



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter January 2017

Cherdyn

Three hundred and ten kilometres north of the city of Perm, on the Kolva river, is Cherdyn, the capital of the ancient Principality of Great Perm. That is three hundred and ten kilometres NORTH of Perm, with a subarctic climate. This is the land that the Vikings visited (and burned); this is the land that provided Moscow with silver to pay the Golden Horde; this is the town where the poet

[Osip Mandelstam](#) was sentenced to internal exile with his wife [Nadezhda](#) in the 1930s. It didn't sound very promising. Why was somewhere so far north the capital of the region? On a weekend trip (weekend from Perm, that is, not Oxford) I found not only the answer to this question, but also discovered an interesting, delightful town, well worth a visit.

Cherdyn has a population the size of a village, with just under 5,000 inhabitants, but it has the aspect of a town with fine merchants' houses, a handsome main street, numerous large churches and a monastery. The reason for this discrepancy lies, of course, in history. When, in 1505, the dynasty of local Great Perm princes gave way to the grand Duchy of Moscow, the Grand Duke sent a governor from Moscow, who chose Cherdyn as his residence. Cherdyn was the starting point of [an early river route to Siberia](#), and indeed, through the sixteenth century, Cherdyn was the gateway for Russian settlers crossing the Ural Mountains eastwards. Moreover, Cherdyn not only controlled the river passage to the east, via the Vishera, to the Ob River basin, but also to the north, via the Kolva River, to the Pechora basin and to the south, via the Kama River, to the Volga and Moscow. A veritable meeting of ways.



At the turn of the 17th century, a more direct route to Siberia via Solikamsk, the Babinov Road, was constructed, and Cherdyn lost its strategic importance. Nevertheless, it retained regional commercial significance; hence its churches and merchant houses.

The oldest surviving church is the Church of St. John the Evangelist, rebuilt at the beginning of the 18th century, with a wonderful icon screen. But many of the churches are impressive. Among those I visited are the Cathedral of the Resurrection, where you can climb the bell tower and get the most gorgeous view over the river, over the plains, to the Urals; the wooden Church of the Prophet Elias, with its wonderful position high on the bank above the river, shimmering silver in the sunlight; the Church of the Assumption, with its sculpture of Christ in prison (despite the Orthodox prohibition of three dimensional figures).

Also worth visiting are the museums, both housed in churches. The Cherdyn regional museum has an eclectic collection, with fine artifacts in the Perm animal style, Perm wooden sculptures, and specimens of hand-written books published in Russia before 18th century (not that I understood any of them). The Museum of Orthodox History offers a collection of exhibits relating to the rites and traditions of the orthodox church, a painting of the Last Judgement which “revealed itself” in 2001 after 90 years of being painted over, and a small exhibition devoted to the last tsar of the Romanov dynasty.

I was lucky, I was taken to Cherdyn by my wonderful hosts. This meant I didn’t have to worry about where to stay – not so easy to find; where to eat, again problematical, and how to get there. There are buses, but I had a visit to Solikamsk on the way there (also worth a visit) and a fast journey back to Perm by car. Good weather helped – a magical sunset the evening we arrived, the next day bright and sunny. No doubt all this contributed to making this a memorable trip, but Cherdyn itself is full of charm and interest, and well worth a visit.

Alison Watt

Note use of hyperlinks in this and other articles for extensive background information, ed

Beata’s Christmas wish

Beata is a seventeen year old Russian girl, who lives in Perm. I have known Beata since she was two and a half and was my own daughter’s best friend at the time. We met Beata and her mum on a cold winter’s evening in the Perm Opera House square. The girls were inseparable until we left for the UK. My daughter Masha now is a (very) English teenager who lives in Oxford and goes to the Cherwell School sixth form. Like any parent, I have worries and anxieties about Masha’s school life, her A-levels, and her future. I also often wonder what she would have been like if we had stayed in Perm. So when I went to Russia for a few days over the Christmas period this year, I decided to ask Beata to talk to me (and this Newsletter’s readers) about what it is like to be a Russian seventeen-year-old. She gladly agreed. Beata has never been to an English-speaking country, but her English is excellent. I made very few corrections and kept it authentic otherwise.

Me: Beata, how would you like to be introduced to our readers?

Beata: *Let me introduce myself. My name’s Beata. I’m only 17 years old and I’m from Russia, Perm city. My family is quite big. We are five: my mother, my father, my younger sister, my younger brother and I. I study in the 11th grade of Lyceum number 10 in Perm. In addition to secondary education, I am studying on an IB (KH: International Baccalaureate) diploma programme. This programme gives me an excellent opportunity to develop my English skills and to think more broadly than curriculum students of our Lyceum.*

Me: I knew you as a little girl, but I am guessing you have changed since then.

Beata: *yes! (smiles).*

Me: how would you describe yourself in three words?

