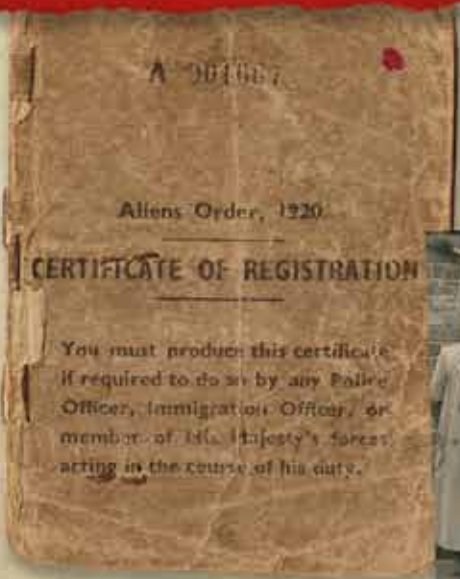
In war & peace

Collected Memories of Birmingham's Poles



Midlands Polish COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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This booklet gives a presentation of the main parts of the 'Collected Memories of Birmingham's Poles' project created and carried out by the Midlands Polish Community Association with funding provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund

The Midlands Polish Community Association was created to serve both Poles and other people interested in Polish history and culture. Its objectives are to broaden cultural awareness and understanding and to aid social integration within the Midlands and assisting recent immigrants from Poland, currently living within the Midlands area, to integrate into local society. It will promote social and cultural events which support these objectives

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www.hlf.org.uk

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Midlands Polish Community Association
Polish Millennium House
Bordesley Street
Birmingham B5 5PH

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i. Introduction

It is widely known that a great many, mainly young, Polish people arrived in Britain in the years after the accession of Poland into the EU in April 2004. A good many of them arrived in Birmingham and settled in the city and other parts of the West Midlands. New Polish shops and sections in supermarkets selling Polish food have made the presence of these newcomers obvious to most city residents. In contrast, few are aware that there had been an earlier wave of Polish migrants in the early post-war years. These migrants were predominantly Polish servicemen and their families, the latter of whom had spent a number of years in various camps abroad in parts of the British Empire. There were also a number of Polish orphans whose parents had died during the war either before or during active service in the army or air-force. In Birmingham these Polish migrants established a significant and thriving community, with three well-established clubs, the most visible of which today is the Polish Catholic Club located in Polish Millennium House in Digbeth. However, in the 60 to 70 years since they first arrived, their numbers have dwindled as the community aged. Only those who arrived as children or young adults still remain alive. The question which must occur to any intelligent and curious English person is: why was there this post-wave of Polish settlers to Britain?

They were not, as with the post-2004 wave, ‘‘economic migrants”. No, they were primarily “political refugees”, and they were refugees from Soviet communism. This project interviews 21 of these early post-war Polish settlers: our “interviewees”. This booklet gives summaries of their life histories, including relevant photographs and documents. Let us briefly set out the key relevant historical background.

The interviewees' locations of residence in 1939

annexed by Soviet Union, 1945

territory transferred from Germany to Poland, 1945

Lives changed forever by the Second World War (WWII)

Please look at the map – the pink area to the east was Polish territory in 1939, but occupied sequentially by Soviet forces, then by the Nazis, and then retaken by Soviet forces and annexed to become part of The Soviet Union in 1945. Today this area is split between the independent countries of Lithuania, Belarus, and The Ukraine. The white area was Polish territory in 1939 and remained so after WWII. The yellow areas were part of Germany in 1939, but became Polish territory after WWII.

Table 1 shows how many of the interviewees lived in each broad section of the map at the outbreak of WWII in September 1939 and also, for those in the “lost territories”, in which present-day country is their former residence.

Table 1: Interviewees categorised by residence, September 1939

Residence in 1939:	Poland (clear area)	Poland - “lost territories’ (pink Area)		
Totals:	5	16		
Country where place of residence is today:	5 Poland	4 Lithuania	3 Belarus	9 The Ukraine

A summary of the effects on lives of WWII

These effects can best be summarised as follows. Of the 21 interviewees

17 – fought in regular Polish units or resistance units against Nazi Germany in the Second World War, or were from families where their father or siblings, fought in the war

15 – were from families who were subjected to deportation to Siberia or deepest Russia, carried out on the orders of Joseph Stalin

6 – were from families who suffered the death of one-or-more members during their exile to Siberia, or their journey to the Middle-East after release from Siberia

3 – were from families, members of whom were forced into conscript labour by the Nazis in factories or on farms in Poland, Germany or occupied France.

All of those interviewed are in one or more of the above categories.

Lives in Britain and Birmingham

All the interviewees have spent a large part of their lives in Britain, with a big part of this in Birmingham. Some came as adults, some came as children – one was born at a Polish resettlement camp in The Midlands in 1949. They all managed to find employment (no interviewee ever mentioned any spell of unemployment) and become productive and law-abiding members of British society. All but two of the interviewees had a Polish spouse, and mostly they kept strongly to Polish cultural traditions in their homes and places of worship. All but two spoke Polish at home and had their children learn the Polish language. Their children, however, rapidly became bilingual upon starting school and the overwhelming majority of their children did very well at school. Interestingly, quite a substantial number of their children have married partners who are not Polish.

The interviewees have all had lives greatly affected by WWII. They mainly arrived in Britain by troopship or large merchant ship after 1945. A few arrived during the war by small boat or aeroplane. They stayed in Britain, with most of their lives spent in Birmingham.

The structure of the booklet

The next section of this booklet gives a deeper and wider overview of the history of Polish settlement in Britain and Birmingham. This is followed by summaries of the 21 individual interviews.

The next section then provides some details on the origins and development of the project. Finally, we acknowledge the roles played in the project by various members of the Midlands Polish Community Association.

ii. Historical Extracts

Antecedents: The Polish presence in Birmingham prior to 1939

There have been varying numbers of people from Poland living in Birmingham over the past two hundred years. In fact, many who had arrived from Poland, as its territory was variably constituted over the past two centuries, would have identified themselves as Jewish, rather than Polish. There is evidence of a Jewish population in Birmingham from the 18th Century; people who fled from persecution and the Jewish pogroms. By 1871, Jewish numbers had reached 2,360 out of Birmingham's total population of 343,787. At this time, of this Jewish population, 251 were said to originate from Germany and Northern Europe while 387 were Russian or Polish (www.bham.de/brum.html).

In his 'History of the Polish Community in Birmingham (1947-1972)' Father Kącki recorded that in a cemetery in Smethwick, he believed there to be a grave of a Polish insurgent of 1863. Indeed in the 1950s, when workers were demolishing some old houses in Aston, they found a cross fashioned in black metal, on one side of which was carved the word WARSAW under a crown of thorns, and on the other side, on the cross-piece, the words IN MEMORY, and on the vertical shaft were the dates 25th and 27th February, and 8th April 1861. He concluded from this that it was probably a Polish insurgent, who had brought this tragic memento with him to Britain to remind people of the rights of his native land. In 1913, scout leader Andrzej Małkowski brought a group of Polish scouts from the three partitioned zones of Poland to the scout jamboree at Sutton Coldfield. Despite protests from the partitioning powers - Germany, Austria and Russia - the founder of the scouting movement, General Baden-Powell, agreed to let the group set up camp and take part in the jamboree under the red-and-white flag of Poland (Father Kącki, 1972).

World War Two and the forging of the Polish Community in Britain

World War Two (WWII), which began when the German army invaded Poland on the 1st of September 1939, followed shortly after by Soviet Russian forces invading from the east on the 17th of September, led, within a few years, to a substantial increase in the size of the Polish community in Britain. Between the years 1940 and 1942, 1.7 million Polish citizens of different ethnic backgrounds and religions, Polish, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish were deported by the Soviets from eastern Poland to special labour camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan and Soviet Asia. Towards the end of WWII under an "agreement" reached at Yalta, the borders of Poland were drastically changed. There was a gain of former German territory in the West (cities gained included Stettin and Breslau) as far as the Oder-Neisse Line. and a loss of former Polish territory – nearly half pre-war Poland's total area - in the east (cities lost included Wilno and Lwów) incorporated into the Soviet Union with the adoption of the 'Curzon Line' as Poland's new eastern border. Overall, Poland emerged 20 per cent smaller than it had been in 1939. This loss in the east was a great blow to many of the Poles located in Britain or in camps in its colonies because they were disproportionately from the "lost territories" of the east. In the eyes of many Poles, while being on the so called 'winning side', Poland ended up being treated as severely as the defeated Germany (Stachura, 2004). This displacement of Poles and other Eastern European nationals contributed to the enforced exile of many and, as a consequence, the total number of Polish people, including soldiers and their dependants, who arrived in the UK through the process of forced migration following WWII is estimated to have been over 200,000 (Kershaw and Pearsall, 2000).

The Polish Government in Exile had moved from Paris to London in 1940 and during the years 1939-1941 the British government, press and community had been largely sympathetic to the plight of the Polish people. However in 1941, after Germany invaded Russia and Stalin was forced to switch his allegiance from Germany to the Western Allies, British-Polish relations were affected. Gradually, the "London Poles" began to get a "bad press", inspired by the barely suppressed pro-Stalinism of many liberal intellectuals and trades union activists. Words such as unrealistic, intransigent and unrepresentative began to be used in leftist organs. The Daily Worker newspaper called them "Fascist reactionaries", "landlords" and "Jew baiters" (Zubrzycki, 1956). Pro-Soviet propaganda was increasingly delivered by sections of the press and accusations of right wing fanaticism against the Poles began, including organised marches against Poles by the Left.

The severing of diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in Exile by the Soviets in 1943 meant that all future discussions of Polish matters took place between the representatives of the Powers (United States, Great Britain, and Soviet Union) without Polish participation (Davies, 1982). Churchill's personal feelings about the way the Poles were treated at the end of the WWII are well documented. When he outlined the Yalta agreement to Parliament in February 1945, he followed by stating

> "In any event, His Majesties Government will never forget the debt they owe to the Polish troops who have served them so valiantly, and for all those who have fought under our command, I earnestly hope that it may be possible to offer the citizenship and freedom of the British Empire, if they so desire.....we should think it an honour to have such faithful and valiant warriors dwelling among us as if they were men from our own blood" (quoted in Sword, Davies, and Ciechanowski, 1989 pp).

This later became known as Churchill's 'pledge' and caused concern in the Foreign Office.

Of course, in July 1945, the British people chose the path of socialism: Churchill and the Conservatives lost office to the Labour Party led by Attlee, and the balance of opinion within Labour and the left towards Poles and The Polish Question was different. They were distinctly more pro-Soviet than the stalwart anti-Bolshevist Churchill and, consequently, distinctly less favourably disposed towards the exiled and displaced Poles. Nothing better represents this than the shameful exclusion of Polish forces from the Victory Parade of May 1946. In fact, there were strong feelings within the Labour Party and its trades union paymasters that as few Poles as possible should remain in Britain and that everything should be done to ensure their removal, including negotiation with the Dominion and Commonwealth countries. Thus, Attlee even tried to reinterpret Churchill's pledge, as having been merely an aspiration. But, thankfully, British public opinion would not tolerate such a shameful reneging. However, there emerged the provision of free passage to repatriates following discharge from the forces, accompanied by 56 days pay and allowances plus a war gratuity according to the years of service and rank in the Polish forces while under British Command (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski, 1989). Thus, large numbers did return to Poland. By the end of 1949, 105,000 Poles had returned to where they had previously lived, or had gone to live in the new areas of Poland. Those Poles who were unwilling to be repatriated to a Communist Poland, but yet took the opportunity to migrate from Britain, tended to move to countries such as Canada and Australia with already significant European populations. The Poles along with Jewish, Baltic and other peoples who were not able to return home following WWII became Displaced Persons, people who, because of their persecution and suffering, were regarded as having been loyal to the Allied cause (Jacobmeyer, 2003).

The problem of registration, supervision and settlement of the Poles imposed a great burden of work on the Aliens Branch of the Home Office and the Police Forces throughout the UK (Kershaw and Pearsall 2000). To address this issue the Polish Resettlement Act 1947 was passed which gave the responsibility for meeting the needs of Poles and their dependants that had come to Britain since September 1939, either by cash allowance or maintenance in camps or hostels of the Assistance Board. This Act also ensured that the health needs of the Poles and their dependants were met and, further, that certain Polish pharmacists and doctors were to be given temporary registration to practise in Britain. These measures identified the Poles as a special case which caused some ill feeling not only in the Government but in the wider public domain.

The Table shows the dramatic effect the war had upon the numbers of the Polish born population in Britain

Table -- Polish born population resident in Britain, 1931–1991

1931	44462
1951	162339
1961	127246
1971	110925
1981	93721
1991	73700

Sources: see footnote 15, in http://www.ashgate.com/pdf/SamplePages/moving_lives_intro.pdf

The data in the Table also shows the shrinking of the Polish-born population in the years after 1951, due to deaths amongst the older Polish settlers, and the excess of outmigration over the very small in-migration in most of the period.

Polish Organisations in Britain

There were established Polish groups in London as early as 1830, and the Polish Catholic Mission and two new further groups, the Polish Welfare Committee and the Polish Catholic Society of the White Eagle, formed around the time of WWI. Many of the post WWII Polish initially saw themselves as being in Britain only on a temporary basis. For them the importance of preparing themselves to return one day to a free Poland was paramount and the notion of integrating or assimilating into a British way of life was for many something for which they were little prepared.

Following the withdrawal of the British Government's recognition of the Polish Government in Exile in 1946, all social, occupational and welfare organisations came under the umbrella of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain. From that time until 1990 the Federation represented the interests of the Polish immigrants with respect to the British authorities (http://www.zpwb.org.uk/en/historical). The aim of this organisation was to set up a system of Polish institutions to take over all such functions normally carried out by the state and to encourage in every way the creation of distinct and self-contained Polish communities in various parts of England (housing estates in rural districts and Polish urban Parishes) to safeguard against assimilation and ensure that the membership of Polish associations would reduce the contacts between Poles and the British people (Zubrzycki, 1956).

There were over 40 organisations under the Federation with the largest being the Polish Combatants Association, whose main aim was to maintain the identity and national distinctiveness of the Polish Community in Exile. They stated that Poles must resist all assimilative tendencies of the British people at all costs; that their main concern was the future of the younger generation of Poles who were undergoing education in English schools. They go on to state "our countrymen in Poland are unable to preserve the identity of Polish cultural values in face of forced Sovietisation and it is therefore our duty to perform this historical task" (Zubrzycki, 1956). There was strong pressure exerted by the Polish political parties on Poles in Britain not to apply for Naturalisation; if they wished to apply, it was recommended that they should first seek permission from the Polish Government in Exile, contributing to exclusion from the wider British society.

The development of the Polish Community in Birmingham

Birmingham is now seen very much as a multicultural city, but in 1939 it was still predominantly homogeneous. Many of the Polish people who arrived in Birmingham following WWII had lived in what was then eastern Poland or the Kresy region. Identifying themselves as political exiles, they arrived in Birmingham at a time when the city was rebuilding

itself in the aftermath of the WWII, when nationhood and self protection were at its height. At that time many men were returning to Britain from the war-fronts in Europe and the Far East and looking for work, and the women rebuilding their married/domestic lives, having been part of the war effort either at home or taking on work that would previously have been predominantly male on the land or in the factories.

In response to the growing numbers of Polish exiles in Birmingham the Anglo-Polish Society was founded in 1944. The objectives of the Anglo-Polish Society were to promote and consolidate friendship and understanding between the Polish and British peoples and to formulate and encourage arrangements for mutual exchange of information in respect of language, arts, science and other cultural activities of the two countries. The membership of the Society was open to 'all who are interested in the work of the society and whose application is accepted by the association'. The group organised fundraising events, public lectures and meetings, and free public lectures were offered at the University of Birmingham. It would appear that these were mainly middle class individuals and that the organisation was focused around the University of Birmingham. The Birmingham Anglo-Polish organisation did not survive but others continued in different parts of the country.

Within the Birmingham Polish community there were groups of Polish nationals who had different political views and who established their own clubs. Three Polish clubs were established in Birmingham before 1962. One was for the Polish invalids from the war on the Soho Road in Handsworth, supported by the Polish Socialist Party with private money and money from the Polish Government in Exile. A second was the White Eagle Club in Gravelly Hill, which was established with money from the Polish Red Cross. The third was at Polish Millennium House in Digbeth. The first two are no longer in existence and with the largest membership and still being in operation, it is the third club that has been central to the majority of interviewees in this study.

The first Polish language Catholic Mass was conducted at the Oratory Catholic Church on the Hagley Road in Birmingham in 1947 by Father Krause. He later moved to St Michael's Church in New Meeting Place where the English priest offered him the disused rooms next door to the church as an office and a meeting place for Polish people. It was here that Father Krause called the first meeting of the Polish Circle and also where they began to sell sandwiches and tea, hold regular meetings and later established a small shop selling Polish groceries. They held dances, opened a bar and a mobile shop in the form of a van that travelled to Handsworth, Sparkhill, Small Heath and Erdington where Polish people were known to be living. By April 1949 the Birmingham Polish parish was under the guidance of Father Kącki.

Many of the founders of the Polish Millennium Club originated from former eastern Poland and had a shared experience of being deported to Siberia and then, for those for whom it was possible, had joined the Polish army or Air Force under British command. In the 1940s and early 1950s some were studying at the University of Birmingham, in either medicine or architecture. One of their number became the first chairman of the all-male management committee. They began with a membership of about 70 which grew to over 3000 members.

As Father Kącki became more established he brought in the idea of voluntary work and when the plans for the new city bypass including the demolition of the first building, at St Michael's, became known, it was decided to raise funds to build a Polish club in Birmingham. In 1958 a new President was voted in and it was at this time that the organisation and collection of funds to acquire the land and build the existing Polish Millennium Club began. There was a membership fee of half a crown (two shillings and sixpence or twelve and a half New Pence) monthly. There were regular collections in the church and eight thousand pounds was raised from the first club, which was added to by individual donations from Poles. Finally on 9th December 1962, the Millennium House was officially opened. The Club had thus been built and paid for in cash entirely by donations from the Polish exiled community and it became the new anchor of the Polish Catholic community in Birmingham. Birmingham's Public Library holds some of the yearly reports of the Polish Catholic club dating from 1953 to 2004. However, they are not a complete record and are in Polish, which makes them inaccessible to non-Polish readers.

