

**The Making of Polish London through Everyday Life,  
1956-1976**

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**PhD Thesis**

I, Paweł Chojnacki, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

The wartime and postwar Polish emigration allows us to study a ‘parallel’ history of the Polish nation. Poles in Great Britain were free from the restrictions imposed on Poles in the homeland by the communist dictatorship; they were thus better able to continue in the intellectual and cultural paths of interwar Poland. But by the later 1950s it was clear that there would be no early return to a free Poland. Poles in exile had to adapt to their condition, and interact with a rapidly changing British society. As a result, their characteristics diverged from those of Poles in the homeland and – despite their best efforts – from those of their ancestors as well. This dissertation examines the distinctive ‘parallel Polish world’ at the level of everyday life, rather than the central institutions of ‘Polish London’. It focuses on three *Gminy* (Communities) founded in the 1950s: the Polish Community of West London, the Polish Community of South London, and the Polish Centre in Lewisham. The diverse and enjoyable social activities undertaken or supported by the Communities – dances, Saturday schools, sport, scouting and guiding, charity, religious and national commemorations – were subordinated to the aim of maintaining Polish national identity in exile, and transmitting it to subsequent generations. This kind of ‘Polishness’ was heroic, martyrological, and Roman Catholic. The organizational and fundraising skills developed in the Communities’ pursuit of their own houses proved invaluable in the building of the Polish Social and Cultural Centre in London (POSK). However, among the casualties of POSK were the Polish Communities of West and South London, which effectively came to an end in 1976. Only the more peripheral Lewisham Centre survived. POSK’s benefit to everyday Polish life in London has been questionable. The *Gminy* may yet offer an organizational model for a new, more numerous wave of Polish emigrants to the UK.

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## **Bibliography**

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I wish to thank all those from the Polish Community of West London (GPZL), the Polish Community of South London (GPL-P), and the Polish Centre in Lewisham (POL) who gave me interviews and statements, and allowed access to source materials. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Mrs Maria Siemaszko and Mr Zbigniew S. Siemaszko for numerous conversations on many aspects of the émigré destiny. I also thank the Polonia Aid Foundation Trust (PAFT), M.B. Grabowski Fund and the Holy Family of Nazareth Educational Trust for the subventions, which I received in the years 2001-2008, which helped me to conduct my research, and the staff of the Polish Library in London for their kind assistance. I am grateful to my own School of Slavonic and East European Studies for covering my fees for the entire period of my studies in 2005-2008.

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My family showed much patience and support during my many trips, during one and a half years of separation, and also courage during the period of life together in London. To them no words can express my gratitude.

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An interest in the émigré 'parallel world' brought me to London in 2001. Initially I was most fascinated by the history of ideas in the Polish emigration. My first meeting with the problems of the Communities and everyday life of the emigration was connected with the invitation of the GPZL to write the history of their organization. I was given access to the Community's archive, and the opportunity to talk to many of



it former activists. The book was published in 2006.<sup>1</sup> This one-off venture (in the plans of my wider studies) into the history of local social groups was intended as a counterweight to my research on the emigration's intellectual elite. Rather unexpectedly, it bore fruit in further research and writing.

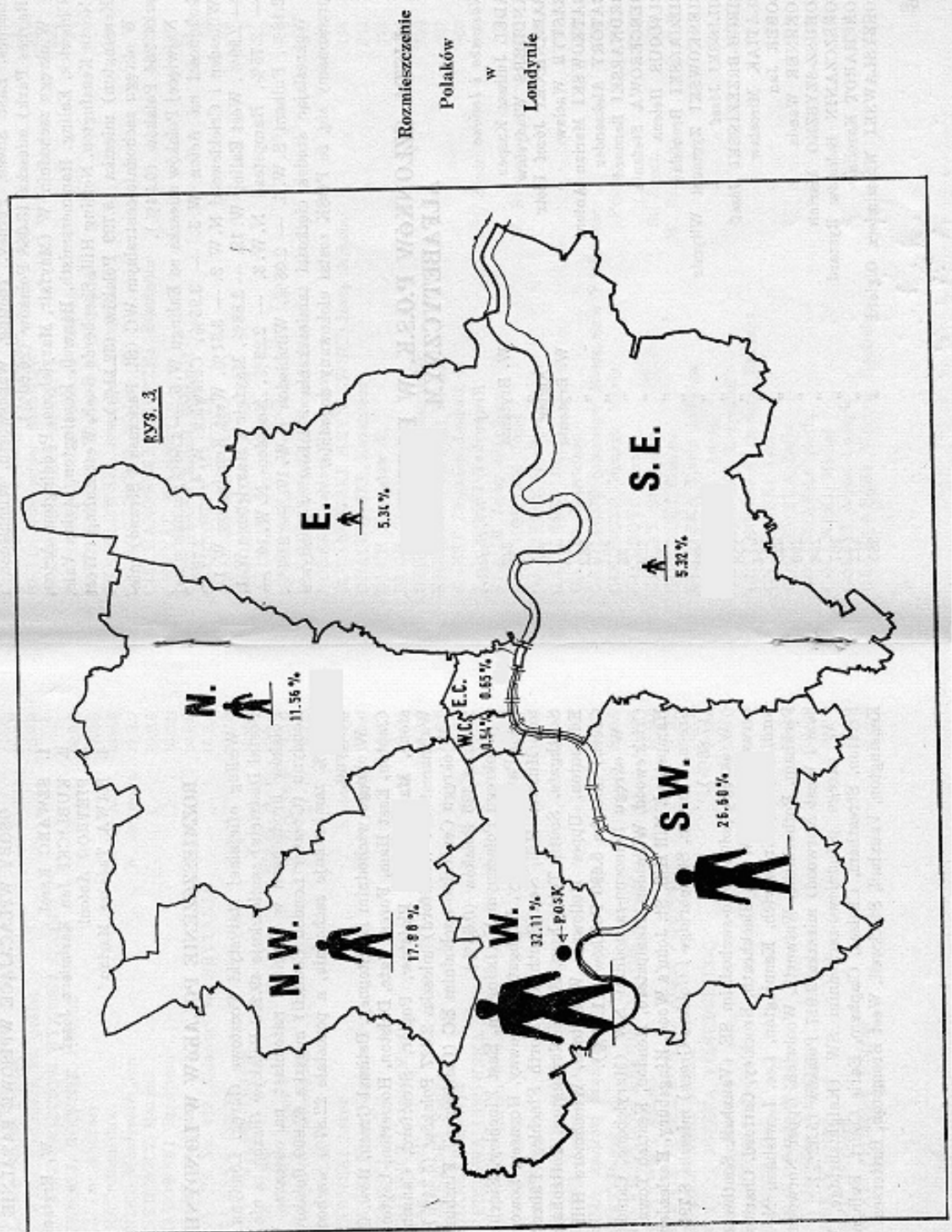
While I was writing this dissertation in 2005-2008, I first lived in the 'Polish lair' in Acton, on the former area of the GPZL. After a year and a half circumstances took me to Lewisham, full of places and people connected with the history of the GPL-P and the POL. I believe that this experience helped me to understand the specificities of these parts of the London universe, and the differences and similarities in the life of the Poles who have lived there. It allowed me to immerse myself in, and continually discover anew the general conditions and flavour of this extraordinary scenery – a colourful, exceptional decoration for so many aspects of Polish life for the past few decades.

Paweł Chojnacki

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<sup>1</sup> P. Chojnacki, *Gmina Polska Zachodniego Londynu. 1959 – 1976 – 2003*, London and Lublin, 2006. The writing and publishing of the history of the Community was enabled by grants from the former Board of the GPZL and PAFT.



## Chapter 1. Introduction

### The ‘parallel world’

As a consequence of Second World War, and above all after the abandonment of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, to the Soviet sphere of influence, more than one million Polish war refugees remained in Western countries. The governments of Great Britain, USA and France withdrew recognition from the Polish authorities-in-exile in summer of 1945. President Władysław Raczkiewicz, the Prime Minister Tomasz Arciszewski and his cabinet still commanded the considerable Polish Armed Forces in the West (*Polskie Siły Zbrojne*, PSZ). The army, which had fought from the first until the last day of the war, was in 1945 almost 250,000 soldiers strong, with a navy and air force. The authorities in exile were not only symbolic: they were the sole legal real government for emigrants with Polish citizenship and who considered themselves to be Poles.

The Yalta agreements with Soviet Union created for all Poles, both in Poland and abroad, a new, quite tragic situation, which determined their fate for the next forty-five years, and whose consequences are still visible. Arciszewski’s cabinet rejected the decisions of the Crimea conference and the Polish Armed Forces were never formally demobilized but only sent on leave. The former émigré Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk’s experiment in co-operation with Soviet collaborators in occupied Poland failed in 1947. It ended with hundreds of casualties from the Polish Peasants’ Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL) which he led, and his own escape from Poland.

After a few years of relocations, when some of the Poles in Western countries had decided to return to the homeland,<sup>1</sup> while many others escaped from communist terror; after the journey to countries beyond Europe, and returns from such exotic

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<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to capture the full meaning of the Polish expression *w kraju* in English. ‘In the country’ sounds like ‘in the village’ (*na wsi*). Following the example of their nineteenth-century predecessors, postwar émigrés made a point of not referring to the ‘Polish People’s Republic’ as ‘Poland’, because they considered themselves the truest continuators of pre-war Poland. Instead they referred to the *kraj*. Although ‘the homeland’ has often been used to translate *Ojczyzna* (literally: ‘Fatherland’, *Patria*) it has been used here to distinguish the country from the communist state that ruled it.

places as India and Africa; and after the concentration of all Polish Armed Forces in the United Kingdom, the Polish emigration in Great Britain started to take shape. It has been estimated at over 100,000 persons.<sup>2</sup>

This phenomenon was called the ‘soldiers’ or the ‘independence’ emigration; it is now frequently called ‘the Second Great Emigration’ in Polish historiography, to distinguish it from the first one in the nineteenth century. It is very important to emphasize that the postwar emigration was the next chapter of the Polish destiny in exile and part of general Polish history which, as Tadeusz Wyrwa has written in his book *Bezdroża dziejów Polski* (Roads to nowhere in Polish history), ‘proceed at two mutually interacting levels: in Poland and abroad. Émigré history started with the election of King Stanisław Leszczyński in the first half of the eighteenth century’. Emigration, according to this author ‘is the time of trial for every refugee and the sum of their attitudes assumed in exile shows, to a significant degree, the character of each nation’.<sup>3</sup> This perspective is particularly interesting.

The years 1945-47 are the period, when the history of Poland and its emigration were not yet completely divided and differentiated. There were still some possibilities of communication: the travel of couriers in both directions, the reunion of families, the paths of individual escapes. The governing bodies of the all-Polish structures which led mass resistance in defence of Polish independence were active to the end of 1947 and kept in touch with émigré political circles. The breakdown of the resistance’s headquarters, the closing of the borders, the penetration and takeover of the foreign contacts of the resistance by the communists’ secret service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, SB) was completed at last in 1954.

The consciousness of membership in some *continuum* of Polish fate did not arise simultaneously with the modern research focused on the phenomenon of the wartime and postwar emigration.<sup>4</sup> The historians of emigration many times mention the fact that one of the first publications of the later renowned *Instytut Literacki* (The Literary

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<sup>2</sup> General works devoted to the beginnings of the Polish post-Yalta emigrations are, among others: Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain. A Study of Adjustment*, The Hague, 1956, and Keith Sword with Norman Davies and Jan Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-1950*, London, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> T. Wyrwa, *Bezdroża dziejów Polski. Kraj i emigracja po 1 września 1939 r.*, Lublin, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Many émigrés insist to this day on referring to the ‘postwar emigration’, not only on the grounds that most of them arrived in the UK after 1945, but also because during the Second World War they were not ‘emigrants’ but combatants. However, about 20,000 Polish servicemen arrived in Great Britain in 1940, and the first institutions in exile were set up then. It seems more comprehensive and appropriate to refer to ‘the wartime and postwar emigration’.

Institute, based first in Rome, and then in Paris) was the ‘Bible of Polish emigrants’ *Księgi Narodu Polskiego i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* (Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage) by Adam Mickiewicz.<sup>5</sup> The first edition of this book was published in Paris in 1832. A similar role of making readers aware of the continuity of both levels of their country’s history was played by articles printed in the weekly *Wiadomości* (Newsletter), revived in London in 1946, where the common military origin of both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century emigrations was emphasized.

Those who decided in the second half of the 1940s to stay in exile (namely officers and soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces, the Home Army, prisoners of war from 1939, their families, former forced workers from the territory of Third Reich, refugees from ‘People’s Poland’ and others) were all aware of the fact that they too walked in the well-trodden paths of Polish history. The influence of the ‘Great Emigration’ after the November Uprising of 1830-31 on Polish culture was, and still seems to be, so enormous that this experience was not limited only to the elite of émigré society. One could also mention the fact that the role of emigration in shaping Polish culture in the second half of the twentieth century has similarly been of great importance. Both ‘emigrations’ were Polish voices of freedom in the times when creative activity, could not be pursued in the homeland independently from what were euphemistically referred to as ‘outside pressures’.

There were, however, significant differences between the twentieth-century emigration and the previous ones. The former was a genuinely mass phenomenon, and contained not only the social elite but also all strata of the Polish nation. Unlike its predecessors, this emigration could not be called ‘a community of solitary men’.<sup>6</sup> Another difference was the fact that legal authorities existed that were strongly supported by the majority of emigrants at the outset, and recognized by some states (for example, the Republic of Ireland, Spain and the Vatican City). One more disparity, very strongly connected with the essence of the émigré fate, was that the Second Great Emigration saw the homeland’s liberation from Soviet influence in the years 1989-1991. An interesting question is why almost no émigrés returned to the homeland.

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi Narodu Polskiego i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego*, Instytut Literacki, Rome, 1946, preface by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński.

<sup>6</sup> Alina Witkowska, *Cześć i skandale. O emigracyjnym doświadczeniu Polaków*, [Gdańsk, 1997].

Research into the postwar emigration has become fairly popular among historians. However, the focus of the research is mainly on literature with a particular emphasis on the Paris-based *Instytut Literacki* and *Kultura* (Culture) magazine on political thought. The same narrow scope of interest can be observed in research. Thus, the output of the Polish London is still underestimated. Although more is being written about it, the tone is usually patronizing and the writers maintain an ostentatious distance towards the subject, particularly when they compare its importance with that of *Kultura* and Radio Free Europe. Overall, one could say that researchers have so far been interested only in the biggest institutions and organizations in this vast and diverse set of research problems.<sup>7</sup>

In 1997 Maria Danilewicz-Zielińska characterized the name and the people of the London-based emigration in the following way: ‘The term “Polish London” is difficult to define. The origins of the Polish London can be traced back to June 1940 rather than to the historic September [1939]. It was then that in Great Britain a new community suddenly emerged, with its own president, government, offices, publications and habits. Over more than fifty years this invasion of foreigners has lost much of its original exoticism. It both slightly irritated and attracted local people, before finally becoming part of multi-ethnic Albion. “Polish London” and “Poland-on-Thames” require an overall analysis which would take into account subsequent stages of their becoming part of their surrounding environment’.<sup>8</sup>

It is also fascinating from a historian’s point of view that Polish émigré community embraced virtually all aspects of human cultural activity, in a broad sense of the term. Jerzy Giedroyc’s editorial and publishing activity is undoubtedly an important contribution to the richness of the Polish émigré activity, yet it is not the only one. For example, the phenomenon of Mieczysław Grydzewski’s *Wiadomości* still needs a thorough monographical study.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, what is also sometimes overlooked is the fact that man’s creative output, as Juliusz Sakowski put it, ‘does

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the existing research results and conclusions will have to be verified as a result of the publication of communist Special Forces documents by *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej* (The Institute of National Remembrance).

<sup>8</sup> M. Danilewicz-Zielińska, *Wprowadzenie* [in] Krzysztof Głuchowski, ‘Wspomnienia. W Polskim Londynie 1947-1970’, *Zeszyty Historyczne* no 122, Paris, 1997, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> A few books have however been published on the subject: *Od Herberta do Herberta. Nagroda „Wiadomości” 1958-1990*, ed. S. Kossowska, London, 1993; *„Wiadomości i okolice. Szkice i wspomnienia*, ed. M. A. Supruniuk, 2 vols., Toruń, 1995-96; Rafał Habielski, *Niezlomni, Nieprzejednani. Emigracyjne „Wiadomości” i ich krąg 1940-1981*, Warsaw, 1991.

not merely consist of geniuses and it would be bad, if it waited for them'.<sup>10</sup> This well-known rule is reflected in the history of Polish culture created beyond the reach of communist oppression and the phenomenon widely termed 'Polish London' is a strong manifestation of this culture.

Thousands of emigrants built their own 'parallel world' in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, France and Germany. It was parallel with the world in the homeland in both the political and social senses, with its own president, a government, state institutions, organizations and associations, newspapers, schools, and even universities. In the course of almost fifty years in a natural way there appeared specific usages of language, hierarchies, stereotypes and a style of understanding and experiencing 'Polishness' which differed from that in communist-ruled Poland. This style referred back to the period of independence between 1918 and 1939 and was inspired both by national martyrdom during the war and the tradition of the Polish Armed Forces in the West and the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK) in occupied Poland. One should mention here such figures as General Władysław Anders, Mieczysław Grydzewski, General Marian Kukiel (also a historian and archivist), Zygmunt Nowakowski, Adam Pragier, Józef Mackiewicz, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Marian Hemar. This world of experience was enriched by its encounters with the host countries' cultures as well as by direct experience of changes that the Western civilization underwent, a process which is well captured by the writer Jan Lechoń in his *Dzienniki* (Diaries).<sup>11</sup>

Jerzy Giedroyc's *Kultura* was critical of a more traditional way of comprehending 'Polishness' and formulating political and historical tasks, although thinking in terms of antitheses would be simplistic.<sup>12</sup> The worlds of the homeland and emigration interpenetrated one another. The books and the press published in the West reached Poland. Also, people in the homeland were aware of the existence of the émigré government and president, as well as of schools where the anniversary of the Constitution of 3 May 1791 was ceremonially celebrated, unlike in Poland, where such celebrations were forbidden by the communist regime. Ridiculed or ignored by the communist authorities, the image of Polish London aroused criticism among part

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<sup>10</sup> J. Sakowski, *Asy i damy. Portrety z pamięci*, Paris [no date of publication], p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> J. Lechoń, *Dzienniki. 1949-1956*, 3 vols., London, 1967-73.

<sup>12</sup> See the latest works, which are, alas, not free from anti-London sentiment: A. S. Kowalczyk, *Od Bukaresztu do Laffitów. Jerzego Giedroycia rzeczpospolita epistolarna*, Sejny, 2006; M. Żebrowski, *Dzieje sporu. „Kultura” w emigracyjnej debacie politycznej lat 1947-1956*, Warsaw, 2007.

of the Polish society. For others it gradually became a legend, a source of melancholic hope. When idealized, it reminded people that not everyone accepted the political status quo and the fact of Poland's inclusion in the Soviet bloc with all the consequences that entailed. Besides, Poles in the homeland felt a certain respect, underpinned by jealousy, towards the Poles living in the 'free world', which was connected with the level of their personal freedom as well as their material and social status. On the other hand, Polish émigrés, whether justifiably or not, developed the feeling of a certain superiority, stemming from their growing belief that they constituted the genuine, immaculate particle of Poland.

This so-called 'parallel world' had a self-sufficient character and, of course, this situation created many dangers typical of all closed communities. The émigré world, which objected to the perverted picture of national culture that was created until 1990 under the decreasingly severe but still prevalent Soviet protectorate, was full of output and activity, which could be qualified as mass culture. These included illustrated magazines (for example *Fotorama*), popular novels (Roman Orwid-Bulicz, Janusz Jasińczyk, Napoleon Sąddek), revues and cabarets (Marian Hemar, Tola Korian, Włada Majewska), books for children and youth (Barbara Kozłowska-Męcarska, Andrzej Janicki), calendars and guides, and comic books. Research into this output could give us new insights into the sources of attitudes that shaped the consciousness of many Poles living in exile in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Voluntary social organization is an important element of national culture. It was not possible in communist Poland, apart from brief moments of political turning points (1956-57, 1980-81). The history of emigrations is full of examples of genuine and spontaneous getting together of different people united by common causes. Rafał Habielski describes this phenomenon in the following way: 'Social organizations were for many Poles working in a foreign environment a substitute for Polish life as well as a chance of being surrounded by people with similar life-stories and interests. They fulfilled the need for self-help and integration. Such organizations were as well an area of maintaining customs, tradition and the "national calendar"; they were also a kind of network for a community living far away from Poland and experiencing the

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<sup>13</sup> An interesting view of the lighter side of émigré culture is offered by Anna Mieszkowska's book *Była sobie piosenka... Gwiazdy kabaretu i emigracyjnej Melpomeny*, Warsaw, 2006. Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz wrote about émigré artistic life in his book *Polskie Galerie Sztuki w Londynie w drugiej połowie XX wieku*, Lublin and London, 2003.



feeling of a gradual loss of contact with the homeland. Participation in those organizations protected the émigrés from being lowered in the social scale and from the loss of national identity and provided them with the possibility of entertainment in their own circle'.<sup>14</sup> Emigrants set up associations of peasants and high-ranking officers, authors and philatelists, alumni of pre-war schools and universities, sailors and highlanders. It could be difficult in the 'émigré parallel world' to find a gap that would not be filled, sometimes even in a tiny symbolic form, by people of similar professions (whether practised previously in Poland or now in exile), similar social or geographical background, or by people who shared interests or wartime experiences.

However, it rarely happens that in one association, circle of people or editor's office, so many manifestations of dynamic activity should occur as it did in the Polish community – *Gmina*, (or communities – *Gminy*). They constituted an interesting, but almost completely unresearched part of this 'parallel world', of a little Poland beyond Poland.

### ***Gminy* – Polish communities. The stabilization of émigré society.**

The aim of this dissertation is, broadly speaking, to reconstruct the activity of three local, émigré associations: the *Gmina Polska Londyn-Południe* (GPL-P) – The Polish Community of South London, the *Polski Ośrodek Lewisham* (POL) – the Polish Centre in Lewisham (which was a kind of branch of GPL-P) and the *Gmina Polska Zachodniego Londynu* (GPZL) – The Polish Community of West London. However, I do not limit myself to listing the activities of this particularly rich social life. Although I believe that keeping a historical memory of the more ephemeral forms of collective activity is also an important task, it, nevertheless constitutes only one part of this study.

In the second part of the work I shall take a closer look at some distinctive features of émigré communities based in several areas of the metropolis, which were distinct in character. This aim will be carried out with reference to the particular organizations I am interested in. I want to show how the establishment of huge centres of social life (to some extent the *Orzeł Biały* club in Balham, but mostly the

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<sup>14</sup> R. Habielski, *Polski Londyn*, Wrocław, 2000, p. 59.

Polish Social and Cultural Centre, *Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny*, POSK, in Hammersmith) affected the disintegration and final disappearance of organized forms of local communities like the *Gminy*.

Finally, I shall attempt to trace changes in the national identity of Poles in Great Britain during these key two decades in exile. The point of reference for émigrés who wished to cultivate Polish national identity remained the independent Poland of the interwar years and the Poland that struggled to defend and then to regain that independence during the Second World War. It could not have been otherwise. The reality of the Polish People's Republic was neither accepted, nor understood, nor considered to be their own. All of these factors defined the content of the national self-identification of Poles abroad between the 1950s and the 1970s. They sought to be Poles like those of the 1920s and 1930s, three or four decades later, in a foreign environment that was undergoing the profound civilizational transformation that affected the entire Western world. It was impossible to convey this traditional way of understanding Polishness to the next generations, and they were unable to generate their own, original approach while in a foreign environment. That is not to say that the adult émigrés were unaffected by their British surroundings, but the changes they underwent did not alter their understanding of Polishness or vision of Poland.

The wider Community in question, in an attempt actively to maintain and pass down a model of national separateness known to them, developed a new type of national identity, different from the pre-war model and also from the type of national consciousness of Poles in Poland (usually called the *kraj* by émigrés)<sup>15</sup>. On this point I shall not attempt to enter into discussion with the most important research on this field made by Keith Sword,<sup>16</sup> but instead to add new material connected with *Gmina* activity and draw conclusions from it. My work has been done 'near' or 'beyond' Sword's results. I have explored completely new sources from a different point of view – not the end of Polish community in the UK, as one could think fifteen years ago, but at the beginning of a newly formed and vast ethnic group in the early twenty-first century.<sup>17</sup> As I shall explain in the sub-chapter on methodology, my dissertation is written from a historical, and not a sociological point of view. This is

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<sup>15</sup> See n. 1 above.

<sup>16</sup> K. Sword, *Identity in Flux. The Polish Community in Britain*, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Sword even used the sentence 'the reduced circumstances of 1990s', op. cit. p. 132.

the first full-scale work of local history on the wartime and postwar Polish emigration in Great Britain.

The above points and statements are an essential part of the thesis.

I focus on groups that are, to a considerable extent, representative of the total number of Poles in exile in this period (the caesurae will be explained below). Of course, not all Poles in exile were interested in these organizations. Polish Communities (*Gminy*) aimed to fulfil the basic needs of their members and, in a holistic way, of all Poles within the range of their operation. These needs were linked to their principal goal, which was to preserve and cultivate national consciousness. The nature of those needs were: religious (services in Polish, parish churches); national and educational (schools with 'native' subjects for children, patriotic ceremonies); self-help (care for elderly and lonely people); general social needs (social meetings, parties, games, excursions, sport).

The Polish communities were territorial forms of self-organization of the lower strata of the émigré society. Unlike the central organizations and elites of Polish London, they dealt with work at the grassroots of everyday exile existence. The democratic and non-elitist and cohesive nature of the *Gmina* it is something that goes against the usual perceptions of Poles in *emigracja*. As local organizations, the local *gminy* had to enter into relations with the central institutions of émigré life in London. However, they consequentially sought to avoid too many such encounters, and to limit the degree of intimacy. Experience proved that dependence on 'central' politics had a negative influence on the effective functioning of local organizations. Party politics divided people, whereas co-operation at a local level united them. The centralization of Polish social life in London, mainly as a result of the creation of POSK, led to the withering of the *gminy*, and to a change in the way in which émigrés organized themselves at local level.

The chief difference between the organizations scrutinized in this study and the typical forms of activity of Polish émigré communities belonging to other regions and times of the Polish Diaspora (for example, the so-called 'old emigration' in the United States or labour migration in France) lay in the fact that the former stressed the importance of the idea of national independence, which entailed some forms of political involvement (for example, recognition of the role of émigré authorities, organization of national holidays and celebrations, educational programmes for schools and *harcerstwo* – Polish scout and guide organizations). Individual émigré

centres differed in the way they organized activities and the degree to which they stressed the idea of independence.

The Polish Communities (*Gminy*), for example, understood the idea of national independence in a universal way that was disconnected from the current tasks, endeavours and divisions that were so much a part of the political and social life of Polish London. In the face of various splits occurring in its political life, activists of the Polish Communities tried to avoid participation in various conflicts and rows. However, I shall demonstrate below that they did not always succeed in abstaining from such conflicts, and that the above controversies also had a considerable influence on the foundations of the social life of the émigré society's lower organizational levels. As the years passed, the language and rituals connected to the idea of independence became more and more standardized, and this process of standardization is also dealt with in this study. Moreover, everyday life during 'less heroic' periods is governed by its own rules. That is why some everyday activities performed by some activists and members of Polish Communities (for example visiting 'People's Poland', or even attempting co-operation with organizations that were part of the communist regime) did not always go hand in hand with their declared ideals. I shall also give examples of uncompromising, indomitable and so-called 'fierce' people.

Undoubtedly, the organizations I focus on in this thesis, that is the Polish Community of South London, the Polish Community of West London, and the Lewisham Centre, did not cover all aspects of everyday life of émigré society in the British capital.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, local centres of Polish life in Ealing, Willesden, Islington, Ilford–Leyton, Wimbledon and Croydon–Crystal Palace are beyond the scope of this dissertation. This is because the parishes, common houses, Saturday schools and other rich examples of social activity that existed in these places seemed similar to the concept of the *Gmina*, but never reached such a level of self-organization and conscious co-ordination of various activities that would be expressed in the formation of a superior body, that is, the *Gmina*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Even though in South-East London the leaders of the Lewisham Centre consistently tried to avoid the term *gmina* when describing the type of their activity, the centre fulfilled the same function as the two other Communities on a smaller scale. It had a very close relation to the GPL-P and many people involved in it were also active in the GPL-P.

<sup>19</sup> Histories of some parish churches have so far been published as commemorative anniversary editions. These include: *1955-1995. 40 lat życia i działalności Ośrodka Katolickiego Matki Bożej Miłosiernej. Londyn – Willesden Green*, London, 1995, and its following edition: *Polska Wspólnota*

Therefore, the aim of this study is not to cover the entire organized life of Polish London during the period of more than two decades when it developed most actively. Its very richness makes it impossible to describe within the prescribed limits. However, I shall try to devote some space to forms of activity in other parts of the city, which are similar to the ones within my main focus. Individual chapters are not intended to be monographic studies of scouting or Saturday schools. I shall attempt to capture some more universal features on the basis of available sources with the concept of the *Gmina* as the unifying one. One should also bear in mind that Polish émigré life was not limited to London.<sup>20</sup>

The next argument in support of such a research focus is the fact that the diversity of the three Communities is sufficient for an attempt to capture the main features of everyday life in the public sphere of the Polish postwar emigration. As Zbigniew S. Siemaszko recalls: ‘From Friday evening to Sunday evening we all lived in the Polish world. All ranks and titles were back in their place and the social scale changed. That was the way the majority of émigré Poles existed’.<sup>21</sup> My main interest is this everyday nature of life in the Polish world, events that usually took place during holiday breaks in British life. Although occupying the majority of their time and energy, emigrants’ relations with the British world are interesting for me only as far as they concern the ‘Polish world’. This everyday life ‘from Friday evening until Sunday evening’ consisted of organizational meetings, Saturday school classes, scout group meetings, parties (and preparations for them), masses, sporting contests, work in private flats and houses and other forms of activity.

Professor Piotr Wandycz in his memoirs concerning his involvement in the émigré political party *Polski Ruch Wolnościowy ‘Niepodległość i Demokracja’* (Polish Freedom Movement ‘Independence and Democracy’), remarked: ‘There were numerous Poles who claimed that being involved in politics in exile is a waste of time. Following an ideology was a way of opposing the attitude according to which one should mind their own business when living in exile and that one should concentrate on building their own lives abroad, without abandoning Polish identity of course. Such an attitude was present on different levels and in different ‘ideological’

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*Katolicka Matki Bożej Miłosierdzia Londyn – Willesden Green 1955 – 2005. Złoty Jubileusz*, London, 2005; *Kościół św. Andrzeja Boboli w Londynie*, ed. R. Juszcak, London [no date of publication].

<sup>20</sup> As far as centres of activity beyond London are concerned, one should look at Janusz Kowalewski, *Penrhos. Soplicowo w Walii*, published by Polskie Towarzystwo Mieszkaniowe, London, 1975.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Zbigniew S. Siemaszko. Rozmawia Paweł Chojnacki’, *Tydzień Polski*, no 25, 2 June 2005.

camps.’<sup>22</sup> Even though the *Gminy* were not interested in émigré ‘high politics’ and indeed they ‘minded their own business’ and concentrated on ‘building their own lives abroad’, it would be unfair to say that the people involved in them were devoid of ideological values.

Many of the distinguished activists of Polish Communities, apart from being active at a local level, were involved in central organizations that were not necessarily strictly political yet were clearly present on the map of Polish London.<sup>23</sup> Their commitment to work for the *Gmina* was often the expression of a general disposition towards such type of activity, a decision to devote their free time to issues concerning Poland. Thus, simple oppositions such as local organization (task-oriented thinking, matter-of-factness, distance towards the government-in-exile) *versus* central organizations (quarrels, phobias, lack of realism, excessive use of official titles) does not withstand scrutiny in the light of the sources generated by the *Gminy*. The émigré reality was far more complicated and the dividing lines lay elsewhere.

Each of the Communities, apart from some common features, had its own specificity. For example the Polish Community of West London was located in the area where the Polish settlement was densest, close to many centres of political and cultural life, not only of London but also of the global Polish Diaspora. Moreover, the fact that the Polish Social and Cultural Centre (*Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny*, POSK) was built in that area played a decisive role in determining this organization’s activities. On the other hand, the Polish Community of South London operated in a seemingly less promising area, yet it developed even more strikingly than the West London one, in seeking to coordinate Polish life from Wimbledon to Croydon. Its activists, who seemed to possess better organizational skills, were instrumental in the creation of POSK.

The smallest *Gmina*, the community and parish in Lewisham, makes an interesting example for other reasons. Firstly, it was a kind of ‘borderlands of Polish London’ (*kresy polskiego Londynu*) situated far away from its centre and led its own, rather provincial life. Secondly, unlike in the case of the other Communities, a vital

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<sup>22</sup> Piotr S. Wandycz, *O federalizmie i emigracji. Reminiscencje o rzeczach istotnych i błahych*. Conversations with Sławomir Łukasiewicz, Lublin, 2003, p. 64.

<sup>23</sup> For example, the long time leader of the GPZL, Colonel Stanisław Kuniczak was the founder and *spiritus movens* of the *Koło Lwowian* (Lwów Circle) and an editor of *Biuletyn*, that circle’s bulletin. Other prominent figures are mentioned in Chapter III of this dissertation.

role in founding and activity of the Lewisham Centre was played by outstanding priests – Father Adam Wróbel and Father Antoni Dębski. It is also important that the community in Lewisham was the only one to have survived *de iure* and *de facto* until the symbolic year 2004, the year when Poland became member of the EU and when the existing phenomenon of the new wave of Polish emigration became conspicuous. Thus, Lewisham could be an interesting location to be explored from the point of view of the process of including new emigrants into structures built by the postwar emigration, but for the moment at least, this is a task for a sociologist, not a historian.

### **The timeframe**

The *Gminy* began to emerge at a crucial time for the Polish emigration. Despite the fact that the origins of the Lewisham parish, which was the nucleus of the Centre, date back to 1951 and the organizational meeting of the Community of South London took place in 1955, the beginning of the most fruitful period of activity of the three social centres covered by this dissertation was in the second half of the 1950s. In a review of Marian Hemar's book published in 1956 in the *Wiadomości* weekly, 'Pandora' wrote about Poles' postwar experience of exile: 'The time of migration of people came. The Second Corps arrived in Great Britain from Italy, other Poles came from the Middle East and Africa and at the same time others left the British Isles for other parts of the world. The army was demobilized, people sought employment and lived under harsh conditions until they settled down. The situation lasted for about two years'.<sup>24</sup>

After the period of 1946-48/49 – the time of 'migration of people' and general confusion – came the phase of gradual stabilization. People completed their studies and vocational courses, bought houses having been able to obtain mortgages, and the first generation of émigré children was born. Although the Korean War and attempts at rebuilding the Polish Armed Forces in 1950-1953 could keep alive the hope for the change of fortune in some émigré circles,<sup>25</sup> it seems to be obvious that 'in the life of

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<sup>24</sup> *Wiadomości* no 19 (527), 6 May 1956: Pandora, 'Siedem lat chudych'. The series *Puszka Pandory* (Pandora's Box) was written by Stefania Zahorska and Adam Pragier. In this case I can presume that the review was written by S. Zahorska (died in 1961).

<sup>25</sup> On Polish hopes for the Third World War to start see, among others: C. Brzoza, 'Zapomniana armia. Polskie Oddziały Wartownicze w Europie (1945-1951)', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no 116, Paris,

each compulsory emigration there is a turning point connected with the crisis of faith in the quick ending of émigré existence and the necessity to accept the fact that it will last a long time. This situation demands not only a change of the rules of life but also of the whole philosophy of existence, its formulas and aims'.<sup>26</sup> The *Gminy* emerged precisely when the rules of life changed.

The second half of the 1950s was the period when hope of many emigrants eventually to return to a free homeland all but disappeared. In 1947 one of the authors who expressed the émigré spirit, Karol Zbyszewski, wrote: 'there was a strong conviction that the day after the war was won we will return to Poland'<sup>27</sup>. After the collapse of the Hungarian Uprising and the abandonment of political hopes connected with the 'Polish October' of 1956 that certainty had to vanish. Aleksander Bregman in an article entitled *Na co liczymy?*, ('What do we reckon on?') published in *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* ('Polish Daily and Soldier's Daily' – the most popular émigré newspaper) on 26 July 1960, summarized the situation in the following way: 'What don't we reckon on? I shall answer without hesitation. We do not reckon on war'.

The events of 1956 in Poland, despite the fact that there were different points of view regarding their importance,<sup>28</sup> brought changes that undoubtedly made an impact on the lives of many Poles in the homeland and in exile. For example, the liberalization of communist policy led to the partial opening of Poland's borders and families, which had in many cases been separated since 1939, were allowed to be reunited. Some emigrants, particularly the younger ones, decided to visit the homeland more frequently without the fear of repression. Also, it was finally possible for Poles living in the homeland to visit their families in Great Britain and for some channels of official cultural exchange to be established; for example there were performances of Polish theatre groups or of the Song and Dance Company

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1996, pp. 3-21; D. Jarosz, 'Polacy wobec groźby wybuchu wojny w świetle przekazów potocznych z lat 1946-1956', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no 2, 1997, pp. 53-62; P. Machcewicz, 'Emigracja w oczekiwaniu na III wojnę światową', *Więź*, Oct. 1998, pp. 141-57; Z. Woźniczka, *Trzecia wojna światowa w oczekiwaniach emigracji i podziemia w kraju w latach 1944-1953*, Katowice, 1999; A. Zaćmiński, 'Polskie siły zbrojne wobec możliwości wojny. Memoriał gen. M. Kukieła z 1947 roku. Wstęp', *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, no 3, 1996, pp. 191-200; A. Zaćmiński, 'Trzecia wojna światowa w planach emigracji polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1945-1956, zarys problemu badawczego', *Czasy Nowożytne*, vol. 1, Toruń, Lublin, Stalowa Wola, Olsztyn and Kielce, 1996, pp. 111-33.

<sup>26</sup> A. Witkowska, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> K. Zbyszewski, *Polacy w Anglii*, London, 1947, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> P. Zientara, *Emigracja wobec Października. Postawy polskich środowisk emigracyjnych wobec liberalizacji w PRL w latach 1955-1957*, Warsaw, 2001.



*Mazowsze* in London. On the other hand, the number of these returning to Poland permanently was not significant, if we take the overall number of emigrants into account. However, there were some prominent figures, mainly from the world of culture, who decided to return to the homeland (Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz and Melchior Wańkowicz among them).

In 'internal affairs' a dramatic break take place in 1954 when General Władysław Anders withdrew his allegiance to President August Zaleski. This event had a significant influence on attitudes, moods and life-decisions of émigré Poles<sup>29</sup>. Despite the division, there remained a strong conviction that it was necessary to fight for national independence among the more active part of the émigré community. Zbyszewski expressed this: 'People who go to Brighton for a weekend share the common idea of having a rest. Similarly, Poles in Britain have one feature in common: they all want Poland to be truly free and they all came here to fight for it'.<sup>30</sup> The means of fighting and setting priorities was left to be decided on. The end of the Poles' first decade in exile approached.

Let me refer once again to Witkowska: 'This lack of one's own place in Poland, a place which once was there but is there no longer, was one of the reasons for Poland to seem more distant for emigrants. This feeling was accompanied by the loss of psychological closeness to the homeland and the exchange of real space for a mystical one that was indestructible and immaterial. It was obvious that one should be interested in what was going on in the homeland, but the real power of life can be found in odds and ends of which the surrounding world where one lived was composed. It was here that one established one's roots and became integrated in social communities of friends and families. It was here that small homelands emerged, where one grew accustomed to particular neighbourhoods and parts of the city, to its eating-places and cafés'.<sup>31</sup>

Taking root in the host country changed the way emigrants perceived matters concerning Poland and themselves. This was particularly true about the youngest émigré generation, that is, people who became adult during wartime and immediately after the war. Their children started their education at English schools, which raised concerns about their Polish education and for many parents who had thus far not

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<sup>29</sup> See P. Ziętara, *Misja ostatniej szansy. Próba zjednoczenia polskiej emigracji politycznej przez gen. Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego w latach 1952-1956*, Warsaw, 1995.

<sup>30</sup> K. Zbyszewski, *Polacy w Anglii*, London, 1947.

<sup>31</sup> A. Witkowska, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

much participated in émigré social life, this was the stimulus to become active at least in Saturday schools. It was often the first step towards a greater commitment.

The political, generational, historical, sociological and ideological transformations of the Polish émigré community, which I deal with in this dissertation, gave birth to a new social situation, which could be called ‘an émigré small stabilization’. The term ‘small stabilization’ is generally referred to in Polish historiography as the period between 1956 until the end of the 1960s and the events of December 1970 or, in a broader perspective, until the breakthrough years of 1976-80 when opposition, of a democratic and ‘independence’ character, emerged, when Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected pope, followed by John Paul II’s first pilgrimage to his homeland, and when the events of August 1980 ended in ‘Solidarity’ acquiring the status of a legal trade union. The term covers the times when First Secretaries of the communist party were Władysław Gomułka and then Edward Gierek and it is taken from the title of the play by Tadeusz Różewicz called *Nasza mała stabilizacja* (Our small stabilization). Taking into account diversified conditions, this period, when Polish society came to terms with the political situation in the country, has its equivalent in the social history of emigration. Thus, a similar timeframe may also be used in this thesis.<sup>32</sup>

The year of 1976 is also significant in the history of the emigration for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the first half of the 1970s the old émigré generation died out. These people, formed before 1939, had up until this point shaped various aspects of both local and central life of Polish London. The symbolic events for this ‘changing of the guard’ in the field of political thought were the deaths of Adam Pragier and Juliusz Mieroszewski, two political columnists and adversaries, who for a quarter of a century had expressed their opposing views on pages of *Wiadomości* and *Kultura*, published in London and Paris respectively.

The emigration, politically reunited only since 1972, was no longer able to set its own political goals and was increasingly oriented towards supporting the emerging independence movement in ‘People’s Poland’. Waław Lewandowski, a researcher of the ‘independence’ emigration, wrote: ‘That year [1976] started the accelerated retreat of the exiled community from any political aspiration which could not be shared with the opposition in Poland, and which would not be inspired by it. The

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<sup>32</sup> R. Habielski describes the period 1958-1972 using the term ‘lasting’ (*trwanie*), which ‘is probably the most accurate in capturing the specificity of those years’, (*Emigracja*, Warsaw, 1995, p. 23).

emigration eventually rejected the relics of its unwavering status, and tried more intensively to perform the role of a servant to the opposition in the Polish People's Republic'<sup>33</sup>. The émigré 'golden age' finished, and not only for political thought and activities. Émigré artistic work became more and more the main topic and reference point for itself and was described and assessed according to its own criteria that were neither universally Polish nor global. This crisis concerned all aspects of émigré cultural and social life. In relation to the activities of *Gminy*, that meant the limit of their development and their gradual end.

In the specific social, London dimension I am interested in, the year 1976 marked the completion of the first stage of building the Polish Social and Cultural Centre and its official opening. The event had a serious impact on local communities and organizations: it not only caused the activities of the Polish Community of West London to cease but it also had further-reaching consequences. Other noticeable changes in the collective life of emigrants were connected with the developments within British society, for example the growing role of television and consumption. This evolution will be dealt with at the end of this thesis. The thirty years that have passed since the events I write about provides me with a perspective to analyse and evaluate them properly. Characteristic of the emigration is the fact that some prominent figures in the history of the *Gminy* were active until *yesterday* and some even now play an important role in the Polish community in Great Britain.

Against this background one can see clearly the concept and importance of the Polish *Gmina*. Several elements of the concept of the *gmina* deserve particular attention. These communities were organized from the 'bottom up' and spontaneously by voluntary understanding by groups of people, for whom social activity was additional to their fully-fledged professional and family lives in a foreign environment. The basis of the communities' activity were democratic and egalitarian principles, which were strictly adhered to in practice. The field of their activity was the fulfilment of clearly defined group needs.

The study of the development of the concept may also uncover more universal mechanisms and processes characteristic of the whole émigré community. The Communities I deal with were not simply organizations with over a hundred members led by activists obsessed with social work. There were many such

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<sup>33</sup> W. Lewandowski, „...Strofy do mew i mgieł”. *Z dziejów literatury Drugiej Emigracji (i jej relacji komunikacyjnych)*, Toruń, 2005, pp. 164-65.

organizations. Because of the multifaceted character of their impact and the richness of their perspectives the *Gminy* can be seen as a lens, enabling one to see a broader picture of social life. The various forms of this life including ways of spending free time seem to be fascinating areas for research. That is itself justification for reconstructing the preparation for Communities' events (such as parties) and the events themselves. Human life is not composed of merely heroic situations. For example, ways of having fun can tell us about customs and habits, which are an inseparable part of a community's history. Three quarters of a century ago, Jan Stanisław Bystron expressed this idea in his monumental *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce* [History of customs in old Poland].<sup>34</sup>

### **The structure of the thesis. Methodology and sources**

The construction of the thesis is predominantly thematic. First, I analyse the general concept of the *Gmina*, write about the first attempts at establishing Communities outside London and reconstruct the process of their emergence in the British capital – the centre of the postwar Polish emigration. I highlight local differences between communities and introduce their activists. Second, I characterize particular areas of activity according to the cyclical rhythm of Polish émigré life from Friday evening until Sunday evening. I start from social life, that is, parties and other celebrations<sup>35</sup>.

Next, I write about problems connected with bringing up children and youth: Saturday schools and scouting organizations' activities. I go on to describe Sunday activities: religious life, parishes and various forms of self-help connected with them; after that, I deal with sporting activities and, finally, with the paths and organizational forms leading to homeownership. I also devote one chapter to tracing untypical events, which happened outside the emerging routine of social work, but which influenced the lives of the Communities and can tell us more about them. Finally, I analyse the way the formation of the Polish Social and Cultural Centre (POSK) influenced the lives of smaller, local communities and write about their participation in the creation of POSK and the idea behind it.

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<sup>34</sup> J. S. Bystron, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek XVI-XVIII*, Warsaw 1932.

<sup>35</sup> Although parties usually took place on Saturday evenings, the process of their preparation started earlier.

In each chapter I try to present, on the basis of specific examples from the Communities' history, the more general problems that characterized them. For example, I deal with the question of the participation of various generations of the wartime and postwar emigration in building Polish life in exile. In particular, the maturing of the second generation in exile, born already in Great Britain, and their lack of involvement in forms of activity created by the generation of their parents raises the complicated problem of their attitude towards the homeland. I also raise the question of the long-term impact of the achievements of the 'old emigration' and their contribution in the process of creating the new Polish émigré community in London at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The sources used in this work are varied. In the case of each organizational unit described I use slightly different sources. For example, when reconstructing the history of the Polish Community of South London, I mainly used the bulletins of this association published regularly from 1955 until 1977, which in the beginning of the 1960s were issued in the form of the carefully edited *GPL-P. Komunikat* (Polish Community of South London Announcement)<sup>36</sup>.

In the case of the parish and Polish Centre at Brockley and Lewisham (POL) I used the preserved three volumes of the detailed, handwritten *Kronika* (Chronicle) covering the years 1951-75, which were the most intensive ones for the Community.<sup>37</sup> The Community of South-East London, although the name *gmina* has never been used in that area of the city, is the only one to have maintained the continuity of its activity and organization, which allowed me to broaden my knowledge of it with the use of the largest number of collected oral reports.

The archives of the Polish Community of West London contain its internal and external correspondence, the protocols of the GPZL's governing bodies' meetings (the Council and the Executive) and many other unique documents of social life. Of course in the case of exploring the history of each organization I use varied sources,

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<sup>36</sup> It is worth having a look at jubilee issues of *Komunikat GPL-P*, which attempt to summarize various periods of the Community's activity. The numeration of issues during the first several years was strange and only from 1961 I can give the following numbers.

<sup>37</sup> According to Czesław Kwaśniewski, the authors of *Kronika* were women: [?] Zawada, then Maria Duszowa and Zofia Koronowa. There was no pagination in *Kronika*, only the division by years of events, arranged in chronological order. The third volume is not completed, there are only collected materials, which I refer to in the footnotes as *Kronika – Materiały*. Unfortunately I was not able to find more than a few incomplete issues of *Wiadomości* (later *Komunikat*) of the parish (*Parafia pw. Św. Jan Bosko*) and the Polish Centre in Lewisham from before 1986. *Komunikat* has been published to this day.

<sup>38</sup> Owned by Roman Szkoda and Zygmunt Jankowski (according to Z. Jankowski).

indicated in the footnotes, but generally the above proportions are kept. Interesting and exceptional sources of knowledge about the history of both the Community of South London and the Centre in Lewisham are amateur films by Władysław Szkoda. These registered some of the most important events in the lives of the Communities.<sup>38</sup>

In order to reconstruct the atmosphere of the émigré ‘small stabilization’ and to indicate the place of the Communities on the map of Polish London, I have carried out preliminary research into the most important émigré newspapers and magazines of this period, paying particular attention to *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* (Polish Daily and Soldier’s Daily, *DPDŻ*).<sup>39</sup> I have also used the few memoirs published so far that were written by witnesses of Polish London’s history. These include those of Lidia Ciołkoszowa, Józef Garliński, Krzysztof Głuchowski, Stanisław Sosabowski, Tadeusz Walczak and Piotr Wandycz.<sup>40</sup> I obtained material for some biographies of people involved in the activities of the *Gminy* from sources found in the Archiwum Osobowe Emigracji im. Bohdana O. Jeżewskiego (The Bohdan O. Jeżewski Personal Archive of the Emigration, AOE) in the Library of the Polish Social and Cultural Centre in London.

It is not always easy to assess the status of these rich sources, their veracity, and how they connect with the oral evidence that I have gathered. I can only mention that I have never found any contradictions between the written sources and interviews carried out between 2005 and 2007. I have verified various facts by comparison between documents and later accounts.

In revealing the everyday life of émigrés, most frequently of old war heroes, my aim was not to make the image of the Second Great Emigration any less heroic. My goal was to add a new dimension to the image that already exists. This was possible thanks to the preserved sources but also to the rapidly passing possibility of confronting these sources with the accounts of witnesses and those who took an active part in the activities of the *Gminy*. As Tadeusz Radzik pointed out as early as 1991: ‘Meanwhile, year by year, in the natural course of events, pass away the

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<sup>39</sup> The full list of titles of newspapers and magazines of Polish London, which I explored, is given in the bibliography.

<sup>40</sup> L. Ciołkoszowa, *Spojrzenie wstecz*. Interview by Andrzej Friszke, Paris, 1995, J. Garliński., *Świat mojej pamięci. Wspomnień tom drugi*, Warsaw, 1998, K. Głuchowski, *W Polskim Londynie. 1947-1970*, London, 1999, S. Sosabowski, *Droga wiodła ugięciem*, London, 1967, T. Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, London, 1996, P. S. Wandycz, *O federalizmie i emigracji. Reminiscencje o rzeczach istotnych i błażych*. Conversations with Sławomir Łukasiewicz, Lublin, 2003.

witnesses of events of thirty or forty years ago, organizations cease to exist, clearing space for new ones connected with younger generations. The traces of, in many cases, remarkable and self-sacrificing social activity begin to disappear'.<sup>41</sup> We are aware of the fact that there is no time to be wasted. This particularly refers to these areas of the most recent past that are inevitably less well substantiated. Tadeusz Wyrwa, who is also a representative of the wartime generation, wrote: 'Now, with the passing away of the whole wartime generation, an era is definitely and irretrievably drawing to a close. This generation, who had a common system of values, common experiences and the common goal, which was the fight for freedom, not only of Poland, but also of Europe, with their heroic conduct played a glorious part in our history. Nobody can take it away from them'.<sup>42</sup>

In the course of writing this dissertation I collected over twenty extensive oral reports, which for the most part (except for the first one and the last two of the interviewed people mentioned below) come from the witnesses of history belonging to the 'wartime generation'. In alphabetical order they are: Zygmunt Grzyb, Zbigniew Jankowski, Janina Karpowicz, Ryszard Kotaś, Jerzy Kulczycki, Czesław Kwaśniewski, Maria Kwaśniewska, Danuta Kwaśny, Bogdan Laskowski, Józef Marian Makulski, Zofia Piątek, Elżbieta Piekarska, Edmund Ogłaza, Maria Siemaszko, Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, Łucja Ślepokóra, Gustaw Ślepokóra, Teodor Urbanowicz, Danuta E. Wardle-Wiśniowiecka, Stefania Wolańska, Maria Wolańska and Ryszard Żółtaniecki.<sup>43</sup> Understandably, taking into account the structure and dimensions of the thesis, I was able to use only a part of their statements: points of view and impressions obtained from the interviewed people.

I decided to quote documents and oral relations extensively, assuming that they are the most reliable sources that bring us closer to the truth about the issues in question. Unfortunately in some cases I was not able to work out full names and surnames given the initials, or even to discover the names of other people who were a part of the history of their Communities.

On the basis of these rich and painstakingly gathered sources I want to show an ideologically coherent effort to preserve desired aspects of Polish national identity,

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<sup>41</sup> T. Radzik *Z dziejów społeczności polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii (1945-1991)*, Lublin, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> T. Wyrwa, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-15.

<sup>43</sup> Thanks to Emilia Mostowicz and Małgorzata Podpora from Warsaw I obtained some information about their aunt Jadwiga Składkowska, the widow of the Polish Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj-Składowski.

especially among the second and third generation, despite contrary cultural and social pressures, and to answer the other questions that I have formulated.

As far as methodology is concerned, I have used methods typical for a historian of social groups who applies elements of sociology. As Jerzy Zubrzycki put it: ‘When I use the term “social organisation” I mean specific activity in a given time and place. Social organisation is a way in which people combine various elements of activity in order to do something they intend to do’.<sup>44</sup> This definition can be successfully applied to Communities. Additionally, I would like to stress the fact that I represent an ‘optimistic’ school of research on the emigration. I focus more on what was achieved rather than on what was overlooked or wasted. This, however, is not at the expense of the pursuit of historical veracity.

Conclusions regarding the extent of the influence of émigré institutions and organizations are limited by the limitations of available statistical data. It is safe only to quote the number of people born in Poland before 1939 and inhabiting the United Kingdom. It is not at all clear how many of them were of Polish nationality (as opposed to citizenship) or how many of them considered themselves Poles. No census was carried out that would have established the number of people considering themselves Poles among the second generation, born in Great Britain. Neither is it possible to establish the scale of the emigration from the Polish People’s Republic in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s that expanded the Polish minority in the United Kingdom.

For these reasons, it is not possible to establish statistically the percentage of Poles in any given region of London who engaged in the work of émigré organizations, or the proportion of children and youngsters from Polish families that attended Saturday schools or swelled the ranks of Polish scouts and guides. We only have estimates, involving a greater or lesser degree of guesswork, which I shall cite in the relevant parts of this dissertation.

It is puzzling that the *Gminy* have not so far been mentioned in studies concerning the social life of Polish emigrants.<sup>45</sup> No information about them can be found in the most important works in this field published until now, such as Rafał Habielski’s *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji (Druga Wielka Emigracja 1945-*

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<sup>44</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Soldiers and Peasants. The Sociology of Polish Migration*, London, 1988.

<sup>45</sup> Only Sheila Patterson (*The Polish Exile Community in Britain*, [reprinted from the *Polish Review*, vol. 6, no 3, 1961], London, 1961) seemed to have noticed the fact that *Gminy* existed. However, it appears that she was heavily influenced by B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik.



1990, vol. 3, Warsaw, 1999) [The Social and cultural life of emigration (the Second Great Emigration 1945-1990)]<sup>46</sup>; *Mobilizacja Uchodźstwa do walki politycznej 1945-1990* [The mobilisation of the emigration for political struggle 1945-1990], edited by Leonid Klisiewicz,<sup>47</sup> or in the sole English-language monograph concerning the problem by Keith Sword.<sup>48</sup> The entry *gmina* does not appear in *Encyklopedia Polskiej Emigracji i Polonii* [Encyclopaedia of Polish emigration and the Polish community abroad], edited by Krzysztof Dopierała (vol. 2, Toruń, 2003). The only *gmina* mentioned there is the *Gmina Polska w Wolnym Mieście Gdańsk* [The Polish Community in the Free City of Gdańsk], founded in 1921.

Rafał Habielski conducted a sociological reconnaissance of emigration.<sup>49</sup> He also analysed forms of collective life in the 1970s and 1980s (pp. 277-299), which is interesting from the point of view of my research focus.<sup>50</sup> In addition, he wrote about social organizations and collective life.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Wiesław Hładkiewicz in *Polska elita polityczna w Londynie. 1945-1972* [The Polish political elite in London, 1945-1972]<sup>52</sup> attempts to analyse the sociological problem of the image of a community, its everyday life and attitudes. This study, however, is limited to the titular circles. The author made an important remark: 'the London elite and their clientele are a starting point for research into emigration, which can be more closely explored only if its peripheries are identified, exile history beyond the circles of London notables acting within the limits of the émigré state'.<sup>53</sup>

Few studies illuminate the details of émigré everyday life. One could mention here a report by Tadeusz Kondracki on the living conditions and catering of Polish veterans in Great Britain after 1945 or some fragments of a book by Bogdan Szwagrzak devoted to youth organizations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Other parts of this study: vol. 1, Andrzej Friszke, *Życie polityczne emigracji*; vol. 2, Paweł Machcewicz, *Emigracja w polityce międzynarodowej*.

<sup>47</sup> *Materiały do dziejów Polskiego Uchodźstwa Niepodległościowego 1939-1990*, vol. 2, Polskie Towarzystwo Naukowe na Obczyźnie [PTNO], London, 1996.

<sup>48</sup> Sword, *Identity in Flux*.

<sup>49</sup> Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, pp. 208-30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277-99.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-107.

<sup>52</sup> Zielona Góra, [no date of publication].

<sup>53</sup> As in Wyrwa, op. cit., p. 201

<sup>54</sup> T. Kondracki, Warunki mieszkaniowe polskich kombatanów w Wielkiej Brytanii po 1945 roku. Zarys problematyki, in *Z dziejów Polski i Emigracji (1939 – 1989)*. Księga dedykowana byłemu Prezydentowi Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Ryszardowi Kaczorowskiemu, ed. Marek Szczurbiński and Tadeusz Wolsza, Gorzów Wielkopolski, 2003, pp. 263-73; T. Kondracki, Zagadnienie wyżywienia personelu Polskich Sił Zbrojnych na Zachodzie i powojennej emigracji w Wielkiej Brytanii. Zarys tematu badawczego, in *Nadzieje, złudzenia, rzeczywistość. Studia z historii Polski XX wieku*. Księga

The creators of the *Gminy* and the organizers of their collective work were ‘flesh and blood’ persons. I hope that awareness of this fact will allow new Polish inhabitants of London to meet, without inhibitions, the needs of the Polish community, whose history will not end when the wartime and postwar emigration disappears. (Equally, the Polish community here did not emerge only with the mass migration of Poles to Great Britain in the last few years.) In the field of social activity nothing fundamentally new has so far been invented. This truth has not been changed by the ‘progress’ of civilization: the Internet, cheap international telephone calls and airlines and the accompanying ease of travel and communication, or by the model of multicultural society present in Great Britain, or by Poles becoming citizens of the European Union.

Obviously there is the question of the extent to which the new wave of emigration will be able to fill the already existing structures of Polish social life in Great Britain and, indeed, whether it will be allowed to fill these structures. To what extent will it be able to create its own forms of organization? The answer to this crucial problem for the future of Polish community in Great Britain is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I have tackled this issue elsewhere.<sup>55</sup>

Several decades of Polish existence in Great Britain, which makes Poles, like the Jews and the Irish, one of the nations that has spent the longest period co-existing with other groups in multicultural British society, can be a reason for pride. The forms of everyday life I write about have to some dimension contributed to the richness of the new image of postwar Britain. Awareness of this fact should shape our contemporary identity and influence the way we feel at home in the British Isles.

In a broader research perspective, going beyond the history and the present of Polish emigration in Great Britain, I would like this work to contribute to the inclusion of the history of emigration in the frames of the common and universal historical experience of Poles in the twentieth century.

To sum up, the dissertation lies within three fields of research:

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dedykowana Profesorowi Tadeuszowi Wyrwie, ed. Wiesław Hładkiewicz and Marek Szczerbiński, Gorzów Wielkopolski, 2004, pp. 343-354 and B. Szwagrak, *Polskie emigracyjne organizacje młodzieżowe w Wielkiej Brytanii (wybrane) jako czynnik w formowaniu postawy społeczno-obywatelskiej 1950-2005*, London 2007.

<sup>55</sup> P. Chojnacki, ‘Szkice o nowej emigracji’: ‘1. Wybrać wolność [2001]’, ‘2. Ostatnie zadanie niezłomnych’, ‘3. Polacy do domu’, ‘4. Przejdźmy do konkretów ...’, ‘5. Wielki pałac i ciasne szalasy’, *Tydzień Polski*, no 30 (180), 28 June 2001, no 38 (228), 22 Sept. 2001; no 50 (300), 15 Dec. 2002; no 1, 5 Jan. 2002; no 9, 2 March 2002.

1. The local history of particular social groups, in this case, three émigré communities. This is the first academic local history of the wartime and postwar Polish emigration.
2. The history of the ‘independence’ emigration in the West, with particular reference to its centre in Great Britain and especially in London.
3. The history of Polish emigration within the *longue durée* of the phenomenon, from the late eighteenth century to the present day, that is, to the wave of departures that followed the accession of Poland to the European Union on 1 May 2004.

Within these three research fields I advance the following three hypotheses:

1. The centralization of organized social life in ‘Polish London’ (the creation of the ‘White Eagle’ club in Balham and POSK in Hammersmith) brought about the end of the form of local self-organization that was the *gmina*.
2. Investigating the activities of the *gminy* as part of the cultural and social phenomenon known as the wartime and postwar emigration will show the formation of a new kind of Polish national consciousness among its ordinary representatives, one that differed both from that in the Polish People’s Republic and from that in independent Poland before 1939.
3. Representatives of the ‘base’ in the wartime and postwar emigration were fully conscious of their place in the history of Polish emigration since the end of the eighteenth century and this influenced the formulation of the aims and means of their activity. They knew, that they themselves were creating history, and moreover, were an important link in the chain of Polish history. They sought to convey this tradition and self-knowledge to their children, seeing in them successors in the struggle for national independence.

## 2.

**The idea of the ‘Community’ (*Gmina*). The beginnings of organizations.****The founding meetings**

This chapter will explore the general concept of émigré organization called the *gmina*. I shall uncover the historical roots of the democratic characteristics of the Community, the place of new organizations on the map of Polish London in 1950s and 1960s and controversies that arose concerning their establishment. It has also been necessary to describe the beginnings of each Community and examine their programmes as examples of non-elitist and cohesive organizations – something that goes against the usual perception of Poles in *emigracja*. Finally, I shall try to sum up this first stage of my work by providing a wider picture of the links between the idea of the *Gmina* and the driving hypothesis of the dissertation.

**‘Strong in a group’ – Polish communities outside London**

Who was the author of the concept of the Community? Mieczysław Z. Słowikowski noted that the very idea of ‘Polish communities’ had been formulated in the *Rada Narodowa* (National Council of the Republic of Poland) – a substitute in exile for the Parliament (*Sejm*) of the Second Republic. ‘The idea was to assemble our compatriots, who accept British citizenship, in order to maintain and cultivate among them – and particularly among the young – knowledge of the language, culture and history, and the idea of the independence and freedom of Poland, and to organize cooperation and mutual aid among themselves. Hence, the motto of our Community is: ‘Strong in a Group’.<sup>1</sup> According to Bohdan Czaykowski and Bolesław Sulik ‘the author of the idea was allegedly Cat-Mackiewicz, who wanted to cover the whole of Britain with Polish communities (although the first Polish community was created in Petworth, Sussex, in 1948.’<sup>2</sup> When, however, did it happen? Unfortunately M. Z. Słowikowski does not specify which National Council developed the idea in question. This is because the historians of the Polish wartime and post-war

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<sup>1</sup> M. Z. Słowikowski, ‘Na 20-lecie Gminy – trochę historii’, *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 48, April 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej London-Południe*.

<sup>2</sup> B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Paris, 1961, p. 266. The title of the book is *Polacy w W. Brytanii*, I expand it, however, following the example of other authors quoting the work.

emigration list four such Councils, and there was also the *Rada Rzeczypospolitej* (Council of the Republic of Poland) at the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland August Zaleski (founded in 1954).<sup>3</sup> The reference to Stanisław Mackiewicz would obviously indicate the period before he returned to Poland, that is, before June 1956.

It is easier to distinguish the characteristics of a community, its ideas or, in the usage of B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, its ‘concept’. A community, as a unit of a local government was known in Poland already in the twelfth century. Radical activists of the First Great Emigration of the mid-nineteenth century, who organised the *Lud Polski* (People of Poland) on the territory of Great Britain, formed the Grudziąż and Humań Group (*Gromada Grudziąż i Humań*) (1835-46), or the Revolutionary Group of London (*Gromada Rewolucyjna Londyn*) (1856-61) used the term *gromada* (group). *Gmina* (Community) was the title of a revolutionary magazine published in 1866-67 in Geneva. The title referred to the ideology of the ‘People of Poland’. The founders of Communities in exile in the twentieth century were fully aware of their origins as émigrés, but the nature of their radicalism was not so much social as patriotic. They knew the tradition they received as a heritage well and knew what they should hand down to their successors. ‘The history of the Polish nation is a nearly continuous struggle for freedom’ – wrote Teodor Urbanowicz in 1975 in the magazine of the Community of West London – ‘Our great-grandfathers and fathers fought for it and so do we. After our lost struggles with the enemy – our political émigré communities were created to continue this fight for freedom outside our country. This is how the two previous emigration communities before us were created, which left living monuments that exist until this day as their heritage in the West.’<sup>4</sup>

In a leaflet calling for a civic meeting in autumn 1959, a meeting that resulted in the foundation of the Polish Community of West London, its founders propagated the following idea: ‘We must adopt an active attitude and organize our own communities in order not to survive, but in order to hand down our heritage to the

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<sup>3</sup> The National Council was an advisory and consultative body of the President and Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile, a substitute for the *Sejm*. The first Council was created in 1939 and dissolved in 1941; the second functioned from 1942 to 1945, the third from 1949, and in 1951 the fourth Council was formed. The National Council was dissolved as the last body of the authorities in exile in December 1991. There were also four Councils of the Republic of Poland (*Rada Rzeczypospolitej* – 1954, 1958, 1963 and 1968). R. Habielski, *Emigracja*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> T. Urbanowicz, ‘POSK i my’, *Nad Tamizą. Kwartalnik GPLZ* no 1, Winter 1975.

next generations. Aware of the great purpose, let us create in our districts a non-party organization gathering Poles in exile: an organization which shall become the centre of our social life and ensure the possibility to fulfill our spiritual and material needs.’<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, according to the assumptions of the Community of South London, the distinctive founding characteristics included: ‘a lack of a financial background and a prominent authority in its aegis [...] a way to heal the social life of émigrés, to shape an example of a London emigration activist that differs from the stereotypical one’. The basic positive task consisted of maintaining the bonds between members of Polish society through ‘parties and other events whose aim is not only to gain profits for the organization’, and also by ‘stopping the process of the loss of a sense of national identity by children and young people’, which was caused by the fact that adults adopted British citizenship and newborn babies automatically (“*Ius Soli*”) received foreign citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

Czaykowski and Sulik, dedicate much space in their book to the plan of developing a ‘completely new and independent centre’ of émigrés in Glasgow and gathering around it different elements of Polish life. The book was published in 1961. It was based on press articles written in 1958-60, which was the period when the Polish Community of West London the (GPZL) was being created and the activity of the Polish Community of South London (GPL-P) and the Lewisham Polish Centre (POL) was being developed. Although the biased opinions included in the book remain controversial, it seems representative of the state of feelings and expectations of that period.<sup>7</sup>

With the passing of time, and as other forms of activity were expected to wane and die out, the planned centre would become the only centre for the collective activity of Poles in exile. The authors went further and even formulated ‘the concept of the Polish community abroad organized on the basis of completely independent centres’. It shall, however, be demonstrated in this thesis that these assessments were only the manifestation of their authors’ wishful thinking, and not a programme which reflected the intentions of the founders of the communities. According to Władysław Kot, an engineer, every Polish circle should constitute also a separate economic unit: ‘people would be pleased if they paid for local, concrete goals. The bases for this

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Do Polaków! Mieszkańców Zachodniego Londynu: Chiswick & Brentford, Acton, Barnes, Hounslow, Hammersmith, Shepherd’s Bush, (i innych dzielnic)...’, Archives of GPLZ.

<sup>6</sup> Słowikowski, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op.cit., passim.*

concept were undoubtedly existing antagonisms in relation to Polish central organizations in London; [the rise of] professional social activists, and the long-term experience of Polish life, but also the conviction which made America, while it was still a British colony, formulate the rule: “no taxation without representation”.’ According to Kot, public money should be controlled by the people who donate it. ‘Only on the basis of such independent centres could the central representation of all emigrants be based, appointed by the Congress of Delegates elected by particular centres. [...] Such a position is sometimes called a “Community concept” (*koncepcja Gminy*).’<sup>8</sup>

The ‘community concept’ was considered by Czaykowski and Sulik to be ‘as interesting and seemingly more practical’ than the other forms of Polish organizations in Great Britain existing in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Guided by a prejudice towards a traditional formula for emigration organizations, evident in the whole course of their narration, they wanted to see the community (next to the parish) as a structure which was the most characteristic for a ‘Polish community abroad’, and which owed nothing to the political origin of their emigration [!]. They tried to prove that ‘the phenomenon of creating communities resulted from decentralizing tendencies, from the aim to free themselves from the supervision of the London centres’. They also wrote: ‘Paradoxically, these aspirations have recently been demonstrated very strongly in the area of London. There are already communities in South London and West London, there are attempts to organize the Community of North London’.<sup>9</sup>

Both authors referred also to the example of the Polish Home Social and Educational Association of General Władysław Sikorski in Glasgow (*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Oświatowe Domu Polskiego im. Gen. Władysława Sikorskiego w Glasgowie*), which was founded as early as in 1954. The first point of its statute was the following: ‘All Poles irrespective of their citizenship [*przynależność państwowa*] can become members of the Association’. The Association stressed the importance of economic matters and saw the control of its members over public money as the main condition of the community’s success. Władysław Kot, one of the founders and *spiritus movens* of the Glasgow initiative ‘imagined that if all centres reorganized on the same basis, it could be possible to set up representations of communities,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

functioning as coordinating bodies for matters of a given area, and finally the representation of Poles in Great Britain'. It would be, as it was planned, more a type of a coordinating committee of equal organizations, than the administration of the whole active part of the Polish community.

The only political group, excluding the initial phase of the existence of the Community of South London, which was interested in the concept of communities was the *Polski Ruch Wolnościowy 'Niepodległość i Demokracja'* (NiD, Polish Freedom Movement 'Independence and Democracy'). The district convention of NiD in May 1960 passed a resolution expressing full support for the idea. Undoubtedly, the NiD's interest resulted from the fact that it found purely political aspects in the idea. In the resolution they included, among other things, an opinion that 'a community does not have to be just one more social organization, but a self-government association whose general character should enable the activity, for general national and its own needs, also of those Poles who have not heretofore been members of any organization. At the same time, the general character of the community should allow for the bridging of previous forms of work for the cause of independence conducted by the older generation with those who are available and comprehensible for the generation educated in exile.'<sup>10</sup>

According to the authors of *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii* (Poles in Great Britain) 'the fuel for the development of communities is dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, a conviction that current, social and political, management of the emigration is beyond any social control. In the statutes and statements of communities the willingness to improve this state of affairs is clearly visible'. They also indicated the fact that during the organizational meeting of the Community of West London much was said about appointing authorities through 'general' elections among its members. Then, there allegedly came to light a reluctance to accept hackneyed platitudes: 'at [...] the meeting in Chiswick [...] a motion to establish the organization by the name *Związek Wolnych Polaków* (the Association of Free Poles) was greeted with loud laughter.'<sup>11</sup> The influence of political parties on social life decreased visibly even within the territory of the organization, where in the past everything had happened on party lines. According to Krzysztof Głuchowski, 'The *Zjednoczenie Polskie* (Federation of Poles in Great Britain) existed, but its

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 444.



importance was not sufficient'.<sup>12</sup> He added: 'Politically we were divided into a few camps. The majority of emigrants were not very knowledgeable about what was going on, and in fact were not very interested in it.'

The Polish Home Social and Educational Association of General Władysław Sikorski in Glasgow was founded in 1954. On 16 March 1953 the above mentioned Władysław Kot, who chaired the Council of Delegates of Social and Professional Associations (*Rada Delegatów Stowarzyszeń Społecznych i Zawodowych*) (a type of a local coordinating committee) sent 'all Poles in Glasgow and its vicinity' a letter calling for a Civic Meeting, in order to elect the representation of twenty five people for all Poles in the region by way of free elections. Voters were to be 'all people who feel themselves to be Polish and who are eighteen years of age'. The assembly would represent the 'general public' both vis-à-vis British society and other Polish centres. Additional aims would be coordinating the activity of local Polish organizations, organizing the Advice and Information Office and the 'Social Club in accordance with the British regulations, and whose profits would be allotted to fulfilling local needs in the field of religious, social, cultural, educational and mutual aid matters'. The majority of the participants of the meeting 'were against the motion as they believed it was unrealistic at that time'. Czaykowski and Sulik conclude their account by saying that 'the engineer believes that the project presented in the motion is still valid.'<sup>13</sup>

### **Founding communities in London – the Polish Community of South London**

Representatives of Polish society from the southern districts of London met first. On 15 May 1955, in the seat of the Government and the President of the Republic of Poland in Exile (43 Eaton Place, the so called *Zamek* – 'Castle')<sup>14</sup>, 91 people signed the foundation act of the Community. The signing of this Act was preceded by a preparatory meeting, which also took place in 'the Castle' on 27 March 1955.<sup>15</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> K. Głuchowski, *W Polskim Londynie*, London, 1999, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> An echo of the fact that the official residence of the presidents of the Second Republic was in the Royal Castle in Warsaw, which was blown up in 1944 by the Germans.

