

## **Claire Burchett – Russia, Summer 2015**

Thanks to Pembroke's funding, I was able to spend 2 weeks on a language course in the Russian city of Petrozavodsk, in the Republic of Karelia, a 5 hour train journey from St Petersburg. Going to Russia this summer was incredibly important to me, not only to consolidate my language skills gained in my first year of learning Russian ab initio, but also to show me whether going to Russia on my year abroad would suit me.

While I was a bit daunted at first, the language school was very welcoming and helpful, giving us a map of Petrozavodsk and offering plenty of cultural activities to do in free time between lessons. We went rafting on the Shuja river and took a boat to the island of Kizhi, an open air museum and UNESCO world heritage site with a 15<sup>th</sup> century church and old peasant dwellings. Potentially less intellectually stretching was our trip to the cinema to see the 'Minions' film in Russian.

Thanks to the volunteer programme organised by the language school, we were able to meet Russian students our age, which allowed us to speak more informally and learn about their lives in Petrozavodsk. The city itself was quite small, but its architecture was sometimes reminiscent of that of St Petersburg, and I always felt safe walking around.

I benefitted both culturally and linguistically from this experience. Staying with a Russian hostess meant I was served Russian food for dinner (questionable at times...) and the conversation was always totally in Russian. There was a real mix of nationalities in our school group, which resulted in a bit of a melting pot of culture: one of our activities was a 'National food party', for which I, along with 2 other British students, attempted an apple crumble. The classes at the language school were flexible, covering topics which students wanted to revise. It therefore served as a great reminder of what had been covered in my first year, and what might have been forgotten during all the post-exam excitement of May week. I therefore feel much better prepared to commence my studies of Russian in part IB, and am very interested in looking into going to Russia on my year abroad.