



DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION

FROM ALBION TO THE REGIONS OF THE NORTH: RUSSIANS IN DEVON

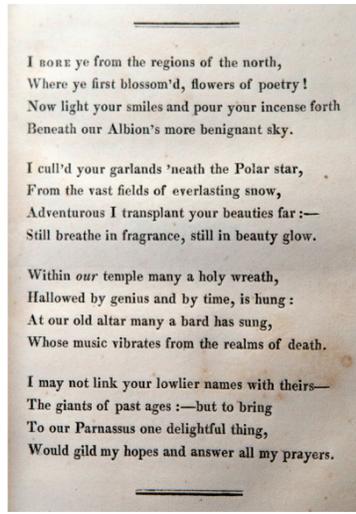
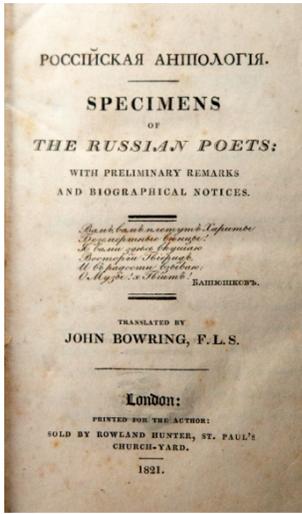
Since the 1700s, commercial and cultural links between Exeter and Russia (a major customer for Devon's thriving wool trade) have encouraged travellers in both directions.

Sir John Bowring (1792–1872), an Exeter-born wool merchant and founding member of the Devon and Exeter Institution, extended a Continental business trip in order to visit Russia in 1819. He was received at the Imperial Court in St Petersburg, where a German acquaintance, Friedrich von Adelung, introduced him to Russian poetry. In 1821, Bowring translated and published the first English-language anthology of Russian poets, for which he was later honoured by Tsar Alexander I.



National Portrait Gallery

(Right) Friedrich von Adelung (1768-1843), was a German historian and linguist, the former tutor of Grand Dukes Nicholas and Michael at the Russian court. He was also the 'illustrious friend' thanked by Sir John Bowring (Left) in the introduction to his poetry anthology. Adelung assisted with translation from Russian, probably by providing Bowring with German-language cribs.



Frontispiece (Left) and dedication of Sir John Bowring's *Specimens of the Russian Poets* (1821)

A century later, the Russian-Jewish poet and translator Samuil Marshak (1887-1964), then studying at the University of London, spent the summers of 1913 and 1914 tramping through Devon and Cornwall with his wife Sofia. His 1913 poem "20th June – 7th July" records one such walking trip between Exeter and Okehampton along the fringes of Dartmoor, sleeping in wayside inns (and sampling local cider). What he called 'the wilds of Devonshire' helped inspire Marshak's love of British literature; back in Russia, he would become that country's greatest translator of Shakespeare, Blake and Burns, among others, and perhaps its best-loved children's poet.



Samuil Marshak with his wife and sister at their cottage in Hampshire in 1913



*Once you were a general,
And ended your days in battle...
Are you contented with your pedestal
And glory in your native land?
I like your peaceful appearance,
Though in life you were a general.
How stout and pudgy you do look...
I'm sure you puffed to catch your breath...*

This extract from Marshak's poem "20th June - 7th July", addressed to the statue of General Sir Redvers Buller (erected 1905), which he would have passed on his way from St David's Station to central Exeter; is playfully irreverent. In fact, Buller had died at home in Crediton in 1908