<sup>15</sup> T. Walczak, '20 lat GPL-P', *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 48, April 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*. Idem, 'Gmina Polska Londyn Południe (I)', *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* (hereafter referred to as *DPDŻ*), no 80, 4 Apr. 1989.

official document reads: ‘[...] We, the undersigned citizens of the Republic of Poland, living temporarily in the South London district, living in the hope of regaining Freedom and Independence, intending to return to our Country, hereby decide to found the Polish Community of South London in order to preserve, maintain and hand down to the next generations our invincible will to fight for a Free Poland. So help us God.’ The statute draft was adopted, the Community Council was elected, and Jan Korzeń became its chairman. The area of activity included ‘all districts to the south of the Thames.’<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with the formulated desiderata, the aims and tasks were as follows: ‘the Polish Community of South London is a national and social organization which assumes the following principles as the basis of its functioning: 1. Preserving, extending and reinforcing the idea of the Polish State in Exile, as the main centre in the struggle for regaining freedom and independence on the basis of faith and hope in the return to the Homeland. 2. Organizing the whole of state and social life of Polish citizens in exile, regardless of their faith, nationality (*narodowość*) and political beliefs. 3. Organizing and working for the preservation, development and promotion of the idea of Polish identity among children and young people, as the main measure against losing their national identity’. There were thirteen points – the last one concerned conducting the shares of the National Treasury (*Skarb Narodowy*), as the means of fulfilling the financial needs of the Polish State in exile. ‘We are all aware that the Polish State in Exile cannot be “a castle in the sky” (*twór zawisty w próżni*). A strong, realistic and reliable basis of this state can, and must lead to the creation of an organized society aware of its rights and obligations. This aim shall be achieved through common effort and common work, through full support and active participation in organizing the Community, to which we shall aspire.’<sup>17</sup> As was written on the occasion of the eighth anniversary of the Community’s registration: ‘It was created in times which were extremely difficult for the Poles in England. Personal animosities often obscured the higher national interest. Political leaders were at variance with each other, society was confused.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Archives of GPL-P, Biblioteka Polska, 1470/Rps/1.

<sup>17</sup> *Komunikat no 1*, May 1955.

<sup>18</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 10, September 1963. The crisis of the authorities of the Republic of Poland in Exile started with the issue of the successor of President Władysław Raczkiewicz who died on 6 June 1947. Against the wishes of some political parties, August Zaleski was sworn into office. After numerous efforts to unite the parties, undertaken by General Kazimierz Sosnkowski among others, a final split occurred on 4 Aug. 1954, when the General Inspector of the Armed Forces (*Generalny*

The foundation of the Community of South London was mentioned by Czaykowski and Sulik: ‘Next to the Polish parish in Clapham there exists also the so-called Polish Community. Initially it was a “Castle” centre. It changed and adopted a non-political character’. The new authorities included both the *Zamek* (Castle) as well as the *Zjednoczenie* (Union) as well as people who were not engaged in the activity of either of the parties. On the territory covered by the Community there lived, according to its activists’ own assessments, about 4000 Poles. The Community ‘understood the territorial range very widely: Clapham, Lewisham, Crystal Palace, Camberwell, Peckham, Putney, Streatham, Brixton; in a word – from Morden to Kensington’. Former servicemen played the leading role in the Community. The authors defined the relations with the parish, which existed there earlier, as ‘correct’.<sup>19</sup>

In its Foundation Act (*Akt Założycielski*) the newly created Community clearly ‘declared loyalty to one of the governments in exile’<sup>20</sup>. The ideological declaration included, among other things, the following postulate, significant for the organization of émigré life: ‘There should be created a network of national and social self-government of Polish citizens in exile, including organizational units, from the basic ones – the COMMUNITY, to the highest – the STATE’. The decision was taken that they should concentrate just on this basic ‘unit’ in the following years. Politics was left to politicians.

This process was described in the GPL-P’s magazine *Nasza Gmina* (Our Community) of 20 August 1957: ‘our Community has crossed the threshold of the third year of its existence. It was created thanks to a voluntary initiative of society, aiming at organizing itself and taking its own matters into its own hands. It victoriously went through a short, but significant (because of its consequences for further development) period of changes. These changes went in two principal directions: 1. Resigning from the previous political character of the Community and giving it the character of a social organization, which manifested itself in changing the statute and the introduction to the Community Council people who had nothing in

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*Inspektor Sił Zbrojnych*), General Władysław Anders, refused to acknowledge Zaleski as the President of the Republic of Poland. The opponents created new political bodies: the *Zjednoczenie Narodowe* (National Union) and the *Rada Trzech* (Council of Three Persons). The emigration diarchy continued until Stanisław Ostrowski became the President and the Unity Act came into force in 1972. (See Friszke, *Życie polityczne emigracji*, vol. I; Ziętara, *Misja ostatniej szansy*.)

<sup>19</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-67.

<sup>20</sup> M. Michalewicz, ‘Słów kilka o początkach Gminy’, *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 18, September 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

common with politics. 2. Laying strong and sound foundations for the further activity of the Community by putting the burden of work and responsibility onto the younger generation's shoulders, which was manifested clearly in electing J. E. Stolarczyk, an engineer, a graduate of the Battersea Polytechnic, as the chairman of the Community Council'.

The Annual General Meeting (*Walne Zebranie*) of 16 March 1957, which saw 'animated and at times heated discussion', brought changes in the statute and a by-election to the *Rada Gminy* (Council). 'It is difficult to imagine any meeting during which participants behave in a way so undisciplined and scandalous, as happened during the meeting in question', they wrote a few years later. Finally, the Statute Commission was elected, and at the next Annual General Meeting it was to present a draft of the new statute. The meeting of the Statute Commission was also 'not a pleasant one' – according to a comment in *Krótki życiorys Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe* (A short history of the Polish Community of South London).<sup>21</sup> The Annual General Meeting on 15 June 1957 led, however, to the change in the statute: 'The Polish Community of South London is an organization of a social character, which as the principal goals of its existence and activity acknowledges organizing and conducting the social life of the members of the Community. [...] Due to the social character of the Community, no political activity can be conducted either in the name of or on behalf of the Community by any of its members.'<sup>22</sup>

After the change of the statute many members resigned. There were difficulties with recruiting new members, because a negative rumour quickly spread among Poles in London: 'I mean these quarrels at meetings', as it was put in *Krótki życiorys...* (A short history...), 'moreover, the Community was still viewed as a political organization. Gradually, after familiarization with the statute, new members started to join the Community. In this way, the places vacant after the departure of those offended by the change in the statute were more than filled.'<sup>23</sup>

The decision was taken to act in the heat of the moment. The Community was registered on 28 September 1960 on the basis of the Companies Act 1948 as the Polish Community (South London) Association Limited. The registration started at the meeting of the *Rada* – Community Council on 23 January 1958 and it was

<sup>21</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

<sup>22</sup> 'Od Redakcji. Przemiany', *Nasza Gmina*, 20 Aug. 1957.

<sup>23</sup> 'Krótki życiorys Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe', *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 5, June 1962.

repeatedly discussed at successive meetings. Finally, the registration was concluded by a motion on 13 February 1960 – to confer a legal character to the Community by incorporation or registration.<sup>24</sup> The Annual General Meeting of 11 December 1960 was the first meeting of the registered organization. It took place in Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill, London, SW2. The registration had a positive impact on the development of the organization: on 8 April 1962 the Community had 240 members, in December 1962 320 members,<sup>25</sup> and on 31 December 1964 388 members.<sup>26</sup> After registration, the number of members who regularly paid fees increased fourfold and the income from fees increased to more than £50 per year. (Earlier the number of members paying fees was only 60 people, which gave the Community about £30 a year.)<sup>27</sup> It should be added that membership fees in the Polish Community of South London – 1/- (shilling) a year – were set at a symbolic level. Organizing the Community from scratch was a unquestionable success in the social life of the émigrés.

### **The work of Rev. Adam Wróbel. The parish and the Lewisham Centre**

The origin of the organization of Poles in South-West London differed from that of the Polish Communities of South London and West London. The existence of ‘the Polish Parish in Lewisham’ – the first name of the community – dates back to 25 March 1951. In the official handwritten *Kronika* (Chronicle)<sup>28</sup> it was noticed after many years that on Easter Sunday, Rev. Canon (later Prelate) Adam Wróbel from the centre of London paid a visit, having been invited by Poles who lived in Lewisham and the vicinity. In the local Roman Catholic Church of St. Saviour he celebrated the first Mass and preached in Polish.<sup>29</sup> ‘Quite a significant number of Poles gathered for the Mass. Dispersed in the English environment and partly lost, they welcomed the words of the Mass prayers and the sermon in their mother tongue and the very

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<sup>24</sup> *Komunikat no 2*, 22 Oct. 1960.

<sup>25</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat no 7*, 1962 [?].

<sup>26</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat no 16*, March 1965.

<sup>27</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat no 4* March [?] 1962.

<sup>28</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1: 1951-1970. Archives of the POL, further quotations in this chapter come from the same source.

<sup>29</sup> ‘In March 1951 in *Dziennik Polski* there appeared an advertisement about the Mass and 25 March of that year became the initial date of the organization of the Centre’. (Z. Szkopiak and M. Turło, ‘Ośrodek Lewisham’, *GPL-P. Komunikat no 35*, March 1970.)

presence of the Polish priest with deep emotion, joy and gratitude.’ Immediately after the service, there was a meeting of Rev. Canon Wróbel with the assembled Poles. The first and most important point made was the need to organize a Polish parish in this part of London.<sup>30</sup>

Less than a month later, on 22 April 1951, led by Wiktor Piotrowicz and in the presence of Rev. Wróbel, an organizational meeting was held, during which it was formally decided to found the Polish parish community based on the example of those already created in other Polish centres on the territory of England, Wales and Scotland. The Polish community was concerned about organizing regular church services and prayers for Polish emigrants living in Lewisham and its vicinity, ensuring Polish pastoral care, organizing religious education and teaching Polish in the form of regular lessons for children of school age, organizing the church choir and different types of social events; these steps would foster mutual closeness and provide opportunities for Poles scattered over a large area of South-West London to meet each other.

The prerequisite for the realization of these aims was the creation of a managing body, the so-called Church Committee (*Komitet Kościelny*), which together with the parish priest oversaw and broadened the development of the religious and social life of the parish. At the organizational meeting the board chaired by Wiktor Piotrowicz was elected. By the middle of May 1951 a Polish school had started up, under the supervision of the Church Committee. Finance was an urgent matter. The effects of the war, the decline of the Commonwealth and the continuing economic crisis still it made difficult to collect money from a poor society. The fate of Poles living in Great Britain was even harder in this respect, for because of their limited knowledge of the English language they had to take less well-paid jobs. Despite these difficulties the Church Committee from the outset introduced the general taxation of all parishioners. A monthly fee was set, of a minimum of one shilling per person (this amount was maintained until the 1960s).

In the summer of 1951, in order to help the board of the Committee in organizing cultural and social life, the Ladies’ Association (*Koło Pań*) was founded with J. Piotrowiczowa as president. A drama association for adults was also created, which

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<sup>30</sup> Elżbieta Piekarska remembers this event differently: ‘Rev. Wróbel was an initiator of Easter confession and the first church service. Without him nothing would be ever be here. [...] During the first church service there were very few of us present. Then it developed. Fifteen to twenty maximum!’. Interview.

with ‘great success’ presented the play entitled *Zaczarowane Koło* and then the *Jasełka* (Nativity Play). The church choir, regular organ recitals and a library were established. They also organized trips to London museums and theatres in the city centre.

In the early 1950s, according to the *Kronika*, the political split in the émigré community not only threatened the ‘general political framework of the emigrants’ community but it was also felt in every unit of the community’s life’. Old friends and wartime comrades could not rise above the differences in émigré political life. ‘Frictions, disagreements and quarrels started, and after that, a split and total break-up’. From 25 April 1955 to 8 December 1962 on the territory of the Polish parish there was no Church Committee. Only a Parent–Teacher Association (*Komitet Rodzicielski*) functioned (also with ‘difficulties’); it finally stabilized in 1958. Out of necessity this Committee took over some functions of the Church Committee.

Józef Marian Makulski recollects: ‘in 1954 many people went to the “Castle”. [Stanisław] Nowak, who was a teacher by profession, and a minister, stood in front of the church with a flag.’ Elżbieta Piekarska adds: ‘Different things happened there. There were sharp battles, in front of the church, too. Rev. Wróbel did not allow that – you should have known Rev. Wróbel – he expelled them from the churchyard and it was finished. “Let no one dare to say one word in the church or in front of the church! If you want to – do it in the street, but not in front of the church!”. Arguments were sharp. There was a lady who flew with an umbrella at other men’s throat! Rev. Wróbel and the most of parishioners were “Anders’ soldiers”, but there were “people from the Castle” too’. According to Danuta E. Wardle-Wiśniowiecka, ‘people were afraid to admit who they supported. The young tended to be for Anders.’

Over the course of the years, old antagonisms faded and ceased to be so important. New members, who came to the parish, started the work from the beginning with enthusiasm and energy. The first steps were cautious: they did not want to alienate anybody and if possible wanted to encourage and engage people in the work for the parish. In this atmosphere in 1960, the First Communion for children from the territory of the parish took place. In the spring 1961, the parish had its first jubilee – its tenth anniversary. A special Commemoration Committee was created. Its works, as well as the celebration itself overcame dislikes and animosities

in the parish and indicated the need to unite and organize again. The commemoration was described in *Dziennik Polski* (Polish Daily).<sup>31</sup>

As it was noted in the *Kronika*, ‘the life of the parish developed and still develops parallel to the individual stabilization of Polish families, thanks to improving material foundations and the establishing of their position, which is so essential when one settles permanently in a foreign country. It was necessary to complete studies, or to begin them, not only to overcome language, financial, educational difficulties, but to win a good reputation among foreigners, in order not to live on the sidelines, beyond general British life’. The first Board of the new Church Committee, constituted in November 1961, set the membership fees, introduced membership cards and established the so called ‘second collection’ in church, destined for parish purposes (the first was for the parish priest). Simultaneously, following the example of other parishes, they began to introduce tax covenants.

‘Together with Marian Turło we belonged to the Community of South London – recalls J. M. Makulski – and we started to think about founding a similar organization. I had some knowledge of finance and believed the Centre should have been registered as a charity in order not to pay taxes (not like the Community South Company Limited, which was badly organized, as they had to pay taxes for every penny).’<sup>32</sup> During the Annual General Meeting in April 1963 the Polish Centre in Lewisham and Brockley was created. Its purposes concentrated mainly on material issues: raising and increasing the funds necessary to purchase the Parish House.

The Polish Centre in Lewisham was a kind of a ‘trust’. It consisted of sixteen people, including three people who constituted the Trust Commission: Rev. Canon Adam Wróbel, Waldemar Cegłowski and Zygmunt Szkopiak. During the first meeting the decision was taken that the Committee of the Polish Centre in Lewisham should be of a charitable character. This meant that until sufficient funds were raised to purchase the parish house, the Centre should grant loans to parishioners on favourable conditions, depending on the possibilities and needs of the person applying for a loan.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Edward Wojtczak, ‘10-lecie parafii Lewisham-Brockley’, *DPDŻ*, no 110, 10 May 1961.

<sup>32</sup> Interview.

<sup>33</sup> The activity of the *Kasa Opieki* is described in Chapter 7.



The Lewisham Centre was characterized by its deep commitment at the beginning of its activity, as well as the prominent role of clergymen: Rev. Wróbel and his successor from 1973, Rev. Antoni Dębski (who died in 2006). For this reason, the role of different forms of religious life in the activities of the community appears to be greater here than in other communities. It could not be otherwise, as this centre of Polish life developed as a parish; all accounts emphasize the fact that it owed its existence and survival in difficult moments to the energy and organizational abilities of Rev. Wróbel.<sup>34</sup> Other elements of the work of the Centre are typical for the concept and phenomenon of the Community (*gmina*).

According to the authors of *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, at the moment when the book was written, the Community of North London was ‘at some organizational stage’<sup>35</sup>, of which we have no further details. ‘Our society achieved a relatively good material stabilization and energetically organized itself into units and local centres, such as parishes and communities (*gminy*)’, wrote Krzysztof Głuchowski when evaluating the situation of Poles in England in a letter at the end of December 1959.<sup>36</sup> ‘Established communities are, perhaps, the portents of the future shape of Polish social life on the island. But, it is still quite a distant future. For the time being, it can at least be expected that a few communities will survive, put down roots, gain for these forms the right of citizenship’ – concluded Czaykowski and Sulik.<sup>37</sup> Tadeusz Walczak, an activist and president of the ‘South’, recollected: ‘Other Communities were to be established as a national and social self-government with the Community as the lowest unit. As far as it is known, only one other Community – the Community of West London – was founded.’<sup>38</sup>

### **The origin of the Polish Community of West London**

‘In the 1950s, I noticed that Polish “settlement” in London to the north of the Thames were growing increasingly clearly, and increasing numbers moved westward from the meridian going through Hammersmith Broadway – that is, the sector

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<sup>34</sup> Rev. Wróbel was an extremely colourful and interesting figure not only insofar as his local activity in South-West London is concerned. I write more about Rev. Wróbel in Chapter 5.

<sup>35</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup> Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>37</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>38</sup> T. Walczak, ‘Gmina Polska Londyn Południe (I)’, *DPDŻ* no 80, 4 Apr. 1989.

including Ealing in the north, with Chiswick in the middle and Kingston in the south', wrote Colonel Stanisław Kuniczak, the first president of the Polish Community of West London, on the tenth anniversary of its foundation.<sup>39</sup>

As in the case of the Polish Community of South London and the Polish Centre in Lewisham, which developed their activity only after recovering from the traumatic political split which troubled the whole émigré community, in West London 'five years were necessary to recover from the shock accompanying this unfortunate incident, which today subsequent generations neither acknowledge nor understand', continued Kuniczak. He added: 'I am fully confident that if it had not been for the political split in 1954, we would have taken our collective life into our own hands five years earlier', more or less at the time when the Community of South London was established. Despite difficulties and discouragement, the colonel (who had organizational experience gained during his social activity in his hometown, Lwów, but also during years of work in counter-intelligence) could find 'strong supporters of building our collective life in our district together with plans for development'.<sup>40</sup>

The initial group had strong support in the wives of its members. We shall return to the issue of women's activity in the Communities. Despite negative experience, the initiators agreed at the beginning that 'we must protect our local organization against internal disputes of the emigration community groups and keep its full independence from any political and party groups' (S. Kuniczak).

Forty-six years on, in 2005 Gustaw Ślepokóra recollects the beginnings of the Community: 'Neither in Chiswick, nor in Acton was there a Polish church. In Chiswick there was a church where a Polish priest celebrated Mass. In those times it was difficult to go to the Benedictines in Ealing, as there were no cars. Only Barszcz, Skąpski and I had one. We participated in services in the English church. In the chapel in Grove Park we had Polish church services, and we brought in a Polish priest from Ealing by turns. Colonel Kuniczak and I made the collection. In the sacristy I distributed the collection between the Polish and the English priest, which the English priest did not know about'. The chapel was situated close to the house of Mr and Mrs Ślepokóra. After the service in the church, a group of people willing to

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<sup>39</sup> S. Kuniczak, 'Na Dziesięciolecie Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu', in *10 lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969*, [London, 1969].

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

talk or gossip gathered. ‘They had to go somewhere – and we had a big house. We met in our house. During such meetings, drinking coffee, we came to a conclusion that something needed to be done for our community. Someone had the idea of founding an association’. The creation of the Community was Adam Barszcz’s initiative – as Stefania Wolańska recollects. ‘He owned a shop with continental food. He distributed provisions (he also visited our place). He had initiative, and believed that something needed to be done’.

Colonel Kuniczak’s group developed into a fifteen-member Provisional Organizational Committee. After a few meetings and consultations, it approved the Kuniczak’s text for an appeal to Poles in West London and called a civic meeting for 21 November 1959. Before the founding meeting, an information campaign was organized efficiently. Given the many Polish initiatives in London, a single short advertisement, even in the most popular newspaper, would surely not be enough. The Organizational Committee first of all issued a leaflet entitled *Do Polaków! Mieszkańców Zachodniego Londynu: Chiswick & Brentford, Acton, Barnes, Hounslow, Hammersmith, Shepherd’s Bush, (i innych dzielnic)* (To Poles! Inhabitants of West London: Chiswick and Brentford, Acton, Barnes, Hounslow, Hammersmith, Shepherd’s Bush (and other districts)). It says: ‘Many years have passed since the war ended – and we still stay outside the country, live dispersed and without a social programme. The history of the last war and the reasons why we live in exile are known to everyone. Time and the experience [we have] gained require that we rid ourselves of all illusions, call for caution and vigilance and demand that we lose no more time, nor opportunities for a better and more sustainable preparation of our society. We cannot simply wait passively. No one will do anything for us except ourselves. [...] Let us create something in a form of a Polish Community, with our own self-government, statute, in our own home and based on our own healthy budget’.

There follows a list of basic tasks of an organization with a working name of the *Związek Polaków w Zachodnim Londynie* – Association of Poles in West London: first, buying a house and founding a club, maintaining Polish identity among children, young people and adults by providing premises and teaching aids for a Polish school and kindergarten; second, finding premises for scouts and guides, teaching Polish subjects in cooperation with the Polish Educational Society (*Polska Macierz Szkolna*) and organizing Polish-language church services. Apart from that,

there were also postulates concerning civic self-help and cultivating the independence movement by co-operation with pro-independence organizations, organizing celebrations on national holidays, supporting and organizing events in order to ‘stress the abnormal condition in the Poland of today’. They did not forget about providing help for their home country (organizing and providing first aid in cases of ‘absolute necessity or natural disasters’). ‘When organized, we shall be a mass which will increase its strength and importance and shall be able to do a lot of good for our society’.

Publishing its appeal, the Organizational Committee wished to move the public, free them from apathy, remind them about their Polish origins and national pride, provoke them to discussions about the planned association and finally to convince them of the need to organize themselves within a prescribed framework and to take part, as numerous as possible, in the Civic Meeting (*Zebranie Obywatelskie*).

A few days before the meeting, an article about the plans to establish the Community was published in the newspaper most widely read among the emigrants – *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* (Polish Daily and Soldiers Daily). In the article, the author who signed only as (K)<sup>41</sup> quoted, among others, Stanisław Kuniczak: ‘In the districts of West London which we wish to include in our organization there live over 3,000 Poles.<sup>42</sup> We have over 300 addresses of homeowners, but they are surely more numerous. Our first aim is to provide aid to the Saturday school. Furthermore, we wish to have Polish church services in Chiswick.’<sup>43</sup> From the organizational point of view, as it seems, little more could have been done to promote the first meeting of new organization. The initiators of the Community did much to ensure that their idea succeeded.

Finally, on 21 November 1959 there came the day, recalled years later by Kuniczak, the president of the Polish Circle of Lwów (*Koło Lwowian*): a doubly historic day.<sup>44</sup> It was the forty-first anniversary of the liberation of Lwów from the

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<sup>41</sup> Probably, as it can be concluded from a letter of 7 Dec. 1959 – it was Zygmunt Kon (1904-81), a former Soviet prisoner, soldier of the 2nd Corps, and who after the war was for many years an employee of the *DPDŻ* and *Tydzień Polski* (Polish Weekly); Bohdan O. Jeżewski Archiwum Osobowe Emigracji – Emigration Personal Archive of the Polish Library in London (hereafter referred to as the AOE).

<sup>42</sup> In the *Biuletyn* of the GPZL in September 1961 the number of Poles in this region was estimated at 10,000.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Gmina Polska powstaje w zachodnim Londynie’, *DPDŻ*, no 274, 17 Nov. 1959.

<sup>44</sup> S. Kuniczak, ‘Na Dziesięciolecie Gminy...’, *op. cit.*

Ukrainian occupation in 1918 and the day when the Community was established. The linking of those two events in the consciousness and memory of its founders is telling.<sup>45</sup> According to some sources over 300,<sup>46</sup> and according to others, 150 people arrived to the meeting room in the Catholic Hall, Chiswick Common, made available by a local parish priest, Rev. Wood. The second number was mentioned by Bohdan Czaykowski in his report published in a monthly supplement to *Dziennik Polski – Kontury. Młodzi mówią* (Polish Daily – Contours. The young speak).<sup>47</sup> He wrote: ‘It is not a great percentage, but neither is it a small number. People came from Hounslow, Acton, Hammersmith, and Chiswick. The elite came, as the chairman, S. Kuniczak, put it. The elite came in two senses: a great part of the intelligentsia, colonels, majors, lawyers, teachers from a local Saturday school; I saw an academic from London University; there came people known for their activity in different organizations and people of leading positions; there came homeowners [...] and also workers, who are not always eloquent, but are in touch with reality. So it was the elite in a double understanding of the term: the cream of the community in a social sense, but also in the sense of a deep interest in Polish affairs.’<sup>48</sup>

The chairman of the Provisional Organizational Committee (*Komitet Tymczasowy*), Stanisław Kuniczak, opened the meeting and welcomed those who arrived. After the chairman’s opening speech a discussion started. ‘Members of different central organizations, political party activists gathered to discuss their own, local and urgent matters’ – commented Czaykowski. ‘It is a pity, perhaps, that the chairman of the meeting, with all his many virtues as an endearing person, could not free himself from a vicious circle of an excessive use of academic and other official titles; the incident in which he forbade one of the speakers to continue was also unnecessary, as it resulted in the speaker leaving the meeting. The problem was inasmuch repaired as the audience and the chairman considered the incident as unpleasant and unnecessary. Apart from that, the discussion was calm; arguments and conclusions were kept to the point; the appeal of one of the young speakers

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<sup>45</sup> In November 1918, during the last days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ukrainian insurrectionists tried to occupy Lwów – the capital of Galicia. This marked the beginning of two-year Polish-Ukrainian struggle for nationally mixed Eastern Galicia.

<sup>46</sup> R. Żółtaniecki, ‘Gmina Zachodniego Londynu (rok założenia 1959)’, *DPDŻ*, no 154, 30 July 2003.

<sup>47</sup> B. Czaykowski, ‘Koncepcja Gminy’, *DPDŻ*, no 287, 2 Dec. 1959.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Our assumption is being a mass, and not an elite’ – said activists of the GPZL, *Biuletyn*, Sept. 1961.

(there was a significant handful of young people) to retain a sense of humour was welcomed sympathetically.’

Speeches demanding concrete objectives were applauded. According to Czaykowski, one of the young speakers declared: ‘Instead of fighting for the freedom of Poland, instead of aiding the country on a grand scale, let us first organize here in our own patch; before we start aiding others, let us help ourselves’. At that point of the meeting, witnesses’ accounts differ regarding the mood of the room. (This matter will be discussed again later.) The next speaker ‘rightly noticed’ that time was running out: ‘most of us are not young people; it is high time we thought about how to make a sustainable contribution’. It was suggested that the Provisional Board should include young people, and ‘a few speakers [...] said they hoped that the initiative of Poles from Chiswick should become an example for the rest of the émigrés.’

After the discussion finished, the lawyer Antoni Radziukiewicz put forward a proposal which was passed unanimously by the assembled company, declaring that the Organizational Meeting is a founding meeting of the organization called THE POLISH COMMUNITY OF WEST LONDON, and its participants received the title of founder-members. The Provisional Organizational Committee and its current members were acknowledged as the Provisional Board of the Community. Czaykowski notes that the proposal ‘to name the newly founded centre by the name of the “Poles’ Association” was rejected”. A great majority was for ‘a much more modest and more realistic name of the *Gmina* – Community’. According to a correspondent for *Kontury* (Contours): ‘it was also worth listening to the murmurs and laughter in the room when someone suggested an amendment that if the name is to be the Association of Poles’, then the adjective “free” should be added – the Association of Free Poles’. The reaction of the room was nearly unanimous: they simply did not want phraseology’. The term ‘community’ was supported by the great majority of the assembled members (there is no doubt of this) for three main reasons. First, the name referred to the tradition of the Great Emigration after the uprising of 1830-31. Second, ‘community’ means an administrative unit created out of one or a few neighboring districts of a city or settlements (the equivalent of ‘commune’ in French), and finally, ‘this name was used to encompass religious groups.’<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kuniczak, *op. cit.*

An emergency collection of money to cover day-to-day expenses was ordained, until the issues of membership fees were regulated. According to Czaykowski, ‘Maybe a convention of representatives from independent Polish centres should be organized; an information and discussion convention?’<sup>50</sup> He concludes the article by emphasizing that a community has more to it than a Saturday school, or buying a house, ‘it is about liberation from the current vicious circle. And, perhaps, people are ever more upset about being ashamed of themselves’. Who was to be ashamed of whom and why, is a question impossible to answer after so many years. ‘Our movement was a quasi-rebellion against the observed process of a kind of deterioration of some forms of émigré life, we were looking for new ways – in the face of new divisions’ – states Kuniczak and this seems to be the principal reason for self-organization.

The Polish Community of West London began work. In the first four months (until the first Regular General Meeting (*Zwyczajne Walne Zebranie*)), a few wheels were set in motion. As early as 13 December 1959 an inaugural Polish Mass took place.<sup>51</sup> A church service for about 200 people was organized. New premises for the Saturday school were arranged from the spring term in St. Mary’s School in Acton Lane. The size of the building made it possible to increase the number of classes, which was important due to the growing number of older children. The statute of the Community was completed in order to purchase a house. Two parties and one carol concert were organized, with the participation of the bass-baritone Marian Nowakowski and a performance of the Fryderyk Chopin Choir. About 200 people came, which was regarded as a satisfactory attendance.<sup>52</sup>

A Regular General Meeting was summoned for 26 March 1960.<sup>53</sup> The Community had at that time 153 registered members, including 128 founders.<sup>54</sup> They

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<sup>50</sup> Community activists reluctantly referred to the issue of centralization: ‘Does the way to healing the social life of Polish emigrants in Great Britain lead through creating Polish Communities in particular centres which should be connected with a general organizational summit? – Anything but a top-down “unification”, anything but an umbrella organization [...]. In this way all the positive features of this organization would be destroyed, or of those organizations which exist and can demonstrate some concrete work. In a central organization it would be surely impossible to avoid political conflicts, splits, grudges and mutual hatred which would then spread among the so called localities (*teren*). Maybe with time there would be some co-operation between neighboring communities, or setting up, within one community, new smaller local units. But that seems to be the distant future” – Karol Lewkowicz, ‘Na Jubileusz efemerydy’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, September 1965, *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>51</sup> A letter with an order for an advertisement to the *DPDŻ*, 1 December 1959, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>52</sup> A report of the Provisional Board, 28 Mar. 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>53</sup> *Komunikat* no 2, 1 Mar. 1960.

sought to find new ways of gaining the support of more Poles living in the area. During one meeting of the Board it was postulated ‘that there shall be banners placed in front of nearby shops and the church saying: “Are you a member of the Polish Community?” together with declarations’.<sup>55</sup>

### **Skowroński versus Czaykowski – a dispute about a sacrifice**

The consequences of and the responses to founding meeting were favourable. Two articles were printed in the *Dziennik Polski*. As I shall demonstrate later, already at the beginning of the Community’s existence there was a wider controversy, which was not limited to the context of a local, West London event. Bohdan Czaykowski’s report in *Kontury* provoked a strong protest from some participants in the meeting. The report was all too clearly underpinned by its author’s views and prejudices – or those of the group he represented. He was not an ordinary reporter. Born in 1932 (he died in 2007), he was a poet and translator of English–language poetry. He belonged, together with Adam Czerniawski, Florian Śmieja, Jerzy S. Sito and others, to the circle of people best known from their contemporary cultural and literary monthly *Kontynenty* (the Continents).<sup>56</sup> These were literary as well as political-ideological circles who tried to see criticism of the ‘indomitable’ emigration’s pro-independence stance in the light of generational rebellion.

K. Głuchowski, who was only slightly older than the people he wrote about, characterized a generation that tried to find its own place: ‘There was a problem with the young; I mean the generation who in 1945 were too young to be conscripted into the army and who learnt at Polish schools in Palestine, India, Africa and the United Kingdom, because, like their peers in the whole Western world, they rebelled. Yet they did not know exactly what they rebelled against and they did not seem to be

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes of the Community Board, 11Aug. 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>56</sup> In 1956-64 the group also edited the periodicals *Merkuriusz Polski* and *Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz*. According to P. Kądziała, *O publicystyce polskich “Kontynentów”*: ‘In the years 1946-47 they arrived in the British Isles, where they studied at British and Irish universities. They learnt how to think rationally, objectively and logically. They familiarized themselves with the English mentality, in which common sense and the power of argument, for which the framework of social life were the rules of democracy, were more important than feelings and sentiments’ (p. 197). The latest publication on the subject is R. Moczkoć, ‘Życie akademickie – Kontynenty’, in *Archiwum Emigracji*, vol. 9, *Źródła i materiały do dziejów Emigracji Polskiej po 1939 roku*, ed. S. Kossowska and M. A. Supruniuk.



willing to rebuild or improve our Polish social life. They harboured a grudge against the older [generation] for not allowing them to be in power, but they immediately surrendered. Certainly there were exceptions, but there were very few of them.’<sup>57</sup>

Shortly after the meeting, on 16 December 1959, a letter was published in *Kontury*, whose author contested Bohdan Czaykowski’s views and observations. The editorial team did not contribute a word of commentary. Franciszek Skowroński wrote: ‘As a participant in the founding meeting of the Community in Chiswick, I cannot agree with Mr B. Czaykowski’s biased perception of the initiative printed in *Kontury*. This lack of objectivity can be seen in the fact that the author considers the initiative a Polish-community-in exile type of event (*impreza polonijna*)<sup>58</sup> that is even supposed to replace the emigration’s political representation. This view is derived from the author’s unsupported claim that “political central organizations are slowly disintegrating”, as well as from the fact that the author supports the argument that “instead of fighting for Poland to be free... we should first get organized locally, instead of helping the homeland on a grand scale... let’s help ourselves”’.

The reader claimed the opposite. The organizing committee’s brochure containing its programme clearly emphasized independence-related goals. Moreover, the meeting’s chairman, Colonel Kuniczak, strongly stressed this aspect of the future Community’s activities in his opening speech, putting particular emphasis on the need, as he saw it, to regain Lwów. On the other hand, the proposal to make the organization the germ of some general-emigration, Polish-community abroad association of Poles (again, the original word is *polonijny*), gained only about a dozen votes. Most of the participants supported the idea of the ‘Community’ (*Gmina*). The meeting in Chiswick, ‘very useful and interesting, did not seem to promote the idea that *Gmina* would like to become separate from the centre of independence-related activity and has some “centrifugal tendencies”, as Mr Czaykowski wrote. I am also wondering who authorized the author to claim, that “we all hope that Polish émigré community will not have to sacrifice its own life”. On the contrary. With the clear exception, as it turns out, of Mr Czaykowski, the majority of

<sup>57</sup> Gluchowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>58</sup> Poles living beyond Poland made a clear distinction between the terms *Polonia* (Polish community abroad) and *Emigracja* (Emigration). The former was applied to Polish communities abroad who did not identify with the idea of opposing communist rule in Poland. Thus, the term essentially referred to ‘economic emigration’. The latter signified ‘political emigration’, which, with different degrees of radicalism, was characterized by moral disagreement with the post-World War II *status quo*. Such political émigrés formulated their own modes of acting and suggested the direction of their own activities.

our emigration, particularly the soldiers, will certainly not avoid making this sacrifice, if there is a need for it, and favourable historical conditions will make this sacrifice in the name of Poland's independence inevitable.'<sup>59</sup>

The above interpretation of the founding meeting was clearly more appealing to the Community's founders. The newspaper cutting with the above reader's letter, not Czaykowski's report, was considered representative of their pro-independence attitude. The letter was later reproduced in the special publication prepared for the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the organization's establishment. The issues discussed above require further commentary.

Juliusz Sakowski, an editor of *Dziennik* (Daily) wrote about those controversies: 'According to our sober, down-to-earth, sagacious youth, "independence" is an unrealistic concept given the existing conditions. That is why they are not flaunting it openly, as they would like to do something more concrete for the homeland. What is it that they would like to do? There is only one thing that they can do for Poland, that is if, taking advantage of freedom of expression, they will demand "it" loudly and in a straightforward manner. The country has to adjust to the "existing conditions", as there is no other choice, and the emigration should put forward a set of ideas, which to our youth may seem "unrealistic". This is the way in which the tasks and roles are distributed.'<sup>60</sup>

Not all the Communities (*Gminy*), despite their social character, were associations without a clear ideological image. The founders of the Polish Community of West London frequently stressed its pro-independence character; it was part of the notion of the 'indomitability' (*niezłomność*) of London émigrés. One can say that it was a sincere and local manifestation of 'indomitability'. The appeals of political leaders, intellectuals and poets in exile genuinely appealed to emigrants living in Chiswick and Acton. In the other organizations this issue was emphasized differently. It seems that the West London Poles were the most 'indomitable'.

## Conclusions

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<sup>59</sup> *DPDŻ* no 299, 16 Dec. 1959.

<sup>60</sup> Sakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s in London a growing awareness of the need for a new type of social self-organization can be observed among ordinary members of the Polish emigration, especially among former soldiers. Following the initial period of a lack of stabilization (which in some cases lasted until 1956), during which emigrants hoped to return to a free Poland, the phase of settling down in the host country began. The partial embarrassment of the émigré political elite that took place after the ultimate rupture in the centre of power in 1954 resulted in the unwillingness of the émigré 'masses' and 'grass roots' (*doty*) to be involved in social activity in general, or in their focusing on local activity (both in the territorial and ideological sense of 'local').

This, then, was the right moment to formulate the concept of the *gmina* – an organization that was democratic, non-elitist and cohesive. After several years during which the idea met with some resistance, it resulted in the establishment of three Communities located in different parts of London, but with broadly similar goals. The Communities started to create their own Polish world, which interacted with the world in which they found themselves (in each case a particular city neighborhood). Creating new organizational units which did not refer back to the social roles played by members of Polish communities before and during the war was a remarkable success; undoubtedly it provided a breath of fresh air in the social life of Poles in the United Kingdom. Only then did many people find their place in this world. Organizing the Communities was a proof of the émigré society's vitality and its openness to new tasks connected with the new stabilization in its life. It was a triumph of the need for self-organization in order to maintain national identity, in reaction to the perspective of the next generations' full assimilation into British society. This need was deeply rooted in Polish tradition and history and characterized the Poles of earlier emigrations as well as those living in Poland during the period of partition (1772/95-1918). Most leaders of the Communities as well as their members were conscious continuators of this tradition.

From the beginning of their existence the Communities were liable to political manipulation, which was a part of a wider struggle concerning the image and programme of the Polish exile community around 1960. The question concerning the ideological and moral foundations underlying even local Polish organizations whose mission was to meet the basic needs of religious, educational and social communities had to be raised in an émigré Polish world that was divided

into ideological camps. Individual communities used different strategies to deal with dilemmas over the political profiles of their organizations.

Within the Communities, the decision made by many Poles in exile to accept British citizenship was not overtly criticized; however, the very concept of the organization was an attempt to neutralize the influence of this process on Polish social activity. The question of visits of the members and activists of the Communities to communist Poland was treated differently. In West London it seems that none of the main initiators of the establishment of the organization travelled to their home country.<sup>61</sup> This was the strongest confirmation of an ‘indomitable’ attitude. Controversies connected with travelling to the People’s Republic of Poland will be discussed in the parts of this work concerning the sports club *Czarni-Varsovia* which co-operated with the Polish Community of West London in the beginning of the 1960s, and the private trips of activists from the Polish Community of South London.

In South London, three or four generations ‘co-operated harmoniously’ in the activity of the Community. The oldest had fought during their childhood and youth for the freedom of their nation in 1914-21, and had then built the independent state until 1939. ‘They were called “the indomitable ones” (*niezłomni*), and one of them said: “I prefer being the indomitable one to being the broken one”’. The middle generation had been educated in the free homeland in 1918-39, took part in the Second World War in the home country, the Middle East and in the West. The younger generation had grown up and was educated in the West, and then there was ‘the youngest – our children born in exile. Naturally, when twenty years passed the numbers of members in the Community changed. There were fewer of the indomitable generation, and the next generations grew up’.<sup>62</sup>

From the beginning of the 1960s the communities consolidated. Their activity had a more systematic character and developed for about a dozen years, with changing intensity, around a few main issues, which shall be discussed in more detail in the next chapters of this work.

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Zygmunt Grzyb.

<sup>62</sup> Mieczysław Z. Słowikowski, ‘Na 20-lecie Gminy – trochę historii’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, April 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

## 3.

**Description of the Communities.****Local differences. Profiles of activists**

The purpose of this chapter is to orientate the reader regarding the geographical, environmental and historical roots of the leaders and members of each *Gmina*. I shall highlight the local differences between various areas of London, where Poles were permanently settled at the beginning of the 1950s, as well as the differences between the three Communities. Despite the many similarities, I endeavour to encompass the diversity of Polish émigré society. These factors influenced inter-personal relations among Polish émigrés, and the type and effects of their social activity.

**From the armies of Anders , ‘Bór’ and Maczek...**

‘Every Pole’s way to England was full of adventure: when a larger group of people gathers, one needs real social abilities in order not to let others prate about their war experience, and to talk extensively about one’s own experience instead’ – said Karol Zbyszewski.<sup>1</sup> This wry comment can easily refer to numerous community activists of that generation. As the authors of one article admitted in 1970: ‘The stories of Poles who settled outside their homeland after the last war are more or less similar’.<sup>2</sup> And at the same time those stories were so different! A few will be quoted here, to outline the background of numerous routes that brought Poles to London, and to highlight the experiences that played such a crucial role in shaping the self-knowledge of the wartime and postwar emigrants. These life stories are dramatically divided into three parts: the period until 1939, the war years, and all that happened after 1945. In principle, the experiences of émigré soldiers fell into the following patterns: the fugitives of September 1939 and later ones, who reached France and Great Britain; those arrested and deported by the Soviets in 1939-41, who managed to leave the USSR with the Polish Army commanded by Władysław Anders; soldiers conscripted into the German Army, who then joined the Polish Armed Forces abroad (PSZ);

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<sup>1</sup> Zbyszewski, *Polacy w Anglii, op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Z. Szkopiak and M. Turło, ‘Ośrodek Lewisham’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 35, March 1970.

prisoners of the 1939 war and the Warsaw Uprising from the liberated camps, people deported for forced labour in the Third Reich, and finally fugitives from the home country, after it had been taken over by the Red Army and their communist supporters.

‘We are all from the Borderlands (*Kresy*), most of us survived Russia. They are decent people, they help each other. They do not quarrel, but help each other. And so it was’ – Łucja Ślepokóra claims. Her husband Gustaw – as he describes himself: the ‘treasurer of numerous organizations’, including the Polish Community of West London – was born in Rawa Ruska, in the Lwów Province, in 1919. He was a soldier of the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej – ZWZ*), arrested by the Soviets in 1940, condemned to death, commuted into twenty five years of hard labour, and a convict in Vorkuta. After the so-called amnesty he served in the Polish Army in the USSR and was evacuated. Then followed the Italian campaign, Monte Cassino and the taking of Ancona, where he was wounded.<sup>3</sup> Who created the Polish Community of West London? According to Stanisława Wolańska, ‘Origins varied. In principle, those deported from the eastern part of Poland: farmers, craftsmen and professional officers who survived’. She stresses that everybody kept together: ‘We looked after everything. When anybody had troubles, we [all] had troubles’. ‘The Community was like one family’, adds Zygmunt Grzyb, who came from the home country to visit his father, a former serviceman, in 1958. ‘It was a big, friendly family’, confirms Stanisława Wolańska.

In principle, the Community consisted of people who came from the army – ‘there were families that did not meet until they arrived here: from Africa, Palestine. My mum had been in Lebanon’ continues Mrs Wolańska. The 5th Borderland Infantry Division (*5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty*), the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division (*3 Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich*), aviators, ‘90 per cent of the Community’s members (if not more) went through the Russian experience, the others through the German one’ – this was their war past. ‘If I told you what I went through in Russia, you would never believe me. I do not believe it myself. These are the things that stay in one’s memory, which one shall never forget, and still it is difficult to believe in them, what a human being can survive’.<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Grzyb has a similar attitude to

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Ł. and G. Ślepokóra.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

family memories: ‘My father even did not want to tell me about his experience with the Soviets’.

The situation was very similar in South London. ‘Franciszek Jakubas from Forest Hill has been in ill health for a long time’ – it was noted as early as 1967 – ‘He suffers from old mementos from his “holidays in Russia”’.<sup>5</sup> According to Maria Kwaśniewska, ‘Most of the Poles we met here went through the Russian experience, there were none from the concentration camps and I think no one from German captivity’. However this was Józef Marian Makulski’s war route; he was a professional corporal of the 72nd Infantry Regiment (*72 pułk piechoty*) in September 1939. Mr Makulski then spent the war years in Stalag 4A, first in Elsterhorst, then in Hochstein, close to the Czech border, taking part in camp underground activity. After the liberation he served in the Polish 2nd Corps in the 16th Pomeranian Brigade (*16 Brygada Pomorska*).<sup>6</sup>

Zbigniew Jankowski, who like Józef Marian Makulski, was active in the Community of South London and the Lewisham Centre, also recalls that many, although not all the people who were active in the Communities had been gone through Russia. Jankowski, who came from a family of military settlers at Radziwiłłów near Brody in the south-east of Poland, was deported to Kotlas in the Arkhangelsk Oblast. ‘We worked in the woods. In 1941 we were released from the camps. We only knew that the army was created in the south of Russia. We left in August, and got there in November’. He joined the Polish army in Tatushev, near Saratov. After evacuation via Persia and Palestine he fought in Egypt, and at Christmas 1943 he reached Italy. Mr Jankowski took part in military activities near Sangro, then at Monte Cassino (until the end of the fighting), Ancona and Bologna. ‘I covered the whole route of the 2nd Corps’, he concludes. Danuta Kwaśny, who also came from a family of military settlers (her father ran a co-operative shop), was deported at the age of nine with her family, in the first transport to Kazakhstan on 10 February 1940. After the ‘amnesty’, her father joined the 10th Infantry Division (*10 Dywizja Piechoty*). ‘We joined as a military family. We came to Teheran. My sister and younger brother and mother were not admitted to the army. Then Africa, Uganda. I went to school there’.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Nowinki’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 26, Sept. 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

Another activist of both centres in South London, Wacław Szkoda (died in 2008), lost an arm while in a tank during the battle of Loreto.<sup>7</sup> Elżbieta Piekarska, a nurse in the 2nd Corps claims that most, but not all, of the Poles who lived in South-West London came from ‘Anders’s army’.

In the region of Lewisham, for example, a group of ladies from Warsaw met. Maria Kwaśniewska spent the German occupation in Warsaw. During the 1944 Uprising she worked in a hospital in the Żoliborz district as a volunteer. ‘I could not remain in a basement when we were buried by the ruins, I thought it was our end. I cannot watch films about the Uprising. I often say to my husband: how did we survive that? It was hell on earth’. Czesław Kwaśniewski, nickname ‘Porębski’, fought in the Old Town (*Stare Miasto*); he reached the city centre (*Śródmieście*) via the sewers.

Another Varsovian, Zofia Piątek, nicknamed ‘Tamara’, was a nurse in a hospital during the Uprising. After the capitulation of the Uprising, she made her way to a prisoner-of-war camp near the Dutch border. This camp was liberated by General Stanisław Maczek’s Polish 1st Armoured Division (*1 Dywizja Pancerna*). Mrs Piątek’s husband fought in the armoured division *Skorpiony* (Scorpions) of the Polish 2nd Corps. Danuta Wardle-Wiśniowiecka was active in the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek walki Zbrojnej, ZWZ*) from the beginning of 1941, then in the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa, AK*) as a woman liaison officer in the *Baszta* (Tower) Regiment. During the Warsaw Uprising she was a commanding officer of a unit of telephonists; wounded, she made her passage through sewers, and was later held in the camp in Pruszków. After the Soviet front had moved on, she crossed the Polish border illegally and went to Italy.

Past experience must have had a decisive influence on explicitly uncompromising attitudes towards communism and the Soviets. For example, Marian Makulski recalls: ‘I knew that the Lublin Committee was founded on 22 July 1944 and at that point I lost my faith that I would ever return to the homeland, to a communist Poland’. In the situation described satirically, and quoted at the beginning of this chapter, by Karol Zbyszewski, in which every inhabitant of ‘Polish London’ had a package of war experiences, such life-stories were treated rather naturally in this group, without any raptures. It is, however, essential to remember

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Nasze sylwetki’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, March 1966.



that these modestly couched accounts, or dry biographical facts, hide great misery, personal tragedies, and sometimes probably untold mysteries connected with occupation, struggle, Soviet forced-labour camps, and the like. This was a generation marked by the war forever.<sup>8</sup>

‘The most significant thing was that we formed a union, we met, acted, helped. There was no time for making a fuss, thinking too much about what shall I do. There was no television!’ emphasizes Stanisława Wolańska<sup>9</sup>. The Community of West London constituted a group of very well-integrated and friendly families.<sup>10</sup> Meetings took place in private houses, the Community Council meetings – sometimes in the Association of the Disabled Veterans of the Polish Armed Forces (*Związek Inwalidów Wojskowych Polskich Sił Zbrojnych – ZIW PSZ*), in which Józef Szlamp, a co-founder of the Community, worked actively,<sup>11</sup> then in the parish house of the Church of St Andrzej Bobola.

Founders of the Communities were also active in the works of other organizations in Polish London. For example, Stanisław Kuniczak, active in the GPZL, created the Lwów Circle (*Koło Lwowian*), while Gustaw Ślepokóra, who was an active member of the Lwów Circle and the Alliance of the Eastern Polish Territories (*Związek Ziem Wschodnich*), belonged to the National Council (*Rada Narodowa*), and worked actively in the scouting and guiding association. Among the activists of the Community of South London, the former pilot Z. W. Bieńkowski served as a vice-chairman of the Federation of Poles (*Zjednoczenie Polskie*), while S. Gudowski (a member of the GPL-P Council), was elected chairman of the Circle of the Polish Veterans Association (*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*, SPK) in Croydon.<sup>12</sup> Wacław Szkoda worked in the Brigade Youth Circles (*Brygadowe Koła Młodych ‘Pogoń’*) – an émigré officers’ school preparing military personnel for the expected war with the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Particular members most often formed unions

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<sup>8</sup> ‘We shall never get out from the shadow of war’, wrote Juliusz Mieroszewski to Jerzy Giedroyc, J. Giedroyc and J. Mieroszewski, *Listy 1949-1956*, ed. K. Pomian, part 1, Warsaw, 1999, p. 304.

<sup>9</sup> Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 175: ‘Increasingly popular at that time, television was becoming a great enemy of public life’.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with J. Kulczycki.

<sup>11</sup> The *Gmina* could repay this by granting subventions to the Association, for example £20 in 1970. Minutes of the Community Board, 24 Sept. 1970, GPZL Archive. She was also a member supporting the ZIW PSZ.

<sup>12</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967, no 26, Sept. 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Z. Jankowski. On *Pogoń*, see T. Piesakowski, *Brygadowe Koła Młodych „Pogoń”. Paramilitarna jednostka*, in *Mobilizacja uchodźstwa*, pp. 108-53, and T. Stańczyk, ‘Druga kadrowa w trzeciej wojnie światowej’, *Rzeczpospolita*, no 262, 10-11 Nov. 2003.

in their veterans' associations embracing former comrades in arms. Separate chapters of this dissertation are dedicated to the association of female graduates of the School of Junior Volunteers (*Szkoła Młodszych Ochotniczek SMO*) embracing some ladies active in the Community and an engagement in building the Polish Social and Cultural Association (POSK) (and subsequently in managing it).

Apart from social activity, it was necessary to learn to live in the British reality. 'In the beginning a great number of educated people (except doctors) – officers, lawyers – worked as unskilled workers', says Zbigniew S. Siemaszko. However, 'after five to six years it was very difficult to meet a Pole who worked in the lowest position. They were storemen, foremen, occupied better paid posts. This resulted from the fact that they worked very well. Precision engineers achieved staggering careers. From Friday evening to Sunday evening we all lived in the Polish world. All ranks and titles were back in their place and the social scale changed. That was the way the majority of émigré Poles existed'.<sup>14</sup>

The relation of the Communities to political split in the emigration between 1954 and 1972 may be perhaps reflected by the fact that the Community of South London only from 1972 decided to pay a fee to the benefit of the National Treasury (*Skarb Narodowy*). Earlier, by not paying it, they expressed their disapproval of the split. Tellingly, the decision to transfer the sum of £25 to the benefit of the United National Treasury (*Zjednoczony Skarb Narodowy*) was taken to 'celebrate the political consensus'.<sup>15</sup>

### **London cobbles**

In June 1975, the *Kronika* (Chronicle) of the Lewisham parish and Centre wrote: 'Thoughts went back to times when we were taking our first steps in exile. Lost, scattered all over the world, we were in a quandary about whether to stay in the foreign country. In Poland, which we dreamed about while fighting, suffering and feeling homesick, we could not see a place for ourselves. Our country, rising from the ruins of six years of bondage, started a new stage of its life on the basis of a

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<sup>14</sup> 'Zbigniew S. Siemaszko. Rozmawia Paweł Chojnacki', *Tydzień Polski*, no 25, 2 July 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the Board, 15 Dec. 1972. In the following years different fees were paid, from £5 to £40.

political system we could not accept. Unsure of “tomorrow”, lonely, among strangers we looked for those who were as lonely as we were. We found each other by chance, we joyfully welcomed every Polish word drowned out by a foreign language, we recognized familiar faces of companions from before the war, or not yet familiar – but already close – because they were ours, Polish. We looked for Poland in a crowd of foreigners, in a foreign environment.’<sup>16</sup>

The beginnings were difficult. According to Maria Kwaśniewska, ‘In the beginning everybody had very hard conditions, everybody worked hard’. Stanisława Wolańska’s husband worked at the airport, where he had a very good job as an engineer: ‘On Friday I waited for the wage he brought and I went to buy something for dinner. [...] It only changed later. When I came – everything was rationed’.<sup>17</sup> ‘No one had a car or money, people were really poor’, recalls Elżbieta Piekarska.<sup>18</sup> When in May 1948 Danuta Kwaśny came from Africa to England with her mother, brothers and sisters, she was a pupil of the fourth class of junior school: ‘We did not have anything. We came with one suitcase. I remember to this day the dress I was wearing. I received a long dark blue coat from the UNRA’. She rented her first flat close to the Oval station. Six people lived in three rooms and a kitchen. She found a job in a kitchen, in the very big, no longer existing Lyons Hotel at Piccadilly Corner. She earned three pounds a week, and had to pay two pounds, ten shillings for a room. She had ten shillings pence left on which to get by. ‘On Saturday and Sunday, if I had a day off I could come and eat at the hotel’.<sup>19</sup>

Twenty-five year olds lined up at the start of the emigration next to fifty- and sixty-somethings. ‘The conditions of the race were balanced, but the age of “contestants” included three generations and this division determined everything’ – wrote a columnist in 1956, observing the first decade of emigrants’ settlement in the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

Families could rarely meet. This was a blessing in disguise for the families who, sentenced to exile by the Soviets, survived the camps (*tagry*) and left with General Anders’s army. Anders was understandably hailed by them as a liberator and was highly regarded. Some people managed to bring in illegally their relatives from

<sup>16</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 3 [collected materials]: 1974-75 (hereafter *Kronika – Materiały*).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Danuta Kwaśny.

<sup>20</sup> Londyńczyk (A Londoner) [J. Mieroszewski], ‘Kronika angielska. Na emigracyjnej scenie’, *Kultura* no 7-8 (105-106), 1956, p. 131.

the home country when this was still possible – in the first two years after the war. Separation was to be the fate of others. The possibility of the legal arrival and reunification of family members came only after the events of 1956 in Poland. An example is provided in the *Komunikat* (Communiqué) of the Community of South London. It is meaningful, but we cannot know if it was typical: ‘After a twenty-eight-year long separation, Mr Stefan Korgul [...] brings his wife from Poland for two-month holidays’.<sup>21</sup> One cannot forget about the people who had the most difficult times. ‘Near the end of the war we had very many wounded who had to receive artificial limbs’, says Elżbieta Piekarska. ‘In our hospital there were 72 people who needed arms, legs, eyes... I was chosen to take these people to the United Kingdom. I took them by means of the Red Cross transport. When we arrived in Edinburgh, it was “VE-Day”, with crowds of people. For these poor people and me the war was over’.

Józef Marian Makulski came to England with the 2nd Corps on 26 July 1946. By 1948 he was in the Polish Resettlement Corps (*Polski Korpus Przemieszczenia i Rozmieszczenia* – PKPR)<sup>22</sup>, first in Boston, and then in Glasgow in a Polish commercial secondary school, where he passed his school-leaving examination. ‘Then I came to London, penniless’, he recollects. ‘In 1950 I got married. From 1951 I worked as an accountant in an international press sorting office, where I was promoted quite quickly to the position of commercial adviser (company secretary, company director) and then I became a partner’.<sup>23</sup> Zbigniew Jankowski came to England in June 1946, also with the army: ‘We landed in Liverpool. The English welcomed us with an orchestra, but it meant little, as later we had to fight for our own problems. We were in the PKPR. I went to a secondary school and passed my secondary school-leaving examination in the training Centre of the 2nd Corps. I returned to my parents and worked there as a manual labourer for a while. I applied for admission to the college, received a scholarship and participated in a three-year course in structural engineering at Brixton’.

Nearly everybody went through various camps and the PKPR. Less resourceful people stayed in the camps longer – the more resourceful left them earlier. According to one account, ‘No one cared about us. Men worked at hotels as

<sup>21</sup> ‘Nowinki’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>22</sup> On the PKPR see Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, pp. 22-40.

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Makulski worked in the same company for thirty years.

waiters, like my brother. First he brought a younger brother. English did not want to rent flats to Poles, they did not believe us. An older sister worked with children as a “domestic help”, I left the camp as the last one. My brother arranged a room for me in the same house where he lived in Maida Vale, close to the centre’.<sup>24</sup>

It often happened that a few families worked in order to buy a house together. Those who earned first – one paid off the other and the last one had a house of his/her own. He would rent rooms to Poles and so they settled one after the other. Friends of friends brought people to England.<sup>25</sup> Poles settled in particular parts of the city. Gustaw Ślepokóra (who after demobilization worked as a hairdresser, then he had ‘his own business’, earning his living by renting houses, giving him his own resources after the war) adds: ‘The English would gladly see us go back to Poland, but we refused, we did not fight for such a Poland, we wanted a free Poland. They sold our Poland – literally Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill’. Only some people who decided to stay in exile had an easier start. Officers for example received a £100 gratuity after they left the service.<sup>26</sup>

Some soldiers and officers had money saved from their pay, or funds increased in ‘military industry’. The term ‘chestnuts’ (*kasztany*) entered the emigration jargon, to talk about gold sovereigns, which were traded with great profit. Janusz Kowalewski wrote about not entirely legal soldiers’ businesses in a collection of short stories *O żołnierzu ciułaczu* (A soldier-hoarder).<sup>27</sup> ‘The smarter ones schemed how to ship them, which was not quite legal. During holidays in Egypt they bought “golden chestnuts” for five pounds and sold them for twenty, twenty-five pounds in Italy. Some people made fortunes. In this way some Poles who came to England had money to buy houses and settle immediately’.<sup>28</sup> Elzbieta Piekarka and her husband stayed in a Pole’s house: ‘Major Janecki, who “worked in the golden chestnuts business” during the war, as it was said, immediately bought a house here and rented rooms. You can imagine: one kitchen and seven housewives! In every room there was a family. Terrible conditions’. Danuta Wardle-Wiśniowiecka remembers that ‘chestnuts’ were shipped generally by officers. Soldiers tended not to know that it was possible to run such a business, for which one needed connections.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with D. Kwaśny.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Ł. Ślepokóra.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with J. Karpowicz.

<sup>27</sup> J. Kowalewski, *O żołnierzu ciułaczu*, London, 1955, pp. 13, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

Janina Karpowicz, however, after her stay in Italy in a Polish secondary school (*gimnazjum*) in Trani, came to England in 1946, and from 1948 lived in London – in the beginning near Stockwell, close to the Oval. They rented a room from a wealthy Pole (most probably thanks to ‘chestnuts’), a pre-war *starosta* who fleeced his countrymen to the tune of £3/10 s. per room (weekly). It was very expensive.

Irrespective of all these difficulties, a ‘natural drive to create Polish circles’ continued.<sup>29</sup> ‘There was no help, one had to achieve everything on one’s own, and despite that one had time for social work [...] We were a tight community, happy, just after the war, that we had regained freedom. One was willing to do everything and did everything so that everything went right’.<sup>30</sup> Slowly, the situation stabilized. Zofia Piątek (who came to England in 1948, was at first in a students’ camp and got married) recalls: ‘we wanted to live somewhere, everyone wanted to buy a house’. Danuta Kwaśny became a dressmaker: ‘I had no idea about how to use an electric sewing machine. I was on piecework and earned quite good money – £12/10 s. (Other men who worked there did not like it and they went on strike.) I saved money for school. I went to a Polish secondary school (*gimnazjum*) for only two years, then for three years to the evening junior secondary school at PUNO [*Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie*, the Polish University Abroad], where I passed my secondary school-leaving examination. I also went to an English school in Balham, where I graduated from Commercial College. I met my husband at a cadets’ party’.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from families, neighbours’ circles also appeared – ‘After some time we started to call on each other’.<sup>32</sup> After many years, the conclusion was reached that social life ‘developed and still develops alongside the personal stabilization of Polish families, the gaining of a material foundation and the strengthening of one’s own position, [all of which] are so necessary to settle for good in a foreign country’. They had to complete studies, or start them, not only to overcome linguistic, financial and educational barriers, but also gain a good reputation among foreigners, in order not to stay on the sidelines, outside general British life. ‘If we look at all these personal and family difficulties of the first stage of emigration, we shall be able better and more

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<sup>29</sup> Szkopiak and Turło, ‘Ośrodek Lewisham’, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Maria Kwaśniewska.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Danuta Kwaśny.

<sup>32</sup> Account by S. Wolańska.

profoundly to assess the effort of people of goodwill, who at that time made an effort, which was not always well understood, to organize social life'.<sup>33</sup>

An attitude that perhaps characterized other ordinary members of communities who engaged in social activity was expressed by L. J. Laskowska who wrote: 'I have always been deeply convinced that "one must belong somewhere". [...] One of many things, which I shall remember with emotion from the period of my work in the *Gmina*, is solidarity. Regardless of any stupid thing one did and how one (more often she) was told off by dear friends at the meeting, the Community Council was always guided by a principle that even if it is not one for all, it surely is all for one'.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Chiswick district**

'It so happened', Łucja Ślepokóra recollects, 'that many Poles, from the army and everywhere, who stayed here, settled in West London, and especially in Chiswick. Some of them had been here earlier; those who crossed the Romanian border, when Poland was defeated in 1939.' Emigrants settled mainly in Chiswick and Acton, only later in Ealing. 'Poles settled in groups, as one Pole then invited others. Those who managed to escape with something via Romania lived in Earl's Court and Eaton Place', she adds.<sup>35</sup> Lidia Ciołkoszowa's information generally confirms this impression: 'Most [Poles] gradually got permanent jobs, some of them earned extra money and lived their own life. A few years after the war, Poles started to move to Earl's Court and Kensington, to Ealing and Putney, that is to districts of South-West London. Some of them earned so much that they could take out a loan to buy a house. Please remember that in England most people who have a permanent job live in their own houses, and they repay their loans over decades. In the city centre, however, to which Earl's Court belonged, houses were too expensive'.<sup>36</sup>

According Mr and Mrs Ślepokóra, the English were not willing to rent flats to Poles. Other Community activists also mention the problems with 'the local people'.

<sup>33</sup> *Kronika*, v.1, 1951-1969, p. 12

<sup>34</sup> L. J. Laskowska, 'Ja a GL-P', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept., 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ł. Ślepokóra.

<sup>36</sup> *Spojrzenie wstecz. Rozmowy przeprowadził Andrzej Friszke*, Paris, 1995, p. 239. L. Ciołkoszowa lived in Putney (West London).

It is difficult to understand for someone who knows the contemporary United Kingdom, but ‘we were the first emigrants as such. There were no black nor coloured people, no emigrants – maybe in embassies. The English were afraid of us. In advertisements, in the windows, shop displays there were notices: “No dogs, no Irish, no Poles”. They put us together with dogs!’

In such recollections, the only friends to Poles were the Irish – also Catholics and discriminated against by the English for the same reason. They worked in the hardest conditions. Most probably, Rev. Wood, who was very friendly towards Poles in Chiswick, was of Irish descent. ‘He said once in church: “Look at these Poles. You give only copper, they give silver! How does it work? Some more time and they shall buy themselves the church”. The Irish were our friends, later the English got used to us’.<sup>37</sup> Ryszard Kotaś also remembers, that ‘people kept together somewhat “against” the English’. ‘Every Pole felt aggrieved – they had sold our Poland. Many people could not work in their own profession. Some of them before the war had prestigious positions (for example, professional officers), and after the war they experienced the loss of social status, which sometimes caused disagreements in the community’.<sup>38</sup> This problem concerned obviously not only the *Gmina*, but also the whole ‘independence’ émigré elite.<sup>39</sup>

After the arrival of the 2nd Corps in England in 1946 and demobilization, Polish settlement moved westward along the Central and Piccadilly Underground lines. ‘Poles started to settle in the Chiswick area, and then Poles from Earl’s Court and the city centre moved here. As we moved, churches were bought, Saturday schools were founded’.<sup>40</sup> Ealing, at the time when the Community was founded and working most actively, was on the sidelines. The activity of the Community of West London did not actually include this area. ‘In the past Ealing was far away’, claims Zygmunt Grzyb. Even when the district became one of the biggest Polish centres it remained,

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ł. Ślepokóra.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with R. Kotaś.

<sup>39</sup> L. Ciołkoszowa described the initial post-war period thus: ‘Higher officers often worked at hotels, cleaning silver or as lift attendants [...]. General Bór Komorowski wove baskets to earn his living. [...] Mrs Wanda Pełczyńska, an ex-MP and wife of the Chief of Staff of the Home Army, cooked in English homes. Mrs Raczkiewicz, the President’s widow, repaired costume jewellery. A pre-war minister, Juliusz Poniatowski, swept the floor in a factory, General Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski earned a living as a factory worker. Some women worked in English houses as babysitters. People were really poor’ (Ciołkoszowa, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206). The wartime hero from Operation Market Garden in Arnhem, General Stanisław Sosabowski worked as warehouseman (S. Sosabowski, *Droga wiodła ugorem*, London, 1967, pp. 201-202)

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Ł. Ślepokóra.



in his opinion, the most poorly organized one.<sup>41</sup> Here it must be mentioned that the organizer of the Polish parish in Ealing (in 1949) was Rev. Adam Wróbel, the founder of the community of Lewisham and Brockley, who from 1946 celebrated Polish church services in the Brompton Oratory and lived in South Kensington.<sup>42</sup>

Relations between people most often were determined by their close geographical distance, in this case mainly the Chiswick region, claims Ryszard Kotaś. 'We have lived in West London for years, just like most of our friends', writes Krzysztof Głuchowski, in a fragment of his memoirs concerning the end of the 1950s.<sup>43</sup> However, according to Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, who lives in Acton, 'ties resulting from the past, war experience or working together were more important than being close neighbours. Poles lived in the same street and did not know each other'.<sup>44</sup> This opinion is confirmed by Jerzy Kulczycki, Juliusz Mieroszewski's 'neighbour' (in London terms at least). Despite the fact that Inka Mieroszevska, the columnist's wife, worked in the *Orbis* bookshop (located near Earl's Court Station), run by Kulczycki, they never met.

With the passing of the years, there a regional flavour and identity appeared among the 'immigrants' – a topic worth further investigation. For example, according to West London residents, mutual relations between West London and South London are best reflected by comparing them to those between Warsaw and its poorer suburb on the east bank of the River Vistula, Praga.<sup>45</sup> According to the same opinion, West Londoners were also relatively wealthier than Poles in other districts. West London also vaunted the greatest concentration of intelligentsia, as well as the elite leaders of Polish London. In Chiswick lived, among others, Juliusz Mieroszewski, the BBC correspondent Zdzisław Broncel, and also a representative of the younger literary generation, Bolesław Taborski.<sup>46</sup>

In South Kensington the following organizations had their headquarters: the Polish Institute and the Sikorski Museum, the well known clubs: *Ognisko* (Hearth,

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<sup>41</sup> This is confirmed by R. Żółtaniecki, in his interview.

<sup>42</sup> M. Turło, 'Śp. Ks prałat Adam Andrzej Wróbel', *DPDŻ*, 20 Sept. 1993. Rev. A Wróbel was succeeded in Ealing parish by Rev. [?] Kornacki. *Golden Jubilee of Priesthood of Canon A. Wróbel 1919-1969* [mimeographs], AOE.

<sup>43</sup> K. Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Z. S. Siemaszko.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Z. Grzyb.

<sup>46</sup> Habielski, *Polski Londyn*, pp. 74-75.

with a Polish Theatre), *Orzeł Biały* (the White Eagle)<sup>47</sup> and *Lotników* (Airmen), the Veterans' Club (*Dom Kombatanta*) with a book shop, *Zjednoczenie Polskie* (Federation of Poles), the Polish Library,<sup>48</sup> and the cafe *Daquise*, which became legendary in Polish émigré life. 'The Kensington district is the heart and brain of Polish London' – as it has been written in a popular guide.<sup>49</sup> Also here were the offices of the *Rada Trzech* (Council of Three), General Anders, the *Egzekutywa Zjednoczenia Narodowego* (Executives of National Unity) and the *Rada Jedności Narodowej* (Council of National Unity) – political bodies that were created following the split of 1954. Only a little further away (in the direction of Victoria Station) were located the other most important émigré institutions – 'the Castle', the seat of the Government and the President. However, only a few well-known personages of Polish London can be found among the members of the Polish Community of West London. They included the historians Józef Garliński and Stefan Mękowski, Kazimierz Sabbat, the President of the Republic of Poland in Exile in 1986-89, and the now completely forgotten, but then very popular Napoleon Sąddek, a writer. The *Gmina* gathered many of its own individuals and characters. Not all can be listed in this dissertation; generally it must be stressed that the 'independence' emigration and the soldiers' emigration was full of strong personalities. One personality that emerges prominently from anecdotes is first the originator, founder and the first president of the Community, Colonel and later Brigadier-General Stanisław Kuniczak.<sup>50</sup> Born in Lwów in 1900, he was one of the first activists of Józef Piłsudski's Polish Military Organization (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*, POW), before he joined the Legions. Among the defenders of Lwów in 1918, he participated in the Ukrainian campaign. He studied law at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów, but he soon decided on a military career, and graduated from the Military University (*Wyższa Szkoła Wojenna*); he was a social and sports activist. Mr Kuniczak worked in the staffs of great military units – as was enigmatically noted in memoirs after his death, it is, however, known that he was an intelligence officer.<sup>51</sup> In September 1939,

<sup>47</sup> Habielski *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, vol. 3, p. 105. This club should not be confused with another *Orzeł Biały*, which was set up in Balham in South London in 1969.

<sup>48</sup> From the beginning of the 1970s, most of these institutions were located in the newly created Polish Social and Cultural Association. POSK has changed the character of Polish London forever. See chapter 10 below.

<sup>49</sup> B. O. Jeżewski, *Polski Londyn. Polish Guide to London*, 7th edn, February 1969, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Information for biographical entries comes from, unless otherwise stated, the materials, mainly memoirs and obituaries from the AOE.

<sup>51</sup> 'Pożegnanie śp. Generała Stanisława Kuniczaka', *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, no 6 (238), June 1974.

he crossed the Romanian border and in Bucharest he assumed the command of a secret outpost in the 'R' (counter-intelligence) agency. As a major he was seconded to the 9th French Corps in the Lorraine sector of the Maginot Line.

After France was defeated, he made his way to the United Kingdom. After the war, he was a co-founder and for many years the chairman of the Lwów Circle, as well as an editor of its bulletin. He was the father of Wiesław Kuniczak, a writer who lived and died in the USA.<sup>52</sup> Stanisław Kuniczak also served in the government in exile as minister of social affairs and the president of the Supreme Chamber of Control (*Naczelna Izba Kontroli*, NIK).<sup>53</sup> He worked in the office of a company dealing with advanced electronics production. After he died on 14 May 1974, one tribute hailed him as 'a real knight of the cause of Polish independence'.<sup>54</sup> 'The late General was first of all paid a last tribute as a faithful son of Lwów, which he fought for [...] by arms in his youth, and here in exile, after this borderland town was lost as the result of the Yalta arrangements, with words and pen'.<sup>55</sup>

Adam Barszcz 'was an unforgettable personality; in all respects. When he appeared, all the children went to greet him... The kindergarten adopted his name', smiles Stanisława Wolańska. 'He was wealthier than all of us and financed many things' remembers Zygmunt Grzyb. Major, engineer, soldier of the 1st Brigade of Legions, president of the Association of Polish Legionnaires and Polish Military Organization (*Związek Legionistów i POW*), for many years a member of the Supreme Chamber of Control, and a member of the Lwów Circle. He died in 1980.<sup>56</sup> Despite long years spent in the United Kingdom Adam Barszcz appears not to have known English very well. Ryszard Kotaś remembers that during a visit to a local MP's office, dealing with the problems of the Saturday school, he did not speak a word. 'A distinguished, tall man, he had prestige. He was also an ex-serviceman, his wife was Hungarian. [...] Mr Barszcz was cheerful, witty, he liked making jokes.

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<sup>52</sup> Wiesław Stanisław Kuniczak (1930-2000), prose writer and translator. In 1949 he graduated in political science at the London School of Economics. From 1950 he lived in the USA. He fought in Korea as a volunteer in the American army. Next he studied journalism at Columbia University. An independent writer, author of *The Thousand Hour Day* (1966), *My Name is Million. An Illustrated Story of Poles in America* (1978), *The March* (a novel 1979) and *Valedictory* (1983). He translated Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy* into English in 1991 and *Quo Vadis* in 1993. *Encyklopedia Polskiej Emigracji i Polonii*, ed. K. Dopierała, vol. 2, Toruń, 2003.

<sup>53</sup> *Nad Tamizą. Kwartalnik GPZL* no 1, winter 1975.

<sup>54</sup> *Biuletyn* no 23, June [?] 1974.

<sup>55</sup> *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> AOE.

