10 – PAVLOVSK AND LENINGRAD

Monday, 25 June

When the Scottish architect Charles Cameron arrived in Saint Petersburg in 1779, Catherine II gave him his first commission: to build a palace for her son Grand Duke Paul (Pavel in Russian) not far from Tsarskoye Selo. It would be named Pavlovsk after him.

The building of the main body of the new palace began in 1781, and it was completed in 1784 when it was decorated by the Italian architects Giacomo Quarenghi and Vincenzo Brenna. When Catherine II died in 1796 and Paul became Emperor, the palace was further enlarged by Brenna, who added a second storey over the galleries and wings, and also erected two new service blocks. In 1803 a fire damaged the interior, and so the palace was reconstructed by a Russian architect, Andrei Voronykhin. The restoration was finally completed by Quarenghi and another Italian architect, Carlo Rossi.

Paul succeeded his mother as Emperor, but only for five years, for he was hated by the people and was eventually assassinated in 1801. He had been brought up as a soldier and, because of this, he had become obsessed with military dress and strict regulations.

Like other palaces in the environs of Leningrad, Pavlovsk was also badly bombed by the hated Nazis, though many of its treasures had been taken away and hidden before the Nazis had come to Russia.

It was sweltering hot on waking this morning, when we would be brought on a tour to Pavlovsk. At the breakfast table, Walter battled with a lump of sugar, which floated around in his tea and refused to dissolve. This had been a regular occurrence. Sid told us that these lumps were not made to dissolve, for the Russians had the habit of clenching them between their teeth and drinking their tea through them. He said that we ought to see the locals doing this, for it looked very odd.

At 9.30 we clambered aboard the hot and sticky coach, and travelled quickly towards our destination: Pushkin. The countryside looked fresh in the morning light. Once again we hurtled through the Egyptian-style entrance gate, then passed the Alexander Palace on our right. We then drove along the winding road, past some other buildings and, at the petrol station, turned left, away from the Catherine Palace. We passed under the archway of the fine Lycée building, where Pushkin had once studied, and suddenly found ourselves in a small modern town, where there were areas of greenery and parkland. As I had not expected this at all, it came as quite a surprise. Here we saw apartment blocks, shops, traffic lights, and various other trappings of modern civilization. It all seemed so much out of place in this lovely area.

We then skirted a river, which we could see on one side of the bus, and a wood on the other, then passed a very elegant yellow-and-white railway station, where the line connected the town with Leningrad. I did not realize that the Pavlovsk palace was so

close to the town of Pushkin; in fact, it seemed as if we had not left Pushkin and were still in the town.

Pavlovsk Great Palace

Shortly afterwards we jumped out of the coach into the fresh air, went through a small gate and followed our guide, Rita, as we skirted the walls of a building. We turned a corner and suddenly found ourselves in front of the palace. It quite took me by surprise, for it looked so different from the photographs that I had seen. Instead of looking at a moderately-sized, though elegant building, situated behind trees on a hill, we now found ourselves in a large stone square, gazing at a large palace with two long colonnaded wings, both of which terminated in small buildings. Up until now I had not known that these wings existed. I stopped briefly to admire the view, but had to follow the others into the building.

Inside the palace it was much cooler. Having put on museum slippers, we began to shuffle our way through the maze of rooms. Here they were much smaller than the ones in the Catherine Palace, and therefore more intimate. For this reason, many of the people in the group preferred this place to the other palaces that we had visited. However, I did not care for some of the furnishings and decorations, probably because they were a little too late in style for my taste. The rooms – forty-four of them were open to the public – were all very sumptuously decorated, though some of them were rather overdone. There were fine views of the extensive grounds from the various windows, which gave a certain charm to the place; here we felt that we were in a country residence rather than a grand palace.

After we had passed through the rather strange hall, which had been decorated in the once fashionable Egyptian style, we ascended the staircase to what were called the Gala Rooms. Here we entered the guards' vestibule, which was quite elegant and contained many clocks. Next we stopped to look at the elegant round Italian Hall with its domed ceiling, large chandelier, niches containing statues, and its decorative marble floor. We then came to a window that overlooked both the square and a long avenue lined with trees, which stretched away into the distance. This was where Paul used to stand and watch military parades.

We now entered the Emperor's study, which was divided into two sections. In the smaller section was a French desk, a set of chairs, a sofa, and a large ugly clock. Only the sofa had survived the onslaught of the Nazis, and so the reconstructed chairs had

to be modelled on the sofa. On the wall was a portrait of Peter the Great. In the bigger section we saw some clumsy-looking furniture, a portrait of Paul's wife, and a large collection of old books. I asked if these were original; Rita assured us that they were.

The Italian Hall, and a view of the square and avenue, Pavlovsk

Next was the Tapestry Study, in which large French tapestries were on display. The furniture was also French. From here we passed into the Small Throne Room (or Hall of War), which was decorated in white and gold. Hanging from the ceiling was a valuable French chandelier.