The Dartington Hall Trust Archive

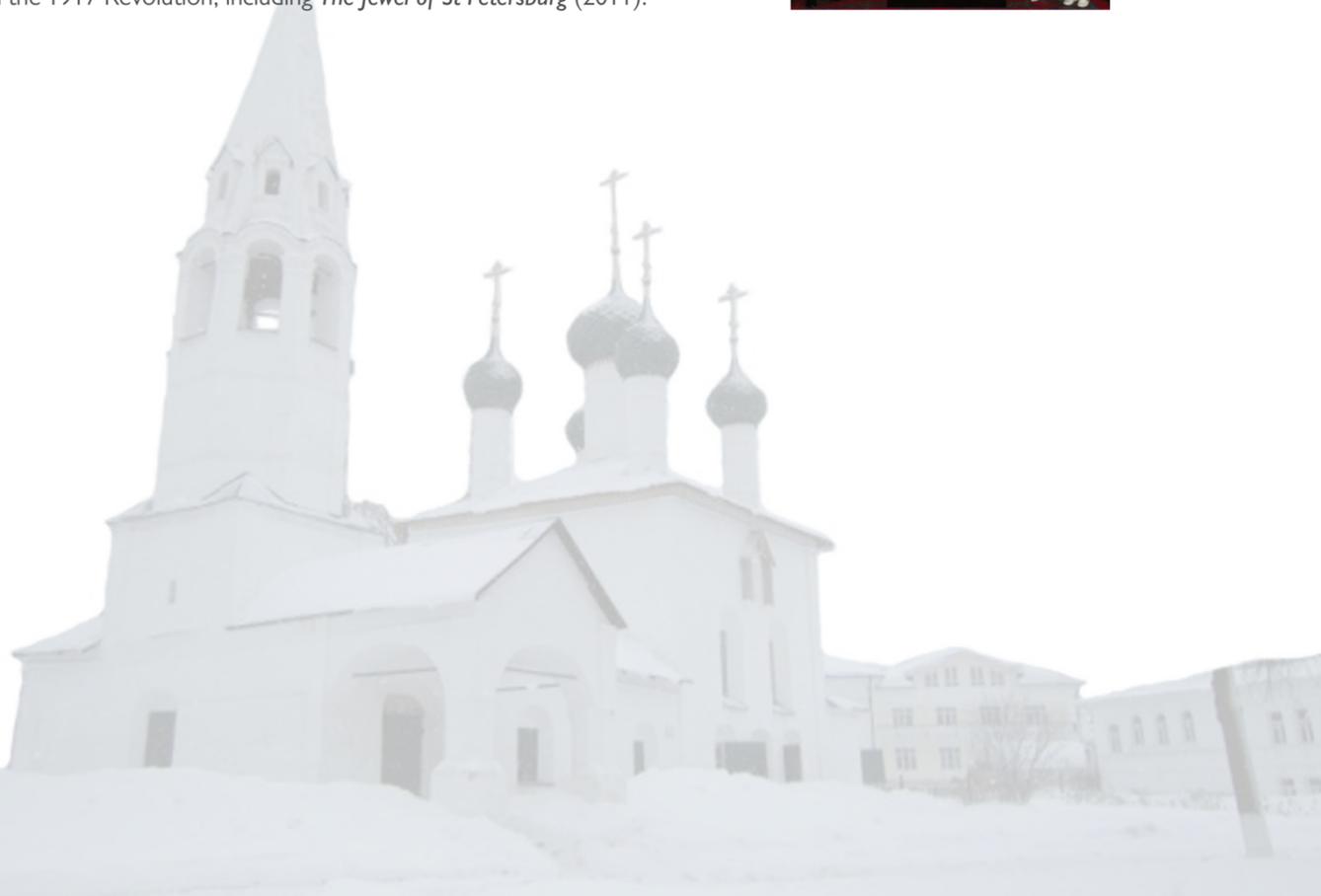
After Russia's 1917 Revolution and Civil War (1918-1922), many Russian aristocrats, intellectuals and opponents of the new Soviet regime emigrated, some settling in Devon. One of Devon's most exotic visitors was the brilliant actor and theatre director, Michael Chekhov (1891-1955), nephew of the playwright Anton Chekhov. Chekhov led a theatre school of about 20 students between 1936 and 1938 at Dartington Hall, near Torquay, which was then run as an experimental hub for creative artists by owners Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst.

Michael Chekhov teaching an acting class at Dartington Hall, Devon, in the late 1930s

Mayor of Exeter Lesley Robson with Mayor of Yaroslavl Vladimir Vitalievich Sleptsov and members of the Exeter Yaroslavl Twinning Association at the Exeter Guildhall, August 3rd, 2017



Since 1960, the University of Exeter has offered courses in Russian language, culture, and history; Russian is now a degree option within the Department of Modern Languages. The Exeter-Yaroslavl Twinning Association maintains civic connections between the medieval Russian city of Yaroslavl, near Moscow, and Exeter, organising annual exchange visits, talks, and Russian-themed events. Devon author Kate Furnivall has written four bestselling historical novels set around the 1917 Revolution, including *The Jewel of St Petersburg* (2011).