Every Saturday he came to the school with his pockets full of sweets. He brought biscuits', recalls Mrs Wolańska.<sup>57</sup>

Józef Szlamp (1912-2002) – exuded another kind of authority. 'Solemnity. A very noble, devoted man'.<sup>58</sup> An major in the Independent Carpathian Rifles' Brigade (*Samodzielna Brygada Strzelców Karpackich*), a participant in the Libyan and Italian campaigns. For many years, he was a leading member of the Tobruk Association (*Tobrukczycy*), the president of the Association of the Disabled Veterans of the Polish Armed Forces (*Związek Inwalidów Wojennych PSZ, ZIW PSZ*). A knight of the Order of *Virtuti Militari*, V class, of the Cross of Valour (*Krzyż Walecznych*), the *Order of Polonia Restituta*, Józef Szlamp lost a leg and his right arm in the battle of Monte Cassino.<sup>59</sup> Despite his disability, he was an extremely active person. Only later in life could his milieu notice how great was his burden.<sup>60</sup>

'Aiming at establishing as close contact as possible between Community members and the Polish community of West London' the board of *Gmina* published *Komunikaty* (Communiqués), which after seven issues became the *Biuletyn* (Bulletin), from September 1961.<sup>61</sup> The first issue reads: 'It is characteristic that despite the facts that Gmina has existed for only one and a half years, and that the number of its members, in relation to the number of Poles in its area, [...] is rather small, it has still managed to gain quite a significant popularity and one can more and more often hear people from our members' list say the following, for example: "Our Community is organizing a party... in our Community they intend to buy a house..." etc.'

## In 'Praga'

Insofar as the emigrant community in West London was founded and developed within a certain order, creating strong links that were rich and self-sufficient in many respects, two facts determined the settlement of emigrants far from the 'heart and

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>59</sup> AOE.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Ł. Ślepokóra.

<sup>61</sup> It was irregularly published until 1974. 23 issues appeared. *Nad Tamizą*, ed. R. Kotaś (two issues: winter, spring-summer 1975), was a continuation of the *Biuletyn*.

brain of the Polish London': coincidence and lower real estate prices south of the river. Marian Makulski recollects: 'After we got married we lived in Putney. I found a house there, but it was a forty-nine-year leasehold, too close to the street and with a small garden. However, the agent would not take a deposit as he claimed that I had no chance of receiving a bank loan. My wife's brother found an advertisement in a newspaper about the sale of a house (freehold) in Lewisham with a big garden. When I saw the garden, I made a decision immediately. The house in Putney cost the same – £2,500, but it was only leasehold, without a driveway'.<sup>62</sup> Mr and Mrs Makulski moved to Lewisham in 1956. Maria Kwaśniewska's father also experienced problems with obtaining a loan which, resulted in her moving with her husband to Forest Hill in 1959: 'it was simply cheaper than, for example, in Ealing'. Czesław Kwaśniewski studied at the Polish University College (PUC) and finally he received a mortgage.<sup>63</sup>

Zofia Piątek, who lived in Catford from 1952, also claims that it was the cheapest district, which had suffered considerable destruction during the war. 'I was very dissatisfied' – she admits, but there was a chance to buy a house.<sup>64</sup> 'After the war, London was terribly destroyed after the bombings and there were problems with places to live in. Finding a flat was a real achievement', says Elżbieta Piekarska. 'My husband was admitted to the PUC in 1947 and it was difficult to find a place to live. There was a real estate agency and we used it to find a flat, first in Stockwell, and then in Lewisham. In this way we moved to this part of London. There was no choice.'<sup>65</sup> Zbigniew Jankowski was offered a job in Lewisham by his company in 1954.<sup>66</sup>

According to Janina Karpowicz, 'the natives' were more polite to foreigners in South London, 'they were more polite when we did the shopping on the market'.<sup>67</sup> Poles were not numerous, but slowly first contacts began: 'we met in the street: "Oh! Someone is speaking Polish!"'<sup>68</sup>, 'we noticed a few Polish families and a parish, a Polish shop in Peckham'<sup>69</sup>, 'it was only when we started going to church for Polish services, and children went to the Saturday school, that we established contacts with

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with M. Kwaśniewska and C. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Z. Piątek.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Z. Jankowski.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with J. Karpowicz.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with C. Kwaśniewski.

Poles'<sup>70</sup>, 'our social life started only when our children started to attend Saturday schools'<sup>71</sup> – this phenomenon gave the strongest basis for the consolidation of the community.

According to the calculations of the GPL-P governors, at the end of 1961 the Community had 118 members. In 1962, of its 320 members, 55 per cent lived in South-West London, 40 per cent in South-East London and 5 per cent in Surrey, Kent and other areas. 'Contrary to a popular opinion, one could notice a permanent inflow and active participation in the *Gmina* of the so called working intelligentsia, who in a practical way demonstrated their attitude to Polish identity' – it was stressed.<sup>72</sup>

The number of Community members on 31 December 1964 amounted to 388. 51 per cent of them lived in the south-western districts, 40 per cent in the south-eastern ones, and 8 per cent in Surrey, Kent and elsewhere. In a report for 1965, the number was put at 400 members was quoted; with roughly similar proportions, respectively 56, 36 and 8 per cent. 'Many Community members took management positions in Polish organizations, thanks to which the influence and importance of the Community increased, and cooperation improved considerably'. Numbers grew slowly. By the end of 1968, the *Gmina* had 412 members, including 223 who regularly paid their subscription.<sup>73</sup>

The Community's activity, which in the beginning was concentrated in the area of Brixton, expanded after its registration in 1961 into the whole of South London. It was stressed that this was possible because of 'a consistent policy of focusing on purely social activity'<sup>74</sup>. During the General Meeting of 8 April 1962 the final goal was defined that 'all Poles in South London should be members of the Community'.<sup>75</sup> The Community Council (*Rada Gminy*) aimed to develop the Community's activity in the whole of South London through individual and collective action, but 'in some areas the action had a long break caused by the desire to avoid misunderstandings and associating the Community with political organizations that conducted an intensive propaganda campaign at that time'. Many

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

<sup>71</sup> T. Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, London, 1996, p. 246.

<sup>72</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>73</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, March 1963; no 7, Dec. 1962; no 16, March 1965; no 20, March 1966; no 24, March 1967 and no 32, March 1969.

<sup>74</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 4, March [?] 1962.

<sup>75</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

of the Community's members used their individual, unrestricted freedom of political action outside the Community, appearing sometimes in opposing camps.<sup>76</sup> They quarrelled about politics, but it resembled discussions at a family table: 'Our 400 families and members are a cross section of society – it is one family', wrote Waldemar Cegłowski on the tenth anniversary of the Community's foundation. 'Everybody is equal and close, irrespective of their profession, education, faith, or political membership'.<sup>77</sup>

The 'friendly attitude' of the director of the printing house 'White Eagle Press Ltd', Stanisław Janicki, who printed the *Komunikat* from its fourth issue,<sup>78</sup> was often emphasised. In the Community magazine there was a *Gossip column* (*Kronika koleżeńska*), which, after all these years, is a mine of information about the events that were important for the community and its members: weddings, births and funerals. There was also information about new businesses (in 28 April 1963 it was recorded that J. Szpytma, 'the owner of a butcher's wholesale company, bought a shop next door in order to expand the existing enterprise')<sup>79</sup> and holiday journeys ('A. Leonard – twenty-four years old, a Community member, leaves with an English friend by the end of September for a journey around the world').<sup>80</sup> There were notices of books written by Community members, for example, 'historical memoirs from the 1920 war entitled *Bój w obronie Warszawy i śmierć ks. I. Skorupki* [The battle in defence of Warsaw and the death of Rev. I. Skorupka], edited by Mieczysław Z. Słowikowski, a former commander of this battalion and Rev. I. Skorupka's friend'.<sup>81</sup>

The work of the most devoted, quiet activists, 'those who were not written about', was given due appreciation by publishing, for instance, special thanks for people such as Julian Piwowarczyk – 'an iron treasurer'.<sup>82</sup> At the same time there were complaints about the fact, 'as one can notice in our announcements', that 'it is always the same people who work and devote time to organizing Community parties. However, everything has its limits – and so also in this case, for many unpredictable reasons, the present devoted enthusiasts may not be here one day, and that in a period

<sup>76</sup> 'Przegląd działalności', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, March 1963.

<sup>77</sup> W. Cegłowski, 'Zamiast wstępu', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>78</sup> *GPLP. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

<sup>79</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 9, June 1963.

<sup>80</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 6, Sept. 1962.

<sup>81</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 13, July 1964.

<sup>82</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965.

when we are in greatest need. We warmly call for as many proposals as possible for permanent or occasional co-operation'.<sup>83</sup> A similar problem was noticed ten years later: 'Although mainly people of long social experience get to work, following their example, timidly and slowly, new people arrive. We do not talk much about them. Sometimes a new name appears on the list of boards or members'.<sup>84</sup>

In order to facilitate Community work the decision was taken to appoint district delegates. Their tasks were to teach the members about the activity of the Community, collect information connecting their life, note addresses in a given district, facilitate contacts with the Community, collect fees and donations for the purchase of a house, inform about the Community's plan of action, and inform the Community Council about members' wishes. S. Sokołowski (who covered the postal districts SW11, SW12 and SW17) was the first to offer himself as a delegate. District delegates could take part in the Council meetings. 'The matter is urgent and the job is rather responsible, permanent and unrewarding (*niewdzięczna*), but necessary in order to make sure that messages about the Community are transferred everywhere and from the other side, to ensure that the Community Council is being informed about the general Polish public attitude to the Community'.<sup>85</sup> It is worth underlining that in the context of the success of the *Komunikat*, a regular magazine, with its own layout, they noticed 'a particular style – our own, Community style, one could say the South-West London style'.<sup>86</sup>

Among the members who were better-known outside the Community were the writer Czesław Dobek, Brigadier-General Mieczysław Zygfryd Słowikowski, Rev. Adam Wróbel, the Community's chaplain, Szczęsna Maria née Orzeł Michałowska (artists from the *Pro Arte* theatre) and Roman Wajda – the founder of POSK.

Colonel Andrzej Stańczyk (1902-73) was for many years a member and the president of the Community. At the age of seventeen he joined the army as a volunteer and fought in the 1920 war, during which he was wounded. For his courage he was twice decorated with the Cross of Valour. After the war he went to cadet school, and as a second lieutenant in the regular service he was posted to the 5th Podhale Rifles' Regiment (*5 Pułk Strzelców Podhalańskich*) in Przemyśl. He was

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<sup>83</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 11, Dec. 1963.

<sup>84</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

<sup>85</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

<sup>86</sup> T. Bogucki, "'Komunikat' wczoraj i dziś', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.



a company commander in 1939, then got to France, where he served in the Independent Podhale Rifles' Brigade (*Samodzielna Brygada Strzelców Podhalańskich*). Stańczyk subsequently took part in the battle of Narvik. He volunteered for the Polish Army in USSR (then the 2nd Corps), and distinguished himself in the battles of Monte Cassino, Ancona and Bologna. Decorated with the Gold Cross, and also the order *Virtuti Militari*, class IV, four times with the Cross of Valour, with the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Cross, he also became an Officer of the American Legion of Merit Medal. 'Feeling that his days were coming to an end and wishing to be buried in his home land he returned to Poland and soon died there'.<sup>87</sup>

An important element linking at least part of the management and members of the Community was business, most of which was connected with the person of an eminent activist of GPL-P and (in a later period) of POSK and many other émigré organizations, Tadeusz Walczak. He writes in his memoirs: 'In the district where I lived (Peckham, Camberwell, Forest Hill, Dulwich) there lived a few hundred Poles, and there was no Polish shop with food, with a delicatessen'.<sup>88</sup> So in 1958 he opened Rye Lane Delicatessen. 'Running a delicatessen shop in Peckham I met Waldemar Cegłowski,<sup>89</sup> with whom I later served in the Community of South London. Cegłowski, older than me by eight years, was severely wounded in the battle of Monte Cassino, where he fought in the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division, and where he won many distinctions. He graduated from an international trade and accounting school in London and had dealt for years with bookkeeping for small companies and individuals. He had a beautiful house, received a good disability pension and never had a permanent job. I started to co-operate with him in 1962 and from 1982 we were partners in many companies [...]. I was only a sleeping partner [...].'

Cegłowski's wife was employed in Prima Delicatessen, while Walczak's wife – starting from Prima Delicatessen, worked in different companies. 'From 1965 to 1982 I was a shareholder and director of Polenterprise Ltd., which sold watches and jewellery.' Cegłowski, Julian Piwowarczyk, Tadeusz Bogucki, [?] Boroń, Antoni Skiba and initially Roch Kowalski and Aleksander Ptak also belonged to the

<sup>87</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973

<sup>88</sup> Walczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 151, 161.

<sup>89</sup> Waldemar Marian Cegłowski, major, born in Żyrardów in 1916, died in 2004 and was buried in the Honor Oak Cemetery. He fought in the battle of Tobruk and Monte Cassino. He was a treasurer of the parish of Brockley and Lewisham and 'Rev. Cynar's active helper' (obituary in *DPDŻ*, no 128, 27 May 2004, AOE).

partnership (Piwowarczyk and Skiba were members of the Board of the GPL-P).<sup>90</sup> Moreover, we know that Cegłowski had a shop with Marian Turło (the president of Lewisham parish), and Walczak's delicatessen in Peckham was bought by Maura Kuterebowa (the founder and manager of the folk group *Niemen – Karolinka*).<sup>91</sup>

Numerous advertisement of companies connected with Tadeusz Walczak appeared in the Community's *Komunikat*: Oliver Stores, Oliver Delicatessen, Peckham Delicatessen, Universal Transfer Agency Ltd. and Polenterprise Ltd., as well as appeals: 'Support the companies advertised in the *Komunikat* of the Polish Community of South London'.<sup>92</sup> It is not fully clear where the border between economic and social activity was to be found. This is understandable why S. Janicki's printing house was advertised there, as were other Polish companies – also those which ran their activities closer to West rather than South London. It is curious that firms such as *Haskoba* and the *Orbis* bookshop did not appear as advertisers, or sponsors of events organized by the Community of West London, which reflects well on the efficiency of the 'South'. However, the placing in the *Komunikat* of an advertisement for the 'Polish Street Agency' – a company of suspicious character, connected with the communist regime in Poland, is surprising.<sup>93</sup>

### **The borderland of Polish London**

The community living in Lewisham, Greenwich and Bromley was, next to the parish organized in Croydon and Crystal Palace, one of the most distant émigré centres. Calm, a little provincial and of suburban character, the south-east (only after the extension of the administrative limits of the city in 1966 were Bromley, Bexley and Croydon included into the territory of Greater London) felt a bit distant from the hub of Polish life in West London. 'Being scattered within the large area of Lewisham and significant distances did not favour the organization of any collective activity at the beginning', wrote Zygmunt Szkopiak and Marian Turło.<sup>94</sup> Despite initial difficulties and thanks to Rev. Adam Wróbel's persistence, the community assumed

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<sup>90</sup> Walczak, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with E. Piekarska and M. and C. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>92</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>93</sup> I write more about the 'Polish Street Agency' in Chapter 10.

<sup>94</sup> Z. Szkopiak i M. Turło, 'Ośrodek Lewisham', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 35, March 1970.

the organized form of a parish. The first presidents of the Church Committee (*Komitet Kościelny*) were Wiktor Piotrowicz, Dr Jan Nowicki and Colonel (Pilot) Jerzy Bajan. To quote the *Kronika*: ‘They were very intelligent and really well-mannered, in private life as well as in social work. Founding the parish they saw it as a centre and an anchor of true Polish identity, which was to radiate [that identity] and attract the generations born in exile’.<sup>95</sup>

In 1975 the *Kronika* concluded: ‘We are significantly dispersed, preoccupied with careers and family duties, but we are connected by moments spent together in church during our meeting with God, at school with children and the young, in the scouts and guides circle, during events organized in common, and at evening parties. Organizational committees, which represent all of us, shall arrange different meetings and wait for our interest and support’.<sup>96</sup> It should be remembered that the organization was not large; there were never more than 100 families in the range of its activity. This also influenced the *esprit de corps* and style of the group; everybody knew one another. According to Maria Kwaśniewska, whole families and especially women were active: ‘we took children to school and then we waited for them, and we spent time chit-chatting, etc. – it was very nice. That is how we met and some circles and groups were created, but when various events and parties were organized, everyone helped’.

The geographical isolation of Lewisham was not complete however: Community members actively worked also in the GPL-P, which was located to the north-west, closer to the centre – both to the centre of Polish life and the general centre of London. This distance was, however, accompanied by a feeling of exclusiveness. Maria Kwaśniewska muses: ‘People living here were very well integrated, there were no significant conflicts. [...] Perhaps it was thanks to Rev. Wróbel and Rev. Dębski that everything was shipshape? Many people were surprised that such a small parish, could organize a variety of big events and celebrations. This was often remarked on. I don’t know how to explain it. Here in South London there lived many representatives of the intelligentsia – doctors, architects... Maybe that was why?’ According to Marian Makulski, Rev. Stanisław Cynar from Balham was believed to have told Rev. Wróbel: ‘You have class, I have mass’ (*Ty masz klasę, ja mam masę*). As in the self-portrait of Poles living in West London, here too the belief in the elite

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<sup>95</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>96</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

character of the social and intellectual group was strong. The same information appears in several accounts; namely that in the parish and in the Centre it was possible to meet a general, two judges, a dozen or so colonels and twelve doctors.<sup>97</sup> Others limit the number of doctors to seven.<sup>98</sup> Zbigniew Jankowski simply claims that they were the ‘cream of the émigrés’.<sup>99</sup>

The Lewisham Centre boasted quite a few real ‘characters’. ‘Our regular songster’,<sup>100</sup> a baritone called Wiesław Skoczylas who sang during church services, acted in Marian Hemar’s theatre (‘but he does not sing there’<sup>101</sup>). When the *Kronika* wrote about him, it mentioned that ‘it is difficult to break away from our group. Mr W. Skoczylas has lived outside the parish for a long time now, and he still very often takes part in different joint church and secular events’.<sup>102</sup> This was not an isolated case. In the *Komunikat* of the Community of South London, we read that Alojzy Kozłowski, although he had long left the area of South London and moved to Wembley, still belonged to the Community, paid fees and participated in events.<sup>103</sup> These examples reflect the cohesion of these groups.

Another, undoubtedly interesting person whose activity transcended the local stage, albeit for reasons connected to his earlier achievements, was the famous pilot, Colonel Jerzy Bajan, one of the founders of the parish. He was buried, however, outside its territory.<sup>104</sup> As for popularity, only Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski could compete with him.<sup>105</sup> The last prime minister of the independent Second Republic lived in Camberwell from 1952. Maria Kwaśniewska’s parents were friends with the

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

<sup>98</sup> Interviews with D. Kwaśny and Z. Jankowski. D. Kwaśny’s husband, Lech, was a doctor, and hence this opinion may come from a better informed person.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Z. Jankowski.

<sup>100</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

<sup>101</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, March 1967.

<sup>102</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

<sup>103</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 26, Sept. 1967.

<sup>104</sup> Jerzy Bajan (1901-1967), pilot and colonel, won the international star rally to Vienna in 1933 and in the international professional sports planes Challenge in 1934. During World War II he was the commander of fighter aviation in the Polish Air Force in the UK. He was active in the *Stowarzyszenie Lotników Polskich* (Polish Pilots’ Association) and its president for a few years, and co-founded the Polish Gliding Club in Lasham. *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, vol. 1, Warsaw, 1997, p. 327.

<sup>105</sup> Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski (1885-1962), a politician, general, doctor. In 1926-29, 1930-31 and 1936-39 he was minister of the interior, from 1931 he combined the ministry of the interior with the post of deputy minister of military affairs and head of the army administration. A member of parliament (Sejm) in 1930-39, and prime minister in 1936-39, he was close to Józef Piłsudski, then Edward Rydz-Śmigły, and a co-originator of the *sanacja* policy. In 1939-40 he was an internee in Romania and in 1943-45 the sanitary head of Polish military formations in the Middle East. He wrote the following and other books: *Strzepy meldunków* (1936), *Kwiatuszki administracyjne* (1961), *Nie ostatnie słowo oskarżonego* (1964). *Powszechna encyklopedia PWN*, multimedia edition.

former premier and his wife Jadwiga after they became neighbours in Peckham. 'Everyone was afraid of him in Poland before the war, and here he turned out to be such a nice person, so easy-going that one did not feel awkward in the presence of a person of such a high "rank". I was surprised that he could be like that'. 'Marvellous', adds Czesław Kwaśniewski, 'he was incredibly conscientious as far as work was concerned, before the war he visited the offices of a *starosta* here and there, *stawojki* are very famous [a type of outside toilets that were named after him]'.<sup>106</sup> However, according to Elżbieta Piekarska, 'Sławoj Składkowski did not come to Polish church services'.<sup>107</sup>

The former premier's third wife, whom he married in exile, was also an exceptional person. Mrs Sławkowska lived for more than a hundred years (1904-2007). She was the sister of Tadeusz Dołęga Mostowicz, the writer. A teacher in Lida and Borysów, she went through Russia (as a prisoner, first in Lida and Borysów, then in the forced-labour camp of Poćma in the Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Mordva). Later, after 'amnesty', she was a teacher in the Polish secondary school in Stowell Park.<sup>108</sup> Danuta Kwaśny, an activist from the parish and the Centre, was her student.<sup>109</sup>

Against the background of calmer political times Stanisław Nowak stood out: as a minister at 'the Castle', he was the one agitated next to the church with a flag.<sup>110</sup> At the local level he was first of all the founder and the head of the Bolesław Chrobry Saturday school in Camberwell, on wider stage a member of the National Council (*Rada Narodowa*), Minister of Education and Faith, and Minister of the Treasury. As the president of the Association of Eastern Territories (*Związek Ziemi Wschodnich*) for many years, he 'actively participated in the defence of the Eastern Territories of the Second Republic of Poland'. After his wife's death, he took over the editing of *Kwartalnik Kresowy* (The Borderland Quarterly).<sup>111</sup> Major Gustaw Piwakowski (1888-1980) was the oldest and a very popular member of the Lewisham Centre and

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<sup>106</sup> Interviews with M. and C. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Emilia Mostowicz and Małgorzata Podpora from Warsaw, who are Władysław Mostowicz's daughters. Jadwiga Składkowska, née Mostowicz, was Władysław's sister. In 2007 I was shown F. Składkowski's mementos, kept by J. Składkowska, later offered to the Gąbin District Society Museum in Gąbin (*Muzeum Towarzystwa Ziemi Gąbińskiej*), the birthplace of F. Składkowski.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with J. Karpowicz.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

<sup>111</sup> W. S. Nowak, 'Stanisław Nowak 1909 – 2000', *DPDŻ* no 42, 29 Febr. 2000, AOE.

the Polish Community of South London at the height of their activity; he was the treasurer of the parish, of the school and Auxiliary Members' Associations (*Koło Przyjaciół Harcerstwa*, KPH) and a member of the Centre Board (*Zarząd*). 'He works, he helps his daughter to redecorate the house. Active at all events'.<sup>112</sup> The major's eightieth birthday was an occasion for a jubilee, and name day was also celebrated then.

None doubted, however, that 'the head of this small group – as well as its heart and soul, was Rev. Prelate A. Wróbel'.<sup>113</sup> Elsewhere, someone said: 'A group of Poles who founded the Polish parish in South London developed into the community which constitutes a partial substitute of home land to us, allows them to work for it, to bring up children according to national tradition and their fathers' faith, and who know Polish language and culture'.<sup>114</sup>

## Conclusion

The members of the Communities came from all circles of the wartime and postwar emigration and reflected all the routes taken by Poles to London in the 1940s. In this respect the organizations I focus on are fully representative of the whole of the Second Great Emigration. Thus, the conclusions drawn on the basis of the insights into the lives of individual Polish Communities may equally well refer to the whole of Polish émigré community in Great Britain at this time.

The different experiences of people involved in the Communities did not have any significant influence on the level of understanding between them, as reflected in their fulfillment of their tasks in the newly established organizations. Veterans of the Warsaw Uprising as well as those who had fought in Africa, or former prisoners of the Soviet concentration camps (*łagry*), were able to build the foundations of the new Communities. Before this occurred, former war heroes frequently had to face the difficult challenge of finding their own place in a reality that they found alien. Most of them started from scratch. This experience was often accompanied by the feeling of having lost everything they had achieved so far. The youngest generation, that is, those who entered their adult life during the war or

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<sup>112</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, March 1967.

<sup>113</sup> On both priests, see chapter 5 below.

<sup>114</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

immediately after it, found making a new start easiest. This generation built most of the foundations of the Polish Communities.

A wartime background (whether as a soldier, prisoner, or deportee) had a profound influence on the way in which the group's national identity evolved as well as on the set of ideas that governed the process of bringing up their children, born in the United Kingdom. The most pressing task was to reconcile their own aspirations with the habits and aspirations that typified British society. The generally accepted imperative to pass down Polish national consciousness drove many Poles towards greater social activity.

These new arrivals, aliens in their environment, now inhabitants of London, clung to each other and felt the common need to offer mutual support in this frequently hostile, not yet multicultural British society. Naturally, cases of a lack of solidarity between Poles also occurred. Following extremely difficult beginnings, both economically and psychologically (the accounts are almost unanimous in this regard), in the 1950s the process slowly began to take shape of 'getting settled' in one's own neighbourhood, one's own workplace and the social position one occupied. Despite the differences between various areas of the metropolis as well as between the Polish communities inhabiting them, one can notice many similarities between the Polish Communities that determined their common character.

There were circles of friendly families, parents and children within each *Gmina*. People leaned on one another and worked together not only in social activity, but also sometimes in business (for example in the Polish Community of South London) or in building a religious community (for example the parish and Centre in Lewisham). It seems that past divisions and the hierarchy characteristic of Polish émigré society were sometimes deemed irrelevant at the level of *Gmina* (the former Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składowski is a case in point). The typically Polish, and often only symbolic, attachment to social ranks and titles was not, however, entirely abandoned and the achievements of distinguished members of Polish Communities during the independent Second Republic (1918-39) and the war were preserved in the collective memory of the Polish Communities in London. There were also attempts to raise the self-esteem of the group. However, the Polish Communities in London were examples of the least elitist and closed organizations in the émigré world (although such openness only applied to representatives of the soldiers' emigration, to their descendants, and sometimes to their relatives who

arrived from Poland). Care and respect was offered to senior members of the Communities. Activity in other social areas, beyond the Community was appreciated (as in the cases of Colonel Kuniczak's Lwów Circle, Professor Wajda and Tadeusz Walczak's initiative to build POSK). The material and professional success of some Community members was a source of joy, shared, it would seem, by all Community members.

Having been established initially on the edges of the Polish émigré life, the Communities slowly became a more important part of Polish London. They expressed a spontaneous and genuine need for collective social activity.



## 4.

**Parties, events and social life.****The Ladies' Circles**

Exploring the ways of having fun can tell us much about customs, which are an inseparable part of every community's history. In this case, the character of dancing parties, fairs, lotteries, beauty competitions, jubilees and so on is interesting not only from a historical narrative point of view and not only because it has not been done before. Such mechanisms of social relations help us to understand the everyday lives of émigré Poles, which differed both from the people around them in London and from people in Poland. The activity of Ladies' Circles can reveal the changing place of women in social life, a reflection of wider social changes in Great Britain and Polish communities during the third quarter of the twentieth century.

**Always with the same aim**

Let us also begin this chapter with a quotation from a book by Karol Zbyszewski, who in his precise manner sneered at the martyred pose of his peers. His main character *Emigreytan*, who symbolizes the indomitable Londoner-Pole, visits a psychiatrist: 'Sir', he moans, 'save me, please! I am afraid that I have gone mad...' The wise doctor asks, 'What brought about such a sad supposition?' Emigreytan responds, 'Well, that's because for no apparent reason I have been in a continuously good mood and feeling very happy'.<sup>1</sup> Zbyszewski himself was a journalist and an 'indomitable-style' writer. Coming from his pen, such criticism assumed credibility. The story captures the turning point in the moods of the vast majority of émigrés at the end of the 1950s. One was now supposed to live on, one was supposed to settle down firmly in the place that had been chosen by destiny.

Balls and parties constituted a very popular form of social life in exile. Famous balls for the emigration's *crème de la crème* took place in the *Ognisko* (Polish

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<sup>1</sup> K. Zbyszewski, *Kluski z custardem*, Newtown, 1957, p. 119. The name *Emigreytan* refers to Tadeusz Reytan (1742-80), a nobleman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, who made a famous protest against the ratification of the First Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by the *Sejm* in 1773.

Hearth) and the *Orzeł Biały* (White Eagle) Clubs in Kensington (the latter place should not be mistaken for a less elite club that opened in Balham in 1969). Some English halls were also rented, including the most prestigious – on 4 January 1969 the Polish Community of South London organized a Grand Carnival Ball in the Dubarry Room of the Cafe Royal in Regent Street, London W1. The invited guests were asked to arrive in ‘evening or formal dress. The dances that night would be accompanied by Iza Geiger’s Viennese Orchestra Septet, renowned for the previous year’s ball as well as their performances at the BBC’. At three pounds and ten shillings, the entrance fee was high.<sup>2</sup> Another Carnival Ball – ‘The Three Kings’ – took place in the beautiful Peter Jones hall at Sloane Square where, it was said, ‘Polonia from London and around gathered in their numbers.’<sup>3</sup> In the sixties and seventies, except for the annual balls, the GPL-P organized popular Saturday dances at the Clapham Manor Bath in Manor Street.<sup>4</sup>

The GPZL organized more modest parties.<sup>5</sup> ‘These were not balls (*bale*), but dance parties (*zabawy*)! There is a difference. A ball is refined, everything must be ‘formal’ and held in proper halls’, says Łucja Ślepokóra about the Polish Community of West London’s events. ‘We had the so-called *Stodoła* (Barn). It was a parish hall at Rev. Wood’s church, where we were obliged to wash the floor and clean up all by ourselves. The Board members, including the president (chairman), took hold of the brooms and washed, everything had to be prepared, the tables set, the table-clothes bought. The ladies wore various outfits, whatever was within their price range. The GPZL dance parties were not the only such forms of entertainment for the Poles in West London. Competition sprung up in many places: in Ealing Town Hall, in the hall of one of the local Catholic schools. The wildest – carnival parties – were in South Lane, in a building, which now no longer exists, especially rented for the

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<sup>2</sup> During the ball there a lottery of the Friends of the Camberwell and Brockley Scouting Association, the profits of which was devoted to the Monte Cassino scout gathering. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 31, Dec. 1968. However, a few years later we read: ‘The traditional New Year’s Ball at the halls of Cafe Royal this year (January 1975) will not take place. Ongoing inflation causes the price of the tickets to go up to £7.50, which may seriously lower the attendance and expose the organizers to a monetary loss. As a result, the Council (*Rada Gminy*) decided to call off the booking of the hall.’ *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 47, [1974].

<sup>3</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, March 1968. The use of word ‘Polonia’ in such a source is interesting.

<sup>4</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 246, cites party on 23 October 1965: ‘Over 160 people enjoyed themselves, our regular customers, including a few English couples and numerous ‘troops’ of the *Pancerniacy* [veterans of the 1st Armoured Regiment] with their beautiful ladies’. Within a month, on 20 November 1965 another party was held, and again to the accompaniment of the ‘Mazur’ orchestra. ‘The hall – that time – was not too crowded, yet a warm and almost family atmosphere dominated the room all through the evening’. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with J. Kulczycki.

occasion by the Polish people. The emigration liked to enjoy themselves.’<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Lidia Ciołoszowska states that ‘our social life was very modest’. She and her husband Adam ‘never attended any balls’.<sup>7</sup>

Juliusz Mieroszewski, a correspondent for the Paris-published *Kultura* (Culture) writing under his *Londyńczyk* (Londoner) pen name, observed in 1956: ‘one could learn more about the Polish emigration in Great Britain by observing, if only for half an hour, the convention of guests for the *Miss Polonia* ball than from melancholic wonderings of émigré columnists (including the ‘Londoner’). [We would see] Around 600 private cars with number plates from all over England, outfits, make-up, hats, jewellery. We have come a long way from [...] barracks, from uniforms, re-made into suits, from military cloaks dyed dark blue. Who governs the soul of that wealthy, motorized crowd?’ asked the Londoner, seemingly rhetorically, then proceeding to formulate a controversial assessment that ‘it seems certain that these people are not interested either in the seventeen years of national mourning or in the Council of the Three, the Executives and other pitiful misunderstandings’.<sup>8</sup> It seems more likely, on the contrary, that the fate of the emigration and involvement in various forms of émigré politics in no way conflicted with having fun.

As Zbigniew S. Siemaszko recalls: ‘It is often said and written: “in the foreign lands, in exile, we have suffered”... Those feelings did indeed occur, especially among the older generation. I am saying that as a man born in 1923. [...] There were many more like me. Older generations than ours were hit worse by the effects of war, my generation never had so much to lose. We were more open. In Greater London on Saturday, wherever there was a party – there were plenty of Polish people. Everyone enjoyed themselves and danced! They also worked, studied, gathered together – life was made up of much more than high dramas’.<sup>9</sup> To give one example, the *kawiarenki* (in that meaning not little cafes but coffee parties) of the Polish Technicians Association (*Stowarzyszenie Techników Polskich*) are recalled by Krzysztof Głuchowski: ‘They were organized, like our balls, together with the Polish Medical Association (*Stowarzyszenie Lekarzy Polskich*). [...] The doctors sent out a proportion of the invitations and enjoyed themselves greatly. All the preparations were left to the engineers, and the members of our board, together with their spouses,

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Z. S. Siemaszko.

<sup>7</sup> Ciołoszowska, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>8</sup> Londyńczyk, ‘Kronika angielska. Na emigracyjnej scenie’, *Kultura*, 1956, no 7-8 (105-106), p. 131.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Z. S. Siemaszko.

took care of the bar and the cold buffet, which was always delicious and abundant'.<sup>10</sup> It was the Polish Technicians Association and the Association of Farmers (*Stowarzyszenie Rolników Polskich*) that organized the most famous Polish balls in London.<sup>11</sup> Years later, the Technicians' balls, which took place at 9 Prince's Gardens (above the Polish Library) were described by Tadeusz Walczak: 'the entrance fee was very low and there was always a good orchestra playing. Drinks and wines at the buffet were quite costly, so each of us, would bring over some gin, some vodka or whisky in our pockets, and the ladies in their handbags. Those were fabulous dances. One could meet young couples from all over London. There was no blowing into breathalysers at that time, so many of us would actually head back home in quite a tipsy state'.<sup>12</sup>

The Communities organized parties for New Year's Eve, Carnival, Shrove Tuesday (*Ostatki*), the spring, the autumn, and Saint Andrew's Eve, as well as sporting events, children parties, celebrations of the *matura* (the Polish school-leaving examination equivalent to 'A' levels), bazaars, lotteries, and so on. From the moment that the Community of South London was registered and a fresh breath of air was finally inhaled, in the course of a single year there were ten profitable events (bring in £230), two children's parties, *Opłatek* (a typically Polish celebration of sharing a eucharistic wafer and exchanging wishes before Christmas), two official celebrations: 'one to commemorate the November anniversary [Independence Day] and one in memory of the Constitution of 3 May [1791]'.<sup>13</sup> Events were held frequently. Here is an example of such a series in 1962. 9 June: a dancing party for adults at Eccleston Hotel, Victoria, SW1; 16 June: a dance party for adults at the New Park Ballroom, 390 Brixton Road, SW9; 1 July: a party for children at New Park Ballroom, 7 July: a dance party for adults, again at the Eccleston Hotel; 21 July: a party for teenagers at Clapham Bath, Clapham Manor Street, SW4.<sup>14</sup> It was of course the summer season, but the density of the party agenda is still nonetheless impressive.

In the first decade of the GPZL's existence, according to a summary presented during the Board meeting of 20 February 1970, there were thirty-five dance parties,

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<sup>10</sup> Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> Habielski, *Polski Londyn*, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 246.

<sup>13</sup> The Community's assets amounted to £600 (at the moment of registration they were only £220), *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 4 [1962].

<sup>14</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 5, June 1962.

three *Koleđy* (Carol singing events), three bazaars, five official celebrations and social evenings, four tombolas, two fairs, as well a Nativity play, a lottery, an outing and annual celebrations of the anniversary of 3 May 1791. It is noteworthy that each dance party dance was held for a particular purpose.<sup>15</sup> Whether these aims were oriented towards purchasing a house, or supporting the church or the scouts, more about the causes can be found in other chapters of this thesis, but here we will concentrate on the means, which may seem less important and are easily underappreciated.

### **‘Full of verve’**

A dance party needed to be prepared. Here is a typical conference before a dance party held by the Polish Community of West London on 30 April 1960: ‘a four-person orchestra has been hired and is going to play from eight o’clock in the afternoon until midnight, for the sum of £10. The decorations suggesting the springtime character of the party are almost done. The prize lottery is going to be prepared by Mr Tunikowski. Balloons left over from the previous parties should be used [...]. Mr Urbanowicz will take on the role of the dance leader (*wodzirej*), the cashdesk will be controlled by Messrs Kotaś and Szlamp’.<sup>16</sup> The Lewisham Centre organized balls in a spacious and well-equipped hall at Saint Joseph’s Academy (where the headmaster, Brother John Swift, played a role similar to that of the GPZL’s supporter, Rev. Wood). Each New Year’s Party drew around 120 participants.<sup>17</sup> They all began with the Ladies’ meeting, ‘we would specify what needed to be done’, relates Zofia Piątek, the long-time head of the Community’s party section (*kierownik sekcji imprez*), ‘cold buffet (herrings, meat products) or *bigos* (a traditional hot Polish dish made of cabbage and meat)?’. The entrance fee was paid independently of the buffet, the fee was not collected at the door but was included in the tickets sold in advance. During each party a lottery was organized alongside various other forms of entertainment.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ł. Ślepokóra.

<sup>16</sup> Protocol of the Community Board, 21 April 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>17</sup> According to M. Kwaśniewska and C. Kwaśniewski (interviews), but Z. Jankowski claims that they gathered up to 250-300 participants.

A rich social life was gradually taking shape. ‘In the [19]60s and [19]70s there were many parties, among which one could always find something interesting’, wrote Tadeusz Walczak. ‘At the Saturday school meetings and other events in South London, bigger and smaller social circles began to be set up. [...] Almost all our friends held grand nameday celebrations.<sup>18</sup> Before each party food and alcohol had to be purchased, the latter exclusively with a one-off licence. In the GPZL Archives we find a routine request for an ‘Occasional Spirit Licence’ placed on behalf of the organizers by Stanisław Koziol owner of ‘Lucullus Restaurant, 449, Oxford Street, London W1’, to ‘The Clerk, Acton Magistrate Court’, and to ‘The Superintendent, Chiswick Police Station, 210, High Rd, London W4’.<sup>19</sup> The venue, which was situated after all in the city’s most important shopping street, was considered sophisticated, and was run by a renowned pre-war Lwów restaurateur, Stanisław Koziol.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes organizations joined forces. In 1965 a New Year Party was organized jointly by the GPL-P and the Friends Association of the 1st Armoured Regiment (*Koło Koleżeńskie 1 Pułku Pancernego* – to which Tadeusz Walczak belonged): ‘At the streamer-showered tables, delightful Ladies and Gentlemen, mostly in evening dresses, at the buffet decorated with oriflames and streamers, [there was] a crowd of customers. The 1st Regiment’s tables attracted much attention – they were decorated with black and orange pennants with purple lines, all done by Mrs Wosiek. The ever-present smiling faces of men and women confirmed the air of a good, pleasant mood’.<sup>21</sup>

Coincidentally, and also in the archives of London West Community, an exceptional document was preserved, namely the ‘The Alcohol Requirements for the Grand Carnival Party of 12 February 1966’ (*Zapotrzebowanie na alkohol na Wielką Zabawę Karnawałową 12 lutego 1966 roku*). It can safely be said that the the promise of ‘an abundantly equipped buffet with attractions’ inscribed in the invitation was not a bluff. The list of requirements reveals that the general preference was for Polish alcohols, with a strong representation of coloured vodkas. The following evokes the moods to be encountered in the Lewisham Centre at the Saint

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<sup>18</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 246.

<sup>19</sup> Letters of 5 Oct. and 11 Oct. 1961, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>20</sup> Habielski, *Polski Londyn*, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965. The same source voiced complaints about the innacurate coverage of of the event in the *DPDŻ*.

Joseph Academy during the organization of the second successive New Year Party in 1973/74: 'Guests gather in groups at the booked tables. The ladies are enveloped in scarves. The gentlemen have a much better means to warm themselves up. Two or three shot glasses of 'Wyborowa' [vodka] and immediately it is warmer and more cheerful. The hall is full to the brim with dancers. There is an entire procession, with one couple behind another, for a glass of champagne to celebrate the New Year'.<sup>22</sup>

There were of course some unforeseen situations, closely associated with the particular form of human activity that is a dance. The GPZL activists once related that Rev. Wood, who until that time had always granted them an alcohol license, refused to give it for the upcoming dance. The reason was the report of the bartender that during the dance the participants drank their own alcohol, which was forbidden by the regulations in view of the safety rules. 'In future we must find a solution to that problem'.<sup>23</sup> It is an old problem, perhaps not as old as the hills, but quite like the history of organizing parties at which the alcohol was priced much higher than in the shops.

During the discussion of the party at the *Ognisko* (Hearth) Club on 3 June 1967, the hosts had to confront another problem: 'the members of the Community Board will keep watch so that people not taking part in the party should not enter the dancehall. Those with entrance tickets will be given white and purple ribbon pins as a check'. The Board also decided that all its members participating in the party will purchase their tickets on a regular basis, whereas 'the Ladies who contributed by offering their work and gifts are to be ushered in free of charge'.<sup>24</sup> On 19 November 1970 it was underlined that among the duties of the entrance personnel was the 'prevention of drunk *Ajrysze* from entering'.<sup>25</sup> The use in such a context of this Anglo-Polish slang term for the Irish might suggest that some of the Poles' early solidarity with fellow Catholics mentioned earlier had evaporated two decades later. By this time the Northern Irish 'Troubles' had begun, while the Poles had long since settled down in Great Britain.

The organizers undoubtedly took great care over the quality of the entertainment they offered. The GPZL's president, Stanisław Kuniczak, once wrote to Eugeniusz Nakonieczny, the director of *Nako* orchestra: '...in the course of the latest dance I

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<sup>22</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>23</sup> Community Board minutes, 12 September 1962, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>24</sup> Community Board minutes, 30 May 1967, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>25</sup> Community Board minutes, 19 Nov. 1970, Archives of the GPZL.

realized that a certain type of its participants got too carried away to the sound of *Maruszka, Maruszka*; the libretto especially seemed to give them a boost of unnecessary verve (*niepotrzebny animusz*), they started screaming wildly and loudly, danced in a way hardly reminiscent of a proper dance and... it came to misunderstandings, in which a row was avoided solely thanks to my successful and fortunate intervention. Thus I do request You not to – EVER – play or sing the melody any more during our parties, for I would not like the events to be lascivious fun (*wyuzdana uciecha*) for some and for the others a great nuisance. We would like our dances to be pleasant entertainment for all our guests in equal measure. I know that Your repertoire is so rich that no-one will truly feel the absence of the *Maruszka*'.<sup>26</sup>

A characteristic note from the Community of South London *Komunikat* said: 'The latest dance (26 November 1960) organized by the Board is bound to be considered successful in all respects, including the financial ones; it brought in a clear profit of £60. The total amount was added to the account for the purchase of a house at the Building Society, thus putting the amount at £300'.<sup>27</sup> Activists of the GLP-P felt obliged to explain that 'the clear profit of each dance is whatever the buffet and the lottery would give, because the entrance tickets could basically cover the costs of the hall rent, the orchestra, the advertisement in the press and other administrative expenses. Until then the buffet has largely been "funded" by the members of the Community Council and their families, and the lottery has been paid off. To avoid placing this continuous burden on the shoulders of the few, who even apart from that devote much time for Community work, we would like to place a request to a "big bunch", mostly to the Ladies, to come with their help in the organization of the buffet. [...] There are over 350 of us in the Community and if each of us donates just one prize a year, we will be able to organize four lotteries, each bringing a profit of at least £20'.<sup>28</sup> In the *Kronika* of the Lewisham Centre it was noted: 'the sum called a "clear profit" is also a party – whether successful or not. The number of silver coins from the so-called 'silver collection' is proof of the quality of the dance. The satisfied pay more!'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Letter of 18 Oct. 1961, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>27</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 6, Dec. 1960.

<sup>28</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 9, June 1963.

<sup>29</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.



Some events ‘broke through’ to the central London Polish press. ‘The Carnival of the Polish Community of West London ended with a dance and the choice of the “Queen”. There were around 200 people; the marvellous *Nako* group introduced a fantastic mood to the rhythmical [wasn’t that the *Maruszka?* – *P. Ch.*], sentimental dances. In a secret ballot 542 votes were given [...]. 6 ladies qualified for the finals’. After a short competition consisting of the waltz and the tango the jury unanimously awarded the title of the ‘Queen of the Carnival’. The queen and the two vice-queens were given boxes of chocolates and flowers. The Community Board promised to introduce regionally themed events, starting with one on ‘Warsaw’.<sup>30</sup>

Dances did not always succeed, however. Some made losses, like the one held by the Community of West London on 26 January 1963, which incurred a loss of £4.11 s.: ‘the Board accepted the report and agreed that the dance had not worked out due to low attendance, attributed to the bad weather’.<sup>31</sup> There was some comfort to be had in the fact that ‘where organization failed, improvization obtained great results. Anyone would surely admit that even after an unsuccessful dance, an improvized *ad hoc* ending in somebody’s private place has always worked!’ – wrote L. J. Laskowska.<sup>32</sup>

‘Cleaning lasted until midnight after the parties’, recalls Ryszard Kotaś from the GPZL. One of the most vivid of his memories is one from the New Year’s Parties, the profit from which amounted to a round £200 – which at that time, in the 1960s, was a very substantial amount. ‘After such successful dances it was particularly sad if no-one would come to the next one. Sometimes as few as 50 people came along. We were haunted by a feeling of ungratefulness’.<sup>33</sup> Zofia Piątek remembers: ‘We were young, all cleaned up together, and the hall was supposed to be left in the state we found it in’. She would follow her intuition in the organization of the events, ‘I was lucky – it always worked out’. She adds that being the director of the events section was a responsible function.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from dances, the Communities organized outings and excursions.<sup>35</sup> ‘The Community generally took part in the car excursion to the Polish Secondary School

<sup>30</sup> ‘Perła karnawału’, *DPDŻ*, no 64, 15 Mar. 1962.

<sup>31</sup> Board Minutes, 20 Feb. 1963, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Ja a GL-P’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with R. Kotaś.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Z. Piątek.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

of Marian Fathers' Convent at Fawley Court, near Henley, at Pentecost. The line of private cars of the Community members, decorated with a sign which read 'The Polish Community of South London', in both English and Polish, with a beautiful white eagle in the middle, aroused general curiosity and favourable comments both on the way and at Fawley Court, where they occupied places reserved especially for that purpose', it was reported in the *Komunikat*'.<sup>36</sup> The GPZL organized excursions, just like the dances, that gathered many volunteers, such as the one to Fawley Court on 26 June 1966, in which as many as 70 people participated.<sup>37</sup> Other destinations for outings included the *Dom Litwinów* (the House of Lithuanians), an inn able to stage grill parties at Headley Park, near Bordon in Hampshire.<sup>38</sup>

The trips 'to the Lithuanians' constituted a lasting tradition of the Community of South London.<sup>39</sup> On 27 June 1965 eighteen cars departed with around 80 participants, with 'young people and children in that number', as it was thought worth emphasizing. 'Strawberries were a great treat for the children, and not only for the children. A local gardener brought a lot of them in his truck. Some ate a record quantity of them and were close to overeating. We do hope they have caused no harm to anyone'.<sup>40</sup> Not only strawberries were on the menu. For example, during the 1976 outing (which had 72 participants) all the wine was paid for by the Community.<sup>41</sup> The destination was also the Rowfant House (7 June 1970) near Crawley, and depending on need the organizers offered the possibility of hiring a coach for those Community members who did not own their own cars.<sup>42</sup> A few trips were also made to Bodiam Castle, 15 miles from Hastings on the river Rother, where 'after sightseeing we had a delicious dinner at the local inn and in the afternoon everyone enjoyed their free time'.<sup>43</sup> Some more ambitious entertainment also appeared on the Community agenda: in January 1970 an 'outing' was planned to the

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<sup>36</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 4 [1962].

<sup>37</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 6, June 1966, Letter dated 20 June 1966, from the GPZL's secretary, M. Pułaski, to the headmaster of the school in Fawley Court, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with J. Kulczycki.

<sup>39</sup> An announcement, May 1982, Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>40</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>41</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>42</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 35, March 1970. 'The outing to the Rowfant House was a success – the weather was wonderful, eighty people participated', according to the *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 36, June 1970.

<sup>43</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971, *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 37, Dec. 1970.

Royal Festival Hall to the performance of Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* (despite the price: tickets cost eighteen shillings each).<sup>44</sup>

### **'Eight dozen cups', that is the Ladies' Circle**

'It has been decided [...] that a Social Meeting with a tombola is to be organized [...]. The Secretary is to post an advertisement in *Dziennik* on Thursday 14 of the current month and to print an information leaflet, which is to be distributed around Polish shops. Our Ladies will be asked to organize the buffet'. 'The success of the party and its financial effect is to be attributed largely to the devoted work of our Ladies, who have prepared and managed the buffet. In this place we would like to thank them and [...] we recommend ourselves to their favour for the days to come'; such expressions are typical of the GPZL notes.<sup>45</sup> Czesław Kwaśniewski continues in this vein: 'Our Ladies...', he says, 'the ILC - Indefatigable Ladies' Circle (*NKP – Niestrudzone Koło Pań*)'.<sup>46</sup> The dances could not have taken place at all if they had not been organized by the female members of the Communities. In the course of time this contribution took on institutional forms. The one we know most about is the GPZL Ladies' Circle (*Koło Pań GPZL*).

'Whenever there were parties, the ladies went to the kitchen. It was a necessity'.<sup>47</sup> The activists' wives spontaneously offered their help with the buffet during the dance parties. The common aim was to get to know one another: that is why Board meetings were moved to private homes.<sup>48</sup> The first information meeting of the Ladies' Association took place at Mrs and Mr Barszcz's home.<sup>49</sup> Maria Chylińska was elected President and she started work full of energy, in a short time gaining many helping hands among her fellow members. 'Her tactic was to organize meetings rather in the form of tea parties', continues Łucja Ślepokóra, 'as opposed to starchy meetings with strict minutes'. (After the Circle's activity was renewed in

<sup>44</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>45</sup> Community Board minutes, 7 July 1960. Archives of the GPZL; *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 6, Dec. 1960.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with C. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>48</sup> Ł. Ślepokóra, 'Koło Pań Gminy Zachodniego Londynu', in *10 lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969* [London, 1969].

<sup>49</sup> I echo here the more chivalrous character of the Polish language, rather than the conventional 'Mr and Mrs' in English.

1967 protocols have were meticulously written. Typed minutes of the Ladies' Circle Board meetings are the most diligent of all Community minutes preserved). In time, sections emerged: a charity section and dance help section for the Community events, proposals were made to form drama and handicraft sections. 'Like the Community itself, the Ladies' Circle also went through a series of ups and downs. Only a faithful handful of ladies, led by Mrs Cichowa, survived the difficult period until 1967, when in connection with the approaching anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino the Community decided to enliven its activity and bring the Association back to life.'<sup>50</sup>

At the request of the Community's president, Łucja Ślepokóra made an appeal to all old and new members of the Circle, which resulted in a well-attended information meeting on 20 April 1967.<sup>51</sup> 'The New President turned to those gathered with words of encouragement, adding that work in the Community was not hard but very often enjoyable and constituted an escape from daily household chores. If the work was divided between all the members, it would not be a burden'. 'The Community work got much livelier and so did the work in the Ladies' Circle'.<sup>52</sup> New members joined as well.

The West London ladies' meetings were 'pleasant social events in private homes', where each host served tea and biscuits, which were paid for with a symbolic penny. The funds raised were devoted to buying 'eight dozen pyrex cups and saucers, some towels and other details, and the Ladies were happy not to be forced to knock on the Community's door for money'. Such was the modest comment for the Community's tenth anniversary, but other causes, such as for example the financial aid for the youth trip to Monte Cassino, were reinforced by the Ladies with the serious amount of £232, 16 s., 9 d. ('just like all other organizations', it was added<sup>53</sup>). In the first ten years of the Community, three bazaars had been organized to raise the money, as well as the annual celebrations of the anniversary of 3 May 1791, held together with the Mikołaj Rej Saturday School and the Scouts. The Ladies' Circle helped with all the events organized by the Community. It co-operated with the British Heart Foundation, the director of whose Polish section was Ananka Barszcz, and within a few months the apportioned funds provided £57, 4 s. for

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<sup>50</sup> Ślepokóra, 'Kolo Pań'.

<sup>51</sup> Ladies' Circle minutes, 20 Apr. 1967, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>52</sup> Ślepokóra, op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

charity to the Community's account. Most members of the Ladies' Circle were also active on the boards of other organizations. 'The work in the Ladies' Circle is sometimes hard and it demands certain sacrifices, and yet its effects, along with the atmosphere at its meetings and parties give it the pleasure of a well-completed duty'.<sup>54</sup> To make it possible for one to imagine the work, let us quote excerpts from the minutes. It is essential to stress what the significance and value of all this activity by the Ladies' Circle were in the detailed account of their activities. Two examples must suffice.

7 October 1970: 'We are going to learn how many eiderdowns and sleeping bags Mrs and Mr Sabbat will be able to give to the bazaar.<sup>55</sup> [...] We must provide the rest on our own.'

15 December 1971: 'There was another appeal for each of the Circle's members to take on the washing of tablecloths and towels after a dance party, as with a little good will and a sporting approach each of the twenty-three members would only have to act once every three years, counting an average of six dances a year. It is something to think over, and the positive effect of such thinking would greatly add to the smooth working of the Circle'.

The minutes of 8 January 1975 signalled a turning point: 'We have been thinking of the role of the Ladies' Circle in co-operation with the current Board of the *Gmina*. The Circle has been established to: 1. help the Board with the organization of profitable events to raise funds for the set goals, local ones first and foremost; 2. take care of the sick and lonely in our area, and finally 3. help in the organization of social meetings such as lotteries, anniversaries and bazaars, while keeping close relations with the families permanently living in our neighbourhood. Having become acquainted with the current aims of the Community, the Circle is either to reorganize or to adjust to the Board plans, which for the moment are not clear. In the 'idle' period of the Community, whose next event is due in June, we have resolved to organize an Easter Bazaar and to devote all the profit to Polish Youth Center (*Polski Ośrodek Młodzieżowy – Pomidor*) at POSK.'<sup>56</sup>

The definite end of the Circle came soon afterwards. According to the minutes of 18 May 1975, 'The existing team is no longer able to help with the organized dance

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Kazimierz Sabbat, later the President of the Republic of Poland in exile, owned a company manufacturing eiderdowns.

<sup>56</sup> The profit was £170. Ladies' Circle Minutes, 14 Apr. 1975.

parties and the younger generation displays no willingness to take over the Circle's duties in their present form. The only way out is to organize the dance parties at POSK, which is going to relieve the Ladies of their duties in preparing the buffet'. The decision was made to dissolve the Association. The £14.50 remaining in the Circle's budget was unanimously passed to *Pomidor* (Polish Youth Center).

Apart from current duties, we shall find one more important factor mutually connecting the Circle members – the 'female side' of the Community. 'There were a lot of us women who had come from Palestine, where we were at school', says Stefania Wolańska. 'We were all in the Young Volunteers' School (*Szkola Młodszych Ochotniczek*, SMO) in Nazareth. We knew one another and later, when we were already married, we introduced our husbands to one another as well, [...] whenever any of us got married a stranger joined us, but he would very soon become one of "our" people'. The SMO had started its activity with the Polish Army in the East in 1941. It was evacuated from USSR together with the troops to Iraq and Persia before finally it found its quarters in Palestine.

The SMO graduates were also active also in South London. The *Komunikat* informed its readers that, for example, 'Ms. Iwona Wereszczyńska joined the Organization Committee for the meeting of the *SMO Nazaretanki* school'.<sup>57</sup> L. J. Laskowska, the wife of the former president and Community activist, was also one of the school's graduates.<sup>58</sup> Seweryna Stanisławska-Oberleitner organized the first SMO Convention in 1952, an assembly celebrating the visit of the school's commandant Teodora Sychowska-Czarlińska at *Ognisko* in 1966, and the great banquet for the twenty fifth anniversary of 1967.<sup>59</sup> She too was an activist of the parish and Centre at Lewisham, the founder of the Charity Section.<sup>60</sup> Another active 'Nazarene', Elżbieta Piekarska, recalls that she 'baked hundreds of cakes for various celebrations'.<sup>61</sup>

As in West London, in the southern and the south-eastern parts of metropolis the ladies very quickly organized themselves into autonomous groups. Today we are able only to reconstruct their general outline. In Lewisham the ladies congregated as early as 1951, with the aim of helping the Board of the Church Committee with the

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<sup>57</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with B. Laskowski.

<sup>59</sup> *Książka Pamiątkowa Szkół Młodszych Ochotniczek* (London, 1976) p. 257.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with J. Karpowicz.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

organization of cultural and social life. Their Ladies' Circle led by Mrs J. Piotrowiczowa.<sup>62</sup>

As early as the first General Meeting of the GPL-P, the female director of the party section made a request: 'Do elect women [to the Council] because there is no-one to make sandwiches'.<sup>63</sup> And so it proved. A typical reference from later years is: 'During a break [in the General Meeting of 28 March 1965] our genteel "sutler Ladies" (*Panie Markietanki*) reinforced us with coffee, tea, doughnuts and sandwiches, of course at a modest charge'.<sup>64</sup> The organization of a May dance party on 29 May 1965 at Clapham Bath 'lay in the experienced hands of the ladies, who also sold lottery tickets'.<sup>65</sup> The Ladies was almost mythologized.

At the beginning of the 1970s the Lewisham Centre's *Kronika* wrote that 'according to tradition a housewives' circle (*koło gospodyń*) has appeared (with members changing from time to time). In the ways only known to themselves they are able to satisfy our appetites. Tradition has it that they only read in the Parish News (*Wiadomości parafialne*) and they hear the words "God bless You" or "Thank You", which is the sole reward for their effort in the culinary field'.<sup>66</sup> During the Easter fair of 1973, 'the tables were loaded with the wonderful baking of our Ladies'.<sup>67</sup>

Many efforts were made in order to step beyond the 'catering' scheme of female social activity. 'An Exclusive Ladies' Club (*Amazonki*) from Brockley, led by Mrs Barbara Berkowa, MA, organizes "Thursday dinners", outings to theatres, cinemas, coffee etc.', informed the GPL-P *Komunikat* of 24 March 1967, adding that the 'Female Club' is a collection of charming ladies who meet on Thursdays, each time in a different place'. The *Amazonki* had no authorities. Their meetings were led by the day's hostess (*pani domu*), whose duties consisted mostly of the preparation of the 'hall', the food and, last but not least, the 'removal' of the useless master of the house for that one night.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> L. J. Laskowska, 'Ja a GL-P'.

<sup>64</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> 'Nowinki', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

### Jubilees, jubilees...

Numerous jubilees were one of the favourite types of entertainment for the emigration. They provided the reason and the subject for various forms of celebration. Many émigrés indulged in observing each and every one of them. If some anniversaries were merely a pretext to meet and spend some time in a pleasant way, connecting entertainment with social integration, others gave an opportunity to honour those who celebrated their anniversaries. Reasonably well-documented anniversaries such as the tenth, fifteenth, twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries of the founding of Brockley and Lewisham parish may serve as the model for the description of jubilees in all three organizations.<sup>69</sup> As has been noted above, both the preparation and the celebration itself of the first of the above-mentioned anniversaries in 1961 gave a direct impulse to organize the Lewisham Community along new rules.

The *Komunikat – Odezwa* (the Announcement) issued for the occasion announced a collection to cover the cost of the celebration (around £40). ‘Without setting the donation level’, it read, ‘at the same time we warmly ask for generosity proportionate to our means. Our desire, which we hope is shared by all, is to bestow magnificent frames on the celebrations. Let us give a genuine expression of the appreciation of the role in our lives, which are so deprived of lively contacts with other sources of Polishness, played by the Mass and the Word preached in Polish’.<sup>70</sup> The patriotic dimension of the jubilees, the cultivation of national tradition, the bringing up of the young in the spirit of the love for God and Motherland – these were the fundamental aspects of the celebrations. Necessarily – in the official parts – jubilees were celebrated with pathos, solemnity, and grandiloquence, beginning from the Word of God in Polish and ending with the artistic frame of the celebration. That is, in this author’s opinion, as it should be. On the Centre’s twenty-fifth anniversary, the hall of Saint Joseph’s Academy was ‘adorned with large compositions [...]: the crowned eagle, folklore paper cut-outs, and on the stage the number twenty five, made of red roses against the background of white roses’.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> In Lewisham, the concept of the parish was equal to the concept of the Centre. All parochial celebrations were simultaneously Centre events.

<sup>70</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>71</sup> S. Legeżyński, ‘25 lat parafii Brockley-Lewisham’, *DPDŻ*, no 110, 10 May 1976.



This is how the *Komunikat* of the Polish Community of South London described the afore-mentioned tenth anniversary: ‘Rev. [Rafał] Elston-Gogoliński delivered a solemn sermon with references to the most characteristic fragments of the life of the Polish Emigration. Having left the church, the crowd of parishioners received their guest with a glass of wine in the nearby Catholic school. [...] Rev. Canon Wróbel was moved; in cordial words he thanked those responsible for the organization of the solemn celebration and in reference to a beautiful speech given by Mr Machulski both in Polish and in English, he encouraged other young people to participate more actively in social life’. ‘The moving moment’ of the handing of the chaplain a hand-made chapel in the Zakopane style ended the official part of the celebration. Then came the dance party to the rhythm of the improvised local orchestra.<sup>72</sup>

This fragment is a good illustration of the pattern followed by various jubilees, too numerous to list here. The celebrations would be opened by a Mass and solemn sermon in the parish church, often attended by senior clergymen from the diocese, or connected with the emigration, then came the official performance and the dances with wine at the end. ‘Round’ anniversaries of the founding of parishes and Communities were celebrated alongside birthdays of more prominent (usually senior) activists and chaplains, and sometimes even the wedding anniversaries of couples deeply involved in the social life (for instance the silver wedding of Maria and Czesław Kwaśniewski in 1973).<sup>73</sup>

The speeches delivered in the official part of the celebrations were numerous, and may sometimes have been rather pompous. As an example, we read that on 29 October 1975, the eightieth birthday of Rev. Prelate Adam Wróbel, the following spoke: ‘Rev. Dr Karol Zieliński, the President of the Polish Catholic Mission (*Polska Misja Katolicka*), the afore mentioned Rev. Prelate Stanisław Cynar, Brother John, the headmaster of Saint Joseph’s Academy, which hosted the event, Mr Tadeusz Walczak, the President of the Community of South London. Rev. Antoni Dębski read out the congratulations sent by Rev. Prelate Elston-Gogoliński of the Polish

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<sup>72</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 2, 29 June 1961. Compare E. Wojtczak, ‘10-lecie parafii Lewisham-Brockley’, *DPDŻ*, no 110, 10 May 1961.

<sup>73</sup> C. Kwaśniewski (with a break between 1975-1985, when he working in Hong-Kong) was the president of the Parish Council from 1970 until 2007! Interview with M. Kwaśniewska and C. Kwaśniewski.

Chaplains Association in Great Britain (*Stowarzyszenie Kapłanów Polskich w Wielkiej Brytanii*) and the letter of Rev. Walerian Gajecki'.<sup>74</sup>

The jubilees were meticulously prepared, the tiniest details were taken care of, and the greatest possible number of people and organizations was engaged in the process. 'The official and artistic program was put into the charge of Jadwiga Żerdzińska, a long-time organizer of Saturday school and parish celebrations. The blueprint for the artistic shape of the event, the choice of recital excerpts, songs and the text of the congratulations were carried out by Zofia Koronowa. The detailed plan, the order and choreography by Jadwiga Żerdzińska. The music by Wiesław Skoczylas (the programme soloist) and Jerzy Pockert. The folk dances performance was directed for many years by Zofia Cegłowska, was led by Maria Stepan. The decoration of the hall and stage was made by Jerzy Nowiak and Jan Smagała. [...] The President of the Church Committee, Marian Turło, showed the huge importance of rigour, discipline and strictness in the social life. He directed the whole of the event with great resilience. He deserved to be proud of the outcome'.<sup>75</sup>

This is how *Kronika* recalled the preparations for the double jubilee of the Lewisham Centre and Rev. Prelate Wróbel in 1971. It was attended, apart from the clergy, by the representatives of the Polish Scouting Association (*Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP*), the Uhlans (*Ułani Krechowieccy*), the Community of South London, the nurses and doctors from the wartime hospitals known by their numbers – 2 and 7, and the press. Five years later the list of the invited guests had lengthened: 'the English clergy was represented by the dean of the area, Father Larn Canon and Brother John Swift, the headmaster of Saint Joseph's Academy, [...] the Mayor of Lewisham Borough, Mr A. Paterson with his wife, the presidents and representatives of such organizations as the ZHP, the Polish Teachers' Association Abroad (*Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego Za Granicą*), the Institute of Catholic Action (*Instytut Akcji Katolickiej*), the Polish Educational Society (*Polska Macierz Szkolna, PMS*), POSK, the Clapham and Croydon and Crystal Palace parish committees, the *Orzeł Biały* (White Eagle) Club, the Community of South London'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>75</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>76</sup> 'Echo 25-lecia na Brockley', *DPDŻ*, no 174, 23 July 1976.

The organizers made every effort to add variety to the meetings. Side by side with the regular recitals, choir performances, national and folk dances, Saturday school oral and musical displays, there was also occasional poetry, such as that read at the eightieth birthday of Major Gustaw Piwakowski, the long-time treasurer of the Lewisham Centre.<sup>77</sup> During the golden jubilee of Rev. Wróbel's priesthood, a special visual and sonic performance symbolically illustrated the priest's life. A series of slides, displaying Polish countryside scenes, moved across the stage. The reading of his life history was broken by recitals, choir and solo singing.<sup>78</sup> During the silver jubilee of the parish, the 'figures of the quarter-century' were presented. Those were illustrated satirical dialogues on the parish activists: 'short, to -the-point, good literary work'.<sup>79</sup>

As we can see, the celebrations were taken extremely seriously. Just as meticulous and solemn were the reports of each event; the presence of the press was always welcome.<sup>80</sup> Apart from the records in chronicles and announcements, film footage was shot and brochures were published. It is thanks to this that today we know the content of the sermons and speeches, we know when 'Happy Birthday' was sung and who handed out the presents. What does this detail of ritual, noting specific points and the punctilious order tell us about both the events and their reporting? It was certainly a conscious transmission to posterity, a ritual to maintain order and continuity with the past.

The emigration loved to bestow upon one another not only flowers but also works of art especially prepared 'for the occasion' (such as a 'beautiful chapel of the Suffering Christ made of wood'<sup>81</sup>), photo albums, wristwatches,<sup>82</sup> medals and badges, chasubles.<sup>83</sup> In a word – pomp. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lewisham Centre lasted two days. The prolonged celebrations of the eightieth birthday of Rev. Prelate Wróbel caused the poor priest to faint. 'In the second part [after nine speeches and the reading of letters – *P. Ch.*] there was the performance of the Saturday school with their dances and songs. [...]. The four couples of the *Niemen*

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<sup>77</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73, p. 70. The major's other 'round' birthdays were also celebrated: H. Krayerowa, '90-lecie we wspólnocie parafialnej', *Gazeta Niedzielną*, no 18 (1552), 30 Apr. 1978.

<sup>78</sup> C. Wędrowski, 'Złote gody kapłaństwa ks. prałata Adama Wróbla', *DPDŻ*, no 138, 10 June 1969.

<sup>79</sup> Legeżyński, '25 lat parafii Brockley-Lewisham', *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> For example two reports were devoted to the twenty-fifth anniversary in the *DPDŻ*.

<sup>81</sup> Wojtczak, '10-lecie parafii Lewisham-Brockley'.

<sup>82</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

<sup>83</sup> During the GPZL's tenth Anniversary three ornates were handed to Rev. Prelate Kazimierz Sołowiej. Archives of the GPZL.

dance group were given a cheerful welcome. [...]. the “highlander” dances were performed. Schubert’s *Ave Maria* was admired. [...] The celebrating priest spent his beautiful day among his own familiar people (*wśród swoich*). Joy and emotion must have made him grow weak towards the end. All ended well, however, and the honorable guest could rest the next two days under the parish priest’s protection’.<sup>84</sup> Danuta Kwaśny recalls the ambulance coming and the priest being taken to Lewisham Hospital: ‘the party went on, but my husband and I went to see what was going on with the priest. He said: ‘They took my trousers, made me lie down and I am just all right. I want to run away!’<sup>85</sup> So everyone – including the absent Prelate – enjoyed themselves greatly.

As it appears from the reports and accounts known to us, the jubilee celebrations – both in their length and form – were generally liked and well attended. It can fairly be said that the entire Community (variously numbering between 200 and 500 people)<sup>86</sup> took part in them. They were an opportunity to bear witness to the maturity of Polish organizations, which can ‘gather all the force in order to honour, to experience and to remember’<sup>87</sup> those important Community moments.

## Conclusion

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the manner of spending leisure time can tell us much about the lifestyle of a given community and it is undoubtedly an element of its culture and social customs. Until now the topic of the emigration’s social life has not been taken up by researchers, who have thus far focused mainly on political and cultural topics.<sup>88</sup> The issue concerning the shape of the social bonds that tied the emigration together also seems uninteresting to its representatives, who do not view this aspect of their lives as anything capable of arousing a historian’s interest.

The historiography of the Polish emigration in Great Britain has reached a certain cognitive level in research on the emigration’s elites and most important organizations. Certain stereotypes have also been discerned, one of which is the

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<sup>84</sup> *Kronika – Materiały...*

<sup>85</sup> Interview with D. Kwaśny.

<sup>86</sup> That massive party was the Golden Jubilee of rev. Adam Wróbel’s priesthood, C. Wędrowski, *op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-1973.

<sup>88</sup> Keith Sword’s *Identity in Flux* has a chapter on the culture and traditions of the Polish community as well as structures and organization. Although he does not address the *Gmina* (because they ended their activity before his time), many points he does make are interesting.

belief in the seriousness and harshness of the emigration's destiny. In that field of research we can still find many gaps, but it is worthwhile to focus – shall we say – on less solemn questions. As Alina Witkowska wrote in reference to the research on the nineteenth-century emigration: 'It does not mean that the research of the Great Emigration should not continue in the order of history [...] – the history of the idea, the institutions, the internal changes of the emigration's organizational structures and so on. These are, however, mere frames, which must be filled with the life, thoughts, emotions of the people, their ways of actually being emigrants. Otherwise our understanding is bound to remain imperfect, and the stereotypes overpowering. Especially the stereotype of sublimity (*stereotyp wzniosłości*) [...]'<sup>89</sup>

Despite the recent personal tragic experience of war, the separation from the Homeland and relatives, and Poland's loss of independence, all of which were genuinely experienced, the members of the wartime and post-war wave of emigration did not remain in a state of national mourning; indeed, it would be difficult to expect that they would. The arrears of the war were finally being made up, one began to live normally, made use of one's youth while it lasted, and enjoy material stability. It is hard to determine to what extent the need for a common dance party among the émigrés surpassed a certain norm that would be characteristic for a community less hurt by history. It is, however, certain that in the organization of Polish life in Great Britain this phenomenon occupies a vital position. It is also certain that any attempt to subject the willingness to pass time merrily to some higher social tasks worked out fully. If on Saturday evenings an average emigrant planned to spend a certain amount of money on entertainment anyway, it was much better to do it for a good cause such as the Saturday school, scouting, a house for the Polish organization or any of the social tasks previously mentioned in this chapter. Dance Parties brought a substantial advantage to the Communities.

Dance parties were confined largely to Polish circles, although more than once native Londoners visited as guests. Most were English friends of Polish children born in exile. The variety of ideas implemented during the events is impressive. The thematic dances with appropriate decorations, the lotteries, competitions and other attractions were supposed to attract the participants and guarantee a good attendance and financial success. The preparation of the dance

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<sup>89</sup> Witkowska, *Cześć i skandale*, pp. 27-29.

party entailed a huge organizational effort made selflessly by the Community activists. Here, a group of ladies found their role, in this way adding their own beautiful chapter to the record of social activity while simultaneously fulfilling their social needs. However, attempts to introduce youth into the organizational engine rarely succeeded. The activists, who were often also the parents, had to be satisfied by the presence of their offspring during Polish dances.

The jubilee meetings, except for applying to the above-mentioned tasks, also contributed to the building of group cohesion and were a means of appreciating its most active members. These events fortified the self-esteem and self-confidence of groups vis-à-vis both the Polish and English milieu.

Despite the risk connected with group events of this kind (the intake of alcohol, the presence of the young, mixed-sex company) in the extant sources concerning the organization of events we do not find many examples of troublesome or drastic situations. On the whole, people enjoyed themselves in a disciplined, even 'polite' way. That manner of experiencing leisure was considered the most proper characteristic of a Pole and a good example to youth. It is hardly surprising that in view of cultural changes of the sixties and seventies, which so drastically shook the World and Great Britain alike, such a way of spending free time lost its attraction to the young. The growing influence of television, popular culture and a shift in the patterns of leisure saw Community events eventually limited to dancing parties for a closed group of the retired.

## 5.

**Saturday schools**

Organizing and supporting Saturday schools was commonly considered, not only by activists and members of the Communities, but also by the whole emigration, as one of their most important tasks: a duty towards their children and youth. The establishment of the schools came prior to the appearance of the Communities. However, all three organizational units from the very beginning closely co-operated with the institutions of schooling existing within their borders. We shall look at the relationships of each Community with the schools operating in its area, the kind of help they provided, the usual problems that arose during co-operation, and the place of Polish émigré educational system in everyday life of Poles in London from the beginning of 1950s to the mid-1970s, when the serious activities of the *Gminy* came to an end.