We then entered the large reception hall, which was named the Grecian Hall because of the rows of tall green marble columns and the décor in general. Gold basket-shaped chandeliers hung from the elaborate ceiling. This hall had been designed by Voronikhin. I found it a rather cold and impersonal place; the thick pillars looked quite unnecessary and out of place.

By now we had reached the southern or back part of the palace, where a suite of rooms had been built for Paul's wife. These were small and intimate, though rather cluttered with indifferent furniture. First of all we were brought into the elegant Hall of Peace, modelled on a hall in Versailles. The Library contained a lumpy-looking desk, a large tapestry that hung on a wall, statues, books, and a fine parquet floor. The Morning Room, designed by Charles Cameron, contained imitation Greek pillars and decorations, a table with a porcelain top, and an elegant little square piano by Zumpe of London which, we were told, was used for concerts. Next came a very ornate bedroom, which contained a huge and elaborate four-poster bed and, for some unknown reason, a large dinner set. In the room beside it we saw a painted fresco, depicting a classical view, on the wall facing the window.

From here we entered one of the wings of the palace, where we were brought through the curved and very elegant Picture Gallery, which contained an important

collection of paintings by famous masters of different schools. Here the ceiling was low and the floor was plain. We were told that Paul hated high ceilings.

At the end of this fine gallery was a large and impressive octagonal room with an elaborate painted low ceiling that gave the observer an optical illusion of perspective, as though one were gazing up at a circular gallery surrounded by a balustrade, and above it the blue sky. This room had been used as a throne room, though later it had been turned into a ballroom. It contained little furniture – just some chairs and a few long tables with dinner services displayed on them – and the acoustics were quite unusual.

We then passed through a small room where musicians had assembled, and entered the elegant and highly decorative Church Gallery, so called because it formed the approach to the church. This gallery contained rows of classical Italian statues dating from the second century AD. The décor here was essentially pale green and white, and was very pleasing to the eye. It was here that Paul had received a Maltese religious group; a reminder of this event was a depiction of a Maltese cross on the ceiling. We then entered the lovely little church, where we were surrounded by a riot of gold and a collection of European religious paintings. We were able to look down into the chapel from the Royal Balcony.

We now went to the smaller and more intimate living quarters of the Imperial family. Passing through the Ladies-in-Waiting Room, we descended a staircase. Downstairs, we passed through three studies: the old study of Paul I, the Common Study, and the new study of Emperor Paul II, which was more elegant. A collection of paintings hung on the walls of the Common Study. This was where the architect Carlo Rossi had studied after the fire of 1803, and where he had designed a room for his 'diploma', which we now saw. It was quite elegant. From here we went into the Dining Room, which overlooked a fine view of the grounds. In the distance, at the bottom of the green hill on which the palace had been built, could be seen the Slavyanka River, which was now sparkling in the sunshine.

We then entered the billiards room, in which we saw an unusual square piano with a box-like structure underneath, which meant that none of the legs could be seen. There was no maker's name over the keyboard and I could see levers under the lid; perhaps these replaced the usual pedals. Finally we saw the Painting Room, designed by Cameron, which was full of pictures.

The pond and Aviary, Pavlovsk

We then made our way back to the entrance, where we took off our museum overshoes and walked out into the boiling sunshine. We were now given a few minutes to wander around and take photos. I had a good look at the exterior of the palace, then walked into the shady grounds by the avenue. Here I found some statues and a picturesque pavilion by a pond, which I later discovered was the Aviary.

I took my time and then ambled back to the coach, where I was told that I was the last to return and that they were about to leave without me. By this stage I did not care, for we had been promised a walk around the grounds and then denied it because of the lack of time. Needless to say we had seen nothing of the acres of grounds surrounding the palace. Once again I was tempted to stay here for the rest of the day and return by train (now that I knew where the station was), but this time I was put off by the heat and the fact that I had become somewhat disenchanted by the modern town of Pushkin.

The driver started the engine and off we roared, passing through Pushkin once more, and then back to Leningrad, leaving the countryside behind. We arrived at the hotel in time for lunch at one o'clock.

It was just as well that I had not stayed at Pavlovsk, for it clouded over in the afternoon. As Walter decided to have a rest, I went off to the Smolny Cathedral, which I was interested to see.

I walked up a short stretch of Nevsky Prospekt, then turned to the right, up Ispolkomskaya Street; I was hoping to catch either the number 10 or 38 tram. However, neither appeared as I walked along this uninteresting street. After a while, when I was walking along Novgorodskaya Street, I saw my destination in the distance, and so decided to walk the rest of the way. However, it suddenly began to rain heavily, and so I took shelter in a doorway of a nearby building, where I stood looking at the pouring rain. The local people did not seem to mind the downpour, for many of them were out walking without any protection. Two girls, who were running and laughing, came over to where I was standing and took shelter from the rain, chatting together animatedly. Both were well dressed and wore make up. One of them asked me something, but I could not understand what she said.