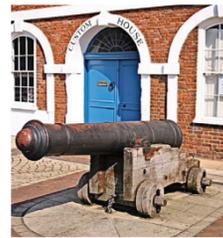


DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION

FROM ALBION TO THE REGIONS OF THE NORTH: DEVONIANS IN RUSSIA

The two cannons standing guard on the Quay outside Exeter's Custom House were originally sold to the Russian Navy for use at the Arctic port of Archangel. They were deployed at the Battle of Waterloo before being returned to England.

Military relations between Russia and Devon have not always been so friendly. The South Devonshire Regiment of Foot ("the 46th") fought in the Crimean War (1853-1856) between the Russian Empire and the Allied Powers of Great Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire. In 1854 the South Devonshires were in the key battles of Alma, Balaclava, and Inkerman; they also took part in the year-long Siege of Sebastopol (1854-55), which ended in defeat for Russia.



One of the Russian cannons, beside Exeter's Custom House

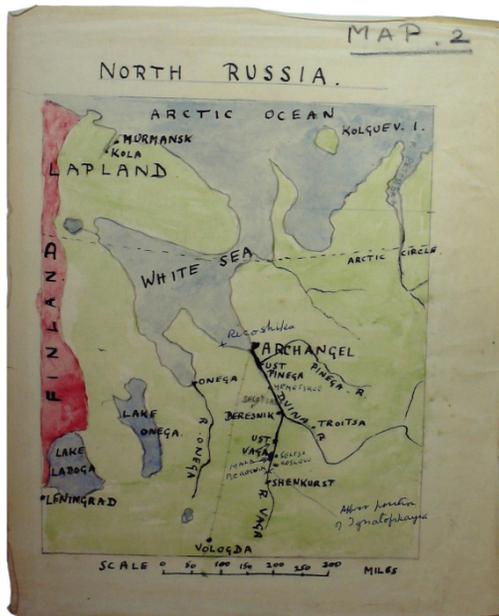
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Elizabeth Thompson, Balaclava, 1876

Manchester Art Gallery

After the 1917 Revolution, the Bolshevik government negotiated a peace settlement with Germany, bringing Russia out of World War I. Hawkish elements in the British Government (including Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War from 1919 to 1921) urged the dispatch of British troops to key Russian regions, to prevent German forces from accessing Russian coastal waters. In 1918, a British Military Mission was sent to North Russia to protect the Arctic Ocean ports. A former Devonshire Regiment officer, Major-General Sir Charles Maynard, commanded the 600-strong expeditionary force in Murmansk, while the rest of the Mission, under General Ironside, occupied nearby Archangel.



Hand-drawn map (probably by Colonel Wilcox, Devonshire Regiment) of the North Russian theatre

© Keep Military Museum

JULY 30 ON THIS DAY 1919

Since January Ironside has had to combat not only the Bolshevik in Russia, but the Bolshevik at home, who has insidiously impregnated our men with the idea that they had no right to be there, that the war in France being over they should be home, leaving Russia to work out her own salvation. In the annals of military history I doubt that we shall find another man who has had to contend with so many conflicting issues as General Ironside. I am certain that he has never been given definite instructions about his policy... He has tried, by every peaceful means conceivable, to win over the Bolsheviks to sane ideals...

PERIL OF OUR MEN AT ARCHANGEL

(From a Special Correspondent Lately at Archangel)

It was only a coincidence that my dispatch on the situation in North Russia should be published simultaneously with the official announcement that the Bolsheviks had succeeded, with the aid of treachery on the part of the supposedly loyal Russian troops, in taking the town of Onega and thereby threatening Archangel itself.

To my mind, the most serious aspect of the advance made by the Red Army was the rushing of our front at Obverskaya. Here we had a strong force of supposedly loyal Russian troops under the command of Brigadier-General Turner... I am satisfied that the situation is serious now for those troops isolated on the banks of the River Dvina, 200 miles from Archangel. Of course, General Ironside may have devised a means of getting the men down. He may have succeeded in eradicating from the Russians that which is the greatest failing of the Russian - instability of character...

Article from *The Times* by special correspondent Andrew Soutar, dated July 30 1919, questioning General Ironside's brief and the conduct of the war in Russia.