Employment Issues

The numbers of first generation post WWII Birmingham Polish never exceeded 3,000. They represented a cross-section of Polish society: professional people, workers, intellectuals, natives of the eastern borderlands of Poland, career army officers (including two generals), professors, judges, teachers, doctors, and they came by various routes (Father Kącki, 1972). Despite being highly skilled in Poland, apart from doctors and dentists, most had to either take unskilled work or retrain, which many found to be difficult or they thought of it as demeaning. In the immediate post-war years there were raw memories of high unemployment in Britain before the war and, consequently, in the beginning the unions were opposed to the Polish workers taking British jobs. British plans to resettle former Polish military personnel were drawn up in collaboration with the trade union movement and business leaders; however this did not prevent problems. There were four negotiated conditions supposed to apply before the introduction of a group of Poles into any industry. Firstly, there should be appropriate consultations with the trade unions directly concerned. Second, no Poles should be employed in any grade in industry where British labour was available. Third, where Poles required further training for filling posts in industry the conditions under which such training would be provided should be comparable to British ex-servicemen. Finally, if any Pole was placed in a suitable occupation and for any reason left it, subsequent employment should be secured only through the Ministry of Labour (Sword, Davies, Ciechanowski, 1989 pp 256). Agreements were made to employ Poles in Scottish mines following local negotiation with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) but lack of agreement at national level prevented this happening. Despite vacancies and shortages, and low stocks, of coal, the NUM executive were resolutely opposed to the employment of even experienced Polish miners, fearful that the this might lead to unemployment in the coal industry. The National Union of Agricultural workers (NUAW) had long argued that conditions for farm workers deterred native workers from seeking employment in agriculture. Thus they had been demanding a more realistic structure of hours and wages to compare with workers in urban areas and, despite vacancies, they would not initially agree to the introduction of Poles into agriculture. At the Trades Union Congress in 1946 the NUM and the NUAW opposed the General Council's recommendations to support the government's efforts to employ the Poles in British industry. Some of the opposition was scurrilously fueled by suggestions that the Poles arriving in Britain had served under British command only after deserting from the German Army. The fact that the Poles were openly anti Soviet Russia was further reason for some of the pro-communist union members to oppose their employment.

Thankfully other unions were more open. The General Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) had established links with the Polish equivalent as early as 1943, and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) actively recruited Poles from the resettlement camps from 1947 onwards, enabling many Poles to find employment at a time when other unions were opposed to their introduction to the workplace.

By 1949 it was reported that over seven thousand Poles where working in the mines, foundries and the factories of the Midlands. The Birmingham Gazette reporter, Dennis Irving, spent two days interviewing them and found that many felt they were isolated and that they were condemned to the life of a labourer because of agreements that had been made between the trade unions and the employers; conditions that were imposed to protect the British workers. Irving reported that employers thought highly of the hard working Poles, but that they would be the first to go with redundancy regardless of how long they had worked for the company. A welfare officer was quoted as saying "we are building up a class of semi-slave labour, the trade unions who encouraged it should look beyond the present and call a halt to it. We talk about equal rights and fair play and here we are withholding those rights from the Poles" (Birmingham Gazette, 1949).

As the social and political climate evolved so did the lives of the Polish people living in Birmingham. The Birmingham Poles have made a significant if often invisible contribution to the fabric of the city despite a very difficult and traumatic beginning.

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Website:
www.zpwb.org.uk/en/historical

Newspaper:
Birmingham Gazette 1949

iii. Summaries of the interviews of the project participants:

01. Mr Michał Babicz

Michał was born on the 12th August, 1927 in Boldury, near Brody, in the Tarnopol region [now deep inside the Ukraine]. He was the eldest of six children, having three brothers and two sisters. In 1935 his family moved: "my father sold his farm and bought another one, near the border between the Tarnopol and Wołyń voivodships. He built a house there, and that's where we were when the war broke out."

The beginning of the war brought great personal tragedy, as Michał recalls: ***"My mother died on 1st September, 1939 the day war broke out.*** The war came in the morning and in the evening my mother died. My grandmother stayed with us, but my grandfather had to go away, and it was the last time I saw him. In 1944 he was killed by Ukrainian bandits. But my grandmother stayed with us and witnessed everything that happened to us after mother's death." Soon the war came to his area: "I remember it was a beautiful autumn that year. … In the second week after the outbreak of war, on the road between Beresteczko and Racichów, there appeared a huge crowd of civilians – refugees fleeing east from the German front. They had all their possessions with them, and small babies in prams. ***In the evenings the German planes started shooting the crowds with machine guns. People had nowhere to hide because there were only fields on both sides of the road.*** This was happening every day, up until 14th September."

Then the Russians arrived from the east, and the refugees turned round again and started heading west. It was a terrible winter in 1939/40 under Russian occupation, and: "On 10th February in the middle of the night we heard a tremendous banging on the door. My father opened the door and an NKVD [Soviet Security Police] man entered with a gun and seven Red Army people. They scattered around our house. … Suddenly they took something out of the sewing machine drawer and shouted 'weapons'. They immediately surrounded my father and put guns against him. We started crying uncontrollably, it was so frightening. We'd lost our mother, then grandmother left, and now father had guns and bayonets pointed at him. I'll never forget this. What the Russians had taken for a weapon was simply my toy gun, which I had put in the drawer of the sewing machine. My father, pale and scared, managed to explain it to the soldiers. This picture of my father surrounded by those ready-to-kill soldiers will stay with me for ever." The Soviet official told them they would only be taken 110 miles distant, but a young soldier whispered "take as much as possible, there's nothing where you're going."

The family had to go by sledge to the railway station, 24 km. away. Michał has a last memory: ***"We had a big dog and he howled terribly as we were leaving. One of the Soviets shot him dead. That was my last memory from our house."***

They were then put in cattle trucks and their long journey to Siberia began. They were in the cattle truck for twenty-two days! Their rail journey only finished when the track ran out at Kotlas in Siberia.

The family endured nearly eighteen months at their camp in Siberia before the amnesty of July 1941. Then they were free to leave Siberia. Michał recalls their journey south: "Several families had to chip in to 'rent' a railway coach, the same kind as the one we were deported in to Siberia. … the coach was attached to any train that was found going south. We travelled for five weeks. The first major stop I remember was Molotov. Everybody jumped out of the train in order to get some food. I joined the queue and got a big wooden ladle from a Soviet officer, who told me to never part with it. I went into a big room – ***there were tables laid and a huge cauldron of hot stew in the middle, with meat and vegetables. We all had as much of it as we could, it was the first time I'd had a full meal in Russia."***

Their journey took them to Tashkent and then by boat to the Aral Sea, then to Engels in Uzbekistan. Here, after the departure of their father to join General Anders' army, tragedy struck: a typhus epidemic which sent all four children to hospital and, after a premature discharge whilst they were still weak, his 5-year old brother Bolek died. Thereafter, with their father away and out of contact, the remaining children were placed in the newly formed Polish orphanage.

Next they were moved to Baghdad and, here, where Polish forces were assembling, there was a brief reunion with their father. Here also Michał passed exams for the Junak Cadet school and had his four years of secondary education and then did a year of technical (mechanics) college.

Michal's family were very scattered by the end of the war: Michał was in Palestine, his father in Egypt, his sister and youngest brother were in Mexico, and his other sister and brother were in Russia, near Archangelsk.

In 1947 Michał came to England, and spent his first months at a camp near Winchester. But nearing twenty and given his background in mechanics and the need to build a future, he made for Birmingham. Housing was in short supply in Birmingham in the late 1940s. Thus, at first he had to share a room with seven others in a house in Handsworth, although later his landlady, who regarded him favourably, allowed an Englishman and Michał to share a double room. Finding work, however, was a little tricky. This was because a number of trade unions were dominated by communists and, wishing to please Stalin's whims, made the employment of Poles difficult or impossible. But some firms – often where there was a boss or senior manager with war-time experience of Polish soldiers and airmen - positively sought to employ Poles. Michał quickly found work at Chamberlain and Hookham, in Digbeth. Most people working there were Polish.

Michał was ambitious and quickly sought better qualifications, attending Higher National Diploma evening courses in mechanics, which he obtained after five years.

Michał was from the start a very active member of the Polish community. He was one of the few adults in the first years who had a reasonable English vocabulary and he would often spend time as a translator at estate agents for fellow Poles who were looking to buy a house. But his major contribution is undoubtedly as a fund-raiser: he spent hundreds of evenings and weekends collecting small amounts from other Poles in order to fund the building of a Polish community centre.

01. 'Barbara' Cadet School, 1945.
02. 1946.
03. Primary Certificate in English, Middle East Forces Army Education Corps, June 1945.
04. Haifa, 1947.
05. Final Matriculation ('A' levels), at 'Camp Barbara' in Palestine, June 1946.
06. Gold Medal, National Treasury of the Republic of Poland, London 1985.

02. Mrs Teresa Babicz

Teresa was born in 1937 in the very south of Poland, in a small place called Peczeniżyn, near Kolomyja and the foot of Carpathian Mountains. This was then near the Polish border with Russia/Ukraine (today it is deep within Ukraine) and Romania. Her father was a border policeman. He was one of the first to be arrested by the Russians after they occupied the area in early 1940. She was too young to remember the details of the arrest and has only a few vague memories of the deportation of her family in 1940 – grandmother, mother, and herself - to Siberia. She remembers being lifted by a Red Army soldier, wrapped in her quilt, and being placed into a sleigh. The weather was so fiercely cold, that undoubtedly it was this quilt and a fur coat of her father's that kept them from perishing on the long, hard, journey.

In the camp in Siberia, her mother had to do arduous work, supplying other camps by driving a cart pulled by two oxen. Food was so scarce and the family so hungry that Teresa was sometimes sent to beg for carrots in the fields. This particular ordeal lasted until the amnesty of summer 1941. Then there was a long train journey to Krasnovodsk in Kazakhstan, from where they crossed the Caspian Sea to Pahlevi, and then on to Tehran.

Teresa recalls: "In Tehran we got split up into groups to go to different parts of the British Empire. Since my uncle was in the army, we got to go to India, to a camp where there were over five thousand of us, mainly women and children. ***The Indians were wonderful to us, very friendly and helpful and we were very well taken care of."*** Certainly, Teresa encountered an unusual and exotic range of animals – snakes, scorpions, a parrot, and monkeys – during her years in India.

Teresa was in India from 1942 to 1947, by which time she was almost ten years old. By this time they had received news that their father had survived his imprisonment (most had died), escaped, and had fought in the Polish army of General Maciek in France, Belgium, and Holland. In September they sailed for England. On the long journey Teresa had her first attempt at learning English. The first winter in England was spent at a camp with thirty other Poles in one large hut. After the heat of India, everybody – most arrived without winter clothes - was shocked by the cold (1947/48 was a very cold winter). It was a few months before long separated fathers were re-united with their families. ***The 10-year-old Teresa had not seen her father since his arrest when she was two!***

There followed a year in a succession of camps and, then, after some difficult times at ordinary English schools, Teresa went to Grendon Hall near Aylesbury, a special school for Polish children. For the children, separation from families was difficult (some were orphans), but: "Gradually, after the first year, things started getting better. We got a new English teacher, Miss Wood, and she was absolutely great. ***Her fiancé was a Polish pilot who had died during the Battle of Britain and she had made a vow to dedicate her professional life to teaching Polish children.*** ***She was a fantastic teacher*** and taught us a 'proper' English accent. When I got my first job at an insurance company in Birmingham my colleagues laughed at my 'posh' accent, but were impressed with my good spelling, and I earned their respect."

Teresa had come to Birmingham for work, because her father and uncle already had jobs in the city. Teresa's family was one of four who together bought a small house in Erdington – the kitchen was shared and each family had a bedroom. Her father worked in a steelworks and her mother at The Polish House in Erdington. For Teresa there began years of service to the Polish community and her future husband Michal - they married in 1959 – spent years making small collections for a fund to build a Polish club in the city centre. Teresa acted as secretary through most of the 1950s to the influential priest, the much-loved Father Kącki, previously an outstanding chaplain in the air-force. It was he who obtained the Club's first licence.

Teresa had a daughter, Alinka, born in 1961 and a son, Adam, in 1962. Then, for a few years, she spent her days looking after her children and her evenings engaged in activities for the Polish community. When Alinka started secondary school Teresa decided to embark on formal teacher training, at Bordesley College. It was here that she regained contact with English people. She made many friends there.

Teresa wanted to get a job in a Catholic school. "My first teaching job was in St. Augustine's School in Handsworth and I enjoyed it very much. My next school was in Aston, Newtown, where I stayed till the end of my teaching career. It was an eye-opener for me. It was a deprived school, with really difficult conditions. 75 per cent of the children came from single parent families. ***It was not unusual to have four children in my school, who all had the same mother, but four different fathers.*** The realisation of how hard a life those kids must be having was a steep learning curve for me. Many parents were themselves illiterate, so I tried to help some of them with reading in my lunch break. At one point I was wrongly accused of hitting a child and as a result I stopped trying to help those kids individually. … On the other hand, there were some very talented and hard-working children, too. I'm still in touch with some of them. I had three very keen Hindu boys in my class who were very bright and very interested in learning and comparing our religion with their religion. After a few years I met the mother of one (of those) boys who told me that ***her son had gone to India to a Mother Theresa centre, an orphanage, to teach English there.***

This story is a wonderful example of religious tolerance and understanding between our culture and the Indian one.

…. It was a crowning glory of my work as a teacher. I had a lot of empathy with the Indian people as a result of living in India during the war; they were so wonderful to us then."

01. My first and only 2 years in Poland, Peczeni˙zyn, 1939.
02. Out of Russia, Teresa with her Mother, 25 July 1943.
03. Teresa with her Mother, Tehran, Persia, 1943.
04. Our home made from bamboo and mats, Valivade (India).
05. Tickets from the camps in the Middle East, proof of registration with the Polish government in Teheran.
06. Polish Camp for over 5000, mostly women and children survivors from Siberia. Main street in Valivade, India.
07. Corpus Christi Procession, India, 6 June 1947.
08. Travel permit from the Polish consulate in Karachi.
09. In our first camp in England: Possingworth East Camp, Black Bays, Sussex. 17 October, 1947.

03. Mrs Bronisława Boguniewicz

Bronisława was born on 12th August 1926, in a small place called Baranów Sandomierski, in Podkarpacie, in the south of Poland. She enjoyed a happy and peaceful childhood on her parents' farm, before the war broke out. One of her earliest memories from schooldays was reciting a poem dedicated to the one-time President of Poland, Marshal Piłsudski, and how she broke down in tears, as she felt so emotional at that moment!

When the war broke out she was 13. The Germans took over the schools for the young children in the area, but for older pupils like Bronisława, there was no school to go to.

"I remember very well the first year when the Germans invaded, they started to take away the younger people to Germany, as volunteers … two years later they were rounding people up in the streets, and deported them for work, both boys and girls".

People were forcibly taken to Germany and Austria to work in factories and on farms. Conditions were harsh. Bronisława still suffers from the torn ligaments in her hands as a result of being forced to work hard on a farm at the tender age of 15:

"In those days there were no machines, everything had to be done by hand. My God, I couldn't feel my hands, now I have no strength left in my fingers, they feel stiff, once your ligaments are torn there is no cure".

She stayed there four years, until the end of the war, when the British came and organised the transport of various East European nationalities to different countries. She and other Poles were taken to Italy. They were told they could go back to Poland eventually, but not just yet.

Staying in Italy turned out to be a happy period in Bronisława's life. At that time there was a shortage of people willing or able to join the army and those who could were encouraged to do so. Bronisława was enthusiastic and, having added 2 years to her age in order to appear older than she was, and rather than be sent to school, she was accepted into the army as a lorry driver. Due to her small size, she had to have a cushion on her seat as the seats were not designed for women drivers. That was in 1945. She then had to do a course (Unitary Course) designed for those who wanted a career in the army, and so she joined the 1st Transport Company no 316, in the 1st Platoon. It so happened that at one time there were three Bronisławas working in the Polish section of the army! Clothing, food, chocolate and cigarettes were in abundance. Those were really good times!

"My happiest memories are from the army. I loved the army. Those were the best moments of my life. You were given everything you needed … that's when I learnt to smoke, there were so many cigarettes you didn't know what to do with them!"

After a year in Italy they were brought to Britain and the first camp Bronisława found herself in was at Ty Croes in Wales, where she met her husband Janek, also a Pole, whom she married in 1947, at the next camp, in Foxley, near Hereford.

They had only known each other for three months. During the war he used to work as a security guard for General Anders, and before that for General Sikorski

It was in 1950/51 when Bronisława came to Birmingham. As with most Polish people who came during those years of post-war shortages in Britain, the early years were not at all easy. Living in a succession of rented accommodation and, to begin with, being viewed with suspicion by the local population – not to mention the obvious necessity of learning the new language – were some of the obstacles to be overcome. There was no question of getting any qualifications, there was no time for it, Bronisława says, as everyone had to concentrate on finding work. And so she managed to get a job at Cadbury's, which at that time was taking on quite a few Poles, and ended up working there for many years. Her earnings then were £5 per week, which, as she points out, was more than her husband was getting - £4 per week. Her husband worked initially at Lucas, but later on he also got a job at Cadbury's. In those days it was the husband's salary, not the wife's, which was used as the basis for calculating the mortgage which could be given to a married couple, in order to buy a house. Eventually, after several years of work, they were able to get their house, first in Edgbaston and then in Kings Heath, where she is still living today. Tragically, though, her husband died in 1985 – killed in a car accident, and Bronisława was left with just her son to share her life with.

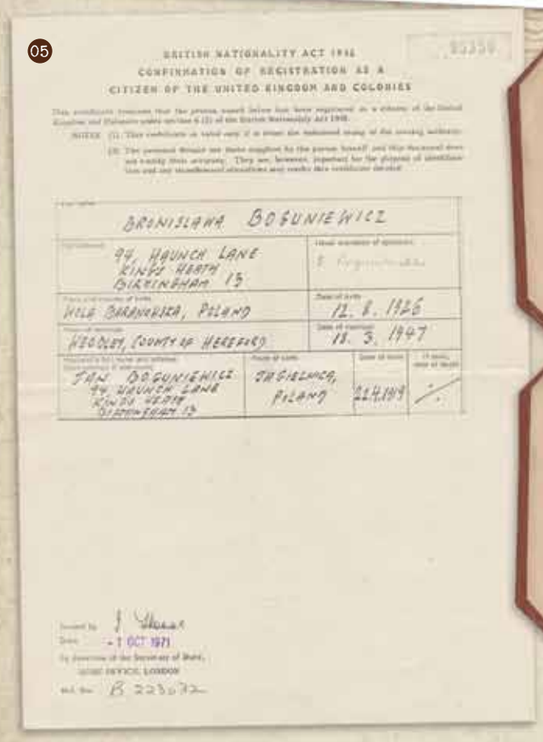
Her social life has been mainly centred on the Polish Club:

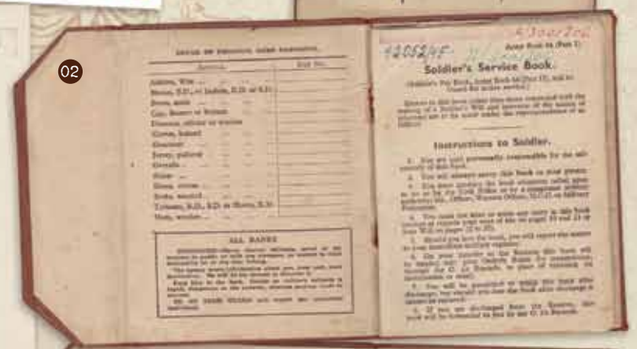
"We've been very close within our Polish group, we are almost like a family …, but we are all widows now, just the ladies left".

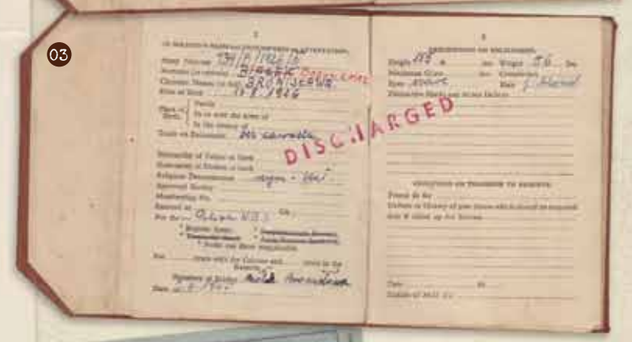
But she says she has made some very good English friends, too, and she's been very happy with her life in England.