**With the persistence of pioneers**

All the accounts concur: 'It all started with the school,' according to Stefania Wolańska;<sup>1</sup> in Czesław Kwaśniewski's words: 'It all revolved mainly around the school';<sup>2</sup> Tadeusz Walczak writes: 'As far as my generation is concerned, we all got married and started sending our kids to schools around the same time',<sup>3</sup> that is, starting in the early 1950s. Thus the schools sprung up even earlier than the Communities; nonetheless, only in the subsequent decade, which coincided with the period of prosperity for the Communities, did Saturday schooling begin to thrive most abundantly in Great Britain. It is estimated that approximately fifty percent of Polish children were subjected to such schooling.<sup>4</sup>

The genesis of this type of complementary schooling, according to Tadeusz Radzik, is to be sought even before the First World War in the activities of the Polish School affiliated with the Polish Society (*Towarzystwo Polskie*) in London, and

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with C. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>3</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> T. Radzik, *Szkolnictwo polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii po drugiej wojnie światowej* (Lublin, 1991), p. 204.

subsequently in a similar institution affiliated with the Polish Catholic Mission (*Polska Misja Katolicka*), also in London. They both functioned intermittently in the interwar period. The reason for establishing Saturday Schools after World War II was ‘a growing conviction in the Polish community that, in order to prevent the assimilation of the younger generation, opportunities for a thorough learning of the mother tongue had to be created, in connection with providing the students with essential information on the culture, history and traditions of Poland’. Saturday schools did indeed create such an opportunity, as they provided children with additional classes in Polish, religion, Poland’s history and geography, as well as singing, on days that were free from English school classes, or in the afternoons.<sup>5</sup>

The *Komunikat* issued by the Community of South London in 1963 informed: ‘We maintain warm-hearted contacts based on trust and mutual respect with the schools in Brockley, Camberwell, Crystal Palace and Croydon, and Wimbledon.’<sup>6</sup> What was the genesis of those institutions?

The Adam Mickiewicz School was established in the area of Brockley and Lewisham in August 1951.<sup>7</sup> At its core was a group of seven children studying in the school’s cloakroom. ‘It was an emanation of the parish organized by Rev. Canon Wróbel – a fulfilment of the ambitions of the first church committee’, which appointed a special school team for this purpose.<sup>8</sup> This was shortly after Rev. Wróbel had organized a school in Ealing, at the parish which had been established a year before.<sup>9</sup> The school at Lewisham, attended in the first year ‘merely by several dozen children,’ developed very rapidly and as a result it faced serious problems with inadequate classroom space.

During the first two years, the head of the school was Mrs Maria Duszowa. Rev. Wróbel took over the official post of headmaster after the arrival of ‘pedagogical reinforcements’ in the form of A. [Anna?] Nowakowa. ‘A noteworthy fact is the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 201-202.

<sup>6</sup> It also mentioned the Auxiliary Members’ Associations (*Koło Przyjaciół Harcerstwa*, KPH.), the Youth Club (*Klub Młodych*) and the Szymanowski Choir (*Chór im. Szymanowskiego*). *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963.

<sup>7</sup> See note 10 below. However, according to the *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69, the school was founded in mid-May 1951.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kaik, a teacher and member of the Union of Polish Teachers Abroad (*Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego za Granicą*, ZNPZ), J. Piotrowiczowa and J. Kulikowski.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Rev. Prelate Adam Wróbel, then the parish priest in the area of Ealing, started the first Saturday lessons as early as the end of 1950, employing Jadwiga Chwalibogowska as the school’s first teacher.’ Aleksandra Podhorodecka, *W służbie oświacie. 50 lat Polskiej Macierzy Szkolnej 1953-2003* ([London,] 2003), p. 236.



establishment and functioning of the so-called secondary school group (*grupa gimnazjalna*), from the very beginning of the school's existence. Teaching in this group was carried out separately, on Sundays, before church service, for three full hours. The course lasted three years and four students took their Polish O-level examination. For many years, the school was supported by the Polish Combatants' Association (*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*, SPK) circle no 11.<sup>10</sup>

'I remember how we started teaching a mere handful of students. There were only fifteen of them, at different ages and with varying levels of interest from their parents, who were largely the children's first teachers', recalled Rev. Wróbel recalled in a conversation published in 1965 in the *Komunikat* of the Community of South London. The interview was concluded with the following comment: 'Rev. Wróbel's most important and most favoured activity is the Saturday School. It entails working for the benefit of children and teenagers, and it consists in educating our successors and replacements, and thus it is the most important field of work for Poland.'<sup>11</sup>

The Bolesław Chrobry School of Native Subjects, headed by Stanisław Nowak, was set up in Camberwell in 1957, although its founder had been planning its establishment since 1954. Its foundation and development was aided in large measure by Mrs Anna Nowak (his wife), Irena Broniatowska, Andrzej Trenczyński and Rev. Canon Stanisław Cynar, who were the school's first teachers. It ran at Calcecot School. The school was initially attended by twenty-nine children (twenty-five leaving certificates were issued), there were forty in the second year of operation, and 171 in 1965, (with 141 leaving certificates ultimately issued). The school offered three levels of education, namely nursery, primary and secondary. By 1965, 51 students had passed their O-levels and 17 their A-levels in Polish.<sup>12</sup>

Tadeusz Walczak recalled Mr and Mrs Nowak and the school: 'both of them were teachers from Poland, from Stanisławów [in the far south-east of interwar Poland], and thus they were perfectly suited for this sort of work. [...] The school supported the Polish President and Government in Exile, rather than the *Rada Trzech* (Council of Three Persons). The school's students gave their [...] New Year's wishes

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<sup>10</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963, 'Szkoly polskie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 7, [Dec.] 1962, Z. Szkopiak i M. Turło, 'Ośrodek Lewisham', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 35, Mar. 1970.

<sup>11</sup> B. Dziedzic, 'Szkoly polskie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no. 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej London-Południe*.

<sup>12</sup> 'Szkoly polskie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 7, [Dec.] 1962, Dziedzic, 'Szkoly polskie'.

to the President August Zaleski and were received with their parents by Mrs Ewelina Zaleska at the President's seat at 43 Eaton Place.'<sup>13</sup>

The Karol Chodkiewicz School was created by the merging of the schools in Croydon (which started in September 1950, thanks to the initiative of Father Walerian Gajecki) and Crystal Palace (initially bearing the name of Queen Jadwiga, established by J. Bokiewicz in 1953).<sup>14</sup> The School in Wimbledon Park was established in 1960. It was initially governed by the parents, although subsequently it was transferred to the aegis of the Polish Educational Society (*Polska Macierz Szkolna*, PMS). The classes took place at the County Primary School in Havana Road, SW19.<sup>15</sup>

As Teodor Urbanowicz recalled, the initiative to start a school at Chiswick was born in the summer of 1953, 'when a representative of the Polish Educational Society in our area, Mr M[arian] Nadachowski visited us (we had two boys, aged four and five and a half), in order to discuss the possibilities of opening a school in Chiswick, and with the support of the Society's president at the time, Mr [Władysław] Kański, we decided to try and organize one.' There were, however, three essential difficulties. One was 'significant resistance from the parents, fearing that simultaneous instruction in Polish might "distort" the children's correct pronunciation of English';<sup>16</sup> second, there was 'a shortage of proper classrooms'; and finally there were 'no qualified teachers willing to work who lived in the vicinity of our area.' 'With the persistence worthy of early pioneers, the above obstacles were overcome'.<sup>17</sup>

The closest private English school, attended by a fairly large group of Polish children was Saint Margaret's School for Girls and Compton School for Boys, in Sutton Court Road. The owner and headmistress of both these schools was Miss Margaret Melady. 'We were to accept all of her conditions concerning discipline and rigour'. Miss Melady's husband, Józef Szeremeta, became the guardian of the

<sup>13</sup> The school closed in 1973. Walczak *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 184. It outlasted its patron by one year, as President August Zaleski died on 7 April 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Podhorodecka, *W służbie oświaty*, p. 229.

<sup>15</sup> 'Szkoły Sobotnie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ł. Ślepokóra's view that 'Polish children excelled in both English private and state schools. Generally, bilingualism came to them easily'. (Interview.)

<sup>17</sup> T. Urbanowicz, 'Sobotnia Szkoła Przedmiotów Ojczystych na Chiswick – geneza', in *Szkoła przedmiotów ojczystych im. Mikołaja Reja. 1953-1993. Chiswick. Jednodniówka Jubileuszowa* (London, 1993). On the school's 50th anniversary appeared *50 lat Szkoły Przedmiotów Ojczystych im. Mikołaja Reja, Chiswick London. 1953/4-2003/4*, ed. D. Pniewska, M. Jakubowska, D. Podolska and S. Wolańska [London, 2004].

school, and was also invited to join the Board of the Polish Community of West London. 'At first, we only had one classroom at our disposal, but later, as more children joined us, we extended our requirements to two classrooms, and a playroom for the nursery.' Using 'all the available connections from war times,' Mr and Mrs Urbanowicz found Maria Krzyżagórska (living as far away as Brixton), who agreed to take on the post of headmistress of the school (which received the name of Mikołaj Rej) and teach the Polish language.

### **The School in Camberwell and other initiatives**

In the *Komunikat* of the Community of South London, articles covering schools' questions appeared fairly regularly, and in this sense the periodical also fulfilled the role of the school bulletin. Thanks to these articles, notes and periodical summaries, we can discover a great deal about the Community's attitude to the problems of primary and secondary schoolchildren, and identify the problems that bothered the children and their parents. One number in 1968 was 'largely devoted to the issues of Young People [capitalization as in the original]'; alas, this particular issue is missing from the set kept by the Polish Library in London.<sup>18</sup>

This chapter is most concerned with the schools' contacts with the Communities, rather than the stories of the particular institutions. By discussing these relationships, I attempt to shed some light on Saturday schools, which were an important phenomenon and which it is difficult to evaluate clearly. We must not forget that, because the children of activists and members attended the schools, they constituted an important element of the 'Polish life' of the entire Community. Additionally, it was common practice not to bind oneself only to one school: Tadeusz Walczak's two sons started their schooling in the Bolesław Chrobry School, and subsequently 'attended the Polish school in Lewisham, and afterwards the one in Croydon and Crystal Palace where, thanks to the remarkable commitment of Mrs Zofia Koronowa they both passed their O-levels and A-levels in Polish.'<sup>19</sup>

Danuta Wiśniowiecka also recalls this teacher's commitment (Mrs Koronowa was the Head of Adam Mickiewicz School): 'my daughters (Anna and Marta) did not

<sup>18</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 30, Sept. 1968.

<sup>19</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 63.

want to go to Polish school, and we tried sending them to various ones. In Clapham there was a very big school, I used to take Anna there – she did not want to go. [...] A wonderful teacher, Mrs Zofia Koronowa taught Polish privately to both of my daughters’.<sup>20</sup>

The information on the school in Camberwell may also be interesting because it stopped functioning and apparently, because it was not affiliated with the Polish Educational Society; researchers studying Saturday schooling in Great Britain do not mention it.<sup>21</sup> We know that the Bolesław Chrobry School counted 118 pupils in its initial stage of co-operation with the *GPL-P* in 1962. That year twenty-three students passed their O-Levels in Polish language at London University, and two successfully attempted A-Level examinations.<sup>22</sup>

The speciality of the school was the organization of young talent contests, in the course of which ‘children could display their recital skills, prose reading, singing and musical artistry as well as dancing, drawing, crafts etc’. The best ones were awarded monetary prizes and diplomas of distinction, and all the others received certificates of participation. Partaking in the contest was independent of where the children lived. In 1965 there were thirteen people teaching in the Bolesław Chrobry School, and Stanisław Nowak was in charge of the administration except for his teaching in ‘one of the divisions.’<sup>23</sup> The classes were held first in the new, comfortable building of the Sacred Heart Secondary School in Camberwell, and later at Peckham Manor School.<sup>24</sup> Its headmaster told the readers of the *Komunikat*: ‘I work for money at night and I go to the school directly afterwards, usually sleeping just about six hours a night, usually in stages and with various interruptions. [...] My wife and daughter demand that they have a chance to see their husband and father at home at least from time to time.’<sup>25</sup>

In 1970 a fall was noted in the number of students. This was associated with a non-central localization of the school. By that time its graduates had passed 139 O-Level and 36 A-Level examinations. Many thanks were expressed to the school’s supervisory authority, the Education Department of Great Britain (*Wydział Oświaty i*

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Z. Wiśniowiecka.

<sup>21</sup> Not mentioned in Podhorodecka, *W służbie oświaty*.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Szkoly polskie w południowym Londynie’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>23</sup> Dziedzic, ‘Szkoly polskie’.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Szkoly Sobotnie w południowym Londynie’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Dziedzic, ‘Szkoly polskie’.

*Wychowania w Wielkiej Brytanii*) and to private people for their £200.<sup>26</sup> The school fee per child was £1 a month.<sup>27</sup>

From the moment of its formation, the Community of South London had also organized children's playtimes. A Christmas Eve event for children took place on 7 January 1962 at Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton: 'The programme comprised games, playing and singing, as well as tea snacks for the kids, after which Santa Claus gave out [...] presents. That nice little party, full of surprises, brought together over 300 people – children and grown-ups alike. The children left the place sorrowfully, asking for a "more frequent organization of similar playtime".'<sup>28</sup> The event of 7 January 1962 gathered 280 children and adults.<sup>29</sup> A similar party on 13 January 1963, despite particularly bad weather, attracted 85 children and 80 adults: 'Santa Claus, wearing an outfit kindly lent by the ever-obliging parish priest, Rev. Gajecki, handed Christmas gifts to the children.'<sup>30</sup>

The Communities' games for children always enjoyed great popularity, serving as an example to other organizers. They were organized three times a year. At Christmas time, Santa Claus gave out gifts to children, the games and dancing were lead by Mrs Kołaczowska, while Mrs Dulembina played the grand piano. There were balloons for decoration, funny hats, a lottery and lucky rod fishing, the organization and carrying out of which was assigned to the Council members.<sup>31</sup>

'Fourteen and up' youth was by no means forgotten. Dancing was organized for teenagers in the Clapham Baths on 27 October 1962 'and gathered over 96 young people and 60 adults, who enjoyed themselves until 11 p.m. to the sounds of the *Karo* orchestra.'<sup>32</sup> It was always emphasized that 'within the youth section [...] all events were thought out in such a way that apart from adequate entertainment (*godziwa rozrywka*) they should also provide for the young an opportunity to meet their elders and that 'dancing events for the young always include a large percentage of adults and the orchestra thoroughly take particular care not to limit their dances

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<sup>26</sup> 'Szkoły Sobotnie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>27</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 63.

<sup>28</sup> 'Unfortunately [...] the possibilities are limited by the lack of our own establishment' – read the closing words of the note, *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 4, [1962].

<sup>29</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>30</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963.

<sup>31</sup> 'Na przełomie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej London-Południe*.

<sup>32</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

exclusively to the twist or the Madison'. During the parties, Polish customs were observed 'as closely as possible.'<sup>33</sup>

An article entitled 'Udany eksperyment' (A successful experiment) describes a Carnival Fancy Dress Youth Ball, organized on 16 February 1963 at Clapham Bath, this time accompanied by the *Mazur* orchestra: 'beginning from the early hours young people started sneaking in with their tiny suitcases [...] asking for a place to change into their disguise [...] The very fact that they had come, or that they had come early, did not by any chance mean their willingness go straight into dancing. First came some traditional coyness, only later did the party get into full swing. Young ladies and men, in various costumes (in many cases creatively home-made), danced in colourful spots against the background of adults, who this time were few.'<sup>34</sup>

The Spring Ball (for adults) took place on 16 April 1966 at Clapham Baths, and was organized jointly by the *Gmina* and the Bolesław Chrobry School. The *Domino* orchestra played and the event itself prompted a 'technical' thought: 'The handsome and energetic Mrs Irena excelled in her role of the hostess, which was by no means easy as the President was late and many Board members failed to turn up at all, they seemed to be celebrating the feast of Saint Stanisław privately. We noticed the sudden falling off in attendance whenever our parties coincided with popular feast days, we must stay away from such dates....'<sup>35</sup>

Many forms of activities were taken on. In 1963 the Community Council resolved to found an Amateur Theatre for both adults and teenagers. The organization and the direction of the theatre was taken up by Stanisław Korgul, 'who has considerable experience in the field, in close co-operation with the Community Youth Department (*Referat Młodzieżowy*). [...] We kindly request the parents of adolescent youth to encourage their offspring to a greater and more numerous participation, for the theatre, apart from providing an opportunity to spend time in a Polish environment, provides education and, most importantly, teaches proper pronunciation.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963.

<sup>34</sup> 'Our youth brought some English friends, who felt great and enjoyed themselves' *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963.

<sup>35</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 21, June 1966.

<sup>36</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 9, June 1963.

The idea did not exactly ‘catch’ on, but it was not rejected out of hand. A Youth Club was founded at the Community, ‘with a board elected out of its own members’. ‘The young very willingly and numerously took part in every meeting but desired a location of their own, equipped with various games, which the *Gmina* unfortunately could not afford’.<sup>37</sup> There was also some information on the Millennium Youth Club (*Klub Młodych ‘Millennium’*) operating under the charge of Rev. Szczepaniak, with its seat at 50 Nightingale Lane in the Association of the Friends of Children and Youth (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci i Młodzieży*, TPDM), drawing its members from Clapham, Balham, Camberwell, Streatham and thereabouts.<sup>38</sup>

During the South London Community’s General Meeting in the *Orzeł Biały* (White Eagle) Club on 27 April 1969, it was decided that a special schooling and youth fund was needed. ‘The aim of the fund will be the support of youth sports clubs from south London, scouting and financial help for Polish Saturday schools [...] in a particularly difficult economic condition.’ During the Community’s Spring Ball, which took place on 10 May that year, for the first time in the White Eagle club, and gathered together 200 people, money was raised for the fund. Apparently ‘the party was a success’, but we do not know how much money was actually raised.<sup>39</sup>

The Community also supported forms of education extending beyond its South London ‘backyard’. During the general meeting of 28 March 1965 a ‘one-off subsidy for Marian Fathers, amounting to £5’ was granted (the order had charge of a Polish secondary boarding school in Fawley Court near Henley in Oxfordshire).<sup>40</sup> There was widespread interest in a similar institution for girls: information was spread about a ‘grand dancing party’ for the graduates of a Polish secondary school directed by the Holy Family of Nazareth Sisters in Pitsford, and held on 4 June 1966 at St. Mary’s Hall in South Clapham. The profit from the party was devoted to the fund for the opening of high school classes. The Organization Committee under the management of B. Tokarska ‘put an insane amount of effort and work into the organization of the event’, with as many as 350 prizes gathered for the lottery!<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Na przełomie’, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965.

<sup>39</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 33, June 1969.

<sup>40</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Despite the dreary space that is Saint Mary’s Hall, there was a great party’, the income was £200, ‘Zabawa Absolwentek Szkoły w Pitsford’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 21, June 1966.

general meeting of 24 April 1966 recommended that the newly elected Council give 'a minimum of £5 in financial help to the school.'<sup>42</sup>

Within the sphere of relations with the British educational system – so vital for all emigrants with children – it is noteworthy that on 17 December 1968 Z. Rodowicz, working at Saint Joseph's College, gave a lecture at the 'White Eagle' club, outside of the intended programme and devoted to the organization of secondary schooling in England. However, the first lecture turned out also to be the last due to the lack of interest. 'Not everything is bound to work out', was the conclusion in the *Komunikat*.<sup>43</sup>

### **Schools and the GPZL**

Since the beginning of 1960s, the Mikołaj Rej School had, like other institutions, flourished and developed, which provided a huge opportunity for action to the West London Community. After the foundation of the GPZL, children from the school took an active part in all the ceremonies and lectures organized by the Community. The first common opportunity to show themselves outside was the 'Civic Week', organized by local authorities of Brentford and Chiswick from 3 to 10 September 1960. 'The invitation received foresees participation on 3 September at the beginning of the current week. There will be a performance by the children in Polish regional outfits as well as a display of Polish YMCA dance formation. Properly marshalled, the children will pass along on a decorated carrier along the route: Brentford High Road – Chiswick High Road – Chiswick Lane – Burlington Lane to the sports grounds on the river Thames.'<sup>44</sup> The following year, during John F. Kennedy's visit, the children held a banner with words 'Freedom for Poland'.<sup>45</sup>

The description of the relationship between the school and the Community cannot simply be reduced to co-operation. Here and there the same people had been active for years (Adam Barszcz had for years been an honorary member of the Parent-teacher Association [*Komitet Rodzicielski*]), but organizational fusion never took place. In truth, during the 1960/61 academic year in view of the deficit, and

<sup>42</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 21, June 1966.

<sup>43</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>44</sup> *Komunikat no 5*, Aug. 1960.

<sup>45</sup> *10 lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969* [London, 1969].



‘without the possibility of it being covered’ (this being the first time a similar situation had occurred), a proposal was put forward for the school to be more closely integrated with the Community through the reshaping of the Parents Association into the Community Schooling Department (*Wydział Szkolny Gminy*). The election to the Committee was to be held during a GPZL General Meeting. This solution would involve the Community’s taking on full financial responsibility for the school. This step, however, never took place.<sup>46</sup> It is hard to say on what premises Czaykowski and Sulik based their opinion that ‘the Community is characterized by a certain greediness and selfishness, which is especially expressed in its attitude towards the local Saturday school, scouting and other activities.’<sup>47</sup>

Just as in South London, the school topic was widely discussed on the pages of GPZL’s *Bulletin*. A letter preserved in its archives provides the following insight. Julia Pieńkowska wrote: ‘I have been able to place my grandson, who is a visitor from the home country [Poland], at a Saturday school in Chiswick, having managed to keep him in England for a year so far. He attends an English school as well, and at home he follows the course of his Warsaw class. I can declare with great pleasure that the Saturday school not only pleases him greatly, but he finds it useful to learn the history of his Country, some old songs and verses. I deeply appreciate both the lady teacher leading the course for his class, and the gentleman founders of the school’.<sup>48</sup> The Central London émigré press also informed their readers about some events organized by the school. A representative example of these can be found in the coverage of the academy commemorating the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino, inserted in the 3 June 1969 issue of *Dziennik Polski*.<sup>49</sup>

The money for the school’s needs mostly came from profits from the *Mikołajki* (Santa Claus Party), which became a traditional annual event. It took place, among other venues, in the Community’s *Stodoła* (Barn) – the Catholic Church Hall in Common Road. ‘*Mikołajki* have always been a success’, recalls Jerzy Kulczycki, while Maria (Stefania Wolańska’s daughter) most vividly remembers the mandarin

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<sup>46</sup> ‘List otwarty w sprawie Polskiej Szkoły Sobotniej na Chiswicu wydany na Walne Zebranie Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu dnia 25 lutego 1961 roku’, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>47</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

<sup>48</sup> J. Pieńkowska’s letter [no date available] and A. Malczewski’s response, 13 Nov. 1961, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>49</sup> Z. U. [Zofia Urbanowicz - ?], ‘Obchód Rocznic Majowych na Chiswicu’, *DPDŻ*, no 132, 3 June 1969.

oranges!<sup>50</sup> On 9 December 1962 ‘as many as 112 children and 108 parents participated in the event’<sup>51</sup>. Since 1977 *Mikołajki* have taken place in the *Sala Malinowa* (Raspberry Hall) in POSK. The school was run according to its own teaching programme, which predated that produced by the Polish Educational Society some time later.<sup>52</sup>

The number of pupils at the school slowly yet steadily grew. Miss Melady’s premises began to be too small. By 1962/63, 139 children were registered and divided into six groups. Every new president of the Parent-Teacher Association, the Community Board and school management faced new tasks due to the increasing number of children. Problems also appeared in their relations with the English schools in which Saturday classes were held. It was necessary to move classes to another place, as well as to intervene with higher authorities. Beginning from the academic year 1963/64, the school was granted a new location at M.C.C Hogarth School. The newly appointed Community Board found it necessary to voice an appeal to the parents to ‘instruct their children that the lack of discipline and respect for public property, that is, the school building and its equipment, makes it difficult to co-operate with Middlesex Council Educational Committee, and that it might even lead to losing the school, which required such a huge effort to obtain.’<sup>53</sup>

In September 1968, during a Community Board meeting, the case of the Saturday school resurfaced: ‘the children and the teachers alike often confront verbal harassment (*szykany*) practiced by the English headmaster.’ In order to prevent this, the assembled decided to turn to the parents of the children attending the Saturday school to enrol in the Community. As a social organization ‘registered by English authority [...] it feels obliged to act and defend its needs deriving from the obtained rights, especially where the Saturday school is in question.’<sup>54</sup> In January of the following year Adam Barszcz informed the Board that ‘the case of the Saturday school has been successfully dealt with by determining English authorities in such a way that it will receive quarters in the school building’<sup>55</sup>. From January 1970 lessons took place at Chiswick School in Burlington Lane. ‘The quarters are comfortable,

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with J. Kulczycki and M. Wolańska.

<sup>51</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 2, Dec. 1962.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with R. Kotaś. The first, exemplary, programme was formulated by the ZNPZ in 1951; after modifications in the forthcoming years it was obligatory in Saturday schools until 1989. Radzik, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>53</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 3, Apr. 1963.

<sup>54</sup> Community Board minutes, 23 Sept. 1968, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>55</sup> Community Board minutes, 31 Jan. 1969, Archives of the GPZL.

spacious, the class halls are bright and most importantly the relations with the English authorities have been quite good'.<sup>56</sup>

The initiative for co-operation came also from the school. In 1970, 'Mrs. J. Kosicka, the headmistress of the Saturday school, put forward a motion, according to which at every Parents' Meeting of the school, the Community Secretary was to be present in order to enrol new Community members, with the emphasis on the fact that a poster should be displayed in a well visible place to inform everyone that this is where one can enrol, and support the activities of the Polish Community of West London'.<sup>57</sup> The Community regularly subsidized both the school and the scouting group. The first payments made to the scouts on 1 January 1960 ('the profit from the latest party') and to the school on 20 February 1963. In the course of the first decade of the GPZL's existence, however, it donated only £41 to the school as compared with £505, 8 s., 6 d. for scouting and £121 for Saint Andrew Bobola Church.<sup>58</sup> The children at the school on numerous occasions represented both the school and the Community. An example was the occasion of Zygmunt Nowakowski's jubilee, during which they proclaimed best wishes on behalf of both institutions.<sup>59</sup>

In December 1969, in the first issue of the school magazine *Czyżyk* (the Siskin) Tadeusz Wolański explained the origin of the title: 'the siskin is a small bird, which sings all the time. Many people living in the Chiswick district for obvious reasons tend to mispronounce its name as *czyżyk* (siskin). There is nothing to be done about it, as it is only those already born in England that pronounce the name in the proper way.'<sup>60</sup> So *Czyżyk* is an invaluable source of knowledge on the activities of the unique expression of emigration life that was the Saturday school.

Let the youth speak for themselves: 'It was in the class of Mrs Ślepokóra that I worked to my utmost', said Jerzy Kotaś, aged 15, 'for over seven years we had the same teacher, who really helped us with the Polish language. In 1970 I moved to a higher class, run by Mrs Wolańska. Here, there were no excuses as to why the homework had not been done or the paper not written. One simply had to do it. It seems it was there that everyone started to seriously consider the O-Level exam.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Community Board minutes, 14 May 1970, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>58</sup> Community Board minutes, 20 February 1970, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>59</sup> Z. Nowakowski (1891-1963) was one of the famous émigré writers. Community Board minutes, 20 Feb. 1963, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>60</sup> *Czyżyk. Gazetka szkolna*, no 1, Dec. 1969.

<sup>61</sup> '12 lat w Polskiej Szkole', *Czyżyk. Gazetka szkolna*, no 9, July 1972.

The topic of *akademie*, fireplace meetings (*kominki*) and all that Jadwiga Kosicka named ‘our ideology’ is best described in a poem on Lwów written by Marta Wolska: ‘Let us always remember / our beautiful city / beautiful Polish city / called Lwów / where the Lwów ‘Eaglets’ (*Lwowskie Orłęta*) / were killed in the awful war / while they were keeping guard...’<sup>62</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to surmise that only serious and heroic subject filled the hearts and the heads of the students and the pages of *Czyżyk*. In 1977 there appeared a comic strip about a superhero, *Captain Rej*, who on seeing books being stolen from a Polish school, ‘put on his atomic boots and hurried from Mars to the Earth in order to return them to the children.’<sup>63</sup>

Traditionally students took part in May Masses and October Rosaries, as well as the feast of Christ the King in November. ‘We have our own school Mass, once a month the children read out lessons and prayers after the *Credo*, and the altar boys serve at the Mass.’ There were carol concerts, the Gunnersbury cemetery commemorations at the Katyń Memorial as well as those at the Northolt monument for Polish airmen, and many other aid activities related to Polish history and tradition.<sup>64</sup>

This thesis is concerned with the period of the school’s activity that coincides with the history of Polish Community of West London, and so more or less until 1976. It should be remembered, however, that the school continued its activity after the Community moved to POSK and that it remains active to this day. ‘The fears that Polish language would represent a drawback to studying English proved wrong’ concluded Teodor Urbanowicz.<sup>65</sup> In 1975, on the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Mikołaj Rej School, its long-time headmistress, Jadwiga Kosicka, wrote in the Community’s quarterly magazine: ‘The handful of Poles who organized the school in Chiswick, even with their farsightedness, most probably could never have predicted that the institution would last for so many years and that it would grow to be of today’s size and importance as a part of that district.’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Pamiętamy zawsze / Piękne miasto nasze / Piękne polskie miasto / Nazwane Lwów / Bo tam Lwowskie «Orłęta» / Zabijała wojna wstrętna / Gdy obraniały miasto[...]*, *Czyżyk*, no 14, Mar. 1974. The reference is to the very young defenders of Lwów, known as the ‘eaglets’, during the Polish-Ukrainian conflict of 1918-20.

<sup>63</sup> The comic strip was made by Tadeusz Moyseowicz, aged 15, and Marek Dembiński, aged 15, *Czyżyk*, no 25, Dec. 1977.

<sup>64</sup> H. Żurowska, ‘Zarys podstawowych wiadomości z życia Szkoły Przedmiotów Ojczystych im. Mikołaja Reja w Londynie za okres drugiego dwudziestolecia pracy od 1973 do 1993 roku’, in *Jednodniówka jubileuszowa...* (n. 17 above).

<sup>65</sup> T. Urbanowicz, ‘Sobotnia Szkoła Przedmiotów Ojczystych na Chiswick – geneza’, op. cit.

<sup>66</sup> *Nad Tamizą. Kwartalnik GPZL*, no 2, spring-summer 1975.

When on 29 September 1953 the teaching of the Polish language was introduced, the only handbook that the children used was Marian Falski's *Elementarz*. Despite very modest means, the school had been financially independent ever since the beginning of its existence. 'We did not pay for the quarters and had no need to pass huge budgets', Teodor Urbanowicz would recollect. 'We introduced school fees for the children, while providing minimum wages to the teachers.'<sup>67</sup>

### **The remaining schools in the South**

The Adam Mickiewicz School was also self-sufficient. It was one of the oldest Saturday schools in London, closely linked to the parish and to the Brockley and Lewisham Centre. The funds were drawn from school fees and party events organized by the Parents' Committee. In 1962 classes were held for 100 children at the LCC Stillness Primary School, and at that time another secondary gymnasium class was also formed.<sup>68</sup> 'We teach', recalled Rev. Wróbel, 'in a third school building [...]. In the former two buildings the local English school service did not show a proper understanding of the needs of our young students; there were clashes and the best thing to do was to leave their walls.'<sup>69</sup> It was to the hall of that very English primary school on 29 September 1962 the Parents' Committee sent out an invitation to a dance, the profit from which was directed towards the school's own needs.<sup>70</sup>

Some events were organized together with the GPL-P.<sup>71</sup> The Fancy Dress Party of 4 February 1967 was also a joint venture.<sup>72</sup> The *Nowinki* (News) column of the *Komunikat* proudly wrote in 1967 that the 'the pillars of the Parent-Teacher Association of the Brockley school are Community members: Engineer Z. Jankowski (President), W. Gajdur (vice-president), Major G. Piwakowski (treasurer), K. Kujawa (secretary).'<sup>73</sup>

In 1970 the school had 66 pupils aged between thirteen and sixteen, and eight teachers, all women (a characteristic feature of Saturday schools). Rev. Wróbel

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<sup>67</sup> T. Urbanowicz, op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> 'Szkoly polskie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>69</sup> Dziedzic, 'Szkoly polskie'.

<sup>70</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 6, Sept. 1962.

<sup>71</sup> 120 people came to such an event on 29 Dec. 1962. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 13, July 1964.

<sup>72</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

remained the spiritual minder. The school's pupils achieved good marks in the GCE O-Level and A-Level examinations.<sup>74</sup> The head teacher, Zofia Koronowa, prepared the children for both levels of examinations in Polish (Polish *matura*). 'It was thanks to her that our sons passed their *matura* exams', recalls Maria Kwaśniewska.<sup>75</sup> Wiesław Skoczylas, the president of the Parent-Teacher Association, organized school parties to support these activities.<sup>76</sup>

As *Kronika* commented: 'Rev. A. Wróbel, despite living outside the parish area, put every effort into being present at school at least for an hour. He was not only the catechist and the patron, but he was virtually the school's life and soul. He provided books, dealt with all the business with the English church and secular authorities, did his best to raise funds, participated in all the assemblies, meetings and events, very often covering financial shortages at his own expense. There was only one thing he could not bear and that was "misunderstandings", these however were not spared him'. After his retirement, his successor in the parish, Father Antoni Dębski, became the head teacher of the school (he held the post until his death in 2006).

The parents of the children at the Adam Mickiewicz School co-operated with those at Saint Joseph's Academy, which many young Poles attended. This resulted in a very positive opinion of the Poles in that school: the students' diligence, behaviour (reflecting well on their upbringing) as well as good marks. A similarly good opinion about their families was the consequence. 'There had been a long-time cooperation with the school's headmaster. Our parents are a help in the organization of various events and celebrations inscribed in the programme of the English school.' Zofia Piątek (who also held the post of the Polish school's head teacher) helped in the organization of dinner parties, decorated tables with flowers and candlesticks of her own design. Zbigniew Jankowski 'has been in the sports events (such as Sports Day) organization assistance group for quite a few years. Mr. Czarnecki was in the Parents' Committee for some time. Dr Kazik Stepan teaches economics to the highest grades. [...] Such a relationship between the parish and the English school result in the possibility of hiring a spacious hall with a stage. It was there that we held all the important celebrations and parties. The presence of the stage made it

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<sup>74</sup> 'Szkoly Sobotnie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with M. Kwaśniewska.

<sup>76</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

possible to promote various attractions. We feel at home in that school', the *Kronika* commented warmly.

Then it noted, in a passage that should be of interest to researchers of national identity in all emigrations and indeed to policy-makers, 'That small element of co-operation between the English and the Poles was a step forward in the attempts to bring together relations between the Polish emigration and the English environment. It is necessary primarily for our teenagers, who, not wanting to feel different from their English peers, quickly assimilated into their environment. Little children quite obviously, although not fully consciously, adopt English customs and are ashamed of their "otherness". Teenagers, usually in some isolation, deal with the problem of what attitude they should take on the question of whether to freely display their Polish origin, or to act in such a way so that nobody would ever find out their national distinctiveness. The organization of Polish parties in English surroundings provides a solution to the young people's dilemmas, for as much as they would like to emphasize their Polishness, they would not like to feel alienated among their English friends. The *Niemen* dance formation proved immensely helpful in these teenage problems.'<sup>77</sup>

The notes contained in the *Kronika* – the memorial book of the parish, the Centre and the Adam Mickiewicz School alike – provide many unique observations concerning the everyday worries about the running of the 'native subjects' school in that part of London. They also have a more universal value in the depiction of the background of that field of emigration social work.

'The teaching staff, wondering about the reasons for numerous absences of their pupils, looked for the causes of low attendance. First, a revision of our proper work must be made. [...] Are these Saturdays already routinized? Even in the name of an important goal, students must not feel 'slaves' to their classes. Perhaps it is better to leave the school sometimes, visiting theatres, museums and exhibitions for equally valuable methods of learning about the native language and culture? [...] We lack the methodological teacher conferences that the teachers – especially the young ones – are asking for. The head teacher might be of help in many difficulties, but being a full time teacher, she does not have the time. So, she invites the teachers to her own classes.'<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

‘Accepting the duty of prolonging Polishness in the places occupied by Polish immigration, we are trying to do it in a simple and kind way, namely through the children. It is for them that we are making all the artistic, vocal and culinary efforts. It is for the children that we preserve tradition, songs and dreams. Before our eyes young talents spring up, talents of all kinds’.<sup>79</sup> Pride was mixed with anxiety. ‘In the parish there are still many Polish children who do not attend the Polish school. These are usually offspring of mixed families. We cannot find a way to reach them...’<sup>80</sup>

In May 1975 the Polish President in Exile, Stanisław Ostrowski, on the recommendation of the Polish Teachers Association Abroad (ZNPZ), decorated four teachers of the Adam Mickiewicz school with the Cross of Merit (*Krzyż Zasługi*).<sup>81</sup>

Less attention in the work of the GPL-P was paid to the three remaining schools existing in South London. The second issue of the *Komunikat* (22 October 1960) reported that Rev. Walerian Gajecki taught religion in the schools in Croydon and Crystal Palace. Two years later the news was spread of the fusion of these two schools under Rev. Gajewski’s supervision. He became the headmaster. ‘Thanks to its own initiative, dedication and work, this parish is one of the first London parishes in which in the occasion of buying a piece of real estate property as a joint effort has laid the grounds for a real action for the Polish cause. Outside school time it is going to provide a meeting place for all the local Polish people.’ There were thirteen teachers and 180 students who could use this amenity. ‘The school divides its pupils into two levels: primary – before noon – with around 125 pupils and secondary – in the afternoon – with 55 students.’ A solemn opening and consecration was to be held on 16 December 1962.<sup>82</sup>

The institution had a library with 160 volumes. The Parent Association purchased a projection lantern (epidiascope) and a tape recorder for the school. Thanks to the dedication of the parents, national costumes and props were accumulated for the school performances.<sup>83</sup> In 1970 the school embraced 153 children in its fold, including 42 taking O- and A-Levels. There was a special unit for the children not capable of speaking the Polish language, six classes of elementary school, two classes each for O-Levels and A-Levels, and an active Parent-Teacher Association.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Refleksje Jubileuszowe [1971]’ *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

<sup>80</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

<sup>81</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Szkoły polskie w południowym Londynie’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>83</sup> H. Pruszyńska, S. Gudowski, ‘Crystal Palace’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej London-Południe*.



The school remained under the charge of the parish, the Polish Educational Society (PMS) and the Polish Combatant Association (SPK) in South London.<sup>84</sup>

In 1962-63, the teaching-staff of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska PMS school at Wimbledon Park (Havana Road, London SW19) was composed of five teachers, who taught were six classes, with 105 pupils. There was a theatre section and classes were held in dance and singing. 'Despite the fact that the school was founded only two years ago, its achievements and development are testimony to unusually skilful organization as well as dedicated and professional work on the part of the school management and the Parent-Teacher Association'.<sup>85</sup> We do not have a deeper indication of any closer school-community co-operation, except for the fact that to 'the uproarious (*huczna*) dance party', organized in Wimbledon by the Parent-Teacher Association and Parish Association on 8 May 1965 in the hall at the Edge Hill church, was attended by around 200 people, 'among whom [...] there was to be found a numerous representation of the Council and Community members, around 30 people.'<sup>86</sup> In 1970 the school had 112 children, six classes and six teachers, and enjoyed modern teaching aids: epidiascope, gramophone, records, blackboards, a set of educational slides and a pedagogical library.<sup>87</sup>

The fifth school operating in the area of the South London Community's activity showed less of a tendency to stay in touch with the Community. In 1962 the school of the Society of Friends of Children and Youth (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci i Młodzieży*, TPDiM) 'failed to send their news to the *Komunikat*.'<sup>88</sup> Two years later, while providing information on the Spring Festival of Song and Dance of 24 May at Saint Mary's Hall in Clapham Common, the *Komunikat* mentioned that among other participants, children from the TPDiM School 'performed their songs and dances.'<sup>89</sup>

GPL-P activists wanted somehow to include the 'insubordinate' school into the range of their activities. While preparing the jubilee issue of the *Komunikat* in 1965, Mr Dziedzic paid a visit to the headmistress on the school's premises at 50 Nightingale Lane, SW12: 'Immersed in work and paper there is Mrs Melania Arciszewska sitting at her desk'. The emissary of the Community's newspaper learnt that the school 'is being subsidized by the TPDiM, an organization which has existed

<sup>84</sup> 'Szkoly Sobotnie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>85</sup> 'Szkoly polskie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>86</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

<sup>87</sup> 'Szkoly Sobotnie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>88</sup> 'Szkoly polskie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>89</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 13, July 1964.

in Great Britain for almost eighteen years, and is going to celebrate its twentieth Anniversary in two years' time. The Community of South London is a much younger organization and may not absorb a much older organization, not even in such a form as giving its representative information necessary for the writing of a report'. Mrs Arciszewska underlined ('fortunately'), that this was her own private opinion, something she 'emphasized twice'. In order to break the ice, Dziedzic showed the president 'the caricatures of the *Gmina*'s leaders, a beautiful print of the title page of the future issue of the *Komunikat*, [...] depicting the entrance gate of the building belonging to the Community.'<sup>90</sup>

Two years later the TPDiM celebrated its twentieth anniversary. There was a celebration at Saint Mary's Hall and a glass of wine was served at the Society House. The Community representatives gave their congratulations and wishes.<sup>91</sup> A year later it was again mentioned in the *Komunikat* that the school had operated for twenty-one years (which was not precise, that was how long the Society had functioned, but it was an obvious nod in the direction of the patroness of both institutions), has 175 pupils aged four to fifteen and that among its sixteen teachers 'the headmaster and the priest are the only representatives of the sterner sex'. It was stated, for no apparent reason, that the lady teachers were aged between twenty and seventy years which was an intriguing break with the *savoir-vivre* rules that were usually so closely observed in the émigré environment. Education took place on forty-two Saturdays a year between 9.30 a.m. and 13.30 p.m.. The subjects taught were: Polish, history, geography, obligatory singing, dancing and piano playing. Many successful passes at O-Level and A-Level were recorded.<sup>92</sup>

There were complaints in 1970 that 'none of the five schools in the Community area wants to boast about their achievements. And the output is substantial and seemingly not quite properly recognized.'<sup>93</sup> We do not know the reasons for which the relations of the GPL-P with individual schools worked out so differently. Reading the *Komunikat*, one might get the impression that the Community tried, under the facade of summing-up the social activity in its area, to present the autonomous organizational achievements of the various institutions as its own.

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<sup>90</sup> Dziedzic, 'Szkoły polskie'.

<sup>91</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>92</sup> 'Szkoły Sobotnie w południowym Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, the schools were helped by the GPL-P in a variety of ways: ‘the Community made an effort with the London City Council and local boroughs for financial help for Polish schools, which pay excessive amounts for the hire of school premises’, it was noted in 1962. At the same time the organizational strategy was made clear: ‘The next stage of the Community’s effort, will be the gathering together of all Polish youth with the aim of mutual meetings in locally organized clubs.’<sup>94</sup>

There was a flow of material help from the GPL-P as well but, in view of the budget and the ambitions of the organization, the sums were not decisive for the workings of emigration education. As early as 1962 the schools were paid twenty-five pounds ‘as a one-off donation’.<sup>95</sup> In the course of its twenty-year existence the Community gave a total of £573.00 to Polish Saturday schools.<sup>96</sup>

The experiences and anxieties connected with the question of children and teenagers were noted in both the *Komunikat* and the *Kronika*. Articles and notes express parental concern about the Polishness of their children, as well as the social activists’ managerial worries about the directions and content of their actions. In the late 1960s the problem of adolescent youngsters was noted as ‘very hard to solve, due to the special conditions in which we currently find ourselves, the influence of our environment, the economic conditions of our existence, the attributes of these adolescents as well as their characters. The youngsters are naturally always opposed to their elders, and more importantly to us, in our role as parents.’<sup>97</sup>

It was thought that giving the young opportunities and encouraging them to take independent action was the best way to obtain their co-operation with their elders and would in the end lead to mutual understanding. ‘The fulfilment of this aim was to ensure that our Polish Community would be able to transfer all of its output into the hands of the next generation raised in accord with the same ideas.’<sup>98</sup> ‘We have a dream that one day it will be them – our pupils, children and alumni – who carry on what for us will be only a memory and a reflection’, we read in the *Kronika*.<sup>99</sup> That

<sup>94</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 4 [1962]. Another example of help for the schools by influencing British organizations is considered in chapter 10 below.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* Donations in 1965 were the Adam Mickiewicz School: £20; the Bolesław Chrobry School: £20; the Croydon and Crystal Palace School: £10, the South Norwood School: £10, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>96</sup> Compare the £69.00 allocated to the Polish dance teams. Walczak, ‘20 lat GPL-P’, *op. cit.*

<sup>97</sup> Z. S. [Zofia Słowikowska], ‘Problem polskości naszej młodzieży’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 27, Sept. 1967. ‘As soon as the problem of children finished, the problem of youth started’ according to ‘Rada Gminy i nasza młodzież’, in the same issue of *Komunikat*.

<sup>98</sup> Z. S. [Zofia Słowikowska], ‘Do naszej młodzieży’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 26, Sept. 1967.

<sup>99</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

dream did not come true. But the answer as to why it did not lies outside the scope of this thesis.

## Conclusion

Co-operation between the Communities and Saturday schools is not surprising, because the children of Community members studied the Polish language, history, geography, and religion in the schools. There were different degrees of this cooperation: from financial help to personal involvement as teachers or activists of Parent-Teacher Associations. Saturday schools certainly have their own history, but it would not be complete without emphasizing their importance for the activities of the Communities. The volunteer-based idea of the Saturday school fits neatly into the democratic ethos of the *Gmina*.

When studying the undoubted phenomenon of the organization on a large scale of classes taught in Polish for the descendants of the soldiers' emigration, one may notice the paradox that Saturday schools were both a success and a failure. They were a success because the very fact of establishing so many voluntarily organized educational institutions was unprecedented among the numerous ethnic groups living in London. Besides the constant financial, organizational, and even psychological problems (such as persuading Polish children to attend classes on their days off from their classes at English schools) these efforts resulted in maintaining the schools for successive generations of émigré children. Activities accompanying classes at Saturday schools such as games, ceremonies, national and religious holiday celebrations were the essence of Polish life in exile and helped to preserve national identity. While the communist regime in Poland restrictively controlled school syllabi, Saturday schools in exile were places where one was exposed to a picture of Polish history that, whatever an academic historian might think about its emotional, martyrological tones, did not pass over events such as the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 in silence. It was not the consciously falsified history taught in 'People's Poland'. According to all accounts, native subjects and religious education were not separated, as they had been the in pre-war period. Religious identity, even for weak believers, was important in the idea of 'Polishness' in exile.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, p. 108, 121.

However, it is hard to overlook the fact that these sometimes heroic efforts of parents, teachers, and tutors, did not result in the realization of the most important task, which was clearly formulated, namely educating those who were about to continue the Polish social activities in the émigré world. As mentioned earlier, I shall not provide an answer to the question whether the above task was itself realistic. Would any other type of educational institution have been able to make the realization of the set task possible? This aspect of the Communities' history highlights a more universal problem, that is the fact that Poles in exile had to come to terms with the fact that their children or grandchildren were unlikely to think in Polish and speak it fluently.

The demands imposed on pupils were high, basing the understanding of the desired type of national consciousness on the heroic military and scouting traditions. These were solemn and full of martyrological elements. This was inevitable, since it was those traditions in which the generations brought up before and during the war were also exposed to in their education. Even though there were people who were aware of the pitfalls of heroic patriotism, they were not able to develop alternative educational ideas that would be culturally attractive and able to compete with the British ones.

Some of the changes in the minds of young people that in fact resulted from broader historic or generational reasons were considered by their elders to be influenced only by the political reality of communist Poland. It was also sometimes the case that Saturday schoolteachers, despite their goodwill and sense of mission, lacked proper teaching experience or even the ability to use the Polish language properly, which is sometimes evident when reading some of the letters and articles they wrote.

The 1960s and 1970s saw strong generational conflicts in the western world as a whole. In the case of Polish emigrants these conflicts widened the generation gap further. The schools survived, thanks to successive waves of emigration and the second émigré generation born in Great Britain, for whom Polish will, at most, remain a better or worse spoken foreign language.

## 6. Scouting and guiding

It is not my aim here to present a detailed history of the particular scouting units that operated under the supervision of the three London Communities. I shall only outline the interface between these structures of émigré life. The analysis of sources not connected directly with scouting throws light on those aspects of its activity which most concerned the Communities. We should also remember that the scout and guide groups contained the children of the Communities' activists and members. A brief introduction to Polish scouting and guiding may however be helpful.

In Great Britain, the homeland of scouting, the Polish form of the scouting and guiding movement has developed dynamically since the 1940s. Polish scouting came into existence around 1910, while Poland was still partitioned. Apart from the universal values and educational methods formulated by Lord Robert Baden-Powell, it was characterized by specific forms and a style which differed somewhat from the British original. The participation of girl guides and boy scouts in the fight for independence in 1914-1921, their work to restore national and state sovereignty in the period to 1939, and finally the heroic part they played in the Second World War created the background of strong patriotism, the idea of serving the nation and a stronger emphasis on military elements than in Great Britain.

For a brief time, the scouting and guiding movement continued to develop in post-war Poland, but it was liquidated in 1950-1956, and only allowed limited freedom thereafter. As a result, the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association Abroad (*Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego poza granicami Kraju, ZHPpgK*) became the only place for unhindered activity and for cultivating the values and principles included in the Polish Scout and Guide Law and Promise. The movement's role and place were perceived in this way by both social activists and ordinary émigrés. In Great Britain, the ZHPpgK developed in the form of separate units – 'standards' (*chorągwie*) – for girls and boys, divided into 'districts' (*hufce*) covering particular parts of the United Kingdom. The smallest organizational unit was a group (*drużyna*), which in turn divided into 'troops/patrols' (*zastępy*).

Together with Senior Scouts and Senior Guides and Auxiliary Members Associations (*Koła Przyjaciół Harcerstwa, KPH*) these units created a scouting and guiding organization that at its zenith in the 1960s gathered 1140 girl guides, rangers

(senior girl guides) and chartered scout leaders (*instructorzy/instruktorki*) (1962) and 1791 boy scouts and cub scouts (1969).<sup>1</sup> The scouting and guiding movement could play a part in preserving the Polish identity of the younger generation. It also became a breeding ground for new social and political leaders in exile. The movement brought forth, for example, Presidents Kazimierz Sabbat and Ryszard Kaczorowski, as well as activists of the Polish Veterans' Association (*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*, SPK).<sup>2</sup>

### **The scouting and guiding movement and the Polish Community of West London**

The scouting and guiding movement in West London was, like the Mikołaj Rej School, older than the Community itself. At the school a cub scout pack (*gromada zuchów*) was set up in 1955.<sup>3</sup> After reaching the age of ten or eleven, the boys were admitted to the scout group in Ealing. After a few years, the pack ceased to exist presumably because there were insufficient new recruits. In 1962 a new pack was organized, called the *Orlęta Lwowskie* (the Eaglets of Lwów).<sup>4</sup> Pack meetings took place on Sunday mornings in the parish room of the Saint Andrzej Bobola Church, as the parish priest, Reverend Prelate Kazimierz Sołowiej, took a keen interest.

When in January 1965 the 3 Scout Group was recreated, sixteen boys came to the first meeting. In 1965-69 the group organized three independent summer camps, several days' camporees (overnight camps) and took part in two ZHP scout jamborees in Lilford Park in 1966 and Monte Cassino in 1969.<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 1968 a well-run scout group, commonly called 'the Blue Three' (*Błękitna Trójka*), celebrated its twentieth anniversary with the help of the KPH and scouts' parents: 'this very successful event [...] started with a church service during which the children's choir from the Mikołaj Rej School sang – the young people took Communion together, and the prelate preached'. Veterans from the Carpathian

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<sup>1</sup> B. Szwaagrak, *Polskie emigracyjne organizacje młodzieżowe w Wielkiej Brytanii (wybrane) jako czynnik w formowaniu postawy społeczno-obywatelskiej 1950-2005*, (London, 2007), pp. 263-75.

<sup>2</sup> Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> My principal source for this section was 'Harcerstwo na terenie Gminy', in *10 lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969*, pp. 24-29.

<sup>4</sup> See above. Chapter 5, note 62.

<sup>5</sup> A letter from the scouts expressing gratitude, August 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

Rifles' Brigade (*Brygada Strzelców Karpackich*) took the group under their wing,<sup>6</sup> and the group's senior scouts (rovers/explorer scouts [*wędrownicy*]) had the right to wear the brigade badge.<sup>7</sup> 'The Blue Three' developed into a local district (*szczęp*) called *Wola*, which was composed of 110 cub scouts, scouts, rovers/explorer scouts, chartered scout leaders (*instruktorzy*). At that time it was probably the most numerous and best organized local scout district in London. 'The Blue Three' could be also proud of the opinion they enjoyed as the best scout group in Great Britain.

After numerous efforts (the parents of girl guides, who participated in scout meetings in distant regions of London, even petitioned the Polish Scout Executive Committee [*Komenda Harcerstwa*]) the 9 Girl Guides' Group was created in September 1967, during an annual scouts and guides' pilgrimage to Aylesford. It was named after the River San, which rises in the Carpathian mountains of south-eastern Poland. Initially, it was a small group, but after two years it had grown to include thirty-three girl guides, divided into four troops/patrols.<sup>8</sup> A brownies' pack was developing, and was attached to the girl guides group.

The *San* group came under the supervision of the 'Lwów Circle'. On its group flag there was the Lwów coat of arms and colours; the group neckerchiefs were also in these colours. 'It is now usual that at all the Circle's events [...], that is, anniversaries of the defence of Lwów [in 1918-19], tombola, or holiday events – everywhere, the *San* girl guides offer their help.' At Christmas, the girls visited Polish houses singing carols, and they participated in Christmas fairs. During the fairs prepared by the Ladies' Circle, they sold hand-made Christmas tree decorations and Christmas cards, while at Easter they prepared palms and they stood guard at Christ's Tomb.<sup>9</sup> It also became the tradition that girl guides from the *San* group conducted the events at the Mikołaj Rej School. In the summer, scout camps were organized. 'Girl guides from the *San* group did really well – fourteen out of eighteen girl guides participated in the summer events' – joyfully informed the *Biuletyn*. 'The girl guides made their scout camp at Rumerhedge Farm near Reading. Despite the terrible weather and constant rain, the mood [...] was great.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 14, June 1968.

<sup>7</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 17, July 1969.

<sup>8</sup> 'Harcerstwo na terenie Gminy', *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> In Polish religious tradition, on Good Friday a guard of soldiers, firemen or scouts stand guard near the symbolic tomb of Christ, a feature of all churches. The figure of Christ is removed before the first Mass of Easter, the empty tomb symbolizing His Resurrection.

<sup>10</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 15, Dec. 1968.



An important event for the Community as a whole as well as of the scouting and guiding movement was the Youth Rally for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino (1944). ‘The emotions caused by the sight of our youth gathered in White City on the occasion of the Millennium celebration [in 1966] are still vivid in our memory. “They are our Polish children, our future”, it was said and this brought tears to many eyes. [...] A new holy day is coming [...]. The organizers of this celebration have decided that at every grave of a fallen soldier there will stand a scout or a girl guide’.<sup>11</sup> These are the words of the first appeal for financial help, which appeared in the *Biuletyn* of June 1968. As a result of the collection for the local fund for the Rally in Monte Cassino, the sum of £384, 8 s. was collected, to which the Community Board added £48, 2 s., giving a total of £432, 10 s. A special commission, which represented the Polish Community of West London, the Mikołaj Rej School and the KPH, divided the fund between the scout groups.<sup>12</sup> ‘Thanks to the Community initiative, the Local Monte Cassino Fund enabled twelve girl guides to go to the Rally. Travelling and participating in the Rally was a great experience for many of them, a contact with real history, with the sacrifice of many people’s lives for the homeland, a lesson in patriotism’, concluded the *Biuletyn*.<sup>13</sup>

Many girl guides from the 9 Girl Guides’ Group *San* participated in the solemn funeral rites of General Władysław Anders in 1970. They were in the guard of honour at the coffin during the tribute, and participated in the service in Westminster Cathedral. Two girl guides even travelled to Monte Cassino for the general’s funeral.<sup>14</sup>

In West London there was also another girl-guide group, called *Wilia* after the river that runs through the other great city of Poland’s lost eastern borderlands (*kresy*), Wilno (Vilnius in Lithuanian). This group, apart from its ordinary scout activities, participated, among other things, in the commemorations at Chiswick of the fiftieth anniversary of Colonel Leopold Lis-Kula’s death in 1969,<sup>15</sup> the anniversary of the Constitution of 3 May 1791 and the battle of Monte Cassino.<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup> During the battle of Monte Cassino 924 Polish soldiers were killed, Jan Bielatowicz, *Laur Kapitoli i wianek ruty*, London, 1954, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> *Błękitna Trójka*: £267.10.0; *San*: £140.0.0; *Wilia*: £25.0.0; *Biuletyn*, no 17, July 1969.

<sup>13</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 18, Nov. 1969.

<sup>14</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Leopold Lis Kula (1896-1919) was active in many independence organizations. In 1914-16 he was an officer of Józef Piłsudski’s Legions, and became legendary as ‘the youngest Colonel of the Polish Army’ in history. He was killed during the struggle against Ukrainians in March 1919.

<sup>16</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 18, Nov. 1969.

order to get the flavour of a typical scout meeting in the early 1970s let us quote an article from *Czyżyk*: ‘Every Saturday we have a troop/patrol meeting. We usually meet in the Parish Room, but sometimes in other places. We go to a park, or a museum, etc. At meetings in the Parish Room we write scout notes, dance, or the troop/patrol leaders teach us how to tie knots, but near Chiswick Park it is sometimes possible to play football or another open-air game. [...] Our meetings last from 4 pm to 6 pm [...]. When the meeting finishes we always sing the Scouts and Guides’ Anthem’.<sup>17</sup>

Polish scouting and guiding in West London, just like Saturday School, still writes its own history. Closely related to the school and parish, it will exist as long as Poles live there. The advantages of scouting and guiding from the Community’s standpoint were emphatically expressed by its quarterly magazine *Nad Tamizą* in 1975: ‘all those who take the Polish Scout and Guide Promise do so sincerely. Perhaps some of them speak Polish poorly, perhaps they have never been to Poland – but while the Polish blood is flowing in their veins Poland shall not perish! [...] It is scouting that creates conditions in which young people of Polish origin can regularly meet and spend time together. It already means much. Being a scout or girl guide gives a kind of extra enthusiasm, which can help to achieve better results. And in achieving better results we create a better world – and this is the idea of scouting and guiding [...]’<sup>18</sup> The characteristic points in this quotation, which are worth drawing out, are the reference to social interaction for the young and the accentuation of the altruistic element of changing the world for the better.

### **Scouting and the Polish Community of South London and the Polish Centre in Lewisham**

In South London, the 20 Jan Sobieski Scout Group began its activity at the beginning of 1952.<sup>19</sup> According to Tadeusz Walczak, ‘in the beginning, all Polish Saturday schools organized meetings of cub scouts and brownie packs, and later scouting and

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<sup>17</sup> Andrzej Malecki, aged twelve years, *Czyżyk. Gazetka Szkolna* no 2, Mar. 1970.

<sup>18</sup> Teofil Tlen, ‘Rola harcerstwa na emigracji’, *Nad Tamizą. Kwartalnik GPZL*, no 1, winter 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Szwagrzak, *op. cit.*, p. 264. King Jan III Sobieski (reigned 1674-96), despite his many political failures, continues to be venerated for his victories over the Turks, notably at Vienna in 1683.

guiding groups as well, usually after lessons'.<sup>20</sup> We know that during the Christmas meeting organized for boy scouts and girl guides and their parents in the parish hall in Croydon by the KPH on 21 January 1961, 'the reorganization of the scouting and guiding movement in this area took place.' The new Bolesław Chrobry Scout Group was created.<sup>21</sup> It received the number 23 and together with the cub scout pack constituted the local district *Żoliborz*.<sup>22</sup> In 1962, the GPL-P, 'as a one-off assistance', paid a scout group £16 – but we do not know which one.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from traditional scout meetings, camporees, trips, summer camps, an original example of the scout group and local district's activity were the literary competitions for young people ('from eleven to twenty-four years old') organized from 1967 onwards by the editorial staff of *Szczepowy Płomień* (Scouts' Flame) – a magazine issued by the *Żoliborz* scouting district. The Community of South London sent a delegate and 'granted a subsidy of £10 for literary awards'. Help was also forthcoming from the Church Committees of Clapham (£10), Brockley and Lewisham, the KPH, and the Polish Paratroops' Association (*Związek Polskich Spadochroniarzy*, ZPS, an association of veterans of the 1 Parachute Brigade). The topics of the works were divided into four groups – religious: 'Poland as the bulwark of Christendom', 'The Cross and the White Eagle through 1000 years'; historical and literary: 'A short story from the prehistoric times', 'Momentous events from our history', 'A meeting with a hero from a novel I have read', 'My favourite author'; social: such as 'An act of kindness', 'Courage'; and miscellaneous, for example: 'A recollection', 'A great adventure', 'An interplanetary trip', 'In 1000 years'.<sup>24</sup> The choice of subjects was a mixture of general patriotic issues characteristic of émigré education with lighter topics – signifying a search for less serious or even less pompous topics, that could be attractive to young people who were learning and improving their Polish.

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<sup>20</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Komunikat no 1* [?], 15 Mar. 1961. Bolesław Chrobry (reigned 992-1025) was the first Polish ruler to be crowned king. His sway extended at times as far as Kiev in the East, Moravia in the South and present-day Saxony in the West.

<sup>22</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, 'Z życia Koła Przyjaciół Harcerstwa', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*. Żoliborz is an attractive suburb of Warsaw, which was much favoured by the officers, civil servants and intelligentsia of the interwar Republic of Poland.

<sup>23</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 4 [1962].

<sup>24</sup> 'Konkurs literacki dla młodzieży', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

For the second competition, seventy-eight works (seventeen literary and sixty-one artistic ones) were sent in by thirty-six people (some from outside London and even from the USA). The patrons were: the Polish Community of South London, the Adam Mickiewicz and Bolesław Chrobry schools, the Polish Paratroops' Association, the Lewisham and Brockley Parish Committee, and the KPH of Brockley and Camberwell. The prizes (certificates and high-quality books by Polish writers) were awarded at a ceremony on 29 November 1970, in the magnificent setting of the principal room of the *Ognisko* (Hearth) club in South Kensington.<sup>25</sup>

*Szczepowy Płomień*, and *Harcerskie Iskry* (Scouting Sparks) – the magazine of the *Żoliborz* scouting district – consisted of 'a few pages of coloured paper. A few songs and poems, riddles, tales, short stories, humour'. It was pinned on Saturdays on the school blackboard, and had so many readers that, as *Kronika* put it, 'we absolved them for their bizarre grammar.'<sup>26</sup> It was thanks to the magazine that one of the typical scouting actions conducted by the Bolesław Chrobry Scouts was recorded. In the twelfth issue of *Harcerskie Iskry* in February 1971, we can read a copy of a report concerning the saving of books from the flooded General Władysław Sikorski Polish Institute. The books were soaked as a result of damage to a water main. The books were moved, dried and sorted.<sup>27</sup>

On Sunday 21 March 1971, the KPH of Brockley and Camberwell and the 23 Scout Group celebrated their tenth anniversary. It started with a church service, followed by entertainment featuring shows and surprises in a room at Sydenham Church. The KPH organized a buffet. During the event the President of the ZHP, Ryszard Kaczorowski (called the *harc mistrz*, or scoutmaster; he later became the last President of the Republic of Poland in Exile) awarded 'Scouting Activist' (*Działacz Harcerski*) badges. 'This distinction moved our lady activists, and especially Mrs Maria Smagała – whose cooperation with scouting and guiding was many years long, very dedicated, and appreciated by the closest environment – [Her badge] was finally awarded [...] by the authorities of the beloved organization in which the whole of her family is active – her son and four grandchildren', joyfully reported the *Kronika*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971, *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>26</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>27</sup> 'Ratujemy polskie książki', *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> J. Smagała, '10 lat', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971, *Kronika*, vol. 2: 1970-73.

Rev. Adam Wróbel, on the occasion of this tenth anniversary, which was also the fiftieth anniversary of his own ordination, donated £100 to the scouting movement.<sup>29</sup>

The summer camp for cub scouts was organized in France, in Boulogne, at the Polish Scouting and Guiding Centre 'Stella Plage'. The *Kronika* stressed that for scouts and guides the most important event of the years was the summer camp: 'summer is the "paradise" of scouts' and guides' life. Nothing ties the groups better than camps and camporees. For the whole year long funds are raised in order to include all the organizational units in summer scout camping.'<sup>30</sup>

The *Kronika* described the atmosphere in front of Saint Mary Magdalene Church after the service in September 1972: 'Scouts from the 23 Group talk loudest about "what the camp was like". [...] The boys hid like wolves in the bushes guarded by mud. Many cars with guests and parents sank deep in mud, until they tracked down the camp'. The KPH contributed £100 to the organization of the camp.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the Polish Community of South London 'contributed to a great extent with its financial help' to the success of the scouts and guides' summer activities. As a result, 'young scouts and guides, and cub scouts and brownies gained more knowledge about Poland, learning games and plays, legends and our traditions.'<sup>32</sup> The priority given by the Community to scouting is proved by the sums donated. In 1967, the GPL-P granted £65, and in 1974, £100. In total, between 1955 and 1975 the Community allocated £711 to the scouting and guiding movement.

The activity of girl guides is even more poorly documented in the sources concerning the Community of South London and Lewisham Centre than the activity of boy scouts. We know that in 1967 the troop/patrol belonging to the *Wisła* (Vistula) Scout Group transformed itself into the thirty-member Girl Guide Group *Niemen* (again, these are the names of Polish rivers; the *Niemen* flows through the north-eastern borderlands lost in 1939/45).<sup>33</sup>

As these young people grew up and gradually left to go to university, their number decreased; in 1975 only eight girls remained in the group. A similar decline

<sup>29</sup> Letter of Rev. A. Wróbel in *Harcerskie Iskry* [no number nor date of publication].

<sup>30</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>31</sup> The camp was organized in Burwash, Essex. Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, *op. cit.*, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, March 1968, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 47, [1974], T. Walczak, '20 lat GPL-P', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

<sup>33</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, 'O Kołach Przyjaciół Harcerstwa', *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 48, April 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

affected scouts, cub scouts and brownies.<sup>34</sup> New recruits did not take their place, presumably because the scouts' methods ceased to be attractive for a new wave of Polish youth born in the UK. This fact casts some doubt about the success of the Community in preserving Polishness for the long term through its support of Scouting and Guiding.

In the school in Camberwell there was also a cub scout and brownie pack called the *Niezapominajki* (forget-me-nots). In 1970, the summer camp for brownies was organized in Wales, whose 'picturesque landscape resembled the Polish one.'<sup>35</sup> The *Kronika* wrote that 'generally parents do not realise how beneficial for a cub scout or brownie was a two- or three-week stay at the summer camp among their peers. A child left without his or her parents felt he or she belonged to a new group and is responsible to it and for it. The cub scouts and brownies' programme was prepared well before the summer camp started and required much work. It was structured in such a way that through play, children enriched their language, learned legends and the history of Poland, learned to love nature and spend every single day joyfully.'<sup>36</sup>

While most Polish girl guides in West London cultivated the traditions of the south-eastern lands of interwar Poland, south of the river they looked to the north-eastern borderlands. It was the tradition in the Lewisham parish that the girl guides from the *Niemen* Group baked ginger hearts on the feast-day of the Patron Saint of Wilno (Saint Kazimierz Jagiellończyk, known affectionately as 'Kaziuk') on 4 March and then sold them in front of the church.<sup>37</sup> In January 1971, scouts and guides visited homes, singing carols and collecting prizes for the lottery, the profit from which was destined by the Community of South London for scouting and guiding purposes.<sup>38</sup> The profit from the Great New Year Ball (organized by the Community together with the ZHP Executive Board (*Zarząd Okręgu*), held in 1970/71 at the Cafe Royal in Regent Street) was allotted by the Community to the Scouting and Guiding Centre (*Ośrodek Harcerski*) in Fenton.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>36</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Saint Kazimierz (1458-84) was the youngest son of Kazimierz IV Jagiellończyk (reigned 1440-92 as Grand Duke of Lithuania, 1447-92 as King of Poland).

<sup>38</sup> *Kronika – Materiały...*

<sup>39</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 40, Dec. 1971.

It is worth focusing on a particularly successful initiative undertaken by the Girl Guide Group *Niemen*, an initiative that included boys. It went beyond traditional scouting and guiding activity both in scope and style.

### **The *Niemen* dancing group**

In February 1971, on the initiative of the scouts and guides, and also of Zofia Piątek, a dance group was established. It was later called *Karolinka*. Maura and Bolesław Kutereba took up the idea; they supervised the group and took care of the choreography. Jerzy Pockert arranged the music. The team, which in order to maintain the stability and continuity of senior scouts and guides' activity was called the Scout and Guide Folk Dance Group of the Local District *Żoliborz 'Niemen'* (*Harcerski Zespół Tańców Ludowych Szczepu Żoliborz „Niemen”*), consisted initially of scouts and guides from the Adam Mickiewicz Saturday school. The first trace of this group's origin dates from Spring 1967, during the Easter meeting of the school and parish (no less than 150 people came). The main attraction of the evening was a dance performance by girl guides dancing in national costume.<sup>40</sup> 'It was a surprise for us that the young people attended lessons and rehearsals willingly. They learned quickly. One successful performance of a trained eight-person group was enough for the *Niemen* dancing group to encourage ever more young people to take up dancing.' Dance rehearsals took place at school in Eltham Green in the evenings and in private houses. The first performance of *Niemen* at the carnival party in Saint Joseph's Academy was successful.<sup>41</sup>

The group developed its work on the territory of the Lewisham parish and Centre on the more important religious and secular events (New Year's Eve and carnival performances, Christmas meetings, jubilees, Easter meetings at the school, etc.), and also in front of English audiences 'during music festivals, carnivals and garden shows.'<sup>42</sup> Social and charitable aims were realized by the group through performances for the elderly and abandoned children in the 'Silver Stars Variety Company' association in July 1972, in a singles' club in the *Orzeł Biały* (White

<sup>40</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>41</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>42</sup> A. D. 'Karolinka', *DPDŻ*, number and date unknown, from the archives of Z. Jankowski.

Eagle) club in November 1972, and in Mabledon hospital (the Polish centre for the mentally ill) in November 1972 and May 1973). Any income raised by the shows was used for the production of new costumes (sewn and embroidered by the dancers themselves) from different regions of Poland. *Niemen* presented the heritage of folk culture from nearly every part of Poland: ‘every dance in a different costume. [...] I sat there enchanted with the colourful pictures, folk music and lively performers’, wrote the correspondent of *Dziennik Polski*; ‘I admired their language, as they sang not only in Polish, but often also in regional dialects, which are difficult for them. I listened to different songs, folk chats and country banter. I travelled the length and breadth of Poland with them. From Rzeszów to Kashubia, from Lublin to Kraków, from Silesia to Kujawy and then into our mountains.’<sup>43</sup>

With the help of the choir and the band (which included English musicians) the group grew quickly.<sup>44</sup> All observers emphasized the characteristic fact that among those who danced there were scouts and girl guides, who even after they left school stayed in *Niemen* and continued at the same time to participate in their scout and guide groups, in relations with Polish circles and, of course, in their enthusiasm for folk dancing.<sup>45</sup> The group participated in events organized in the whole of London (in November 1972 at the show in *Orzeł Biały* club at the KPH party, in April 1975 at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Highlander Circle (*Koło Podhalań*), the Third of May celebrations in Ealing Town Hall 1978, and in June 1978 at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Polish Educational Society (PMS). The Community of South London’s *Komunikat* wrote that ‘eighteen-person group in beautiful folk costumes presented a short, but very interesting show of Polish dances’ during the Spring party on 13 May 1972.<sup>46</sup>

The group owed its popularity not only to perfect performances of regional dances. They achieved fame thanks to the original compositions of their musical director, Jerzy Pockert. For example, during the great carol concert organized by the London Choir Association in January 1979, the group presented two of his pastorals: a highland and a Mazurian one. In addition, occasional lyrics about ‘emigré life’ written to well known folk melodies gained recognition. In 1974 *Niemen* ceased its

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<sup>43</sup> Wacław Netter, ‘Sukces Karolinki’, *DPDŻ*, number and date unknown, from the archives of Z. Jankowski.

<sup>44</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>45</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73, A. D., ‘Karolinka’, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 42, July 1972.



activities only to return to the stage for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Brockley and Lewisham parish in 1976. It was at this point that the group took the name *Karolinka*.<sup>47</sup>

This group is still performing today. Since moving to the parish in Croydon and Crystal Palace in the 1980s, *Karolinka* has been connected neither with scouting and guiding, nor with the Lewisham Centre. It constitutes an independent, separate artistic group whose activity still arouses interest, and attracts new members from among old and new emigrants alike. It is undoubtedly connected with the popularity of folk music, which continues to grow among young people, and remains unchanged among older generations. Polish folk bands with their regional songs, next to Scottish bagpiping or Irish dancing, win the authentic applause of British and international audiences. Folk music and regional dance groups are not merely (as émigré activists once thought) the best way to propagate the Polish identity and national spirit. Without doubt, the folk tradition – lively, light, cheerful, carols and pastorals – constitutes an original Polish contribution to, we can safely say, worldwide culture. *Niemen-Karolinka* achieved its first ‘international’ success within a few months of its creation. In April 1972, in a competition of dancing groups of different nationalities at the Lewisham Music Drama and Dance Festival, the group gained 85 points and an invitation to perform again during the ‘Prize Winner Concert’ as honorary guest.<sup>48</sup>

### **‘Homeless’ Auxiliary Members Associations (KPH)**

Auxiliary Members Associations (*Koła Przyjaciół Harcerstwa*, KPH) made an important contribution to scouting and guiding. These associations usually included parents and sometimes, because of the non-existence of Senior Scouts and Guides Circles, adult members of scout and guide groups. Apart from offering various financial and organizational help, Auxiliary Members Associations also promoted the scouting and guiding ethos (included in the Scout and Guide Law and Promise) in émigré social life. For the members of the Communities, the KPH ranked alongside supporting the Saturday school. The KPH created a social work space

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<sup>47</sup> A. D. ‘Karolinka’, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> W. Netter, ‘Sukces Karolinki’, *op. cit.*

aimed at children and young people, but even more than a school Parent-Teacher Association, it linked a group of adults in a tightly-knit, friendly group.

