3 – MOSCOW AND KOLOMENSKOYE

Monday, 18 June

As I woke today feeling rather unwell, I stayed in bed during the morning. Walter went off on his own to see the Kremlin once again. However, when he returned for lunch, he told me that he had got no farther than part of Kalinin Avenue as it was too hot out in the scorching sunshine. He had gone into the Dom Knigi (House of Books), where he had spent some time looking at what was on sale.

By lunchtime I felt well enough to get up and eat. Down in the dining room our guides fussed around me, asking whether I was all right, and ordered a bowl of chicken broth and some hard-boiled eggs for me. They even offered to telephone for a doctor.

In the afternoon, Walter and I went on an optional tour that we had paid for: a trip to an area of architectural and historic importance, Kolomenskoye (pronounced 'Ka*lom*yinska-yeh') in the south-eastern part of Moscow. This place had been given this name because in 1237 the people of Kolomna village, who had fled from Tartar invaders, had settled in this particular area, which was closer to Moscow. Several important churches had been built in this pleasant village, and Ivan the Terrible's son liked spending some of his time in it. Peter the Great had also spent a considerable part of his youth there.

After a delay, during which we had to wait for a second coach to arrive, we set off at about 2.30 p.m. Today we had a pleasant guide who was quite helpful and forthcoming with information, although it was a little difficult at times to understand what she was saying because of her strong accent.

We drove towards the Kremlin, crossed the river, then skirted it. On our way we passed housing estates, apartment blocks, skyscrapers, factories, and various fine old churches. At one stage we passed a picturesque monastery complex, which I thought might be the New Spassky Monastery. It looked very striking in the bright sunshine.

The gateway into Kolomenskoye

We eventually crossed the Moskva and approached a wooded district. We turned off the road and continued along a narrow and dusty laneway; this, we were told, was Kolomenskoye, where there had once been wooden houses. Sadly, all of them had been pulled down. Our guide told us that a wooden palace had been built here in 1671 by order of Alexei Mikhailovich. This palace had been used by the Romanovs (including Peter the Great) as a residence, but in the eighteenth century Catherine II had ordered it to be dismantled and a model made of it for future reference.

Kazan Cathedral, Kolomenskoye

The coach stopped and we clambered out, entering the calm and peaceful grounds of Kolomenskoye through a very fine stone gateway. Here, between the trees, it was shady and pleasantly cool. We now ambled along a narrow pathway at an easy pace, listening to the birds singing, and passed a very beautiful whitewashed church that had shining blue cupolas. This was Kazan Cathedral which, unfortunately, was locked.

Left: the second gateway; right: the Church of the Ascension, Kolomenskoye

We then approached another stone gateway; it was larger than the first one, but also very beautiful. We now entered a large clearing. In front of us stood the tall white

church of unusual design that I had read about and had wanted to see: the Church of the Ascension, built in 1532 by order of Vasily III in gratitude for the birth of his long-awaited heir, who would become Ivan the Terrible. Our guide told us that the French composer Berlioz had visited this fine church and that he had been greatly inspired by it. I was annoyed to discover that this too was closed to the public for restoration, and that scaffolding had been erected around the bottom part of it.

We were told that this private church of the Tsars is important because of its age and design, for it is one of the earliest brick churches to have a tent-shaped steeple, which began to oust the traditional domes after the 1540s. It also features a type of gable known as *kokoshnik*, which imitates a woman's medieval headdress and which is difficult to create in stone. Also copied from wooden churches was the practice of raising the level of the church to the second storey, relegating the ground floor to a storage area, and the building of a covered stairway to the entrance of the church.

Just to the right of this fine church stood a bell tower and a small chapel: that of Saint John the Baptist, built in 1540. Unfortunately I did not manage to get a proper look at these two buildings.

We now stood around for a while, waiting for another guide. In order to kill time, our guide began to tell us about the place in an earnest, yet helpful manner. Eventually a good-looking young lady named Olga, who was suntanned and was wearing a pretty summer dress, made an appearance and chatted to our guide. She then began to tell us about the place in Russian, rattling it off as if she had learned it from a textbook and had repeated it many times, while our guide earnestly nodded her head and translated what Olga was saying into English.

She began by telling us that, at one time, there had been a bridge over the Moskva River nearby, which was used by the local inhabitants. Over where this bridge had once been, we were able to see a number of cannons, which were thought to have been used by Peter the Great when he stayed here. At one time there had been a row of mechanical lions near the bridge; we were told that they were able to open their jaws and roll their eyes in order to scare away intruders.

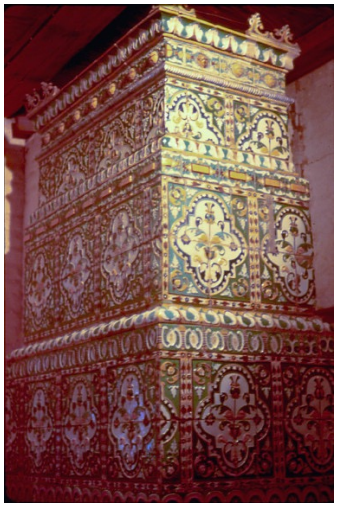
The guide then went on to tell us that six palaces had been built for the Tsars over a period of four centuries; the last one, which Catherine II had ordered to be dismantled, had been described as 'the eighth wonder of the world'. When Peter the Great had stayed in this palace, he had built boats and had sailed them in the river – an event that had ultimately led to the creation of the first Russian navy.