"I'll never say anything against England. The English people have always been fair to us. There may have been some small problems, but it would have been the same anywhere else".

One can see that hers is an example of a modest, decent, hard-working life, with determination to adapt to living in a new country, make the best of it, and contribute to the life of the Birmingham community. It is with this positive attitude to life that Bronisława has managed to achieve stability and contentment and is able to look back on the last 50 or so years of her life in Birmingham as happy ones.







01. Discharge Certificate from the Polish Resettlement Section issued to Bronisława Boguniewicz, dated 19th September 1949.

02. Discharge book from the Polish Army, issued to Bronisława Boguniewicz, dated 6th June 1945.

03. Discharge book from the Polish Army, issued to Bronisława Boguniewicz, dated 6th June 1945.

04. a) & b) National Registration Identity card of Bronisława Boguniewicz, February 1951.

05. British Nationality Act 1948 - Confirmation of Registration as a Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies, issued to Bronisława Boguniewicz, dated 1st October 1971.

04. Mrs Genowefa Czepiel

Genowefa, born in 1929, looks back on her early childhood near Grodno in eastern Poland (now in present-day Belarus) as a long happy period. But, with the coming of the war in 1939, its ending was abrupt: and her family had inflicted on it a sudden brutal plunge into a nightmare. During the following two years she witnessed the deaths of many fellow Poles at close quarters - often just a few feet away – deaths from intense cold, starvation, and disease. For the modern day emigrant, with all the convenience of cheap, safe, air-travel, and readily available public services and social welfare, Genowefa's recovery against all the obstacles she faced in her life is a story which should give rise to some humility.

Let us step into her world in 1936: "I was 7 or 8 years old, there were six cows, horses, sheep, poultry, geese, it was a mixed farm. They were doing very well indeed. My mother used to say: 'Gosh, we are well off now!' …. I loved school; my parents took great interest in our learning. … My father said: 'If you study hard, I promise you will go to Warsaw to study' – this was my dream."

But Genowefa's world changed in 1939: "I remember it very vividly: my mother came and she was as white as a ghost. She said: 'O, Frank, you will never believe what I heard on the wireless today'. …. And she said: 'The war broke out! The Germans invaded Poland this morning!' My mom was so upset, she started crying".

"I knew that terrible things were to come."

And terrible things did come: "In September (1939) we started school as usual. But two weeks later, when the Russians came, when we returned from school our mother said to us: 'Please don't cry, but something sad has happened. 'Your dad has been arrested'. … My life turned upside down."

"Well, Christmas came and went, we were living quietly, and then on the 10th February 1940 at 6.00 in the morning our house … soldiers with guns…. were knocking on the door, we were all frightened. The Russians said we had half an hour to get ready to go to Russia. .. It was bitterly cold, deep snow. … "

"They packed us into the cattle trucks. There were 3 levels. On the top level there were mothers and children, … There was no toilet and no water … Once a day we were given some hot soup. … We travelled forever."

Survival itself in the camp in the Urals was an extreme challenge: her mother was forced to work cutting wood in the forest for 12 hours every day and Genowefa had to look after her younger sisters. Hunger was extreme, and deaths amongst the deportees were common. ***"Death was all around us. It really made a grown-up person out of you very quickly."*** Without Genowefa's efforts in begging porridge and picking berries her own family would probably have perished. The ordeal in the camp lasted sixteen months.

Amnesty arrived suddenly in July 1941, but release only brought a long, hazardous journey for the family – re-united after the arrival of her unrecognizable and half-starved father (half the Polish men imprisoned in Grodno died) – through Uzbekhistan and Kazakhstan to Pahlevi in Persia. Here, in the months at a transition camp, many Poles died after eating meat (often fatal for stomachs unused to rich food). Next, the family were moved to Tehran, then to British India, to a camp near Karachi (in present-day Pakistan) for six weeks. Next they went by ship across the Indian Ocean to Mombasa, and then they had to go by train to Kampala in Uganda. It was an unforgettable train journey for Genowefa: ***".. (from the train) we saw giraffes, antelopes, beautiful birds, and, even, elephants".*** And, finally, by open lorry to a camp on a hill overlooking Lake Victoria: ***"It was the most picturesque place on earth. There were about 2,000 Polish refugees (living) in African huts."***

For the next six years, Genowefa was at the camp in Africa. There, not knowing to which country they would eventually go, a good education in Polish was provided by the numerous qualified adult Poles in the camp. However, by 1945 they knew that their home was now part of the Soviet Union, and they couldn't bear the thought of living under Stalin and communist totalitarianism.

In 1948 Genowefa's father was demobbed in England (he had fought in the army in Italy) and the family sailed for England, landing in Southampton in March – it was a cold shock after Uganda. The family settled in Blackshaw Moor Camp in North Staffordshire.

Quickly, Genowefa left her family at the camp, to follow her dream of becoming a teacher and went to Grendon Hall near London, a special school for Poles to train to become teachers in England … but her English was poor, and it was a three-year course crammed into two years! Worried that she wouldn't pass English, she took additional courses in crafts and art. Her workload was immense: "I studied all the hours that God gave me". And, Genowefa passed her diploma and by then, an inspector having seen her work in the foyer came to her and said: ***"I have a guaranteed job for you in Birmingham, because we need people with skills like yours."***

Meanwhile her parents were still in the camp and now there was a new baby brother. For Genowefa, two hard years followed, first with serving her probation year, and - living in digs - saving every penny for a deposit on a house. And she succeeded: ***"So I bought a house for my parents, I hired a lorry and went to Blackshaw Moor to get my parents. They couldn't believe this was our house. … And that's how our life started here in Birmingham."***

Genowefa did not live in this house for many years as before too long she married a young man who had been in the Polish orphanage in Britain. They had four children. Her husband studied six hard years to become a design engineer and worked for the Midlands Electricity Board for 25 years.

Genowefa, herself, worked mainly at two schools, each for 17 years: first at Our Lady of the Holy Rosary School, in East Birmingham and, second at the Martyrs school on Stratford Road. In addition, she taught at the Polish Saturday School, part of her extensive connections with the Polish Club in Digbeth.

Despite much of her free time being spent at the Polish Club or with the Polish community, Genowefa has many English friends and quite often bumps into her former pupils when in the city centre.

She revisited Poland for the first time in 1972 to wish farewell to her dying grandfather. When her train took some Russian soldiers on board, it brought back terrible memories of the deportation her family suffered all those years ago.

01. Genowefa's parents and cousins, Grodno (now in Belarus) 1935.
02. Genowefa's father, Teheran, Persia 1942.
03. Genowefa's parents and the three daughters: Genowefa in the middle, Pahlevi, Persia 1942.
04. View of the camp in Koja, Uganda, 1944.
05. Teachers in Koja camp school, Uganda, 1943.
06. Koja camp, group with crocodile, Uganda 1943.
07. 'A' level certificate obtained by Genowefa from the Polish school in Great Britain, Grendon Hall School, 1st October 1950.
08. Polish school in the Polish Centre, Birmingham, 1954.
09. Wedding photo of Genowefa and her husband, Birmingham, 1957s.
10. School Our Lady of the Holy Rosary where Genowefa used to teach, in Saltley, Birmingham, 1955; Genowefa in the middle.

05. Mr Stanisław Jankowski

Stanisław was born in 1936 near Wilno (Vilnius) in then north-east Poland. His father was in the Polish army when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. The Russians very soon occupied the local area. On 10th February all eight members of his family were deported by rail in cattle trucks through the depths of the Russian winter to frozen Siberia. ***The privations of the journey led to the death of his youngest brother shortly after their arrival in Siberia.*** There, his parents had to work outdoors cutting trees, the older children attend school, and the younger children stay in the camp. The amnesty enabled them to leave in late-1941. He remembers the arduous journey south after the amnesty and their release: "my father was very handy or good with his hands. He built three sledges … ***my mother pulled one sledge, my father pulled another one and my oldest brother, who was 12, pulled another one and my sister, who was 10, she walked because there were three younger*** …" On this journey he also remembers receiving a pan of soup and deliberately going under some stabled horses to eat it without risk of losing it. To resume: "I don't know how long it took them … but they managed to get to the station." Then they travelled by train and met up in Uzbekistan with the newly-forming Polish army. His father joined, and the family was supposed to remain and tend cotton fields in return for subsistence. But, after three weeks his mother decided conditions were so bad that they should attempt to leave, following the army. Obstructed by officials at a train station, they were rescued by some Polish troops on a passing train, who grabbed them on board. This was extremely fortuitous, given the terrible experiences of other Poles, who got stuck in Uzbekistan. Let us glimpse into Stanisław's world in 1942 as a 6-year-old: "there were some transports organised and we left [Kazakhstan} in '42 for …. Persia. … That's when we [again] met my brother. … and from there, through India, we moved to one of the British colonies called Tanganyika in East Africa – [now part of Tanzania]. There I started my private education."

Six years later, in 1948, Stanisław and his family sailed for England and were re-united with his father. Life was in camps in Nissen huts in the Cotswolds and nearby counties for Stanisław, and a succession of ad-hoc schooling arrangements until he eventually settled at a boarding-grammar school for Polish children in Northamptonshire. Life was basic and without any luxuries, and sometimes without breakfast: ***"our dormitory had to be checked that everything was perfect. If it wasn't perfect we couldn't go and have breakfast. We had to wait until everything was perfect and then the whole Nissen hut would be released but by that time it was too late to go to breakfast."*** He describes a situation where they were using English books, but had Polish teachers who themselves had spoken little or no English. The result was that many pupils passed their English 'O-level', but couldn't yet speak English. Some progressed exceptionally: Stanisław's elder brother got a grant to go to Cambridge University.

Stanisław also thrived on his opportunities: he not only passed all his exams, he also, at Lidford Park school in Northamptonshire, met his future wife, Krystyna! This is where the Birmingham connection really starts, because Krystyna's mother worked in Birmingham. Where? Well, at one of the clubs for Poles springing up in Birmingham from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

By the time he finished school, Stanisław already had another connection with Birmingham: his sister was married and living there. He went to join them and quickly started work as a draughtsman. Before not too long he was further pursuing his ambition to become a fully qualified mechanical engineer by enrolling for degree studies in the new Aston College [now Aston University]. Krystyna also enrolled to study optometry. After qualification in 1966, they married. They had a daughter, Isabella, in 1967. At home, his family kept to Polish traditions and always spoke Polish. Married life initially meant living at Stanisław's mother-in-law's house – but they saved hard for a deposit and after three years they had enough to put down the deposit on a house. Much of Stanisław's own family was departing for other places during these early years: his elder brother moved to Canada, prospered there, and before too long his parents and another brother followed.

Taking part in community activities from the start was important for Stanisław and his wife, with most activities in the early years concentrated at the Polish club in Gravelly Hill. "(with some) time on our hands to try and give something back to the community and … my wife always helped a lot…. and she still does" And, there are some surprising facts in Stanisław's sporting past at Gravelly Hill!: "there was a volley ball pitch at the back, people were (often) playing volley ball... ***Actually, our club at Gravelly Hill were the first champions of Great Britain in volley ball. … We represented England in the European championship."*** Eventually, Stanisław became one of the most prominent figures in the Birmingham Polish community with two separate periods as Chairman of the Polish Club in Digbeth. An interesting aspect of his community work has been his contributions as a translator/interpreter for public bodies, such as hospitals, courts, and the police.
This has continued in recent years with the influx of Poles after 2004, many of whom, as yet, know little English. Stanisław is a keen observer of the differences between the new generation of voluntary arrivals and his own generation of post-war arrivals, who usually suffered deportation or other traumas. Certainly, when he arrived there were few publicly-funded interpreters available to help Poles who found themselves in hospital or police custody.

To return to Stanisław's work: Progress at his company, which eventually became part of Cincinnati Molecular, led to much international travel, including frequent visits to Poland from the late-1970s onwards. Although he and his wife, like much of the rest of the then Polish community in Britain, responded with food and clothing parcels to the various crises which occurred under communist rule in Poland he has not, as yet, sought to revisit the area of his former home in pre-war Poland, now in Belarus.

01. First photograph in England - 1948.
02. PT lesson - Bottisham Grammar School - 1950/51.
03. KS Pogon - Basketball team - late fifties.
04. Description missing.
05. Description missing.
06. Mr.S.Jankowski, Abp Szczepan Wesoly, Mrs.K.Jankowska, Botanical Gardens - 1987.
07. Audience - Pope John II - Vatican 1995.
08. Description missing.
09. Outside White House, USA - 2000.

06. Mrs Danuta Kenyon

Danuta was born on 25th of May, 1930 in Lwów. Her father was a policeman. Her mother suffered from TB for a number of years and died in 1937. She had three siblings, two older sisters (one from her mother's previous marriage) and an older brother.

When the Russians invaded and occupied the area in 1940, her father was immediately arrested. Then, "a few days afterwards, Russian soldiers came at twelve o'clock at night. ... And said: 'You have to get up and get ready, because we are taking you away'. … My older sister, because she didn't have my father's surname was allowed to stay … my brother wanted to say good-bye ... to other members of the family. And he wasn't allowed to do that and the soldier just fired at him and he had a wound in his neck, which was bleeding and while they were taking us to the station, we begged them to take him to the hospital and they did. They took him to hospital and they took just us two youngest sisters to the station. We didn't know where we were going. We were just packed into some like [cattle tracks]. … The whole train was absolutely full and we were taken deep into Russia, into Kazakhstan. … ... it was in the middle of the night when we arrived into that place. From the train we were put into big lorries and taken far into the country. ***Then we met those men, Kazakhs, … they were quite different than... They were dressed differently. I've never seen people like that before. And all us children, we were all terrified."***

Danuta had what she calls two terrible years on the Kazakh steppes: living in a hut; sleeping on straw; enduring the severe cold of the winter; suffering lots of insect bites in summer; and with only a few bricks to enclose a fire for cooking. Her sister had to work and the younger children were staying behind…. to try and collect some fuel for the winter, but: "There was no wood around ... it was just bare, there where we were. And then... there was very little food that we were given. …there was no bread for a year. We had some flour that we could get [and used to make]... little cakes with... And ... that's what we used to eat."

"One day (in August 1941) we were told that we were free to go, if we wanted to go. So we all got on the train, although the local people were very kind to us … begging us to stay … We just travelled on the train for days and days, just asking to be sent wherever this Polish army was forming. …. ***We had terrible diseases. I had malaria and dysentery. And I nearly died. Nearly all the young children died. … Very few of us survived, but my sister and I managed to.*** So, eventually, we got ... to [where] the Polish army was staying. And then, they did help us. … They said: 'Come every day and we will give you some dinner to take with you'. And so, that's how it really did help us to survive and they helped us, they formed transports to take us out eventually from Russia. And we travelled to the port on the Caspian Sea … and we left for [Persia], for Tehran."

Danuta reckons she spent nearly two years in Tehran, where she resumed her education with traditional-style Polish lessons. Then, Danuta's life further improved when they were moved to Kazia in the Lebanon, which she remembers as a beautiful country. Here they were given some basic money for living expenses, and they were looked after by the Red Cross and there she passed her A-levels.

As a displaced Pole, Danuta came to Britain in 1948 and for a time stayed in Polish camps in various parts of England. Danuta tells us what then happened: "I entered the school of nursing. At the [Cambullan] and the Family Academy of Carlisle. ***And from that day my life changed completely. For very much better. Yes, I learned English there and I met some very wonderful people. Lovely Scottish people … there were many Scottish people there... in Carlisle.*** And I was there for three years. And then I had to work another year as a sort of compensation, gratitude for the hospital, for giving me this training. .. (then) I went to Leeds to do my first part of my midwifery, which was six months. … (then) I came to Birmingham to do the second part midwifery, at Marston Green Maternity Hospital, near Birmingham…. (then) I was a qualified midwife as well … (then) I wanted to work only district, I wanted to be independent. … So I went for that training to Worcester for six months. And I got qualified as a Queen's Nurse, and so became a district nurse.

She worked in Rugby and married there the Polish man whom she'd met at a camp in Penrith. It was he who had persuaded her not to return with her married sister to Poland and he had helped her get on the nursing course in Carlisle. He had waited for her to qualify and they married in 1956. Danuta passed her driving test and bought a car, which was unusual for any woman in the 1950s, let alone one whose life had been disrupted by deportation. As she says: ***"I had to have a car, because I was visiting patients at their own house and delivering babies at home, because in those days there were home-deliveries mostly."***

In 1965, after 10 years in Rugby her husband bought a Post Office and business, they moved to Quinton in Birmingham. They have one daughter, who is now married and living in Coventry. They always followed Polish traditions in their own home, speaking Polish and eating traditional Polish food. However, both through her own work and through her husband's role in the Federation of Post Masters, they had extensive participation in the life of the wider community in Birmingham.

In Birmingham, Danuta has been a most active member of the Polish choir and through them, of course, she made very many friends in the Polish Club. She was the chair lady of the choir for seven years... She has also led the Polish welfare section for over ten years.

Now, to end Danuta's story. Her brother survived the war and was never sent to Siberia; instead, after the amnesty he was released from prison and allowed to return home. Sadly, and a reminder of the brutality which was prevalent in Russia under Stalin's dictatorship, she was informed by the Red Cross after the war that her father, like thousands of other Polish officers and officials had been killed either in Katyn or some other mass killing forest chosen by that evil dictator.

01. School in Teheran, 1947.
02. Scouts, 3rd from the left, 1945.
03. Nurse Certificate.
04. As a Student Nurse, 1949.
05. Student Midwive, 1955.
06. Wedding Day, 1956.
07. Head of the 'Lutnia' Choir, 1987.
08. Visiting Zakopane, 1959.
09. Postmasters Ball, Birmingham 1965.
10. With Husband, Presidency of sub-postmasters of Birmingham and Worcester Quinton, 1979.
11. Golden Wedding Anniversary, 2006.
12. Voluntary Work, 2010.

07. Mrs Michalina Kuczyńska

Michalina was born on the 30th November 1926 in Ciepliwoda, about 14 km. from Baranowice, near the then border area of Poland with Soviet Russia (and located in present-day Belarus). Her parents had moved as settlers to the area. They had a farm of 30 hectares. But it was sandy soil, so they had to work very hard to get a decent living. Her schooling was happy: at first in a very local school, about 1 km. on foot. Then her parents decided that the three eldest children would stay on the farm, being given one hectare of land each. The two youngest ones – Michalina and her younger brother would be sent to school and have a different life. This school was in Nowa Myśl, where she stayed for two years. She recalls: "we had to walk 7 km. every day to be there for 8 o'clock. It was a pleasure, and we were happy to walk." But in winter they had to lodge in Nowa Myśl. "After this school my parents decided to send me to the next school, further away, and in 1939 they registered me for the exams for the grammar school. I was successful and got accepted. … The school was 14 km. away, I cycled there every day, on a sandy road, not easy, but I didn't complain."