The president of the Camberwell and Brockley KPH for many years, Zofia Kaczmarek, wrote: 'It is a well known saying that the Church and school are as two pillars keeping our young generation close to Polish identity. It is, however, forgotten that there is also a third factor, which is not less important, but supplements the other two in the love of God and the Homeland. This element is the scouting and guiding movement, with its ideals, which for many of us, older ones, were an indication of how to live and die for Poland. [...] As scouts and girl guides are young schoolpeople who need both moral as well as material support, centres were created helping scouts and guides in the form of Auxiliary Members Associations (KPH)',<sup>49</sup>.

The beginnings of the Association were described in the *Komunikat* of March 1961.<sup>50</sup> It was founded at the Bolesław Chrobry School, and also operated on the catchment area of the Adam Mickiewicz School in Brockley. It looked after the male local district *Żoliborz*; the cub scouts and brownie pack called the *Jaskółki* (swallows), and two girl guide troops/patrols, which constituted the *Wisła* group operating on the territory of Crystal Palace, Camberwell and Brockley. 'In order to tighten co-operation with Polish organizations, the Community tried to organize Community events together with the KPH', it was written a year later.<sup>51</sup> In 1964, the Association turned to the community for financial help in order to enable one of the girl guides to go to the Jamboree in Portugal. The Community Council voted a subsidy of £5, 5 s., and the Council members also collected £4, 15 s. among themselves.<sup>52</sup> In South London there were also associations in Wimbledon and a more numerous one in Clapham.<sup>53</sup>

The KPH of Camberwell and Brockley was managed by a Board, elected annually at the General Meeting. 'It is sad to note how few parents come to the meetings in comparison with the number of scouts and girl guides. But then the summer approaches and it turns out how badly the money is needed to organize summer camps, granting subsidies not only to the groups, but also to individuals who

<sup>49</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, 'Z życia Koła Przyjaciół Harcerstwa', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>50</sup> *Komunikat [GPL-P]*, no 1 [? ], 15 March 1961. The GPL-P activist A. Roch-Kowalski was a director of the KPH in the school run by the TPDİM.

<sup>51</sup> *Komunikat [GLP-P]*, no 4 [1962].

<sup>52</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 14, Sept. 1964.

<sup>53</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, 'O Kołach Przyjaciół Harcerstwa', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

want to go to camp so much, and parents cannot always cover the entire expense', complained the *Kronika*.<sup>54</sup> Despite such complaints, after five years of existence the number of KPH members fluctuated between forty and fifty people, which in the context of voluntary social activity seems a reasonable level. Income came from three sources: membership fees (one shilling per month), donations and income from parties. With the Community's financial support the Association every year enabled scouts and guides 'who deserve to go because of their work, but whose parents do not have enough resources to pay the expenses' to participate in summer camps in England and abroad. The Association also helped scout and girl-guide groups to buy camp equipment: in 1965 it bought a tent for the 23 Group. Later, the term 'Homeless KPH' was commonly applied to the association, because its general meetings 'in order to save funds of the room rental, take place in the open air in the park near the Horniman Museum.'<sup>55</sup>

The Polish Community of South London willingly co-operated with the Association. Together they joined in the effort to build a Polish scouting and guiding centre or *stanica* (a hostel) in England.<sup>56</sup> The Spring Ball on 22 April 1967 was organized together with the school and the Circle of the Friends of the 1 Armoured Regiment (*Koło Koleżeńskie 1 Pułku Pancernego*).<sup>57</sup> The income from the Midsummer's Eve Ball (24 June 1967) was also allocated for 'young people, and scouting and guiding'.<sup>58</sup> During the Community New Year's Eve Ball on 4 January 1969 the Association organized a lottery, which 'gave unexpectedly good results and considerably fortified the KPH budget.'<sup>59</sup> Together with the GPL-P, carnival parties in the Cafe Royal were also organized, and the income from them was allocated either to the Association or to the cause of building a hostel.<sup>60</sup> A few times a year the KPH organized parties on its own, in order to cover scouting and guiding expenses from its own funds.<sup>61</sup> The KPH party in the *Orzeł Biały* Club on 4 October 1975 'was well prepared', although, as the *Kronika* noticed, 'more people could have come!'<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>55</sup> Kaczmarek, 'Z życia Koła Przyjaciół Harcerstwa'.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>58</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 26, Sept. 1967.

<sup>59</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 32, Mar. 1969.

<sup>60</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, 'O Kołach Przyjaciół.' The Great Carnival Ball took a place on 12 January 1974, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 46, Apr. 1974.

<sup>61</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>62</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

The Community also supported the Association directly – for example by transferring £50 in 1976.<sup>63</sup>

In 1973 the *Kronika* wrote sincerely: ‘The KPH [...] is the basis of existence of the scouting and guiding movement in the parish. Without its educational, moral and especially financial help many needs of the groups: events, celebrations, and especially summer camps, could not exist.’<sup>64</sup> Zofia Kaczmarek summed up her experience in such a way in 1975: ‘[...] The KPH and the whole scouting and guiding movement can put their heart and soul and much work into their activity, however, it will not bring sufficient results unless parents create a Polish atmosphere in their own homes and teach their own children to love their country and language.’<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

‘For it is known that the Church, [Saturday] School, and Scouting and Guiding are the three pillars on which the Polish identity can be based and preserved’. Thus wrote *Komunikat* in the early 1970s.<sup>66</sup> This sentence of course expresses rather the common awareness of leaders of émigré organizations and active Community members than the standpoint of all Poles in exile. The issue of scouting and guiding should be understood in the context of the chapters of this work related to Saturday schools and parishes. These three institutions were created to strengthen a certain type of Polish identity, which they represented, and their creators sought to pass on this kind of Polishness to their successors. The element of co-ordination of their activity is well presented through the phenomenon of the *Gminy*. The scouting and guiding movement with its Law and Promise (whose highest duties are helping one’s neighbour, developing personally, educating young people by young people and love of nature) brought other commitments and ideals in its wake.

The military and patriotic heritage was intended to mould both soldier and citizen. The military aspect of the Polish form of scouting and guiding facilitated contact between young people and the wartime generation of their parents. At the same time

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<sup>63</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976. In 1965 the KPH of Brockley and Lewisham and the KPH of Croydon and Crystal Palace each received £10, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar.1966.

<sup>64</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>65</sup> Z. Kaczmarek, ‘O Kołach Przyjaciół.’

<sup>66</sup> ‘Szkoly Sobotnie w południowym Londynie’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

it helped to link them with the common origin of the whole wartime and post-war emigration. A similar educational model, intended to mould the masses, was adopted by the Polish state before 1939 and by émigré authorities during the Second World War. No other way of shaping young people's spirit was known to the continuators of Poland-in-exile in its various forms and levels of existence.

An essential part of the educational phenomenon of the Polish scouting and guiding movement lay in its ability to include adults. Members of the KPH, scouts and guides' parents themselves were 'educated' and changed by their contact with the movement, which was subject to a clear patriotic and moral canon. They co-operated with the movement, which from the outset of the twentieth century opposed what was considered to be the egoistic and materialistic direction of Western civilization (of which industrial Great Britain with its capital of world high finance – the City of London – seemed to be the symbol). Adults could in the activity of the KPH find an escape from the rat-race of stratified English society.

The period of the biggest development of the Polish scouting and guiding movement was already over by 1976. The cultural and social changes of the 1960s necessarily caused a deepening crisis in scouting and guiding. It seems that it was difficult, almost impossible even, for majority of Polish youth growing up during the time of counter-culture (the hippie movement, anti-war demonstrations, the expansion of rock music and – in the mid-1970s – the punk revolution in UK) to adopt the unreconstructed educational propositions of their parents' and grandparents' generations with any enthusiasm. The Polish moderators of social life had difficulties in suggesting a new, attractive way of supplementing the national education of young people, which in the field of language, geography and religion was already provided by some families and Saturday school.

Among the most interesting attempts to overcome the crisis of the Saturday school and the scouting and guiding movement were folk dance groups which (it seems unexpectedly) appeared very attractive for the second and even the third émigré generation. They resulted in the continued influence of the scouting way of life and at least some interest in Polish issues among young people via recreation. The *Niemen-Karolinka* group, coming directly from the scouting and guiding organization and tradition, constitutes a good example of such a successful metamorphosis. It is, however, difficult to compare the passion for Polish folklore with the scale of the possibilities offered by the scouting and guiding movement.

## 7.

**Parishes and self-help**

This chapter examines the place of religion life in the everyday existence of the Polish Communities in London. It is more concerned with technical relationships that show the role of priests and parish units in the organizing of Polish society than in émigrés' spiritual experience. Three extraordinary individuals deserve particular attention. The self-help campaigns uncover the understanding of relationships inside Communities, the meaning and strength of national links in a strange environment and the presentation of Christian *praxis* in the existence of the wider Polish community in exile.

The correlation of the notions of Polishness and the Roman Catholic faith is deeply rooted in Polish national consciousness. Although the experience of the multicultural phenomenon of the Jagiellonian realms between 1386 and 1572 and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*) between 1569 and 1795 opened up Polish culture to other nations and religions, the period of the lack of independence following the partitions of Poland resulted in the formation of more explicit features of national identity. The Roman Catholic Faith distinguished Poles different from Protestant Prussians and Orthodox Russians. This model of the nation united by one religion was not questioned in the émigré circles. Reminiscences of the tradition of the former *Rzeczpospolita* and the composition of General Władysław Anders's Second Corps, in which there were many Jews, Uniate Ukrainians, Orthodox Belarusians, and even a few Muslim Tatars, are often evoked as a beautiful epilogue to Central European multiculturalism. However, this diversity did not much influence the image or self-image of the émigré community, the majority of which owed its very survival to 'Anders's Army'.

The model of the 'Catholic Pole' helped to maintain a clear distinction from others, initially from the mainly Protestant British nation of the 1950s, but also from the increasingly multicultural society that London became. The outcome of this approach was the consolidation of a homogeneous way of cultivating Polishness, that kept its distance from other traditions less closely connected with the Roman Catholic Church.

There are few Polish social organizations in the United Kingdom founded earlier than 1940, that is, before the arrival of the Polish government and armed forces following the French capitulation. If we assume that the institution of the Church is a form of uniting people in a common cause, which in this case is religious worship, then the most important of the pre-war Church-related organizations was the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (*Polska Misja Katolicka w Anglii i Walii*, PMK). The role and tasks of the Church, understood as a community of believers, are of course much broader than any superficial categorization may imply. However, let us concentrate on the structures.

The PMK was established in London in 1894 at the behest of the then Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Herbert Vaughan.<sup>1</sup> It was situated in the district of Shadwell in the eastern part of the city. After the lease had expired, the PMK had to look for a new location. In 1930 the Mission bought a Swedenborgian church,<sup>2</sup> not far away from Shadwell, in Islington. In December 1930 the primate of Poland, Cardinal August Hlond, in the presence of the Archbishop of Westminster, Francis Bourne, consecrated a church in Devonia Road, dedicated to the Częstochowa Mother of God and Saint Kazimierz Church. Before and at the outset of World War II, the number of Poles living in London was small and the building met the required condition of being just a Catholic church. Following the arrival of the Polish state authorities and armed forces, the situation changed, but wartime conditions did not favour steps towards building a more permanent framework for Polish religious life.

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<sup>1</sup> Z. S. Siemaszko, *Dzieje parafii św. Andrzeja Boboli w Londynie*, in *Kościół św. Andrzeja Boboli w Londynie (Przewodnik – historia – informacje)*, ed. R. Juszcak [London, 1989], pp. 61-91.

<sup>2</sup> The Swedenborgians were a religious movement that founded their belief on the revelations of the Swedish philosopher and scholar Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). It is interesting that it was in London that the only Polish editions of his works, *Arcana caelestia* (8 vols., 1749-56) and *Nowa Jeruzalem i jej niebiańska nauka* (8 vols., 1749-56), were published in 1938.

### **‘Until the red star falls!’: Father Kazimierz Sołowiej and the Parish of Saint Andrzej Bobola**

It was only after the end of the war that preliminary steps were taken towards creating a new centre of religious life in the area where the Poles had settled down, that is in the western part of London. Polish Masses (that is, with the sermon, hymns, announcements and some of the prayers in Polish<sup>3</sup>) began to be offered in the chapel of the newly bought house at 21 Earl’s Court Square and in the co-called Little Brompton Oratory. The Sunday service at 1 pm held in the chapel of Brompton Oratory was particularly ‘popular’. In 1949 the painting of the Kozielsk Mother of God (*Matka Boska Kozielska*) was placed in the chapel situated on the right from the main altar. ‘Some people claim that this event marks the beginning of the *Parafia Londyn-Śródmieście* (Central London Parish), which later became Saint Andrzej Bobola Parish’ wrote Zbigniew S. Siemaszko.

In the mid-1950s, after the political situation in Poland had stabilized, which for Poles living abroad meant the loss of hope for an immediate return to a free home country, the task of the Church and of the thousands of émigrés was to find their own, permanent location. ‘When on 15 February 1955 Father Kazimierz Sołowiej MA was appointed parish priest of the *Parafia Londyn-Śródmieście*, his official promotional task was to find and buy a property suitable for a church and to establish a Polish parish there.’<sup>4</sup>

Who was the new parish priest? Born in 1912, Kazimierz Sołowiej was ordained by Archbishop Jałbrzykowski in Wilno in June 1938. In September 1939 he left Poland and became chaplain to the Polish troops in France. Following France’s surrender he established contact with the Primate August Hlond, residing in Lourdes, who sent him on a religious mission to Algiers. After the liberating of these lands at the end of 1942, he taught in a Polish school and performed the duties of an army chaplain. In 1944 he was moved to Scotland, where he was appointed the chaplain of the Communications Training Centre (*Centrum Wyszukolenia Łączności*) in Kinross. He remained in the post until the demobilization of the Polish armed forces in 1948. He was then a parish priest in Edinburgh, before he was moved to London in 1950 where he became the secretary of the Polish Catholic Mission in Devon

<sup>3</sup> Mass was in Latin until the reforms of Vaticanum Secundum were implemented.

<sup>4</sup> *Fotorama*, no 25, 10 Feb. 1961, quoted in Siemaszko, *op. cit.*, p. 66.



Road. On 1 March 1955 he assumed the position of the parish priest of the *Parafia Londyn-Śródmieście* in Brompton Oratory. In 1961 he successfully completed the purchase of a church, the patron saint of which became Saint Andrzej Bobola. The parish priest of was Rev. Sołowiej, who remained in charge until his sudden death in Rome on 20 May 1979.<sup>5</sup>

On 14 September 1955 a parish committee in the Brompton Oratory was organized, with Lieutenant Colonel Mieczysław Piekarczyk as its president, Mateusz Grabowski as vice-president for financial affairs and Teresa Łubieńska as vice-president for organizational affairs. The committee started the search for an appropriate church. After initial failures, when the Anglicans refused to sell their church in Ennismore Gardens, 'Providence ordained that Scottish Presbyterians should come to the rescue. They sold the Poles their old church situated in an ordinary quiet side street in the London Borough of Hammersmith, near to Shepherd's Bush.'<sup>6</sup>

It has been suggested that the decision to choose this particular location may have been connected with the fact that the church was situated within the area of the Polish Community of West London. Z. S. Siemaszko goes on to explain that the Community did not fuse with the parish, 'even though their mutual relations were satisfactory.'<sup>7</sup> The above words seem to be an understatement. The Church of Saint Andrzej Bobola immediately became the parish church for Poles living in the area of the Community's activity, with all the consequences of this fact. Tadeusz Chachulski, who since 1961 had dealt with 'covenants' in the parish, is the only noted activist of the GPZL mentioned among the organizers of the parish in the collective work on the church and parish, quoted above (n. 1). For many years the president of the Parish council was Zbigniew Tyczkowski.<sup>8</sup>

The Community quickly carried out one of its major tasks, namely to provide religious services in Polish (a few years later, after the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Latin was replaced by Polish throughout the Mass). Masses held in the Chapel of Saint Joseph in Chiswick had not served this purpose for a long time.

<sup>5</sup> Brochure: *Jubileusz kapłaństwa kapłaństwa ks. mgr. Kazimierza Sołowieja, 11.06.1938 – 11.06.1963* in Siemaszko, *op. cit.*, s. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Adler, '10-lecie kościoła św. Andrzeja Boboli', *Tydzień Polski*, no 49 (289), 4 Dec. 1971. The price of the church was about £10,000, but after including the price of the house and costs of the conversion, on 23 June 1962 the cost rose to £41,690. In May 1964 the debt was £30,600, the repayment of which took about a dozen years. Siemaszko, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>7</sup> Siemaszko, *op. cit.* pp. 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> AOE.

Coincidentally, at the same time the purchase of the church building was being finalized. 'The Board (*Zarząd*) of the Polish Community of West London welcomes with joy the purchase of a Polish church in the area of our activity. Father, we assure you that we are ready to co-operate', wrote the secretary and president of GPZL on 9 March 1960.<sup>9</sup> On 14 March Rev. Sołowiej thanked them for this willingness to work together and declared that he would be able to join the Community.

On 2 February 1961, the day of the Roman Catholic Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, known in Polish as *Matka Boska Gromniczna* (Candlemas), the parish priest received the keys to the newly acquired church. Members of the Community's board wrote to Father Kazimierz Sołowiej on 10 February 1960 to 'express their joy at the successful finalization of such an historic event as that of purchasing a Polish church in the area of the Community'. They expressed pride, promised 'genuine co-operation' and asked the priest to accept their congratulations. They also thanked him for his willingness to become a member of the community and for his acceptance of 'putting his candidacy forward to become a member of the board.'<sup>10</sup> 'I am deeply grateful for your kind assurance of the desired co-operation in our joint efforts for the glory of God and for the good of Poland', replied Rev. Sołowiej. 'In a few months the renovated church will come to life and from the mast on the tower of our Saint Andrzej Bobola Church a Polish flag will be fluttering during the more important religious and national celebrations'. To his letter the priest attached his membership application as well as an entrance fee and an annual fee. 'In addition, further to our conversation, I am giving my assent in writing to the putting forward of my candidacy for the Community's Board.'<sup>11</sup> Rev. Prelate Sołowiej served as a member of the board for several terms of office.<sup>12</sup>

In order to maintain contact an invitation was sent to Rev. Sołowiej to participate in the Third of May National Holiday celebrations, which were supposed to take place on Sunday 8 May at the Catholic Church Hall in Chiswick Common Road.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, developing mutual relations was not always easy at the beginning. The parish priest could not attend, because of two christenings he had to

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<sup>9</sup> Letter of J. Frąckowiak and S. Kuniczak, dated 9 Mar. 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>10</sup> Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>11</sup> Letter of 14 Feb. 1960 [wrongly dated as 1961], Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>12</sup> *Biuletyn*: Dec. 1962, Dec. 1964, June 1966, Apr. 1967, June 1968, and July 1969.

<sup>13</sup> Letter dated 5 May 1960 and a reply dated 6 May 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

perform at the time the celebrations were supposed to take place. The Parish committee from Ealing and their parish priest were also invited.

In April the *Dziennik Polski* (Polish Daily) announced: ‘A visible sign of co-operation between the parish and the Community is the fact that Father K. Sołowiej has been chosen Councillor (*Radny*) and that at the last general meeting it was agreed that the profit obtained from the coming party should be allocated to a church renovation fund.’<sup>14</sup> ‘We are pleased to inform you’ the priest was told, ‘that the party held on 15 April 1961 brought a clear profit of £65’<sup>15</sup>, which was allocated to ‘the newly acquired Polish church.’ The indefatigable Ladies’ Circle soon offered their ‘humble gift in the form of four tablecloths for the main altar’.<sup>16</sup> Calling on parishioners to take advantage of the ‘Covenant Scheme’,<sup>17</sup> the *Biuletyn* stressed that ‘Our new Saint Andrzej Bobola parish church situated in “Seven Stars” (the so-called “Hammersmith”) in the area of our Community’s activity, embracing at least ten thousand Polish souls, requires our full support and co-operation in its administration. Let us fulfil our civic and Catholic duty by filling in the appropriate application forms, and we shall do our duty in order to maintain our church in such a way so that it is representative of Roman Catholic Poles in London.’<sup>18</sup>

For a long time the priests from the parish taught at three Polish Saturday schools situated in its area, including the Mikołaj Rej School. (The schools in Chelsea and Notting Hill Gate closed down.). In 1962 Archbishop Józef Gawlina visited the parish. At this time, ‘The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council [...] was a shock to the Church and some Polish parishes in the United Kingdom. Fortunately, Father Sołowiej demonstrated great moderation and introduced the reforms gradually, which ensured stability’.<sup>19</sup>

On 11 June 1963, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination, Rev. Sołowiej treated about 50 Polish and British guests to lunch at *Ognisko Polskie* club. He received a car as a present. By this time the following organizations were active within the parish: the Women’s Circle, the *Patria* Club and the Rosary Circle. Care

<sup>14</sup> ‘Gmina Polska w Zach. Londynie’, *DPDŻ*, no 86, 12 Apr. 1961.

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 23 Apr. 1961, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from S. Kuniczak, A. Malczewski and M. Chylińska (president of the Ladies’ Circle), Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>17</sup> If a tax-payer signed a deed of covenant (a declaration that they will make a weekly donation to the church in their own parish) the Church could claim back from the tax authorities a proportion of the declared amount equal to the rate of tax paid (up to 64 per cent).

<sup>18</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 1, Sept. 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Siemaszko, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

for old and sick people was provided at nearby hospitals and social life flourished, centred around a cafe open on Sunday. The parish co-operated with the 3 London Scouting Group and the 9 Guides Group *San*. ‘Thanks to our parish priest, Rev. Prelate Sołowiej, scouts, cub scouts (*zuchy*) and guides use the church hall, but it would be worth giving them a separate room, which they could use on a permanent basis’.<sup>20</sup> As it was recorded in the *Biuletyn* in the context of the afore-mentioned crisis connected with the unsuccessful attempt at buying a house, ‘Father Prelate strongly supports our initiative and completely agrees with our view that the Community not only does not want to compete with the parish but also they both complement each other. We must underline that so far there has been perfect harmony between the Community’s Board and the parish’.<sup>21</sup> Some of the Community’s general meetings were held in the church hall next to the church.<sup>22</sup> Members of the Board would also sometimes meet there.

Members of the Community tried not to miss opportunities to make gestures of friendship towards the parish, for instance by sending congratulations to the parish priest on his promotion to the prelature. ‘I am pleased at the mutual understanding and successful co-operation with the Polish Community of West London’, wrote the new prelate in his letter of thanks.<sup>23</sup> Vestments were bought, which were given to the parish priest during the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Community.<sup>24</sup> Father Kazimierz Sołowiej is well remembered by the parish and Community members. Many years later, they reminisce affectionately about him. The forcible phrases he used while delivering sermons, for example ‘until the red star falls!’ – are remembered to this day.<sup>25</sup>

Saint Andrzej Bobola Church fulfilled (and still fulfils) a double role. On the one hand it was a regular parish church for Poles living in the area. On the other hand, it was a centre for the soldiers’ and ‘independence’ emigration. The fact that since the mid-1970s POSK (the Polish Social-Cultural Centre) has been located nearby is also significant. It was there that funds were found to provide stained glass windows devoted to, among others, General Anders, Polish Airmen, the Carpathian Brigade, the 1 Armoured Division, and Saint Kazimierz, one commemorating Rev.

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<sup>20</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 5, 12 Nov. 1965.

<sup>21</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 9, Jan. 1967.

<sup>22</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1969.

<sup>23</sup> Letter dated 22 Feb. 1964 and Rev. K. Sołowiej’s reply, dated 5 Jan. 1965, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>24</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Z. S. Siemaszko.

Sołowiej and numerous commemorative plaques. One of them is devoted to the Polish Community of West London and it was put there after the official dissolution of the Community: 'In memory of all the members who made their contributions in order to support the church, the school, Scouting, POSK and POSKlub in the area. 1959 – 2003.' Next to the church a cemetery was built, where urns containing the ashes of many prominent figures are buried.

The funeral ceremony of General Władysław Anders was also held at the church on 19 May 1970. 'About 8,000 people marched in front of the coffin including elderly people who would some times limp, middle-aged people, elegantly-dressed ladies, grandmothers, youth, children, and Poles from Poland temporarily residing in England. Some of them came straight from work, others managed to get home earlier and put on black clothes for the funeral. The Military Police of the 2 Corps directed the traffic. The coffin was placed low, so that every one could see the General's face for the last time.'<sup>26</sup> So many members of London's Polish Communities marched among the crowd...

### **Father Stanisław Cynar and the 'masses'**

Polish parishes in South London had a slightly different character from Saint Andrzej Bobola. Additional, representative aspects, unconnected with the local context, were less strongly emphasized here. The activities of priests and other parish members were focused on everyday issues, that is, religious life and creating the material bases for its growth. The interest of the Polish Community of South London in Church-related issues was connected with the fulfilment of the general task of co-ordinating different forms of social activity in the area; it is also certain that four parishes situated south of the Thames played a particularly important role in this kind of activity. In 1962 the Clapham parish invited the chairman of the board of the Community of South London to participate in the Parish committee.<sup>27</sup> 'The friendly attitude of parish priests is an invaluable help', it was concluded a year later. 'Not only do they announce our events and are interested in our work, but they also take

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<sup>26</sup> Antoni Murzicz, 'Prywatna relacja z pogrzebu Generała...', *Tydzień Polski*, no 19 (113), 12 May 1973.

<sup>27</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

an active part in it.’<sup>28</sup> Rafał Habielski noted that Polish churches fulfilled not only religious and political functions, but ‘as they had a permanent character, they were also important centres of social life’. They contributed to the reinforcement of group ties and the elected parish councils were the expression of authentic social self-organization.<sup>29</sup>

Parallel to the role of Father Kazimierz Sołowiej in the creation of the parish in west London, the history of the biggest parish in south London and its relations with the Polish Community there would be incomplete without Father Stanisław Cynar, an ‘extraordinary parish priest.’<sup>30</sup> Born on 24 May 1905 in the Rzeszów region of southern Poland, then part of Habsburg Galicia, he was an alumnus of the Jesuits’ school in Chyrów (he later founded *Związek byłych Chyrowiaków na Obczyźnie* – the Association of ex-Chyrów Students in Exile). He was a prelate with an MA in Theology obtained from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

During the war he was the deputy head of the priesthood of the 3 Carpathian Rifles’ Division (*3 Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich*), the chaplain of the 12 Podolian Uhlan’s Regiment (*12 Pułk Ułanów Podolskich*) and of the 14 Great Poland Armoured Brigade (*14 Wielkopolska Brygada Pancerna*). He would write the ‘Carpathians’ (*Karpatczycy*) in any questionnaire under the rubric ‘organization’.<sup>31</sup> In 1946 he arrived in England together with the 14 Great Poland Armoured Brigade and a year later he settled in Clapham and worked as a builder for some time. He was one of the *księża kamienicznicy* (landlord priests) – those Polish priests who had their own financial resources after their arrival in London, and so could swiftly become property owners.<sup>32</sup> Father Cynar ‘bought a small house in Clapham North and conducted the first Polish masses at Saint Mary’s church.’<sup>33</sup>

As early as 1948 he organised a parish in a hall of residence under the auspices of the Society of the Friends of Children and Youth (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci i Młodzieży*, TPDiM). As military camps were disappearing, increasing numbers of Poles settled in this district and the parish started to expand. In 1950, to the immeasurable amazement of the Poles’ English neighbours, he led the first Polish Corpus Christi procession. This was a historic event, because, as it was noted at the

<sup>28</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963.

<sup>29</sup> Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, vol. 3, p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Ksiądz prałat Cynar’, *DPDŻ*, no 114, 14 May 1976, AOE.

<sup>31</sup> Personal questionnaire in AOE.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Z. S. Siemaszko. ‘More businessman than priest’ – interview with B. Laskowski.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Danuta Wardle-Wiśniowiecka.

time, 'for 300 years nobody had seen such a procession on the streets of London.' The same year on 20 December, he called a meeting during which a Temporary Parish Committee was organised.<sup>34</sup>

'Out of concern for young people' on every Saturday he organised alcohol-free parties at Saint Mary's Hall. As a vice-President of the TPDiM, he helped organize a school, a nursery school and an orphanage, and brought the Marian Sodality and Rosary Circle into being. He put forward a plan for buying a church and house in order to organize a Catholic centre. Being aware of the fact that the parishioners' dedication alone was not enough to guarantee the quick fulfilment of the plan, he was the first to organize a campaign of the so-called covenants, which was essential for the development of all Polish parishes in England and Wales.<sup>35</sup>

The Community of South London wrote on many occasions about the life of the Clapham Parish on pages of its magazine. The first *opłatek* (a pre-Christmas party during which Christmas greetings are exchanged) organized by the GPL-P was attended by three priests: Rev. Canon Adam Wróbel, Rev. Dr Jan Jaworski and Rev. Stanisław Czereśniowski.<sup>36</sup> Because of the Corpus Christi procession on 20 June 1965 the Community decided to postpone its excursion: 'So we shall all be able to take part in our solemn religious celebration, the organization of which has become a tradition in our borough.'<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere it was written: 'After the procession a short "fashion show" gave many ladies an opportunity to show and see many inventive and often costly outfits (during the procession they were covered by a veil or a scarf); men were free to chat with their friends then.'<sup>38</sup>

In 1966 it was reported that Father Stanisław Cynar 'was promoted to the position of Gentleman of His Holiness (*Szambelan Jego Świątobliwości*)' and that £25,000 had been collected so far in order to purchase a new church.<sup>39</sup> In an interview, which was published in the *Komunikat* of the GPL-P in the same year, the priest said that when he had taken over the parish in 1948 it had 200 members, but

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<sup>34</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 2, 22 Oct. 1960.

<sup>35</sup> S. Wiśniowiecki, the husband of Danuta, was the author of a brochure about covenants, published thanks to Father Stanisław Cynar: *Polish Benevolent Fund Acting On Behalf Of The Polish Roman Catholic Mission In England And Wales. Ofiary Na Rzecz Kościoła Stwierdzone Prawnym Dokumentem. Wytyczne Dla Komitetu Prawno-Podatkowego*, trans. and ed. S. Wiśniowiecki (London, [1952]). The brochure was later sent to all communities.

<sup>36</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 4 [1962].

<sup>37</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

<sup>38</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>39</sup> 'Między nami', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

now it had 3000. In the beginning there had been no capital, but now the financial base amounted to £30,000: ‘We intend to spend this money on a church, but only when we come across a suitable offer – and this offer will appear, as some English churches are empty and inevitably will have to be closed down. [...] I am pleased to underline that the Clapham parish is characterized by harmonious, unselfish co-operation for the good of the Church.’

Father Stanisław Cynar’s final achievement was the purchase of a club at 211 Balham High Road, SW17, in March 1969 (religious services were also held there on Sundays and religious holidays). This was the beginning of the *Klub Orła Białego* (the White Eagle Club), an important centre, and not only for the activities of the parish or Community of South London. Through the club’s activities the parish received considerable help in paying for its liabilities. In the grounds adjoining the club were built a housing estate for the elderly and a chapel, dedicated to Saint Anthony.<sup>40</sup> In 1973 the Clapham Parish celebrated its silver jubilee. The President of the Republic of Poland in Exile, Stanisław Ostrowski, Bishop Władysław Rubin, the mayor of the Borough of Wandsworth, and some MPs graced the celebrations with their presence. Zygmunt Szkopiak represented the Community of South London.<sup>41</sup>

Father Cynar died suddenly on the night of 18/19 March 1976. The funeral of this ‘extraordinary parish priest’ turned into a large demonstration by Polish London. He was buried in Streatham cemetery ‘among the graves of the members of his parish, who had earlier been summoned to Divine Judgement’, it was written in the account cited above.

The remaining parishes in the area of the Polish Community of South London were smaller and the Community’s relations with them are less well documented (except for the Lewisham Parish, which is dealt with separately). In the second *Komunikat* (22 October 1960), it was noted that the parish priest of the Croydon Parish, Father Walerian Gajecki ‘has a difficult task, as the parish is widely spread around the Croydon church.’ Father Gajecki, a very popular priest, lived in Forest Hill, on the edge of his parish. He went to the church by bus, but also often on foot as he did not have a car. Despite his tiredness, with a friendly smile on his face, he always had time for the parishioners. He also devoted a considerable amount of his time to visiting them in hospitals, staging and directing theatre performances for

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Ksiądz prałat Cynar’.

<sup>41</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973.



children during each national holiday, and teaching religious education at the Saturday schools in Croydon and Crystal Palace.

In 1961, the parishioners appealed for the purchase of a car for the priest.<sup>42</sup> During one of the parties for children organized by the Community of South London in Brixton Town Hall, ‘thanks to the kindness of the Parish Priest Grajecki the school in Crystal Palace gave a guest performance [...]. The auditorium was full.’<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere it was mentioned that the priest was completing the building of a parish hall.<sup>44</sup>

The Putney and Wimbledon parish is only briefly mentioned as ‘the most recent and probably still at the stage of being established’. A Jesuit, Father Józef Cudziński, led it and it had a Parish Committee. The above area, despite being situated south of the river, within the borders of the interest of the Community of South London, clearly gravitated towards the nearby Polish centre in Hammersmith and Fulham. The Community’s ties with the school in Wimbledon were stronger.<sup>45</sup>

In one of the issues of the *Komunikat*, the words of Primate Stefan Wyszyński were quoted: ‘Hold on in London in unity and love’ along with the words of the ‘protector of the Polish Emigration’, Archbishop Józef Gawlina: ‘The ones who have forgotten about the past bitterness, feuds and the discord are experiencing joy and true relief now’. The editorial team replied: ‘We are glad and proud that the Polish Community of South London has been able to put into practice such beautiful ideas for several years now.’<sup>46</sup>

### **Father Adam Wróbel and the ‘classes’**

<sup>42</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P] no 1 [? – the number was difficult to identify], 15 Mar. 1961.

<sup>43</sup> There were over 300 children and 200 adults present, which was considered a surprising success, ‘Na przełomie’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Między nami’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 21, June 1966.

<sup>45</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P] no 2, 22 Oct. 1960. The district of Barnes, also situated south of the Thames, was officially mentioned among the areas under the sphere of activity of the Community of West London, *Do Polaków! Mieszkańców Zachodniego Londynu: Chiswick & Brentford, Acton, Barnes, Hounslow, Hammersmith, Shepherd’s Bush, (i innych dzielnic)*, leaflet in the Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>46</sup> *Komunikat* [GPL-P], no 4, Mar. 1962 [? – the year is uncertain]. Quoted after *Gazeta Niedzielną*, no 18 (675), 29 Apr. 1962.

A recurring motif of this thesis is the interconnected nature of the histories of the Parish in Brockley and Lewisham and the Brockley and Lewisham (or simply Lewisham) Centre. Therefore, it is difficult to focus on those aspects of this community, which are connected only with the parish. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to concentrate on religious issues in this section, and particularly on the life and activity of the first parish priest of the Lewisham Parish, Father Adam Wróbel.

The Lewisham Parish was exceptional for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was the smallest Polish parish in London. Secondly, it was built and maintained thanks to the determination of the priest who for over twenty years commuted from a different part of the city. Rev. Wróbel appeared in South-East London after establishing a parish in Ealing.<sup>47</sup> Lastly, which seems most interesting, the parish was established and functioned for a long time independently of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales.

Father Adam Wróbel was ‘an exceptional man’. One could write a fascinating book about his activities before 1939 or his experiences and activity during the war. ‘He spent a number of years in the army as a chaplain and his approach was not only a strictly religious one. He was a man who was listened to when he said something. He had his own firm opinions. Rev. Wróbel was an exceptional man. I do not hesitate to say that I have never met a priest like him’, testifies Czesław Kwaśniewski.<sup>48</sup>

Adam Andrzej Wróbel was born on 29 October 1895 near Przemyśl.<sup>49</sup> He passed his school-leaving exams in Kraków in 1914, one day before the outbreak of World War I. Conscripted into the Austrian army, he was released thanks to the intervention of the Church authorities. He studied at the seminary at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów. He worked in the Lwów region as a priest, where he built and rebuilt after war-related damage a dormitory, five churches and sundry other buildings. He established co-operatives, savings banks and cereal granaries, farmers’ associations and dairies, as well as a power station. He was a vice-director of the Dairy

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<sup>47</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with C. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>49</sup> Rev. A. Wróbel’s curriculum vitae is reconstructed on the basis of according sources: J. Zaorski, ‘Pożegnanie Ks. Prałata Adama Wróbla’, *DPDŻ*, no 233, 30 Sept. 1993. M. Turło, ‘Śp. Ks prałat Adam Andrzej Wróbel’, *DPDŻ*, no 224, 20 Sept. 1993, *Druk powielony Parafii Najśw. M. Panny Matki kościoła*, Ealing, 3 Oct. 1993 [a copy of a typescript], the *Komunikat Polskiej Misji Katolickiej*, 16 Sept. 1993, ‘Golden Jubilee of Priesthood of Canon A. Wróbel 1919-1969’, AOE.

Association (*Związek Mleczarski*) as well as a member of the Main Co-operative Council (*Główna Rada Spółdzielcza*). He also found time to work with scouts.

He was arrested by the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) as early as September 1939, but was released due to the fear of a strong local counter-reaction. He was arrested again in October, however, and interrogated night after night. Sentenced to death, he waited thirty days for the execution of the sentence, before it was changed by Nikita Khrushchev into ten years of hard labour. He was then moved to Kolyma, going from Kharkiv through Vladivostok (10,000 kilometres in cattle trucks). He stayed there for seventeen months. He conducted conspiratorial Holy Masses in Soviet concentration camps.<sup>50</sup> He conducted his first Mass after his release on 15 February 1942 at Otar, near the Mongolian border (the altar was leant against the building of the local NKVD.) As a chaplain of the Krechowiec Uhlan Regiment (*Ułani Krechowieccy*) he also looked after displaced Polish people in the nearby *kolkhozy* and civilian labour camps known as *posiolki*, delivering food and money donated by soldiers. After evacuation to the Middle East, he founded a primary and a secondary school and prepared 600 children for their First Holy Communion. He was a chaplain of the military hospital in Kanakina, Iraq. From Russia through Persia, Iraq, Egypt and Italy, Rev. Wróbel was founding chapels, which he decorated meticulously. In March 1944 he moved to Italy, where his hospital was a front-line hospital during the battle of Monte Cassino.

In late 1946 the hospital was moved to Diddington in England. Immediately after demobilization and his arrival in London in September 1948, he conducted a Mass in the Brompton Oratory, which he continued to do regularly, until at least 1969. He lived in Kensington, at the very centre of Polish life in London. After twenty-three years of very active work he handed over the Lewisham Parish to Father Antoni Dębski and provided spiritual care to Poles in central London. In exile he fulfilled the function of chaplain of, among others, the Regimental Associations of the Cavalry (*Koła Pułkowe Kawalerii*), Armoured Units (*Broń Pancerna*), Women-Soldiers' Association (*Koło Kobiet Żołnierzy*), the *Krechowiaczy* (former uhlans), and the Polish Community of South London. He belonged to the Association of Ex-Political Prisoners of the Soviet Union (*Stowarzyszenie b. Więźniów Sowieckich Politycznych*), the Polish Teachers' Association in Exile (*Zrzeszenie Nauczycielstwa*

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with D. Wardle-Wiśniowiecka.

*Polskiego Zagranicą*), and was a patron of the song and folk dance company *Karolinka*. After more than seventy years of active priesthood he moved to *Antokol*, a Polish house for the elderly, where he acted locally as a priest until his death. He died on 8 September 1993 in his seventy-fifth year of his priesthood. He was buried in a family grave in Przemyśl.

As with all extraordinary and unconventional individuals, people reacted to him in various ways. For example, he would say to his parishioners those Biblical words: ‘You did not choose me but I chose.’<sup>51</sup> Always well-to-do, he helped the parish and was able to establish it. ‘Father Wróbel could make money everywhere [...] he was also very energetic and this was what other priests from the Catholic Mission were jealous of’, said Elżbieta Piekarska, who had become acquainted with the priest in Iraq and maintained close ties with him. ‘He never cared for other priests’ opinions and actions’ she adds.<sup>52</sup> His sense of individuality and independence stemming from this, most probably caused difficulties in his relations with local Polish Church hierarchy.

The question of the relations between the parish established by Rev. Wróbel and the Polish Catholic Mission is a complicated and opaque one. It may well remain one of the mysteries of Polish London, which its last Mohicans will take to the grave with them. The only sources that we have are oral, which are, to say the least, economical. We know that the parish was independent from the Polish Catholic Mission for a long time.<sup>53</sup> ‘The Mission did not send Wróbel; he arrived himself. They did not quite agree’, recalls Marian Makulski. ‘He wasn’t on good terms with the Polish Catholic Mission’, confirms Zbigniew Jankowski. The leaders of the Mission did not visit the parish for a long time.<sup>54</sup> The first meeting with the then Rector of the PMK officially mentioned in the sources took place during a double jubilee – the twentieth anniversary of the parish and the fiftieth anniversary of Rev. Wróbel’s priesthood in 1969, in the hall of Saint Theresa’s Catholic School. The Rector warmly congratulated Rev. Wróbel ‘and wished him God’s grace and blessing.’<sup>55</sup> However, the presence of Father Staniszewski at the celebration was not equivalent to an official visit to the parish.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with M. Makulski.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews with Z. Piątek and M. Makulski.

<sup>54</sup> Interviews with M. and C. Kwaśniewscy.

<sup>55</sup> C. Wędrowski, ‘Złote gody kapłaństwa ks. prałata Adama Wróbla’, *DPDŻ*, no 138, 10 June 1969.

‘It was only Father Antoni Dębski who invited the then Rector of the Mission, when we bought our first house’, adds Marian Makulski. On Sunday 22 June 1975, Father Prelate Karol Zieliński visited the parish.<sup>56</sup> However, the problem of the ownership of the house remained a bone of contention between the parish and the PMK. The Mission insisted that the house should be made over to them.<sup>57</sup>

Despite those controversies of a personal, political, and property-related nature, the history of the Lewisham parish is an example of self-sacrificing organizational and spiritual work. This little community, despite the fact that members paid voluntary ‘taxes’, was initially unable to support either a priest (£24 a month), or to finance religious education and Polish language teaching at school. Rev. Wróbel came to the rescue. He lived outside the parish and for some period of time did not expect any remuneration, except reimbursement of the cost of his journey to the parish and of the costs connected with visiting the sick in hospitals and private houses. He would receive £1 a week from the Church Committee and he would keep the money from the first collection on a Sunday. The Church Committee paid him separately for teaching religion from the money paid by the pupils’ parents. ‘We would take turns in giving the priest a lift to the church’, and the person transporting the priest would also invite him to lunch.<sup>58</sup>

At the beginning, the English Catholic Church authorities looked on sympathetically, yet in disbelief, at the Polish parish. Nevertheless, they allowed Polish services to be held in their churches. Difficulties started the moment the Saturday school appeared, as there were more and more children and the space for learning was getting smaller and smaller. Moreover, ‘the English Church authorities did not permit the icon of the Częstochowa Mother of God to be hung at the Holy Saviour Church in the centre of Lewisham.’ Left with no choice, the Church Committee together with Rev. Canon Wróbel started talks with the Superior of the Augustinian Fathers and the parish soon moved to Saint Mary Magdalene Church in Brockley.<sup>59</sup>

Every year, parishioners from Brockley took part in the Corpus Christi procession.<sup>60</sup> In late October 1961 the first Covenants were registered, and ‘having

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<sup>56</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with D. Kwaśny.

<sup>58</sup> Interviews with Z. Jankowski and J. M. Makulski.

<sup>59</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

gone through difficult and unpleasant experiences the parish clearly, yet gradually, gained strength, developed and expanded.’<sup>61</sup> At the time, the task of finding and buying a house was given to the Centre, which allowed the Church Committee to concentrate on other issues connected with the everyday life of the parish, such as making a register of parishioners, verifying their addresses, organizing a youth club and a choir.<sup>62</sup> At the beginning of the parish’s existence, dances were a major source of income.<sup>63</sup>

The parish grew. According to the *Kronika*, ‘success and recognition were a motivating force for organizing various *akademie*, diverse in form and content, on the occasion of different religious and lay celebrations. Those meetings of ours and the moving beauty of Polish religious holidays and the accompanying *akademie*, Christmas and Easter parties, First Communion for children, retreats – were based on Polish traditions. We wanted them to accompany us in a foreign environment in order to heal our still intense longing for the home country’.<sup>64</sup>

In 1973 it was reported that ‘Rev. Prelate had not visited parishioners before Christmas. He is already weak. He only managed to visit sixteen houses in which sick and lonely people lived.’<sup>65</sup> This marked the end of a beautiful tradition. Father Adam Wróbel ‘each year before Christmas together with the Chairman of the Church Committee visited sick, retired and lonely parishioners, giving them his best wishes, comforting them and giving each of them either a bottle of fine wine or a cheque for a certain amount, depending on the material status of the person visited. This year the parish priest and the Chairman of the Church Committee [...] is visiting about forty such parishioners’ noted the *Komunikat* in December 1965.<sup>66</sup> A year later Father Adam Wróbel ‘gave away £200’ during his visits.<sup>67</sup>

The last Mass in the parish church conducted by Rev. Wróbel took place on 30 December 1973. The church could not accommodate all the parishioners in attendance.<sup>68</sup> Rev. Adam Wróbel retired and was replaced by Father Antoni Dębski, who had been assistant curate (*wikary*) to Father Stanisław Cynar in the Clapham

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> *Kronika – Materiały...*

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Między nami’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>68</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

parish.<sup>69</sup> The arrival of the new priest marks a new chapter in the history of the parish.

At the beginning of his tenure Father Dębski looked back at the first year in Brockley and Lewisham: ‘on the register of parishioners there are 270 addresses of Polish households and individuals, the main service in Saint Mary Magdalene Church on Sundays and religious holidays was attended by 70-100 believers. During the summer season this number dropped off significantly. Every day in the chapel of the Parish House a Mass is said at 9.00 in the morning, the attendance is very low: one, occasionally a few people. [...] There is a Marian Sodality and a Rosary Circle. The aim of the Sodality is the deepening of religious life on the basis of services devoted to the Mother of God. The monthly meetings are accompanied by the reading of papers and high-level discussions. There are eighteen persons in the Sodality. The parish and social life is managed by the Parish Committee and the Committee of the Centre (*Komitet Ośrodka*)’. The organizations ‘co-operate harmoniously and fruitfully.’ In order to raise money, two bazaars, two parties, one concert and a Christmas party were organized in 1974. From 1974 Rev. Dębski took on the editorship of the parish’s *Wiadomości* (News) and from then on ‘the content is richer, and the texts are more precise thanks to the use of a descriptive style’.

In 1975 an author of the *Kronika* wrote: ‘we can learn a lot from the past. Our Sunday Mass is not convincing for our parishioners; children and youth do not attend it... This could also be said about the *akademie* and parties organized for the whole community. Let us make our Polish ties closer and give our social life a more dynamic character [...]’. He or she added: ‘The time has come that after long “meagre” years we finally possess the necessary financial resources to put into our church, to add splendour to the Masses and other ceremonies’, and announced that on 29 September there would be a ceremony of consecrating vestments and outfits for the altar boys.<sup>70</sup> Marian Makulski reveals the secret of the parish’s increasing wealth: ‘When I resigned in 1975 from the position of the Director of the Centre, Rev. Dębski asked whether I wanted to return to the Parish Committee, as we only have

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<sup>69</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973. Rev. Dr Antoni Dębski SDB, chaplain of the Salesian order, born 26 April 1936, died 30 July 2006. A long-time parish priest of Saint Jan Bosco Parish, also a long-serving chaplain of the Nursing Home *Antokol* near London, chaplain of the Association of Poles in Kent (*Zrzeszenie Polaków Okręgu Kent*), chaplain of the 19 Little Poland Uhlans’ Regiment (*19 Pułk Ułanów Małopolskich*). Buried in Bachowice near Wadowice on 7 September 2006, *DPDŻ*, no 165, 18-20 Aug. 2006, *DPDŻ*, no 170, 25-27 Aug. 2006 and *DPDŻ*, no 175, 1-3 Sept. 2006, AOE.

<sup>70</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

thirty covenants. I was surprised because I left forty-eight of them. We both started to act [...] and managed to increase the number from thirty to 140. For several years we were getting five or six thousand pounds. After some time a tax inspector realized that something was wrong and we were punished, but we only had to pay £1400.’<sup>71</sup>

In this way the *sacrum* meets the *profanum*...

### **‘Pyjamas for a sick person’ – types of self-help**

In a leaflet which appeared in November 1959 to mark the establishment of the GPZL, entitled *Do Polaków!* (To Poles!), the tasks of the ‘civic self-help’ were understood in the following ways: organizing ‘care for the elderly and those unable to work, spreading information about Polish commercial and industrial enterprises, organizing local groups for carrying out various projects, employment and property-renting mediation, counselling and giving references (if necessary)’. The Christmas greetings published in the *Biuletyn* in 1973 contained the following declaration: ‘We constitute a close-knit group of citizens’. Members of the Community of South London exchanged ‘special greetings so that, just like in the Community, all Poles regardless of their citizenship, country of residence, political views, creed, profession, education, or professional position, would be real brothers ready to help each other, enjoy mutual cordiality and solidarity living in one large common Polish family.’<sup>72</sup> During the Annual Meeting of the Parish Committee and the Lewisham Centre on 23 February 1974, it was declared that plans for the future would include expanding charitable activities (in addition to expanding covenant activities).<sup>73</sup>

Polish people in exile, most of whom went through the experience of concentration camps, Soviet labour camps, displacement, misery and war, were necessarily particularly sensitive to the issue of mutual support in a foreign environment. The problem of creating a system of support for their fellow Poles in need was a recurrent theme during the meetings of the authorities of the Community of West London. It needs to be emphasized at the beginning that the scale of self-help was limited on both sides of the river. It appeared that there was no need for it

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

<sup>72</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>73</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*...



because of the lack of appropriate cases. Perhaps other organizations (combatant, job-related, regional) took responsibility for this kind of activity. The *Komunikat* wrote about a 'Meeting for the Lonely', which took place at the *Ognisko* club: 'I cannot overlook the fact that I met many members of the Community among the participants, so I was not alone.' An appeal was then published which stated that the Community of South London should take an interest in lonely people.<sup>74</sup>

Some examples of self-help, found among the documents connected with the activities of the Communities, provide an interesting perspective for looking at the everyday life of Poles in London in the 1960s and 1970s.

The beginnings are always ambitious. It seems that in the 'heroic' period of the organization of the GPZL its founders hoped that the Community would have a local, informal character of a self-government, which would, nevertheless, enjoy authority. The tasks, which they were to fulfil, included also the difficult role of arbiter of disputes between Poles. There was an assumption that it was a matter of honour not to expose embarrassing conflicts in public. The wider Polish community, if not all of it, then at least the part which is active in *Gmina*, should project a proud image of unity in front of the world, and particularly in front of the British authorities.

'We have a statutory duty to help our members', wrote to the barrister Stanisław Kuniczak, who was engaged in a complicated conflict between the tenant, Władysław Chorzewski and the landlady, Antonina Skrzat. Unfortunately, Mrs Skrzat disregarded the formal intervention by the Community Director, Colonel Kuniczak, who, having exposed himself to letters 'of a very brusque content', eventually had to regard the conflict as a matter for Mrs Skrzat's conscience.<sup>75</sup> The long-term plans for self-government quickly clashed with reality. In future, the activists of the GPZL would not get engaged to such an extent in people's problems, which cannot be solved by an authority that is not supported by the coercive power of a proper institution.

As mentioned earlier, it is beyond doubt that the GPZL treated the task of self-help seriously and that it even sought opportunities to provide such assistance. During a Board meeting in 1964 it was reported: 'Among the Community's various activities there is also active social welfare, not on a large scale so far' with three people benefiting from it. 'The aim of it is first of all to provide moral support,

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<sup>74</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>75</sup> Letter dated 30 Sept. 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

especially to the elderly members of the Community, in the form of visiting the lonely and giving them Christmas presents.<sup>76</sup> Not surprisingly, Christmas was also the time when providing help was a matter of especial concern.<sup>77</sup>

The *Koło Pań* (Ladies' Circle), inevitably, played its part in self-help. On 3 January 1973 'Mrs Ślepokóra reported visiting Mr [Tadeusz?] Okoń, for whom she bought pyjamas on behalf of the Circle. The visited person was glad of the gift and the visit. The visit gave also an opportunity to Mrs Ślepokóra to talk to a sick fellow-Pole from Ealing, asking her if she needed any help'. We also know that on 14 February during the Ladies' Circle meeting it was decided to start a *Klub Samotnych* (Lonely Persons' Club)<sup>78</sup>. The charity section of the Community co-operated in 'the closest possible way' with the parish of Saint Andrzej Bobola.<sup>79</sup> 'On every Saturday starting from 5 January [1972] in the church hall, a day room for lonely people is open from three in the afternoon until seven in the evening. Ladies from our Circle are on duty there making tea or coffee for guests. Unfortunately, the attendance is very low'.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps it is possible to surmise that this was no reason to be upset?

It needs to be emphasized here that paying fees was a problem for the elderly members of the Communities. During the Annual Meeting on 21 April 1963 the Community of South London made the decision that 'all the members who received benefit from the Assistance Board would be exempted from paying fees.'<sup>81</sup> Aid came in various forms. The following excerpt comes from Stefan Korgul's letter to the Council of the GPL-P, dated 3 March 1971: 'I am truly grateful for the gesture which the Council has made towards me of paying my television licence, which I had been paying so far from my own savings and which I have been forced to stop paying, due to my current poor financial situation [...] It was a genuinely moving piece of news for me, especially because leading a lonely life entails not being able to have a conversation with anybody and television brings a bit of life into this state, so that one does not feel so alone any longer [...].'<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 4, Dec. 1964.

<sup>77</sup> Community Board minutes, 20 Jan. 1963, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>78</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 13, March 1968.

<sup>79</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1970.

<sup>80</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 21, Apr. 1972.

<sup>81</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 9, June 1963.

<sup>82</sup> *GPL-P. Kronika*, 1965-73, vol. 2. GPL-P Archives 1470/Rps/9/b

Members of the Communities would also receive condolences when their loved ones died.<sup>83</sup>

The Communities were also involved in the aid provided by central organizations of the emigration. ‘Social Welfare for Polish Soldiers (*Opieka Społeczna nad Żołnierzami Polskimi*) asked the Community [of West London] to give them the names of the ex-soldiers who were living in harsh conditions and needed help.’ The matter was looked into.<sup>84</sup>

Aid for people in the home country, which was also centrally organized, belonged to a separate category: ‘To help flood victims in Poland £7, 16 s. has been collected so far’, it was announced during the Community Board meeting of the GPZL on 15 September 1960. The Committee for Aid to Compatriots in the Home Country (*Komitet Pomocy Rodakom w Kraju*) ‘is deeply grateful for the news about the collection of clothes and money for the benefit of flood victims. Delivering clothes is not of immediate urgency’, added the secretary of the Committee, Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, ‘as each day a dozen or so packages are being sent and we still have some supplies left.’<sup>85</sup> ‘It is our duty to deliver aid to the flood-stricken in Poland’, it was emphasized. Getting involved in the action of the Committee for Aid to Compatriots in the Home Country, ‘in order to facilitate the collection of clothes or money for our fellow-Poles, we are organizing our own collection point at 31 Duke’s Avenue, W4’.<sup>86</sup> Members of the Communities were able to show great dedication in this matter. Floods sometimes used to affect Poland (as they still do) and the aid was undoubtedly extremely valuable to the victims – if, of course, it reached them at all.

It is worth adding here that it is difficult to find either in the documents relating to the Communities or in the activists’ statements any reference to the events which shaped the history of Poles in the home country, that is the ‘Polish months’: March 1968, December 1976 or June 1976. Only the negative consequences of the elements provoked some reaction.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Letter from 22 December 1961, Archives of GPZL; *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>84</sup> Community Board minutes, 20 Feb. 1963, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>85</sup> Letters from 15 Sept. 1960 and 8 Oct. 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>86</sup> *Komunikat* [GLP-L], no 5, Aug. 1960.

<sup>87</sup> In 1981 the Community of South London donated £300 ‘in aid of the country.’ However, it is not known what specifically this money was spent on in this exceptionally important year for Poland. GPL-P Archives, 1470/Rps/3.

Continuing and widening the theme of aid, it can be added that the Lewisham Parish donated £25 to earthquake-victims in Turkey. The *Kronika* noted: ‘We received a beautiful letter of gratitude from the Turkish Embassy.’<sup>88</sup> It was in this Community that self-help and other forms of charitable activities developed the most, which was related to the strongly developed sense of Christian moral duty. The Mission Section (*Sekcja Misyjna*) of the parish ‘from the beginning of its existence’ (the exact date is unknown) until 1973 collected £2043.<sup>89</sup> The director of the section, A. Góral, ‘quietly, without any publicity and in different ways (selling brochures, books etc.) scraped together some money sending Catholic missions into different parts of the world’.<sup>90</sup>

A totally unique initiative appeared in the Polish Community in Lewisham, namely a Zero-Interest Self-Help Fund (*Bezprocentowa Kasa Samopomocy*): ‘the only one in our emigration’.<sup>91</sup> During one of the Centre meetings, Father Adam Wróbel moved the proposal to create the Fund ‘by suggesting individual contributions’ and so that the funds collected for the house ‘would not lie idle.’<sup>92</sup> The Statute was approved during the Centre’s Committee meeting on 13 March 1964. The value of a contribution was £1 and the possibility to withdraw from the commitment after five years was guaranteed. Members of the Fund were entitled to take out a loan with ‘all deserving cases being taken into account.’<sup>93</sup>

The Church Committee gave the initial capital – £200 – and the first loan of £100 was paid out towards the end of 1964. A one-off self-taxation of the parishioners brought in £420.<sup>94</sup> The priest’s idea turned out to be very useful; within the first eighteen months eight parishioners benefited from loans amounting to £1250.<sup>95</sup> In June 1966 one could read that ‘the Self-Help of the Centre of Brockley and Lewisham lent money amounting to £700’<sup>96</sup>, and in 1970 it was concluded that ‘the repayment of loans, except for a few occasional cases, is excellent and does not create any problems for the Committee’. At this point the Fund’s capital amounted to

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<sup>88</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>92</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 22, Sept. 1966.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Kasa samopomocy Polskiego Ośrodka Brockley-Lewisham’, edited by Z. Szkopiak, a copy of a four-page typescript, Archives of Z. Jankowski.

<sup>94</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>95</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 22, Sept. 1966.

<sup>96</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 21, June 1966.

£1893 (compared to the total disposable income of the parish and Centre of £3000), which brought the comment: ‘it is too little to buy a house, but the funds do not lie idle.’<sup>97</sup>

By the end of 1970 the Fund had aided forty-five parishioners, to the sum of £6775. It had 79 members, whose contributions amounted to £649. The Fund had £2235 worth of assets.<sup>98</sup> Elsewhere one can read that ‘throughout the period of its activity the Committee of the Polish Centre Lewisham provided aid to fifty members to the total sum of £7560.’<sup>99</sup> The significance of the Fund decreased after the Centre bought its house. It is known that in 1974 ‘due to the fact that the Centre was burdened with the necessity to pay a mortgage it was voted through, with one abstention, that the point in the statute of the Self-Help Fund concerning the withdrawal of one’s contribution would be changed.’<sup>100</sup> The financial support offered was of great significance to some parishioners. For example, in 1966 in the *Kronika Towarzyska* (Gossip Column) of the South London *Komunikat* we read: ‘Thanks to the loan from the Brockley Self-Help Fund, Mrs H. Wodarzowa is buying a house in Norwood.’<sup>101</sup>

The second example of charitable activity in Lewisham and Brockley that is worthy of attention is the [Women’s] Charity Section (*Sekcja Charytatywne*), which started its activity in the mid-1970s. The first mention of it can be found in the *Kronika* for 1975: ‘On 26 April at the initiative of the Women’s Charity Section, a pleasant meeting was organized with tea, chatting and other attractions for the oldest generation of parishioners. For the lonely, sick, and often infirm old people the meeting was a moving experience and they are looking forward to the next one.’ It was also at this section’s initiative and with the financial support of the Parish Committee that at Christmas 1966, ‘packages were organised for the elderly and the sick in the parish.’ Over thirty were distributed.<sup>102</sup>

The underlying assumption behind the establishment of the Charity Section was that many elderly and sick people living within the parish’s borders needed more or less regular help. However, the people who were intended to receive help most

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<sup>97</sup> Z. Szkopiak and M. Turło, ‘Ośrodek Lewisham’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 35, March 1970.

<sup>98</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>99</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>100</sup> *Kronika – Materiały...*

<sup>101</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 22, Sept. 1966.

<sup>102</sup> *Kronika – Materiały.*

frequently claimed that they did not need it.<sup>103</sup> The founder of the section was Seweryna (Wera) Oberlajtner,<sup>104</sup> but the first director remained Halina Krayser. Not more than eight to ten women were active at any one time. At the beginning of the section's existence it helped in obtaining 'attendance allowances', which people in need of additional care were entitled to receive from the British authorities. Many older Poles had never been able to speak English adequately, or else were no longer able to speak it intelligibly, a fact of which they were not always fully aware. Many of them did not see or hear very well. They needed assistance in dealing with doctors or the authorities, but also in washing, cleaning, shopping or preparing meals. Annual parties for the elderly were organized: this included a Christmas party for the senior members with Santa Claus handing out presents and an Easter party, at which Easter eggs, having been blessed by the priest, were shared.

The parish would always help the section and Father Antoni Dębski introduced a contemplative, humble atmosphere into its work. In 1983 a *Memorandum* was formulated, effectively an internal constitution of the section, specifying its independence within the parish. The Charity Section had its own bank account and a Treasurer, which differentiated it from similar initiatives active in other parishes, for example in Croydon and Crystal Palace. However, it was based on the parishioners' donations. The patrons of the section were the parish priests and the basis of its activity was the Christian principle of helping one's neighbour.

## Conclusion

Giving émigrés the opportunity to engage in religious practices in their own language and within their own religious organization (Polish parishes of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales) was, along with bringing up youth, one of the most important and undisputed tasks for Polish social activity in exile. It is not surprising, therefore, that Polish parishes and churches were established where Polish

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with J. Karpowicz.

<sup>104</sup> S. Oberleitner, née Stanisławska, was deported to USSR during the Second World War. Later she was a student of the Young Volunteers School (*Szkoła Młodszych Ochotniczek*, SMO), mentioned in chapter 4 above. Interview with J. Karpowicz. The following information comes from the same source.

settlements were taking root. The London Communities immediately established relations with basic church organizations and their leaders: parish priests.

For the vast majority of 'ordinary émigrés', the model of experiencing Polishness based on Roman Catholicism was the only comprehensible and available one, regardless of individuals' true involvement in the spiritual life of the Church. In this respect, the lives of the Communities functioned similarly to the smallest unit of the 'parallel state' in exile – local self-government. It was a state that respected religious freedom, yet there was one dominant, official religion in it. This contrasted with the life of Polish society in 'People's Poland', where the communist authorities were in permanent conflict with the Church and freedom of religion was constantly questioned.

It is important to make a connection between the democratic ethos of the *Gmina*, self-help activity and relations with the Roman Catholic Church – relations that are usually hierarchical. Perhaps it was because the Lewisham Centre and Father Wróbel enjoyed rather 'egalitarian' relations that conflict arose between him and the PMK? All the local priests were very important people in their social environment, not only in their districts, but also in the wider Polish émigré community in London, or even in the United Kingdom. They were treated with demonstrative respect. In the three cases described above, the strong individuality and organizational skills that these priests possessed contributed mightily to the laying of the foundations for a life in emigration that was not limited to the fulfilment of religious needs, but which also catered for more universal ones. This was the way these priests understood their wider social roles, as heirs to the model that they knew from their nation's history, both at home and in exile.

## 8.

**Sports clubs and games**

The communities engaged strongly and willingly in sport. As a form of activity attractive for all (children, young people, adults), combining advantage and pleasure ('sound mind in a sound body', *mens sana in corpore sano*) – in a light, entertaining way it became at the same time a way of cultivating the national tradition for Polish Communities. The democratic ethos of sporting events is a perfect presentation of the egalitarian features of the *gmina*. In this chapter I shall reconstruct the sports activity of the Communities, the amount of help given to sports teams and the atmosphere that accompanied sports events. In the final sub-chapter the question of the relationship between sport and politics will be posed.

**Games, games...**

From 1962 onwards, the Community of South London organized annual Sports Games for Polish Youth (*Igrzyska Sportowe Młodzieży Polskiej*). This may have been a rather elevated name for one-day Games (once it was even called the Olympic Games!),<sup>1</sup> but according to the sources these Games were an extremely popular event – at which many people participated and spectated. For example, the 1962 Games, 'despite the bad weather, can be rated as one of the most successful events of the Community of South London. 400 people took an active or passive part in the event.'<sup>2</sup>

The first Games took place on 15 July 1962 at the Ladywell Recreation Grounds. Apart from athletics (there were 60-, 70-, 100- and 400-metre sprints) the most emotive were football matches held for the Challenge Cup (funded by the *Gmina*) between the Adam Mickiewicz School from Brockley, and the Bolesław Chrobry School from Camberwell. The first victors were the pupils from Brockley, who won 3:1.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "‘Olimpiada’ w południowym Londynie", *DPDŻ*, no 185, 5 Aug. 1965.

<sup>2</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 6, September 1962. Cf. *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>3</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 6, Sept. 1962.



Apart from sporting competitions there were also ‘sideshows, such as the sack race, egg and spoon race, children’s races, etc. [...]. There were also showpiece fathers’ high jumps and (not so) long jumps. Many of the young generation were pleased by a display of riding a bike backwards, without holding the handlebars and, as it seems, without using pedals either, when it was performed *ad hoc*, with considerable grace and bravado by the editor of *Fotorama*, Mr E. Wojtczak as well as a “dads” 100-metre run (with overtaking) which was won “hands down” by Mr Florkiewicz’. Prizes for adults in the form of lollipops provoked general mirth. In the athletic competitions the Adam Mickiewicz school was the winner. Prizes were funded by the GPL-P and the Adam Mickiewicz school. Rev. Adam Wróbel presented all the awards.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the fathers of the boys who fought for the Challenge Cup would regularly play ‘old boys’ matches. Thus, before the first Games this advertisement appeared in the *Komunikat*: ‘A challenge. A group of “old boys” from Brockley and Lewisham throw down the gauntlet to “old boys” from South-West London for a fierce combat over “goals” on the football pitch. Place, time and weapons shall be provided by the seconds from the Community Council, to whom the application should be sent.’<sup>5</sup> Later, however, the match entered the Games programme for good.

The first seniors’ match was described by Edward Wojtczak in the *Dziennik Polski*: ‘The match can be undoubtedly rated as an historic one, due both to the fact that it was the first event of that type and also because most of the players know the interwar history of Poland from first hand experience. The fact is also that players from both teams, after adding up their combined ages, could organize their own Millennium celebrations. [...] Just as during performances by [the dance group] *Mazowsze*, the spectators warmly applauded the fantastic diversity of players’ sportswear from both teams. [...] The event should have been considered a great success if only due to the fact that organizers managed to attract onto the playground a regulation number of twenty two players (some of them yielded to persuasion only after finding out that there was a priest and a doctor in the audience: Rev. Canon. Wróbel and Mrs Nowiak, the doctor). [...] After a few minutes of play, the great fitness of both teams could be observed. It was proved by the fact that for the whole duration of the match on average there were only three players from each team lying

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

on the ground. [...] Surely, due to the lack of touch lines, the spectators were often taken as witnesses, or a vote for and against whether a ball was out of touch was held, in accordance with the current attitude of the émigré community.’<sup>6</sup> The match finished as a 1:1 draw.

The Games became important and popular enough to extend their range to the whole of South London: Brockley, Camberwell, Crystal Palace, Wimbledon. For the third Games in 1964 the team from Wimbledon could not come, but Crystal Palace and Croydon sent a nine-member fencing team (from the Scout/Guide Fencing Circle *Lilia* (Lily) KPH Crystal Palace and Croydon) under the supervision of S. Mazowiecki. ‘It was the first fencing show at our Games and it delighted and provoked the applause of the participants’. From that moment *Lilia* systematically added variety to the Games with fencing shows.<sup>7</sup> Also for the first time, that year a ladies’ volleyball match was played. ‘It turned out, however, that volleyball is too popular a sport; everybody played volleyball: men and women, as well as young people.’<sup>8</sup> This sport became a permanent element of the games. Following the sportsmen’s example the ladies also competed in teams of Brockley versus Camberwell.<sup>9</sup> A very emotive match had to be the one for the Community Cup in 1964 – it took place in pouring rain (refereed by W. Robinson ‘under an umbrella’) and it finished at 9:0 for the school from Camberwell, ‘despite a fierce defence on the part of Brockley’<sup>10</sup>

Every year during the Games, apart from medal-winning events for children and young people (100-metre runs in the categories of four to seven years olds, boys of ten to thirteen years of age, and over thirteen years of age; 400-metre runs for boys, one-mile runs;<sup>11</sup> 60- and 100-metre sprints for girls) – the sports combat of adults took place at the same time. ‘Also all the mums ran, but only 60-metre races [...] they were applauded and noisily cheered by their children, to general joy.’<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> E. Wojtczak, “‘Starzy chłopcy’ na boisku’, *DPDŻ*, no 186, 6 Aug. 1962. This event seems to be an interesting aside concerning the democratic ethos of the *Gmina* – voting on what is really a referee’s decision!

<sup>7</sup> *Lilia* organized also a fencing competition (*mistrzostwa szermiercze*). We know that the second one took a place in the Parish House in Croydon and Crystal Palace (6 Oliver Grove) on 5-7 January 1968. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 27, Sept. 1967.

<sup>8</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 14, Sept. 1964.

<sup>9</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965

<sup>10</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 14, Sept. 1964.

<sup>11</sup> “‘Olimpiada’ w południowym Londynie’, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> ‘Czwarte doroczne Igrzyska Sportowe’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

During the Games of 1965, it so happened that the adult games caused a general cheerfulness and took so much of the attention of the commentators that they did not have time to note the surnames of the children who were the winners of some events: 'Running in the sack races. Unfortunately the results of the children's races were impossible to obtain. We only have the results of the parents' race. In the male event the winner without difficulty was Mr Żarków, and in the female event, Mrs Góral in an exciting photo-finish. Egg and spoon races. There were a few children's races, but we did not manage to catch all winners at the finish, so we apologize in advance to those nice competitors whose family names are not listed, which we of course greatly regret. The extent to which these young competitors were actually excited about their wins is shown by the fact that Mrs Zapletal had a lot of trouble with rounding up the winners to award them the prizes of a beautiful eagle, or give them sweets', explained the *Komunikat*.<sup>13</sup>

The members of the teams that played for the Challenge Cup were, however, noted. The match was won by the pupils from Camberwell 8:0. A photograph from the Cup award ceremony was published in the *Tydzień Polski* on 28 July 1965.<sup>14</sup>

The Millennium Games, organized on 3 July 1966 by the Millennium Committee and the Saturday schools on Tooting Bec Common Sporting Ground were to be particular 'because of their specific character'. However we do not know what was the nature of this 'specific character'. According to some sources those Games did not differ in any way from others, maybe apart from the weather as 'for the first time in four years they were held during beautiful, sunny weather' and the fact that they were considered 'more festive as they [took place] in the year of the millennium.'<sup>15</sup> The organization of the games was, as usual, very careful, detailed and meticulously prepared. Apart from numerous members of the management and the many referees, there were people responsible for medical care, prizes, sports equipment, dancing and singing, fencing, decoration, selling programmes, information, ladies' events, insurance for competitors, co-ordination, press- and photographic documentation.

The Games, as an annual event, organized with great effort by many activists and members of the community, could attract also unorganized people: 'we wish to kindly thank three anonymous people (two gentlemen and one lady), who are not

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Photography taken by A. Grochowski

<sup>15</sup> 'Igrzyska sportowe', *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 22, Sept. 1966.

members of the Community and still, on their own initiative, devotedly performed different supporting and maintenance works.’<sup>16</sup> There were also attempts to set these games in the wider émigré sports life: for the seventh Games in 1968, the Board of the Polish Sports Clubs (ZPKS, *Zarząd Polskich Klubów Sportowych*) provided special diplomas free of charge.<sup>17</sup>

The Games were always successful, whatever the weather, and thanks to the fantastic atmosphere among spectators and competitors who left themselves room to manoeuvre and improvise: ‘The common and voluntary effort of people of goodwill made it possible to meet, offer wholesome (*godziwy*) entertainment for children and adults and an inexhaustible source of topics for comment and discussion for many weeks to come.’<sup>18</sup> The Games took place annually for many years, enriching the fixed repertoire of events with still new ideas. We know that in 1977 ‘the Games for children were resumed’, at the Tooting Bec Athletic Track stadium.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Młodzi Sports Club and Grunwald Football Club***

The Games in 1967 took place at the Tooting Bec stadium with a match between *Młodzi Sports Club*, ‘this year’s finalist of the Polish Championships in the United Kingdom and *Grunwald FC*, a promising team of seventeen-year olds.’ *Grunwald* won 7:5: ‘The modest manager of *Grunwald*, Mr B. Zagórski, explained that *Młodzi* were playing below strength.’<sup>20</sup> This report concerns two football teams well known in Polish London, which trained and played on the territory of the Community of South London. In the United Kingdom – the homeland of football – there were many Polish football teams with beautifully sounding Polish names: *Gopło* Halifax, *Pogoń* Birmingham, *Gryf* Slough, and (the very famous) *Błyskawica* Swindon among others.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 31, Dec. 1968.

<sup>18</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 6, Sept. 1962.

<sup>19</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976; *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 52, June 1977. Under the *Gmina*’s protection, bridge and chess clubs were also active. From the twentieth anniversary of Community onwards a chess competition was organized for the *Gmina*’s Challenge Cup. Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>20</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 26, Sept. 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Edmund Ogłaza.

