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Scots Diaspora

Andrew Elliott

Post-accession into the European Union, the arrival of Polish immigrant workers to Scotland has heralded an increased interest in our new guests from the eastern edges of Europe. The latest influx of Poles has rejuvenated Scots-Polish links; not for the first time in our histories. You could be forgiven for thinking the first links were established during the Second World War when Scotland stationed Polish soldiers who had made their way to the UK via France.

Would it surprise you to know that in the 17th century, upwards of 40,000 Scots (some figures state 60-90,000) immigrated to Poland? Religious persecution during the protestant reformation led many to leave to a clime which was religiously tolerant (by law since 1573). For others, their reasons were simple: a hope of improving their standards of living thus providing greater prospects for their futures.

Dr James Hunter, author of 'Scottish Exodus: Travels Among a Worldwide Clan', told me an epic account of Scots who travelled to many countries in many continents throughout history. We discussed in great detail the background of one Jerzy Machlejd* and his family.

"Jerzy Machlejd knew of his Scottish ancestry and chose to research his roots", Dr Hunter began. "They [the Machlejd family] retained an awareness that centuries before, they had descended from Scots." To anyone with an interest in genealogy, the individual can feel justifiably pleased upon learning

* J in Polish pronounced as Y.

their origins, even a few generations old. In the case of the Machlejd family, they were sitting on a gold mine of family history.

Jerzy Machlejd was a politician in the Polish Sejm (parliament), who had researched his Scottish ancestry and discovered that his family's roots originated centuries before on the Isle of Skye. In 1937, with a few relatives, Jerzy Machlejd travelled by car from Warsaw to Dunvegan castle on Skye to re-establish his Macleod clan links. Such a journey is no mean feat today, and back in 1937 it must have been difficult, but also an adventure.

Two years later, the Second World War began. Jerzy and his brother Józef were to become victims of the Katyn Massacre - a mass execution in 1940 of 22,000 Polish POWs (Officers and intelligentsia) by the NKVD in Katyn forest, near Smolensk, Russia. The remaining family members, living in Warsaw, were to suffer a long period of occupation. After years of endurance, at 17.00 on the 1st of August, 1944, the Warsaw Uprising began.

Józef Machlejd's daughter, Wanda, fought in the ranks of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK) during the Warsaw Uprising at the age of 17. Wanda's official role was that of messenger; an important role carried out by mainly young fighters.

During the first few days of the uprising, there was a real sense of freedom as fighters gained ground, sang Polish songs and heard the banned national anthem for the first time in years. The Warsaw Uprising, intended to last only a few days, was doomed to failure from the beginning. Lack of support from the allies ultimately ended any hope of victory.

RAF flights to Warsaw did help fighters, unfortunately, the majority of supplies dropped in Warsaw ended up in German hands. The RAF could not sustain further heavy losses flying to Warsaw from bases in Italy. Despite the heavy losses, efforts were made to continue supply drops to Warsaw through Soviet held territory; however, Stalin would not allow RAF aircraft to land. Any efforts that might lead to the Home Army achieving victory and representing the Polish government-in-exile as a legitimate and democratic force to welcome

Soviet troops into Warsaw went against Stalin's grandiose plans for Eastern Europe after the war.

The biggest shock to fighters in Warsaw was the inaction of Soviet troops for the majority of the uprising as they remained on the other side of the Vistula (Wisła*) River, observing the fighting. Without consulting his Soviet superiors, Gen. Zygmunt Berling, commander of the Polish 1st Army, ordered his troops to cross the Vistula River in an abortive attempt to link up with the Home Army in the Żoliborz* region of Warsaw. As a consequence of his actions, Berling was dismissed from his post. Sixty three days after the uprising began, Warsaw capitulated. Two hundred thousand civilians and over fifteen thousand insurgents lost their lives.

After capitulation, Wanda, like many other female soldiers of the AK, was deported to a POW camp on the Dutch/German border. The camp was liberated, as the war was steadily coming to an end, by the Polish 1st Armoured Division (Polski 1 dywizja pancerna) under the command of Gen. Stanisław Maczek; a division created and stationed in Scotland from 1942 to defend the coastline between Edinburgh and Aberdeen. There came a twist for both the liberators and the liberated. Wanda and her fellow inmates had made a Polish flag in secrecy, which was promptly waved around as the camp was being liberated. Polish soldiers were astonished to find Polish women at the camp waving the national flag and singing the Polish national anthem; feelings that must have been mutual when the camp inmates discovered their liberators were Polish soldiers of the British Army.

Wanda was later moved to a DP (displaced persons) camp near Brussels, which would have been better than a POW camp, but a camp with harsh living conditions nonetheless. There Wanda was to remain until she was helped by a Macleod.

* W in Polish pronounced as V and Ł pronounced as W.

* Ż in Polish pronounced as ZSH.

Stuart Macleod was from the Australian branch of the Macleod clan with direct links to Skye. Working for the British government during the war, Stuart Macleod had known about Wanda's uncle's visit to Skye in 1937 after reading about the venture in the Macleod Society's magazine. Having close contacts to Polish exiles, as part of his wartime duties, Stuart Macleod was able to establish that Wanda had fought in the Warsaw Uprising. With this information, Stuart Macleod mobilised his contacts in government and discovered the whereabouts of Wanda, later bringing her to the UK.

Wanda was moved from the DP camp to Dunvegan castle where she was greeted by Dame Flora Macleod, clan chief at the time. Wanda's first ever visit to Skye's Dunvegan castle would certainly have had its fair share of sentimentality. Dr Hunter explained, "It's pleasant to think that her ancestors would certainly have recognised the castle as a strong centre of the Macleod clan. Wanda's return ended one part of a wheel coming full circle." The remaining part of the full circle came from another member of Wanda's family.