But the war soon meant that, in February 1940, Michalina's life was turned upside down. One day her mother, accompanied by a Russian soldier, suddenly arrived at school. Tearfully her mother had to take her from school because the whole family was being deported! That evening they were packed in cattle trucks at the railway station and off they went into the bitter snowy weather of Russia in the depth of winter. "The journey lasted the whole week. We travelled mainly at night; at daytime if we stopped it was always in the middle of nowhere." Eventually they stopped and were put in a camp at Gorodok Południewica in the Vologda region. Ominously they found out that its previous occupants, the Tatars, had all died there. In winter, when everything was frozen, they were given a bread allowance - the amount depended on how much work you did.

It was fortunate that her father was skilled at making furniture. He organised a group of people with similar skills, including two of Michalina's brothers and her brother-in-law and this enabled them to work indoors, and not, like most others, in the forest. They earned some money, were not exposed to the severe frost, and until the illness struck, the family were all right. Michalina recalls: ***"My mother, father, two brothers and my sister-in-law … got ill. We were given vaccinations against typhoid … terribly painful, in the back between the ribs. I fainted, but I didn't get the typhoid, nor did my younger brother and my brother-in-law. My mother was very ill. ….. My father developed pneumonia with some complications, and he died four months later"*** She continues: "My job was to look after all of them [family members] … it was hard work and very painful because you couldn't get anything nourishing to eat. … But fortunately we survived."

The amnesty In July 1941 enabled them to leave. In September many of the young men left for the army. Her remaining family needed some savings and food, so her brother and brother-in-law found work on a farm and were given meat in exchange. Her mother then spent her time preparing the meat and baking dry bread. In November they left, again in cattle trucks, but this time, going south to Uzbekistan. "It took a month; we were going a round-about way, travelling only during the night." In Uzbekistan they had to spend nine months, working in the cotton fields in order to subsist, waiting for a transport to the Caspian Sea through Kazakhstan. Here, Michalina first contracted malaria and it made her terribly weak. It would bother her for many months. Eventually, in August 1942, the order came to take them to Iran. They were taken by train to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea. Michalina remembers: "We were terribly thirsty … Some boys were selling water like gold dust, but we had very little money. So we had one small bottle between four girls. When we landed on the other side of the Caspian Sea, it was beautiful – clean beaches, clear water. ***We were stripped of our clothes – they had to be burned because of infestation, our heads were shaved and we all had a bath. We were given men's uniforms to wear, with trousers tied on to us!"***

Arriving in Tehran, Michalina had to have a month in hospital to treat her malaria. Released, she found out that her cadet unit was going to Palestine, but without her, as she was not strong enough to go. Terribly upset, she joined her brother and uncles in a nearby camp. She recalls: "Then we were moved to a transit camp in Ahwaz. We stayed there two years. My uncle was on a committee there to organize transports to other places – Africa, India. We had a school … But my malaria kept coming back … I was very ill. Finally my friends took me to a hospital outside our camp. They gave me some new, bitter medicine and after two weeks I got better, but was advised to change the climate to get rid of my malaria. So I managed to get myself on a transport of young people to Palestine, to join my old group. ***I wanted my younger brother to come with me. He was a bit too young then, but I managed to change his date of birth to make him a bit older on paper, and took him with me.*** I placed him in a cadet school for training officers. I joined my old unit school, in Palestine, in Nazareth."

"We came to Liverpool on a ship from Egypt, and were put in a camp in Foxley, an ex-American army camp, which was well equipped, and we sat our 'A'-level exams (in the Polish language). After the exams we had to find jobs. … there were jobs in a cotton mill, Horrocks Mill; some girls went to work as nurses in hospitals in Wales, but most of us stayed in factories in Lancashire. We stayed in a hostel, so accommodation and food were provided. Then my husband came – he and his two sisters stayed in that hostel, we met and started going out together."

Michalina's mother had stayed behind in Uzbekistan with her sister and grandmother, but she now found out that they had both died there and that her mother and her brother had moved to Silesia. By this time, Michalina was married and had a daughter whilst in Lancashire. They moved to Birmingham in 1954 "because in Lancashire there was high unemployment then. At first, it was very difficult to find accommodation in Birmingham; the local people were not keen to let rooms to foreigners. If you had a friend, sometimes you had to share a bed together. "In Birmingham, my husband changed jobs several times. He was looking for jobs as an artist – painter, but couldn't get any, so he got a job at Cadbury's working night shifts. He didn't like it, and then he worked in a car assembly factory. It was day work, so it was better. At first, we lived on the west side, near the centre. It was convenient with the buses, we didn't have a car. There was even a tram then. Then we got our own place in Kings Heath, a big old house, too old and crumbling really. I said to my husband who didn't want to move 'I'm getting another place', and so we did, we got this place in Northfield. We've been here 18 years now and we are happy."

Later, her mother and sister visited her and they also visited Silesia, but Michalina says that she found everything rather strange in Poland, and, of course, it was not in the area where she had grown up. ***"You are always homesick for the place you were born, even though there is nothing left there, but I would have liked to just have had a look at it again."***

01. The grave of the Kowalski family (relatives of Michalina Kuczyński), Vologda Oblast, USSR, 1940.
02. Julia Kowalska - Skalska, older sister of Michalina, before the war, Poland.
03. Polish camp inmates before boarding the ship Maratea to take them to Britain; Port Said, Egypt, 26.06.1947.
04. Michalina Kowalska, Polish camp in Ahwaz, Iran, 05.03.1943.
05. Michalina Kowalska as a student of SMO, Polish camp in Ahwaz, Iran, 01.03.1944.
06. Daughters of Mieczysław and Michalina Kuczyński: from the left - Iwona, Ewa and Krysia, 64 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, 1965.
07. Michalina Kuczyński, cooking the Polish dish bigos, at her home in Kings Heath, Birmingham, 1968.

08. Mr Mieczysław Kuczyński

Mieczysław was born on 15th September, 1923 in Dermanka in the Wolyn region of eastern Poland [now in present-day Ukraine). He had four sisters. His father was an *osadnik* (military settler) who had been appointed a forest ranger. The family moved during his childhood to Karpiłówka, where they lived in a detached house, although Mieczysław was mainly away at boarding school, some 150 km. distant in the town of Równe (now called Rivne). He was educated there until 1939. He had just passed his A-levels and was then wishing to go to Art School, as his ambition was to be a painter. But the war put a cruel stop to all his ambitions. When it started in September 1939 he remained in the family house through the winter of 1939/40. By January 1940 the Russian troops were occupying the area. Then the whole family was deported on 10th February, 1940. He remembers the words of the Soviet soldiers, who came deep in the night at 4 a.m.: ***"You've got twenty minutes! Get something to eat! Get something to … keep you warm, …",*** He recalls they were taken to the train station, 22 km. distant, and packed into cattle wagons - about 50 people per wagon. They didn't know where they were to be taken.

They travelled for at least two weeks in these trucks, kept alive only by a bowl of hot soup served once a day. Then each family had to complete the journey with the aid of one sledge, which meant that Mieczysław and his father had to walk, as there was only room for his mother and sisters on the sledge. Their camp was to the west of the Ural Mountains, at Dorowatka. Here they lived in barracks, with a number of families sharing each hut. Living conditions were very crowded. They worked in the forest cutting trees and wood from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. – his mother also worked, because each worker received 400 grams of bread per day compared to 200 grams for those who remained in the barracks.

After the amnesty of July 1941, Mieczysław was allowed to leave to join the Polish army. His journey was complicated and included a period picking the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. Then a transport was arranged by train which took them through Kazakhstan to the Caspian Sea, and across by ship to Persia. By February 1942 Mieczysław had joined the Polish army and much of 1942 and 1943 was spent in training in Egypt. Late in 1943 they embarked for Taranto in southern Italy. Mieczysław fought throughout the Italian campaign, including at Monte Cassino. He was with the troops who took Bologna in early 1945. Then the war ended.

How was his family at the war's end? Tragically, only three of the seven members of his family deported to Russia had survived. ***"My mother, my father, they died in Russia. Two of my sisters also died in Russia. My [other] two sisters had left Russia and spent five years in India."***

Mieczysław arrived in Liverpool with his army unit in September 1946. He recalls his impressions of the weather: "It was horrible because it was rain, terrible rain; we had come from Italy where there is sunshine. Rain … horrible. … and sometimes so foggy, you could hardly see."
He was demobbed in 1947. Now he found himself without any English qualifications and he had to find work.

His sisters were soon to arrive from India and for a time were located in a hostel in Lancashire, and visiting them, Mieczysław met Michalina, his future wife. They got married in 1950 in Preston, Lancashire. But before too long his sisters moved to Birmingham, where job opportunities were better, and Mieczysław and Michalina and their first daughter followed them in 1954 – eventually they would have three daughters and one son. However, the shortage of accommodation was more acute in Birmingham, and Mieczysław recalls some hostility and snubs received from landlords and locals, who like him, were looking for factory work. He recalls the city as he saw it then: ***"(it was a) horrible city. You see, it was industrial. Now … you can't recognise it … Birmingham has changed completely. But before it was dirty, black, houses, old, like slums."***

Mieczysław worked in a number of factories in Birmingham. First, he worked at Charles Brothers' glass factory, and he recalls "it was very hot there and … dirty and horrible." Then he had a spell working night shifts at Cadbury's, but this was difficult with a young and growing family. He left before too long and eventually spent many years working at Berman & Sons, a company which made steering gear for many marks of car – Italian, American, European, English, even Korean.

Mieczysław and his wife, Michalina, have been significant figures in the Polish community in Birmingham. They were regular members of the congregation at St. Michael's for decades. Also Mieczysław was on the committee of the Polish Club for over 40 years, with his wife acting as secretary and, in addition, many of his paintings - of historic Polish events and places - hung for many years on the walls of the restaurant and in the downstairs lobby of the Polish Club.

01. Mother of Mieczysław Kuczyński, Maria Kadłubowska (top right), and three of her sisters: Apolonia (top left), Rozalia (bottom left) and Helena, Budki Ujscienskie - a village in Poland (now in western Ukraine), 1915.

02. The Kuczyński family: Mieczysław (centre), his parents (bottom row) and two of his sisters, Poland, 1930.

03. A church in the village of Okopy, photograph commemorating a religious festival which took place on 24th August 1934, Poland (now western Ukraine).

04. A painting by the sister of Mieczysław Kuczyński showing the house in Karpiłówka, the place where his father worked as a forest ranger, Poland (now western Ukraine), 1935.

05. The Kuczyński family: Mieczysław (top right), his father, a forest ranger, (left), mother (centre), and his three sisters, Poland (now western Ukraine), 1936.

06. Mieczysław Kuczyński as a pupil in year 6 at Henryk Sienkiewicz Primary School, in the town of Równe, Poland, (now western Ukraine), 1936.

07. Family Kuczyński in the Polish camp Darowatka: Mieczysław (top centre), his father Feliks with one of his sisters, mother Maria with baby Weronika, Gorkowskaja Oblast, Siberia, USSR, 1941.

08. Mieczysław Kuczyński (2nd from left) and some members of his family in a Polish camp called Darowatka, Gorkowskaja Oblast, Siberia, USSR, 1941.

09. Mr and Mrs Kuczyński at their home in Northfield, Birmingham, December 2010.

09. Mrs Blanka Kuźmińska

Blanka was born on 28th of May, 1932 in Wyszogródek, Krzemieniec, Województwo Wołyń. Her father was a policeman. In the course of his work he had been transferred from place to place. In 1937 he was moved to Nowy Jaryczów, 20 km. from Lwów (Lvov, now in The Ukraine), near his own birthplace. Blanka had only just started at primary school when the war broke out.

Blanka recalls the drastic effects war brought: “At the beginning of 1940, the Russians invaded us from the east, and I remember being at school. They started to teach us Russian and we always had to go to the cinema and watch the Communist propaganda films … They arrested all the professional people. And the women and children were sent to Siberia. My father was arrested and he was placed in the prison in Lwów. And we didn’t hear what happened to him till after, after we met again a few years later. He… he was sentenced to 25 years hard labour as a political prisoner. He was sent to Lagry, Northern Siberia. They were in tundras… and their job was to cut trees from morning till night.”

“It was 30th April 1940 when Russian soldiers came in the night…. They woke us up and told us to pack and they took us to the train station. We waited till morning, whilst others joined us from Lwów and other towns from around Lwów and they… packed us in to the cattle trains.” They travelled for three weeks … “They dropped us in the night in Northern Kazakhstan; in some town near the town hall … ***Russian people were very good. They… In the morning we’ve found women coming with milk for children, and bread. And … They agreed to take us into their homes. They didn’t have much but they… shared whatever they had…*** there were six of us: mother, three older sisters, brother, and I was the youngest. … Two older sisters and my mother had to work in the fields on the Kolkhoz and three younger ones, we had to go to school “

Then came the amnesty and her father was released. Her mother also insisted on moving the family to the nearby town, Kustanai. In town her mother and elder sisters found work, because at that time many young Russian men were away at the war front. “My mother and older sister, they were making bricks. My second older sister was working in the bakery – making bread or cakes and she often smuggled some bread or cake to bring us … because we never had enough to eat really. My middle sister stayed at home. She was cooking for us, while my brother and I had to go to school.” In Kustanai her father, who had joined the army, found them in the autumn of 1941 and soon they set out on the journey south-east by train with other army recruits. It was not an easy journey as, being by now winter, they had to cross the frozen River Volga. In Werewsk, she and her older siblings joined the cadets. Eventually they reached the Caspian Sea and crossed over to Persia.

Blanka recalls: “The men, as soldiers, went to Palestine, while the refugees, because we were classed as refugees, as we couldn’t go back to Poland in 1942 … We travelled to … Tehran, where we stopped a few months. We spent Christmas there. … After some time they … transported us to Karachi in British India, and then ... We waited for … the ship to take us to Africa.”

“There were two camps. I was… in Rusape, where I spent 4 years. We were 6 years in Africa altogether. At the age of 13 I passed the exam to… grammar school … a boarding school at Digglefold, not far from our camp. With two sisters I went there. And I was only at Digglefield about a year, 1946 – 1947, because after the release of all the Italian prisoners of war, a big camp in Gatuma became available. We stayed there until 1948 until they sorted … it took a few years after the war to sort the refugee situation out. My father had joined the British corps by then and he was in England. So, in 1948, in June we arrived in England … We landed in Southampton, but soon moved to where my father was based … near Preston, Lancashire. Soon after he was demobbed and we moved to Preston. And we lived there for two years where I attended Holy Jesus Convent School.

Blanka, her family, and her circle of friends all shared a deep religious belief and a strong sense of Polish patriotism. As she says: ***“We were always brought up … to be believers and very patriotic.”***

In 1952 Blanka came to Birmingham, and it was here that she met her future husband. She often recalls that times were much harder in the early 1950s. Luckily, her husband, who was a fitter, always had work. Blanka worked in an office. They had four children. The Polish community was always important to Blanka and her family: “At first, by the church there was a building, which ... belonged to the church. It was like a little club, … in which we had our meetings, dances. We used to go to the dances very often. We decided to build a club for ourselves. ... but because there was no money... they... every family had to sign on... sign to... to give so much a week. Because, you know, that was the times... [very] hard times.”

Blanka’s husband rarely wanted to talk about the war. He, like many thousands of Poles, living in the path of the German advance in September 1939 – he lived in Bydgoszcz – was like his four brothers … forced into the German army. … One of his brothers... nobody knows what happened to him. ... He was lost during the war, probably at the Russian front. Blanka’s husband ... was eventually released by the allied forces ... and so he joined the British corps. And he came to England, through France... in 1946.

Returning to discuss their home life, Blanka says: “We always spoke Polish at home. … The first two, they spoke perfectly, but with the third one because ... I was working then, more and more the children would speak English at home. As you know, they go to school, and after a while they don't want to be different and they speak English. So they started speaking English at home as well. Of course, the younger two, it was easier for them to speak English than Polish. I spoke to them in Polish and they answered me in English. I still speak to them in Polish. And they understand me, but they still answer in English. Just the younger two... the older two they... they want to speak Polish”

Speaking of food, Blanka says: “Traditional Polish... I always had to have *barszcz* (beetroot soup) and *uszka* (small dumplings).” However, Blanka likes English food. She recalls her first encounter with fish and chips in Preston: ***“I still remember, you know, coming to England, oh we loved going to the [fish shop] they wrapped it in newspaper. Fish and chips - oh, we thought it was wonderful.”***

In recent years Blanka has been a leading figure in the Polish Senior Citizens group and together they have done much travelling and visiting, both within Britain and to Poland. She is very fond of Kraków and the Polish mountains, and this year visited Sopot for the first time.

01. Parents.
02. Christening Act 1932.
03. First Holy Communion.
04. In 1942.
05. On the way to Africa 1943.
06. Rusape Africa 1945.
07. Preston 1949.
08. Blanka aged 16.
09. 1953 dancing in Polish costume.
10. In Bydgoszcz in 1965
11. Celebrating her 70th birthday in 2002.

10. Mr Jan Maślonka

Mr Jan Maślonka was born in December 1921 in Lida. Lida was not far from Wilno; this area was within Poland between the First and Second World Wars and like the surrounding areas was populated by different ethnic groups. Now in Belarus, Lida was in the Great Lithuanian Principality in the second half of the 14th and 15th centuries, and became a centre of production by craftsmen and trade. Lida was connected with Wilno, Nowogrodek and Minsk and most closely with Polotsk, a source of raw materials.

The Maślonka family had moved from the South of Poland following the First World War when Mr Maślonka's father had fought in Piłsudski's legions, the Second Brigade.

In between the two World Wars, Lida was a very patriotic place to live and like many other young Polish boys Mr Maślonka was a member of the Polish Scouts. It was here that his love of flying began when he had the opportunity to try gliding. Mr Maślonka was a good scholar and having attended the gymnasium his intention was to go to the Lyceum in Warsaw. Mr Maślonka commenced his training to be a Pilot in Warsaw but this was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. Under difficult conditions, with bombs dropping and railway travel being disrupted, he had to walk much of the way but eventually made his way home to Lida where he discovered things had changed following the Soviet invasion from the East on the 17th of September.

In the hard winter of 1939-40 Mr Maślonka and some of his friends made the decision to return to Warsaw but on their way they were captured by the Soviets and along with many others Mr Maślonka was eventually sent to Siberia as a forced labourer to work in the oil fields deep inside the Northern circle.

The work was hard and conditions were difficult. It was here that he had an accident that could have been fatal. He was fortunate to survive. During his time in the Soviet camp Mr Maślonka knew his father had been imprisoned by the Soviets and now he discovered that his mother had also been deported. He was reunited with her for a short time when a friend received a letter which told him Mr Maślonka's mother was in another Soviet Camp; he travelled to collect his mother and other people so that they could be together.

In 1941 Stalin changed allegiance and agreed that a Polish army could be formed from those who had been deported, now Mr Maślonka was a leader of a barrack at the young age of twenty and he decided that he wanted to fight for his country and join the Polish Air Force.

Plans were made to evacuate to the Middle East and so began his long and arduous journey to join his fellow compatriots. Having arrived by barge the journey now began by train, using the railway tracks that had been built using forced labour and included a boat to New Delhi and on to Durban in South Africa where they lived in tents on a race course for two weeks. They embarked from Durban on the Empress Canada; they got as far as Free Town in West Africa when they were torpedoed by an Italian boat. They were picked up by a destroyer and transferred to a commercial cruise ship who continued to look for survivors and scare the sharks away; they were all covered in oil.