We were now brought to a door in the stone gateway and shown into a museum that had been created inside. A couple of old women were at the door to inspect tickets and to keep their beady eyes on us. The first room that we entered contained a number of large and elaborate icons that had been brought from Soloviesk in the sixteenth century. The most important one was a work entitled 'The Symbol of Belief Icon', made in the seventeenth century. This very detailed and decorative icon illustrated the main principles of Russian Orthodoxy.

In the next room we saw the famous model of Alexei Mikhailovich's wooden palace, which had been built during the reign of Catherine II. This was very big, excellently made, and quite beautiful. In other display cases were small wooden models of household goods. One of the old women, smiling and bursting with enthusiasm, pointed to various models and explained what they were to us, in Russian of course. It struck me that these lonely old women were warm-hearted and eager to talk to visitors.

We then entered a dark but very quaint old office. In it was a table covered with a thick red cloth, on which some books and candles had been placed. In one corner, on

the wall, was an icon of Saint George and the Dragon, which had once been the symbol of Moscow. On another wall was a painting of Alexei Mikhailovich, which I had seen before in a book. There was also a tall Dutch enamelled stove, which looked quite attractive as it was decorated with colourful designs. The little room looked very cosy; I could have stayed in it for quite a long time. The next room, which was whitewashed and therefore brighter, contained bells of different periods. They were all black in colour, and ranged from small to large.



Top: model of wooden palace. Bottom: Dutch stove, and a reconstructed office

We then climbed a very steep and narrow staircase to the next room. Those of us who were tired by now, or unable to manage the steps, left and went back outside. In this long and whitewashed second-storey room we looked at various old church clock movements, the earliest of which was made in 1539. Many of them contained mechanisms for chiming the hours; like the bells, all of them were black. In some of the display cases were old locks, keys, and strong iron hinges for doors.

At the end of this room we found another flight of steps, which we descended, for we had just been above the entrance arch. We now found ourselves in a large room full of old wooden household articles, tools, axes, and so forth. Here we saw part of a

decorative roof of a wooden church, a child's chair made of oak, and a large wooden sleigh.

When we finally left, we joined the other members of our group and walked in the shade of the trees. It was delightfully peaceful here. After a while we came to a clearing where we found the tiny and delightful wooden church that Peter the Great had once used. I went over to photograph it, missing what the guide had to say about the next building: a small wooden house in which Peter had lived during 1702, the year before Saint Petersburg had been founded. I tore myself away from the little church, joined our group outside the quaint house, and caught the last few words that Olga had to say. She now thanked us for our attention and left us.

Peter the Great's house in Kolomenskoye

Two old peasant women at the door smiled at us as we entered. It was dark and cool inside. The old rustic furniture conjured up visions of the past, and I almost expected the very tall Peter the Great to make his appearance, stoop down as he came through the low doorway, and take his seat in the cosy study that we now stopped to admire. In the room we saw a tall enamel stove, a plain wooden table covered with a cloth, three high chairs, and an icon hanging on the wall. It was the type of room in which one could feel snug and cosy while looking out of the tiny window at a cold and snowy scene. We admired other small rooms in the house: a neat and tidy storage

room, a comfortable dining room, another room (the purpose of which was unclear), and a rather charming bedroom.

When we were leaving, I smiled at one of the old women at the door and said to her, in Russian, 'It's a beautiful little house'. She seemed to be overjoyed by this simple remark. Her eyes lighting up, she agreed, and then, taking me by the arm, brought me back to the bedroom and pointed to a mirror that she obviously liked. I then thanked both the ladies, stepped out into the fresh air and, as we slowly made our way back to the entrance of the area, joined our guide, who was now talking to a lady in our group, comparing the architecture here in Moscow to the architecture found in Leningrad. We agreed that there was a distinct old-world Russian atmosphere about this lovely place, whereas Leningrad (or more correctly, Saint Petersburg) was much more European and hardly Russian at all. Despite this, however, I thought that I had detected a slight touch of Dutch influence in the wooden house that we had just visited.

On the subject of religion, our guide mentioned (in passing) that there were some forty-four practising Orthodox churches in Moscow alone, and some practising churches of other denominations. I was surprised to hear this, and guessed that there must be many more churches open to the public outside the big cities, where people would probably be more religious. My impression that communist USSR was a fiercely anti-religious nation had now effectively been shattered by this welcome information; obviously it had changed greatly since the brutal rule of leaders such as Lenin and Stalin.

During most of this time, an English lad had been chatting to Walter and annoying him by expressing his rather cynical views about almost everything. When I caught up with Walter, he showed me a film that had just burst asunder when he had taken it out of his camera. It was a film that he had used when photographing the Kremlin at night-time, and when taking other important pictures. As he was understandably disappointed by this, I felt sorry for him.