One of the oldest –*Młodzi* Sport Club – came into existence as early as 1950, and it started to co-operate with the Community from the moment of its registration. ‘We can inform with pleasure about the fact that our youth section made contact with the old and distinguished (now existing for twelve years), *Młodzi* Sports Club, whose seat is located in a newly opened office in 50 Nightingale Lane, South Clapham. *Młodzi* SC start a sub junior section (*młodzicy*), for the time being only volleyball and ping-pong are taken into account. A sports supervisor for the youngest competitors from *Młodzi* SC is our member of the Board, Mr J. Nowiak.’<sup>22</sup>

The Community helped the club in a number of ways. The *Komunikat* urged new sportsmen and women to join: ‘Attention Parents! – Enrol your children to *Młodzi* SC – minimal fees’<sup>23</sup>, ‘Ping-pong players! Enrol in *Młodzi* SC’.<sup>24</sup> It announced club meetings: ‘the aim of the meeting: organization of a Sports Section depending on the interest of young people.’<sup>25</sup> It organized balls and dances, the income from which was destined for the activity of the team: on 29 September 1962 in Saint Mary’s Hall, Clapham Common;<sup>26</sup> ‘within the framework of co-operation between Polish organizations in South London, the GPL-P and *Młodzi* SC organized a joint dance’<sup>27</sup>, sports balls in 1964 and 1965,<sup>28</sup> and a spring ball on 22 June 1968.<sup>29</sup>

They also met on other occasions. At the beginning of February 1965, Rev. J. Szczepanik exchanged Christmas greetings with the members of *Młodzi* SC. The delegates of the Board of the Polish Sports Clubs Association (ZPKS): Tadeusz Krasoń (secretary), Ludwik Słomnicki (treasurer) and Jerzy Nowiak (chairman of the ZPKS Audit Committee) gave speeches.<sup>30</sup> The Association certainly supported the Club financially, but the *Gmina* itself also directly financed sportsmen. In the report of 1967 £127, 10 s. was entered ‘for sports’.<sup>31</sup> ‘From the time when the Community started its activity it has financially supported Polish organizations in South London’

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<sup>22</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>25</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 6, Sept. 1962.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>28</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 16, Mar. 1965.

<sup>29</sup> Together with *Grunwald* FC, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 29, June 1968.

<sup>30</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 16, March 1965. More about the Zarząd Polskich Klubów Sportowych (ZPKS) in Szwagrzak, *Polskie emigracyjne organizacje młodzieżowe*.

<sup>31</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, Mar. 1968.

– this was the general sense of a summary for the twentieth anniversary of the organization's existence. A total of £196 had been given to clubs.<sup>32</sup>

Members of the GPL-P supported *Młodzi* SC and followed the results of matches in the *Komunikat*: 'playing under the name *Polonia*, the footballers of *Młodzi* SC have had a very good winter season in the London Sunday Football League. They have won the Junior Cup – one of the league's cups. [...] In the matches of the seniors [of the Polish league] *Młodzi* SC have entered about forty players. The fact that they easily won the first two matches of the championship showed the team's excellent form. *Młodzi* have defeated *Grunwald* FC, which played in the senior event for the first time, by the wide margin of 6:0, and in the next match have won equally easily with *Varsovia II*: 4:1. Both the defence and support of the *Młodzi* team did an excellent job, showing good ball control. Maliński has already scored three goals, Kasza two, and Galiszewski, Jakubiec and Buczyński one each. On the basis of these first matches *Młodzi* SC is a favourite to become the champion of the group and should even reach the final.'<sup>33</sup>

The second team that the Community took care of was the younger *Grunwald* FC, in which some of the sons of GPL-P activists played.<sup>34</sup> The *Komunikat* joyfully reported the team's every success. Playing in the fourth division of the Southern Area Sunday League the team played fourteen matches in the season 1967/68, winning all of them (scoring 80 goals and conceding just nine). The team's asset was a 'goalscoring attack' (*bramkostrzelny napad*) and 'not much worse defenders'.<sup>35</sup> We also know that in the following season (1968/69) *Grunwald* played twenty-four matches, winning twenty (scoring 113 goals and conceding 29).<sup>36</sup>

'At the teams' party in Battersea Town Hall they were promoted to division three (after winning the championship of division four) and they were awarded a highly valued certificate for the fairest play. Every player received a beautiful badge, and the club, the championship trophy and a nice looking statuette of a footballer. *Grunwald* is the only Polish sports club in the Southern Area Sunday Football Club [SASL] and it is a real honour that a Polish team was awarded the Sportsman's

<sup>32</sup> Tadeusz Walczak, '20 lat GPL-P', *GPL-P Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

<sup>33</sup> 'Piłkarze KS "Młodzi" w dobrej formie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 33, June 1969.

<sup>34</sup> The GPL-P General Meeting of 30 April 1967 voted aid for *Grunwald* team, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>35</sup> The patrons of club were Bronisław Zagórski and Aleksander Dyki, 'Nowe sukcesy KS "Grunwald"', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 32, March 1969.

<sup>36</sup> 'Podwójne trofea KS "Grunwald"', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 33, June 1969.

Certificate in the homeland of football. During the awarding ceremony the manager of *Grunwald*, Mr B. Zagórski, received congratulations on behalf of the Polish Community of South London from the member of the Council Mr A. Grochowski.<sup>37</sup> In 1969/1970 *Grunwald* FC was promoted to division one: 'The third season in SASL and the third promotion.'<sup>38</sup>

Interest and considerable assistance of the Community for clubs was not only an expression of the usual excitement for sports but was also another occasion to manifest and continue national and patriotic traditions in an attractive and accessible way – without pomp and bombast. And with such benefit for the young! 'The local press informs that *Grunwald* has the best defence in the whole league of South London. Lately *Grunwald* footballers played in new colours: black shorts and shirts in black and orange stripes. They are the colour of Polish tank troops, a generous gift of the Friends Circle of the 1 Armoured Regiment (*Koło Koleżeńskie 1 Pułku Pancernego*). The Circle, thanks to the initiative of Mr Waław Borkowski, a member of the Polish Community of South London, has offered care and help in the form of equipment to the club. *Grunwald* players all appeared at the Christmas meeting of the Circle of the 1 Armoured Regiment, where everyone received a beautifully illustrated copy of the history of this famous regiment of the legendary division of General Maczek. The boys read about their fathers', uncles' and guardians' deeds with interest. The President of the Circle in a beautiful speech stressed that the heritage of the Polish youth in exile should be the great Polish traditions of the Polish armed forces which fought during the last war in western Europe.'<sup>39</sup>

*Grunwald* regularly took part in the Championships for the General Anders Cup (*Mistrzostwa o Puchar Generata Andersa*). These games were held, in different periods, under the patronage of General Władysław Anders (who sometimes graced the matches with his presence), General Kazimierz Głabisz and General Stanisław Kopański. 'During the match on 17 May [1970] where there appeared members of the Community Council with their families and a circle of the club's supporters, they commemorated the deceased General Anders with a minute's silence.'<sup>40</sup> In these games, *Młodzi* SC obviously also took part: 'In May, when the English football

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 36, June 1970.

<sup>39</sup> 'Kronika Młodzieżowa', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 32, Mar. 1969.

<sup>40</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 36, June 1970.

season ends, Polish sports clubs in the United Kingdom start annual matches for the General Anders Cup. *Młodzi* SC with the twenty years tradition of sound successes and the much younger *Grunwald*, where our members' sons play, represented South London. Both clubs get on well with each other, organize common parties, and play in different English leagues, they do not suffer from excessive competitiveness. The *Grunwald* players greatly respect their older colleagues [...]. In the Polish championship, *Młodzi* won one match after another and reached the final. As they have already won the Cup twice before, in the event of winning it again they would keep it. Unfortunately the ball is round and the opponents had apparently two or three good players, conditions were more favourable for "the Northern team", so that they had to be happy with the title of runners-up.'

*Grunwald* did worse, although actually they did not lose any match in the championship. In the group games *Grunwald* beat *Varsovia II* (London) 3:2 and 3:0 and drew with *Gwiazda Gdyni* 2:2 and 3:3. But *Gwiazda Gdyni* won the group on goal difference. In the quarter-final for the consolation cup played at Amersham, *Grunwald* drew with the local *Karpatczycy* 6:6. Regulations prescribed three penalty kicks for each team; *Grunwald* missed one and *Karpatczycy* used all three penalties.'<sup>41</sup>

The names of the teams playing for the General Anders Cup clearly prove the strength of the sport in its patriotic dimension. The teams supported by the Community of South London belonged to the top émigré groups. Similarly, the afore-mentioned *Varsovia* – connected with the GPZL – did not fall behind: 'The Polish Championships in 1969 are inasmuch difficult for *Grunwald* as the average age of players is only nineteen, and matches in the seniors' events are played with such experienced teams as *Młodzi* SC and *Varsovia*. After the first defeat by the *Młodzi* team the players from *Grunwald* won their next match 5:3 against *Varsovia II*.'<sup>42</sup> This rendition of scores and rivalry have some significance for our understanding of relations between the London Communities. The teams supported by the Communities played the matches during émigré competitions and not only the sportsmen, but also the leaders and members of the *Gminy* could meet during these events.

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<sup>41</sup> A. G., 'Letnie batalie piłkarzy', GPL-P. Komunikat no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>42</sup> 'Podwójne trofea KS "Grunwald"', *op. cit.*



### *Czarni-Varsovia* – fierce amateurs

As was noted in the minutes of the Board of the Polish Community of West London, Władysław Tunikowski talked to Adam Barszcz ‘about a sports club which wants to connect with the Community’.<sup>43</sup> Was *Czarni-Varsovia* that team? We do not know that with any certainty. Any such co-operation had not yet started, however, since as of 17 May 1962 the issue of the manager of the sports section was discussed again and the candidature of Mr Tunikowski was put forward.<sup>44</sup> On finally taking up this position (a year later) he indicated that he wanted to begin his work by starting a football team, and to build other sections attached to it, ‘the possibility of obtaining the playground from the school should be checked’, he added.<sup>45</sup> It can be concluded that the GPZL had plans to organize its own, new sports team. Other Community tasks seemed too pressing, however, as no traces of the implementation of such a project can be found in the available sources.

‘The Board of the Community has for many years tried to start a Youth Sports Club, whose organization has encountered technical difficulties such as the lack of premises; however, we have spared no effort to handle the issue positively as early as possible’, we read in a letter printed in the June 1966 *Biuletyn*. In the meantime, members of the Board decided to postpone the question of establishing a sports club ‘until such time as they obtained appropriate premises.’<sup>46</sup> In April 1967 information about the foundation of the football team appears. There were plans to name the new club characteristically as *Sarmatia*.<sup>47</sup> Its state was evaluated as ‘liquid’. According to Stanisław [?] Kosicki, it was necessary to appoint the team’s captain, and Bogdan Szwagrzak noticed that boys who were scouts could belong to the team and *vice versa*; he gave an example of a similar situation in Birmingham.<sup>48</sup>

Attempts to develop and put physical education at the appropriate organizational level was significant for the plans of the Community. It kept trying to develop the sports section, with a flexible attitude toward all new projects and ideas. This came from an understanding of the importance of organizing a sports movement in the life

<sup>43</sup> Community Board minutes, 21 Jan. 1962, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>44</sup> Community Board minutes, 17 May 1962, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>45</sup> Community Board minutes, 20 June 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>46</sup> Community Board minutes, 6 June 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>47</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 10, Apr. 1967.

<sup>48</sup> Community Board minutes, 14 Apr. 1967, Archives of the GPZL.

of the Polish community in exile. It appreciated the importance of sport for national self-identification, especially for young people: ‘Last year I prepared a boy of Polish origin for the 11+ exam who did not know a word of Polish’ someone wrote in the Community quarterly. ‘I asked him which football team he supported. He answered the question quickly – “Poland!” (which had not yet played that famous draw at Wembley stadium [in 1973]). A little surprised I asked again – why? “Because that’s how I feel”. A beautiful answer, which appeals to the heart.’<sup>49</sup> This telling fragment convincingly shows the living national feeling, despite the language problems of young members of the émigré community, born in the United Kingdom.

Finally, on 19 September 1969 Henryk Radkiewicz applied for admission to the Community Sports Club *Varsovia*. ‘The Board with great pleasure approved the application’, recommending at the same time that ‘the team supervisor or manager and captain should as soon as possible contact the Community Board.’<sup>50</sup> In April 1970 the fact of Community’s supervision over the club was confirmed, with the emphasis that all its members should join the Community, which was required in order to conform with its Statute and ‘regulations applicable to “independence” organizations.’<sup>51</sup> This last statement, as shall be shown later, was neither groundless nor trite.

‘We were a part of the Community’, says Edmund Ogłaza, who remains to this day the manager of the Club. According to Zygmunt Grzyb (the president of the GPZL between 1975 and 2003, who also played in defence): ‘*Varsovia* are fierce amateurs’. Ryszard Żółtaniecki answers: ‘we played once against the English in Wimbledon as a team of ten players, but we won. Our opponents appealed the match to the football authorities, basing their claim on the argument that *Varsovia* played against the rules. – What was against the rules? – They were asked – They played in a team of ten! – Only that? Who won? – was the further question – the Poles did... After that answer everybody convulsed with laughter!’<sup>52</sup>

In September 1970 Witold Kojder, the team’s captain and its distinguished organizer, convinced the Community Board of the tough conditions under which the Club functioned – especially a lack of funds to cover essential expenditure. In order to demonstrate his claim, he distributed among those present forms presenting the

<sup>49</sup> Teofil Tlen [Ryszard Kotaś?], ‘Rola harcerstwa na emigracji’, *Nad Tamizą*, no 1, winter 1975.

<sup>50</sup> Community Board minutes, 19 Sept. 1969, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>51</sup> Community Board minutes, 1 Apr. 1970, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>52</sup> Interviews with E. Ogłaza, Z. Grzyb and R. Żółtaniecki.

costs of participation in league games. He mentioned the fact that *Varsovia* play at a very high level and that the team has a good reputation both among Poles, the English as well as among the sports authorities ‘spreading publicity of Polish sports players under the title “Polish *Varsovia*”’. In the face of such arguments a subvention of £50 was unanimously granted.<sup>53</sup>

In the same year information was provided that the Community Sports Section (which had just been created) under the supervision of Stefan Zieleniewski cooperated with *Varsovia* SC. It was confirmed that the Club was a member of the GPZL. It was ambitiously emphasized that ‘there appeared the need to create a second football team which would consist of young footballers and later supplementary players for the team and would take part in the matches of the Sunday Football League’. There were appeals to parents to inform their sons who were footballers and encourage them to join.<sup>54</sup> *Varsovia* continued to play ‘under the caring wing of the Community and developed its activity.’ At the end of 1970 it received a subvention of £50 and a similar one in the following years.<sup>55</sup> In 1973 the club received as much as £75. In September 1971 the authorities in *Varsovia* changed. Under new management the club took part not only in the Sunday League championships,<sup>56</sup> but also in the ‘senior football championship for the General Anders Challenge Cup.’<sup>57</sup> The results were perhaps less satisfactory than earlier, as on 22 March 1972: ‘the president [S. Kosicki] read a letter from the Club with a request for financial help. After discussion, a subsidy of £50 was agreed to as an incentive to improve the form of the team’.

Co-operation, as it happens, had various outcomes... In the Community Board minutes of 24 November 1973 we read: ‘The Community party on 23 June brought very poor financial results, moreover it was clearly boycotted by *Varsovia* despite the efforts to explain to *Varsovia* members that calling off the party on 19 May happened because of Rev. Wood.’ The background of this story is revealed by the minutes of the previous Board meeting: ‘the president Kosicki informed with grief that the party of the Community and *Varsovia* [...] was called off. Father Wood, despite writing down this date together with other dates of events organized by the Community, had

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<sup>53</sup> Community Board minutes, 24 Sept. 1970, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>54</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1970.

<sup>55</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 20, Dec. 1970 and *Biuletyn*, no 21, Apr. 1972.

<sup>56</sup> The manager of team remained Janusz Szczygłowski, the secretary Edmund Ogłaza, the treasurer K. Wolski, *Biuletyn*, no 21, Apr. 1972.

<sup>57</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 23, June [?] 1974.

wrongly assigned this room to the Irish School party despite the insistence and persuasion on the part of Mr Kosicki. The president stressed the fact that the whole above case was the subject of different comments and with emphasis claimed that the calling off was caused by Rev. Wood's mistake.'<sup>58</sup>

Neither side was cross with the other for too long. Despite the fact that on 19 September 1974 the Board dryly communicated: 'the sports team *Varsovia* was dissolved. The manager of the team, Mr Kojder, emigrated. Financing the team by the Community is financially impossible – it required about £1000 a year', this was neither the end of the club nor of its co-operation with the Community. Already in the preliminary estimate of expenditure for 1975 £50 or 50 per cent of income from the New Year's party, whichever was the higher, was allocated to *Varsovia* from the Community accounts. It was the first and the highest position in the then planned expenditure.<sup>59</sup> The following year the sum was £40.<sup>60</sup>

Who, however, founded the team? What was its history before it crossed with that of the GPZL? Players came from a younger generation of émigrés who had not served in the army. Originally the team was called *Czarni* because the players wore black outfits. *Czarni-Varsovia* SC usually played in the Sunday League of West London. The team reached the cup final twice. 'The only football team from London, consisting only of Polish players', informed *Dziennik Polski* in 1962, 'reached the final in the English amateurs' league matches. In a deciding match for a cup with the English team Sundew Athletic the Poles lost 0:2 (0:0).'<sup>61</sup> During the games for the General Władysław Anders Cup *Varsovia*'s great rival was the *Młodzi* team from Balham.

In the period 1962-1970 the *Varsovia* players joined the ranks of the Polish Veterans Association (SPK, *Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*), to which the children of Polish veterans can also belong. Being a member constituted a condition of receiving a subsidy from this Association. 'Witek Kojder, a good organizer, who managed our team, dealt with the issue of obtaining an official approval of our membership in the Polish Veterans Association' – recalls Ryszard Żółtaniecki. In 1971 Edmund Ogłaza, as the oldest player, took over the club 'for one year of a

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<sup>58</sup> Community Board minutes, 22 June 1973, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>59</sup> The Community Board meeting minutes, 30 May 1970, Archives of GPZL.

<sup>60</sup> Community Board minutes, 6 Apr. 1976, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>61</sup> 'Puchar "Varsovii"', *DPDŻ*, no 88, 12 Apr. 1962.

probation period.’<sup>62</sup> He remembers the episodes, which proved that the club went beyond the framework of sheer amateurism. In the 1960s, as a assistant coach, he was a witness to the situation when ‘Witek Kojder “outbid” players. He paid £5 per goal’. The players Jan and Robert (Bobas) Wawrzeski were more remembered – they passed the ball only between each other in order to score a goal. Always during the Polish Championship two good English players from a semi- professional league were also engaged in the team (the number allowed by the rules). These players were paid.

Matches were played on different grounds right across London. Referees were only English, they were paid-referees appointed by an appropriate Saturday and Sunday league, one of the hundreds of those active here. In the case of *Varsovia* it was the Senior Sportsman League, in which teams played at a good, semi-professional level. The costs of a match (pitch, referees etc.) amounted to £50. Witold Kojder covered the team’s expenditure from his own pocket, working professionally outside the world of sports. From the same sources he paid the players. He had a wide range of contacts, which resulted in friendly matches with the teams from outside of the Polish community, for example with ‘Maccabi’ Hendon, or with African community teams.<sup>63</sup>

A real football atmosphere prevailed. Among other things the dances organized by *Varsovia* in the Airmen’s Club (*Klub Lotników*) are remembered wistfully. Whole crowds of supporters, mainly female, assisted the team enthusiastically. ‘We easily made contacts with girls with a similar past. Mutual understanding appeared quickly and deeper friendships were built. Many marriages were made, especially in the first years of the existence of the Club, when we met frequently at the matches and parties. We gradually achieved financial independence. Today, after forty years from the first contacts, these marriages are still lasting and working. Children, now young people – the fruit of these relationships – usually achieved university education and professional positions.’<sup>64</sup>

Poles in West London played organized volleyball and tennis, but mostly in English clubs.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Varsovia* SC is still playing in 2008. The team manager remains E. Ogłaza.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with R. Żóltaniecki.

<sup>64</sup> R. M. Żóltaniecki, “Czarni-Varsovia”, *DPDŻ*, no 159, 12 Aug. 2005.

<sup>65</sup> More about the Polish Tennis Club *Polonia* (1952-74) in Józef Garliński, *Świat mojej pamięci. Wspomnień tom drugi* (Warsaw, 1998), pp. 95-98.

The facts presented above tell us much about the significance of football teams for national identity building, marriage-making, political questions, and last but not least, about relations with the English community.

### **Six broken noses, or the London Polish Rugby Football Club**

‘The fundamental aim of every team of fifteen is putting the ball behind the goal line of the opposing team. It is a so-called “try”, which requires great skill in passing the ball, agility and incredible running speed. For every “try” four points are counted and two others for a converted and successful goal. Two other possibilities of gaining points in a rugby match are a penalty and a “dropped goal” [*sic*], each for three points.’<sup>66</sup> This was the manner in which in December 1971 the authors of the *Komunikat* of the Community of South London informed their readers about the rules of rugby. The game, as we can see, was not popular and still unknown (after twenty-five years of settlement) among Polish émigrés – at least among the older generation. It is a game whose homeland – like football – was the country of their domicile. (Were there Polish polo or cricket teams? Probably better connected individuals played polo.)

The *Komunikat* testified to a low level of interest: ‘On Good Friday, 31 March this year [1972] on the Saint Joseph’s College playground [...] players from London Polish Rugby Football Club [LPRFC] played a showpiece match, to which Polish society was invited. Despite advertisements in the *Dziennik*, only a handful of spectators came. It seems that rugby does not inspire great enthusiasm among our compatriots’;<sup>67</sup> ‘Last year the Community contributed to the foundation of the first Polish rugby club on the territory of the United Kingdom. To this day, however, Polish society does not show much interest in this game’;<sup>68</sup> ‘Despite a lack of enthusiasm among the members of society LPRFC does not give up and obstinately fights for further recognition.’<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 40, Dec. 1971.

<sup>67</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 42, July 1972.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 43, Dec. 1972.

The London Polish Rugby Football Club was founded in February 1971. Its originators were representatives of the younger generation, born in Great Britain.<sup>70</sup> ‘The initiative of the London Polish Association came from the group of Polish youth who had an opportunity to learn about rugby at English universities and had liked the game to such an extent that they expressed their willingness to continue playing in a Polish club. A group of these students applied to the Community for support. Seeing the young people’s enthusiasm and serious attitude the Community Council with delight took care of the new team and quickly provided the team with part of the equipment they needed’. It was decided that income from the Secondary School Graduation Ball (*Bal Maturalny*) should be allotted to the benefit of the whole team. The young men entrusted Waław Borkowski, a distinguished member of the Community Council with the position of manager.<sup>71</sup> And rightly so because Borkowski, not only by his work, but also with his financial support contributed to the development of the team.<sup>72</sup>

‘The beginnings were hard’.<sup>73</sup> Already in March 1971, the team played their first match against a team from Saint Mary’s College in Twickenham and ‘rather according to expectations lost 37:5. At the same time those fifteen, wearing red and white stripes played with such dedication that they justly deserved the applause of their opponents and an invitation to a return match the next season.’ The second match played by the Polish team was on 18 April 1971 at Saint Joseph’s College playing fields in Warlingham, Surrey with – according to the accounts – ‘an experienced team of Old Josephians’ (surely all British teams were experienced...). It finished with the result 16:9 for the hosts. Despite the loss, the match was considered ‘exceptionally interesting’. ‘In a rematch, in September, the result shall surely be more favourable for our team’ – it was announced in the *Komunikat*. Unfortunately, the rematch was also lost, 16:48.<sup>74</sup>

The next season went better. During the first two months London Polish played seven matches, four of which were won and three lost – ‘so not too bad at first glance, but more important is the relation of scores gained in all matches, at that moment exceptionally good for our boys. Matches in Rugby Union are friendly

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<sup>70</sup> J. Makulski, ‘Polski Klub Rugby – London Polish R.F.C.’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

<sup>71</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Makulski, ‘Polski Klub Rugby...’.

<sup>74</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971; *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 40, Dec. 1971.

matches and there is no league. It is all about the game itself, the skill of passing the ball and in general the class of fifteen players who constitute the team. [...] They play first of all for pleasure, with the emphasis on development of co-operation with other team members.’ And it seems this is what the creators of the team had mainly in mind. They won the matches with National & Grindlays, Merton RFC, Saint Mary’s College, Grand Metropolitan Hotels, losing to Shoreditch Training College, Micham RUFC. ‘Taking into account all matches, the general tally of points amounts to 168:122 to the benefit of London Polish. We can be very satisfied with such progress.’<sup>75</sup>

It seems that young people – despite the lack of a bigger group of supporters and technical difficulties (‘there are problems with the team’s transport to matches, training, the lack of their own ground is felt’<sup>76</sup>) – had great fun playing in the national white and red colours. This was an unusual phenomenon in the younger generation of the emigrations – the desire to be active on their own, at their own initiative, in a Polish organization. This was after all a constant concern of the moderators of social work in exile. ‘Everybody talks a lot about young people and the Community decided to do something.’<sup>77</sup> We know that in 1975 the GPL-P allotted £50 to London Polish RFC.<sup>78</sup>

‘After London Welsh, London Scottish and London Irish we have now London Polish’, and twenty fixtures for the next season were announced with joy in June 1971.<sup>79</sup> It was hoped that ‘there were many young players and much enthusiasm among young people in order to ensure the future of the team in the second century of world Rugby Union.’<sup>80</sup> Enthusiasm did not cease: ‘Antek Jermak from Bournemouth and Liverpool and Tadek Borejko from Nottingham found us through the English press and are regular members of the team. Antek’s 1 m, 95 cm is priceless in a line-out. It helped us in the first victory with the oldest rival “Lewisham Hospital” 20:18 on the last Sunday of February’, wrote the captain, K. Skoczyński, on the third anniversary of the team. ‘Our achievements on such an important anniversary in the history of the Polish emigration are six broken noses,

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<sup>75</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 40, Dec. 1971.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Other Polish institutions in South London supported the club as well. Thanks to the director of the *Orzeł Biały* club J. Pokrzywnicki were printed in the *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 46, Apr. 1974.

<sup>78</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>79</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971.

<sup>80</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 39, June 1971.



one broken arm and a dozen or so broken fingers, a few thousand bumps and the most importantly destroying a thousand gallons of beer with the willing help of our opponents.<sup>81</sup>

Sporting life flourished vigorously. ‘The Polish Rugby Club entered a second fifteen, which for the time being (by 3 November [1974]) had lost all, that is four of their matches’,<sup>82</sup> but already in the next year they had begun to succeed: ‘now we have about forty players and every Sunday we enter two teams. We win most of the matches and at Easter we are invited to play in matches in Scotland.’<sup>83</sup> The Championship for the Rugby Cup was announced, which was to take place at Rugby Osterley, Tentalow, on 7 April 1974.<sup>84</sup>

Rugby players played with unceasing energy, but they also tried to develop ‘a social and entertainment section’. The team organized ‘a Christmas party, in March a dance, an annual club dinner in April, a weekly trip to the continent at Easter’,<sup>85</sup> co-organized with ‘the Community of South London “Secondary School Graduation Balls” (*Bale Maturalne*)’ – in 1974 and 1975.<sup>86</sup> One of the events of the social and entertainment section was described in the following manner in 1974: ‘the last party organized on Friday, 8 February was not a very great success, as only 100 people gathered. Even members of the Community Council (*Rada Gminy*), our patrons, despite warm assurances, could not find time to visit us then, with the exception of Mr Kuźmiński, who we warmly thank for the donation to the benefit of the Club’.<sup>87</sup>

In 1976 the team decided to visit Poland in order to play three matches with local teams. On their return the players of Polish London had to say bitterly: ‘we played with changing fortunes’. Surprisingly in the face of Poland-based players, who played rugby in the conditions of Edward Gierek’s Poland of the 1970s, ‘we did not do well as we lost two matches and won one, but it was an important one. We were warmly welcomed in the home country and we shall try next year – here “on our own ground” – to get our sporting revenge and pay back with our hearts our friends from

<sup>81</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 46, April 1974.

<sup>82</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 47, [1974].

<sup>83</sup> ‘Lately we can gather in the new Community premises. The *Gmina* always helps us so much’ added, Makulski, ‘Polski Klub Rugby’.

<sup>84</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 46, Apr. 1974.

<sup>85</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 47, [1974].

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* The ball was held 5 July 1975 in the *Orzeł Biały* club. Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3. Cf. ‘The last two “Secondary School Graduation Balls” were organized together with London Polish Rugby Club. There were approximately 300 young people present’, T. Walczak, ‘20 lat GPL-P’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

<sup>87</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 46, Apr. 1974.

Poland’ – it was announced in one of the last issues of the Community *Komunikat*. We do not know about the result of that revenge. The account was finished with a note: ‘On this occasion we would like warmly to thank the GPL-P for its care so far and ask for further assistance.’<sup>88</sup>

### **When you go to the homeland...**

Back in 1963 *Czarni-Varsovia* (under the name *Varsovia SC*) had also travelled for guest performances to ‘People’s Poland’ after being invited there by the Polish Olympic Committee. Stanisław Gierula, a soldier from the 2 Corps from Tarnobrzeg (a professional footballer who played for Leyton Orient FC, among other teams) was the coach and manager at this time. The team played three friendly matches with leading clubs: *Polonia* Warsaw, *Wisła* Kraków and *Siarka* Tarnobrzeg. ‘Invited by a famous sportsman, Waław Kuchar, we were welcomed in the seat of the Polish Olympic Committee in Warsaw’, writes Ryszard Żółtaniecki. ‘Naturally there were inevitably controversies due to political reasons, but before our departure we also received unofficial phone calls from the authorities of Polish London wishing us the best of luck [‘If you must go, I wish you all the best’, Tadeusz Krasoń was believed to have to said].<sup>89</sup> Most team members had earlier been deported from the country by the NKVD at a very young age; at last they now had an unrepeatable opportunity to see their homeland. ‘During their whole stay in Poland the team did not take part in any events organized by the communist authorities. Particular sports clubs took care of us. The next visit to Poland took place in 1965.’<sup>90</sup> In total, they went to Poland three times. The initiators of these visits were Witold Kojder and Janusz Szczygłowski. After Kojder went to the United States no further visits were organized.

The decision was neither easy nor obvious. About a quarter of the team’s members decided not to visit Poland.<sup>91</sup> The club was criticized by a part of the émigré public opinion, *Dziennik Polski* published disapproving articles, and Witold

<sup>88</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with R. Żółtaniecki. Tadeusz Antoni Krasoń (1909-71) was an officer during the Libyan and Italian campaigns during the Second World War. In exile he was secretary of the SPK for many years and also general secretary of the *Związek Polskich Klubów Sportowych*, AOE.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Interview with E. Ogłaza.

Kojder received phone calls urging him to abandon these visits. The team was punished, as its relations with the Association of Polish Sports Clubs clearly cooled off. According to Edmund Ogłaza the decision to travel to Poland was still causing problems a decade later in the 1970s, especially regarding subsidies for the club from émigré social funds. He himself did not go, as ‘it was unbecoming for a veteran (*nie wypadło*).’<sup>92</sup> ‘*Varsovia* lost because of the visits. It was a kind of offence for émigrés’, comments Zygmunt Grzyb years later. ‘Some time passed before they forgave’.

In a specially issued brochure *Kiedy jedziesz do Polski...* (When you go to Poland...),<sup>93</sup> which was both a kind of official standpoint and a realistic guide for those emigrants who decided to visit the homeland, we read: ‘Despite the raising of the iron curtain after 1957 a great number of Poles living in the free world did not use this opportunity and does not want to use the possibility to visit their homeland, because the feeling of fidelity to their ideological attitude, which they adopted after the war finished, dictates that it be so. On the other hand, a considerable number of emigrants use the possibility to visit Poland’. The authors of the guide understand the strength of family ties and nostalgia, which some emigrants ‘cannot overcome’; they indicate the basic conditions of the visits. ‘Those who accept PRL consular passports voluntarily cease to be political émigrés benefiting from the right to asylum and become formally and in reality subjects of the PRL’. There were, however, no explicit statements against naturalization in Great Britain: ‘the *formal* [*italics – P. Ch.*] acceptance by Polish émigrés of the citizenship of the country of settlement is not contrary to their ideological and political attitude. A Pole with the citizenship of the country of settlement is still in his soul a political émigré.’

The number of people deciding to become the subjects of Her Majesty constantly increased and from 1959 to 1965 it did not fall below the number of 2000 a year. In the record year of 1960 4115 former Polish citizens were naturalized in the United Kingdom. By 1966 more than 43,000 Polish emigrants held a British passport. At that time the fee for naturalization was £30, and four British citizens had to act as sponsors.<sup>94</sup> Remaining a Polish citizen and using – as a stateless person – ‘a travel document’ which did not entitle one to travel to Poland was increasingly less

<sup>92</sup> E. Ogłaza himself visited Poland many times after 1962 for family reasons.

<sup>93</sup> *Kiedy jedziesz do Polski...*, published by *Rada Organizacji Kombatanckich* (Council of Veterans’ Organizations) (London, 1974); brochure in the Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>94</sup> B. O. Jeżewski, *Polski Londyn. Polish Guide to London*, 7th edn (February 1969), p. 14.

frequent and characteristic more of the representatives of the political, social and cultural elite in exile than ‘an average émigré’, although such ‘average indomitables’ (*niezłomni*) were not rare.

A person who came to the United Kingdom from Poland wrote in 1976: ‘I met in Wales [...] two higher officers (a colonel and a major), who worked at clearing the forest for twenty-six years in complete isolation from other people. They nearly lived in seclusion. Full of fortitude, with great emotion they talked about their unusual ups and downs, resembling nineteenth-century settlers in Brazil.’<sup>95</sup> Of course accepting the citizenship of the country of settlement did not necessarily mean a simultaneous wish to visit the People’s Republic of Poland; it was, however, a sign of stabilization. Some groups (for example, former intelligence and counter-intelligence officers of the Polish Armed Forces, soldiers of the underground movement who continued the fight after the Red Army entered Poland, and who later managed to escape to the West) did not decide to risk visiting Poland. Jagoda Jędrychowska noticed: ‘[...] only those come to Poland who have nothing to fear from the communist system, not all those, however, who wanted to, as probably the majority would like to. Then the emigration visited *en masse*. When it visits Poland, to be honest, it is, like every mass, very different.’<sup>96</sup>

‘Travels to Poland give pleasure and fulfil some emotional needs of emigrants, but in their consequences they can be and often are harmful for the ideological attitude of émigrés’ warned the guide. Now visits are possible, but ‘every about-turn of the regime’s political tactics is either dictated or at least approved by the Soviet Union’. Some action against the emigration also constituted a realization of the communist plans. The tactics consisted in selective usage of social, economic and cultural contacts between Poland and the emigrants for spying and political sabotage. ‘It is neither cold-war-speak’, it added, ‘nor spy hysteria. Actual cases of intelligence and sabotage approaches are now known.’

It was indicated, on the basis of sound knowledge, that in communist countries there was no division between science and politics, between education and propaganda. To sum up, in accordance with the canon of the ‘independence’ emigration, visiting Poland was neither approved, nor recommended. Such a decision was conditionally tolerated if it had an individual character and was caused by

<sup>95</sup> F. Adamski, ‘Emigracja polska w Wielkiej Brytanii’, *Studia Polonijne* (Lublin, 1976), p. 168.

<sup>96</sup> J. Jędrychowska, *Widzieć Polskę z oddalenia* (Paris, 1988), p. 7.

important personal or family reasons and, most importantly, it was undertaken privately, and not in the name of, or within, an emigration institution. Those going were asked to remember that visiting their families was an occasion also to transport literature, the emigration press as well as information from the ‘free world’.

Zbigniew Jankowski (who from 1968 onwards went with his father to visit his family in Mława) remembers that ‘while Anders lived people did not go to Poland’ (General Władysław Anders died in 1970). Elżbieta Piekarska adds that from a certain moment ‘everybody went – people wanted to see their families, help them’. ‘It was not easy to decide’, writes Krzysztof Głuchowski, recalling 1962. ‘There was the question of contact with the PRL consul. In order to be able to go for a visit to Poland it was necessary to receive appropriate stamps from the consulate. Once in a conversation on the necessity to apply for a visa my fellow engineer Prus-Chąciński, summed the situation up in an excellent way: “The PRL consulate is like a brothel, you use its services, but you do not maintain social relations”. Actually it was possible to apply for a visa through travel agencies.’<sup>97</sup>

Using the services of travel agencies when applying for a visa constituted only one of the strategies of bypassing the émigré ideological order. Combining different émigré public functions with the wish to travel required more flexibility. We have already noted Edmund Ogłaza’s dilemmas. More examples can be found in the book *Życie nie tylko własne* (Not only one’s own life) by Tadeusz Walczak. Working as a sales manager for Eastern Europe in Central Asbestos Co. Ltd (an agency of the asbestos trade, mainly from the Republic of South Africa, which was covered by an international boycott), from 1962 he took numerous business trips to all the eastern bloc countries, including the USSR.<sup>98</sup> The author admits in his memoirs that ‘émigré activists could not go to Poland’ (p. 155), but in endnotes (pp. 169-170) he carefully lists all his trips. We can thus see that the position of the president of the GPL-P he held in the period 1973-75 did not prevent him from visiting Poland nine times in 1973, once in 1974, six times in 1975 and five in the first nine months of 1976 (without counting his stays in Czechoslovakia or Romania). Nor did his seat on the POSK Council (*Rada POSK-u*) from 1966 make him resign from such trips.

Only the presidency of POSK 1976-1979 (and later 1982-85) made it necessary for this activist to interrupt his trips. It is surprising that this break concerned only the

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<sup>97</sup> Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>98</sup> Walczak, *op. cit.* pp. 159-60.

PRL, (which he again visited in the meantime: once in 1980 and three times in 1981). Holding one of the most important social functions in Polish London Tadeusz Walczak visited East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. It is difficult to say today who determined the level of engagement in the émigré organizational life, for which it 'was unbecoming' to go to Poland and who was able to cast such visits in a negative light. We do not know why the emigration public opinion evaluated trips to PRL differently to those to the so-called German Democratic Republic.

Some older activists of the Community of West London did not go to Poland on principle and used a 'travel document'. Neither Stanisław Kuniczak, nor Adam Barszcz, nor Józef Szlamp visited Poland.<sup>99</sup> 'The Gossip Column' of the Community's *Biuletyn* informed, however in the summer of 1961 that several members spent their holidays in Poland: Mr and Mrs Ślepokóra ('for four weeks, with children Krzysia and Artur, by car'); Mr and Mrs Skąpski ('taking two Hantias – their own daughter and Hania Chachulska'); and Marian Kwieciński and Władysław Tunikowski ('with his wife and brother's daughter Misia, Józef's daughter').<sup>100</sup> The 'Nowinki' of the *Komunikat* of the Community of South London in 1967 described the following holiday episodes: 'Elżbieta and Kazimierz Szemirski came back from their holiday in Poland full of impressions, the family of doctors Zofia and Jerzy Nowiak while staying on holiday in Poland met four times by chance the family of T. Walczak and his wife Regina, every time in a different place. Rev. Wróbel went for a month's treatment to Poland, Mr Olesiak (Streatham) prolonged his holiday in Poland [...].'<sup>101</sup>

It is striking that even after many years certain ambiguities arise from the travels to Poland of people such as Rev. Adam Wróbel. Zofia Piątek exclaims: 'Rev. Wróbel in Poland – I can't imagine it!'<sup>102</sup> Elżbieta Piekarska claims, however, that the priest used to visit Poland and that some other priests criticized him: 'In the beginning it was not the done thing to go and at that time Rev. Wróbel did not go either, but then, little by little, people started going and Rev. Wróbel went too'.<sup>103</sup> 'If he went he

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Z. Grzyb.

<sup>100</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 1, Sept. 1961.

<sup>101</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 26, Sept. 1967,

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Z. Piątek.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

never talked about it', says Danuta Wiśniowiecka.<sup>104</sup> Józef Marian Makulski also confirms the parish priest's trips.<sup>105</sup>

'Obviously there were determined, tenacious (*zacięci*) people who did not go', says Elżbieta Piekarska, but she does not give any names. We know that from South London, among others Major Gustaw Piwakowski never visited Poland. 'To this "iron emigration"' also belonged Mr and Mrs Martin from the Circle of Alumni of the pre-war *Szkoła Główna Handlowa*, who remained stateless people till the end; in the Clapham parish there was Colonel Maleciński (he knew six languages, was a military *attaché* in Moscow before the war, and worked in intelligence as a translator).<sup>106</sup> The Prime Minister's widow, Jadwiga Składkowska, was in Warsaw for a month in 1976, when she tried to bury her husband's ashes in the family grave in Powązki Cemetery. She obtained a British passport for this purpose.<sup>107</sup>

It cannot be surprising then that in the light of the attitude outlined above the three trips made by *Varsovia* to 'People's Poland', the first as early as 1963, appears to be a controversial break with the 'independence' attitude, so bluntly and often declared and presented at least by the then management of the Community of West London. It seems that the rugby team's trips (a decade later) did not raise equivalent controversies 'in the South'. Another aspect of the problem constituted visits to England of 'chosen young people from Poland'. Students were invited, in order to support 'education of young, good and talented Poles, who would give help at the same time: help for one's wife in household chores, or giving children lessons in living Polish', but also to 'save some expenditure connected with painting, small repairs, cleaning, or gardening works', or 'go for a necessary holiday and leave the house under somebody's supervision'. The appeal finished with the call: 'Let us build the future of Poland in young people's good hearts.'<sup>108</sup>

Émigrés do not talk very willingly about their experience from trips to Poland – searches happening at the border and first of all the order to report on arrival at the police stations. For people from the PRL, every application for a passport and an approval to go to Western countries necessitated a meeting with an officer of the

<sup>104</sup> Interview with D. Wardle-Wiśniowiecka.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski. There is clear documentary evidence that Father Wróbel travelled to communist-ruled Poland in August 1973, June 1974 and April 1975: *Trzy notatniki z podróży do Polski – 8/73, 6/74, 4/75*, Rev. Adam Wróbel Collection, no 423/32, General Sikorski Institute and Museum.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with D. Wardle-Wiśniowiecka.

<sup>107</sup> Interviews with E. Mostowicz and M. Podpora.

<sup>108</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 6, June 1966.

Secret Police (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, SB). Emigrés paid for their visits to the homeland in ways that on the whole were less drastic, but nevertheless analogous. Probably many émigrés may not have even realized that they were talking to agents of the SB, rather than ‘ordinary’ policemen. The character of such conversations depended on many factors, and the price was the possibility of a further visit. It seems in the light of recently revealed documents,<sup>109</sup> that many emigrants who travelled to PRL underestimated the scale of the communist secret services’ interference in the social life in the period of ‘small stabilization’, and the sometimes derided ‘indomitable’ caution was justified.

## Conclusions

The fact that recreational physical activity has a positive effect on every human community seems self-evident. The Communities’ focus on this aspect of their collective life demonstrate their members’ care for their physical and spiritual well-being. This was also a way of making youth feel attached to the Polish community (via émigré sport clubs) as well as to the patriotic and military tradition (via the patronage of war veterans). Sport was a natural supplement to other aspects of Communities’ lives. Poles’ passion for football, already evident before the Second World War, can be easily noticed when looking at the Communities’ sporting lives. This passion was shared with compatriots in Poland. There were also attempt to incorporate sports that (at that time) were not known widely in Poland, but were popular in Great Britain, such as rugby. It should be noted that rugby is usually played by independent schools and the best universities, and therefore carries a cachet of social status. This may point to an integration of certain sections of Polish youth into the British class system. We should also note in this context that older émigrés took – and continue to take – characteristic pride in the university education and professional occupations of their children and grandchildren, whatever the level of their Polish.

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<sup>109</sup> Many examples are presented in Ryszard Terlecki (ed.), *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec emigracji politycznej i Polonii*, (Warsaw, 2005) and Krzysztof Tarka, *Mackiewicz i inni. Wywiad PRL wobec emigrantów*, (Łomianki, 2007).



Any attempt to exclude sports activities from politics, which strongly permeated all forms of Polish social life both in the home country as well as in exile, proved a bitter experience for émigré activists. Hence, the digression concerning the attitude towards visits in People's Poland seems legitimate here. The problem of emigrants' attitudes towards accepting the citizenship of the country of settlement as well as attitudes towards the Polish communist state takes us beyond sport. This reflection can enrich our knowledge of the Polish emigration in Great Britain regarding the problem of shaping Polish national consciousness in exile.

## 9.

**Houses**

The possession of a building, in which social and organizational activity could take place was the one of the first tasks for each of the three Communities. This chapter presents the history of the Communities' efforts to own a house. Every story is different and can yield much material connected to the aims, ambitions and work of *Gmina* leaders and members. It also reveals much about the collective mindset of these groups. At the end I shall try to summarize the Communities' experience with houses and give a general opinion enriching the main hypothesis of this dissertation.

**A noble obsession**

'Poles are obsessed with owning houses. It is understandable: years of wandering in camps, hostels, years of temporariness, life as if in a station waiting room, has made us a people who are greedy for houses. Poles then have a *house obsession individually and as a group [italics – P. Ch.]*', as Bohdan Czaykowski and Bolesław Sulik put it.<sup>1</sup> Many émigrés had their own property in Poland before the war, which is why their aspirations to have their own house again must have been natural.<sup>2</sup> Years later Tadeusz Walczak recalled his situation in 1952: 'As with most Poles, I started to look for a house to purchase, in order to live there myself and to let a part of it.'<sup>3</sup> In many accounts concerning the first period of emigration the following statements are repeated: 'as with most Poles, they wanted to buy a house as soon as possible', 'everybody wanted to buy a house', and so on.<sup>4</sup> Poles tended to support each other in these undertakings. In the Community of South London's *Komunikat*, in the sections 'Kronika Koleżeńska' and 'Nowinki' (Gossip column and News), which became more and more developed with every issue, one could read all the time about new 'Polish houses'. For example, in the twelfth issue of the *Komunikat* (March 1964) there were five such pieces of information in sixteen pages. This seems to be the most telling indication of the stabilization of the émigrés' situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with R. Żółtaniecki.

<sup>3</sup> Walczak, *Życie nie tylko własne*, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with D. Kwaśny and Z. Piątek.

Still more worthy of our attention is ‘the obsession of a group’ mentioned above. Czaykowski and Sulik go into more detail: ‘Society, cultural, organizational, political and social life, national life, cultivating traditions and the feeling of membership, sentimental and patriotic sessions, all this is not possible without a seat – without a House.’<sup>5</sup> These feelings were also coupled with the sudden need, which arose much earlier in 1945, to deposit state funds in the face of the withdrawal of the impending recognition of the Government in Exile by the Allies. This caused a situation where many social organizations became owners of their houses, mainly in London, but also in the country. At about the time when the Polish Communities in London were created, in 1958/59, no less than twenty-six houses belonged to the biggest and the most numerous Polish organization, the the Polish Veterans Association (*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*, SPK).<sup>6</sup> They could not imagine a different form of communal life. It is not surprising then that for the Communities the question of buying or building their own houses appeared as a priority and one of their primary goals. It was discussed and written about very clearly in the initial organizational set-up period of each *Gmina*.

This desire was in spite of the fact that the profitability of house ownership in that period was becoming significantly lower, as the example of the SPK houses shows. Czaykowski and Sulik estimated that ‘this profitability is based in the first place on the income from the bar, and to a lesser extent from the restaurant. It could be argued that with the increase in Poles’ wealth, the turnover of such Houses would grow. In fact just the opposite was the case. Indeed, periodic economic fluctuation, temporary belt-tightening directly affected turnover, but during the last twelve years income generated from the houses has constantly demonstrated a downward trend, despite the fact that emigrants gradually made their fortunes.’ The paradox was explained in this way: ‘in the first years after demobilization (or after coming back from German camps), Poles, often lonely and not yet settled, drank away a big part of whatever they earned. Now they are much more restrained. Those, who started families, visit a club much less often, even if they come they usually talk over a drink or two, instead of a bottle like in the past.’<sup>7</sup> The gradually declining turnover was easy to notice even on the basis of one year, and in this case Czaykowski and Sulik

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<sup>5</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 407.

analysed the situation of SPK houses in the years 1957/58 and 1958/59, which are of special interest to us. Such calculations however, did not influence the activity of dynamically developing, new organizations like *Gminy*.

### **The house of the Community of South London**

As early as the meeting of the Organizational Committee of the Community of South London on 5 May 1955 it was stressed that ‘having one’s own roof over one’s head is the basis of success’. However, it was only after the meeting of the Community Council, over a year later, that a concrete plan for buying a house was presented, which envisaged creating a joint-stock company. After a long discussion it was decided to study this project thoroughly. However, personal changes occurring in the composition of the Council caused a long silence (‘but only as far as the house was concerned – apart from that it was quite loud there’ – as it was stressed).<sup>8</sup> In 1957 the Community maintained as its main goal ‘the organization of its members’ life, in the future [based] on its own house; most of the Community’s income is allotted to its purchase, or possibly to its construction’. The main source of this income became the organization of parties which, ‘with the kind support of society’, yielded £145, 5 s. 7d. in 1956 alone (from the foundation of the Community of South London the sum was £174, 11 s. 5 d.).<sup>9</sup> For the *Gmina*, purchasing its own house was feasible.

However, two years passed, before on 20 November 1959 Krzysztof Szemirski presented a plan for purchasing a free hall in the area of North Clapham. ‘Unfortunately it was not a success (not due to the lack of willingness, but of cash), but from this time the demon of the landlord overcame this good man’, as it was recorded; ‘he constantly goes back to the issue of the Community’s own house and all the time “invents” new events to gather funds for a house’. Instead of individual Christmas wishes, Community members made donations for the purchase of the house and ‘invite their friends to imitate this action.’<sup>10</sup> By the beginning of 1962, £150 had been collected; it was explained that ‘this sum could be much higher if it

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Historia naszego domu’, in *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965. Unless otherwise specified, all information and quotations relating the GLP-P house are from this source.

<sup>9</sup> *Nasza Gmina*, [no number of issue] 20 Aug. 1957.

<sup>10</sup> There was printed set of fourteen surnames, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 3, 12 Dec. 1961. A similar action was organized in 1963. Set of sixteen surnames in *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 11, Dec. 1963

was not for their willingness to enable the parishes located in the area of the Community to successfully complete the Covenant campaign, to which end our own fundraising was delayed on purpose'. This campaign is strongly reinforced by the sense of thrift: renting rooms cost the Community in the years 1961-62 £271 – 'money which could have been saved if we had our own place.'<sup>11</sup> To cap it all, Lambeth Borough Council did not consider GPL-P as a local organization, and that implied paying higher rents.<sup>12</sup> In June 1962 there was already £600 in the budget; many Community members subscribed and committed themselves to monthly or weekly payments, others contributed on a one-off basis.<sup>13</sup> The issue of the organizational framework necessary for collecting money, the possible accumulation of gained profits, purchasing real estate and administering it remained open. The registration of the Community in accordance with the British law took up much time, which caused delays in looking for a house. Of course this campaign, as with others of its kind, served to establish and maintain solidarity through mobilization around a goal. It was a collective saving activity with a clear objective.

During the first General Meeting, after the registration of the organization as the 'Polish Community (South London) Association Limited', on 11 December 1960 Tadeusz Walczak demanded a report on the question of building or purchasing a house.<sup>14</sup> The Council Members formulated different proposals, but unfortunately money was constantly short. A proposal was put forward to apply to the Borough authority for a subsidy or a meeting room. However, the steps taken in this direction brought disappointment. In November 1960, Mr Walczak found an appropriate 'place', but again there was no money, and someone else bought the plot. Finally, in January 1961, the creation of a special House Department (*Referat Domu*) was suggested. Its manager, Krzysztof Szemirski, presented the plan, which was accepted by the Council. In June the possibility of taking out a lease on a room in 390 Brixton Rd. was considered. However, the Community Council's offer was not accepted as it was too low.

The house fund now amounted to nearly £800, when on 12 December 1962 Tadeusz Walczak put forward a proposal to buy a house at 80 West Side, Clapham

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<sup>11</sup> *Komunikat*, no 4 [1962].

<sup>12</sup> 'Z życia Gminy. Informacje Rady', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>13</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 5, June 1962.

<sup>14</sup> 'Protokół z Pierwszego Walnego Zebrania po zarejestrowaniu Polish Community (South London) Association Limited', 11 Dec. 1960. Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/ Rps/7.

Common, SW4. It was a 33-year lease, worth £4,000. It was noticed immediately that rent could be charged amounting to £800 to £900 a year. The Community Council after conducting a thorough analysis unanimously decided to purchase it, however, there was not enough money even to pay the deposit and the lawyer's fee. Council members agreed to guarantee the mortgage of £3,000, which was taken on by Tadeusz Walczak and Waldemar Cegłowski. Aware of the size of this undertaking the Community Council decided to call a Special General Meeting on 3 February 1963 in order to discuss once again the issue of the purchase, loan and administration of the house and seeking to gain the moral and financial support of all members. Unfortunately not many of them came, 'but those who came, came with goodwill, constructive ideas and... with money', noted the *Komunikat*.<sup>15</sup> The Council's project aroused considerable interest. An atmosphere of excitement dominated the room. There was a suggestion that they should join forces with the Brockley parish and to buy a house together, also inquire about buying a freehold. On the other hand, Jan Korzeń, who was against buying a house, stated that the Community's property should be used to maintain Polish identity. A heated debate developed during which participants of the meeting started to offer donations spontaneously. The meeting was suspended in order to enable the registration of declared offers. In ten minutes £80 was raised and 'a few weekends and evenings of work were offered by members who were professionals.'<sup>16</sup> A proposal to buy the house was passed with one vote against and five abstaining. It was decided that all Community members should subscribe £1.<sup>17</sup>

Notifications were sent to all members, but in view of the fact that the response was very weak, Council members decided to visit houses and collect at least £1 from each of them. In this way the remaining portion was collected. 'After many years of planning, discussions, hard work and enormous effort, we finally obtained something which brought us closer to having the Community House where we could organize the youth club, which was so very much needed, a place of relaxation and meetings for older members and entertainment for all generations', it was declared.<sup>18</sup>

And so on 15 March 1963 the GPL-P became the owner of its own, as it was called, 'first house'. It was explained that it was bought in order to invest the

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<sup>15</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, March 1963.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Later T. Walczak became head of the *Gmina*, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 38, March 1971.

<sup>18</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, Mar. 1963.

Community's money, which was unfortunately always in short supply, and there was 'far from enough in order to be able to buy a house only for the Community's use.'<sup>19</sup> The purchase agreement was signed by Andrzej Stańczyk, Krzysztof Szemirski and Julian Piwowarczyk: 'the transaction was made all the easier as the matter of the house's sale was conducted by the "Universal Homes Ltd. Agency" whose owners were W. M. Cegłowski and T. Walczak'. They both decided to forego the £113 commission in favour of the GPL-P, 'and Mr Walczak contributed also by receiving the loan in the bank amounting to £3,000 and acting, together with Mr Cegłowski, as its guarantor'. Costs connected with the purchase amounted to £75, 13 s., and the deposit paid at time of purchase was £1,000.<sup>20</sup> Probably, the doubts concerning the participation of the 'Universal' company (appearing in the sources under different names) incited a discussion during the General Meeting on 21 April 1963 and an official decision that 'the President of the Community Council, Mr Cegłowski, and the secretary of the Community Council, Mr Walczak, should act together as co-owners and directors of the "Universal Transfer Agency", which acted as the agent in the sale of the house to the Community.' Simultaneously, formal thanks were expressed for their having taken care of this problem and resigning from a fee.<sup>21</sup>

The dedication of Community members who paid their money and worked selflessly during the renovation contributed to the success. 'The House has three furnished flats. The rent brings in £19, 6 s. a week. After paying the last instalment of the loan this year only £600 will remain to be paid off in 1966. So, in the face of a few pessimists, we have a house which brings in profits and thanks to which our capital grows; soon we shall be able to afford to open a club as well'. From June 1963 the house brought in £200 (after deducting the contribution incurred for the renovation of one flat and supplying the missing furniture as well as the payment of the bank loan of £400).<sup>22</sup> In 1964, £900 of income from rent was estimated, and £1,012 was earned. Expenditure included the payment of the mortgage – £800, interest on the loan – £37, furnishing the house, administrative expenditure, announcements (*Komunikaty*), adding up to £288. The debit balance at this point amounted to £113. The Community's debt had decreased, however, by £800 and now

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

<sup>21</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 9, June 1963.

<sup>22</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965.

stood at £1,400.<sup>23</sup> Krzysztof Szemirski selflessly dealt with the administration of the house from the very beginning, according to his original pledge, with the ‘official’ help of the treasurer.

Although the opening of a youth club in the basement of the house was a declared goal,<sup>24</sup> the main goal of the Community continued to be the profitable renting out of the new property. Such a decision caused doubts, as in no way did it change the GPL-P’s working conditions. Activists confirmed these concerns declaring: ‘we did not resign from buying a house in the near future, which would suit our needs, but we have to have some more money than we do. [...] The collection for the purchase of the house continues, and persons authorized to collect donations are still active.’<sup>25</sup> The credit was successively paid off: in 1963 – £800, 1964 – £800, 1965 – £200. ‘There remained £1,200 to be paid, including £600 that shall be paid this year, that is for the next year there shall remain £600 to be paid off’, it was written in 1965. ‘Taking into consideration the rise in the house’s value, we can all congratulate ourselves, that with common effort we managed to achieve, after all, an enormous success’.

It was a real success indeed that a locally based, small organization was able to buy the house for local needs and successfully pay off a mortgage. The majority of others organizations usually ‘inherited’ their money from the resources of former Polish State in Exile. The Polish Community in South London started from nothing, with no donation from the government or the presidency. All the money was gathered privately from modestly situated individuals and families.

The Community leaders were convinced that the house was a good investment and a formidable source of income. A few GPL-P members regularly, every year, sent donations for the house.<sup>26</sup> In the 1965 report it was stated that the Community’s income amounted to £1,288, including £971 from rent, with expenditure of £1,766 (This was a big deficit.) It was proclaimed in *Komunikat* that ‘due to the probability of a law being passed allowing the purchase of the so-called freehold we shall be soon able to purchase the title deed of the Community house. Then the agreement to use the basement of the house as a club shall not be necessary.’<sup>27</sup> From this it

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<sup>23</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 16, March 1965.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Udany eksperyment’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 8, March 1963.

<sup>25</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 9, June 1963.

<sup>26</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

<sup>27</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 16, Mar. 1965.



emerges that the Community could not fully decide about its property, given the terms of the lease.

The issue of a club returned many times onto the agenda, which is not surprising. An ordinary GPL-P member could ask: ‘what do we need the house for if we cannot decide about what goes on in it?’ In March 1965 it was written that Community members were very interested in the Community Council works, and especially in ‘the matter of negotiations concerning renting the house and opening a club first in The Pavement, and then in Clapham High Street. Many members offered their help and others gave donations’. Unfortunately, despite these efforts and agreement of all necessary offices, in spite of obtaining an alcohol licence and registration of the club, the owners refused to agree to have a club organized in their building, as ‘ironically enough the owner of the house turned out to be the Temperance Society’. The search continued.

Deepening the basement of the Community house was planned in order to use it as meeting rooms and a bridge club<sup>28</sup>, which as we know turned out to be impossible. In December 1965 it was assured that the club ‘is still the Council’s concern and we do not omit any opportunity that appears [...]. In the few negotiations that we have conducted the case foundered because of either a too high price or due to an objection to the alcohol licence as was the case with the building in Clapham High Street.’<sup>29</sup> The issue of owning an appropriate building was considered as ‘a very vital, if the Community was to be an Organization which fulfils its statutory aims and objectives.’<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the house continued to bring in profits, but was not in very good condition. In the report of 1967 it was stated that new negotiations were in progress concerning the purchase of the freehold and the possible organization of a club there. Simultaneously, *Komunikat* informed that ‘there are great difficulties in finding an appropriate building.’<sup>31</sup> It is difficult not to question the logic of the Community’s actions: the house was bought and instead of opening a club in it, the house became a source of profit and energy was focused instead on buying the next building. Could it be the case that the Community activists had got carried away in their enterprising fervour? During the Annual General Meeting on 28 April 1968 it was said that the

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<sup>28</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 16, Mar. 1965, and no 17, June 1965.

<sup>29</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965.

<sup>30</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 22, Sept. 1966.

<sup>31</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, Mar. 1968.

house is the main source of income in the Community budget, as membership fees do not cover even the costs of publishing the *Komunikat*, which is received by all members free of charge. Alterations were planned in order to prepare a modest place for the Community office. As far as the club was concerned it was said that the *Gmina* president had viewed eleven buildings, ‘maybe the next Council will be luckier and the problem of the club, troubling every Council for years now, will finally be positively resolved’, commented the author of the GPL-P communiqué.<sup>32</sup>

For the first ten years the profits from the house were used to pay the bank loan with interest and income tax (about £300 a year). Only in the fifth year could the Community grant subsidies to schools and to the scout and guide groups and other organizations (about £360). In June 1968, the house’s freehold was purchased (£1,380 after taking out a bank loan of £1,000). Again after many years of using the house, some investments and renovations needed to be made: the roof was repaired, the gutters and pipes were replaced, a gas and electric cooker were purchased, and the staircase and corridors were renovated. Given that the renovations ate up almost the entire income, problems associated with paying back the loan appeared. It was decided that by December 1968 that the whole profit should be used to pay off this loan.<sup>33</sup> After a year it was written that the debt connected with the purchase of freehold still amounted to £500, and the bank was demanding immediate payment. The Community had ‘great problems with granting subsidies to schools and other social organizations.’<sup>34</sup>

As if these troubles were not enough, during the General Meeting on 19 April 1970 the project of the joint purchase of a house with the Lewisham Centre was accepted in order to set up a club. ‘After a heated debate there was a vote and the motion was passed’, however, the Council was given the right to make the final decision.<sup>35</sup> This project was not realized (information about the Lewisham Centre’s house can be found below). In the report of 1970 it was stated that the debt connected with the purchase of the house now amounted to £374, 8 s. 2 d. Again the payment was estimated to take place in a next year, but this time the aim was achieved: ‘our main investment, the house [...] has no more financial liabilities and is now fully

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<sup>32</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 29, June 1968.

<sup>33</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 31, Dec. 1968.

<sup>34</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>35</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 36, June 1970

owned by the Community', it was written nine years after the purchase. It was estimated that its real value by then exceeded £10,000.<sup>36</sup>

The club, however, was still not in operation. It was finally decided that one of the house floors should be used as meeting venue for the Council, Bridge Club and possibly for social evenings. The decision was also made thoroughly to renovate the property, inside and out. From November 1972 the Council meetings and bridge meetings took place on the first floor of the Community's own house.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, however, the Community Club was still not established. Until 1974 the house 'was used only as a tenement house.'<sup>38</sup> Finally, during the General Meeting on 6 May 1973 the president of the Council could declare 'that the Community's financial situation is better than at any time during the eighteen years of its existence. The house has been paid off, £500 is in a Building Society.'<sup>39</sup> However, more renovations were needed.<sup>40</sup> The report of 1973 lists the rent from the house amounting to £1,045, from a total £2,084.89 in revenue. House administration and cleaning cost £51, furniture, carpets and furnishing £397, renovation £320.22.<sup>41</sup> Thus it is clear that the Community House was a going concern and the task for *Gmina* members was not only to buy and next pay mortgage but also look after the house to make it comfortable and useful.

In July 1974, 'quite unexpectedly', and so not as the result of planned activities of the Community, a tedious resident, who had occupied the ground floor so far, had at last moved out (the tenant had cast-iron rights and could not have been evicted.) Only then did the opportunity arise to create the appropriate headquarters for the *Gmina*'s activity. The Council immediately passed a resolution to convert the ground floor and a part of the first floor to meet the needs of the Community. The estimates from local companies for the alterations were very high (£2,000), so it was decided that the works should be performed by members themselves.<sup>42</sup> These lasted for up to four months and cost £750 (the community overdraw its bank account by £600).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 38, March 1971 and no 41, March 1972.

<sup>37</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, December 1973.

<sup>38</sup> T. Walczak, '20 lat GPL-P', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

<sup>39</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973.

<sup>40</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 46, Apr. 1974.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 47, [1974],

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Walczak, '20 lat GPL-P'. The different amounts were published in *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48. According to these all renovations and adaptation of house in order to open the club cost £2,759.54!

In this way – a day before the twentieth anniversary of its existence and nearly twelve years after buying the house – the Polish Community of South London owned ‘a spacious and attractively furnished building where there was a bridge and chess club and where social meetings, parties and dances shall be able to take place.’<sup>44</sup> From 1974, General Meetings took place in the community house, and the club was opened on 15 December 1974. (By this time Tadeusz Walczak was the president of the GPL-P). The Community Club was open for members on Fridays from 8 p.m., on Saturdays from 7.30 p.m. and on Sundays from 5.30 p.m. The bridge and chess clubs operated and Andrzej Rumistrzewicz, a lawyer, gave ‘legal advice in cases concerning property, transferring property; housing, residential issues, etc.’<sup>45</sup>. It was hoped that public and social life as well as the Community’s charitable activity could gain momentum from 1975: ‘already now the Community house is vibrant with life. On Fridays up to forty people come to the Club.’<sup>46</sup>

In 1975, the rent from the rented part of the house still amounted to £1,419.75, but expenditure on the house came to £1,121.77<sup>47</sup>. During the General Meeting on 9 May 1976 (in which only thirty-six people participated) it was said that ‘paying off expenditure connected with furnishing the club was not yet complete.’<sup>48</sup> A year later (at the General Meeting of 27 March 1977) it was reported that income amounted to about £2,200 and exceeded normal expenditure by about £800. Thanks to this the debt was decreased by about £550 and the Community could spend £255 on social causes. We do not know, however, which debt this referred to, or if it concerned the further furnishing of the club. ‘After the meeting there was a tea party and a game of bridge.’<sup>49</sup>

One of paradoxes of this story – which is sometimes presented in the GPL-P documents with epic passion – is the fact that the opening of this long-awaited, and fully-owned club was followed by a general falling-off of activity in the ageing Community. The last, 52nd issue of the *Komunikat* was published in June 1977 and the further story of the organization (which is of less importance to us due to the

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<sup>44</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 49, December 1975.

<sup>45</sup> B. Laskowski, ‘Klub Brydżowy’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P; GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 49, Dec. 1975.

<sup>46</sup> Walczak, ‘20 lat GPL-P’.

<sup>47</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 50, Apr. 1976.

<sup>48</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>49</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 52, June 1977.

timeframe of this work)<sup>50</sup> is a series of social events for a closed and inevitably shrinking milieu of activists. I write about this process in the last part of this dissertation. The Community's own house was not as needed as before. The setting up in 1969 of the 'White Eagle' (*Orzeł Biały*) Club in Balham, South London, made it less necessary for the *Gmina* to own its own building, as both the General Meeting as well as many GPL-P events took place in its spacious hall. Finally, the house was handed over 'to POSK' in 1989 and sold in 1998.<sup>51</sup>

The role that buying and furnishing the house served, however, to develop solidarity, a substitute goal, which brought together a community who probably had little in common otherwise. Democratic entities such as the *Gmina* required such mobilizing tasks regardless of the real needs of the people they served.

### **Sarmatia, Ltd.**

It is impossible to decide today to what extent the decision to own a house as a practical aim of existence of the Polish Community of West London was inspired by the activities of 'the South', and to what degree it resulted from the general feeling about the directions of social activity. The first documented contact between the Community of West London and the Community of South London is a letter from the latter to the former with an invitation for a children's party of 13 October 1963. 'It would be nice to get personally in touch with the Board of the Chiswick Community' the South London Community concluded its letter.<sup>52</sup> The tenth *Komunikat* of the Polish Community of South London of September 1963 was attached, to be followed later by subsequent issues. The West London Community sent in return an invitation to the New Year's party on 1 January 1966.<sup>53</sup> The 'South' replied with an invitation to a New Year's Eve Ball on 31 December 1966.

'Most of us are still in Poland with our hearts, longing and thoughts' – it was written in the Community of West London's *Biuletyn* in September 1961 – 'as, however, we decided voluntarily and for *ideological* reasons to settle in exile, we

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<sup>50</sup> The history of the GPL-P between 1977 and 2004 (to the formal dissolution of the GPL-P) is recorded in Archives of the GPL-P deposited in Polish Library in London (Biblioteka Polska POSK).

<sup>51</sup> T. Walczak, 'Gmina Polska Londyn Południe (IV)', *DPDŻ*, no 83, 7 Apr. 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from J. Słowikowski, 30 Sept. 1963, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to the GPZL Board, 20 Nov. 1965, Archives of the GPZL.

must somehow organize here, in this foreign land, our own *Polish* life, and that is why we need a seat, our own POLISH HOUSE'. Creating such a centre was considered 'our generation's duty, we must leave a lasting memento to our successors – the Polish heritage.'

The first trace of attempts to purchase a house for the Community of West London and the need to set up a partnership to realise that goal can be found in the minutes from the Board meeting of 10 May 1960. Apparently, there was a chance to buy a house suiting the Community's needs. It was a big building, with twenty-three rooms, surrounded by quite a large garden (135 square feet). The price was £15,000. 'If it was found useful to purchase this house, added Adam Barszcz, '[then] we should hurry as it will surely not be on the market for long. It is necessary to develop legal a formula for the partnership and prepare candidates who are willing to and going to belong to it and are willing to pay an appropriate sum which would enable the purchase of this house.' It was decided that the issue should be prepared and presented at the Community Council meeting.<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, the house 'on which the Community put an offer of £15,000, received a new offer from the municipality of £16,500'. The Board decided not to increase its offer. It was decided that the 'Financial Committee (*Komisja Finansowa*) shall prepare a plan for the setting up of a partnership for the purchase of the house, it shall be discussed at the Board meeting and then accepted at the Community Council meeting.'<sup>55</sup> There was a not a long delay, because on 9 June, during the next Board meeting, Adam Barszcz informed those assembled that on 31 May, during the Financial Committee meeting, Tadeusz Rozwadowski had presented a project for the partnership. This was then reported on 21 July during the Council meeting. He did not have any doubts that: 'among all known types of Company Limited partnerships, the most appropriate shall be – a Private Company'. He enumerated the advantages of this kind of company: it only required two people to set it up, it is not necessary to publish accounts and issue a prospectus, it is possible to start the activity at the moment of submitting documents to the Registrar of Companies and receiving an appropriate certificate; he also stressed the relatively low fees. Accumulated capital, until it was used, should be kept in a safe place, preferably in a Building Society. It was important that the Community should have a privileged position in the

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<sup>54</sup> Community Board minutes, 10 May 1960. Archives of the GPZL

<sup>55</sup> Community Board minutes, 26 May 1960. Archives of the GPZL

partnership. The speaker was chosen to be a secretary of the future limited company and the Community's joining this partnership of the house purchase – as a founder – was passed. Shares of £200 were declared. It all went smoothly and unanimously.

Soon, it was officially announced in the *Dziennik Polski* that at the beginning of 1961 the house fund amounted to: £470 collected by the Community, £670 declared by shareholders, which amounted to the sum of £1,140.<sup>56</sup> 'This is only the beginning, but it is a good one and undoubtedly it shall find many followers, especially among local representatives of freelance occupations and owners of enterprises or houses', added the author of the article hopefully. It seems, however, that the only noticeable echo of this publication, instead of responses from new wealthy compatriots in the Community's area was a letter from the organizers of the Polish Club in Wolverhampton. They would also wish in the future to 'buy their own house and already had some funds to this aim'. As a reply they received the Partnership prospectus from the Community secretary with 'the wish to realize the project as soon as possible.'<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned above, from the outset, in the very first year of the West London Community's existence, steps were taken to create a 'legal entity', which would enable the Community to buy real property. Setting up such a partnership was a necessity as without it any plans to purchase the house would be impossible. The Community, as a completely Polish, social, self-governing and non-political organization, did not actually exist officially in the eyes of the British authorities.<sup>58</sup>

After lengthy twists and turns and debates with English lawyers it was confirmed that the original belief that the correct solution was a limited company in the form of so called 'Private Limited Company' was the best solution. It was registered on 10 April 1962 as 'Sarmatia Investment Co., Ltd.'<sup>59</sup> In this partnership, created only on the initiative of the Community, the latter was a privileged shareholder in the ratio of 3:1. A part of funds was located in it, destined by the Community for the purchase of its own house. Thanks to 'Sarmatia', the Community finally gained all the rights resulting from registering this partnership on the basis of the Companies Acts.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 'Gmina Polska w Zach. Londynie', *DPDŻ*, no 47, 24 Feb. 1961.

<sup>57</sup> Letter dated 19 Apr. 1961, and a response from A. Malczewski, dated 21 Apr. 1961. Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>58</sup> *10 lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969*, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> 'Załącznik do Biuletynu GPZL – listopad 1966'. Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>60</sup> 'Załącznik do Biuletynu GPZL – grudzień 1962'. Archives of the GPZL.

Three trustees elected by the Community Council for three years were responsible for the Community funds invested in 'Sarmatia Invt. Co., Ltd.', its shares, their administration, protecting the Community's interests and representing it at the shareholders' meetings. The trustees performed their duties free of charge.<sup>61</sup> It was decided that the Community Statute should be strictly tied in with the partnership statute and to this end on 27 April 1962 during the General Meeting a new statute was passed. It remained in force until 1969, when 'Sarmatia' was closed down.<sup>62</sup> The initial capital of the partnership was to amount to £6,000 in one pound shares, including 3,000 'A' type privileged shares – reserved only for the Community and 3,000 'B' type shares for other buyers. 'A' type shares had three votes, 'B' type shares – one vote. The board of three to seven directors, chosen by the shareholders meeting, managed the partnership and moreover the Community, as the 'A' type shares holder, had the right to designate one director to the board. Directors also performed their duties free of charge.

The search for their own accommodation continued, but without great success. In the meantime a house was found which nearly perfectly suited their needs, which could accommodate the Community and the social organizations' offices, a reading room, library, conference room and opened up the prospects of self-sufficiency due to the possibility of renting rooms. When the mortgage was assured, however, Chiswick Borough Council, in whose area the house was located, unfortunately refused to grant a licence to organize a club in this area.<sup>63</sup> Although the leaders of GPZL fought back, as demonstrated by the official correspondence of Stanisław Kuniczak with the Town Clerk of the Borough of Brentford & Chiswick, in the County Council of Middlesex,<sup>64</sup> they did not succeed. Undeterred, the Community activists searched for another appropriate building in the area, which was in fact suggested by the Borough Council. We can read in the report of the Community's activities of 1961/62: 'Two unsuccessful attempts dampened our ambitions a little and make us attempt to solve [the problem of] the Community-owned home more

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<sup>61</sup> The trustees were A. Barszcz, G. Ślepokóra and S. Kwieciński. *Biuletyn*, no 4, Dec. 1964.

<sup>62</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 3, Apr. 1963.

<sup>63</sup> Letter no R9/2/2 from County Council of Middlesex, 19 May 1961 informed: 'The area is allocated for residential purposes on the County Development Plan and the use of premises for the purposes required would prejudice the enjoyment by neighbouring occupiers of their premises', Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>64</sup> Letter dated 15 June 1961 and response dated 11 July 1961, Archives of the GPZL.



prudently – not putting them off, but rather encouraging the Community authorities to further efforts.’