Mr Maślonka remembers women who came and gave the survivors cigarettes and cups of tea. The ship took them first to Glasgow and they eventually disembarked in Liverpool, from here he made his way to Blackpool to the Polish Air Force base. He continued his training in different places in England including the first elementary Polish flying school in Brighton where they stayed in holiday homes and finally he fulfilled his wish to be a pilot. Among other planes Mr Maślonka flew dual engine bombers and was based in Andrewsfield where there were five Polish squadrons and one English squadron; before the end of the war Mr Maślonka flew operational flights. Mr Maślonka had a friend who had been injured and so invalided out of the Air Force and was in Birmingham at engineering college, he suggested that Mr Maślonka may like to join him and do the same. Mr Maślonka flew a Spitfire and landed near to Birmingham for his interview to attend engineering college and so began his life here, where he has had a successful career, married and had children and now grandchildren. Along with many Polish people who found themselves living in lands that the Soviets had occupied since 1939 and which were now to be incorporated into the Soviet Union under the agreements made by Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill at the Yalta conference in 1945, Mr Maślonka's family, his father, mother and older brother moved west into the Republic of Poland and they lived in Gdansk. Having made the best of his life in Birmingham Mr Maślonka never saw his father again and only saw his mother on two occasions before she died. Like many Polish people living in England, the risk of returning to Poland was too high. Conditions for his family in Gdansk were difficult; both his brother and his father were imprisoned at different times by the new regime. In his lifetime Mr Maślonka's father had been imprisoned under the Germans, the Russians and the new Polish regime.

Mr Maślonka was very active in the Polish Catholic club in Birmingham. He was Chairman for six years from 1958-1963 and was one of the key people responsible for the organisation of the building of the present Polish Millennium House. Mr Maślonka made a speech at the laying of the foundation stone on 17th of September 1961; the date was carefully chosen, the anniversary of the Soviet Army invading Poland from the east.

In addition Mr Maślonka continued to be an active member of the Polish Air Force Association and was instrumental in returning the colours back to Poland after independence was gained; he felt that this is where they belonged.

01. Mr Jan Maślonka, Tollerton near Newton in 1943, aeroplane "Master".
02. RAF Newton, 1944.
03. Squadron 315 Coltishall, 1946.
04. RAF Coltishall, 1946, aeroplane "Mustang".
05. Squadron 315 Coltishall, 1946.
06. Squadron 315 Coltishall, 1946.
07. Mr Maślonka with a friend Mr A Dziewulski.
08. Coltishall Mr Maślonka with friends in May 1946 just before coming to Birmingham.
09. Mr Maślonka at the laying of the foundation stone ceremony for the building of the Polish Millennium House on the 17th September 1961.

11. Mr Julian Michalski

When it comes to war-time experiences, Julian's personal story makes a very interesting contribution to the history of the Polish participation in the Second World War.

What is more, having listened to what he had gone through, one can easily see what a remarkable contribution a person like him has made to life in Birmingham. So let us have a brief look at Julian's story:

He was born in 1919 in Puławy, central Poland. Julian lost his parents at an early age and thereafter always had the feeling that he had to fend for himself. Life was poor and there weren't many opportunities for people. Thus, for Julian, joining the Polish army in 1937 at the age of 18 had many advantages: amongst other things, he learnt some useful skills in mechanics and transport systems. He provides very detailed descriptions of fighting with the Germans when war broke out.

Here is just one such incident, and there were many like it, in which Julian and others could easily have been killed.

"On many occasions we were bombed by the Germans … I remember we were coming back from the supply depot with the weapons for the brigade and we were attacked by what looked like the German Messerschmitt 110. It dropped a bomb, but fortunately the bomb fell just behind us to the left on the embankment … it was built on the soft sand so the bomb went deep into the ground and we weren't hurt".

His brigade kept being moved from place to place, eventually to Hungary and then to France and Morocco. Julian's driving skills and knowledge of mechanised vehicles certainly came in very useful when his army division made a 1000-mile trek through the Sahara towards Nigeria, where at some point the sands of the desert changed into the swamps of the River Niger delta and still had to be crossed! They couldn't have managed without help from friendly natives who had built rafts for them.

Julian remembers this trip as a real adventure, in spite of the inevitable bout of malaria. Staying with the family of one British officer in northern Nigeria, he says

"It wasn't like war at all. It was a holiday really, hunting wild animals and having a great time".

In Lagos the group were told:
"You can either go to England or to the Middle East".

At this point Julian says: ***"Well, in England there was no war going on, but in North Africa there was more excitement, so we decided to go there".***

For Julian the challenge of 'excitement' proved too much to resist and so, the Middle East it was.

Tobruk was the next big operation, where many lives were lost. By this stage Julian's English was sufficient for him to be used as an interpreter and translator, and he also had some French.

Having heard about the Battle of Britain, Julian's reaction was typical for him:

"Whoa, that would be interesting, after spending a couple of years in Africa perhaps I could find what England is like and we'll have an opportunity to fly".

And so Julian found himself arriving in Liverpool in 1941 which, at that time, and after the years in the African sun, didn't make a very favourable impression on him. Anyhow, his strong desire to be a pilot was eventually fulfilled and he was sent to a flying school in Brighton, and then, of all places, to Canada, to be trained as a navigator. After that he returned to Britain to be attached to the 304 squadron stationed in the Outer Hebrides.

Julian's experiences as a navigator in the air force during the war could easily serve as the basis of a thrilling war time movie. His courage, quick thinking and ability to make the right decisions in critical situations helped to save lives more than once.

For someone like Julian the end of the war and demobilisation came as a bit of an anti-climax. On the other hand, he now saw new opportunities – to get some formal education at last. In addition to being good at languages, he had a natural talent and interest in physics, maths and mechanics and so he followed an engineering course in Wolverhampton, which he passed with distinction, and then went on to do a higher degree at a university in London. For both courses he obtained grants from the Ministry of Education, under the ex-servicemen's education scheme. Only then did he feel ready to take up a job, which he did: his first job was as a designer of tube-making machines in Aston, Birmingham. This was followed by research and design work in the Hardy Spicer company, designing brakes for cars, and then he was employed as a research engineer at a company called Mira, near Nuneaton, dealing with automatic transmissions. Always aiming high, Julian was looking for even better opportunities, and was offered a job as a lecturer at Birmingham College of Technology, which later became Aston University. There they wanted not just academics, but people with experience in industry. So, he became a lecturer at Aston University and worked there for the next 25 years!

On a personal level, Julian has been happily married to Zofia, and they have a son Anthony and a daughter Helena, both brought up in the Catholic faith. They attended the Polish Saturday School and both speak good Polish.

Julian modestly attributes his successes in life to the fact that his parents died when he was very young. He says:

"I realised … life could be very difficult, you have to do something … , so I started learning whatever I could right from the very beginning …, I think I've tried my best. I couldn't have done any better".

When asked how well integrated he feels into the life in Britain, Julian points out that at every stage he has felt

welcomed and encouraged by the British people, and this, he says, goes for most of the Polish community who found themselves in Britain straight after the war.

When in the late 1950's Julian was offered a lucrative position as a scientist in the coal mining industry in Salt Lake City, USA, he declined the offer and says he never regretted the decision to turn it down. He and his family were by then firmly settled in Birmingham.

Well, Birmingham is certainly lucky to have held on to someone like Julian.

01. Description missing.
02. Mr Julian Michalski in 1944. A Navigator. Squadron 304.
03. Colleagues of Mr Julian Michalski, Squadron 304.
04. Mr Julian Michalski in 1944.
05. Zofia and Julian Michalski. Wedding Day, 1953.
06. Mr Julian Michalski with wife Zofia and children Antos and Hanka. Christmas, 1964.
07. The Opening University of Aston, in the picture Two Polish Lecturers Mr Julian Michalski and Mr Tadeusz Slimak, he is the brother of Z ofia Michalski.
08. Celebrations in honour of the Polish Airmen who died in action fighting in defence of freedom, by Northolt Monument dedicated to the Polish Air Crews, 2005.
09. Zofia and Julian Michalski. 50th Wedding Anniversary.
10. Julian Michalski, 90th Birthday.

12. Mrs Zofia Michalski

Zofia comes from a family of settlers (osadnicy) who, after the First World War, were given some land in the eastern part of Poland in recognition of their participation in the War. Zofia was born in 1928 in a small village near Drohiczyn, in the Polesie region, now in Belarus. As she remembers, life on the large farm her father had been given was very good. In addition, her father had been made mayor of a town close to the farm so that, in effect, the family enjoyed the benefits of both town-living as well as farm life.

It all came to an abrupt end when war broke out, with the Germans dropping bombs and the Russians starting to harass the Polish population. Then the fateful date of 10th February 1940 arrived, which for so many Poles severed their connection with their homeland and their previous way of life. In the depth of a very severe winter, and given only 20 minutes to pack, Zofia's family were told they would be taken 'somewhere else'. That 'somewhere else' turned out to be, of course, Siberia. Zofia was just 11 at the time. In the labour camp people were allocated various jobs in the forest to do with tree felling, cutting logs, loading and transporting them to the railway line. Zofia remembers how on one occasion her brother, only 15, was using a whip on a horse which didn't want to move, when a Russian supervisor noticed it and shouted at him:

"Don't do that, the horses are precious, people are not! He then taught my brother a few juicy Russian swear-words to use, and, sure enough, the horse moved".

Hard labour, starvation and disease were the norm. Zofia is able to give many harrowing details of what it was like to live in that labour camp. Then, one memorable day, out of the blue, somebody from outside turned up and asked:

"What are you doing here? Don't you know there's an amnesty – Russia is at war with Germany?!"

They didn't know!

This was all very well, but logistically, organising the now free Poles scattered all over the vast Russian empire and enabling them to join the Polish army was a formidable task. Zofia remembers the long and perilous journeys by trains

and trucks in freezing temperatures (it was the autumn and winter of 1941), constant worries about food, not knowing how and when they would be able to get out of Russia. Sadly, her grandmother died then, probably from starvation. Eventually, they found themselves in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. By then Zofia had become very ill, not eating for many days. One day she woke up and said:

"I want some soup!" When her mother said there wasn't any food to give to her, Zofia replied: ***"If I don't get some soup I'll be dead in the morning!"*** Well, some water and flour was found to make the soup for her.

The family then got separated, with Zofia's father being made to leave to join the army. Typhoid struck down her mother and brother. Disease and starvation continued.

In the next stage the family managed to find some transport to Krasnovodsk, on the Caspian Sea, but were too late to get onto the ship which had already left. So it was back to Uzbekistan for them! Here, Zofia joined the local girl cadets group but this didn't mean an easier life. In fact, the camp she was in was called 'The Valley of Death'. But after a while, Zofia did get back to Krasnovodsk and onto a ship bound for Pahlevi, Persia, then to Tehran. From there the journey took them to Karachi and eventually to Uganda where they stayed in the camp in Koja, near Kampala. Here, Zofia's memories become much happier. She was enchanted with the exotic aspects of the place, food was nutritious and plentiful, medical care available, and, better still, Zofia was finally able to resume her education. She joined the grammar school, had French, Latin and English lessons, and even history, current affairs and philosophy at another camp's school. She was doing very well. Life got so much better at last! By then Zofia was 19 and starting her 'A' level courses.

In the meantime her father, after surviving the battle of Monte Cassino, had got to England, but was in poor health. It was already 1948 and the camp was being disbanded. Zofia and some other families were sent to England by plane – it was an amazing experience for her.

She first found herself in a camp called Daglingworth, near Cirencester, then moved to Northwick Camp near Moreton-in-Marsh. Finally she, her mother, and her brother who was in RAF, were reunited with her father.

Zofia was keen on education and got a place at Stowell Park School. She praises the high quality of the teachers there. Always good at academic work, and with her English already at a high level, she was advised to do a teacher training course after completing her 'A' levels. Following a successful interview, she got a place at a teacher training college, but was advised to defer it for one year, and so in the meantime, Zofia, not wanting to waste any time, did a typing course and got a job in a factory

Her time at Padgate Teacher Training College, near Warrington, was a very enjoyable one. But life was not all work, and there were plenty of opportunities for socialising, dancing, and so on. That's where she met her husband, Julian.

In 1953 Zofia got her first teaching job: at the Rosary Primary School in Saltley, run by a nun. Zofia remembers her as having a bit of a temper, not putting up with any nonsense from the children.

In January 1954, Zofia and Julian got married. There followed a period of quite frequent moves as her husband kept getting jobs in different places. They finally settled in Sutton Coldfield and Zofia got a job at St. Chad's School. This wasn't to last long – she had her son and daughter to look after.

During that time Zofia got involved with the Polish community and did some teaching at the Polish Saturday School. She sent both her children to a private convent school and got

a job at the Abbey School, where she worked for many years. She ran a Pottery Club, a Gardening Club and even a Sports Club at the school. Soon, she was promoted to a senior teaching position and then offered deputy headship, but, at that point recognizing that it would have been too much to take on, she declined the offer. When she retired, she continued teaching on a supply basis. She is also doing some interpreting for Birmingham City Council.

She has a good reason to be proud of her children: her son did so well at Bishop Vesey School that his name and the list of his achievements is on the school board for future generations to see. He studied medicine at Birmingham University and eventually ended up working at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Her daughter did very well too, and now Zofia is a proud grandmother of several grandchildren, all of whom are well educated and in good jobs.

Zofia has also found time to be involved in the Polish community. She is on the committee of the *Klub Seniorów* and has been doing charity work for the elderly in nursing homes. Naturally, at home, all the Polish traditions have always been kept, especially those associated with Easter and Christmas Eve.

Well-adjusted, fully integrated into the new country, determined to make the most out of the opportunities offered to her, Zofia's achievements are an excellent example of meaningful contribution to life in Birmingham.

01. Zofia Michalski, Wedding Day, 1953.
02. The Opening of University of Aston in 1966. In the picture Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering, Mr Julian Michalski with his wife Zofia.
03. Reference from Erdington Commercial College, 1949.
04. Joint Matriculation Board Certificate, 1962.
05. The Legion of Mary in the Polish Millennium House with Rev. Father Zygfryd Zastocki in 1980.
06. Polish Senior Citizens Group in Vilnius in 2006. Excursion organised by Mira Golya.
07. Mrs Zofia Michalski with her class in 1990 at Abbey Primary School, Erdington.
08. Mr Michalski with wife Zofia. On Celebrity Cruise-Western Mediterranean, 2011.

13. Mrs Stanisława Olejnik

Stanisława was born on the 1st September, 1927 in Podole, in the Tarnopol region [now in the Ukraine]. Her mother died when Stanisława was only six months old and her father married her mother's sister. Eventually, there were six children - Stanisława and her elder sister, and four children from the second marriage. Her father had a substantial farm and, unusually, they lived in a white stone house which her father had built. It was a happy childhood amongst the fields and orchards. She enjoyed school and the family were regular worshippers at the local Catholic church.

Stanisława has a powerful story to tell: ***"10th of February, 1940 was the day of the start of our horrible wandering and humiliation.*** In the morning of that day the Russian soldiers barged into our home, where they put my father against the wall, pointing a gun at him. We were told to get dressed, and to quickly pack our belongings. And … there were two sledges ready to take off, because it was winter, 10th of February, very cold…. Initially we were told we'd come back, that we were only going just to another place. ***But one Russian, a good person, warned us to 'take everything, whatever you can, because you're not going to come back here'.***" We were taken to the nearest station. …… I remember, the most important thing were the eiderdowns, I have to mention the eiderdowns, ***those eiderdowns saved our lives during our wanderings, very often they were our only heating system,*** otherwise we wouldn't have survived it all. We were taken in the evening to the railway station, where the goods wagons were waiting for us: they were not heated, and almost the whole of the settlement - all of us - were packed into that one wagon. There were four bunks, two bunks on one side, and two bunks on the other side. In the middle there was one little stove to heat the place. The rest was in a very poor state ….there were no … sanitary …A sealed box, in which all of us were suffocating, because they packed us just like sardines in a tin. And in this way, without any help, without medical help, we were travelling most probably for about 3 weeks, we were all exhausted, almost everyone had lice."

Finally, their train ordeal ended: "They got us out into sledges and we were taken to the immense Siberian forests, it was the region of Sverdlovskaya Oblast. The place was called Winokurka; there were barracks already prepared for us - prepared so that we were ready to start work in the forest. …. ***we were totally exhausted, with the cold, the hunger and all these things. The barracks were warm, but full of bedbugs.***"

But, another tragedy was brewing: "My sister Janina, who was 11, was taken ill with TB; she had a cold during our journey and there, in Siberia, she, at the beginning of next winter, died…."

They were given very little food, but with the summer, blueberries, blackberries, and mushrooms could be picked …"but the most helpful thing was that we exchanged …. We sold some good clothes that we'd brought from home, and bought a goat, and we drank this goat's milk, and this goat's milk helped us to recover from the typhoid …"

The amnesty meant release from Siberia. But this journey south proved a great tragedy for the family. Reaching Uzbekistan, "we had no news of the whereabouts of the army …" And needing shelter from the cold they got a kibitka (a mud hut): "… there was nothing inside, only some holes for light … father found some old doors to make bunks and some straw. With spring, lack of food became a terrible problem – rummaging in the fields for the overlooked beetroot or onion … we made soup from pigweed."

"And from here my father was desperate to find the army, and news reached us that in a certain place the Polish army was being assembled, so my father left. … But on the way he fell ill, we lost all contact with him … we thought he was dead. It happened that some people left and never came back; they just died on the road. Meanwhile a tragedy was happening at our place: my 15 year old sister she had high fever, she couldn't work or anything … an Uzbek man gave us this arba, it's a rack wagon, and he said he'd take her to hospital, ... but she died. ***After all this my mother started getting swollen from hunger. We were left helpless, we didn't know what to do, and then my mother died, I put her on the arba, like I did with my sister before, and … My mother died, and we were left without a roof over our heads.*** But she had found out that an orphanage was being set up nearby, and at the last moment she said – 'get the kids over to that orphanage' …"

In the orphanage: "when the sun went down, we couldn't see anything because we all had 'chicken' (night) blindness. In the mornings we were given some warm water and cotton wool, so that we could unglue our eyes. It was not too bad, since we were taken care of, we had a feeling that people were caring for us. Before that we didn't have anybody to take care of us." Then: "***sitting there … I looked and saw a man in army uniform, looking terribly exhausted … I didn't recognize him as my father to begin with, but then I saw it was my father!"***

At last there was transport arranged which took them on the long journey to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian. Getting on the ship was itself a great ordeal … Stanisława had to carry on board her brother on her back as he was completely without strength. Then they went to camps in Tehran, and her brother, along with many others who were just "skin and bones", received good professional medical care.

After some time they were among 500 Polish orphans who were sent to a camp near Bombay. They were there for five years. There, Stanisława remembers some very caring priests and a Polish manageress/tutor, Mrs Gryzlowa. After the war they sailed for Liverpool and were in camps in the north-west and Wales.

The authorities were keen that adults and young adults start work. Stanisława remembers that there were many in the camps who wished to return to Poland. Lack of knowledge of English was a major problem for her and many others. It meant that they were restricted to manual work. She worked for nearly a year at Brinton's Carpets in Kidderminster, but moved to Birmingham when her father got work, along with former Polish judges and high-ranking army officers, at Saltley Goods Depot. Stanisława found work in south Birmingham at a factory making bandages and other medical supplies.

