



The Probe

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August 2013, #75

L'Hermitage

We had been trying for two or three years to have a speaker on The Hermitage. The thought was that we would hear a talk on the lines of the past talks on the Portrait Gallery or The Group of Seven. What we did not know was that Canada, and in particular, Robert Kaszanits, had a major role in preserving and protecting the collection. Robert's talk was an eye-opener!

Robert Kaszanits' Russian adventure started in Prague in 1991 after thieves stole 5 Picassos, shooting and killing a guard in the process. The Czech Embassy contacted the National Gallery and asked for advice on security. Robert provided the advice. The next year the Russian Embassy asked if Robert could go to 5 museums and give advice on security.

His first view of the *Winter Palace*, home of the Hermitage collection was, appropriately, in winter. It was love at first sight. A closer look did not change his opinion but he found it distressing to look through holes in the roof at the parquet floor and to see water streaming around the frames of old masters. The basic problem was that the museum was asset rich and cash poor. The long daylight hours were bleaching pictures, carpets and almost everything else.

Robert took on, as his first task, raising sufficient funds to make a difference. His target was \$1,000,000 to provide film

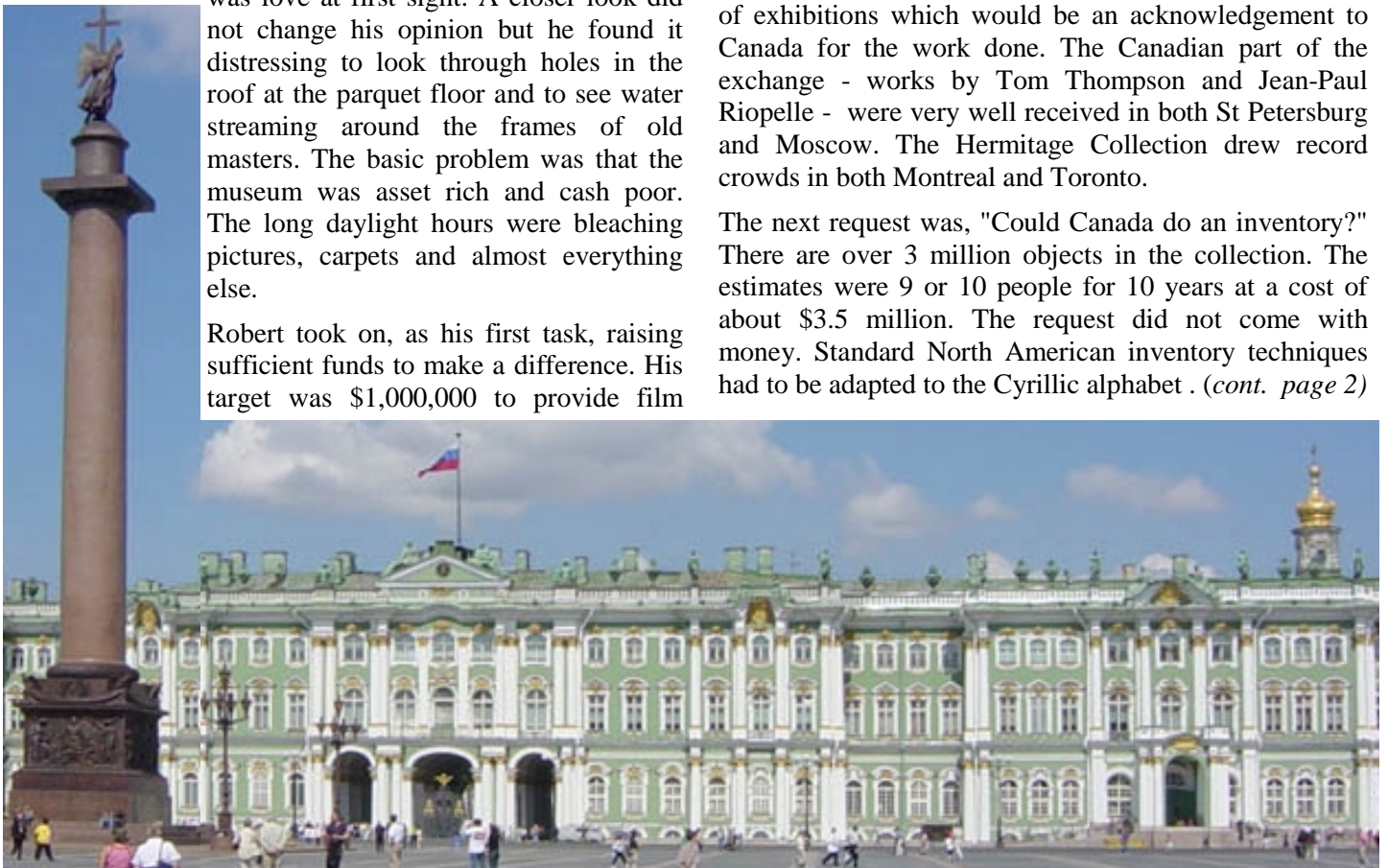
which would filter out the UV from the sunlight. This amounted to a railroad car-load of material to cover 2,213 large windows.

