

This year`s study day took us to Whalley Abbey for the first time, where it rained on our day together; again for the first time!!! Whalley Abbey is not, surprisingly, situated in the picturesque, Lancashire village of Whalley and is an Anglican retreat and conference house set in the stunning grounds and ruins of a 14th century Cistercian abbey, on the banks of the River Calder, in the beautiful countryside of the Ribble Valley. Belonging to the Church of England Diocese of Blackburn, the retreat and conference centre provides high-quality and welcoming hospitality. The flexible, four-star accommodation is ideal for both day and residential conferences, wedding receptions and other family celebrations.

At the moment, the focus of our language study is that of `easy reading in Russian` and I think that we are having great fun with this activity. We are all able to think about our pronunciation, build up slowly our `banks` of vocabulary and listen to one another as we continue to strive together to create basic but flowing discussion among ourselves.

On a much more `heavy` note, for the cultural section of the day, we decided to scrutinise and then discuss a recently published report by the House of Lords on the future relations between the UK, the EU and Russia. The report may be viewed via:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldcom/115/11502.htm>

Some of the conclusions which were drawn were as follows:

- the possible creation of an economic and military zone extending from Portugal to Vladivostok but sadly, with the Russians not wanting the USA in these zones;
- the need to have significant and regular educational exchanges between the three areas;
- the need to acknowledge fully the huge population losses suffered by the former Soviet Union during WW2 and the consequences of this regarding the security of its borders;
- in general it seems that `educated` Russians still look to the `West` whereas others look to the `East`;
- interestingly, at the moment, there is not enough UK-based Russian language and culture expertise.

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18<sup>th</sup> June 2015