Getting accommodation was so difficult in the late-1940s that she and her father lived separately for some time. Eventually they bought a dilapidated old house in Alum Rock and there, with her siblings returning, the surviving family could live.

Stanisława married in 1952 to Mikołaj, whom she'd met in Kidderminster. They bought a "ruin" in Alum Rock, without electricity (!), and worked all hours on it. Then her husband needed a serious operation, they sold their house to a sister, and left for Canada in 1953. But Stanisława was "homesick" and after a year they returned to Birmingham. In 1964, they had a daughter, Elzbieta. Stanisława's sister, Genowefa, married in 1956 and had five children. At home, her family have kept up Polish traditions and Elzbieta attended the Polish Saturday School and passed her GCSE in Polish. Over the years, Stanisława and her family have made a major contribution to the Polish community.

01. Mother of Stanisława Olejnik with her mother's brother, Poland, early photo.
02. Soldiers Service and Pay Book (front cover), 10th Feb. 1943.
03. Soldiers Service and Pay Book (inside).
04. Certificate from the 2nd Polish Corps, commemorating participation in the war action in the USSR, Iraq, Palestine and Italy, issued by Gen. Władysław Anders on 04.09.1946, and entitling Mikołaj Olejnik to wear the award of the 2nd Corps.
05. Certificate entitling cannoneer Mikołaj Olejnik to wear The Italy Star - a British Award for participation in the 1939-1945 war.
06. Some children at a Polish camp in Murad Kolhapur, India, 1946. Stanisława top centre.
07. Wedding photo of Stanisława and Mikołaj Olejnik, Birmingham, 8th August 1952.
08. Stanisława Olejnik, Birmingham, 1955.
09. Mikołaj Olejnik, husband of Stanisława.
10. Family of sister Genowefa, her husband, Felicjan Sawko and their 5 children, 1980. In the centre is the Archbishop of Liverpool, Derek Worlock.
11. Stanisława Olejnik, Birmingham, 1980.
12. Newspaper cutting: the charity Polish Relief Foundation in Liverpool received funds from the sales of the single by the Liverpool singers, the Pattons, backed by a school, Liverpool, 1980s.
13. The surviving sisters and brother of Stanisława Olejnik: Genowefa (in the white jacket), Stanisława and Adela, with their brother Czesław, in front of Stanisława's house in Birmingham, 2010.
14. Memorial service for Mikołaj Olejnik, the Polish Church, London, 2008.

14. Mrs Jadwiga Orłowska

Jadwiga was born on 10th October 1928, in Ostróg, which was then on the Polish-Russian border and the nearest town was Zdołbunów [now in western Ukraine]. She had two older brothers and a young baby brother. Her father had fought the Russians during the conflicts of the 1920s. Indeed, he remained in the army reserve, in the cavalry. As a member of the army her father had been given a 25-acre plot by the Polish government. Her father had built a house and outbuildings and the farm brought prosperity to Jadwiga's family. She recalls: "… before the war I was already in the third grade and I loved school. My father could afford to send my two older brothers, who had finished their sixth grade, to a grammar school in town."

But the war changed everything. Russian troops invaded and occupied their area in February 1940, and informed all the local population that Poland and Russia were at war. Soon the deportations to Siberia started in the area and Jadwiga's family, like many other Poles who arrived in England in the late 1940s, were victims: ***"They came before 8 o'clock in the morning and told us to pack our belongings in the space of half an hour... They loaded us onto cattle trucks.*** Each family had its own shelf in the wagon. We travelled I can't remember for how long, and then we stopped at a big station. We were unloaded and they put us on sleighs again and took us further into Siberia. Camps had already been prepared for us there. Each family had a small room with shelves for sleeping. We lived there for well over a year. My brothers and father were taken straight to work; my mother stayed at home cooking for us and looking after my baby brother. I went to school."

Jadwiga recalls their release from the Siberian camp in 1941: "When the Amnesty was declared we were free to go, we were no longer prisoners. We couldn't go back to Poland, so we were taken to camps in Persia. We were very happy. We had schools, there were scouts and girl guides groups, there was food, and hospitals. My mother was working. We were three years in Persia and then they took us to Lebanon. All this time my father was in the army." But, there were some tragedies for her family: "One of my older brothers died, as well as my baby brother."

In the Lebanon, Jadwiga's mother found work in an American base, and Jadwiga helped. She recalls: ***"so I quickly learned some basic English to speak with the Americans. I had one or two boyfriends, you know, which helped my English.***"

After the war, Jadwiga and her mother came to England as the family of soldiers in the Polish army. She recalls: "By then I was already in the third year of grammar school and went into fourth grade in England. I was already speaking English quite well."

When Jadwiga and her mother came to England they lived at Shobden camp, near Cheltenham (her elder brother used his demob money to buy land and emigrate to Canada). Here she completed her education and met her future husband: "In the army camp all the girls went to dances and that's how many of them met their future husbands. His sister was in the same class as me. My husband came to ask me to dance and we felt happy together. He kept writing to me almost every day, I had to tell him off for it, I said to him that I'd be in trouble with school if he kept pestering me."

"I finished school and we got married. He already had a job in Birmingham and was renting a room with an English family. He was a turner, a highly skilled man, and he had a good job in a factory."

Jadwiga and her husband had three children, two girls and one boy.

Jadwiga has had two jobs. First, she worked as a cashier at the Beaufort cinema and, when her children were a little older, she worked at Lewis's in the furniture department. She worked there for over 20 years, and made many English friends. Indeed, Lewis's also relied on her knowledge of Polish and Russian when, not so infrequently, she was called to the office to provide interpretations and translations.

She is satisfied that her children had a good education in Birmingham. They were all brought up in the Polish Catholic tradition and went to Catholic schools. They also attended the Polish Saturday School and thus they speak Polish. Indeed, this is especially useful now to her younger daughter, who is a teacher with several newly-arrived pupils from Poland. Her oldest daughter has a beauty salon in Canada. Her son is an engineer and lives in Sutton Coldfield.

Jadwiga, like others interviewed, has made an immense contribution to the Polish and wider community. She was for a long time chairwoman of the organisation *Sodalicja Mariańska* – Children of Mary: "Once I'd started they didn't want to let me go. During that time we made and sent parcels to Polish orphanages, to blind children, to poor families. We sent parcels to Africa as well. It was a charitable organisation. People were so kind; they were always giving us things to send." And: "I've also been in the Polish choir for many years. Wherever I was I always sang in a choir; I had a good voice." Further: "My first husband was a chairman of the Polish Club, and my second husband sang in the choir, that's where I met him."

When asked about whether she feels Polish or English and how she feels about England, Jadwiga says: "I always feel Polish. I know I'm Polish in my heart. I suffered for Poland; I was happy for Poland; I helped Poland. But I live in England and am very grateful to England. I think all the Poles who came here after the war have been very happy. Look – ***they sent me to school, they set up Polish schools and Polish camps; how can we say anything against England? I was very happy at my work, everybody treated me so well. I never had an argument with anybody,"***

01. Medal of Merit awarded to Jadwiga in acknowledgement of her work for the Polish community in Birmingham, Rome, 25th May 1972.
02. A nun working for Sodalicja Marianska, Birmingham, 1980s.
03. Polish choir and members of the Polish Club management board; Jadwiga, 1st row, 4th from the right, Birmingham, circa 2000.
04. Jadwiga singing in the Polish choir, Birmingham, mid 2000s.
05. Jadwiga, a Polish priest and possibly Julie Walters, circa 2005.
06. A group of African children: commemorative photo sent to Jadwiga from Africa in appreciation of her charity work from Birmingham.
07. A group of deaf African girls: photo sent to Jadwiga from Africa in appreciation of her charity work from Birmingham.
08. Letter of thanks to Jadwiga from the vicar of the parish in the Mazury district, for sending parcels to Poland, as part of her charity work for Sodalicja Marianska, 28th April 2000.

15. Mr Jan Pawłowski

Jan was born of Polish parents in Nancy, in Alsace & Lorraine in eastern France in 1927. His father had worked nearby as a forced labourer for the Germans during the First World War. After the war he lived in France until 1936 when his family, who were staunch Roman Catholics, returned to Poland, after facing much local hostility arising from a confused mixture of anti-semitic and anti-Polish feeling.

Jan's family moved to Koło - about 130 km. to the east of Poznań. When the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939, their house was destroyed by German bombers and the family were without proper shelter for some months. However, they were then allocated an empty property. But, not long after tragedy struck, when his mother, who was working on the railway tracks, died after being hit by a locomotive. Soon, the rest of the family, his father and, later, his two sisters, were sent to Germany for work (as forced labour) and Jan was sent to Poznań, where he was put to work in a factory making machines.

Ironically, he enjoyed the work itself, as he had had ambitions to work with machines, but his living conditions and lack of sufficient food made life very hard: "***They were giving us one litre of,...Eintopf! That's a litre of thick soup, once a day - dinner time. And I had three, two kilograms and three quarter of bread a week and that's it. .. Came weekend: canteen was closed, factory was closed, nothing to eat. …*** and we, as Poles, couldn't go in shops.".

In his first year, aged twelve, he worked six hours each day, five days a week. He spent three years in Poznań. Then he was transferred to Karlsruhe in Germany and had to work eight hours a day. By this stage, in 1943, Germany's war situation was becoming much more difficult: soon Karlsruhe and its factories started to be subject to almost daily bombing. And the Nazis drove the forced labour harder: in the later stages of the war, Jan was forced to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

But by the end of 1944, Jan's freedom was not far away: "After being bombed in Karlsruhe, we went by train...narrow gauge train. It took us three days to come to Lörrach. In normal time it takes, … it takes now, well, five, six hours …. but during the war, as it had to avoid the bombing, we were travelling during the night … it went all along Swiss border. 'Bout five or six hours and I'd seen the lights, in every town plenty of lights. And I said to myself ***" 'Oh, no, you're going, you're not going to help here any more.' " ... I decided to run away to Switzerland."***

"There were twelve of us. About seven or eight from the factory I was working in and five Poles working on local German farms, we went together." They crossed into

Switzerland at the upper reaches of the River Rhine in February 1945

In Switzerland they were treated as refugees in Basle and the young ones sent on to Lugano in the south of Switzerland, near the Italian border. In Lugano there had already been, since 1940, a considerable number of Polish internees, who had escaped from France after its capitulation. Jan recalls: "So, we had schooling from their chaplain, and there was work in that camp for which the Red Cross were paying us … it was very good."...

But with the end of the war, there were some fears about repatriation to the now communist dominated Poland, and thus a further escape was planned. This involved a five-hour walk up the mountains and across into Italy, where there was a lorry waiting, which took them to the Polish camp at Macerata, 15 km from the Adriatic. Here, Jan joined the army and became involved in the friendly occupation of Italy

In 1946 he came to London by ship. Soon he was sent to the Isle of Anglesey, where he spent 12 months learning English. Then he went to number four army hospital at Whitchurch, in Shropshire. Here, he was a platoon guard, guarding food and medical stores, which was very necessary in those early post-war years of shortages, rationing, and black markets. When the army hospital became a civilian hospital, he was demobbed. But, "I thought to myself this is a beautiful Polish oasis. I decided to stay on as a nursing orderly in the psychiatric wards. I stayed there for about a year."

From Whitchurch, Jan went to Kidderminster first. Here he found a job in a sugar beet factory of the British Sugar Company. He worked in the boiler house as a coal trimmer. "The pay was bad, so I decided to look for another job. And I found a job in Oldbury, at Albright and Wilson, a chemical plant. I spent two years on the furnaces and I spent six years as a booster precipitator operator. This was managing the gas pressure and sending it all over the factory with buttons. It was a very good job."

But working at the chemical plant, Jan's health and well-being began to worsen, so again he decided to leave and came to Birmingham and obtained a job at Salisbury transmissions, which worked on motor car axles. It became part of GKN. Here he remained until his retirement.

By the late 1950s he was lodging in West Bromwich, with a Polish landlord. A visitor to the owner one day caused his heart to flutter … and before long, in 1962, she became Jan's wife. They had two children.

His sisters remained in Poland and he visited them in 1962: ***"I felt a stranger there …, you could feel the atmosphere of, of occupation..."***

Throughout his years in Birmingham, since 1952, Jan has been an active member of the Polish community, contributing much voluntary effort in a variety of handyman jobs to the building in Digbeth.

Reflecting upon his life, Jan has been happy in Britain. He gains great satisfaction in the rise of Solidarity in Poland and the downfall of communism throughout Eastern Europe, and of course "our Pope." As Jan often says: "and that's it... ."

01. Himself when in Germany taken by the German authorities. As photographed he wears a shawl underneath the jacket. In the winter he would wear two jackets. He was not given a shirt. Note square badge sewn onto jacket.
02. Jan Pawłowski's sister taken in similar circumstances as 01. She also wears a badge with 'P' embroidered.
03. His second sister taken as before and also wearing 'P'. The badge with 'P' signifies that they are Polish. Russians wore a similar badge with 'O' embroidered standing for 'Ost' meaning east and Jews wore the Star of David to mark them out.
04. Canteen card for German factory in Poznań. Jan Pawłowski didn't get the bread and soup from there but theoretically he could buy other food from the canteen. The canteen was always empty however. He feels that it was issued for administrative reasons.
05. Jan Pawłowski when 19 years old. A recruit in the Polish division of the British 8th Army in Macerata, Italy. The badge on the shoulder signifies that with the nationality written above, in his case Polish.
06. Jan Pawłowski was based around 15 km. inland of Macerata town but was free to travel there, often by army vehicle. The vehicle he drives is an American built - Dodge - water tanker.
07. Castle San Angelo, Rzym. While in Italy Jan Pawłowski was free to travel around. Taken on a trip to Rome the person standing to his left is a colleague who had been with him since Poznań.
08. Taken at Mona Camp, Llangefni, Anglesey.
09. Identity Card issued by Britain following Jan Pawłowski leaving the army.
10. Taken on a trip to Lourdes, 1955. The three people to the right of the photograph are friends they met en route.
11. Soldier's Service and Pay Book. On page 4 of the book is a declaration of acceptance of the judged sentence in case of rape or other serious violations. It is signed by Jan Pawłowski. The service book also contains a loose leaf written in Polish and then English it is a pass slip to record and allow Jan Pawłowski to leave the barracks.
12. Again Jan Pawłowski is seated with his accordion. Taken in 1959 at Birmingham University. The group is dressed in national dress and would entertain around the city.
13. A photograph taken through the Polish Club in Digbeth. Jan Pawłowski sits with his accordion.
14. Taken of the band that Jan Pawłowski was a member of. Not every member is shown on the photograph but Jan Pawłowski is shown with the accordion.

16. Bolesław 'Barry' Smojkis

Bolesław was born on his grandfather's farm just outside Wilno in pre Second World War Poland, the eldest of two boys. He left the farm to go to school and live in Wilno with his parents at the age of seven.

"I cried my eyes out when I left my granddad's farm because though it was just a poor little farm, it was nice with all the forests and grass and I used to run bare foot all around for miles".

Bolesław's schooling ended abruptly in 1940 when the Germans occupied his town. At the age of 14years in 1941 Bolesław was taken from the street and eventually transported in a cattle truck to France to work as forced labour in an iron ore mine near to the Maginot line. Conditions were hard; little food – only dark bread with watery soups made from beetroot stalks and there was hardly any heating. Life was difficult and as a young man he saw people die every day

"Some died of starvation, some got beat up, but mostly they died of starvation. My legs were swelling up from hunger and working in the ore mines. I had no shoes and it was damp and cold; there were Dutch clogs, wood, but you couldn't walk in them".

In the summer they would get out of the camp and pick berries in the forest.

Towards the end of the war Bolesław gained his freedom with three other men and they began to walk from the camp, eventually he joined the Polish army and was sent to train in Italy. In December 1946 he was sent by ship from Italy to Lincoln in England, he joined his regiment in Carlisle and carried out work on the land and in factories until he was demobbed a year later when he became a member of the Polish Resettlement Corp (PRC).

Bolesław went to Leek in Staffordshire where he worked in Buxton Lime works for three months. He was then found work through the PRC and travelled with Polish friends to Birmingham. Starting as a labourer in factories and eventually, as his English improved, working in a brass foundry. He said that he never found it difficult to find work because the Polish people gained a good reputation for working hard and being reliable. In his early days in Birmingham Bolesław joined other Polish people at St Michael's Catholic Church and met up with friends in the rooms that the Priest allowed them to use.

Bolesław found out after the war that his younger brother had died of pneumonia in 1944. In 1948 Bolesław's father Jacob Smojkis found him through the Red Cross, he told him that he had moved to Bydgoszcz in the West of Poland. When Bolesław wrote to his father saying he wanted to go home, his father told him "not yet there is nothing in Poland". Bolesław found out his mother had been in a German forced labour camp, and after her release she was sent into forced labour by the Russian for six years. He had been writing to her but not getting any replies

"But my mom was sent to hard labour by the Russians, for six years, but I didn't know. The last letter I had was 1947. I said I want to come home but she said don't come home, your friend Peter came but he didn't stay long".

Bolesław knew this to mean that his friend Peter had been sent to hard labour by the Russians, it wasn't safe to return.

He found out that his grandparent's farm had been burnt to the ground by the Germans and, following an accident, his grandfather had died. The messages he was getting from home fitted in with the things he was hearing from other Polish people although the facts were not generally in the public domain. In post Second World War Poland life for many was not good under the new regime. For those like Bolesław's mother who remained in what had been eastern Poland life also changed dramatically. The Soviets took control of Vilnius (Wilno) from the Germans in July 1944 and this domination continued until 1991 when Lithuanian independence was established. From previously being the majority population, the Poles are now a small minority in Vilnius, but some of Bolesław's family have continued to live there. The first time Bolesław returned to Poland was in 1968:

"The first time I went back to Poland was about 1968 after twenty five years but I couldn't go back to where I was born because the Russians was there, they didn't let you, if I'd went on a Polish passport they probably would arrest you".

Like many Poles living in England Bolesław was not in a hurry to become a British citizen – he eventually did in 1999. Under the Aliens Registration Act of 1929, Bolesław, like many others, had to report to a Police station every time he moved house or took a new job, this continued until the Act was changed in 1962.

Bolesław married June Carpenter in 1950 and they had a large family together, although June was English and not Polish she did cook some Polish food and visited Bolesław's parents in Poland in 1971 with six of their eight children. For this visit Bolesław's mother had to get special permission to travel to Poland from Vilnius so that she could meet her grandchildren and daughter in-law for what would be the only time.

Sadly June died in 1985. Bolesław later married Marj, also a Birmingham woman, and they lived happily together until his death in June 2003.

Bolesław maintained friendships throughout his life with people who had gone through similar experiences although they were not all Polish, some were Lithuanian, Russian and Ukrainian. Before he died he visited Vilnius where he looked to see if his name was still on the wall of the town hall where he had written it with a friend as a small boy. Of course it was gone, like many traces of Polish Wilno. In Poland he visited his remaining family for one last time, reminiscing about life before the Second World War and singing songs with them about Wilno.

01. Bolesław Smojkis aged fourteen just before deportation to German forced labour.
02. Mother Karolina Komarowska 1946.
03. Mother Karolina Komarowska as a young woman.
04. Father Jakob Smojkis 1948.
05. Bolesław and other army trainees Polish II Corp May 1945.
06. In the Polish Army Christmas 1945.
07. Alien registration document.
08. Soldier's Service and Pay book.
09. Birmingham 1947.
10. Bolesław his wife June and two oldest daughters Caroline and Susan celebrating the Coronation in 1953.
11. Family visit to Polish family in 1971.
12. Bolesław visiting his cousins in Poland 2003.
13. The children of Bolesław and June.