The ‘Sarmatia’ fund amounted that year to £762, not counting twenty-one Community members who declared contributions of £840. ‘We have the right to believe that the English local self-government authorities would help us with the purchase or construction of our own house, provided, however, that we shall demonstrate a good, MASS organization of the Polish community [...]. We regret to say that the present list of Community members amounts to 219 people, nearly a half of whom has not paid their fee’, they appealed.<sup>65</sup> The impetus, however, slowed.

Things changed only after two years. Negotiations conducted from the beginning of 1965 concerning the purchase of the building ‘were so advanced that we had a ready contract to exchange with the seller’, unfortunately they were broken off by the seller in the last moment. ‘Until today we have not found an appropriate building, which would suit our purposes, and whose cost would be contained within the limits of our capabilities, which are very modest. [...] The issue of our own building is very important as according to the Board, our own building would activate the public and social life on the Community territory and would also create the basis for the activity of youth organizations.’<sup>66</sup> It was indeed a critical moment in the activities of the Community. An ordinary General Meeting of the Community members, on 12 June 1965, due to low attendance (only eighteen people were present) was rescheduled for the post-holiday period.<sup>67</sup>

Suddenly, in September 1966 the issue of purchasing the house became relevant again. ‘There appeared a house in the centre of Chiswick, suitable for our aims, in Sutton Lane.’<sup>68</sup> Many Community members viewed it, and during the Council meeting on 1 October 1966 it was decided unanimously to buy it. The price was £8,650. ‘Sarmatia’ took action immediately. First of all, it applied to a Building Society for a mortgage. The application was accepted, a £5,650 mortgage was granted to be repaid over twenty years. Given the interest rates of that time, the monthly payment would amount to £48. Thirty-one shareholders paid £1,026 to ‘Sarmatia’s’ budget, while the Community paid £1,000 in shares. It was ensured that

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<sup>65</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 2, Dec. 1962.

<sup>66</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 5, 12 Nov. 1965.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Letter from the GPZL Board to ‘Sarmatia Investment Co. Ltd.’ dated 19 Sept. 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

in future 'in order to enable loan payments and covering other costs connected with the maintenance of the house it was planned to rent a part of it to residents.' The opening of a professionally run nursery 'for Community members' pre-school children was also planned in order to help working mothers'.<sup>69</sup>

Further appeals were made to meet the payments and help for the Community Board and 'Sarmatia' in obtaining enough capital to purchase and start activity in the house. A special civic meeting was called on 3 December 1966 in the parish room of Saint Andrzej Bobola Church. In the face of revived hopes, activity was clearly stimulated and new initiatives flourished. It seemed that their own house was within reach. In order to obtain additional funds the decision was made to organize a lottery. The winners were to receive fifty, twenty five and ten pounds each and 'a range of valuable and useful prizes'. The prize drawing was planned for May 1967, during the festival on the territory of the Chiswick House Grounds.

Unfortunately, all these efforts proved to be of no avail. 'The only reason why we had to resign in the last moment was the fact that we lacked £600 [...] despite the fact that the president of the Council, Mr A. Barszcz offered an interest rate free loan for a few years for the costs of the house freehold purchase.' The efforts of the representatives authorized by the Board to raise funds for the house purchase, Adam Barszcz and Stanisław Kuniczak, did not bring positive results. They tried different methods. A series of letters applying for a loan was sent to a few émigré institutions. They turned mainly to institutions where they could expect money: the Polish Merchants and Industrialists Association (*Związek Kupców i Przemysłowców Polskich*). The Merchants refused writing: 'We regret that we cannot currently accommodate you, since we are planning to engage our capital in a different investment.'<sup>70</sup>

They also tried where there was not much hope: to the President of the Parent-Teacher Association (*Komitet Rodzicielski*) of the Mikołaj Rej Saturday School. The school refused and gave its reasons: 'The funds of the Teacher Association come from parents' payments for school and other sources, and are destined only for expenditure connected with the running of the school. Neither the president, nor the Association Board has any authority to withdraw money for any other aims. Granting loans from the school funds to the Community or any other institution would be

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<sup>69</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 8, Nov. 1966.

<sup>70</sup> Letter dated 5 Oct. 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

exceeding the Board's authority and could cause fierce protests on the part of parents, and even lead to a court case against the Board members.'<sup>71</sup> And again the vision of their own house slipped through their fingers, when it seemed so close to achievement...

'The Board was very disappointed with the lack of response to our appeal among the [Polish] society living on our Community territory', it was written overtly in the local press. 'The Civic Meeting called on 3 December 1966 did not attract the number of Community members and compatriots living on our territory, which the Board and the Council had every right to expect.' Despite this defeat the Board decided not to resign from 'the main goal, which was obtaining a seat for the Community and a hearth and home around which social activity could concentrate. [...] Facing a kind of crisis, when the Board's appeal to the members and society in such a serious case as purchasing a house, met with indifference of all members, the Board set itself, as its most urgent task that of increasing the number of active members and improving membership fee payment'.<sup>72</sup>

Only twenty per cent of Community members regularly paid fees during that period. There were appeals that as far as possible the fee rate should be voluntarily increased, as it was 'very low', in order to be able, in accordance with the Community statute, to allocate the obtained surplus to the house purchase fund.<sup>73</sup> It was necessary to focus on collecting funds and engaging new members in the Community's activity and shareholders in 'Sarmatia'. At the 'Sarmatia' shareholders meeting (26 March 1967) four directors were elected – due to the resignation of the former ones, leaving one position unfilled at the disposal of the Community.<sup>74</sup>

'Community savings and shares in "Sarmatia" [...] reached the amount of over £3,000 in 1968-69, including about £1,300 in "Sarmatia" alone' – it was estimated on the tenth anniversary of GPZL. Community activists admitted however, that 'they could not keep up with the increase in house prices and the fall in the value of the pound'. However, an idea had gradually crystallized which – as it seems – made the issue of the purchase of their own, local house outdated. 'When it was found out that "the Polish Centre of London" – started to move toward the Community – the Community decided to support the efforts of the Polish Social and Cultural Centre

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<sup>71</sup> Letter dated 21 Oct. 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>72</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 9, Jan. 1967.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 10, Apr. 1967.

(POSK) and to transfer to POSK as much as possible of the Community's resources.'<sup>75</sup> The Community had been coming closer to POSK for some time. The question of their own house increasingly lost its validity. 'Two houses, one next to the other, this would not have made any sense', Stefania Wolańska declared.<sup>76</sup>

There remained the question of the partnership. On 2 July 1970, information appeared that 'after closing "Sarmacja" down about £70 was left and it should be suggested to the Liquidation Committee that the above sum either be transferred to POSK, or possibly placed at the Community's disposal'. A 'heated debate' started. Finally 'the sum was handed by the Liquidation Committee to Mr Kowalski as a remuneration for his work for the benefit of "Sarmacja" [the Polish spelling of this name as in the original text – P. Ch.]'.<sup>77</sup>

'Sarmatia's' founders decided to close it down and deposits were returned to shareholders. A part of them bought shares in POSK (either directly or through the Lwów Circle, in this manner increasing the Circle's shares). The last time when the issue of buying a seat for the Community appeared was during the Board meeting at the end of May 1975. Zygmunt Grzyb 'asked if the Community could not buy or rent a modest place for its needs as there was no place in POSK now. The Board expressed its doubts if in the present conditions such an aim could be achieved, the more so because most of the Community members had supported POSK financially.'<sup>78</sup>

### **The presbytery in Lewisham**

A house of one's own was perhaps the greatest dream of the founder of the parish and the patron of the Polish Community in South-East London, Rev. Adam Wróbel. If it had not been for his constant efforts, and even for a kind of 'blackmail' towards his parishioners, it is possible that the search would not have ended successfully: 'And the most important thing our parish priest used to repeat was: "What will happen when I am not here any more?"' It is a phrase that is often remembered.<sup>79</sup> It

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<sup>75</sup> *10 lat..., op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>77</sup> Community Board minutes, 22 Mar. 1972, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>78</sup> Community Board minutes, 30 May 1975, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>79</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

should be stressed that Rev. A. Wróbel was completely financially independent and had his own house, while each of his successors had to be supported by his parishioners. ‘This is why Rev. A. Wróbel linked his concern about the future of the parish with having its own parish house, where a new parish priest could live.’ He knew the difficulties which girl guides and scouts had to deal with due to the fact that they did not have their own meeting place. Also ‘every meeting and larger gathering of parishioners was a problem – where should it be organized this time?’<sup>80</sup>

Prior to the revival of Polish community activity, which occurred after the successful celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the parish in 1961, it was difficult to even dream about buying a house. The General Meeting was arranged, the Parish Committee was created and organizational work started, fees were introduced,<sup>81</sup> covenants were taken out. In December 1962, during the General Meeting of the Church Commission (*Komisja Kościelna*) a proposal was put forward to purchase a house. In April of the next year a sixteen-person Committee for Building a House (*Komitet Budowy Domu*) was created. The task was ambitious, as the parish included only about 100 families. It was decided that the second collection during the Mass should be destined for the purchase of the house. The millennium donation on the occasion of the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Poland in 966 amounted to £393, and £247 was declared by parishioners. There were attempts to co-operate with the Community of South London, which also searching for a house. During the Special General Meeting of GPL-P on 3 February 1963 an activist of both organizations, Józef Marian Makulski, suggested joining forces and buying a house together.<sup>82</sup> As we now know, however, the Communities decided to act independently.

Given the fact that Rev. Adam Wróbel did not work with the complete approval of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (discussed in chapter 7) it was not assumed that the house should be owned by the parish, that is a local unit of the Mission, and thus remain in the hands of its financial umbrella – the Polish Benevolent Fund. In order to obtain independent organizational forms it was decided that the ‘Lewisham Polish Centre’ (POL, *Polski Ośrodek Lewisham*) should be registered according to British law, under the Charity Act – according to the statute

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Twenty pence from each family monthly (before decimalization, £1 counted 20 s. or 240 d.), *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965. The GPL-P allocated ‘£100 for a Parish House in Lewisham Centre’, T. Walczak, ‘20 lat GPL-P’, *op. cit.*

of 'Declaration of Trust'.<sup>83</sup> 'The Centre was created in order to collect money for itself, but the main aim was a flat for the priest', remembers Czesław Kwaśniewski, who also confirms that GPL-P activists were engaged in the organization of the POL. The Centre did not, however, constitute a part of the Community of South London; it was a very important undertaking for Rev. Wróbel, who even periodically (when there were no other volunteers) fulfilled the function of president.<sup>84</sup> 'I knew a lot about finance and I believed that the Centre should have been registered as a charity in order not to pay taxes. Not like the Community of South London, as a limited company; that was badly organized, as they had to pay tax on every penny', claims Józef Marian Makulski. The Centre was finally registered in 1973. 'The trust declaration' was signed on 20 November 1972.<sup>85</sup>

The closest possible contact and co-operation between the Church Committee and the newly created Centre were strongly emphasized.<sup>86</sup> The activity of the new Polish organization covered the region from Camberwell and Peckham to Dartford.<sup>87</sup> Already at the first meeting it was decided that the Committee of the Lewisham Polish Centre should be a charity. This meant that by the time enough funds had been collected to purchase the house, the Centre would grant loans to parishioners on easy terms – investigating each request individually – depending on the possibilities and needs of the person applying for a loan.<sup>88</sup> This was how the interest-free mutual assistance fund discussed in chapter 7 was created. There was not, however, much progress with the issue of the house. A factor that mobilized the members of Centre was the imminent, inevitable retirement of Rev. Wróbel.

There were some hesitations connected with main aim of owning a house. The year 1970 eventually closed with a General Meeting and an official resolution to change the aim of the house purchase. In the beginning it was to have been a Centre serving the school and youth club as well. 'The parish takes into account the resignation of the 75-year old parish priest, which is why his younger successor needs to have a flat. Hence, regarding the building for the House, a presbytery should be sought', wrote the *Kronika*. 'The "assets" of the Centre and the Committees

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<sup>83</sup> There were three Charity Trustees: Rev. Adam Wróbel, chairman, Waldemar M. Cegłowski, secretary, and Dr Zygmunt Szkopiak, treasurer. Szkopiak and Turło, 'Ośrodek Lewisham'.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Kwaśniewski.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski. Polish translation of the Declaration in the Archives of the POL.

<sup>86</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>87</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>88</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

(Parish and School) had clearly increased and the awareness of this fact encouraged parishioners to enhance their efforts.’<sup>89</sup> On the twentieth anniversary of the parish in 1971 a question was asked: ‘and maybe we should buy a parish house? We have been addressing this task for ten years! As we know, we have managed so far to miss some good opportunities!’<sup>90</sup> We know nothing more about these ‘missed opportunities’.

They were aware that ‘the prelate would like to have some rest after so many years of difficult social and personal life’; they also knew that he ‘will never rest until he finds his successor, and the successor needs a stronger material base.’<sup>91</sup> It seems that this question was left a bit on ‘the priest’s shoulders’. However, in the autumn of 1971 the search for a house accelerated: ‘we found an appropriate building at 1 Perry Hill, SE 6. The deposit was paid. [...] We have waited nearly ten years for this news. From this month onwards – all efforts for the house’ – the alarm was raised. ‘An autumn party’ (23 October 1971) despite low attendance brought in £54 – for the house.’<sup>92</sup>

During the Special General Meeting of both the Committees (School and Church) and the Centre (seventy people attended) the financial capabilities of the community were discussed. The price of the house was £7,600. After the discussion it was decided that it should be purchased. Volunteers paid cash – £583 – and additionally £1,869 was pledged in support. It was decided that the Committee members should visit parishioners and promote the need for additional payments according to the financial means of benefactors.<sup>93</sup> The New Year’s Eve party of 1971/72 brought in £140, ‘that was a good result’ noted the *Kronika*. A few weeks later, however, unexpected news came – ‘the house was gone! The house – the one discussed, watched separately and in groups, already settled and furnished in our imagination – this House was gone. Why did it happen? Well – simply. The agreement was broken. Someone else offered more. The owner withdrew his offer. We were exposed to unnecessary costs of initial formalities and a great disappointment. Our parish priest seemed to be the most strongly affected by this disappointment. His strength, fuelled

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<sup>89</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> ‘Refleksje Jubileuszowe’ [1971], *Kronika*, vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>92</sup> *Kronika* vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

by the hope of a quick, urgently needed rest, broke down completely.’<sup>94</sup> Despite the fact that enthusiasm decreased a little, everybody set about searching for a new building with redoubled effort.

In the beginning of 1973 a new building in Brockley Grove (price £11,000) was found. ‘It seems this time the house shall be ours’ – it was promised.<sup>95</sup> It had one room on the ground floor, and a second bigger room upstairs, a kitchen and a bathroom. In April 1973 the next General Meeting of the Polish Centre and Church Committee took place. The budget report of the outgoing boards demonstrated that buying a house had a financial justification. By that time the Centre’s committee had collected the sum of £8,000. It was considered that this capital combined with the Church Committee’s donation and a necessary loan of £4,000 should be enough. The loan was received and the house was purchased. The whole ‘financial story’ (*legenda finansowa*), with lists of voluntary donations and the numbers of hours worked to adjust the building to the parish needs were scrupulously published by the parish *Wiadomości*. Unfortunately, no issue of this magazine from that period was preserved apart from a telling cutting from the *Kronika*: ‘A disclaimer of the list no 4 of the supplement to *Wiadomości* in February. 1. We misinformed that Mr R. Janik worked from 0-5 hours, it should be 25-100 hours. Mr Janik worked on painting the wood (doors, windows, staircase) and renovating the kitchen.’<sup>96</sup>

It was assessed that the house ‘was created thanks to the prudent financial management of the Centre, thanks to funds collected over the few years by all parish organizations and Committees. [...] In every wall, in the floor there shall forever remain the effort of voluntary, physical work and dedication of parishioners. During their work misunderstandings disappeared, different views and even gender differences blurred as ladies equally well as men wallpapered and painted the interior’. This is a fundamental point that illustrates the democratizing and solidarity-building consequences of such joint efforts. In the summer of 1973, the house was not yet completely ready either to be lived in by the parish priest or for social activities. There were appeals to construction experts for help and it was decided that modifications should be carried out separately.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> *Wiadomości. Polska Parafia Brockley-Lewisham*, [, 1974 - ?]



In autumn 1973, Rev. Wróbel continually appealed to the dedication of the parish members in order to obtain the remaining sum of £800 needed for the final completion of the renovation. He did not confine himself simply to appealing, ‘his financial contribution to cover the costs of the house is really great’ – informed the GPL-P’s *Komunikat*.<sup>97</sup> The loan was repaid in monthly instalments of £39, which represented a considerable charge for the Centre. Finally, the most important works were finished: ‘a new parish priest Antoni Dębski has been in residence “in the presbytery” since 31 December [1973]’.<sup>98</sup> In the chapel located on the ground floor there was in the beginning no altar, the priest celebrated mass at a common table.<sup>99</sup> Apart from the parish, the house was also to serve youth. It was planned that ‘at least twice a month young people should spend evenings in discussions, having some entertainment and listening to music.’ It was recorded that ‘it was necessary to do everything possible in order to make the Parish House the centre of social life for them [the adolescents], with the possibility of learning about Polish culture and engaging in social and national work, which is the moral basis for Polish émigrés in England’.<sup>100</sup>

The Annual General Meeting of the parish Committee and Centre (23 February 1974) demonstrated that the financial assets as of 31 December 1974 amounted to £470.54, however £700 was transferred to the Centre for the maintenance of the ‘Parish House’. The aim of founding the Centre was to purchase a house, now the aim for the future is ‘taking care of the house, its maintenance and administration’.<sup>101</sup>

Before long, 25 April 1975 brought the first surprise: a fire broke out in the house. Fortunately it was quickly put out. Renovation work started. Negotiations were conducted with the insurance company, but the money received from that source did not cover all the expenditure – again parishioners’ dedication made up for the missing funds. A new electricity grid and ventilation system were installed, chairs and tables were purchased. There remained the problem of cleaning. There were appeals to volunteers to ‘help from time to time in cleaning the House, especially after the parties.’<sup>102</sup> In 1975, during one of the parish meetings additional

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<sup>97</sup> A. Stepan, ‘Działalność ks. prałata Wróbla w parafii Lewisham-Brockley’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973.

<sup>98</sup> *Kronika* vol. 2, 1970-73.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

<sup>100</sup> *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

regular fees amounting to one pound were passed unanimously to be paid monthly for paying off the loan and towards the maintenance of the parish house. Fifty commitments were made, but there were appeals for more.

The *Dziennik Polski* wrote in acknowledgement of the Centre, on the occasion of the award of decorations by the President of the Republic of Poland in Exile to its most distinguished activists: ‘With great effort of many people, their work in their time free of professional obligations, the house was restored to a functional condition. [...] The room on the ground floor serves all organizations as a meeting room for official and social occasions, and apart from that there are held, depending on the occasion, evening masses and church services. Despite its modest size, the house fulfils its function and is the parishioners’ pride; it is evidence of their dedication and sacrifice and their determination in preserving Polish identity and propagating the Polish spirit and culture in exile, especially among young people.’<sup>103</sup>

In 1980, this ‘modest house’ was sold and another one was bought, a two-storey one, in Waldram Park Road in the Forest Hill region (consecrated in 1982).<sup>104</sup> ‘We sold the house for which we paid £12,000 for £26,000, it seems that we took a loan of only £10,000 and from a bank’, sums up J. M. Makulski. ‘We started to pay back the rest. The alterations started. We joined three rooms downstairs in order to open the chapel and a bigger room. We changed the floor; we started to prepare two flats upstairs. One was destined for Rev. Dębski. One day he tells me: “Prepare this flat, but not for me, because I am buying a house”. In the beginning he lived in the basement (the whole house was used by residents). Later he moved to the ground floor.’<sup>105</sup>

A noble obsession...

## Conclusion

Even contemporary commentators of changes happening in the conscience of Poles in exile observed ‘the hunger’ to possess a house and accumulate capital in real estate which did not open them to any risk, and was a new characteristic of an

<sup>103</sup> K. C., ‘Ośrodek Polski Lewisham’, *DPDŻ*, 15 Apr. 1972.

<sup>104</sup> *Parafia Brockley-Lewisham. Aspekt historyczny* [typescript in the Archives of the POL] p. 2, J. Korona, ‘Biskup S. Wesoły na Brockley. Wizyta pod znakiem młodości’, *DPDŻ*, no 137, 11 June 1982.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with J. M. Makulski.

emerging lower middle class – something unknown in pre-war Polish society.<sup>106</sup> This need to create solid financial stability, or even make a fortune, the best proof of which was the obsession for possessing their own houses, was not known to this extent amongst the pre-war Polish intelligentsia. This social stratum can be considered a kind of equivalent to the British middle class in the period that closed with the Second World War. We can risk the conclusion that that private desire realized in every day life was transferred to the level of communal social life. The émigrés who created the Communities felt comfortable in their role as people hunting for houses, buying them, paying off loans and managing real estate.

All three stories told here concerning the search for, the repayment of the mortgages on, and the management of their own houses by the Polish Communities in London may serve as an interesting example of the building the material basis for the émigré social life. The fate of particular undertakings was also different. Activists organizing the social life in exile, coming from similar environments and declaring similar aims, decided on different technical means for organizing their activity. It is not fully clear, after several dozen years, why these and not other decisions were made. In the ‘South’, it was decided to set up a partnership ‘Polish Community (South London) Association Limited’, which – naturally – was closely connected with the activity of private companies whose owners and shareholders were the Community leaders. In West London, in setting up a partnership (‘Private Limited Companies’ type) – ‘Sarmatia Investment Co., Ltd.’, there participated people who, as it seems, paid more attention to separating their social from their professional activity. In the South-East, the ‘Lewisham Polish Centre’ was created under the Charity Act, according to the statute of ‘Declaration of Trust’. It seems that this last form, that of a charitable foundation, was the most convenient, and also the most common among the rest of the organized émigré life.

When we try to comprehend the effort expended over thirty years by a team of people from the Community of South London, we cannot escape from the impression that these activists became somewhat confused. As was summed up many years later, ‘it was a completely natural thing that *the whole effort* [*italics – P. Ch*] was directed towards the repayment of loans’. This was the reason why GPL-P organized lots of ‘different kinds of events for adults, young people and children, such as: parties,

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<sup>106</sup> W. A. Zbyszewski, ‘Przyszłość emigracji polskiej w Anglii’, *Kultura*, no 5, May 1965.

social meetings, sports games, trips, which were filmed, and the incomes were turned into the payment of liabilities.’<sup>107</sup>

The question of possessing of house was mythologized, it was desired so much and even some organizational shortcomings were put down to the lack of their own building. Simultaneously, in the course of setting new tasks (loan repayment, then the purchase of the freehold, finding a new place for the Community club, and even participation in buying houses for other communities) the usage of the house in accordance with the original intentions was put off. The activists’ unquestionable, original success, not so common in the émigré reality, which is seen in the counter-example of the Community of West London’s failures, in efficiently collecting funds, was lost in the many years of long bustle. However, perhaps the decision to treat the house solely as a financial source for other Community activities was taken at a very early stage. After all, the leaders of the *Gmina* demonstrated great efficiency in running a business in their private activities. It is still an open question if this social energy, channelled by an aspiration to have their own house, could have been used for another aim. Nonetheless the Community of South London’s ‘house epic’ constitutes an example of the success of social activity – a declared task (possessing the real estate necessary for the proper work of the community) was achieved quite rapidly. Only in the later phase the means in the form of possessing private Community building was mistaken for the aim – using it for the benefit of the *Gmina*. The aim in itself became just possessing and generating profits from rental.

The Polish Community of West London did not even achieve that much – they did not manage to overcome the problems of administration, renovation and repayment. The funds raised were transferred to a greater goal, which was considered ‘higher’ – POSK, the huge Polish Social and Cultural Centre in West London. It was controversial, but for the residents in the immediate proximity there could be no doubts that it would also fulfil a local role, similar to the one their own GPZL club could have played. The Community’s settling in POSK irretrievably changed, however, the character of its activity. The Community was deprived of an important, it seems, aim for its existence – namely in the form of searching or repaying their own house – and thus gradually lost its identity and style.

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<sup>107</sup> M. Z. Słowikowski, ‘Na 20-lecie Gminy – trochę historii’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

Only the story of the Polish Lewisham Centre gives us an example of matching words to deeds, and ending in success. Thanks to the persistence of the spiritual patrons of the community (people of such stature and authority did not appear in other Communities) the house was not only bought, repaid and used in accordance with declared intentions, but after not a long time it was sold and exchanged for a bigger one, which serves the community to this day (2008).

In the case of all the Communities, of course, the importance of activities connected to a the house cannot be undervalued as a form of integrating the group and gaining organizational efficiency, qualities which benefited other fields of activity.

It is interesting to note how the focus on the material structures did in the end contribute to the social integration of these groups during the 1960s and early 1970s. The subsequent search for tasks came to an end, and the wider émigré community entered a routinized state – until 2004, that is, when new challenges came their way via the mass migration of Poles to the United Kingdom. Could new buildings and projects – such as daily Polish schools, or the saving of Fawley Court,<sup>108</sup> be substitute vehicles for integrating new communities? I should however point to the myriad of minor efforts and disappointments, which required a strength of spirit to overcome the loss of a possible purchase. It is in this way that the building blocks of social integration are put together through the social glue of effort and sacrifice.

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<sup>108</sup> At the time of writing (the end of 2008), it appears as though the Marian Fathers will sell the house and park, despite the concerns expressed in émigré circles. The museum closed in 2006.

## 10.

**Special occasions in the public sphere**

The London Communities co-operated with other institutions of Polish émigré life. It was natural, therefore for the *Gminy* to initiate, co-ordinate, sponsor and generally assist with the staging of some public events. Apart from the most important issues for these Communities (community life, parties and searching for premises), they organized their own cultural and political events or participated in those that were shared with the entire ‘independence’ emigration. Both the first sort of activity (connected with schools, scouting and guiding, a parish, or sports clubs) as well as the second kind, together constitute the entirety of the Communities’ history. Exceptional situations could also occur in the midst of routine activity.

The Communities also shared some dangerous situations characteristic for all émigré social activity – infiltration by the communist regime’s secret service. It is, in its way, a kind of link with the history of Poles in Poland. On another hand we can observe the process of integration into British society, which is represented here by the contacts of activists from the *Gmina Polska Londyn-Południe* with the local authorities: Lambeth Council.

**Flowers for General Haller**

The degree of particular organizations’ engagement in the fields that extended beyond their own ‘backyards’ varied. It was at its greatest in the Community of West London, but was lower south of the river. Activists from the Lewisham Centre unanimously confirm that ‘nothing shocking’ happened as far as its activity was concerned<sup>1</sup> (although the dance group *Niemen – Karolinka* was undoubtedly a success). ‘An extraordinary event?’ wonders Zbigniew Jankowski, ‘in principle I guess there was no such event...’ Elżbieta Piekarska adds: ‘it was difficult to manage in the conditions of “our poverty” and our greatest problem was to get money to support the parish and the school’. ‘There was no extraordinary event – we really

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with E. Piekarska.

worked very hard', remembers Danuta Kwaśny, while Józef Marian Makulski responds: 'financially it went well'.<sup>2</sup> However, nothing 'more than our poverty' happened, at least initially. For example, English-language advertisements have survived for concerts in Saint Saviour's parish hall on 17 August and 14 September 1951, and also for a 'Carol Evening' on 11 January 1952.<sup>3</sup> While on the subject of music, it is worth noting that one of the members of the West London Community, Teofil Andrzejewski organized a 'Chopin Evening' on 11 June 1960, during a 'Chopin year'. It was one of the first grassroots initiatives to be proposed to the Community after its foundation. The programme included 'a tale interlaced with pieces from the Chopin's extremely rich repertoire'.<sup>4</sup>

In West London, the Community was swift to involve itself in activity of an 'all-Polish' character (meaning that it concerned all Poles who were part of the wartime and postwar emigration). In January and February 1961 the Committee for the Care of Cemeteries (*Komitet Opieki Nad Cmentarzami*) of the 2 Corps in Italy (whose president was General Władysław Anders) asked the GPZL to send money for taking care of the cemeteries under the slogan: 'From the living to those killed in action' on the occasion of the seventeenth anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino. Numerous events were planned for May 1961, including a lottery, concert, and the paying of respects to the standards.<sup>5</sup> The Community transferred £15 of the income from the party to the Committee for the Care of Cemeteries. Nor did the Community forget to delegate members of the Board to take part in the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Józef Piłsudski's birth on 5 December 1967.

At the beginning of its existence, members of the Polish Community of South London also engaged actively in all-émigré events and commemorations. This was connected with the clearly political character of the GPL-P at that stage. On 15 July 1956 on the Community's initiative 'an impressive protest against the killings in Poznań' took place in Saint Mary's Hall, while during a party held on 17 November 1956, £10, 11 s. was collected and transferred to the Mayor of London to be sent as aid for the victims of the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In July 1957 medicine worth £24, 14 s. 6 d. was sent to the Office of the Primate of Poland and Archbishop of

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Z. Jankowski, E. Piekarska, D. Kwasny and J. M. Makulski.

<sup>3</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from T. Andrzejewski to S. Kuniczak, 28 Nov. 1959, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>5</sup> Archives of the GPZL

Gniezno, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. They were destined for compatriots 'returning from Soviet forced-labour camps and prisons'.<sup>6</sup>

After the registration of the GPL-P in 1961, this type of activity became more declatory in character. On the twentieth anniversary of the Battle of Monte Cassino the Community Council 'paid homage to those killed in the fight for the freedom and independence of Poland',<sup>7</sup> they also remembered the fiftieth anniversary of the struggle of Józef Piłsudski's Legions against Russia (in 1965) and in 1969, 'the year of great anniversaries', appeals were made to commemorate: the thirtieth anniversary of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Rising, the allied landings in Normandy and the battles fought in France by General Maczek's 1 Armoured Division, and the capture of Monte Cassino. The Community issued a reminder that 'we came here as free Poles and while we live and our Polish children and grandchildren live, free Poland shall last',<sup>8</sup> but it is impossible, reading these and similar fragments after many years, not to notice the tendency towards platitudes. In the thirty-sixth *Komunikat*, issued in June 1970, the information about the death of General Władysław Anders (on 12 May 1970) was placed on the first page. It was also due to the much-revered general's death that the date of the spring party had already been rescheduled for 30 May.

As well as these words and gestures, the Communities financially supported some émigré institutions, which guarded the ethos of the post-war emigration. The GPZL subsidized the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum, the Committee for Commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of Marshal Józef Piłsudski's Birth and the Polish Library.<sup>9</sup> In 1968, on the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the GPL-P, it was written that 'taking part in action on a larger scale' the Community contributed £15 to the Monument in Portsmouth to the Insurgents of the 'November' Uprising of 1830-31 against the Russian Empire. It was also called the monument of 'the Founders of the First Polish Expatriate Community in England'.<sup>10</sup> In addition, that year they gave £70 to the Polish Library.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Nasza Gmina*, 20 Aug. 1957.

<sup>7</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 13, July 1964.

<sup>8</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>9</sup> According to the resolution of the General Meeting of 25 Feb. 1967.

<sup>10</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, Mar. 1968.

<sup>11</sup> T. Walczak, '20 lat GPL-P', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*



The Communities did not function in an organizational void. On 21 October 1966 the GPZL became a member of the Federation of Poles (*Zjednoczenie Polskie*),<sup>12</sup> and on 20 October 1967 became a supporting member (carrying a £2 fee) of the Association of the Disabled Veterans of the Polish Armed Forces (*Związek Inwalidów Polskich Sił Zbrojnych*).<sup>13</sup> In 1967 Stanisław Kuniczak was the Chairman of the Executive Committee Council of the Federation of Poles, and in 1975 Łucja Ślepokóra was the secretary of this Council. In the ‘South’ it was announced that Lieutenant Colonel Pilot Z. W. Bieńkowski was vice-chairman of the Federation of Poles,<sup>14</sup> but the Community of South London cannot be found on the list of organizations belonging to the Federation of Poles in 1970. Its engagement in the activity of POSK, described in the next chapter, is a separate case.

Sometimes the Communities organized their own patriotic celebrations. For example, on 10 November 1968 the Lewisham Centre organized the commemoration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Stanisław Kostka (a pious, miracle-working Jesuit novice who died young, and so was held up as a role model to generations of pupils in Jesuit schools) and the fiftieth anniversary of Poland regaining its independence on 11 November 1918.<sup>15</sup>

The GPZL archive contains an unpublished description of a celebration organized on the 170th anniversary of the Constitution of 3 May 1791 (the first modern constitution in Europe), with the co-operation of children from the Saturday school and other young people, on 7 May 1961, in the Chiswick Catholic Church Hall. The president of the West London Community opened the meeting, and later gave a speech, which is worth quoting, to give some idea of what could be heard on such occasions. Stanisław Kuniczak ‘stressed that Poland of that time was leading in the field of social and political development in Europe and that it was already following its path to the perfect modern state. Poland was a more perfect creation than its neighbours but physically weaker than them. The love of freedom and attachment to civil liberties survived in all generations until today and this quality was even recognized by our enemies, no to mention the so-called friends, who in their hours of need coin the cliché of an “inspiration for nations” for us. Poles never accepted persecution, in any form; they shared their freedom with other nations or

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<sup>12</sup> Community Board minutes: 4 Apr. 1966, 20 Feb. 1970, 8 Mar. 1967, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>13</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 12, Dec. 1967.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Nowinki’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>15</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

rushed to fight for their freedom.’<sup>16</sup> These words also seem to be also characteristic of émigrés’ interpretations of other aspects of the more distant Polish past.

A year earlier during a similar celebration, the speech was made by Professor Stefan MękarSKI,<sup>17</sup> whose membership in the Community was not, however, taken further advantage of. There was a proposal to organize a lecture by him, but probably nothing came of it. This failure probably indicates that the Community leaders kept their distance from more intellectual events. Professor MękarSKI agreed, however, to accept the position of the chairman of one of the General Meetings.<sup>18</sup> Such things as the wreath to be laid on General Józef Haller grave were remembered: ‘on the ribbons there was to appear an inscription “the Polish Community of West London”’.<sup>19</sup> In 1976 on All Souls’ Day (2 November) a delegation of the Community of South London laid flowers at the Katyń monument in Gunnersbury Cemetery with the ribbon: ‘To the victims of the crime – GPL-P’. It was stressed that the ribbon should be placed in the General Sikorski Institute and that the present representative of Radio Free Europe recorded that moment on tape.<sup>20</sup> In 1972 Bogdan [?] Brodziński on behalf of the GPL-P conducted a trip round London ‘for a group of forty former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, invited by the Dulwich branch of the Rotary Club,’<sup>21</sup> However, we shall not find further examples of this sort in the Community of South London.

Reading was promoted incidentally. In March 1968 an advertisement appeared in the *GPL-P Komunikat*, no 28, about the publication of ‘Introduction to Modern Polish Literature’, by L. Krzyżanowski and A. Dillon, and in 1975 an advertisement of the book *Siedem dni i siedem nocy w Normandii* (Seven Days and Nights in Normandy) with a preface by General Stanisław Maczek, written by doctor Ludwik

<sup>16</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 1, Sept. 1961.

<sup>17</sup> Archives of the GPZL. Stefan MękarSKI (1895-1985), philosopher, historian of Polish literature, librarian of the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów. In 1918-34 he was an editor of *Słowo Polskie* in Lwów, in 1930-35 a Member of the Polish Parliament. During the war he worked in the Ministry of the Interior and in the Ministry of Information of the Polish Government in Exile. After 1945, he was one of leaders of the League for Polish Independence (*Liga Niepodległości Polski*), a member of the National Council (1951-53, 1973-83), and other émigré institutions. As a political writer he wrote for the periodicals *Orzeł Biały* and *Wiadomości*, and published books analysing the situation in postwar Poland (for example *Przewrót obcy w kulturze polskiej*, London, 1952) and the former Polish south-eastern lands (*Lwów – A Page of Polish History*, London, 1944). Arkadiusz Adamczyk, *Wstęp* in S. MękarSKI, *Zapiski z Rothsay 1940-1942*, London and Piotrków Trybunalski, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Community Board minutes, 9 May 1969, Community Council minutes, 2 July 1961, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>19</sup> Community Board minutes, 9 June 1960 and 16 June 1960, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>20</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Goście z Kraju’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 43, Dec. 1972.

Józef Szygowski ('published under his own imprint, a short, seven-day diary covering the hardest moments of the Normandy campaign of 1944').<sup>22</sup>

To depict fairly the GPZL and GPL-P's support for highbrow culture, let us mention that in 1970 the Board of the Community of West London voted a subsidy of £20 for the Congress of Polish Contemporary Science and Culture in Exile (*Kongres Współczesnej Nauki i Kultury Polskiej na Obczyźnie*) (held on 9-12 September 1970),<sup>23</sup> while the Community of South London granted as much as £150 to that aim.<sup>24</sup> Zygmunt Szkopiak wrote extensively about this event in the *Komunikat*, emphasizing the scale of financial aid contributed by the South London Community. The thanks from the treasurer of the Congress's Organizational Committee Walery E. Choroszewski were also reprinted, which shed some light on the background to this donation: 'As the subsidy is transferred after the congress', wrote the treasurer, 'I believe that we can take it as a kind of appreciation for the idea of the Congress and work that went into to the preparation and conduct of the whole event.'<sup>25</sup> The initiative was generously supported after it had already succeeded. This indicates that the attitude of the Community leaders to the financial decision was practical and careful. They did not accept any serious risk during their rare acts of co-operation with central émigré organizations and events.

### **Infiltration – between *Polonia* and the emigration<sup>26</sup>**

The Communities and the 'independence'-oriented emigrés also shared concerns and dangers. The infiltration of social and political organizations by the communist authorities and different forms of provocation did not escape their notice.<sup>27</sup> The brochure *Kiedy jedziesz do Polski...* (When you go to Poland...), quoted earlier, warned about the enemy within, in the form of the Association of the Polish Community Abroad in Great Britain (*Zrzeszenie Polonii w Wielkiej Brytanii*) and the magazine *Przegląd Polski*: 'Common frauds happen. Regime magazines for the

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 3 above, for the advertisement of the book by M. Z. Słowikowski, *Bój w obronie Warszawy i śmierć ks. I. Skorupki*. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

<sup>23</sup> Community Board minutes, 1 Apr. 1970, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>24</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> For the differences between these two definitions, see chapter 3 above.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Z. S. Siemaszko.

Polish community abroad (*polonijne*) inform, for example, that representatives of a well-known organization in exile took part in an event organized by the embassy of the Polish People's Republic. Then it transpires that a small group of a few people acted under the stolen banner of the independence institution.<sup>28</sup>

A similar danger was also indicated in the documentation of the Federation of Poles, kept by the Community of West London, so probably it was known to its members or at least to its leaders: 'In the second half of 1966 we received information that pro-regime agents want to set up an organization which is to resemble the Federation of Poles. There were plans to create – and there are already created – different fictions and camouflaged, allegedly apolitical and not connected with any party, organizations whose authorities include always the same small group of people. [...] The Federation of Poles in Great Britain has already warned Polish society in exile and social organizations many times, both during its annual meetings as well as in the independence press, against attempts of infiltration taken by the communist regime. Although these attempts, undertaken for many years, did not yield any results, lately, however, the regime has come forward with a new sabotage, that is, the creation in Great Britain of an institution which, as we read in a distributed leaflet, is to constitute a wide representation of "the Polish community in Britain" (*Polonia Brytyjska*). We are further reminded in the statement entitled 'The Federation of Poles Warns' (*Zjednoczenie Polskie ostrzega*) that the Federation is 'the only and sole institution representing the whole of organized and independence-related Polish life', that 'fifty leading social organizations' belong to it and that 'all these organizations are founded on the idea of continuing the struggle for independence, because Poland is a not a free country and nor is the Polish nation free.'<sup>29</sup>

The warning against infiltration was published in the GPZL's *Biuletyn* of November 1966 titled 'Alarm. The regime attacks the émigrés' (*Alarm. Reżym w ataku na emigrację*): 'Let us bear in mind the real good of our Homeland. Let us avoid the hypocritical slogans spread by traitors, renegades and opportunists. We are émigrés conscious of our aims, we know our enforced fate, as well as its causes. Motivated by the spirit of fighting for Poland's rights to its stolen lands in the East,

<sup>28</sup> *Kiedy jedziesz do Polski...*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Przegląd Społeczny. Komunikat Zjednoczenia Polskiego w Wielkiej Brytanii*, London, no 60, Jan. 1967.

which shall never be obsolete, as well as the full freedom and independence of our country, we must increase our vigilance and repel with determination the attack of the regime. We were not weakened by the hardships and experience of the tough past – so today as well let us find the strength to fight back sanctimonious slogans and empty platitudes. Let us keep sound Polish thought and Polish hearts founded on indomitable (*niezłomne*) independence ideas.’

An example of an attempt at infiltration, which took place just after the beginning of the West London Community’s activity, was no doubt an attempt to organize a lecture about the Regained Territories by an activist from the Central Committee of the Millennium of Poland (*Centralny Komitet Millenium Polski*). The lecture was called off on 19 May 1960. To gain better knowledge of this field, which is very delicate from the point of view of research and requires great responsibility, primary research would be needed in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN, *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) and the intelligence and secret services in communist-ruled Poland, if they were preserved and were made available. One of the first publications to use such materials has recently appeared.<sup>30</sup>

I am, however, in possession of certain sources concerning the Polish Community of West London, which help to reveal the most evident examples of the regime’s attempts at provocation.

In the GPZL Archive there is an appeal of ‘the Central Committee of the Millennium of Poland in Great Britain’, in which it promotes itself as ‘the initiative of people of goodwill’ and which constitutes without a doubt a subversive event. A leaflet dated April 1960, starting with the appeal: ‘Compatriots!’ was nothing but a provocation aimed at the existing Committee of the Millennium of Christian Poland (*Komitet Tysiąclecia Chrześcijańskiej Polski*), founded by the Federation of Poles. This was a very simple destructive method, which obscured the facts: the Central ‘Committee notes with satisfaction that nearly at the same time two Polish centres in central England have proposed an initiative to commemorate the Polish Millennium [...] in London the Federation of Poles prepares for the celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in Poland, while recently a general meeting of the Community of West

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<sup>30</sup> *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec emigracji politycznej i Polonii* (Warsaw, 2005), in the series *Monografie*, edited by Ryszard Terlecki and published by the IPN. The most interesting from our point of view are the papers by Sławomir Cenckiewicz, (‘Działanie Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego przeciwko repatriantom z Zachodu w latach 1945-1953’), and R. Terlecki, (‘Walka wywiadów, czyli rozpracowanie pułkownika Bąkiewicza’). See also Krzysztof Tarka, *Mackiewicz i inni. Wywiad PRL wobec emigrantów*, (Łomianki, 2007).

*London requested the newly elected Board to take the initiative to commemorate in the period 1960-1966 the 1000th anniversary of the Polish state and adoption of Christianity by the Polish nation [italics – P. Ch.]*’ The authors of the appeal announced ‘co-operation with local committees, mutual information and exchange of experience’.

On the reverse of the leaflet, a Community activist handwrote ‘SABOTAGE’ (*DYWERSJA*)... Any doubts concerning the character of this provocation were dispelled by a second leaflet. This time it came from the tourism section of the dubious Committee. It informed about the common initiative with the Polish Travel Bureau ‘Orbis’ and LOT Polish Airlines of a trip to Poland ‘along the route of the Millennium and to take part in the Grunwald celebrations,’ (In 1410 the combined forces of Poland and Lithuania had defeated the Teutonic Order on a battlefield between the villages of Grunwald and Tannenberg.) It offered a temptation: ‘during this trip for those who would stick to visiting the seaside and taking part in the Grunwald celebrations it shall be possible to visit families’. Certainly, ‘due to a tight deadline’, and because it was a really good bargain, ‘those interested were requested to apply as soon as possible to the address of the Committee’.

The Community reacted immediately. In a handwritten version of a letter to the unnamed ‘Mr Editor’ (surely of the *Dziennik Polski*) the secretary (T. Chachulski) and the president (S. Kuniczak) wrote: ‘We are alarmed by the appearance on our territory of an appeal of an unknown Central Committee of the Millennium. [...] So to avoid even the smallest misunderstandings – we firmly declare that we have had and shall have nothing in common with the above mentioned Central (?) Committee. We shall participate in the celebrations of the Millennium of Poland in the general framework of events organized by independence émigré organizations.’<sup>31</sup>

We also know about one more attempt of sabotage, which the Polish Community of West London encountered directly on 20 October 1966. The *Dziennik Polski* carried an anonymous advertisement for a party, which was to take place in a location traditionally and frequently used by the Community – Chiswick Catholic Church Hall, Common Road, London W4. ‘Many people could suppose that it was a party organized by the Community’, wrote the worried president and secretary, Adam Robiński and Mieczysław E. Pułaski, to the editorial staff of the *Dziennik*

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<sup>31</sup> Archives of the GPZL.

*Polski*. ‘When checked, it turned out that the advertisement concerned a party organized by the “Polish Olympic Committee” which was, as is well known, an organization under the patronage of the Warsaw regime’. The authors of the letter paid attention to the inappropriateness of printing in ‘an independence organ, this kind of anonymous advertisement’, which can become the cause of misunderstandings and ‘in consequence promote regime-sponsored events, which we think is not the intention of *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza*.’ The case was treated seriously, as a copy of the letter was immediately sent to the ‘highest emigré authority’ – General Władysław Anders.<sup>32</sup>

‘Sceptics, defeatists and people co-operating with the regime in Poland call us every word under the sun, slandering the emigrants; ZBOWiD [*Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację*, the regime organization uniting veterans] wants to divide us for good’, warned the founder of the Community of West London.<sup>33</sup> Similar uncompromising statements are not to be found in the publications of the sisterly Community of South London. In its history there are however two episodes, which are not easy after so many years to reconstruct or explain unambiguously.

The 1965 *GPL-P Komunikat* carried an unusually handsome advertisement of the ‘Poland Street Agency’ (15 Poland Street, London W1).<sup>34</sup> This agency ran a branch of the communist state bank PKO, and the Polish Tourist Bureau ‘Orbis’, so without any doubt it had very close relations with the Warsaw authorities. Its quite telling advertising slogan was: ‘From Poland and to Poland the way goes through “Poland Street”...’ Promoting such travels in the pages of a magazine of an organization, which described itself as an ‘independence’ organization, may seem amazing. ‘The Community’s aim was to improve the Poles’ living conditions, take care of maintaining Polish traditions and customs, to help young people, *and first of all to struggle to regain the Freedom and Independence of Poland [italics – P. Ch]*’, wrote Tadeusz Walczak.<sup>35</sup> ‘Poland Street’ advertisements appeared repeatedly in the Community’s bulletin. I did not find any reactions against the decision of the editorial board to accept them. This episode describes a strange gap between the official slogans of émigré activity and everyday practice. There is a further example

<sup>32</sup> Letters, 26 Oct. 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>33</sup> S. Kuniczak, ‘Na Dziesięciolecie Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu’.

<sup>34</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P*.

<sup>35</sup> Tadeusz Walczak, ‘Gmina Polska Londyn Południe (I)’, *DPDŻ*, no 80, 4 Apr. 1989.

of similar dimness in approach to an institution evidently influenced by communist regime.

The enthusiasm with which a weekly *Kronika. Pismo dla wszystkich* (Chronicle. The magazine for everybody) praised the Community seems controversial in retrospect: ‘The GPLP [*sic*] belongs to those few, although increasingly frequent, signs of reason and positive actions in the life of Polish émigrés in Great Britain’, ‘an exemplar of behaviour for emigration organizations, eaten up by quarrels and conflicts’, ‘in the life of Polish émigrés in Great Britain platitudes lose importance and concrete achievements gain significance. That the place of different highly-regarded activists under the banner of SPK [...] is taken by practical (*konkretni*) people, entering the scene of Polish life, who can do something, and who during long years of hard work ensured the foundations of their personal life! It would be the most fortunate if the example of the GPLP [*sic*] became widespread, if it became an example for the émigré life, which is going through a serious crisis’. A photograph presenting the board with cuttings regarding the GPL-P accompanies the article, in which there is another praise of the Community published in *Kronika*. A caption under the photo: ‘*Kronika* is not boycotted in GLP [*sic*], which is proved by the above endpaper put on the wall during the General Meeting’.<sup>36</sup> Edited by a well-known publisher, Bolesław Świdorski (who secretly co-operated with the communist intelligence service, using the pseudonyms ‘Nord’ and ‘Kozerski’),<sup>37</sup> *Kronika* was a magazine financed by the Polish communist regime’s London embassy to the considerable tune of £7,200 a year. The regime’s intention to use *Kronika* for the sabotage of the ‘independence’ emigration were obvious to majority of émigrés.<sup>38</sup> There is no doubt about that fact.

In explaining other questions regarding the interaction of ‘Poland Street’ and *Kronika* with the Polish Community of South London, the latter’s former activists do not help after all these years. Bogdan Laskowski (the last president of the GPL-P), trying to make light of the matter, only stresses that the Community, where in general ‘the subject of independence was not emphasized’, did not boycott *Kronika*.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Brawo Gmina Londyn-Południe!’, *Kronika. Pismo dla wszystkich*, no 18 (76), 3 May 1964.

<sup>37</sup> Details of Świdorski’s co-operation with the communist counter intelligence service are in K. Tarka, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-250.

<sup>38</sup> Wacław Lewandowski, ‘...Strofy do mew i mgieł’. *Z dziejów literatury Drugiej Emigracji (i jej relacji komunikacyjnych)*, (Toruń, 2005), pp. 117-137, Friszke, *Życie polityczne emigracji*, pp. 320-21.



He admits that other émigrés boycotted this magazine as ‘a non-independence’ one.<sup>39</sup> In the first volume of the hand-written *Kronika GPL-P* (GPL-P Chronicles), we can find a photo of smiling men leaning with interest over a newspaper. They are: Jerzy Nowiak, Tadeusz Walczak, General Mieczysław Z. Słowikowski (and his wife), Waclaw Borkowski, Zygmunt Szkopiak and Stanisław Janicki.<sup>40</sup> The same photograph was also published in an issue of *Kronika. Pismo dla wszystkich*, describing a Community children party: ‘an afternoon snack for children is presented on the photo below. On the left their parents play bridge and [...] read *Kronika*, which is distributed selflessly by the friend and patron of our magazine, Mr J. Nowiak.’<sup>41</sup> Jerzy Nowiak was not an ordinary Community member; his name is often repeated in the accounts of the GPL-P and the Lewisham Centre events. Neither in *GPL-P Kronika* (whose first volume J. Nowiak actually edited), nor in *Kronika. Pismo dla wszystkich* did a protest, disclaimer or comment to this information appear.

Given the lack of other materials which could illuminate these matters, I can only carefully express my personal opinion: despite the indisputable credit gained by their social activity, the Community of South London, or at least some of its activists, took their peculiarly understood ‘lack of political engagement’ one step too far.

### **‘Freedom for Poles’ was their message**

‘Not everything that happened in our Community was a result of good planning. There were cases of organized improvization, which in consequence gave also the best results’, it was stated in a diary publication on the tenth anniversary of the Polish Community of West London.<sup>42</sup>

An occasion for such a well-organized improvization was given by Barbara Kozłowska-Męcarska, who on the Saturday that preceded the arrival of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, in London in June 1961, informed the vice-president of the Community, Adam Barszcz, on the phone that on Sunday – the

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with B. Laskowski. J. M. Makulski (mentioned by B. Laskowski as a person important for the GPL-P) did not remember this affair at all.

<sup>40</sup> *GPL-P. Kronika. 1962-1964*, vol. 1. 1470/Rps/9/a. Interview with B. Laskowski.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Gmina Londyn-Południe dzieciom’, *Kronika. Pismo dla wszystkich*, no 22/23 (80/81), 30 May-6 June 1964.

<sup>42</sup> *10 lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969*.

following evening – at about 8.00 p.m., the President of the United States would be landing at London's Heathrow Airport. On the Monday, 'in the afternoon in Westminster Cathedral the baptism of Mr and Mrs Radziwiłł's daughter Anna was to take place, in the President's presence. Stanisław [Radziwiłł]'s wife, Lee, is the sister of the President's wife, Jacqueline', explained the *Dziennik Polski*.<sup>43</sup>

Adam Barszcz telephoned the Community's president, Colonel Kuniczak, and the decision was immediately made that the Community should greet the President of the United States when he would be crossing its territory. 'In that way, within a few minutes of receiving the information the decision was disseminated and with the honest and enthusiastic help of their compatriots, they set about mobilizing their forces and resources'. First of all it was important to mobilize the greatest possible number of people, especially young people. 'Bikes, cars and telephones were pressed into service as means of communications, along with an evening party organized by the Community in an English parish house and a short meeting next to the "Polish" Saint Joseph's Church in Bolton Road.'<sup>44</sup>

Crowds of Poles reacted to the Community's invitation. A substantial group of adults and children in national dress, scouts' and guides' uniforms – 'appeared lively and in a well-disciplined way near the exit of Dukes Avenue (jokingly called Mr Barszcz Avenue) and Great Western Road', because it 'was calculated by the staff', that it was the way which President Kennedy should be coming. Banners were put up over the heads of the crowd and the Polish national flag was flown. 'A triumphal ride of many miles of the President from London airport to the house of his brother-in-law Prince Stanisław Radziwiłł had to impress him greatly. When he was going past our Polish group, he leaned out of the car, as if he wanted to remember our slogans, and for a long, long time he waved in our direction'.

It turned out that the group organized by the Community was the only national demonstration that day in London, which in such a friendly way welcomed the president. 'No one else in Polish London, the seat of the émigré authorities and political management of our emigration thought about nor used the president's ride through the territory. A spontaneous initiative and the warm support and understanding of the compatriots surely fulfilled the aim and our picturesque group

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<sup>43</sup> *DPDŻ*, no 132, 5 June 1961.

<sup>44</sup> *10 lat...*, *op. cit.*

was undoubtedly engraved in the memory of the President of the United States', it was stated with justified satisfaction.<sup>45</sup>

Information about the demonstration<sup>46</sup> appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>46</sup> The *Dziennik Polski* wrote about it in an article entitled 'Polacy w Londynie witają prezydenta Kennedy' (Poles in London greet President Kennedy): 'they appeared as a big group summoned by the management of the Community of West London. They stood [...] with the white and red flag and banners with inscriptions: "Freedom for Poland", "Free Poles" and "The Polish Community of West London". Poles welcomed the passing President enthusiastically and warmly.'<sup>47</sup>

This was a great day for the Community, which had reason to feel well satisfied: 'When it was necessary to show in London that 35,000 Poles live there, our Community did it for everyone and our name and photographs went out into the world through the radio and press.'<sup>48</sup>

### **An act of will and faith**

If the improvised welcoming of President Kennedy constitutes an example of the most interesting action of the Polish Community of West London spontaneously generated from within a Community, then participation in the celebrations of the Millennium of Polish Christianity in the stadium at White City on 22 May 1966 is the fullest projection of external impacts on the *Gminy*. Let us look at the Communities in question in the light of one of the most significant, yet still underestimated, events of Polish history in the second half of the twentieth century, this huge demonstration of traditional Polish spirit.<sup>49</sup> The significance of the millennium celebrations in communist-ruled Poland was based on the conflicting approaches to the Christian heritage of Polish culture taken by the communist party and the state on the one hand, and the Catholic Church and the majority of Poles on

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> No 33,009, 5 June 1961.

<sup>47</sup> *DPDŻ*, no 133, 6 June 1961.

<sup>48</sup> 'Sprawozdanie z działalności Gminy w r. 1961/62', Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>49</sup> More about Millennium celebration in London in R. Habielski, 'W świątłach i cieniach przeszłości. Emigracja wobec Millenium', *Więź* 1998, no 11 (481), pp. 140-57.

the other. This was one of most important battles between the regime and society in 'People's Poland'.<sup>50</sup>

'Life in exile is full of celebrations in the form of school jubilees (*akademie*). However, even some excess of celebrations should perhaps not be too hastily condemned, as their number is the result and evidence of our past; they constitute the fuel for Polish identity and a patriotic injection, which for us, who spend our lives in a foreign environment, are not only very much needed and useful, but truly essential', wrote Witymir Z. Bieńkowski a day before the celebrations.<sup>51</sup> Then he developed this thought: 'for it shall not be a school jubilee or a performance, which one can listen to or watch. At White City no one can be only a spectator or a listener. There everyone of us has to be a participant, has to be a pilgrim who with their full heart and soul shall deeply experience this act of faith and will of Polish exiles'. He finished with an appeal: 'it is necessary to make the celebrations in White City an occasion to look into oneself, recognize our weaknesses and national faults that contributed to the fact that we today have to celebrate this great jubilee not in the Homeland, but in exile.'<sup>52</sup>

Organizers and participants of the Millennium commemoration set themselves important tasks. Exactly a year before the planned celebrations in Clapham, a local organizational Committee for the Millennium was set up in South London. According to the *Komunikat*, representatives of the Community Council appeared at the information meeting, having been invited by a Community member and the vice-president of the Millennium Committee for England, Major Pilot Z. Bieńkowski and the secretary-general of this Committee, Mr J. Płoski. In the presence of Reverend Canon Stanisław Cynar, the president of the Clapham Parish Committee, Colonel Siewiński, and delegates of local social organizations, the representative of the Community was assured that the commemoration would have a religious and patriotic character, would not be used by political organizations or their activists, and funds shall be administered and controlled according to the above mentioned rules, with any surplus after the actual costs had been covered to be used to fund scholarships, an Old People's Home or a Scouting and Guiding Centre.

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<sup>50</sup> See Bartłomiej Noszczak, '*Sacrum*' czy '*profanum*'? – *Spór o istotę obchodów milenium polskiego (1949-1966)* (Warsaw, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> *Tydzień Polski*, no 21 (120), 21 May 1966.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

After listening to explanations (which characterize the lack of trust typical for the Community when it began any co-operation with other organizations) the GPL-P representatives entered the Committee. It was communicated further that similar Committees were being created in all the Polish parishes of South London, and that Community members ‘who wish to contribute to organizational works, receive further information or buy brochures, posters, etc.’ were requested to contact the vice-president of the Council, Tadeusz Walczak and Z. Bieńkowski.

The Millennium Committee in South London (*Komitet Tysiąclecia w Południowym Londynie*) was chaired by Rev. Canon Stanisław Cynar. ‘The first task of the Committee is to organize a religious celebration of Christ the King on 31 October 1965. The Committee requests kindly all Poles living in South London to give their full support to the millennium campaign’, reads the appeal.<sup>53</sup>

In response, Community activists decided that on the occasion of the Millennium celebrations in South London, the Sports Games planned for 3 July 1966 would have a special character.<sup>54</sup> For the Lewisham Centre, as it was stressed in the *Kronika*: ‘the year 1966 was the Year of the Millennium of Christian Poland and the second jubilee – the fifteenth anniversary – of the parish’. The Lewisham jubilee was organized in Saint Michael’s Hall in Sydenham and during its course, we read, ‘prayers of thanksgiving for the years of harmonious work flew to the throne of the Highest One’.<sup>55</sup> GPL-P and POL activists decided, evidently, to integrate their local needs into the general émigré millennium plans and within their framework to put into effect an earlier schedule to integrate their small communities. ‘Undoubtedly a unique occasion – to live at the turn of two ages’, it was commented with pride. ‘It should be used to tighten the bonds of our young people with Polish identity and promote Polish achievements among our hosts. For all of us, it shall be an occasion to analyse our history, draw conclusions and use experience from the past for the spiritual and material wealth of Poles in the second Millennium.’<sup>56</sup>

In the Polish Community of West London preparations for this big event were also carried out – with less exaltation or rapture, but with a more practical dimension: ‘The Community Board ordered and distributed 200 programmes (tickets) for the

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<sup>53</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*

<sup>54</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, March 1966.

<sup>55</sup> *Kronika*, vol. 1, 1951-69.

<sup>56</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

Millennium celebrations in White City on 22 May 1966', the *Biuletyn* informed its readers.<sup>57</sup> At the request of Colonel Mieczysław Piekarczyk, the manager of the collection, the Community Board delegated ten members to collect money at the stadium during the celebration.<sup>58</sup> 'At the assembly point in the inside corridor of the stadium [...] of 22 May this year at 11.00 a.m. [...] there shall be distributed armbands, trays, bags for money and essential information [shall be given]' wrote the manager of the collection on 3 May. The prelude to the celebrations was to be the commemoration organized by the Polish Educational Society (*Polska Macierz Szkolna*, PMS) entitled 'School youth's tribute to Christian Poland', in Hammersmith Town Hall. The children of the Community members who attended the Mikołaj Rej School would take part in this celebration.<sup>59</sup>

Everything went according to plan.<sup>60</sup> Not only the collectors but numerous Community members gathered at White City on 22 May 1966. From ten o'clock onwards, 45,000 people filled the stadium. At noon, accompanied by the sound of fanfares, General Władysław Anders gave the sign to bring in the standards. The national anthem was played and the parties of thirty-two combat standards proceeded towards the altar, which had been especially built for this occasion. The parade began with five standards decorated with the *Virtuti Militari* Cross. The colour parties were commanded by Colonel Zygmunt Czarnecki, the Chief of the Brigade's Youth Circle 'Pogoń' (*Brygadowe Koło Młodych „Pogoń”*) – an organization of the last soldiers of the free Poland, trained in order to fight in armed combat for freedom of the Homeland. On the altar stood a copy of the painting of the Mother of God from Częstochowa, Polish and papal colours; flags, and on them in turn were placed golden eagles, whose forms dated from the times of the Piast and Jagiellonian dynasties (to 1370 and 1572 respectively). Pontifical Mass was celebrated by Bishop Władysław Rubin assisted by Mitrate (*infułat*) Władysław Staniszewski, Prelate Kazimierz Sołowiej and Chamberlain (*szambelan*) Stanisław Cynar. On the right was the Roman Catholic primate of England, Cardinal John C. Heenan, on the left was the apostolic delegate, also a cardinal-archbishop. Around the altar sat English and Polish Catholic bishops and prelates. Mass began, during which a telegram from

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<sup>57</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 6, June 1966, invoice for selling the programmes from the SPK Bookshop (20 Queens Gate Terrace, London SW7) £20, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>58</sup> Letter to M. Piekarczyk, 23 Apr. 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>59</sup> M. Goławski, 'Młodzież szkolna w hołdzie Polsce Chrześcijańskiej', *Tydzień Polski*, no 22 (126), 26 May 1966.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, 15 June 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

Pope Paul VI in English and in Polish was read out, along with the blessing of the primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. Then the *Apel Jasnogórski* (prayers to Virgin Mary from Częstochowa) and the singing of the religious song 'Boże coś Polskę' burst out.

After an hour's break, during which there were ten buffets open, the performance part of the programme took place. It consisted of four parts: *Tarcze Miast Polskich* (Shields of Polish Cities), *Nasze Tysiąclecie* (Our Millennium), *Róża Polskich Ziem* (The Rose of the Polish Lands) and *Wkraczamy w nowe Tysiąclecie* (We Enter the new Millennium). A great presentation followed of all Polish strata and environments outside Poland,<sup>61</sup> and 'a few young people took part in the march of national heroes, in period costumes [...]' mentioned the *Biuletyn*.<sup>62</sup>

During the Convention of Fighting Poland (*Zjazd Polski Walczącej*), whose members came from seventeen countries where Poles had settled,<sup>63</sup> and which was held at the same time (18-21 May), enabling members to participate in the celebrations at White City, Colonel Kuniczak gave a speech which included the following words: 'I participate in this Convention only because I deeply believe that only when Poland finds its place in the centre and in the east of Europe, with its borders from the Zbrucz to the rivers Odra and Nyssa, in the family of countries and nations living under the influence of Western culture, Europe shall regain its balance. On every appropriate occasion, and I believe the World Convention of Fighting Poland is such an occasion, we must demand the return of Polish lands taken away as the result of the Yalta agreement. We must all demand that, persistently – until it has an effect!'<sup>64</sup> It is important to mention that while refusing to compromise on the Eastern border he was also insisting on retaining the lands taken from Germany.

In the twenty-first *GPL-P Komunikat* of June 1966 we find not even one word about the May demonstration in White City. We only know that nearly a year after the celebration – in accordance with the Community's conditions made during the founding meeting – the Millennium Committee in South London transferred the

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<sup>61</sup> 'Millenium na White City w Londynie. Demonstracja siły i jedności uchodźstwa', *DPDŻ*, no 121, 23 May 1966.

<sup>62</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 6, June 1966.

<sup>63</sup> Habielski, *Życie społeczne emigracji*, p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> A. Treszka, 'Wspomnienie o S. Kuniczaku', *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, no 7/8 (239/240), July/Aug. 1974.

remaining part of funds 'to a theatre locally organized under the professional and energetic supervision of Mr E. Landowski.'<sup>65</sup>

Two Polish demonstrations in London 'shall be immortalized in the annals of the emigration history', wrote Paweł Hęciak.<sup>66</sup> These were the famous 'march of silence' on 22 April 1956 with the participation of over 30,000 Poles and many representatives of other captive nations from Eastern Europe (on the occasion of the visit to Great Britain of the Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin) and the Millennium demonstration of 40,000 Poles (22 May 1966). These events should be clearly remembered not only as the part of history of the Second Great Emigration – but also in the history of Poland in general.

### **The Lord Mayor's bugle call**

'This lack of one's own place in Poland, which once was but is now no more, was one of the causes of growing apart from the country [...] the strength of life lay in details, and they filled the world around in which one existed. Here they put down roots, created family, friendship, social and other ties. Here small homelands were created, habits of living in certain districts of the city, getting accustomed to their eating places and cafes', writes Alina Witkowska.<sup>67</sup> These sentences reflect in an unusual way the truth about both Great Emigrations.

Postwar exiles of the twentieth century – maybe not all of them, but certainly the ones I am writing about – saw themselves (apart from the universal horizon of being a Pole) first of all as a community defined by the 'independence' values of soldiers, then possibly as a group of members of the Polish community of some region, city or town. They also finally began to see themselves as a part of the wider community of their own district and as an element of the place where they lived. This identification followed calmly, gradually, with the purchase of houses, tending gardens, bringing up children in the local system of education. Slowly and inevitably émigrés melted into the local landscape (this process, in almost case of every group of emigrants takes about ten to fifteen years).

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<sup>65</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, March 1967.

<sup>66</sup> P. Hęciak, 'Manifestacyjny obchód Tysiąclecia na stadionie White City w Londynie', *Orzeł Biały*, no 23/24 (1170/1171), June/July 1966.

<sup>67</sup> Witkowska, *Cześć i skandale*, p. 187.



In the case of London this was a particular area of the city (such as the South-East or West), more often a metropolitan borough, or even a smaller territorial unit (such as Brockley, Camberwell or Acton). This blend was reflected, among other things, by the interest in the history or the specificity of the region. For instance in a one-off issue for the tenth anniversary of the GPZL in 1969 an article by Jadwiga Kosicka was published entitled simply 'Chiswick'. We read in it about the ancient beginnings of this area which dated from the Roman times or earlier, about famous personages living there in the past, we can learn about the etymology of the district's name and we track the changes it experienced until the moment of writing of the article.

The Community of South London, in turn, tracked *polonica* on its territory (there were not many of them in the West, only the 'independence' wave of emigration created such traces). For example, the *Komunikat* reviewed a book by Zofia Libiszowska, *Życie polskie w Londynie w XVIII w.* (Polish life in London in the eighteenth century), that, among other things, described the visit to England in 1754 of the future king of Poland, Stanisław Poniatowski.<sup>68</sup> The interest generated by this book is evidence of 'getting accustomed' to the place where émigrés lived in a more general sense. Similarly, an article entitled 'Skarby w Londynie' (Treasures in London) is a manifestation of identification with one of the regions of the city: 'Most of the galleries and museums are located on the other bank of the river', writes the author. 'The South, however, is not poor and often rewards a patient wanderer with an unexpected discovery'. One such 'treasure' is Dulwich Picture Gallery, which has paintings from the collection of Noel Joseph Desenfans collected from 1790 for King Stanisław August Poniatowski (of the 600 or so paintings in the gallery, thirty-nine were originally collected for Warsaw).<sup>69</sup>

The Community was interested in those British issues that concerned Poles. We can read in another *Komunikat* of 1965: 'At the last meeting of the Editorial Board an unpleasant issue arose concerning the law issued by Her Majesty's Government, according to which the children of British citizens of Polish origin (among others) cannot become officers of the British Armed Forces. As the result of this law the

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<sup>68</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 43, Dec. 1972. Z. Libiszowska, *Życie polskie w Londynie w XVIII w.* (Warsaw, 1972). Zofia Libiszowska, née Gołuchowska (1918-2000), professor of history at the University of Łódź, was a frequent visitor to London, where she stayed with her relatives in Ealing.

<sup>69</sup> Z. R., 'Skarby w Londynie', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 37, Dec. 1970. Cf. the catalogue of an exhibition at the Royal Castle, Warsaw, *Kolekcja dla króla. Obrazy dawnych mistrzów ze zbiorów Dulwich Picture Gallery w Londynie* (Warsaw, 1992).

sons of Polish officers who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Britain, the twenty-fifth anniversary of which was celebrated that year, were reduced to second-class citizens. We hear with grief that no political party or organization took a decisive stand in this matter at the appropriate moment. Despite a short mention in *Dziennik Polski*, this unjust law did not cause any reaction so far in official émigré circles.’<sup>70</sup>

The *Komunikat* was also interested in more local subjects. In June 1965 it wrote about a lecture planned in Lambeth Town Hall ‘Lambeth yesterday and today’. The lecture in English was to include some history of the Borough of Lambeth, including ‘the recent territorial changes which concern a considerable number of the Community members and our present rights, responsibilities, facilities we use and which we have right to use.’<sup>71</sup> (The way of formulating this information proves distinctly how strongly they were rooted in the district.) Unfortunately, as the editorial staff wrote in December of that year: ‘as we have not yet received any information from reliable authorities, we consider this information outdated.’<sup>72</sup> The *Komunikat* also analysed the issues of the Income Tax Return in the article ‘Uwagi i rady o Deklaracji Dochodowej’ (Comments and advice on Income Declaration)<sup>73</sup> and also published a discussion of the appalling economic situation in Great Britain in 1974 (which was relevant to the wider interests of the Community’s members),<sup>74</sup> and commented on the educational reforms of 1967.<sup>75</sup>

More serious contacts of the Community of South London with the local environment (it seems that the Community of West London did not have such contacts) began with the usage and hiring of public halls for meetings and parties. From 1965, the Community Council meetings took place in Streatham Congregational Church Hall, Streatham High Street, London SW16, while the General Meeting of 30 April 1967 took place in Havin Hall, in Camberwell Town Hall, Peckham Road, SW5.<sup>76</sup> Ceremonial events, which were especially important for the GPL-P, took place in Lambeth Town Hall.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>70</sup> ‘Z ostatniej chwili’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, Sept. 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

<sup>71</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 17, June 1965.

<sup>72</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 19, Dec. 1965

<sup>73</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 7, Dec. 1962.

<sup>74</sup> J. Bielski, ‘Koniunktura gospodarcza w Wielkiej Brytanii w 1974 r.’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 46, Apr. 1974.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Reformy w szkolnictwie angielskim’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, March 1967.

<sup>76</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 18, September 1965. *10-lecie Istnienia i 5-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P, GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, March 1967.

<sup>77</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 31, Dec. 1968.

Co-operation with the local authorities entered a new, more regular phase, when Councils for Community Relations (CCRs) were established in 1966. Their aim was to regulate the forms of co-existence of inhabitants in particular population centres, irrespective of their nationality or origin. It was explained in the *Komunikat*: 'As the Community does everything to be everywhere where the interests of Polish society require it to be, it was one of the first social organizations which joined local CCRs in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. Community delegates participate in meetings, take part in discussions, and even have seats on boards of these organizations.'<sup>78</sup> A year earlier it was written than 'to protect and represent Polish interests and for general social and civic co-operation the Community delegated representatives to the local government organizations of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark.'<sup>79</sup>

The South London Community's delegates to the CCR in Lambeth were Tadeusz Bogucki, Waldemar Cegłowski and Julian Piwowarczyk.<sup>80</sup> The Lambeth CCR organized different meetings that were intended to integrate local communities and local government activities, such as a 'People to People Week' (6 July 1968 in Lambeth Town Hall), within the framework of international celebrations of a week dedicated to human and civil rights,<sup>81</sup> as well as regular parties and balls. The events were attended from the British side by ministers and their wives (as it was seen fit to note). ('The Minister of Public Works the Rt. Hon. Charles Pannel MP and Colonel Marcus Lipton MP showed a great deal of friendly understanding of our problems and the knowledge of our affairs'.)<sup>82</sup> They were joined by Members of Parliament, mayors of particular districts, representatives of the armed forces and the police. Some parties were graced by the participation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, who 'was interested in immigrants' problems, while his wife was discussing with Mrs Bogucka young people's problems, the system of education and other things. They even found they had friends in common'.<sup>83</sup>

The Community sources reveal something of the attitude of the municipal authorities towards representatives of the Polish Community. The first recorded party

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<sup>78</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>79</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, Mar. 1968.

<sup>80</sup> Mr Bogucki has been 'a member of the Executive and Education Committee and also a permanent representative of Council', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>81</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 29, June 1968

<sup>82</sup> Civic Reception 18 Feb. 1966, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>83</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

took place on 18 February 1966 in the fine salons of County Hall on the south bank of the Thames. The host of a 'Civic Reception' for the substantial number of 1,000 guests, who were treated to five buffets, two orchestras, light effects, and artistic decor, and waited on by hundreds of staff, was the Lord Mayor of the City of London, who welcomed the guests together with the Mayor of Lambeth, Councillor Evan G. Carr, BEM, JP, and his wife. Among the guests there were ministers, over forty MPs, the mayors of all the London Boroughs, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Armed Forces, the Chief of London Civil Defence and many other.