Beata: *My friends describe me as intelligent, patient and optimistic. "Three words aren't enough" – they say. I agree with them because they know better.*

Me: What are your hobbies?

Beata: *As I am a person with a little bit of free time, I try to occupy myself with something sensible. Apart from school I devote my leisure time to some hobbies. Now I'm a computer science buff. I spend almost all of my free time improving up on programming skills. My mother thinks that I have become a homebody. Despite of my study busyness, I strive to devote time to sports because I want to keep fit. I literally visit the fitness gym four times a week.*



Me: You are now seventeen, which presumably means that you are in the last year of secondary school?

Beata: *Yes, it's my last year of secondary school and a very crucial time. A full course of study at the Russian school takes 11 years. There are three levels of education: primary general education (from the 1st to the 4th grade), basic general education (from 5th to the 9th grade), and complete general education (from 10th to 11th grade). At the end of education students receive a certificate of general secondary education. The document confirming the knowledge in the state of standard volume and needed for university entrance. At the end of 11th grade we pass the USE (unified state examination). There are general subjects students must pass: Math and the Russian language. Taking exams in other subjects is voluntary. Each person select those subjects which are required for admission to the chosen university. I would like to get higher education abroad, but it is not possible. Now, I consider Perm universities with faculties based on IT. One of the universities I want to study is HSE (high school of economics). I'm interested in the IT-field and I hope for admission at this university. I spend most of my time preparing for USE.*

Me: Tell me more about your Lyceum. How is it different from an ordinary secondary school?

Beata: *Lyceum number 10 is one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Perm. In our school there are some special programs: IB primary years programme and IB diploma programme. Also there are a few "specialized" subjects, such as Math, Economics, English, Computer science. In the 10th grade each student must choose a specific profile: Economics and Mathematics, business informatics or IBDP.*

Me: This all sounds very serious and you sound much more dedicated than Masha and her friends! So, have you decided what you want to do after school?

Beata: *I'll go home and will sleep for a long time, because while studying I could sleep only in lunch break. (Smiles) Speaking seriously, I want to continue my education and to prepare for entering university. As I said before, I consider universities with faculties based on IT because I want to connect my life with this field. The majority of my friends decided to go for humanities, such as: linguistics, law, business, culinary business, psychology, etc. Many of them even want to study in other cities, such as St. Petersburg, Moscow. I will stay in Perm.*

Me: how easy is it to get into a university of your choice in Perm?

Beata: *To enter most of the Russian universities, it is necessary to pass USE of selected subjects*

that are required for admission to the chosen university. For universities such as HSE it is necessary to gain a high score of USE of each subject. But before that, all pupils of the 11th grade must write their final literature essay to be admitted to the USE. Many universities also accept candidates who won in different "Olympiads" (KH: academic contests) - it gives a huge advantage on admission. Also, various reputable universities organize their own entrance examination. I have already passed the essay grade and now I must prepare for the upcoming exams. If I want to enter the HSE's software engineering, I have to pass three USEs: Mathematics, the Russian language, and computer science.

Me: If you fast-forward to 2027, where do you think you will be? What will you be doing?

Beata: *It's difficult to say what will happen in 2027 with me, since I don't even know what to expect this summer. I can imagine that I would like have a dream job. I've loved video games since childhood and I have an irresistible desire in the future to write codes for creating games. I want to achieve unreal success, therefore I study hard.*

Me: It is Russian Orthodox Christmas today, what is your Christmas wish?

Beata: *Yes, today is a Russian Christmas. It's celebrated according to the Orthodox Calendar on the 7th of January. The only thing I recently always want it's a successful passing of exams, and I don't need anything else.*

I was somehow expecting to hear more about friends, films, music bands, and even politics (!) – given my experience with my daughter, her English friends and cousins, but Beata was determined and focused beyond belief! I do hope her Christmas wish comes true.

Ksenia Hewitt

The floating sign

It was one of those soggy spring time days when your shoes are soaked and your feet get wet whatever shoes you wear. I was going to the university on foot from the distant bus stop because I had to take the "wrong" bus after twenty minutes waiting for my usual "right" bus. I must say, the way from the bus stop to the university even in not such bad weather is not the Arbat and it's quite hard to make it. And in rainy weather it turns into rivers or lakes with rare aits (small pieces of dry land). In some places you can just pass by balancing on a road kerb.

So, I went charging through the wind and water, wandering to live somewhere else, in warmer and cleaner town, when suddenly I saw something out of the corner of my eye. It was a colourful flyer, mixed in with the rubbish floating down the stream. It was an advertisement for the Perm Tchaikovsky Opera and Ballet Theatre. Memories of the past spring filled my mind, a theatre trip to the première of the Fountain of Bakhchisarai, a wonderful ballet based on the poem of the same title by Alexander Pushkin. It reminded me of the beauty of the ballet and adorableness of the theatre square with its lilacs and apple trees in blossom, and how pleasant it is to walk there in warm 'white nights' and how I adore listening to our opera singers in this magnificent theatre.

