

The Polish Community in Brandon 1947.

by Victor Lukaniuk

When the second World War ended in Europe the Polish 2nd Corps were in Italy. The vast majority of these soldiers and their families were displaced persons, (DP's). They had lost their homelands, a concession made to the Russians by the Allied leaders. Large numbers of Polish people were displaced as a result of invasion and occupation during the war, with many deported to forced labour camps in Serbia.

The British were grateful of the Polish effort in helping to defeat the Germans, so they absorbed about 150,000 people into the UK. They were to be housed in former military camps scattered throughout the country and many were sent to Norfolk and Suffolk to live in displacement camps. These include Weeting Hall Camp at London Road, Brandon and camps at High Ash, near Mundford, Bodney, Riddlesworth and East Wretham. The "Weeting Hall Camp" which housed about 80 families or 400 people. These were transient camps; people would come and go in an attempt to be reunited with relatives. Such was life after the war. The accommodation was basic, but the huts were warm and comfortable and the families lived without the fear of having to return to Poland, then under Soviet control, and the prospect of facing deportation to Siberia.

The Polish community soon established a church, a shop (Kantyna) and, at times, the Polish kids may have been in the majority at the local English school. Apart from farming and forestry related work, local employment was rather restrictive and, as other opportunities arose elsewhere, the Polish community began to dwindle and by about the mid 1950's the camp no longer existed.

Some families were extremely happy to make Weeting their permanent homes such as the Chwarszcynski's, Swierdzewski's, Lukaniuk's, Pawloska's, Juzwiak's and Pianko's but, the bulk of the community dispersed globally.

Occasionally children brought up in the camp will return as a "pilgrimage" only to find there is nothing remaining of "Little Poland".