

Captain John Perry worked in Russia for Peter the Great for about twenty years. He was initially sent to finish the Volga-Don Canal after an engineer from the Low Countries or Germany had failed. He then built a major shipyard on the Don at Vorontsev, before being sent to survey the waterway routes from the Volga to the Neva. He finally managed to leave Russia circa 1712, though not without great difficulty. The canals he worked on in Russia were comparatively small, though probably in advance of anything similar in the UK. I do feel that he should be better known as an early English waterway engineer, so have transcribed sections from two books, one by him, and an account in his own hand of his final work which held is in the manuscript collection at the British Library.

Little has been published on Russian canals in English, though a good outline can be found in *Soviet Waterways*, by Lebed and Yakovlev, and published in 1956. It covers what was being proposed by the Soviets at that time in greater detail than the waterway history. There are also a series of articles in *Engineering*, from Jan 1899 to March 1900. There is also *Bread upon the Waters: The St. Petersburg Grain Trade and the Russian Economy, 1703-1811* by Robert E Jones, published in 2017, which describes the trade and in lesser detail boats at that time.

1716, John Perry, *The State of Russia under the present Czar*, pp41-44

St Petersburg-Wolga canal survey

Therefore to remedy these Evils, his Majesty was pleased to send me three separate Ways quite through the Country, from the a side of the Lodiga Sea to the Wolga, to trace the several Rivers, as they fall into each other, to the Places where, at the Heads or first Springs from whence they take their Rise, they come nearest, and are most commodious for a Communication to be made. [p42] Accordingly I proceeded and took the Descent or Difference of Level, of the said several Rivers as they fall down into the Wolga on the one side of the Countrey, and discharge them selves into the Lodiga Sea on the other side of the Countrey; with such other Observations as were necessary to be made; and returned at the End of the Year 1710, to his Majesty, who was then at Petersburg, with the Draught and Report of the most proper Place, and the Time and Charge required for making the said Communication, by way of the Rivers Koefsha, Beila Lake, and Shacksna on the one side of the Countrey, falling into the Wolga, (near the Town of Rebna aforesaid;) and by the way of the River Whitigor, the

Onega Lake, and River Swire, falling into the Lodiga Sea on the other side of the Countrey; where there is required only the placing of twenty two Sluices, and the cutting of an easie Canal not three English Miles in Length: A Draught of which intended Communication, is shown in the general Map hereunto annexed.

And for the sake of those who may have Curiosity in this Affair, I shall here add this short Abstract of the Survey which I made. First, That where I survey'd the Countrey by way of the River Sass and Tiffin, to the Top of the High-land within the Countrey, from whence an Arm of the Tiffin takes its first Rise; I found the same, the whole Way, with abundance of Falls descending into the Lodiga [p43] Sea, in running 174 Russ Miles (winding as the Rivers take their Course) to be Difference of Level, 897 English Feet; and from the Top of the said Highland, in running on the other Side of the Countrey, 420 Miles, down the Rivers Chacodoshea and Molloga, to the place where the Mouth of the River Shacksna falls into the Wolga, I found the Descent to be by Observation 562 Feet.

Secondly, By way of the River Emsta, Elmena Lake, and River Volcoff falling into the Lodiga Sea, I found the Descent in running 550 Russ Miles, to be 568 Foot; and on the other side of the

Countrey, Southward, descending by way of the Rivers Twere and Wolga, as far as the Mouth of the Shacksna, aforesaid, in running 720 Russ Miles, I found the Descent to be 233 Foot.

And in the third place which I survey'd, quite through the Countrey, by way of the River Whitigor, Onega Lake and River Swire falling into the Lodiga Sea; in the running of 278 Russ Miles, I found the Descent to be but 445 Feet from the Top of the highest Land where the Rivers come nearest for a Canal to be cut; and the Descent down on the other side of the Countrey, in running 418 Miles, by way of the Rivers Koefsha, Beila Lake, and Shacksna falling into the Wolga at the same Place beforenamed, but 110 Foot.

This being much the lowest or most level Part of the Countrey, attended with the least [p44] Falls, and requiring the least Number of Sluices to be made; and the Rivers Swire and Shacksna, and good Part of the Rivers Koefsha and Whitigor being already navigable for small Vessels which pass the whole Year backward and forward, except only when the Rivers are frozen; I therefore recommended it to his Czarish Majesty, in my Report, as abundantly preferable for the making the said Communication that was intended.

But just before I arrived with the said Report, there came Advice, that the Turks, at the Instigation of the King of Sweden, had declared War on the other side of the Countrey, which put a new Face upon all Affairs. The Thoughts of the said Communication was then laid aside at once. The Lord Apraxin who was Admiral, with the other two Flag Officers who were Foreigners, and most of the Captains and Seamen, were thereupon immediately sent to Veronize: Strong Detachments of the Army were ordered to march from all Parts, and new Levies immediately to be made. The Czar himself went first to Mosco to settle Matters with the Senate (whom he had created the Year before, composed of 9 Boyars;) and from thence he went directly to his Army, and I was left again to attend the uncertain Event of this new War.

But before his Majesty's Departure, as sudden as it was, I humbly renewed my Application to him for my Arrears, which he had promised me...