Once again we passed the lovely Kazan Cathedral, which our guide told me dated from the seventeenth century. On our way out, I stopped to take some more photographs of it, and then of the entrance. I finally rejoined the group when we boarded the coach. I had enjoyed this trip very much, for this beautiful quiet spot was well worth the visit.

In the evening we were taken to the Kontsertny Zal imeni Tchaikovskovo (Tchaikovsky Concert Hall) for a concert of folk music. I recognized the building and the square in which it was situated, for we had obviously passed it at some time during the previous couple of days. The crowds of people who were converging upon it were only being allowed to enter through one of its many glass doors, and so a long queue had formed.

As we were on our own this evening, we had to find our own way inside the building. We walked through a huge empty foyer and went up an impressive wide staircase to the first floor. On our tickets the word партер (*parter*) was printed – a term coined from the French *parterre*. We were shown to a side door and from there to our seats. Inside, the hall was large, spacious and bright. All the walls were painted white and there was a pipe organ at the back of the large stage. We noticed that the seats, which were not very comfortable, were very wide.

At 7.30 p.m. a large orchestra of Russian folk instruments made its appearance on the stage. As I had not expected to see such a huge ensemble, I began to wonder what sort of music they were going to perform. Would we be listening to genuine folk

music? As it turned out, they played modern adaptations and Westernized versions of folk tunes, and also arrangements of classical music.

At the front of the stage were two large instruments that I thought were dulcimers, but they turned out to be two large zithers that were played by two huge Russian women in black dresses edged with gold. Within the main body of the orchestra were banks of balalaikas, mandolins and other plucked instruments; behind them was a row of bass balalaikas. In the middle were various wind instruments that I could not identify, though some of them sounded like shawms. To the right was a large percussion section that included kettledrums, bells, and a glockenspiel.

The large ensemble sounded really marvellous when they played, and the music was performed in a very expressive and pleasing manner. All the items were introduced, in Russian, by a good-looking lady in a black and gold dress. Her introductions were then translated into English by a young lady in one of the boxes, who spoke into a microphone and used the public address system. The concert in general was rather formal, though very enjoyable nonetheless. The conductor, a good-looking man with a little beard, was very precise and courteous.

I recognized the second item, which was a one-movement concerto for a small circular plucked instrument like a mandolin, for it had been used as the theme tune for the Russian language series that I had been following on BBC radio, and had also been used in the American television series *The Unknown War* (1978). Judging by its reception, it was a great favourite. This difficult piece was very skilfully played by a very handsome young man who had wavy hair and neat sideburns.

He was joined in the next piece by the young lady who was introducing the items, and together they played a duet, accompanied by the orchestra, which was greeted with loud applause because of the novelty of the piece. However, musically it was rather insipid. Next came a group of virtuoso songs, sung by a well-built Russian tenor who sported a beard and looked a little like Tsar Nicholas II. His first offering was a fire-and-brimstone song by Rimsky-Korsakov, and his last item was a rowdy and drunken street song. The Russians made a great fuss of him, even though he received rather unenthusiastic applause, and he was presented with a bouquet of flowers. The first half of the concert ended with a selection of instrumental pieces, most of which were quite pleasant and very passionate.

During the interval everyone went downstairs to the bare but plush foyer, where they queued to get refreshments. However, the gents' room was anything but plush; only one loo had a few scraps of paper torn from a toilet roll wrapper. The interval did not last long and we were summoned back to the hall by a bell. Back in our seats, Walter told me that he had bought a glass of champagne, which had cost him £1. A lady in our group, who had given money to a confused girl, had received no change, and therefore had ended up spending £10 on a glass of champagne and some caviar.

In the second half of the concert we were treated to a rather pleasant waltz composed by Glinka, which sounded very good played on the folk instruments. After this they played a selection of waltzes, one of which was by Tchaikovsky. The following item caused general excitement and clicking of cameras, for a number of lovely girls in bright costumes appeared and sang some genuine unaccompanied folk songs; the harmony was quite unusual and the rhythm was very catchy. They all had powerful throaty voices, which gave a terrific rustic quality to their songs. While they sang, they danced around, and some of them played rhythm instruments: a drum beaten with a stick, clappers, and a tiny pair of cymbals. They received hearty applause when they finished their performance.

The concert ended with a selection of instrumental pieces. The final one, *Evening Bells*, was very beautiful and expressive; its simple theme consisted of four notes played on the tubular bells. This was taken up by the rest of the orchestra, starting quietly, swelling to a great climax, then fading to a gentle murmur. It served as an appropriate ending to an enjoyable concert. It was 9.30 p.m. when we left for our coach.

Back in our hotel bedroom, Walter and I wrote our diaries while half watching television. We occasionally glanced at a soppy Socialist Realism film, set in dockyards, which featured too much operatic music. Next came a rather idiotic opera set in the nineteenth century, and finally the news, which dealt with the SALT 2 talks between Mr Brezhnev and 'Jeemy Carrterr'.