17. Mrs Zdzisława Śledzińska

Zdzisława was born in 1933 in Odopol, in the Wolyn region (now in The Ukraine). By the time Zdzisława landed in Liverpool on the ship Orbis, on 1st April 1948 as a 15 year old girl, she had already had experiences of deportations, the death of her younger sister, starvation, disease and uncertainties about what would happen next – all of which were typical for most Poles who had been deported to Russia in 1940. The countries she had been through were, in this order: Soviet Siberia, Uzbekistan, Iran, India and Tanzania. Her memories of a happy childhood on her parents' farm in eastern Poland were very distant. Nevertheless, there were some:

"The house was situated on a farm, with some outbuildings; everything was made out of bricks. My three sisters and I each had a bedroom, my brother had his, and my parents had theirs. The kitchen was very large, with a huge stove and a dining table for 12 people … My parents grew tobacco, rye, sunflowers, and we had cows, pigs, chickens and ducks. We were exporting meat abroad, including to England".

It was certainly a very prosperous farm.

The deportation on 10th April 1940 took the family to Vologda, in north-east Russia.

"All we could see there was an enormous forest. My mother was employed as a driver transporting the logs, and my brother's job was cutting the trees. The young twins (born just before the war) went to a sort of nursery; my mother had to pay 50 roubles for that – the whole of her wage. I was allowed to join my older sister at school … Then my mother had an accident – she nearly drowned together with her horse and cart. She couldn't walk for six months; she was just lying on the bed all the time. That meant starvation – she wasn't earning any money so there wasn't enough food. It was obvious we were starving …."

Zdzisława attended schools set up in various camps during her seven years of forced travels from place to place, and she always did well. Her artistic talent manifested itself quite early – she remembers drawing a picture of a rooster and some chickens when in school in Tehran, and receiving an award for it. From an early age she had been interested in sewing, and already when she was in Africa, she started making some of her own clothes. Later on, when living in a resettlement camp at Blackshaw Moor in Staffordshire, she did a basic course in sewing, using a sewing machine.

When she turned 18, she went to the employment office to register as an unemployed person. She was asked what she could do: when she said she could sew and showed them the clothes she was wearing, which she had made herself, they immediately offered her a job in a clothing factory. This was the beginning of a long career for Zdzisława in the clothing industry and the making of clothes. Already, in her first job, she was asked to show other workers how to operate sewing machines, and to supervise the work in the lingerie department. At the same time, she was generally a fast learner, was learning English quickly and soon was able to act as an interpreter for her family.

Here is an interesting detail: Zdzisława claims to have had prophetic dreams; one of them, while still in Tanzania, was that she would one day live in Birmingham! So, while the family was still living in Blackshaw Moor, she asked her father to arrange for them to go and live in Birmingham – and that's what eventually happened.

Before that, however, in 1952, Zdzisława got married to her Polish husband, Wiktor, who had decided to buy her a fur coat as an engagement present, so that, as he said, she looked more like a grown-up. She was only 18 then and looked younger than her age.

In 1954, Zdzisława and her husband, who found himself a job in a train-carriage making factory, moved to Birmingham. Soon Zdzisława found a job, too, in a clothes factory called Lerose. It was a good, well-known company. She says she enjoyed her job there very much. Commuting to work from Ward End, where they lived, on a bus was very cheap – 4 [old] pence per ride!

But to go back to Zdzisława's prophetic dreams – well, one of them had already come true (living in Birmingham); another one was that she would marry at 18 (she did); that she would have a baby when she was 24 (she gave birth to her son in 1957), and yet another dream was that she would study and become a teacher. And this one came true, too!

When she had her baby, the factory Lerose was so keen to keep her that they promised to provide care for her child during her working hours. Instead, under family pressure, she opted to work from home and developed a successful business for herself.

At the same time, Zdzisława decided to improve her skills and went to a local college to do a course in men's tailoring and ladies' dressmaking. She was accepted to study for the 'O' level City and Guilds qualification, during which time she was asked to do some teaching, followed by two more years of study for the 'A' level certificate. On completion of the course, she was offered a job as a lecturer straight away, teaching women's and men's tailoring. She taught for a number of years, and was very popular as a teacher.

She says: ***"Everybody wanted me to teach them: on one occasion the principal said that much to his regret he couldn't cut me in two!"***

One of her students was a princess from Saudi Arabia. Zdzisława taught in several colleges; one of them was Garretts Green College – now a branch of East Birmingham College and City College. This was definitely a fulfilment of one of her dreams!

All the time, while developing her professional life, Zdzisława was actively involved in the Polish community. She was singing in the Polish Midlands Choir and became its chairman and secretary. A Polish priest – Father Kącki – used to say that when he heard her sing he had to stop praying, he was so impressed with the beauty of her voice.

Zdzisława says: ***"As a Pole living in Birmingham, my life has been very successful. I managed everything by myself; I was independent and didn't need any special help. I couldn't have expected a better life and more professional achievement".***

These words sum up perfectly what a person can achieve with the right ambitions, hard work and continuous striving for self-improvement.

01. Zdzisława's First Holy Communion, Teheran, 1943.
02. Zdzisława, her little brother Marcelek and her mother, Teheran 1943.
03 Zdzisława's mother Mrs Olga Michalak and Marcelek, with two nurses from the hospital, Teheran 1943.
04. Marcelek and Zdzisława with their mother in the centre, Polish camp in Tengeru, Tanganyika (now Tanzania), 1944.
05. A group of school girls, Tengeru, 1947.
06. Father Michalski and Father Sargiewicz with members of the choir in the Polish resettlement camp of Blackshaw Moor, 1950.
07. Zdzisława's letter of acceptance to the tailoring college at upper secondary school level, on the basis of her entrance exam of 1st February 1948, Tengeru.
08. Zdzisława's engagement photo: with Marcelek below, her parents in the centre, and Zdzisława with her fiancé Czesław in the top row above her parents, Blackshaw Moor Camp, 25th Dec 1951.
09. Another engagement photo of Zdzisława and Czesław, with Marcelek.
10. Wedding photo of Zdzisława and Czesław, Leek, Staffs., 21st Feb 1952.
11. Another wedding photo with a group of guests, Leek, Staffs., 1952.
12. Snaphots of life in Blackshaw Moor Camp, 1952 - 1954.

18. Mrs Paulina Śliwa

Paulina was born on 18th October 1925 in Korczyn Szlachecki, 15 km. away from the Carpathian Mountains. She had two sisters, Marysia and Niusia. Korczyn Szlachecki was an area occupied both by Poles and Ukrainians. Her father was appointed as a *sołtys* (village/town administrator) in 1930 and he built a school, which was hallowed in 1935.

In 1935, the death of Piłsudski, the historic Polish political figure, (on the very day her own grandfather died) reignited conflict between Poles and Ukrainians in Korczyn Szlachecki, and, in 1936, Paulina's family moved to Podole, close to the border with Russia and Romania. It was a Polish colony and it was called "Towarzystwo parcelacyjne". They lived there for four years, and were amongst the first to see the Russian troops cross over the border after the start of the war.

Paulina remembers the day of their deportation: "It was Sunday, it was terrible; we didn't even go to church that day as there was chaos … We were packed into a cattle coach. There was 65 people in one wagon, they were locked and had very small windows with bars. ***We were there for three weeks; no food; no nothing. It was February, there was one iron stove.*** Fortunately, we had some flour and groats, so we could make some food. But some people had nothing." Her mother also brought eight chickens with her, who all survived the journey.

After three weeks of moving north, they were at the Russian border again and were transferred to Russian wagons, which were even worse. It took them till the end of March - seven weeks in all to reach their destination in Siberia. Then: "barracks … were already prepared as they had used them for prisoners in the past. The barracks were full of bedbugs and lice. It was April. We started work in the forest. Men were cutting the trees; kids like me were burning the trees. "

The 1st of May brought a terrible setback: Paulina's father was arrested when the Russians were annoyed by the Poles having improvised a small place of religious worship. They deported him and four other men to Mongolia. They did not expect to ever see her father again: ".. we were told we should forget about him because no one ever came back from there."

They were then set to work preparing ground for rail-tracks. Paulina recalls how hard life was: ***"There were lots of deaths: toddlers had no chance of survival as there was no milk, so mums couldn't feed their babies.*** They were giving us 1 kg of bread per working adult or kid. My mum, my sister and I, we all worked and that is why we survived. My little sister was going to school and she had some soup in there. We lived like this all the summer of 1940."

But there was the amnesty in 1941 and their father was released and returned. Thanks to the amnesty, they were able to leave Siberia in 1942. Her father chose to head for Jambyl in Kazakhstan. "We sold some fur coat and some wheat in order to collect some money for the journey. We stopped half way between Siberia and Jambyl in Sympałatyjsk and got off the train to buy bread." But when Paulina returned the train was gone! Many who were left in this way were never heard of again. Luckily, a kindly Russian station master helped her find another train and various Russian strangers, including an NKVD man with his family, gave her food. It was a nerve-wracking two days, at the end of which she was reunited with her, hitherto, distraught family.

There being no further transports available in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1942, like many other Poles they had to simply survive many months in the cotton-growing areas to the south in 1942. Initially they were given a "Lepianka", and soon they worked on the cotton fields. It was very hard work. In the winter, Paulina contracted pneumonia. It was impossible, with rivers frozen, to reach hospital, and because of her illness their family was allocated a small house which was kept warm with a stove made from parts of a scrapped car which her father and a friend fixed up. At last, news came that a transport would be available soon from Ugawoja. "In order for us to get there my mum gave up our last chicken, which we'd brought from Poland, to the Russian women who helped us to get to the train. We were registered there and we were transported – it took three days - to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea." Paulina recalls: ***"There were 15000 people waiting for the transport, all kids had to have their hair cut because of the lice. My sister had such a beautiful head of hair, but we had to do it."*** Despite her father and sister falling ill, they all made it onto the ship.

It was hot in Pahlevi, as it was now August 1943, and her father was taken directly to hospital in Tehran. "We were given a wash and some clothes. From there we were transported to Tehran. My mum was ill as well, so they took her to the hospital. I was determined to find my father. I went to look for him, I remember it was Sunday. I went to the hospital; there were a lot of people waiting by the gates. I was so exhausted and it was so hot, I collapsed, and the medics took me into the hospital. …. I finally found my father; his face was very yellow but he recognised me. I was so happy and started to cry. They said my father isn't very well but he is getting better."

"My father left hospital and he joined the Army. My mother, sister and myself went to Ahwaz and from there to India. Once in India we were divided into groups and our group went to East Africa to Masindu. We got into the camps. My sister and my mother fell ill, they had malaria (the illness reduced mother to 42 kg!). We had medical help. There were also some schools."

"The war had finished. We wanted to go back to Poland but my father said it's not a good idea as we had nothing there. So we went to England." There they spent some time at a camp near Cambridge, and her sisters were in special schools to enable Polish children to gain English qualifications more quickly. Kazik, the future husband of her younger sister, Niusia, worked at one of these schools and he bought a house in Cambridge, where Paulina lived for a time. A certain Henryk also lived there, and it was he who introduced Ludwik, who worked at The Shakespeare Restaurant in Stratford, to Paulina. Ludwik's family wanted him to return to Poland. But he chose to marry Paulina and remain in England … Ludwik found a better job, working for the Midlands Gas Board, and this is what brought them to Birmingham. In fact, another attraction of Birmingham was the presence of Father Kącki, the influential and much-loved priest, who was from the same village in Poland as Ludwik.

Paulina had seven children. They kept strongly to Polish traditions in their home and all the children took a full part in Polish community life. Despite the fact that all her daughters have married British husbands, a consolation has been that all these husbands have enjoyed following the Polish Christmas traditions.

19. Mrs Krystyna Weber

Krystyna was born in 1949 in Britain at a resettlement camp for Poles at Tilstock, in North Shropshire. She has an interesting story to tell about how it came to be that she was born there.

Her parents, both Polish, had first met in the resettlement camp. Her mother had been in the AK army (Polish underground National Army) during the war, and had fought in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. When the war ended, she realised that returning to Poland was not an option, since she would have been imprisoned or even killed there, so she made her way to Britain. Being a trained teacher, she had no difficulty in getting a teaching job in the camp. Similarly, her husband, also a teacher, after being demobbed from the army, was sent to the same camp as the head of its primary school. Thus, they met, and got married in 1947, and had Krystyna in 1949. Later they moved to Fairford camp in Gloucestershire and some of Krystyna's earliest memories are of this camp where her family lived in one of the Nissen huts, before they moved to Birmingham in early 1958.

"I remember being in my father's class …, the outlay of the camp – it was very large, it was an American air force base, and our hostel was an ex-American hospital building. There were large Nissen huts that were divided into rooms. Several families lived in each hut. We had 3 rooms at the back, and communal bathroom and kitchen. I remember the school, a chapel, a shop, a świetlica – place for social meetings - a cinema and a place for dances and things like that".

As a qualified teacher with a very good knowledge of English, Krystyna's father was offered a job at the Oratory School in Edgbaston. For her mother it was a bit more difficult – living in the camps and dealing mainly with the Polish community didn't help much with learning English – as Krystyna says, it was mainly a 'shopping English'. For that reason her mother's life was centred on the Polish Club, where she was a teacher and a social organizer.

This at least partly explains why, later on, Krystyna herself got so much involved in the activities of the Club. She went to the Polish Saturday School, and got her GCSE and 'A' levels in Polish. Later, she taught there, too, for a couple of years. She had a class of English students married to Poles, and children of mixed marriages. Until recently, she worked as a Polish guide group leader, went on camps, and is still a treasurer for the Mazowsze division of the Girl Guides. To top it all, for 25 years she sat on the exam board, setting listening and reading exams for the Polish GCSEs, and resigned from it only last year. All this was taking place very much as 'extra-curricular' activities, in addition to her full time day job, working as a teacher.

Krystyna's first language was actually Polish, since it was spoken at home; English came into her life only when she started a local English primary school in Fairford, and it certainly wasn't easy to begin with.

"Our knowledge of English was very poor. The local children didn't make it any easier for us, and the teachers there didn't have any previous experience of teaching foreign children before, and they found it very difficult to cope with us not having any English".

It was certainly a very different situation to what prevails now in British schools! But, as a bright pupil, Krystyna picked up English very quickly and by the time she was eight she was top of her class. On arrival in Birmingham in 1958 she went to St. Augustine's Catholic School in Handsworth.

"I was 8 years old then. There were a few Polish children there already. I remember sitting with other children in the class and helping them read. I also remember the classroom had one of those coal fires in the middle".

Then, having passed her '11-plus' exams, in 1960, Krystyna got a place at St. Paul's Grammar School in Birmingham.

She says that owing to her Polish background her life has been a prime example of a 'parallel existence':

"At home we spoke mainly Polish, and also by that time we had my mother's mother who had arrived from Poland, with no English at all. So we were totally bilingual. It was almost like leading two separate lives. I had my English school and English friends, I studied at college and developed my own professional career as a teacher, but at weekends I had my life here, with the Polish friends at the Polish School and all the activities there, such as Polish Guide Association, being a group leader, going on camps".

Not surprisingly, following in her parents' footsteps and undoubtedly having a flair for teaching, after her 'A' levels, Krystyna went straight on to do a teacher training course at a college on Westbourne Road in Edgbaston. She has been teaching ever since, starting first in 1970 at St. Francis Catholic School in Hockley. At around that time she met her husband, Ryszard (incidentally born in Tel Aviv as his Polish parents had found themselves in Palestine during the war), who had studied engineering and also had a teaching qualification in further education. Since he was offered a job in Doncaster, that's where they moved to and lived for the next 25 years, and that's where their three children were born.

In 1997 the family returned to Birmingham. Krystyna became Head of St. Edmund's School in Ladywood and was head teacher there for 8 years. Due to the stresses of work, however, she resigned from the headship and returned to being a classroom teacher. She is still working full time.

Needless to say, Krystyna and her husband brought up their children bilingually – they, like their parents, have gone through the Polish Saturday School, were involved in the Girl Guides and Scouts movements, went on camps, kept up the religious traditions, and so on. What's more, they got their partners interested in the Polish side of their lives, too!

After completing their higher education in various English universities, Krystyna's two sons and a daughter returned to live and work in Birmingham. When asked whether she feels more Polish or more English, Krystyna firmly says she has no problem with her identity: she is a British citizen born in Britain, of Polish parents; she feels equally comfortable in both roles, and slips easily from one to another.

"I've always said that I'm Polish. At school all the pupils know that I'm Polish … I always tell people who I am if they ask me, I never changed my name and use the Polish spelling of my first name – Krystyna. At school I'm fully accepted as British, of Polish origin".

On a practical level, her knowledge of Polish has been very useful – the influx of Poles since 2004 has meant there are quite a few Polish children in her school, so she can easily help with translation and interpreting!

Krystyna's life is a good example of how successful the combination of the two different cultures and languages can be, and how it is possible to make a valuable contribution through one's personal and professional achievements.

01. Krystyna's father, Zenon, 1940's.
02. Krystyna's mother, Irena, 1945/46.
03. Mother Irena, 2nd from top, in a prisoner of war camp, Germany 1945.
04. An armband worn by Krystyna's mother, Irena, during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.
05. Certificate issued in Lille, France, confirming that Krystyna's father, Zenon, worked as a teacher in France from 1937 to 1940, issued in October 1948.
06. Krystyna's parents' wedding photo, Tilstock, 1948.
07. The Polish school in Milk Street, Birmingham, 1960/61. Krystyna 4th from the top, with her mother to her left.
08. Krystyna & her brother with parents and the headmaster of the Polish school in Fairford, 1953.
09. Krystyna's 1st Communion, with family & friends, Fairford 1957.
10. Krystyna and Ryszard's wedding photo, July 1971.
11. Polish Girl Guides from Britain visiting Rome, 1966. Krystyna 1st from the left.
12. Krystyna and family.

20. Mrs Wanda Wyszyńska

Wanda was born on 8th of April, 1937 in Vilnius in north-east Poland (it is today the capital of Lithuania). Her parents had a small-holding 3 km. from the spa town of Druskienniki, on the verge of the forest; a beautiful place. Her father was a forester and her mother made cheese and other foodstuffs for sale.

Wanda, being so young, can only remember the family's deportation by the Russians and their journey to Siberia from what she was later told by her family: "They came in the middle of the night and gave my parents half an hour to pack." However, one of the soldiers did give some important advice: to bring some gold with them for their journey. Wanda says: "That actually kept our family alive – being able to sell bits of jewellery for food later on."

"My father's mother actually died on the journey by train to Russia. Other people started complaining that the corpse took too much space etc. and in the end it was pushed out of the window. My father never really recovered from that."

Wanda remembers little of her time in Siberia, although she recalls the hunger. In fact, it was after the amnesty that her life was most in danger: "When the Polish army was formed under General Anders, my father was allowed to come and collect his family. I was in hospital then, suffering from typhoid. ***The doctor and the nurses told my father I had a few more days to live at the most, I was so thin and so ill. So my father put me in his rucksack and took me out of hospital …*** I looked like a skeleton and have a photograph to prove it, but I survived. I have another photo taken two months later, after I'd had plenty to eat – for the first time in years – and I look like a little doughnut on it!"