You know, this is one of Russia's oldest theatres and a major centre for music and its ballet troupe is one of the most popular in Russia.

So, I became so proud of my hometown, which has excellent theatres, beautiful historic buildings and great universities and I forgot about the nasty weather and joyfully continued my way to the university.

Ekaterina Zueva, Perm State University 2016

How to enjoy a big birthday party

In October 2016 Perm State University celebrated its one hundredth birthday. The university is always keen to point out that it was the first to be founded in the Urals, the last to have its charter signed by the last Tsar, Nicholas II and that it was already prepared to face the world a year later when the Bolshevik Revolution took place in October 1917.

Last October the celebrations lasted for three days. Three Oxford Professors, the Oxford University International Officer, the Leader of Oxford City Council, a senior executive from the council and myself all travelled to Perm for the jubilee, expecting snow and a sudden plunge in temperature. In fact the weather was chilly and mostly dry, although on the first afternoon the cold began to penetrate our coats and boots as we stood in a patient crowd, waiting for a statue to be unveiled. When the great moment arrived, the statue turned out to be a distinguished and impressive interpretation of Nikolai Meshkov, the founder of the university.

Later, in the vast cultural hall we listened to many speeches from important people in academia, local politics and business for about an hour, before the various foreign contingents were paraded up onto the platform, carrying little national flags. I had been asked to give a speech which I chose to deliver, rather nervously, in Russian. At least the audience laughed, quite a lot, and not just at my accent. There was much warm feeling towards Oxford in the hall.

Outside in the dusk, students had built fires and placed good-sized logs for sitting around them. Some were playing guitars, some singing, a few dancing, and many students shouting encouragement to their own groups and any visitors who were wandering from one site to another, eating the various hot dishes being prepared on the fires. Judy Pallot remarked how pleasant it was to enjoy festivities with students, none of whom were drunk. (Alcohol is only allowed on campus under special circumstances, and drinking in public is forbidden. It certainly did not reduce the cheerfulness.) However, Oxford visitors to Perm will be glad to know that Igor Volkhin spent about an hour brewing a very exotic recipe for 'gluhwein', using a torch to peer at the (frankly implausible) instructions. Eventually he ladled it into small plastic cups which students (summoned by a Heath-Robinson wireless contraption) came dutifully to collect.

Big bands from Perm, from Yekaterinburg and from Moscow were performing on the other side of the campus with elaborate lighting and sound effects. At midnight the drumming suddenly gave way to a spectacular fireworks display from the Botanical Gardens.

The following day the University invited us to a 'concert' at the Opera Theatre, a spectacle of dance, sketches, displays and a lively 'lecturer' which traced events in the 100-year history of the university. It was funny, and once or twice very moving, although some teachers were heard to mutter 'Too much about Rectors and not enough about teachers and students' – a sentiment that several of us could understand.

On the final day, visitors who did not know Perm were taken to Khokhlovka or to the Gulag Museum, Perm-36. In the evening, once again, we all filled the Opera Theatre for a wonderful, enchanting performance of *Eugene Onegin*, conducted by Theodor Currentzis. Currentzis took up the post of musical director of the Opera and Ballet Theatre a few years ago, and has become internationally known for his innovative interpretations of Mozart and baroque music. He is much loved by Perm audiences (that was obvious!) and he returns their affection. So this performance was a cherished present to the university from the Theatre.

And thus the university celebrated and its guests joined in, all of us taking great pleasure in the very 'family' atmosphere of the whole event.

Karen Hewitt

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Recent and Forthcoming Events

Remembrance Service

On a sunny autumnal morning in November at the Remembrance Service in St Giles a wreath was laid by PSU visitor Anton Makarov 'In honour of the fallen from representatives of the people of Perm City and Perm Region in Russia twinned with Oxford'. [photo by Mari Prichard]



Discussion Group first meeting 11th January

The Discussion Group announced in the October issue of Perm News got off to a good start. In response to the News item and an email to all members, over twenty members signed up and over half the group attended the first meeting, held at Karen's house on 11th January. We discussed an article by Jack Matlock (retired US ambassador to Russia) on a new book by Gorbachev; this was followed by studying a translation of Putin's recent speech to the nation. Feedback was encouraging, with several congratulations and thanks. A show of hands indicated substantial support for continuing with a meeting to be held in March.

If any members who have not signed up but are interested in joining the discussion group, please email Karen or David (details at the top of this page).

Perm Association Party for the Perm Teachers

The annual party for the teachers from Perm State University was held in Rewley House in November. Our visitors gave a most enjoyable performance of some Russian folk music with impressive guitar accompaniment.