I waited here for some time, but the rain did not ease off. Eventually I became fed up and began to walk back the way that I had come, in the rain. Once again, there was no sign of a tram.

When I returned to Nevsky Prospekt, feeling very wet, the rain stopped. As it was still very warm and close, my clothes dried quickly. Not far from our hotel I discovered a small kiosk where one could buy tickets for concerts or performances in the city. I studied a large noticeboard that gave information about every event for the week, and managed to decipher some of it. I was surprised to see so many young people examining this noticeboard, for many of them did not look as though they would be interested in going to concerts of classical music. The kiosk was empty but, after a few minutes, a lady returned with a string bag full of shopping. She had obviously seized a few spare moments in order to purchase some goods.

Stepping over some puddles, I asked her if she had any tickets for a concert of Bach organ music. She apologized, for she had none, but pointed to some other event and recommended that I go to it instead, for it would be very good. I declined her recommendation and thanked her. The woman's helpful advice and enthusiasm was in complete contrast to the stubbornness and lack of enthusiasm from the girls at the service bureau in our hotel.

I then crossed the road to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, and wandered inside. The place now looked quite different under the murky sky. Once again it began to rain, and so I headed for the museum. At the ticket kiosk was a notice that read: 'Adults: 30 kopecks, children: 20 kopecks, soldiers: 10 kopecks'. The last price struck me as being rather unusual; I wondered what a small child dressed as a soldier would be charged. I asked for one ticket and handed over thirty kopecks. At the entrance, another lady tore off part of the ticket marked 'Контрол' (*Kontrol*).

When I entered, I wondered why I had bothered to pay thirty kopecks to come here, for the museum was very small and there was very little to see. Downstairs were some graves and tombstones which had previously been outside. Included was Ivan Martos's statue of Princess Gagarina (which I had seen in a photograph), other fine statues made by Martos, and the tombs of Mikhail Kutuzov, Alexander Suvorov, Alexander Biron, and others.

Upstairs I looked at scaled-down models of various statues in Leningrad, some enlarged lithographs of the city, and then an uninteresting section devoted to statues of Lenin and his revolutionary henchmen. I did not spend much time here.

Outside again, I took some photographs of the monastery, waiting for people with colourful umbrellas to appear (see Chapter 6). I noticed that a large number of Russian people were coming out of a doorway that was guarded by a formidable-looking woman, and so whatever was inside was not for tourists like me. I failed to discover what was happening, but did find where the entrance was; that also looked uninviting.

The rain eventually stopped and I wandered out to the street, where I took some shots of the hotel and people crossing the street (see Chapter 6). Here I was approached by a teenage girl who addressed me, saying, 'Извините, товарищ' ('*Izvinítye, tavárish*' – 'Excuse me, comrade'), and then continued gabbling in Russian while she produced a camera and asked my advice about it. She kept talking, which meant that I had no opportunity of telling her that I could not understand her. When she handed me the camera and pointed to the shutter speed dial and the exposure control ring, I presumed that she did not know how to change the settings. With a little bit of difficulty I managed to change the shutter speed from $^{1}/_{60}$ to $^{1}/_{125}$ of a second, then raised the camera to my eye, twiddling the exposure control to see if there was an automatic light meter in the camera, which there was not. Before I could do anything else, the girl then took the camera out of my hands, thanked me and marched off to join another girl, to whom she chatted and laughed. Bewildered, I wondered what was going on; I sensed that there was something strange about the incident. Had I been momentarily distracted from something that I was not supposed to see, or had the two of us been photographed together? The girl must have known how to operate the camera, and should have realized that I was a tourist because of my Japanese camera and European clothing.

Putting the incident out of my mind, I decided to go down to the Metro and take some photographs of it and the people (I found out afterwards that this was forbidden). It was just the right time: 5 p.m., the rush hour, when few tourists would be out and about. I joined the crowd in the station and took a photograph of the platform. I then squeezed into a carriage, which stank of human sweat and drying clothes, and set off for Gostiny Dvor, where I took shots of people going through the automatic gates (see Chapter 6).

Out on the busy street I took some photos of people queuing for buses, a sight to be seen here often, despite the high frequency on most routes. I tried to get into the Roman Catholic church nearby, but discovered that it had been firmly closed for

many years. The Armenian church was also closed to the public. Disappointed, I then returned to the hotel for dinner.

After a good meal, I went into the hotel's Beriozka shop and bought two packets of slides: one of pictures by the Russian painter Repin, and the other containing views of Pavlovsk, for I had only taken a couple of shots indoors during the morning. Both boxes cost £1 each and were worth it, despite the fact that I had to choose them carefully, for many of the boxes contained pictures that were falling out of their mounts.

Walter went off on a boat trip along the Neva in the evening, but I stayed indoors, reading, writing my diary, and resting. As the evening wore on, it became very cloudy and dark. Soon it began to rain, and there was thunder and lightning. I went to bed early.