'The endearing, dignified figure of Lord Mayor of the City of London, Sir Lionel Denny, MC, radiated with honest joy on meeting Poles. In an hour-long conversation he impressed with his great knowledge of Poland, Poles in the homeland and in exile (he knows Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań etc. well). He has been interested in the Polish question for thirty years. He can even pronounce difficult Polish words such as SZCZERBIEC, CZĘSTOCHOWA, BARBAKAN, SUKIENNICE etc. (he even hummed the melody of the *hejnal* (bugle call) sounded daily from the tower of Saint Mary's Church in Kraków.) He knows the history of Poland from Mieszko I to Gomułka better than many Poles. Irish by origin, a person of great knowledge and well-mannered, he talked with dignity and in the presence of dignitaries emphasized the positive qualities of the Polish character', enthused the *Komunikat*.<sup>84</sup>

The Lord Mayor of the City of London was unique in the depth of his interest in Poland but he was not, it seems, the only Polonophile in the ranks of the London local authorities: 'The Borough Treasurer, Mr H. G. Echart, does not only collect municipal taxes. He is very much interested in sport. He pronounces the names of Polish ratepayers with difficulty, but he can pronounce correctly and without difficulty the names of Polish sportspeople. Last year he went to Budapest especially to watch the Polish athletic team. He considers it one of the best in the world.'<sup>85</sup> The Chief of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry L. Kennedy, talking about Poles, emphasized their bravery, loyalty, commercial and administrative abilities.<sup>86</sup>

Other dignitaries often referred to the Second World War (in which they had also taken part): 'The Chief of Civil Defence, Mr French, knows and values Poles since

<sup>84</sup> 'Poznajemy przyjaciół', *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>85</sup> Civic Reception, 24 Feb. 1967, in Lambeth Town Hall, hosted by the Mayor of Lambeth and the Town Clerk. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>86</sup> 'Poznajemy przyjaciół', *op. cit.*

the War’<sup>87</sup>, while the Chief Superintendent of the Police in the area of Lambeth, Mr F. J. Sheppard, ‘remembers Poles with pleasure’ from the Italian campaign.<sup>88</sup> During another Civic Reception on 15 February 1968, the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Gilbert Inglefield, ‘showed a great interest in our problems. He is a director of an engineering concern where a few Poles occupy responsible positions and about whom the Lord Mayor talks with the greatest respect.’<sup>89</sup>

Encouraged by this warm welcome on the part of the British local authorities, Poles from the Community returned the visits, invited representatives of the district and the city to their own parties and events.<sup>90</sup> During the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lewisham parish, the Mayor of the district, A. Patterson, and his wife were present.<sup>91</sup> The English representatives willingly accepted the invitations and it seems that they felt comfortable in the Polish company. For example the lecture by L. S. Garwood, the manager of the Public Relations Office in the Borough of Lambeth, on ‘Lambeth yesterday and today’ on 16 February 1967 (as we can see the organization of the lecture was finally successful and thanks to the Polish side) at Lambeth Town Hall was attended by the Mayor of Lambeth, Councillor Sidney H. Gurney JP, (accompanied by his wife), the Town Clerk, John E. Fishwick, and others. After the official part of the occasion came the entertainment: a tombola, music from the record player, tea and a glass of wine: ‘The Mayor and his wife stayed with us until the end of the evening and said that they have not had such a good and light-hearted time for a long time.’<sup>92</sup> Alderman J. W. Calder, as a former Mayor of Lambeth, was decorated with the Gold Cross of Merit (*Złoty Krzyż Zasługi*) by the Polish President-in-Exile August Zaleski. He also welcomed the President and a few people from his circle in Lambeth Town Hall.<sup>93</sup>

Members of the GPL-P treated these meetings and banquets very seriously. ‘The Community in its social activity does not neglect any occasion to remind the hosts about its existence on this territory’, it was emphasized in the *Komunikat*. On a different occasion, the following comments appeared: ‘many conversations with

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Civic Reception, 15 Feb. 1968, reported in *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 28, Mar. 1968

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Autumn Party, 14 Oct. 1966. Those present included the Mayor of Lambeth, Councillor Harold W. Lockwood, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sidney A. Gurney, and Alderman J. W. Calder, all accompanied by their wives, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 27, Sept. 1967.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Echo 25-lecia na Brockley’, *DPDŻ*, no 174, 23 July 1976.

<sup>92</sup> They were invited to further parties, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Sylwetki przyjaciół’, *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 24, March 1967.

other dignitaries confirmed our belief in the appropriateness of contacts with the representatives of the local society. Limiting ourselves to personal acquaintances although very familiar, does not bring opportunities to address more general matters.’<sup>94</sup>

Meeting brought opportunities to address issues of significance for the Polish Community. The *Gmina* could lobby in order to solve some problems. On at least one example, such action was effective. When the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) planned to increase by half from 1970 the charges for renting rooms by Saturday schools, Community representatives, during the CCR ball on 18 October 1969 spent most of the time ‘talking with MPs, members of local government and other personages to present to them financial problems of Polish schools and ask for intervention in relevant authorities in order to change the decision about increasing the charges.’<sup>95</sup> An appropriate letter concerning this matter was also sent to the CCR. The intervention resulted in a partial success. ILEA agreed to a certain reduction in charges for all Polish Saturday schools on its territory.<sup>96</sup> However, in the face of the scale of activity of the Polish Community of South London, contacts with the British local authorities were not of a routine character, and ceased when the group of people who created them left the field of social activity in the 1970s.

## Conclusion

Émigrés’ public activity, which lacked variety on a day-to-day basis, became more and more routine as years went by. After one school year had finished, there was another school year. This was also the case with parties, excursions and jubilees. Nevertheless, inevitably there were situations which introduced divergence from the predictable course of events and which could tell us something new about the group’s behaviour and consciousness.

Despite the fact that the *Gminy* were essentially local organizations concerned with local issues, large-scale problems of the wider spheres of emigration, the Polish nation, the United Kingdom and even the world concerned all the Communities. Such problems forced their leaders and members to react and act. Membership in

<sup>94</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969. *GPL-P. Komunikat* no 24, Mar. 1967.

<sup>95</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>96</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 35, Mar. 1970.

organizations other than the Communities (such as POSK and the *Zjednoczenie Polskie*) and participation in all-émigré events (above all the celebration of Millennium of Christianity in Poland) placed the organizational units analysed here in the wider context of the émigré ‘parallel world’. The Communities were not a protest against this world’s shape, nor against the rules by which this ‘parallel world’ was governed. Nevertheless, they remained autonomous and, as I have demonstrated, reacted in various ways to the challenges posed to them by the émigré canon of values and duties.

As a local, grass-roots level form of organization in exile, the Communities were also exposed to the techniques of manipulation and attempts at sabotage similar to those used by the communist state’s secret services against all forms of life beyond the reach of its totalitarian aspirations (both within the geographical borders of ‘People’s Poland’ and outside them). Differences between the approach of the GPZ-L and GPL-P leaders to this problem demonstrate the varying sensitivities of émigrés to the danger of communist influences on Polish life after the Second World War. It also reveals different degrees of political sophistication, knowledge and experience at the lower levels of the wider émigré community.

Examples of contacts with local British life at borough level are proofs of how well émigrés put down roots in the country of settlement. In this aspect the image of the Community of South London is much clearer than in the case of its puzzling, surprising attitude towards evident attempts at infiltration by the communist regime in Warsaw. The GLP-P’s ability to find its own place in the emerging new British universe – the multicultural society – was certainly pioneering in the early 1960s. However, the Community members did not achieve much in this field except prestige and moral and satisfaction. Poles had not yet entered in any significant numbers British politics, even at the local level.

The only case known to me of one of the Communities being open to matters of a more universal character (not mention the sporadic solidarity with the Hungarian War of Independence in 1956 at the outset of GPL-P) – the welcoming of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 by GPZL members – not only reveals organizational abilities but also clearly proves that the group had a pro-freedom and explicitly pro-Western attitude.

## 11.

**Towards POSK**

In this chapter I shall first outline the relations of the Community of West London with the Polish Social and Cultural Centre (*Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny*, POSK) when the latter was coming into existence in its area. I shall also attempt to present the subsequent phases of the total dissolution of a dynamic local organization into an institution whose main task was to serve the universal purposes of the entire émigré community. Related to this are the following questions: 1) How did it occur that most of the funds, raised with such difficulty and dedication, were given to an external organization? 2) Why did the ‘contributors’ from the GPZL play an important, yet never a decisive role in POSK? Why was their role only a supportive one? At the end of this chapter I shall present several reflections not quite strong related to main topic, but in my opinion important to summarise the wider question of the Communities.

It is first necessary to present the idea and general history of such a huge enterprise as POSK, which was crucial for the entire Polish community – not only in London or even in the United Kingdom, but for all Poles who aspired to a free Poland. In the brochure of 1964 which initiated the establishment of the *Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny* (the official English name was the Polish Social and Cultural Association Ltd.) we read: ‘There are ever more events, especially out in the British provinces, which are being organized at the initiative of Polish Communities called *Gminy* and social and cultural organizations. The activity of war veterans’ associations is developing successfully. Polish parishes show astonishing activity centred around their own churches and the organizations within them.’<sup>1</sup> Despite these successes, the authors of the brochure also state that in recent years significant changes both in the character and needs of the social life of the Polish diaspora, now forced emigrants to redefine the aims and methods of social work. There is a growing need to pass ‘great traditional values’ on to the younger generations, who either maintained their Polish identity or were attached to the heritage of their parents’ culture. According to the initiators of POSK, this task required ‘the creation of a

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<sup>1</sup> *Twórzmy Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny w Londynie, Komunikat Informacyjny*, no 1, Feb. 1964. Announcements were published as brochures each under a separate title.



centre that could serve as a base for weaker or [financially – *P. Ch.*] unprofitable organizations’.

A further motivating factor connected with the creation of POSK was the need to rescue the Polish Library in London, which did not have its own premises. The British authorities could have parcelled out its rich collection among non-Polish colleges and institutions because officially the library belonged to and was fully subsidized by the British authorities. In 1966 POSK as an association took the responsibility for Polish Library and finally in 1967 became the owner of the library. The British subsidy was however continued, in part by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London.<sup>2</sup>

The POSK enthusiasts’ way of thinking was significantly influenced by their awareness of the fact that the number of émigrés was constantly decreasing. The existing organizations were getting weaker financially and their wealth was being dispersed. Seeing the need to gather together the existing assets, the idea of a fixed Polish centre was formulated.

Its task would be to ‘serve present and future generations of émigrés and their descendants in the UK as well as émigré Poles around the world, through the agency of the ones in the UK.’ It was added without hesitation that experience had proved that London functioned as the unofficial capital of the Polish community in exile and that it was here that the centre should be established. Arguments were constantly put forward that it was necessary to create suitable premises for the Polish Library. This idea was linked with the task of establishing a vast Polish centre. The centre’s massive building would house many organizations, as well as a theatre, art gallery, and restaurant. The initiators of POSK were the Polish University College Association Limited (PUCAL) and the Association of Polish Technicians (*Stowarzyszenie Techników Polskich*, STP). Other organizations joined later. The Polish Veterans Association (*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*, SPK) was among the larger ones, while the smaller ones included the Polish Community of West London and the Polish Community of South London. The date when POSK’s charter was passed, 23 July 1964, is considered the official beginning of POSK.

POSK had also its opponents. In the Archives of the GPZL one may find scrupulously collected newspaper cuttings containing details of discussions

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<sup>2</sup> *Cud nad Tamizą. 25 lat Polskiego Ośrodka Społeczno-Kulturalnego w Wielkiej Brytanii*, ed. J. Garliński (London, 1989), pp. 21-22.

published in the *Dziennik Polski* and the *Tydzień Polski*. They include the principal pro-POSK articles, for instance Roman Ludwik Wajda's 'Przyszłość Biblioteki Polskiej w Londynie'<sup>3</sup> (The Future of the Polish Library in London) as well as articles by Karol Poznański, POSK's main critic: 'Biblioteka i domy polskie w Londynie' (The Library and Polish homes in London) and 'Pomieszanie pojęć czy pomyłki?' ('The confusion of concepts or mistakes?').<sup>4</sup> Apart from these publications there were also many letters to the editors from the concerned public. It was uncertain whether the Centre would be established. Its size was debated. There were two opposing views: the idea that POSK should be modest in size and the idea of a 'big POSK'. Such, in brief, were origins of POSK.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Polish Community of West London – 500 bricks**

The first trace of the relations between GPZL and the Polish Social and Cultural Centre is a letter dated 3 September 1964, written by Eugeniusz Lubomirski and Roman Ludwik Wajda (who were the secretary and director of POSK respectively). The letter had an attachment: *Komunikat Informacyjny POSK nr 2, Wspólnymi Siłami* (Information Announcement of POSK no 2, By our Collective Efforts).<sup>6</sup> The Organizational Committee requested its members to familiarize themselves with its content and 'if possible to take appropriate resolutions, which would enable the intended task to be achieved swiftly'. Then, on 16 October 1964 the information about appointing the Centre's Council (*Rada*) and Board (*Zarząd*) was sent. There were no representatives of the Polish Community of West London among the members of the above two bodies, as it was only during a meeting on 5 May 1966 that POSK's management decided to accept the Community into its members. The Community was registered and on the basis of article 23 of POSK's statute it was guaranteed one vote at the Annual General Meeting. An invoice of ten pounds was signed.<sup>7</sup> POSK was pleased to receive even small sums. For example, a subsequent

<sup>3</sup> *Tydzień Polski* no 15 (88), 12 Apr. 1969.

<sup>4</sup> *Tydzień Polski* no 16 (94) 19 Apr. 1969 and 22 (130), 31 May 1969.

<sup>5</sup> It is not my task to narrate the history of POSK, although no scholarly monograph has yet been published. For the moment, see *Cud nad Tamizą.., op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Issued in Aug. 1964.

<sup>7</sup> Letter dated 6 Apr. 1966, Archives of the GPZL.

circular from September 1966 appealed: ‘Let us remember that each gift of ten pounds is equal to five hundred good-quality bricks.’

The Community lay within the area of interest of POSK activists. In a letter to the director, Roman Wajda, on 7 August 1968, POSK’s Treasurer Krzysztof Głuchowski pondered the possibility of build a ‘big POSK’: ‘Nevertheless, it seems that we should give the hut in the backyard to the scouts. The hosts should be the team *Błękitna Trójka* (The Blue Three), which has King Street in its area. They are children from Chiswick and its surrounding area, whose parents have a fund of £3,000, which belongs to the Community of West London. *Błękitna Trójka* is under the umbrella of the 3 DSK (*3 Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich*, 3 Carpathian Rifles Division), so there exists a possibility of affiliating the “Carpathians” and interesting them. The youth is a good element in our propaganda.’<sup>8</sup> The initially pragmatic approach of the directors and members of the GPZL towards the emerging Centre was characterized by a growing idealism. According to the protocol from the Management’s meeting on 23 September 1968: ‘all members of the management present at the meeting expressed their views concerning the Community’s joining POSK (according to the motion put forward by the Director T. Urbanowicz). It was also decided that a delegation should be elected, the members of which would familiarize themselves with POSK’s projects and plans concerning the position of the Community and what it would make use of. The information received would be passed on to the Council, who would make the decision what to do and present it to the Board.’<sup>9</sup>

When in December 1968 POSK announced the start of ‘raising cash for the putting into effect of the plan of adapting the purchased buildings in King Street for social and cultural purposes’,<sup>10</sup> it became clear that the Centre would be established and, moreover, that it would be located in the area of the West London Community. This fact determined the Community activists’ deep engagement in the establishment of POSK. The Centre’s location was not accidental. In one of the issues of the *Komunikat Informacyjny POSK* (Information Announcement of POSK)<sup>11</sup> a schematic map of Polish settlement in the city was published under the telling title ‘Ośrodek Polski na mapie Londynu’ (The Polish Centre on the map of London).

<sup>8</sup> Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-83.

<sup>9</sup> Community Board minutes, 23 Sept. 1968. Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of C. Woyno and R. L. Wajda, dated 14 Dec. 1968, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>11</sup> *Komunikat Informacyjny POSK*, no 10, Sept. 1968.

Looking at the map it was clear that (using the old administrative divisions) 32.11 per cent of the total number of Poles living in London lived in ‘London W.’ (the West), 17.88 per cent of Poles lived in ‘N.W.’ (the North-West), and a further 26.60 per cent lived in ‘S.W.’ (the South-West). (The apparent precision and certainty of these percentages is extraordinary.) ‘Having identified the centre of gravity of Polish settlement in London, it can be concluded that POSK’s location was convenient.’ The area where the Centre was located, it was argued elsewhere, ‘on the border between Hammersmith and Chiswick, backing onto a large public park, right by an underground station [...], in a main street with busy traffic, is part of one of the fastest developing and modernized districts of London.’ It was predicted that ‘the centre of the metropolis would be moving westwards, which would increase the significance and value of the location and of the “Polish area” in general.’<sup>12</sup>

Some sentences taken from the West London Community’s *Biuletyn*,<sup>13</sup> published at the time, exemplify the hopes which the GPZL invested in POSK: ‘The Board came to the conclusion that due to close co-operation with POSK we shall be able to rent a room for meetings and events on easy terms. In this way we shall gain the basis for our activity, which subsequent managements have been unable to obtain for a number of years.’ Teodor Urbanowicz, also in the *Biuletyn*, outlined the background of the gift of GPZL funds to POSK: ‘[...] In August 1968 POSK purchased a building complex in King Street and Ravenscourt Avenue, W6, worth £48,750. The plans are predicted to be effected by the end of 1970 [the deadline turned out to be very optimistic – *P. Ch.*]. [...] POSK could obtain the necessary cash through selling property, which it owns. This, however, would decrease the Centre’s income, which would be related to the decrease in the Centre’s provision of services to various organizations and academic institutions. In order to prevent this, the Centre’s authorities decided to launch an action of distributing the debentures (*obligacje*) among the émigré society and charter organizations. [...] The Community’s Management is kindly asking the Community’s members to support POSK’s appeal by joining the Community or buying debentures.’<sup>14</sup>

In 1968/69 POSK’s governing body realized that their activity had entered its decisive phase. They believed that the purchased terrain ‘has great potential for

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<sup>12</sup> J. Gurawski, ‘Położenie POSK-u’, *DPDŻ*, no 238, 6 Oct. 1970.

<sup>13</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 15, Dec. 1968.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

development and expansion and could become a centre which would meet the needs of Polish émigré community'. However, in order for this dream to become reality, the collective efforts of Polish organizations were needed. In order to achieve this, on 21 January 1969 'a meeting for information and discussion over a glass of wine was organized.'<sup>15</sup> It is worth underlining that the invitation to the GPZL did was not in any way special; it was sent as a copied form with the addressee's name handwritten on it. The director and secretary of the Community replied that they would attend.<sup>16</sup> In the meantime the debate over the very idea of POSK went on. In the theatre room of the Polish club *Ognisko* in South Kensington, the Association of Journalists (*Związek Dziennikarzy*) organized an evening debate, in which Karol Poznański took part on one side and Roman L. Wajda and the Veterans' Association president, Stefan Soboniewski, on the other.<sup>17</sup> The Community, however, decided to tip the scales in favour of POSK by taking action.

During an Emergency General Meeting on 17 January 1969 the GPZL resolved to transfer £1,500 to POSK. A few days later, on 21 January 1969, the aforementioned meeting of all the organizations forming the Centre was held. During the meeting the decision, considered 'historic', was taken to build a 'big POSK'. Then the West London Community's director, Teodor Urbanowicz, accompanied by the chairman of the POSK Council, Józef Szlamp and its secretary, Michał Pułaski, handed the cheque over to Professor Roman Wajda. Mr Urbanowicz ended his speech with an appeal: 'Let this humble contribution of ours be the proverbial widow's mite, which will tip the scales of human consciences, especially of those who could help today, but leave it until tomorrow. For many of them tomorrow may never come and Polish society will not forgive them the wasted opportunity.'<sup>18</sup>

Representatives of undecided organizations heard these words. POSK's governing body expressed their gratitude for 'the great and exemplary decision of giving almost all of the Community's wealth to the newly-established Polish Social and Cultural Association [...] The swift execution, as it only took four days, of the resolution of the Emergency Community Members Meeting [...] authorizing the Community to give this amount of money to the Centre, is a further proof of understanding the appropriateness of the project and the necessity for decisive and

<sup>15</sup> Letter of C. Woyno and R. L. Wajda, dated 16 Dec. 1968, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>16</sup> Letter dated 4 Jan. 1969, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>17</sup> A. S., 'Dyskusja o Polskim Ośrodku Społeczno-Kulturalnym', *DPDŻ*, no 309, 29 Dec. 1969.

<sup>18</sup> *Dziesięć lat Gminy Polskiej Zachodniego Londynu. 1959-1969*, [London, 1969]

rapid action', it was argued, continuing an important thought: 'we warmly thank them for this great and decisive attitude and their considerable help at the moment of starting formal talks with other organizations. The Community's resolution and the active participation of its members at the meeting on 21 January undoubtedly had a great influence on the statements of other organization's representatives.'<sup>19</sup> Commemorative photographs were attached to the letters of gratitude.

Was the GPZL's financial gift indeed decisive in realizing the project of building the Centre? Other payments soon followed, for example a loan of £25,000 from the Invalids, Widows and Orphans Fund of the 3 Carpathian Rifles Division (*Fundusz Inwalidów Wdów i Sierot Żołnierzy 3 Dywizji Strzelców Karpackich*),<sup>20</sup> and gifts, such as £1,000 from the Trusteeship of the Polish Navy (*Powiernictwo Marynarki Wojennej*).<sup>21</sup> At the very least, however, one cannot exclude the possibility that the Community's decision was a turning point for POSK. The Community's activists had no doubts on the question: 'We rescued POSK', succinctly claims Gustaw Ślepokóra.

After some time the Community bought further shares in POSK of £440, increasing its total share to almost £2,000.<sup>22</sup> This was only the beginning of the considerable and constant aid from the Community that went straight into the Centre's assets. The support, however, was not only financial, but also organizational. In 1971 Stanisław Kuniczak and Teodor Urbanowicz became members of the Technical Committee (*Komitet Techniczny*) of POSK.<sup>23</sup> According to the minutes of the Board Meeting on 25 January 1973, the Community's Council Meeting (21 December 1972) lent £1,500 to POSK at 7 per cent interest. The idea of establishing POSK was popular and strongly supported by activists and members of the Community. A few of Community's activists became members of POSK's Council: Teodor Urbanowicz in 1974 and Father Kazimierz Sołowiej in the years 1969-74 and 1977-79,<sup>24</sup> although the latter's role was essentially titular. Mr Urbanowicz was active in the House Committee (*Komisja Domu*) and Library Committee (*Komisja Biblioteczna*), and he acted as a guide to the building for visitors from around the world. In 1973 the first POSK lottery was organized, which

<sup>19</sup> Letter of C. Woyno and R. L. Wajda, dated 27 Jan. 1969, Archives of the GPZL.

<sup>20</sup> 'POSK coraz bliższy celu', *DPDŻ*, no 155, 1 July 1970.

<sup>21</sup> 'Przykład godny naśladowania', *Tydzień Polski*, no 34 (200), 22 Aug. 1970.

<sup>22</sup> *Biuletyn*, no 19, July 1970.

<sup>23</sup> *Cud nad Tamizą*, p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> *Cud nad Tamizą*, p. 42

explicitly demonstrates the way POSK was able to draw on the experiences of the Community of West London. Ryszard Żółtaniecki claims that the Community was a kind of school for future activists of POSK, the structure of which resembled the Community. When on 29 October 1976 *POSKlub* (POSK Club) was opened, the director of the GPZL, Zygmunt Grzyb, became its treasurer.<sup>25</sup>

Towards the end of December 1974 the western part of the building was opened. This marks the beginning of POSK's cultural and public activity, for example meetings of the Association of Polish Writers Abroad (*Związek Pisarzy Polskich na Obczyźnie*) began to be held there.<sup>26</sup> The West London Community started to settle in. On 27 October 1975 the Management discussed how to advertise *Andrzejki* (the Saint Andrew's Eve party) and what should be included in the programme – 'the first Community party held in POSK', as it was called. Henceforth all Community events took place there. However, some people claim that 'after [the opening of] POSK, *Mikołajki* (when Santa Claus handed out presents) lost their character.'<sup>27</sup> Initially the relations between the Community and POSK were unstable. In the protocol from the GPZL Board meeting on 30 May 1975 there is a fragment in which Zygmunt Grzyb reported that there was 'no place for the Community in POSK', but in the same period, the Community allocated £150 to the *Polski Ośrodek Młodzieżowy* (POM, Polish Youth Centre) for furnishing their premises.<sup>28</sup> The Community members' attitude towards POSK could be characterized as idealistic. They had every right to consider themselves 'at home'.

From that moment on the history of GPZL's members' activity becomes part of the history of POSK. Let us recall the fact that in May 1975 Ladies' Circle (*Koło Pań*) also ceased their activity. 'That was the end of the Community's activity. Urbanowicz would continuously spend time in POSK', recalls Ryszard Kotaś. 'The Community ceased to exist in its current form in mid-1970s – it was difficult to separate its activity from that of POSK and in fact it did not make sense. We all rushed towards POSK. We entered it in a larger group', says Stefania Wolańska. It was the effective end of the Polish Community of West London.

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<sup>25</sup> Zygmunt Grzyb was a member of the GPZL from 14 May 1970 and a member of the Board from 3 June 1974.

<sup>26</sup> The further stages of POSK's building were: on 3 May 1977 the opening of Polish Library, and on 5 June 1982 the opening of the theatre. POSK was able to pay off all its debts by 30 Nov. 1988, close to the 25th anniversary of its foundation, *Cud nad Tamizą*, pp. 40, 68, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

<sup>28</sup> Community Council minutes, 29 Sept. 1975, Archives of the GPZL.

## POSK and ‘the South’

It is striking that the GPZL’s activists were less influential in POSK than those of the Polish Community of South London, although the latter was geographically further away from the Polish Centre. The GPL-P’s activists were present at an earlier stage in the structures of POSK. POSK’s originator and chief organizer, Roman Wajda, was linked to the GPL-P. In March 1966 the *Komunikat* announced that the vice-chairman of the Community Council, Tadeusz Walczak, ‘known for his dynamism in organizing things in the Community, had become a member of POSK’s Council.’<sup>29</sup> General J. Sarnecki and T. Bogucki were also mentioned among the POSK ‘enthusiasts’.<sup>30</sup> During the General Annual Meeting at the *Orzeł Biały* (White Eagle) Club on 27 April 1969, ‘after an exhausting discussion Mr T. Walczak’s motion was passed by a majority of votes, according to which the GPL-P would join POSK with a share of ten pounds.’<sup>31</sup>

The Community was registered as number 589 among the members of the Centre and given one vote at the Annual General Meeting.<sup>32</sup> In 1972 a motion concerning increasing the Community’s support for POSK was discussed: ‘It needs to be mentioned that prior to the beginning of the meeting the Chairman of POSK, Professor Wajda, in his short speech accompanied by a film, presented the aims and plans for the development of POSK. He also talked about the progress in building the Centre’. In recognition of ‘the outstanding value of this activity’, an annual subsidy of £150 was accepted. The subsidy would take the form of a seven-year covenant. ‘Thanks to this, the Community will gain the right of a permanent delegation to POSK’s Council’, it was added.<sup>33</sup>

POSK-related issues were regularly and extensively reported on in the South London Community’s *Komunikat*:<sup>34</sup> ‘The more of us there are in the Centre, the more influence we will have on its development and character’, it was written in an

<sup>29</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 20, Mar. 1966.

<sup>30</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 25, June 1967.

<sup>31</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 33, June 1969.

<sup>32</sup> Letter dated 14 May 1969 informing about admission to POSK, Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>33</sup> General Meeting 23 Apr. 1972, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 42, July 1972.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Gmina i POSK’, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 43, December. *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 43, Dec. 1972 and *GPL-P Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973, also carried significant articles regarding POSK.



article which at almost three and a half pages was far longer than the standard ones printed in the *Komunikat*. This article was proof that the idea of POSK enjoyed considerable interest.<sup>35</sup> Tadeusz Chmura, in a telling and committed article entitled ‘Emigracja a POSK’ (The Emigration and POSK), published in 1975 wrote: ‘[...] POSK is not yet another empty cliché, just as POSK is not merely an impressive building, it is also an action. It is a tough and determined social action, which is developing, despite various obstacles. [...] Where there is action there is also reaction. A reaction against the enthusiasm of the group building POSK is the unfavourable propaganda of envious persons and malcontents, gloomy defeatism seeing the financial and organizational future of POSK in dark colours, as well as a mysterious rumour that certain suspicious individuals have entered POSK... (Indeed, there are suspicious individuals on the outside barking at POSK). The reaction is composed of phantoms and ghosts of the past, who are trying to destroy the laborious work of those, who for twelve years have been building this new and lively HOME. Phantoms and ghosts are not in favour of life and do not understand the idea of work for the future.’ This issue of the *Komunikat* also carried an advertisement: ‘Sign up for POSK membership’.<sup>36</sup>

There were appeals to support the Great POSK Festival (*Wielki Festyn POSK-u*), which took place on 22 June 1975 in the grounds of Chiswick House: ‘We ask for gifts in the form of food or something from Polish Folk Art.’<sup>37</sup> There was also a Circle of [female] Enthusiasts for POSK (*Koło Entuzjastek POSK-u*), which was associated with the GPL-P. The Circle was mentioned during the celebrations of the Community’s twentieth anniversary on 26 September 1975 as a co-organizer (together with the Community) of a dance in Wimbledon. In 1976 the move of the Polish Library to the new building was supported with the sum of £25,<sup>38</sup> and on 6 October 1977 a response to an appeal to all émigrés funded a shelf for the library: ‘The name of our organization will be written on the Founders’ Plaque’, it was announced.<sup>39</sup> The Community of South London was also a ‘founder of a theatre’ and

<sup>35</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 45, Dec. 1973.

<sup>36</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 48, Apr. 1975. *20-lecie Istnienia i 15-lecie Rejestracji GPL-P.*

<sup>37</sup> Announcement signed by Z. Szkopiak (secretary) and T. Walczak (director), Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>38</sup> General Meeting 9 May 1976, *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>39</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

the ‘founder of a chair for the POSK theatre’, neither of which was matched by the Community of West London.<sup>40</sup>

In South-East London, POSK became an issue for the first time on 21 April 1975, when the Circle of the Friends of POSK was formed. It was declared that the ‘main task would be to help the Centre’s management raise the funds necessary for the Centre’s completion and its handing over for public use. We all know that the idea of POSK is a great one and is an achievement of the whole Polish community in Britain and overseas [...]’ One can read further: ‘We Poles from South-East London would like to make our modest contribution to the building and development of POSK.’<sup>41</sup> However, it was only on 1 November that a ‘Jumble Sale’ in order to support the POSK project was organized. The event raised about £130. The gift ‘was accepted with deep gratitude, particularly because our Circle’s ambition is to raise the full amount of £250 in order to become a proper founder of the Centre.’<sup>42</sup>

This ambition was achieved and the Brockley Circle of the Friends of POSK (*Koło Przyjaciół POSK-u Brockley*) can be found on the list of the Centre’s founders at the number 697. The Polish Parish of Lewisham was also one of the founders (number 1042), and so, individually, were some of the Centre’s activists, including Father Adam Wróbel (number 876). Similarly, individual members of the GPZL and GPL-P supported POSK and Tadeusz Walczak did so several times, also doing so through some of his enterprises.<sup>43</sup>

The main event in the common history of the Community of South London and POSK is the fact that on 30 October 1976 Tadeusz Walczak became the Centre’s Director and Zygmunt Szkopiak, who was at the same time President of the Community and a trustee of the Lewisham Centre, took charge of *POSKlub* (POSK Club), which had been managed by Walczak for a year.<sup>44</sup> In 1979 there was yet another change and Zygmunt Szkopiak became the director of POSK (until October 1980).<sup>45</sup> Thus, one can firmly state that in this period activists from the Community

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<sup>40</sup> *Cud nad Tamizą*, pp. 182-83.

<sup>41</sup> ‘The Committee during the first assembly in the presence of parish priest was established as follows: director: M. Makulski, secretary: Cz. Kwaśniewski, treasurer: Dr Z. Szkopiak, members: Z. Piątek, Z. Jankowski and T. Walczak’, *Kronika – Materiały*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Cud nad Tamizą*, pp. 170 ff.

<sup>44</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

<sup>45</sup> After two years break under Czesław Woyno’s leadership, T. Walczak again became director of POSK in 1982.

of South London had a great influence on the Centre's activity in a difficult stage of its development and in paying off its debts.

### **The end of an era**

The last, as it transpired, issue of the *Biuletyn* of the Polish Community of West London, which probably came out in June 1974, announced in its obituaries section the deaths of four founder members of the Community: the pianist Juliusz Lepiankiewicz, Lieutenant Colonel Ludwik Skibiński, the lawyer Józef Narożański and the founder and long-time president of the Community, Stanisław Kuniczak. An era was coming to an end. At the beginning of 1975 the following concerns were raised: 'In a discussion concerning the ways of making the Community's activity more dynamic and recruiting new members the opinion was raised that the *Biuletyn* should be issued regularly. The only difficulty was to find an editor who could take on this work.' This difficulty was not overcome. The Community's quarterly *Nad Tamizą* (On the banks of the Thames) managed just two more issues in 1975.<sup>46</sup>

An era was also drawing to a close in the émigré world as a whole. In the first half of the 1970s the generation who reached maturity in the period of the independent Republic of Poland and which in many cases was fully formed by the ideas and the world from before the First World War was passing away. This was the generation who created Polish culture in exile in all its dimensions, from the literary and ideological to the political and organizational, building it on values inherited from this past world. Younger people were now taking over.<sup>47</sup>

The decisive event in the history of the West London Community (and not only of the GPZL) was the establishment of POSK 'in its area' and the fact that the most active Community members were involved in it. According to Jerzy Kulczycki there are 'two ways of using POSK: weekend events taking place in, for example the *Sala Malinowa* (Raspberry-pink Room), and everyday ones, actually targeted at West London.'<sup>48</sup> However, the Centre was at its best as far as ceremonial events were

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<sup>46</sup> *Nad Tamizą. Kwartalnik GPZL*, no 1, winter 1975.

<sup>47</sup> On this process see Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, pp. 279-78.

<sup>48</sup> A well-known émigré publisher (*Orbis* and *Odnova* publishing houses) and bookseller (*Orbis* book shop) J. Kulczycki was a member of the GPZL Council from 26 Apr. 1969 and deputy director of the Council from 25 Apr. 1970.

concerned, organized for the whole of Polish London or even the entire Polish community in the UK. The Centre's size and the consequent lack of cosiness seemed to be unsuitable for local, everyday events. In a sense, from the point of view of the inhabitants of the nearest neighbourhoods, POSK 'devoured' the Community. The GPZL members were insufficiently numerous to maintain a significant level of activity in two organizations. It would not be far from truth to state that the case of the Community of West London, most visible also from the reason of its topography, is symbolic of the turning point in the whole social history of Poles in London, which seems to be divided into two periods: before POSK and after its establishment.

The opening of the *Orzeł Biały* (White Eagle) club south of the river, not to be confused with the one in Kensington, was a kind of prelude to the centralization of local life. In 1969 one could read in the *Komunikat*: 'In connection with the organization of a Polish Catholic Centre Club under the name "White Eagle" at 211 Balham High Road, SW17, the Board decided to give its full support to this useful institution and, as far as possible, to organize its future events on the club's premises.'<sup>49</sup> The next Annual Meeting of the GPL-P took place in the *Orzeł Biały* on 27 April 1969. During the meeting 'Mr Pawlak, Director of the *Orzeł Biały*, presented the matter of the club' and 'focused on the co-operation between the Community and the Club, which was supposed to bring even better results in social work of these two organizations'. Waldemar Cegłowski supported this view.<sup>50</sup> Afterwards almost all the GPL-P's events took place at the club.<sup>51</sup>

The above fact questioned the role of the Community's house, while the building of POSK called into question the sense of the Community's activities. As early as the 1974 Annual Meeting Tadeusz Walczak admitted: 'I also thought that if the Community did not come alive again it would be necessary to give a part or the whole of its property, that is the Community's House to POSK. I still remain a POSK enthusiast, but perhaps a better way of helping POSK would be to organize events in its benefit, to conscript members and founders etc.'<sup>52</sup> This represents a clear reversal of priorities in the Community's public activity. Tadeusz Walczak wrote in 1989: 'in the 1950s organized Polish life was still in its infancy. [...] Parishes were only at the stage of being organized. Not all of them had their own places where they would be

<sup>49</sup> *GPL-P Komunikat*, no 32, Mar. 1969.

<sup>50</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 33, June 1969.

<sup>51</sup> *GPL.P. Komunikat*, no 34, Dec. 1969.

<sup>52</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 47, [1974]. The General Meeting took place on 28 Apr. 1974.

able to hold services, to say nothing of having their own churches, clubs or parish houses. Polish Saturday schools had difficulty finding rooms for their activities as well as financial problems. The scouting movement established its first cub scout packs and scout troops. Dance groups and choirs began to develop. [...] Even though nobody admits it openly, only now one can realize that the Community in the fifties and sixties was a kind of an umbrella organization, an organizer of large-scale events. [...] After some time parishes, scouting and Saturday schools stabilized and started organizing their own events.’<sup>53</sup> Things developed similarly in west London.

Let us focus on yet another aspect of the Communities’ activity. We read in the GPZL’s *Biuletyn* in September 1961: ‘at present the Community has 216 members, this is both many and few.’ ‘It is few in comparison to the total number of Poles [in West London – *P. Ch.*], it is many, as they are members who fully understand the necessity of existing in changed conditions as a *general*, tightly-knit organization, above political parties (*ponadpartyjna*), an organization that is truly of a social and self-governing nature, embracing in its aims both the present – and above all – the future.’ ‘Most Poles living in West London did not get involved with the Community’, says Stefania Wolańska and continues: ‘as circumstances did not allow that [...] There are still people who – sadly – won’t admit that they are Poles. Why? I’ve no idea. Those, who felt Polish, were convinced that they could do something for the Community, not to gain something, but to give something. It is not enough to gain something, one should give something first. They were still eager to get involved with the Community.’<sup>54</sup>

During the first ten years of the West London Community’s activity, according to the summary presented at the Board’s Meeting on 20 February 1970, the number of the Community’s members was the following: 164 active members paying fees, 44 crossed-out members, 31 members who had changed addresses, 9 members who had emigrated, 27 undecided members, 8 members on a waiting list, 22 dead members, and 305 members in total. Was this few or many?

Without doubt an indisputable achievement of all the Communities was in reaching high level of ability to organize themselves and foster a ‘culture of the deed’ (*kultura czynu*). This knowledge was useful for other émigré associations and it may even have had a pioneering dimension, mainly for POSK. The project of

<sup>53</sup> T. Walczak, ‘Gmina Polska Londyn Południe’, *DPDŻ*, no 304, 21 Dec. 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with S. Wolańska.

setting up the 'Sarmatia' company, even though it did not end as planned, that is with buying their own house, also required, given the time in which it was realized, much ingeniousness, courage and mettle.

## **Conclusion**

POSK has been the pride of Poles in London, their biggest organizational and financial enterprise, which has been almost entirely excluded from any possibility of criticizing it and judging it objectively in émigré public debate, and even in the existing historical studies. The tension connected with the long years of building POSK, evident in the use of expressions such as 'enthusiasts' and 'enemies', has always impeded matter-of-fact discussion concerning the aim of its establishment and the role it was intended to play for the Polish community in the United Kingdom. Thus, the question whether the building of POSK had a positive or negative impact on the life of the whole of the Polish community in exile, seen from beyond the level of the *Gmina*, remains open.

The angle from which I am looking at the everyday life of émigrés and at the creation of 'Polish London' as exemplified by the Communities' activities, enables us to see that the consequences of both the long-time involvement of many activists with the building of one, big house centralizing the activities of the émigré community in the British capital, as well as of the opening and activity of the centre since the mid-1970s are not unambiguously positive. The Communities' members, making their contribution into the building of the centre, went beyond the smallest local scale of their collective efforts. They set examples of organizational abilities as well as the ability, which had been developed in the Communities, to co-operate in order to maintain national identity in exile. This shift of interest had a negative influence on the Communities of South and West London. It was only the Polish Centre in Lewisham, geographically the furthest away from POSK, which was not significantly influenced by its opening.

Let us remember, however, that working for POSK, just like working for the Communities, had a very practical dimension, aimed at the technical facilitation of public activity at a higher level than a district, but not exceeding the scale of Polish

community in London (33,000) or in the United Kingdom (140,000).<sup>55</sup> The *Biblioteka Polska POSK* (Polish Library) was the only institution, whose aim and meaning was more universal than ‘serving’ the small and local but culturally important émigré community. However, to maintain the library it was not necessary to raise such a big building, with all the immense effort and cost that POSK entailed.

Let us add here that the period of POSK’s construction coincided with a serious economic crisis in Great Britain (inflation, volatile property prices and interest rates). On several occasions this crisis posed a threat to the construction and paying off of the building by causing the costs of the project to rise dramatically. It also questioned the project’s profitability, leading to a vulnerability which can still be clearly seen years later.

The centralization of Polish life in London, resulting from the establishment of POSK, consolidated changes in the means and style of émigrés’ involvement with the Polish ‘parallel world’. It was also the expression of the evolution of this social group, which was clearly changing its shape in the 1970s.<sup>56</sup>

### **Epilogue: The true émigré heroes?**

The last *Komunikat* of the GPL-P that I could find in Polish Library in London, is number 52 from June 1977. It contains the following complaints: ‘We have the treasurer’s permission, plenty of paper, the printing house is waiting – but we still have nothing to print!’ It was clear that, as in the Community of West London, members felt insufficient need to maintain their social bond by means of an organizational bulletin. There were only thirty-six people present at the Annual General Meeting on 9 May 1976.<sup>57</sup> A satirical epigram was written: ‘*Wszystkie organizacje się kurczą / – członkowie wymierają, / Tylko prezesi wciąż walczą, / – i na stanowiskach trwają. / Dochodzą mnie głosy, / – coraz bardziej liczne, / Że*

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<sup>55</sup> These figures from 1951, representing probably the highest level of Polish settlement, are taken from Sword, *Identity In Flux*, p. 36. It is of course difficult to determine the extent to which the British-born children and grandchildren of wartime and postwar émigrés, especially the offspring of mixed marriages, have remained part of the ‘Polish community’, and so the estimation of its numbers over time is an inexact science. Sword, *Identity in Flux*, is a sociologist’s attempt to tackle such questions.

<sup>56</sup> See Sword, *Identity in Flux*, for an interpretation of this process.

<sup>57</sup> *GPL-P. Komunikat*, no 51, Dec. 1976.

*niektóre prezesury / – są już nawet dziedziczne. [...]*<sup>58</sup>. (All organizations shrink / - their members pass away/ - Only Chairmen still fight/ - and keep their positions / - I can hear gossip / - more and more clearly / - that some chairmanships/ - are already inherited.)

The Community of South London became merely a circle of friends who would meet several times a year during ‘social evenings’ (*wieczorki towarzyskie*), Christmas parties, excursions, or mushroom picking... The articles printed in the *GPL-P Komunikat*, number 51, from December 1976 were: ‘Ostatni rok w Gminie – widziany oczami radnej’ (The last year in the Community - seen through the eyes of a [female] councillor): ‘and what we shall sing after the shared dinner with the wine will stay with us for the whole year and maybe even longer...’ and ‘Na grzybki...’ (Mushroom picking) proved that the authors were less interested in social activity than in socializing, and that the focus of their interests had changed. In 1981 the Community allocated £275 to POSK and its theatre,<sup>59</sup> and in September 1985 a photographic competition was organized.<sup>60</sup> There were annual Carnival balls in the *Sala Malinowa* (Raspberry-pink Room) of POSK as well as the routine Annual General Meetings. There were ‘traditional trips “to the Lithuanians”’ (*Do Litwinów*),<sup>61</sup> as well as to Fawley Court.<sup>62</sup> There were also trips to the seaside, to the beach at Margate.<sup>63</sup> *Bale Maturalne* (balls held to mark the finishing of secondary schools) and other events and parties were naturally dying out. There was ever less interest from the ever decreasing circle of Community members.<sup>64</sup>

The Community did not adopt or admit new members either. In 1988 it decided to give its house to POSK. The proposal caused one last flurry of excitement among the members of the GPL-P. The supporters and opponents of giving the house to POSK mobilized to argue during the Annual General Meeting. Eventually, the proposal to hand the house over to POSK prevailed.<sup>65</sup> According to the signed

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<sup>58</sup> [ J. Nowiak?], ‘Przestroga dla Zarządu’, *ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Letter dated Nov. 1989, signed by T. Bogucki (secretary) and W. Borkowski (director), Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>62</sup> Letter dated 21 July 1988 to POSK’s treasurer, Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>63</sup> Letter dated 1 June 1989, signed by T. Bogucki (secretary) and W. Borkowski (director), Archives of GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with B. Laskowski.

<sup>65</sup> T. Walczak, ‘Gmina Polska Londyn Południe (IV)’, *DPDŻ*, no 83, 7 Apr. 1989.



agreement POSK committed itself to paying £300 to the Community.<sup>66</sup> In 1998 the house was sold, and the funds were handed over to POSK, the Piłsudski Institute, the Sikorski Institute, the Polish Educational Society (PMS, *Polska Macierz Szkolna*), Saturday schools and scouting groups based in South London.

According to Bogdan Laskowski (the last chairman of the South London Community) the organization had fulfilled its mission and its dissolution was the natural course of events. He does not view the fact that the second generation did not take over from their parents as a failure. He is of the opinion that the Community was an achievement of a particular generation and went with that generation as it passed away. Neither in the 1980s nor later did it engage with subsequent émigré generations. Writing in 2008, I add here that the Polish Centre in Lewisham, which is still active, unlike the officially dissolved Communities, is also run almost entirely by the youngest member of the wartime and postwar émigré generation, born in 1920s.<sup>67</sup>

The motion officially to end the GLP-P's activity was proposed on 29 May 2001: 'The Polish Community of South London will officially end its activity during the current year of 2002 and the Annual General Meeting will decide how to allocate the Community's remaining funds according to the promises included in the Statute. [...] The last event organized by the Council for the members and their guests will be *Oplątek* [a party during which Christmas wishes are exchanged over the breaking of eucharistic wafers] at the *Orzeł Biały* (White Eagle) club in Balham on 2 December 2001.' The last social gathering had taken place on 14 October 2000: 'As it is now the last year of the Community's activity we will certainly have many good memories from those many years of our work, trips, games, etc. The Community's *Kroniki* (hand-written chronicles), albums and other publications gathered in the room will help us with this before they are moved to the archives of Polish Library in London'.<sup>68</sup>

'The Polish Community of West London ceased its activity in 1976, but officially it still existed', emphasizes its last President, Zygmunt Grzyb. As has mentioned

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<sup>66</sup> Letter to POSK's treasurer dated 21 July 1988, with a request to cover the costs of the excursion to Fawley Court, Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

<sup>67</sup> The youngest wartime/postwar émigré I have met was born in 1928. However, from November 2006 the director of Polish Lewisham Centre and one from three trustees was Dr Paweł Dokurno, who arrived in London from Poland in 1995. The young director has little to do and he seems to be an exception prove the rule.

<sup>68</sup> Letter signed by S. Portalski (secretary) and B. Laskowski (director), Archives of the GPL-P, 1470/Rps/3.

above, the GPZL was a twofold founder of POSK (at numbers 72 and 147 – the second being the Ladies' Circle).<sup>69</sup> The Community also supported the action of deposits to help POSK. A deposit of £6,681.33 was given back to the Community by POSK in February 2003. The official dissolution of the Community took place on 31 May 2003 under article twelve of the Community's Statute. It was decided by majority vote to allocate the Community's remaining funds between the Saturday School, scouting, *Varsovia* Football Club, the Polish Library, and the General Sikorski and Józef Piłsudski Institutes.<sup>70</sup> 'For a long time the life of the Community has been concentrated in POSK and has taken various forms. The dissolution of the current structure of the Community seems to be a reasonable and logical end to its activity', claimed its last activists. The Community's remaining furniture, dishes and other items of that sort were given to the Polish Catholic Centre (*Polski Ośrodek Katolicki*, POK) in Ealing.<sup>71</sup> The last event in the Community's activity was affixing a commemorative plaque in the Church of Saint Andrzej Bobola.

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One of the last documents connected with the history of the GPL-P and which can be found in its archive is a letter from the director of Polish Library, Zdzisław Jagodziński, to Bogdan Laskowski, dated 15 August 2000. The former expresses his gratitude for Laskowski's gift of Stefan Korgul's diaries covering the years 1939-64 ('including the periods of his stay in Soviet forced-labour camps, in the Polish Army in the Soviet Union, the Polish Army in the Middle East (*Polska Armia na Wschodzie*, APW), the 2 Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in Italy, and, after demobilization, in England'). Zdzisław Jagodziński wrote: 'It is an important and valuable source for the history of the wartime and postwar peregrination of our emigration, particularly because it describes the ways, thoughts, experiences, and opinions of somebody who belonged to the ordinary strata of émigré society rather than to its elites, which does not mean that his account is not important for

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<sup>69</sup> *Cud nad Tamizą*, pp. 163, 164.

<sup>70</sup> R. Żółtaniecki, 'Gmina Zachodniego Londynu (rok założenia 1959)', *DPDŻ*, 30 June 2003.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Z. Grzyb.

researchers. [...] Thank you for rescuing these diaries, as there are not many of them [...].'<sup>72</sup>

‘Such organizational forms as the *Gminy* are the third, the most unknown, and the most unsung level of émigré life, after “high politics” and main social and cultural organizations. They are the true émigré heroes’, concluded Jerzy Kulczycki.<sup>73</sup> I hope that this thesis adds to our knowledge of the experience of Poles in exile in its individual and human, as well as its social and organizational dimensions.

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<sup>72</sup> *GPL-P. Kronika. 1965-1973*, vol. 2, 1470/Rps/9/b.

<sup>73</sup> Interview.

## 12.

### Conclusions

Does the history of Communities contain the truth of a more general meaning? How can the Communities' activity fit into the broader context of the history of the 'parallel Polish world' in Great Britain?

By 1959, over a decade had passed in emigration, not counting the war years. Even those who were least resigned to their exiled fate had to attend to their own affairs. Their children were growing up and they had begun to flourish in the professions and in business. Ever more people decided, and could afford, to buy their own houses. Moods were changing. Marian Hemar stated bluntly: 'The émigré convention is such that we are all unhappy here and it has to be like this, that nobody is happier here than they would be in the home country, that everyone are smiling through their tears, that English bread is bitter and has no scent, that the gin is of poor quality and it makes you choke, that one is not lucky at cards and the moods are low, that everyone would abandon everything one has here and come back to the home country on their knees, if there was freedom of choice there. Meanwhile the truth is that we all long for the homeland, especially the elderly, but many of us would not return for good any more, especially the young ones. There are people among us who have not been very successful here, but there are also those who have been much more successful than they would ever be in the home country, there are people who have made fortunes and there are also those who gave come to like something more than prosperity here. They have come to like the order, the peace, the security of being a citizen in this particular political system. They have come to like the citizen's indifference towards the state and the government.'<sup>1</sup>

The last two sentences are especially important from the point of view of the growing stabilization of life in exile, which is one of the most important themes of this work. Remaining in their hearts Polish patriots – patriots of a Poland that no longer existed in reality, but only in their memories and tradition – the émigrés absorbed the atmosphere of the country of settlement. This was an atmosphere that was very different from their experiences of Poland's political realities before and during the Second World War. Years of participation in British life – interrupted

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<sup>1</sup> Hemar, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

every weekend by activity in the Polish social field – changed their general approach to such varied issues as the role of the state, government and politics in the life of individuals, mutual relations between people in private and public life, and some behavioural spheres – on which themes I shall now expand.

Stefania Kossowska saw these problems in a different light. In 1960, on the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the *Ognisko* club and the *Dziennik Polski* she wrote in an article entitled ‘Sentymentalna oda na jubileusz’ [Sentimental ode for the jubilee]: ‘Being attached to London is seen by most compatriots almost as national infidelity, as a rejection of other ties. After twenty years, however, one should muster the courage and admit to this indecent emotion – yes, not Warsaw, not Lwów, not Silesia, not Łódź, just London. [...]. Let us not confuse local patriotism with the national one; it is only a private love, measured by a number of years spent just here and not anywhere else and by one’s own experiences accumulated throughout those years. Can we bear a grudge towards somebody, who has lived nowhere so long as in London, for their London patriotism?’<sup>2</sup> Similar emotions created the spiritual background for the decision concerning the establishment of Communities.

‘It was evident that temporariness ended and that we should start long-term planning’, writes Krzysztof Głuchowski.<sup>3</sup> ‘They wanted to build mini-Poland for Poles here’ says Zygmunt Grzyb.<sup>4</sup> As far as London was concerned, it was quite a substantial ‘little Poland’. Towards the end of the 1960s one could read: ‘according to official statistics London Postal Districts are inhabited by 49,200 Poles (this number does not include Poles born in England); so in the area of the Greater London Council there live 62,800 Poles out of whom 77.13 per cent live in West London and the remaining 22.87 per cent in East London.’<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the 1970s, the number of Poles in the entire United Kingdom was estimated at 130,000, including the second generation, born in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

Let us focus at this point on the evolution of émigré associations in relation to their central units. One should remember that the ‘independence’ emigration, because of its legalism and the fact that it maintained the attributes of statehood, was

<sup>2</sup> The article reprinted in the book : S. Kossowska, *Mieszkam w Londynie* (London, 1964), pp. 311-13.

<sup>3</sup> Głuchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Z. Grzyb.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Ośrodek Polski na mapie Londynu’, *Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny w Londynie. Komunikat* no 10, Sept. 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Radzik, *Z dziejów społeczności polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 20.

strongly institutionalized and kept its hierarchical flavour. Bohdan Czaykowski and Bolesław Sulik characterize changes that took place in Polish life in Great Britain at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s as a ‘gradual disappearing of the vertical structure in favour of the horizontal structure’. They later explain that ‘this process is manifesting itself with tendencies to become independent from links with central organizations, with the coming into existence of independent centres (of a Community character) and with the offensive of the parish. This process is not complete and we have seen the obstacles that it is encountering. For the time being, the result of this process is a mixed structure: some centres remain organized around branches of central organizations, some are centred mainly around parishes and for some the concept of the *Gmina* is the organizational basis.’

These authors claim further that ‘the atomization [of Polish life in London] goes hand in hand with decentralization, and this process has been going on for quite a few years now. There occurred a considerable shift of centres of gravity towards London’s peripheries: Islington, Chiswick, Ealing, Clapham, Lewisham, and Highgate, and outside London: Middlesex, Surrey, and Kent. In these areas new parishes, new Polish Houses, independent organizations under the name of *Gminy* and other independent centres are being established. The concentration of “central units” in the district of Kensington is slowly becoming an anachronism.’ One of the most important points of their conclusion is the forecast that further decentralization of Polish social life would follow. ‘The centre of gravity will move towards local associations.’ By this the authors mean branches of the central unit, the parish and the Community.<sup>7</sup> Sulik and Czaykowski had an agenda – they desired the changes they claimed to describe, and some of their conclusions are tendentious. We should seek confirmation from those of a different ideological hue, who also noted and described trends in lifestyles and attitudes among Poles in exile.

Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, who defies stereotyping, observed in a perceptive article written in 1967: ‘About twenty years have passed since the time when young men with military backpacks left the camps. Already middle-aged, they are now portly, they own houses, they have jobs, television [...], cars, families and children. As far as their careers are concerned, most of them are well-to-do. A large percentage of them have academic qualifications. They belong to British professional

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<sup>7</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, pp. 545, 258, 558.

institutions, many of them in managerial positions. Concerning their income, this middle generation of people with Polish roots belongs to middle class, or perhaps often to the lower middle class, which is the most English of all classes of this society. This class has influenced these Poles and that is why they are different from both the older émigré generation and Poles in the homeland. The middle generation of Poles in England has got rid of emotionality and is very *down to earth*. They only deal with practical matters, work professionally, care for their houses and expenditures.’<sup>8</sup>

Mr Siemaszko indicates further characteristics of this class: ‘the simplification of forms of social interaction, the purification from exaggerated emotionalism, the disappearance of demonstrative respect towards ladies, the disappearance of minor *jiggery-pokery*. These people have their feet on the ground, but they have anti-intellectual attitudes, are interested only in their professional specialization, and are losing the traditional features of Polish intelligentsia.’ In an article with the telling title ‘Pokolenie, któremu wyrwano kły’ [The generation whose fangs were removed],<sup>9</sup> the same author adds that the generation described ‘after some time got involved with Polish activities, but at a grass-roots level – parishes, Saturday schools, local clubs.’ They demonstrate at the same time ‘hardly any interest in central matters’. It is nevertheless important that this group work on transmitting Polishness to the youngest generation, born in this country, he concludes, even if this Polishness consists merely of ‘national dances, singing, the language, spoken reasonably well, and a handful of facts from Polish history taught at a Saturday school’.

The prolonged stay in the British Isles was making the social stratification of Polish émigré society ever more similar to the social stratification of British society, claim Czaykowski and Sulik. ‘General embourgeoisation’ is in progress: ‘without significant resistance a part of emigration became the bourgeoisie’. Characteristic features of this group were the following: ‘general resourcefulness, great work output, energy, haste and panache in collecting tangible property, the rapid acquisition of wealth, the ambition to educate children, up to academic level, awareness of social advancement, self-confidence and certain ostentation in lifestyle,

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<sup>8</sup> Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, ‘Pokolenie dwóch kultur’, reprinted in id., *Sprawy i troski 1956-2005* (Lublin, 2005) pp. 427-435.

<sup>9</sup> First published in *Wiadomości*, no 1, 1975, reprinted in Siemaszko, *Sprawy i troski* pp. 435-440.

despite frugality'.<sup>10</sup> All those elements of change within the wider Polish community influenced the emergence of the concept of the *Gmina*, its organizational shape and ways of acting.

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s in London a growing need for a new type of social self-organization can be observed among ordinary members of the Polish emigration. Following the initial period of a lack of stabilization, during which émigrés hoped to return to a free Poland, the phase of settling down in the host country began. The partial embarrassment of the émigré political elite that took place after the ultimate rupture in the centre of power in 1954 resulted in the unwillingness of many among the émigré 'masses' and 'grass roots' (*doty*) to be involved in social activity in general, or else a shift of their focus to local activity.

This moment, then, was the right one in which to formulate the concept of the *Gmina* – an organization which by its nature was democratic, non-elitist and cohesive. After several years it resulted in the establishment of three Communities, located in different parts of London, but with similar goals. The Communities started to create their own Polish world, which interacted with the world in which they found themselves. This creation of entirely new organizations constituted a remarkable success and brought a breath of fresh air to Polish social life in the United Kingdom. Organizing the communities was testimony to the émigré society's vitality and its openness to new tasks connected with its stabilization. It was a triumph of the need for self-organization in order to maintain national identity, in reaction to the accelerating assimilation of Poles into British society. This need was deeply rooted in Polish tradition and history. It characterized the Poles of earlier emigrations as well as those living in the Polish lands during the period of partition (1772/95-1918). Most leaders of the Communities as well as their members were conscious continuators of this tradition.

From the beginning of their existence, the Communities had to contend with a wider struggle concerning the image and programme of the Polish community in

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<sup>10</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *op. cit.*, pp. 551-52.



exile around 1960. The question of the ideological and moral foundations underpinning even local Polish organizations, whose mission was to meet basic religious, educational, or social needs, was unavoidably raised in an émigré world that was divided into political and even ideological camps. Individual communities had recourse to different strategies in dealing with the dilemma of having a clearer political image of their organizations. Within the Communities, the acceptance by many Poles in exile of British citizenship was not overtly criticized; indeed, the very concept of the organization can be construed as an attempt to neutralize the influence of this process on Polish social activity. The issue of visits by members and activists of the Communities to communist-ruled Poland was treated differently.

The process of settling down, buying houses, educating children with the aim of enabling them to achieve the greatest possible professional success in Great Britain, all this had to co-exist with the idealistic vision the older generations of émigrés cultivated of their Polish identity – heroic, martyrological and Catholic. This was a difficult undertaking. It proved impossible as far as the attempt to pass on a living Polish national tradition to the next generations, born in exile, was concerned. A solution was however found for maintaining national spirit among the generations born in independent Poland and at least partly educated in Polish schools to the end of the 1940s. This was the pattern of life in two worlds, with different rules, hierarchies and rituals – in the British world from Monday to Friday and in the Polish world at the weekends.

Of course it would be difficult to state that a double morality also applied to these two worlds. For example, the émigrés' activity in the Polish parish and the British Catholic school, recorded in the case of the Polish Centre in Lewisham is a good example of a single ethical stance in both worlds. Nevertheless, it was the strict guarding of the boundary between the two realities that enabled émigrés to maintain their national distinctiveness.

The membership of the Communities came from all circles of the wartime and postwar emigration and reflected all the routes taken by Poles in order to reach the British capital in the 1940s. The diverse experiences of the people involved in the Communities had no significant influence on the level of understanding between them as they undertook tasks in the newly established organizations. Former war heroes frequently had to face the difficult challenge of finding their own place in a reality that was alien to them. The youngest generation, who entered adult life during

the war or immediately after it, found it easier to make a new start. It was mostly representatives this émigré generation who built the foundations of the *Gminy*.

The wartime origins of the Second Great Emigration had a profound influence on the way the group's national identity evolved as well as on the ideas and values that governed the upbringing of its children, born in the United Kingdom. The pressing task was therefore to reconcile the moral imperatives of the Polish national cause with the habits and aspirations typical of British society. The need to pass down Polish national consciousness to the next and future generations was a highly significant factor, which drove many Poles in exile towards greater social activity.

New arrivals, who felt aliens in their environment, and were now inhabitants of London, clung to each other and felt a common need for mutual support in a generally uncomprehending, sometimes hostile, not yet multicultural British society. Despite the differences between various areas of the metropolis as well as between the Polish communities inhabiting them, one can notice many similarities between the Polish *Gminy* that determined their character.

There were circles of friendly families, parents and children within the Communities. People leaned on one another and worked together, not only in Polish social activity, but also sometimes in business or in building a religious community. It seems that past divisions and the hierarchical tone that characterized Polish émigré society were sometimes deemed irrelevant at the level of the *Gmina*. There were also attempts to develop a sense of high self-esteem for the group. Care and respect were offered to the Communities' senior members. Activity in other social areas beyond the Community was appreciated. The growing material and professional success of many members was a source of pride for the entire Community.

Having been established on the margins of émigré life, the Communities slowly became a more important part of 'Polish London'. They expressed a spontaneous and genuine need for collective social activity. Despite the tragic experiences of war, separation from the homeland and relatives, and Poland's loss of independence – which was genuinely felt – the members of the wartime and post-war emigration did not remain in a state of national mourning. The arrears caused in lives by the war were finally being cleared, Poles began to live normally, make use of their youth while it lasted, and enjoy material stability, even prosperity. Dances brought substantial profit to the Communities. The parties, although confined largely to the Polish circle, were sometimes attended by the English friends of Polish children born

in exile. The preparation of a dance entailed a huge and selfless organizational effort by *Gmina* activists. Here, groups of ladies discovered and beautifully followed their social vocation. It must be admitted, however, that attempts to introduce youth into the organizational 'engine' enjoyed little success. It is hardly surprising that in view of the cultural changes of the sixties and seventies, which so drastically shook Great Britain and the world, that the younger generation ceased to find their parents' way of spending their free time an attractive one.

Organizing and supporting Saturday schools was commonly considered by the whole emigration as one of their most important tasks. There were different degrees of co-operation between *Gmina* and school – from financial help to personal involvement as teachers or activists of Parent-Teacher Associations. The volunteer-based Saturday school closely matched the democratic ethos of the *Gmina*. Activities accompanying classes at Saturday schools, such as games, ceremonies, national and religious holiday celebrations were the essence of all that was Polish in life in emigration, and so helped to preserve national identity. While the communist regime in Poland tightly controlled the school curriculum, Saturday schools in exile were places where one was exposed to a truer picture of Polish history, one that was not deliberately and cynically falsified.

The demands imposed on pupils were high, basing the understanding of national consciousness on the heroic military and scouting traditions, which were – and are – serious and full of martyrological elements. This was inevitable, since it was to these traditions that the generations brought up before and during the war were exposed by their own education. Although there were people who were aware of the traps inherent in propagating heroic patriotism, they were not able to develop alternative educational ideas that would be culturally attractive and thus able to compete with British ones. It was also sometimes the case that Saturday school teachers, despite their goodwill and sense of mission, lacked proper teaching experience or in some cases, even a proper command of the Polish language. The 1960s and 1970s were the times of strong generational conflicts in general. In the case of Polish emigrants these conflicts widened the generation gap further, but some in the older generation mistakenly attributed aspects of youthful rebellion or disaffection from the heroic patriotic ethos only to the maleficent influence of the communist regime in Poland. The schools survived thanks to successive waves of

emigration and the second émigré generation born in the United Kingdom. For the latter, Polish will remain, at best, a well-spoken foreign language.

Three principal kinds of institution were created to strengthen a particular kind of Polish identity, and to transfer this kind of Polishness to the successors of the wartime and postwar émigrés: Polish parishes within the Roman Catholic Church, Saturday schools, and scouting and guiding groups. The co-ordination of their activity is well presented through the phenomenon of the *Gmina*. The military dimension of the Polish form of scouting and guiding facilitated contact between young people and older generations. At the same time it helped to link them with the common origin of the whole wartime and postwar emigration. A similar educational model had been adopted by the interwar Republic of Poland and by the Republic of Poland in exile during the Second World War. No other way of shaping young people's spirit was known to the continuators of independent Poland. An essential part of the educational phenomenon of the Polish scouting and guiding movement lay in its ability to involve adults. As 'auxiliary members', parents of scouts and guides could escape the pressure of the social rat-race and improve themselves under the influence of the movement's clear patriotic and moral canon, which from the outset of the twentieth century opposed all that was considered to represent the egoistic, materialistic direction of Western civilization.

The Polish moderators of social life found it difficult to suggest a new, attractive way of supplementing the national education of young people. Among the most noteworthy and (unexpectedly) successful attempts to overcome the crisis of the Saturday schools and the scouting and guiding movement were folk dance groups. The *Niemen-Karolinka* group, coming directly from the scouting and guiding organization and tradition, constitutes a good example of such a successful metamorphosis.

Giving émigrés the opportunity to engage in religious practices in their own language and within their own religious organization, as a part of the Roman Catholic Church was, along with bringing up youth, one of the most important and indisputable tasks of Polish social activity in exile. It is not surprising then, that Polish parishes and churches were established where Polish settlements took root. The three London Communities immediately established relations with parishes and parish priests.

The model of the 'Catholic-Pole' helped Poles in exile to maintain a clear distinction from British society, which in the 1950s was still predominantly Protestant and native born, but soon became multiracial and multicultural as immigration from the 'New Commonwealth' increased. The outcome of this approach was the consolidation of a homogeneous way of cultivating Polishness, with a distance maintained towards traditions and denominations other than the Roman Catholic Church. Initial feelings of solidarity with the Catholic Irish may well have evaporated as Poles settled down, prospered, and advanced within British society.

For 'ordinary émigrés' the model of experiencing Polishness based on Roman Catholicism was the only comprehensible and available one, regardless of the level of their involvement in the spiritual life of the Church. In this respect the lives of Communities was similar to the functioning of the smallest unit of the 'parallel' state in exile – the local self-government. The Republic of Poland in exile respected religious freedom, yet it contained one dominant official religion. This contrasted with 'People's Poland', where the communist authorities were in permanent conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and constantly sought to restrict freedom of religion.

Parish priests were very important people in their social environment, not only in their districts, but also in the whole Polish émigré community in London or even in the United Kingdom as a whole. They were treated with demonstrative respect. In the cases of Fathers Kazimierz Sołowiej, Stanisław Cynar and, above all, Adam Wróbel, the strong individuality and organizational skills possessed by these priests contributed to the laying of the foundations for a life in emigration that catered for more universal needs than the practice of religious worship. In taking on wider social roles, these priests were conscious heirs to a Polish tradition formed both in the homeland and during previous emigrations. Jubilees also contributed to the building of group cohesion and were a means to appreciate parish priests and the most active Community and parish members. The many special events described in this thesis fortified the self-esteem and the self-confidence of the Polish Communities and brought recognition from the surrounding English milieu – lay as well as ecclesiastical.

The Communities' focus on sport also demonstrates their concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of Polish youth. This was also a way attaching

youth to the Polish community in exile, and in particular to its patriotic and military traditions. Sport was a natural supplement to the other aspects of Communities' lives. Sport also illustrates the impossibility of excluding recreation from politics, which strongly permeated all forms of Polish social life both in the home country and in exile. Sporting issues became entangled with the controversies over travel to and contacts with communist-ruled Poland that, especially in the 1960s, bitterly divided the 'independence' emigration.

Activists coming from similar environments and declaring similar aims, organized their activity in different ways and forms, but the reasons for their choices are no longer always clear. In the 'South', it was decided to set up a partnership 'Polish Community (South London) Association Limited', that was closely-connected with the activity of the private companies whose owners and shareholders were the same Community leaders. Those people who in West London participated in setting up the partnership called 'Sarmatia Investment Co. Ltd.' seem to have paid more attention to separating their social from their professional activity. In the 'South-East', the 'Lewisham Polish Centre' was created as a charitable foundation. It would appear that this was the most convenient form, and it was also the most common among the rest of organized émigré life.

The private aspiration to own property was also transferred to the level of communal, social life. The émigrés who created the Communities felt comfortable in their role as people searching for houses, buying them, paying off mortgages and managing real estate.

In the Polish Community of South London the question of possessing a house gained almost mythical status. Even some organizational shortcomings were put down to the lack of own building. Simultaneously, in setting new tasks the actual usage of the house in accordance with the original intentions was repeatedly postponed. The Community was undoubtedly successful in collecting funds, but the means were mistaken for the aim – using the house for the benefit of the Community. By the time the aim of providing a social club for members was finally achieved in the mid-1970s, the *Gmina* had already entered its declining phase.

The Polish Community of West London, unable to buy a house of its own, transferred its funds to a greater goal – POSK, the huge Polish Social and Cultural Centre, located in West London. Community members who lived in the vicinity hoped that POSK would fulfil a local role similar to their own GPZL club. However,

the voluntary melting of the Community into POSK irretrievably changed the character of its activity, identity and style. Only the story of the Polish Centre in Lewisham and Brockley has a happy ending, in which deeds matched words. Thanks to the persistence of the spiritual patrons of the Community, the house was not only purchased, paid for and used in accordance with the declared intentions, but soon afterwards exchanged for a bigger one. In the case of all the Communities, however, the importance of activity aimed at buying a house cannot be undervalued as a means of integrating the group and gaining organizational efficiency, which was useful in other fields of activity as well.

Most émigré public activity was routine, and became more so as the years passed. There were however exceptional situations and events, affecting the *Gminy*, that cast light on the state of émigré consciousness. The fact that members belonged to organizations other than the Communities placed the organizational units analysed here in the wider context of the émigré parallel world. So did the Communities' participation in events such as the Millennium celebrations in 1966 and the funeral of General Anders in 1970. Like other organizations in exile, the Communities were also exposed to the communist regime's attempts at manipulation and sabotage. GPZL and GPL-P leaders showed different levels of sensitivity to such dangers. The Community of West London's improvised welcome of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 confirms the impression that compared to the others, this *Gmina* had a more explicit pro-freedom and pro-Western attitude that reflected its more 'indomitable' and uncompromising ideological profile.

Contacts between the Community of South London and local government authorities are additional proof of how well émigrés put down roots in their country of settlement. However, the Community members' attempt to carve out a place for themselves in the increasingly multicultural city brought more prestige than tangible benefits. Poles' entry into British politics, even local politics, in any significant numbers still lay in the future.

In the 1960s concern was growing among Polish activists about the steadily falling number of émigrés, and the worsening financial condition of émigré organizations. A fixed Polish centre, so it was argued, could consolidate and stabilize Polish assets in danger of dispersal. The vast Polish Social and Cultural Centre (POSK) has been the pride of Poles in London since its opening in the mid-1970s. However, from the perspective of the everyday life of 'Polish London',

exemplified by the manifold activities of the Communities, the consequences of this centralization have not been unambiguously positive. The Communities' members, in contributing into the building of the centre, set sterling examples of organizational ability and co-operation in a common national cause, abilities which had been developed in work on behalf of the Communities. The casualties of these efforts were the Communities of South and West London. It was only the Polish Centre in Lewisham, geographically the furthest away from POSK, which was not significantly influenced by its opening.

The centralization of Polish life in London, which was the result of the establishment of POSK, consolidated changes in the means and style of émigrés' involvement with the Polish 'parallel world'. In consequence the deepening crisis of the emigration's social life was not interrupted even by a new wave of émigrés in 1980s (the so called 'Solidarity emigration'). The completion of the huge POSK building and the paying off of all debts related to it in 1988 was last great social achievement of the wartime and postwar emigration. The transmission of the insignia and constitution of the Government and President in Exile to Lech Wałęsa, the first democratically elected president of postwar Poland, in 1990 would be its final political attainment. As a result, the sociologist Keith Sword was able to write in the mid-1990s: 'The study of informal groups and social networks [of second generation Poles, but also of the newer arrivals] is one possible direction for future research. [...] the Polish community is in decline – as indicated by the conventional measures of organizational membership and participation. [...]. While it is rash to make predictions, it seems likely – unless unforeseen changes take place – that only London and a handful of provincial metropolitan centres will retain organized Polish communities of any viability in twenty years'.<sup>11</sup>

'Unforeseen changes' have taken place. Following the expansion of the European Union (and even in advance of Poland's official accession on 1 May 2004), a new wave of Polish emigration, utterly unprecedented in its scale, has overrun Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the first decade of the twenty-first century, reaching even the deepest provincial, agricultural corners of the country. The new arrivals fill all the surviving structures of the social life of the older Polish community in exile – churches and parishes, Saturday schools, sports teams, clubs

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<sup>11</sup> Sword, *Identity in Flux*, p. 233.



and so on. They also found new Polish organizations, from the media to the City of London. They lobby British politicians at local and national levels, and hold new types of Polish events. Efforts have been made by some of the new arrivals to reach out to the wartime and postwar emigration.

For all these signs of activity, organized Polish social life in Great Britain remains fragmentary and in relation to the number of Poles here, limited in scale. While much of this new migration is transient, it seems safe to predict that the number of Poles in the United Kingdom will remain above a few hundred thousand for many years to come. Despite much mutual goodwill, the gulf between ‘old’ and ‘new’ emigrants remains a wide one. In this context, the model or concept of the *Gmina* still seems to be still the only form that could suit the rebuilding of organized and associated Polish life in the United Kingdom. For this reason I believe that the history of the former Polish Communities is especially interesting and instructive. A full and fair appreciation of their achievements could even strengthen the organic bond between all Poles: the dead, the living and those not yet born.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This sentence is inspired by Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

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