A similar mission, including some Devonshires like Lieutenant William Reed, whose letters feature in this exhibition, was sent to Southern Russia to assist White Army troops on the Crimean fronts. After the Armistice, both missions intervened in the Russian Civil War against the Bolshevik Red Army - known to the troops as 'Bolshies' or 'Bolos'. Despite considerable Western support, the White Army suffered increasing defeats and desertions during 1919. As continued military aid was unsustainable, a small North Russian Relief Force, including one company of volunteers from the Devonshire Regiment under Major Arthur Northcote, was sent to cover the retreat of the Northern Mission. In August and September 1919, these Devonshires fought Bolshevik soldiers in the boggy, mosquito-ridden forests on the Dvina river and its tributaries near Ust Vaga and Mala Bereznik: eight military medals were subsequently awarded to officers and men of the regiment.

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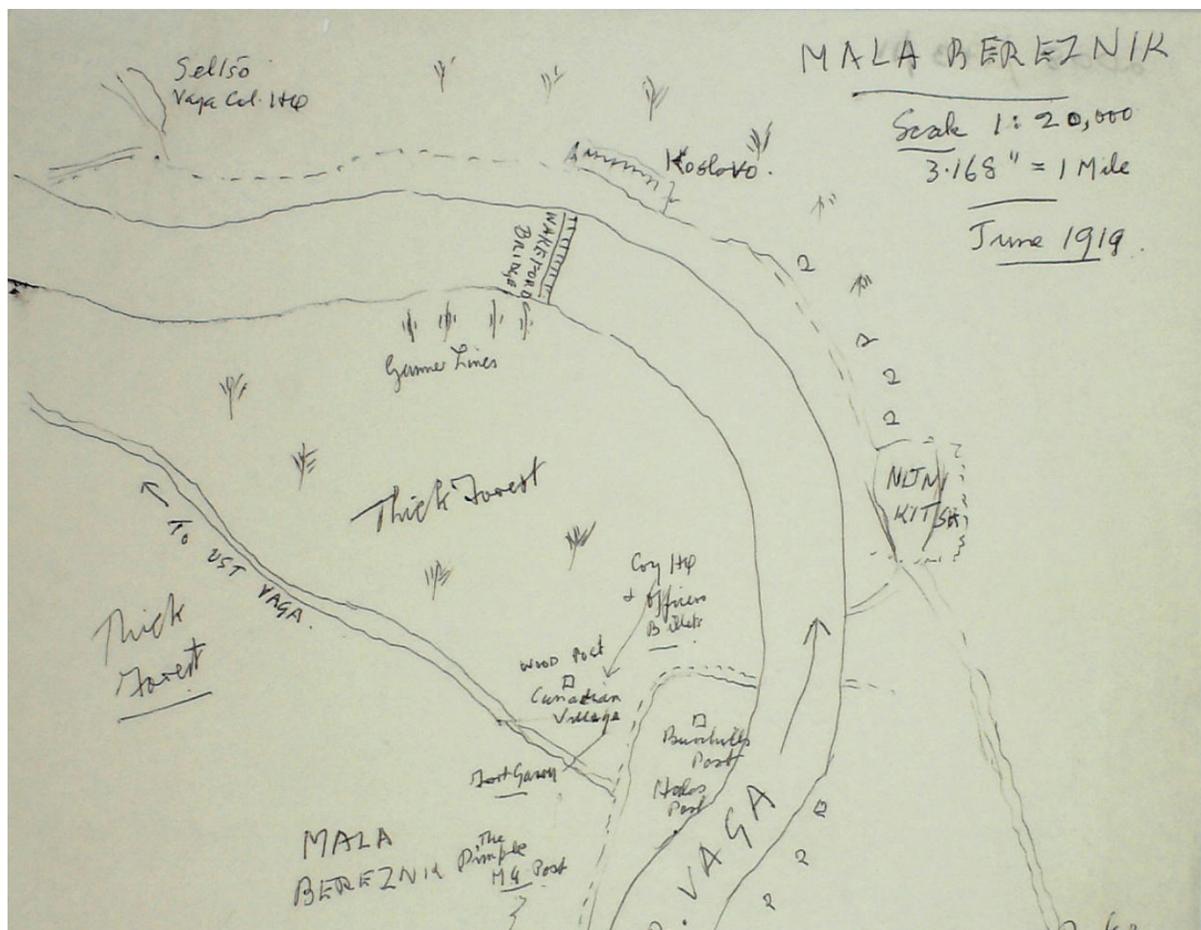
UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

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Sketch of the site of Mala Bereznik, dated June 1919



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