

## Samuel Starobinets, a Cobbler from Berezin

by Howard Cuckle

Samuel was married to Tonya Lifchitz and lived in Igumen, which was renamed Cherven after the Russian Revolution. Most of the information I have on this couple was obtained after 1992, when following a long period of silence their daughter, Leah, reestablished contact with her family in Hull, a small town in the North-East of England.



Samuel and Tonya Starobinets

My grandparents, Nochum and Matla Lifchitz were first cousins from Igumen who emigrated to Hull in the late 19th century. Tonya (born 1891) was the youngest sibling of Matla and the only one who remained in Igumen; a brother lived in Puchowitz.



Jacob Wolf Lifchitz

When Samuel and Tonya married they lived in the large wooden house built by her father, Jacob Wolf Lifchitz. In my childhood I heard a story that Jacob Wolf was sent dollars from his son in New York at a time when it was illegal to possess foreign currency, and was imprisoned where he died. The couple had five children: Chaya (1917), Israel (1918), Leah (1919), Ilya (1922) and Yaacov (1923).

Tonya often spoke to her children about their family in England and America and in the 1930s wrote a letter to Nochum and Matla in Hull. Learning of their poor financial condition, the family sent them a Singer sewing machine.

Tonya died in 1934 of heart failure.

Chaya married Vadimir Nesnevich, son of a Hospital doctor in Igumen, and moved to Minsk where they had two children.

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In 1941 Samuel was visiting Chaya in Minsk when the Germans occupied Igumen; Vadimar was in the Red Army, fighting at the front, where he eventually fell. Samuel, Chaya and the children returned to Igumen where they were shot on 2 February 1942 together with more than 2000 other Jews by an Einsatzgruppe commanded by SS - Brigadeführer Franz Stahlecker.



Chaya and her mother, Tonya

The others escaped. Israel, a gifted engineer, was living in Saratov at that time. Leah was married to Aron Boukin and lived in Vitebsk. Yaacov managed to escape from Igumen and reach his sister in Vitebsk, and they all then travelled with great difficulty to Saratov. Aron eventually fell in the Red Army, Ilya was seriously injured whilst fighting in Stalingrad, and Yaacov was injured fighting near Moscow.

The house built by Jacob Wolf Lifchitz was burned to the ground.

After the War there was a correspondence in Yiddish between Leah and the family in Hull. But then the Iron Curtain descended and there was no further word until 1992. Following the thaw in Soviet-Western relations Leah decided to write again. My grandparents were long dead and their previous address no longer existed but by chance the letter was delivered.

The younger son of Nochum and Matla, Jack (Hebrew name, Jacob Wolf) Lennard was fascinated by Jewish history and was consequently well known at the local reference library in Hull. One day the librarian showed him a letter, which appeared erroneously to be addressed to the Member of Parliament for Hull. This had been forwarded to the Parliament where it was kindly translated into English. It was intended for a Mr and Mrs Lifchitz and the librarian asked Jack if he knew of them.

Imagine the emotion with which the letter was received.

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Jack immediately flew to Charkov for a reunion with the long lost family; this was followed by several meetings and conversations, including my own visit to Ilya in Moscow where he is a retired professor of geology.



Jack (center) visiting the long-lost family in Charkov.