

A Brief Guide around Polish Heritage Places in Huddersfield



The Mission Cross in front of the Polish church overlooking St. Patrick's

The Polish were one of the first post-WWII alien groups who marked a great wave of immigration which has completely changed the social and cultural outlook of the whole Huddersfield area. The initial reaction to their coming was mixed, if not reserved. Most of the immigrants could not speak English and they were different from the locals in several ways. Nevertheless, they soon earned the respect of the local employers for their hard-working nature and flexible working attitudes. The reasons for their settlement here were not only social and economic but largely political and their ingrained anti-Soviet attitudes were not properly understood by the local population. The Catholic faith allowed Poles to follow their national culture and traditions as well as providing the basis upon which to establish a strong and thriving community which has become an important element in the life of Huddersfield. This short booklet gives an overview of places which were/are owned or used by Huddersfield Poles and which became significant to their social, religious and cultural life.

1 St. Patrick's Church

This church on **New North Road** was erected by Joseph Kaye in 1832. The church's records from the end of the Second World War onwards provide evidence of an increasing presence of immigrants from the Old Continent,



Father Józef serving Mass in St. Patrick's Church in the 1950s.
Kirklees Sound Archive

particularly the Polish, Italians and Ukrainians. The late **Canon James Grogan** (parish priest 1930-1957), who was described as the 'Father to the Poles', understood the plight of émigrés very well which was apparent from his sermons and other charitable activities. This Irish-Polish link proved to be vital for the well-being of the Polish community. The first Polish priest and the

THIS PLAQUE HAS BEEN ERECTED TO EXPRESS THE GRATITUDE OF THE POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN HUDDERSFIELD TO THE CLERGY AND PARISHIONERS OF ST. PATRICK'S WHO WELCOMED US AND ALLOWED US THE USE OF THE CHURCH DURING THE YEARS 1948 – 1962.

MAY GOD REPAY YOUR KINDNESS – "BÓG ZAPŁAĆ"

OUR LADY OF CZĘSTOCHOWA, QUEEN OF POLAND
PRAY FOR US AND OUR BRETHREN IN FAITH

ERECTED ON THE OCCASION OF THE JUBILEE
OF THE POLISH COMMUNITY

SEPTEMBER 1998

founding father of the local Polish Community, **Józef Leon Dryżałowski** (parish priest 1948/9-1968), was granted an independent status so that he could serve the spiritual needs of the Polish nationals. This

unique position was commented on by the *Examiner* as 'a parish within a parish'. The Irish and Polish regularly came together in gigantic **Corpus Christi processions** which must have attracted some attention when dressed in their colourful national costumes.

2

St. Patrick's Rectory

Situated right next to St. Patrick's, the Rectory has been a home to the church's clergy. Father Józef was initially a chaplain to Poles in **Cawthorne**, where a former military camp was made into a workers' hostel. He served

Mass in a large Nissen hut converted into a chapel. With people leaving for more accessible Huddersfield industries, there was a need for him to change residence. He found refuge in St. Patrick's Rectory when travelling between the two places. He was accommodated here until 1949 when the emerging Polish community collected enough money to get a loan on a house in Upper George Street. The mutual friendship between him and St. Patrick's clergy, however, still continued.



This photo shows Canon Grogan, the host, who is sitting in the middle and to his left is Father Józef, the visitor, socialising with the priests of St. Patrick's Rectory in 1947/8. Kirklees Sound Archive

3

St. Patrick's Old Hall

Officially opened in September 1926, it was said to be the finest Hall in the town. The Hall was located on the corner of Fitzwilliam and Arthur Street



St. Patrick's Old Hall in 1971, view from the corner of Claremont Street. Kirklees Image Archive

and it hosted various social and religious activities, including dances, performances, concerts and talks. The Polish people initially used the lower part for religious services in their national language but it could not meet their demands. As the *Examiner* reported, the search

for a building which could accommodate 500 Poles started in 1948 and lasted for another 12 years. Saint Patrick's Hall was later also used for cultural fêtes. An example of this is the celebration of **The Third of May**. On this occasion, in 1953, Canon Grogan received **The Gold Cross of Merit** from the Polish authorities for his vital help and support. The Hall was closed in 1971 and later demolished due to the development of the inner Ring Road.

4 **The First Polish Presbytery**

32 Upper George Street, an imposing ten-roomed house, became prominent in several ways. Originally, it was a former home of the first Mayor of the Huddersfield Borough, Charles Henry Jones (in office 1868-1871). The Polish people lacked a place of their own and thus they collected money for a deposit and obtained a loan from the building society in order to buy this house which became the hub of the Roman Catholic Polish life of the town. This first Polish presbytery did not only accommodate the priest but also a small chapel, a nursery and five classrooms belonging to **Saturday School** of which Father Józef became the founder and headmaster. The school became one of the places where Polishness was fostered in younger generations. There, they could learn the language, history, geography and the religion of their parents' Fatherland. The Polish sold the house in 1964 and it is now serving the Asian community as a mosque.