SNC Lavalin, Bombardier and Alcan were quick to offer money but that meant that a charity had to be set-up. He hired Gowlings (who had just set up a branch in Moscow) to help. The process dragged on until he arranged to have a question in Question period. The minister's response was that it would be done next morning. Letters to foundations brought a half-million dollar response from the Ford Foundation. The project was finished in 1997.

About this time Robert, who was in line to head the National Gallery, quit his job and worked full time on managing the charity and organizing the work in St. Petersburg.

In 1998 he walked into the office of the Director of the Art Gallery of Ontario with a proposal for an exchange of exhibitions which would be an acknowledgement to Canada for the work done. The Canadian part of the exchange - works by Tom Thompson and Jean-Paul Riopelle - were very well received in both St Petersburg and Moscow. The Hermitage Collection drew record crowds in both Montreal and Toronto.

The next request was, "Could Canada do an inventory?" There are over 3 million objects in the collection. The estimates were 9 or 10 people for 10 years at a cost of about \$3.5 million. The request did not come with money. Standard North American inventory techniques had to be adapted to the Cyrillic alphabet. (*cont. page 2*)



(from page 1) As an aside, Robert told us about identifying Tsar Nicholas' remains. A photograph of a soldier on a wooden bridge turned up with "I am standing on the Tsar's grave." written on the back. The location was traced and human remains found - but was it the Tsar? In 1870, Tsar Nicholas visited Japan where he was attacked and wounded. His unwashed, bloodstained shirt was somewhere in the Hermitage. It took a month to find it and DNA testing made the connection.

By 2008 the last area of inventory was approached - 27,000 pieces of jewellery. Bob wrote to De Beers in Capetown to ask if they would take it on. They jumped at the opportunity and photographed and weighed everything.

One of the consequences of 9/11 was that the price of oil sky-rocketed. This meant that Russia would get some serious money and could fund the necessities of the Hermitage so foreign assistance was no longer needed.

So as not to lose his connection with the Hermitage, Robert now runs conducted tours. His connections gives him special access "behind the scenes".

He described his experiences as "the best 20 years of my life".

The talk was followed by a film of the treasures, making this the longest meeting we have ever held. Everything received rapt attention.

Five Easy Pieces

Our July meeting followed the recent pattern of 5 in-house speakers, followed by an indoor picnic. With no set theme, the talks covered a wide variety of subjects.

Counter Terrorism

Mike Charrier led off with what sounded like a very serious subject - well, it sounded serious but turned out to be a comedy of errors or Murphy's law writ large.

Mike's secondary title was "The best laid schemes of mice and men ..." and covered the events of Exercise Twin Star, October 31, 1995. It was a joint Canada/US exercise and involved a borrowed DC 10 and 80 volunteer, civilian passengers from the company that



owned the plane plus Mike as an umpire and 4 Sky Marshals. When the plane was airborne, the 4 villainous looking Sky Marshals became terrorists and demanded to be flown to Europe. The plane did not have enough fuel, so they decided on Gander for refuelling. The pilot alerted emergency services and two US fighter jets took station behind the plane.