They reached Tehran, and there her father and the army departed for Palestine and the family was taken to East Africa and spent their time in four different camps. Wanda can recall Africa with fondness: the flowers, the warmth, the animals, and even having her own pet monkey. But, in 1948, Wanda and her mother came to England: ***"Altogether I was in Africa six years. I came to England when I was 11 years old, not knowing any English at all and feeling very lost and unhappy for a long time."***

For the first year, like many other newly arrived Poles, they lived in army camps, in their case at first at Wheaton Aston in Staffordshire, next to Haydon Bridge in Northumberland and then to Husbands Bosworth in Leicestershire. Now aged 11 and knowing no English, Wanda found things difficult in attending English secondary modern schools. But she encountered one thing they hadn't had in Africa: books!: "In Africa we had no books at school, so when I came to England and saw textbooks with coloured pictures in them, I couldn't get over it. I developed such a respect for books."

"I started school in Northumberland, and was extremely unhappy there. I was an ambitious girl and wanted to do well, but felt I couldn't. There were thousands of Polish children suffering like me so they decided to set up boarding schools. I went to the one called Stoke Park, near Gloucester. I was much happier there; the teachers spoke both English and Polish and I really got on well. I got three 'A' levels and my results were so good that the headmistress advised me to study dentistry or medicine. So I came to Birmingham to study dentistry – I thought it was lesser of the two evils. But after the first year I knew it wasn't for me and I quit the university."

What Wanda did when she left university was to get married. She married a man who was the son of her mother's friend who, a few years earlier, had given her a crash course of lessons in Latin in order to assist her in qualifying for the grammar school. Wanda recalls: "I had three boys and then, when the youngest started school in 1974, I started to train formally as a teacher." She summarises her career: "I got a job in Holy Cross School and, after a year, I was made head of mathematics. After 16 years I applied for a job as a deputy head at St. Joseph's, which I got, and I was there for another 16 years. When I was 64, I retired, or so-called retired, because I continued working on a supply basis nearly full time again. Up until 18 months ago I was still teaching."

Wanda's sons have contrasting careers. The eldest, Wiktor, is a language specialist, who is married to an Italian and has an oriental carpets business in London. Richard, the middle son, is an aeroplane engineer, who worked for ten years in America and then returned to Britain and now works in Chester. Konrad, the youngest son, is an accountant and lives in Birmingham.

Wanda has been and is a prominent figure in the Polish community. She has worked as a teacher at the Polish Saturday School since 1974, and has been its headmistress since 1977. The satisfaction she has derived from her teaching is very evident: "I like being busy and I love working with children. That is to me the ultimate in working life."

Recent years have brought some changes at the Saturday school: "This is a language school, so we mainly teach the language. In the past, when we had more space in the Club, we also did some folk dancing. We teach a bit of music, history and geography but the emphasis is on the language. We prepare them for GCSE in Polish, and this year we are doing the 'A' level examinations. We have 18 students attempting it. Last year we had 12 A-stars in GCSEs. Of course, this is due to the latest influx of students from Poland; their Polish is generally very good.

Next year they would be able to try for 'A' levels, but for that they would need to read a lot of Polish books, and that's something they haven't got into the habit of doing."

Asked about friends, Wanda states: ***"We are very lucky having a nice circle of friends, both English and Polish. But we tend not to mix them together because of the language barriers. We have some wonderful neighbours and I have some friends from school and college and still keep in touch."***

Wanda's feelings of nationality and identity are most interesting: "When I go to Poland I love it, but coming back to England feels like coming back home. My break with Poland has been too long to feel that I belong there."

But finally Wanda reflects on the perspective of her parents: "Looking back, the deportation was a terrible thing. My parents found it so difficult to come to terms with the fact that they had lost everything. They felt better when they found out that my brother (who had missed the deportation through being in hospital at the time) had done well for himself in Vilnius. He educated himself, became a respected author and a university professor. He's even had a street named after him. So this compensated a little bit for my parents. … My sister went to South Africa, where her husband had a civil engineering business, and they did extremely well: she is a very well off lady."

My mother looked at all that and said that although there were terrible things leading to the later successes, the compensations were also great. She died a happy woman."

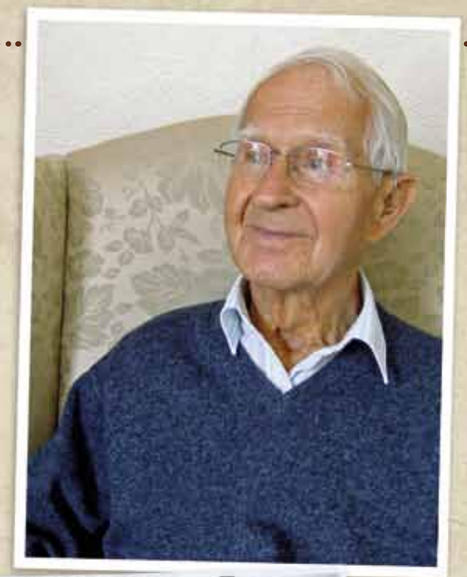
01. A group of foresters: Wanda's father sitting 2nd from the left, near Druskienniki [now Lithuania], 1920's.
02. Wanda's parents Elzbieta & Bronius Basalykai, Vilnius, Lithuania, 1930, [photo taken from the autobiography by Alfonsas Basalykas, Wanda's brother].
03. Wanda's parents, her brother and sister, Vilnius, 1931, [photo taken from the autobiography by Alfonsas Basalykas, Wanda's brother].
04. Wanda's father's Identity Card as a forester, Vilnius, 12.09.1935.
05. Wanda's parents and sister (Wanda centre, very thin) just after their arrival in Teheran, 1944.
06. Wanda two months later (well fed), Teheran 1944.
07. Wanda's brother, Alfonsas Basalykas, Lithuania, 1964, [photo taken from the autobiography by Alfonsas Basalykas, Wanda's brother].
08. Wanda's parents in front of their house in Birmingham, 1968, [photo taken from the autobiography by Alfonsas Basalykas, Wanda's brother].
09. Wanda and her sister Elena Brun, 1968, [photo taken from the autobiography by Alfonsas Basalykas, Wanda's brother].

21. Mr Julian Dreścik

Born 25th May 1918 in Chodenice, Cracow province. In Bochnia he completed four years at Grammar School. In 1936, he joined the 'SPLdM' in Bydgoszcz, qualifying in 1939 as an Aircraft Mechanic at Krosno. He was posted from the school to the 2nd Air Force Regiment in Cracow and enlisted into the Training Squadron. With his unit, he participated in the September 1939 campaign, before being evacuated to Romania.

Travelling through Beirut, he reached France on 8th February 1940. He volunteered for transfer to Great Britain, arriving on 26th March at the RAF Station Eastchurch. On completing his training, he was moved to a British Unit. From there, he transferred on 4th April 1941 to the 304 Bomber Squadron. He volunteered for oversea service, and on 4th December 1944, was directed to Italy, where he was attached to the 663 Polish Operational Squadron.

He was decorated with the Brązowy Krzyz Zastugi z Mieczami, Medal Lotniczy and two Bars, 1939-45 Star, Italy Star and War Medal. He was released from the Polish Air Force, settling in Peterborough, Northants, where he was employed in the production of diesel-engines. For family reason, he moved to his wife's home town of Birmingham. There he was employed in a car production, where he remained until his retirement. He is a married man with one daughter.



22. Mr Tadeusz Tworkowski

Tadeusz was born in Grudziądz, in northern Poland, in 1924. His grandparents had a farm, only 6 km from his school, and he used to spend his time after school there.

He was 15 years old when the war started. The house he used to live in was burnt down in the first six weeks of fighting between the invading Germans and Polish army units. In the confusion and mayhem of this very active front, Tadeusz lost contact with his mother who had evacuated to Elbląg, over a 100 km to the north-east. It was not until 20 years later that they were to be reunited.

Like many young men, Tadeusz joined the army as a volunteer and has some memories of fighting in France and later in northern Italy, and also of being very ill in a coma with typhoid.

In 1944, Tadeusz took part in the battles of Monte Cassino. He was there with the Polish 5th Division.

This is what he says about his years in the army:

"I never slept in bed for 7 years …, I slept on the floor like all army men, Polish or American, or British …, any nationality …, we slept in schools, churches, and various other places. In the autumn of 1944 we had a tent on the ground and slept there. There were times when the British divisions stopped their tanks and slept on the tanks, because at 5 o'clock in the morning we might be going into action".

From Italy, in 1947, Tadeusz went to Fort George, in Scotland, with the Black Watch – the 3rd Infantry Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Scotland. He stayed there for 3 years, and in 1952 was discharged from the army.

Tadeusz was awarded several medals, one of them being the 'Italy Star', from the Home Office, as well as a monetary reward in recognition of his contributions in the war.

After coming to Birmingham, he had a succession of different jobs, and worked many years for Land Rover. He married an English wife (now dead) and they had three children. Tadeusz adopted a very English way of life. They were very fond of taking holidays in Spain. In this English environment, Tadeusz's children did not go to the Polish Saturday School and English was exclusively the language used in their home. Tadeusz has not really been involved much in the activities in the Polish Club.

Tadeusz considers England to be his home. However, he has many interesting photographs and mementos documenting his life in the army. He represents a strong example of why the British should be grateful to Poles for fighting in their joint cause against Hitler and the Nazis.

01. Tadeusz Tworkowski 1945.
02. 1939-1945 Star World War II medal, awarded by the British Government to all the British and other soldiers in the British Army.
03. The War Medal 1939-1945. Awarded for campaign service.
04. The Italy Star Medal awarded for operational service in Italy.
06. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth meet Tadeusz's army unit.

iv. Project Overview

The subject and the time period of this project

This has already been described in previous chapters of this booklet.

Purposes of the project

These have been to involve people in the heritage of the Polish Community and to recruit individuals to develop the project, which records the memories of 21 Polish people who arrived in Britain in the early post-war migration. This project has aimed to capture the memories of older Polish people to give a better understanding to young Poles and the wider community as to why they came here and their contributions to society, and also a better knowledge of the culture and way of life of the Polish community. These memories have been captured using Oral History Interviews, with selections made into Digital Stories using words, photographs and music.

Aims

The Polish Centre in Birmingham has housed many religious, cultural and social organisations over the years. However, many of the Poles who created these patterns of activities and organisations, as a result of their specific social and cultural needs, are now of a considerable age. What cannot be denied is that these people have made an enormous and often little noticed contribution to the social, cultural and economical well being of the city. It seems unlikely that these remarkable individuals will be replaced in a similar way by new generations of Poles. The aim of this project has been to involve a younger generation of people in exploring their heritage and support in developing the project. These individuals have worked on the project by interviewing and collating information letters, documents, photographs etc. of the 21 older Polish people.

All stages of the project have been photographed and documented by a professional photographer

Learning materials have been developed by capturing the memories using Oral interviews

The Oral History, semi structured interview has been broken down into the following subjects or themes

1. Life in Poland before 1939
2. The journey from Poland
   (many Polish people were forced to migrate from Poland either because of the Nazi invasion from the West or because of the deportation to Siberia under the Rule of Stalin from the East)
3. Settling in Birmingham
   - Family life, food
   - Traditions, language, religion
   - Working life
   - Cultural activity, dance, song, theatre

The interviewees have been encouraged to tell their stories in their own words, in Polish or English, and at their own pace with minimal interruptions from the interviewer whilst being recorded on digital audio equipment.

There have been no oral histories previously available from the Polish community in Birmingham. The 21 recordings have been transcribed and will be made available in the Central Library archive in Birmingham alongside any other accumulated material such as photos and written documentation for preservation and dissemination to the wider community, duplicate copies have been made and will be housed at the Polish Centre Library and in the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London.

This project has preserved the memories of the older Birmingham Poles for the present and future generations in the wider community, encouraging community cohesion. By sharing resources it is hoped that the organisation will become increasingly visible and encourage the development of new partnerships with other community groups, including health and education.

The Central Library in Birmingham has provided valuable training of the volunteers in how to archive the collected material and in the process of Oral History. Training on the use of Photo story 3 has been carried out by Maureen Smojkis at the CEIMH at the University of Birmingham. These digital stories have been made available on CDs to be played on media player on a Personal Computer or laptop to be used as reusable learning objects.

How we got the idea for our project

Following recognition of the aging Polish population and the need to capture the unique memories and stories there was a discussion with colleagues from other minority groups whose experiences have been similar.

A lack of knowledge had been identified in the younger Polish community, newcomers and the wider community regarding the diversity of the existing Birmingham Polish population.

Workshop for young students from the Polish Saturday School

Oral history can provide extremely valuable educational material. It is often the first-hand evidence of the past, its traditions and folklore; but it is also a recording of people's memories, feelings, attitudes and experiences. Talking about the past is also a way of bringing different generations together. With this objective of increasing the involvement of young people in our heritage project, some members of our team ***(interviewers, project manager, and the photographer) visited the Polish Saturday School on the 26th of February 2011.*** It was decided that the best understanding and involvement in the project would be shown by the oldest students of the Polish Saturday School.

Thus, for this purpose our team held a workshop for the students of the 17-year level of Mrs Janina Lakin's group.

The main guest speaker at the workshop was Mrs. Genowefa Czepiel, a woman who has already taken part in the project, having given us an interview previously. At the beginning of the workshop the project manager, Mrs. Anna Cielecka-Gibson, briefly informed the young people about the main purposes of the project and the help expected from the students. Mrs. Hanna Forss and Mr. Alec Forss spoke about their involvement in the project and the great importance of the life stories of those Poles who came to Birmingham during and after the war. Mrs. Forss emphasised the tragic time of deportations of Poles from Kresy to Siberia, quoting extracts from the interviews of deported people. Then Mrs. Czepiel presented her very moving life-story, showing on the map of Poland from the interwar period, and the places of her childhood. She described the tragic time of deportation and terrible hardships of life in Siberia. Mrs. Czepiel was also pointing out how difficult it was, after coming to Birmingham, to learn English and work at the same time, after the war.

Mr. Alec Forss, who had interviewed Mrs. Czepiel previously, covered aspects of the technical problems of conducting interviews, and showed how you can interview people using specialist recorders.

The last part of the workshop was dedicated to the young people themselves, who had the possibility to question face-to-face. Our team was very impressed by the adult approach of the students to the subject. All of them had listened through the morning with great interest and respect and their questions showed understanding and a feeling of concern over the tragic history of the older generation of Poles.

Records of the workshop, which lasted two hours, was undertaken by our project photographer, Mr. Alberto Juliao, who took photographs and made sound recordings of the question and answer session. The young students showed enthusiasm to be involved in the preparation of an exhibition.

v. Notes on the 'in War and Peace' Exhibition

The 'In War and Peace' Exhibition opened on Saturday 15 October, 2011 at Polish Millennium House in Digbeth, Birmingham. This was a key landmark in the 'Collected Memories' Project and many participants felt that the day was a great success. The Lord Mayor of the City of Birmingham, Councillor Anita Ward, was welcomed by Ryszard Weber, the Chair of the Management Committee of the Polish Catholic Association (PKK), and then gave a short speech and opened the exhibition. Speeches were then made by the Project Manager, Anna Cielecka-Gibson, Project Officer, Maureen Smojkis, and the Polish Consul, Sergiusz Wolski. After these speeches, the Polish Choir then gave a short recital of songs from the period. Guests were then invited by the Midlands Polish Community Association team for refreshments: as well as wine and soft drinks, a Polish buffet was served at which were available traditional Polish dishes, such as bigos and pierogi. Amongst the guests were Clive Harris of The Heritage Lottery Fund and Izzy Mohammed and Andy Green from the City of Birmingham Libraries and Archives.

Highlights of the day were recorded by two photographers: Alberto Juliao and Sebastian Kudanowski. A selection of their photographs are included overleaf.

The Exhibition ran at Polish Millennium House until Friday 4 November 2011. It attracted a wide range of visitors, many of whom left comments in the Visitors Book.

01. Welcome to the Lord Mayor: (From left to right) - the Lord Mayor, Councillor Anita Ward; the Lord Mayor's Consort, Mr Michael Brown; Chairman of the Polish Catholic Association, Mr Ryszard Weber; Polish Consul, Mr Sergiusz Wolski; Project Manager, Mrs Anna Cielecka-Gibson; Chairman of the Polish Catholic Association, Mr Bogdan Rottner. (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

02. The Polish Consul, Sergiusz Wolski, gives his speech (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)

03. Concentrating on the speeches (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)

04. The Lord Mayor opens the Exhibition (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

05. The Polish Choir gives a short recital (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

06. Mrs Zofia Michalski, The Lord Mayor, and Mrs Wanda Wyszyńska (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)

07. Clive Harris of The Heritage Lottery Fund and Project Officer, Maureen Smojkis (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

08. Andy Green and Izzy Mohammed, City of Birmingham Libraries and Archives (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

09. Members of the MPCA team examine the Digital Stories: (Clockwise from top left) Anna Czerniecka, Jacek Czerniecki, co-author of Digital Stories, Tomasz Mikulski and Maureen Smojkis (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

10. Abstract Co-author, Mrs Hanna Forss with husband, Mr Geoff Forss (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

11. Student volunteers from the Polish Saturday School (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

12. Mr Jan & Mrs Barbara Pawłowski and Booklet Co-author, Mr John Gibson (Photo: Alberto Juliao)

13. Examining the panels (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)

14. Left to right: Parish Priest, Father Marcin Kordel; Student, Konrad Jagodziński; Father Marcin Chodorowski (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)

15. Left to right: Michał Babicz, interviewer Paul Burton, and Alinka Babicz (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)
16. Left to right: Mrs Zdzisława Śledzińska, Mrs Blanka Kuźmińska and Mrs Genowefa Czepiel (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)
17. Elżbieta Kudanowska and MPCA-volunteer, Atonya Sims (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)
18. Mrs Stanisława Olejnik (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)
19. Enjoying the Polish buffet: served by MPCA-volunteers, Atonya Sims and Tomasz Mikulski (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)
20 A great reunion for the interviewees (Photo: Sebastian Kudanowski)

Project People

Project manager:
Anna Cielecka-Gibson

Volunteer project officer:
Maureen Smojkis

Translation:
Hanna Forss,
Anna Czerniecka

Interviewers:
Hanna Forss,
Alec Forss,
Anna Czerniecka,
Paul Burton,
Maciej Mich,
Maureen Smojkis,
Radosław Rajewski

Coordinator and proof reader:
Anna Cielecka-Gibson

Graphic designer:
Peter Fleming

Photographer:
Alberto Juliao

Abstracts authors:
John Gibson,
Hanna Forss,
Maureen Smojkis

Top (from the left): Interviewers Radoslaw Rajewski, Maciej Mich, Anna Czerniecka, Volunteer and Producer of Digital Stories, Tomasz Mikulski, Interviewer Paul Burton

Second row (from the left): sitting Project Manager Anna Cielecka-Gibson, standing Volunteer Project Officer Maureen Smojkis, sitting Izzy Mohammed from Birmingham Central Library and standing Interviewer Hania Forss

Midlands Polish
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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CEIMH

Birmingham City Council

birmingham settlement

I.I.P.

In war & peace

Dedicated to all the Polish people who settled in Birmingham in the early post-war years and to their contribution to the cultural and economic life of the city.