5 **Greenhead Park**

This picturesque place has certainly many stories to tell, some of which have long been forgotten. The Polish also left some footprints there. The biggest Polish organisation after the parish was the **Polish Ex-Combatants' Association** (the *SPK*) and since the beginnings were very basic, its members had to meet on the benches of Greenhead Park. Poles attempted, on numerous occasions, to demonstrate the fact that they were political émigrés rather than mere migrant labourers. They expressed their

dissatisfaction with the post-war settlement as well as their deep opposition to Soviet totalitarianism on a number of occasions. Several ceremonies occurred here. The most symbolic event was **the Silent Protest** against the official visit to Britain of two Russian leaders, Bulganin and Khrushchev, in April 1956. Poles wearing mourning clothes carried the national flag veiled in black as well as a wreath of red and white carnations, which epitomised their national colours, and which was laid at the Cenotaph. The message was transparent: they were a watchful, politically conscious and highly patriotic community.

6 The Polish Catholic Centre

A former Unitarian Church has been dominant in Fitzwilliam Street since the 1840s when it was built by Frederic Schwann. The size of this congregation was greatly reduced in size by the 1950s and a decision



The Church of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Queen of Poland and the Polish presbytery on Fitzwilliam Street

was made to sell the building to the Poles. The amount required for the purchase (£4,500) was collected either in cash or promises in a record time in December 1961. The new Polish Church, only the second in Yorkshire, was consecrated by the Bishop of Leeds, Dr. Dwyer, in September 1962 and was named after the protectress of the nation **Our Lady of Czestochowa**, Queen of Poland. This 'historic occasion' for the Huddersfield Poles meant that after the 14 year tenancy period in St. Patrick's Parish, they were 'able to cultivate the religious, liturgical and national life' in a place of their own, using the words of Father Dryżalowski. The community gradually adjusted and decorated the church according to their liking. Thus, balcony, balustrade and sacristy were built, an altar and pulpit obtained and central heating brought in.

During the 1970s new perspex altar windows were installed. There is an altar window symbolising Christ the King as well as a window above the balcony showing the Holy Spirit. Apart from these general religious themes, other windows on the side disclose the special patriotic character of the



The plaque on the Polish church's wall unveiled in 2006, commemorating the Katyń massacre

Polish Roman Catholic devotion as well as the legacy of this war-torn émigré generation. The figure of the Polish Pope John with St. Mary's Basilica in Kraków is portrayed on one window. Another stained glass panel reveals the ruins of Warsaw, the Polish soldier and a scene commemorating **the Katyń massacre**. Memorial tablets inside the Polish church pay tribute to the founding priest and the conductor of a renowned Polish choir **Varsovia**. When visiting the Polish church grounds, an attentive observer will soon get an idea of things of importance to the Polish culture as well as of some characteristics of this post-war émigré generation.

After the presbytery on Upper George Street was sold, the plan was to build new facilities adjacent to the church building which would be more adequate. The whole of the Polish Catholic Centre was completed during the second half of the 1960s and besides the presbytery it also included the parish hall with a bar and Saturday School. Therefore, the establishment of the Polish Catholic Centre marked the period of transformation of the community and provided a new base for their activities.

7 Father Dryżałowski's Grave at Edgerton Cemetery

The cemetery is interesting in terms of its unique architecture as well as the layout. The Polish graves, among other nationalities, show a large number of people who fought in the Second World War alongside the British and describe their individual fate. Father Józef, a teacher, freedom fighter, organiser of Poles in the Huddersfield area and an instigator of several Polish organisations in the town, found a resting place here; his grave is located in the lower part of the cemetery.

8 The Former Polish Ex-Combatants' House

It might not be totally inappropriate to call it 'Polish' Fitzwilliam Street since this is the strip on the map containing the largest number of places which are significant to Poles. The **SPK** had its first building on **108 Fitzwilliam Street** after they took it over from the **Polish White Cross** in 1958. An extension to this house was made by adjoining the neighbouring building which allowed space for a volleyball court and other facilities. This site was officially opened in November 1961 by the Mayor, H. F. Brook, during celebrations of the **Polish Independence Day**. Unfortunately, the SPK House had to be sold; the organisation bought the premises on 86 Fitzwilliam Street in 1971, just down below the Polish presbytery, which included a hall and an extension for a stage. In the late 1990s, the *SPK* became unable to

continue the upkeep of this place for financial and personnel reasons. Soon after the Golden Jubilee of the Parish in 1998, on the brink of a new millennium, it was sold and has served as the Irish Centre since then.



The Mayor, Ald. H. F. Brook, at the opening of extensions to the Polish Ex-Combatants' House in 1961. Photo by Tony Sosna

The author based the information contained in this booklet on the research conducted for his undergraduate thesis at Huddersfield University.

To learn more about the subject, see the following sources which are all available in Huddersfield Local Studies Library

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