At the Canadian border, the RCAF was supposed to take over but the day was Referendum Day in Quebec and there was an order not to show a military presence, so the RCAF could not fly. A compromise was reached and the US jets were allowed into Canadian air space BUT they did not have enough fuel to get to Gander and stopped at Deer Lake.

The exercise ended but the DC 10 could not return to its home base because the pilots had run out of hours. The result was an all night party and the 80 volunteers returned home the next day with headaches and smiles.

Transition

Walter Terentiuk started by asking who is now living in a retirement home and who was planning on moving to one. Not much response.



The key decision factor for Walter

was the access to care in case of emergency, prompted by an illness. So they moved from their home to Alta Vista Manor, a residence in the area between the General and the Perley-Rideau.

Walter was very enthusiastic about their new community and immediately started a discussion group and became involved in the various activities at the Manor. He is very pleased with the new lifestyle and the security it brings.



We now have three members in residence,. **Jim Maffre** has been there for a year or two.

Official Languages

Hugh Reekie looked into the languages of Canada taking as his starting point the patterns of immigration. There were many Scots in the ranks of the British armies

and their first language was Gaelic. They settled in both Upper and Lower Canada - the Ottawa phone book has 30 pages of Macs and Mcs, and many French Canadians have Scottish names. The French soldiery was not as concentrated from one area but they were supplemented over the years by fishermen from Brittany who came across the Atlantic to fish off Newfoundland.

Brittany was one of the Celtic nations and had its own language until it became part of France. In the 19th century there was a determined effort to stamp out the use of Breton which resulted in more emigration to Canada.

A majority of the "Fathers of Confederation" spoke Gaelic and would have strong sympathies with the Bretons. Hugh's question was, "Could a twist of fate made our official languages Scots Gaelic and Breton French?"

More than English ...

... or "How to spend a week in Spain at minimal cost just by talking in English".

Jim Rader spent a week in Salamanca talking in English to Spaniards - mostly business people - who want to become more fluent in English. It was not a teaching



One of the residences used by Diverbo in Salamanca

assignment as such, just an interesting way of spending a week in pleasant surroundings chatting on any subject that came up - those of us who know Jim recognize that he would be in his element doing this.

Room and board are covered but not travel. Jim and Maggie were planning on a European vacation and so the side trip to Spain was an inexpensive add-on.

There was time to do some sightseeing in and around the historic city of Salamanca with its University founded in 1218. One of the short trips they made was to a stretch of the Pilgrim's Route to Santiago di Compostella which Guy Thatcher described to us in 2010 (Guy has now made a second journey on the Pilgrims' Way which he

* **Picnic** *
* Our thanks to **Marie-Neige** and her Staff *
* for arranging our picnic following the talks. *

will be telling us about later).

The company which runs the courses is Diverbo and their web site is www.diverbo.com/en/volunteer-abroad. They also run courses in Germany.

Orkney

John Wright rounded out the session with a travelogue on Orkney. He admitted to not knowing much about Orkney when he and Joyce went there - Scapa Flow is famous as a naval base and there is an Italian Chapel which has been featured in TV shows. A day's bus tour opened their eyes.

Orkney is a group of 70 islands, 20 of which are inhabited, 10 miles off the northernmost tip of Scotland. The population is about 20,000 and has been constant for the past 200 years. The main industries are farming and fishing but there is also a prosperous distillery - look for *Highland Park* single malt in the LCBO.

There are 7 entrances to Scapa Flow and the ones at the east had ships sunk in them to block access. Despite this, a U-boat found a way through and torpedoed *HMS Royal Oak* and escaped. Churchill ordered better defences. There were Italian prisoners of war but the Geneva Convention prohibited putting them to work. However, by offering to pay volunteers the prisoners saw a way to relieve boredom and put away a little nest egg for after the war. They asked for a place to worship and were given two Nissen huts which, with plaster and paint, they transformed into a chapel of great beauty. It is still maintained by the families of some of the prisoners who make the trip from Italy every year or two.

