 1234

You can also email Graham Dane at grahamdane@yahoo.com. All are welcome to join these sessions. Any level of language from A2 is fine – the groups are small and accommodating to slow conversation. Help others practise their English and you can practise your Russian too. If you teach Russian, why not encourage your students to attend – there is no charge for these sessions.

Oxford Perm Association committee members

Position	Name	Telephone	email address
Chair	Karen Hewitt	01865 515635	karen.hewitt@conted.ox.ac.uk
Secretary	Anne Harrap	07929 981216	anne.harrap@gmail.com
Treasurer	Chris Cowley	07760 251465	chrisacowley@gmail.com
Membership	Liz Wheeler	07891 141293	wheater170@btinternet.com
OIL	Sally Richards	07504 052264	s.c.richards77@gmail.com
Website/Newsletter	Jessica Vlasova	07766 025313	jessica.vlasova@gmail.com

Victory Day in London

Sergei Vlasov

On 9th May Russia and several other countries celebrate Victory Day. For me it's the most important holiday of the year. I will never forget the price the Soviet Union paid for the victory over the Nazi German invaders in 1945. According to the latest figures, the war took about 27 million Soviet lives. In Russia there is not one family that has not been affected by the war. In a battle in Staraya Russa near Novgorod my grandfather Philip Grigorovich Vlasov died. It has been a public holiday in Russian since 1965. Most other countries in Europe celebrate Victory in Europe Day on 8th May. In Britain Remembrance Day on 11th November, the day the first World War ended, is a day to remember not only those who died during the first World War, but also the second World War.



A portrait of my grandfather



It turned out that this year on 9th May I was in Britain. I wanted to go and visit the Soviet War Memorial in London to honour the fallen and lay flowers. The memorial is in a lovely park next to the Imperial War Museum. The memorial was unveiled on Victory Day in 1999 by the Russian ambassador and the UK Defence Secretary. The bronze sculpture 'Sorrowful' is a semi-abstract figure holding aloft a bell which will forever remain silent in memory of those who died. The sculpture was made in Russia by sculptor Sergei Scherbakov from Volgograd. The memorial stone and base were made in the UK. The main inscription on the stone reads:

ВЕЧНАЯ ВАМ ПАМЯТЬ

*This memorial commemorates the 27 million Soviet citizens
& service men & women who died for the Allied Victory in WWII
WE SHALL REMEMBER THEM*

Arriving at the park on the morning of 9th May, I saw in the distance the red victory flags fluttering in the wind. They were like a lighthouse guiding me to the memorial. Although it was still early many people had already come to lay flowers. Some stood silently and crossed themselves.

Representatives from several CIS countries laid wreaths to honour the fallen. The Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Andrey Kelin, was the first to arrive and lay a wreath. Several people held portraits of their relatives who had taken part in second World War. Nearby, observed by police, was a small group of Ukrainian protesters who had come to disrupt the celebrations. After a while they dispersed.



Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom

I spent almost the whole day in the park getting to know and talking to people. 9th May is not a public holiday in Britain so people came when they could - during their lunch hour or after school and work. There were many people from different countries, mainly from former Soviet Republics. It was obvious from talking to these people that the memory of the war had not disappeared and has been passed on the younger generation. Many people brought their children.



People sang songs about the war - *Катюша*, *Землянка* and *Дороги*. Someone had brought speakers and people started to dance to *Kalinka*. It was an unexpectedly warm and sunny day and I was very happy to be with fellow Russians on this important day. People continued to come throughout the day to pay their respects and by evening the memorial was covered with flowers. I didn't want to leave. It is both a sad and joyous holiday. Thank you and a low bow to those who forged victory and gave life to our generation. **No one is forgotten and nothing is forgotten!**



Dancing to Kalinka



A visit to the Russian Orthodox Church in Oxford

Fiona Gow



Around twenty of us met at the Russian Orthodox Church of St Nicholas the Wonderworker in Marston on 17 May to hear a fascinating talk by its priest, Father Stephen Platt. He is English, but was first attracted to the Orthodox Church on family holidays in Greece. Later he transferred his allegiance to the Russian Church, thanks to a Russian girlfriend who subsequently became his wife.

Father Stephen began by reminding us of the special significance of Perm in Russia's religious history; St Stephen of Perm, who became the region's first bishop in 1383, was one of the Orthodox Church's most successful missionaries, converting the Komi people to Christianity.

How did there come to be a Russian Church halfway down a street in Marston? A key figure in the story was Sydney Gibbes. He taught English in St Petersburg in the early 1900s, so successfully that he

was headhunted by the Tsarina herself. She wanted an English tutor who could remove the accent her daughters had acquired from a Scottish governess!

Gibbes became a trusted member of the Imperial household, and when the family were taken to Yekaterinburg, he followed them, and after their murder, he recovered many of their possessions (the subsequent story of these would fill a book – what now remains is in a vault at Christies).

Sydney Gibbes travelled on to China, where in the 1930s he was received into the Orthodox Church and ordained as a priest, taking the name Nicholas in honour of the Tsar. Back in England, Father Nicholas wanted to found an Orthodox church in London, but the blitz forced him to move to Oxford. Here he set up an Orthodox chapel at Bartlemas, and then in 1949 he bought a property in Marston Street, in which he dedicated a chapel to St Nicholas the Wonderworker, a saint to whom the Tsar had been devoted. In the chapel were mementoes of the Imperial family, including the Tsar's felt boots.



A few years later the theologian Nicholas Zernov, a Russian emigre, organised the move to 1 Canterbury Road, where the building was shared by Russian and Greek Orthodox congregations. This worked well until 2006 when they parted company and the Russian congregation acquired the church in Ferry Road. Originally an Anglican building, it had been empty for 30 years, but thanks to Father Stephen and his congregation, it was renovated and refurbished. This church too is dedicated to St Nicholas the Wonderworker (perhaps better known as St Nicholas of Myra, on whom Santa Claus is based).

Like all Orthodox churches, St Nicholas has walls covered with paintings of saints and scenes from the Bible. The range of saints was wide – St Frideswide is there (British saints have become popular with Orthodox worshippers) and so are Russian Christians canonised after execution under Communism.

The other distinctive feature of an Orthodox church is the great screen which hides the altar from view when no service is taking place (perhaps an echo of the Jewish Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies).

The Orthodox liturgy has changed little in more than a millennium. It is based on the Liturgy of St John Chryostom, written in Greek in the 4th century and translated into Old Slavonic in the 9th century. A Russian speaker today understands Church Slavonic about as easily as we would understand the English written midway between Chaucer and Shakespeare.

One of the riches of Orthodoxy is its music – the whole service is sung, by an unaccompanied choir, and some of the St Nicholas choir appeared during our visit to fill the church with their polyphonic singing, including a beautiful Easter hymn.

Today the worshippers in Ferry Road come from a number of countries and many languages can be heard during the coffee sessions after the service. Russian Orthodoxy has traditionally been closely linked to Russian nationality, but there has been no political animosity between Russians and Ukrainians in the congregation since the war in Ukraine started. Exactly how they have dealt with the implications of the war was to be the subject of Father Stephen's second talk on 28 May.

Both Father Stephen and Karen deserve thanks for forging this link between OPA and the Russian Church in Oxford, and I hope that fruitful contact will continue.



Father Stephen Platt