Newsletter and web site

Would all members please note that articles, including book reviews and letters are always welcome for this Newsletter. The submission deadline for the June issue of Perm News is 15th May but it greatly assists planning if you let the editor David Roulston know if you plan to submit an item or to discuss an idea for the newsletter or web site www.oxfordperm-assoc.org. The web site is updated regularly and contains a complete set of all newsletters from 2001; the site has a complete [Perm News Index](#) so readers can see at a glance when specific articles were printed. Readers with on-line access may note the increased use of hyperlinks (underlined words) in this issue of Perm News; this increases considerably the scope of articles to readers with internet access who wish to pursue references in more detail.

Annual General Meeting Thursday - 2nd March 2017

The Annual General Meeting of the Oxford Perm Association will take place in the Long Room at the Town Hall on Thursday, 2nd March 2017. The meeting will start at 6.15 p.m. with nibbles, wine and sociability. At 6.30 we begin the official business and hope to complete it by about 7.10. After another refreshing break, Dr Stanislav Tiazhelnikov of Perm State University, head of the Department of Molecular Biology, will give us an exclusive talk on 'Science and Magic Mushrooms in Russia'.

Please note: The main business will be the election of a committee and of officers. Two officers wish to stand down. New (or newish) members of the Association are very welcome to stand for election, or to propose someone else as a potential committee member. You can send any proposals to the Chair or to the Secretary, Mari Prichard. Contact details above.

We also welcome suggestions for activities in the coming year, and ideas about fund-raising for various good causes. So do bring notes of your proposals to the meeting.

Finally, we are very grateful to those members who bring light refreshments to the AGM. (Food for fingers only.) Wine and juice will be supplied by the Association

A day detour to Yasnaya Polyana

I had visited Leningrad in 1971 as an academic and again in 1996 with a Russian academic colleague and his wife, but decided that at the end of a recent visit to Perm I would again go to St Petersburg, a city so full of Russian history and beautiful architecture, this time for Rosalyn's first visit. But I desperately wanted to visit [Yasnaya Polyana](#) about 170 km south of Moscow and the question was: could it be done in one day en route from Perm to St Petersburg? I was told by more than one person that this was not a feasible plan because the train times from Kurski Vokzal and back would not allow the return trip to be made. However after consulting the Yasnaya Polyana web site and discussing with Karen and with Vladimir, a Tula academic who I had met in Oxford, we concluded that we could in fact make this side trip using a mini bus service.

We left Perm on an early morning train ahead of the normal group returning to Oxford and arrived at the Moscow station at 5.00 am the following day. Locating the left luggage and depositing our cases, we made our way to the metro and, reading intently the Cyrillic script signs to change trains, we eventually ended up at in the South Moscow station of Domodedovskaya. Here we surfaced and looked for the minibus to Tula. There were dozens of them but eventually we found the required one and soon set off in a southerly direction on a very hectic drive. Having sent texts from Perm, once we arrived at Tula we met Vladimir who drove us the 15 km to Yasnaya Polyana. As we approached Tolstoy's estate I was very excited since this was something I had been looking forward to for many years. Once through the kiosk, we walked along the tree lined route to the house and I imagined Tolstoy strolling around on his estate and talking to his workers, remembering that he was one of the first Russians to free his serfs. Once inside the house, I recalled the diaries of his wife Countess Tolstoy and I reflected on the very hard life they had together, specially in their later years when he became a very difficult person to live with, judging from her diaries. The house was full of original furniture including the sofa where Tolstoy would lie and the desk where he would work. This reminded me of Park Town, Oxford, with the lovely paintings by [Leonid Pasternak](#) who stayed with Tolstoy (some of which paintings members had the pleasure of seeing at Ann Pasternak Slater's talk to us several years ago). My favourites have the soft yellow glow from a table lamp, Tolstoy with his substantial beard. It was easy to imagine him spending years in this setting creating the characters and their lives for War and Peace and Anna Karenina.

Rosalyn and I wandered slowly through the wooded estate and eventually found the simple mound beside a little hollow where Tolstoy had requested to be buried. I felt that this was a very suitable place to end our visit and so we headed back to the estate entrance where we met Vladimir who took us back to Tula. We strolled through this lovely town and admired the Kremlin and the coloured domes on the orthodox churches until we reached the starting point for the minibus. Seven hours after arriving in Tula we were on our way back to Moscow and were soon at Domodedovskaya metro arriving at Leningradski railway station in plenty of time for our night train to Saint Petersburg, in which we shared a four berth cabin with two friends from Oxford who had left Perm half a day after us.

I felt elated and very content that I had managed to fulfill a long felt desire to visit Yasnaya Polyana, but felt a strong desire to return one day for a longer more relaxed visit.

David Roulston