There are several archeological sites on the islands, including the Ring of Brodgar, which pre-dates Stonehenge, and Skara Brae. Both are about 5,000 years old. Skara Brae is a settlement of 7 dwellings built into the earth. They probably had wooden roofs but these are long gone. What remains are stone walls, rooms with fire pits, recesses for storage, sleeping areas marked off with stones, and interconnecting passageways. The site was discovered in the 1850's when a great storm uncovered the tops of the walls. No-one knows who the villagers were or where they went.

St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall is the resting place of **Dr. John Rae**, the Arctic Explorer (Hugh Reekie, April 2013).

Management Committee - 2014

At our November Club meeting we will be looking for some new members for the Management Committee. The first requirement is for a Vice-president (normally considered President-elect for the following year). **Bruce Dodd**, our Secretary for the past 3 years has decided to 'retire', so we need a replacement. This is issue 75 of *The Probe* so we definitely need a fresh viewpoint in the Editor's chair.

If you have any interest in a particular job, but want a closer look, join the Committee and back-up the incumbent.

The Management Committee meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month (except August and December) for about an hour.

Interested? Talk to **Joan Evans** or **Robin Rousham** or anyone you see doing something for the club.

From the Internet

A teacher gave each of the 26 six-year-olds in her class the first part of a well-known (to an adult) proverb or saying, and asked her students to complete them. Here are the first 13.

Don't change horses - until they stop running.

Strike while the - bug is close.

It's always darkest before - Daylight Saving Time.

Never underestimate the power of - termites.

You can lead a horse to water but - how?

Don't bite the hand that - looks dirty.

No news is - impossible.

A miss is as good as a - Mr.

You can't teach an old dog new - math.

If you lie down with dogs, you'll - stink in the morning.

Love all, trust - me.

The pen is mightier than the - pigs.

An idle mind is - the best way to relax.

Membership Fees

Being a fairly relaxed organization, we can accommodate potential new members as guests for August and September and ask them to join in October when we open the books for 2014 memberships.

PROBUS' Vital Purpose ...

To stimulate thought, interest and participation in activities at a time in life when it is easy to become complacent and self-centered.

September 25th - Claude Bennett

Claude Bennett served as an Ottawa alderman from 1960 to 1969 and was the city's acting mayor in the period from 1970 to 1972. **Charlotte Whitton** was mayor from 1951 to 1956 and again from 1960 to 1964 so there was an overlap on council of 4 years.

We have asked Claude to reminisce about that period so that we could gain some insights into the character of Canada's first, female, 'big city' mayor. He will also talk about city and provincial politics - he was "our" MPP from 1971 to 1987 - and about some of his post-political activities which include Chairman of the Board of CMHC, President of the Canadian Commonwealth Games Association, Chair of the Ottawa Transition Board, Chair of the Ottawa Airport Authority and a member of the Board of the Royal Canadian Mint.

October 23rd Canadian Agency of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The CWGC-CA has not yet named its speaker, but the Secretary-General (BGen David Kettle) has promised that it will be a senior member of his staff.

The presentation will give a global view of the work of the Canadian Agency but will focus on its work in North and South America. This is an aspect of the Agency's activities which is less well known than the work of the Commission in Europe.

World Views - Fall 2013

Meetings are at Bethany Baptist Church, Centrepointe Drive at Baseline.

Saturday Sept 28

Ed Overstreet – Switzerland's allure – the Alps and its Villages

Saturday Oct 26

Polar Bears and the Svalbard Archipelago – Bill Young

Saturday Nov 30

Jamie Johnson – Patagonia's beauty

Saturday Jan 26

Tony Beck – "Birding in Costa Rica"

Programs begin at 7.30pm. All are welcome.

World Views now has a web site:

<http://worldviewsphotography.ca>

For more information call Sholto Cole at 613-721-3367

Our thanks to **John Kruithof** for this update.