Wanda's cousin, Stefan Machlejd, had also fought in the Warsaw Uprising and survived. Stefan too was moved to a POW camp, in Austria, where in the winter of 1944-45 he escaped and crossed the Alps to get to Yugoslavia. When he reached his destination, he joined Tito's communist partisans, fighting the Germans until the war ended. Stefan was later placed in a DP camp in Italy, and yet again it was Stuart Macleod who was able to discover Stefan's whereabouts and bring him to the UK.

It was when Stefan arrived in London he met Stuart Macleod's daughter, Moira. They were to fall in love and marry, later having three children. "To gain British citizenship, Stefan had to complete nationality papers in the 1950s. Through a clerical error when reading Moira's and Stefan's surnames, a civil servant had misread Machlejd and changed it [officially] to Macleod," said Dr Hunter. The 'clever' clerical error in effect ended over 300 years of separation between the two very different brands of the Macleod clan. Perhaps a Scottish civil servant dealt with the case?

Scots began their steady trickle to Poland as merchants long before the 17th century, seeking to make a profit in the then capital of Poland, Krakow. Poland, during this period, had built up an empire that spanned over a vast area of Eastern Europe. Merchants on their return to Scotland would undoubtedly have spread the word about the prospects of trading in Poland's empire.

Scots that settled in Poland left their mark on Poland's geography. The town name Nowa Szkocja (Nova Scotia) is one of a few remaining markers of where Scots once settled.

Poland's new Scottish guests usually remained in their own communities until eventually they began to assimilate into the wider Polish community. From their tentative first steps, not knowing the native language, Scots eventually settled into life in Poland. Now in their new homeland, many Scots fought alongside Polish forces against Swedish invaders during the Deluge of 1655-1660 and later against the Russians; A few Scots even acquired wealth and power. Alexander Czamer (formerly Chalmers) was a Scot who was elected mayor of Warsaw four times before he died in 1703.

Having settled into the Polish way of life, Scots retained their surnames through the generations - but with a twist. To counter linguistic difficulties, Scots altered their surnames. Examples of alterations are Macaulay, which became Makalinski, Jackson which morphed into Dziaksen and Macleod which later became Machlejd.

Scotland and Poland have come together on many occasions in the past; it would be nice to think that links between the two nations will continue to grow. We see Poles in Scotland today, taking their tentative first steps and gradually assimilating into our way of life. Their situation today, in so many regards, mirrors the first ventures of Scots into Poland all those centuries ago. Dr Hunter summed up our encounter: "It is important to know of the historical links between Scotland and Poland, especially now as Polish entry into the EU means our countries are closer together. We Scots should not see Poles

as simply foreigners; they're continuing a long held tradition both integral to Polish and Scottish history – the tradition of the émigré.” Besides this fact, you never know, you could be related to one of these new Scots-Poles.

‘Scottish Exodus: Travels Among a Worldwide Clan’ by Dr James Hunter, is available from all good bookshops. RRP £17.99.

Fact Bites:

- Members of the Machlejd family still live in Poland.
- Macleod's settled all across the world, some settling in France to become the Maclot clan. One Macleod even settled in Egypt, converting to Islam.
- Bonnie Prince Charlie was half Polish, being the son of James Edward Stewart and Klementina Sobieska, granddaughter of Jan III Sobieski - King of Poland from 1674 until his death in 1696.
- Frederic Chopin visited Scotland shortly before his death in 1849 and his brief stay in Edinburgh is marked by a plaque on the wall of a house in Warriston Crescent.
- Alexander Czamer, four times mayor of Warsaw, was interned in the tombs of the cathedral of St. John in Warsaw which was completely destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising.
- Gen. Stanisław Maczek remained in Scotland after the war, like many other Polish soldiers unwilling to return to communist Poland. He remained in Scotland until his death in 1994, at the age of 102. He is buried in the Polish military cemetery in Breda, the Netherlands.
- In Poland, it is a common phrase to say of Scots: 'Skąpy Szkot'^{*}, meaning 'a mean Scot'. This term derives from Scots travelling salesmen in Poland

^{*} A in Polish pronounced as AW.

who, in the 17th century, were seen as entrepreneurial and shrewd. The nature of their profession meant that Scots often evaded paying taxes, further contributing to the view of Scots as being shrewd.

- The Warsaw Uprising was a national tragedy for Poland. In a global context, it was a symbol of the already evident political power struggles between the major powers of the world. The struggle would later become the Cold War.

Additional Information:

I.

Following on from my article, I wish to bring to your attention an extract from a book which proved useful when researching for 'Scots Diaspora.' The extract in question gives an insight into the liberation of POW camps along the Dutch-German border by the Polish 1st Armoured Division under the command of Gen. Stanisław Maczek. The following text may or may not be directly related to Wanda Machlejd; however, considering the facts, the probability of this being the camp in which Wanda was interned is high.

The following extract is taken from 'Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw' by Norman Davies (2003), pp.501-503.

...“One particularly joyous moment, however, has to be recorded. Stalag VIC at Oberlangen was situated in north-west Germany very close to the Dutch frontier; and it was the principal POW camp for female soldiers of the Home Army. Its 1,500 inmates consisted mainly of former nurses, couriers, and other women auxiliaries from the Warsaw Rising. On 12 April, word spread that 'the English Army', as they called it, would be arriving any minute.

The story is best told by one of the soldiers of that 'English Army' driving along in his jeep at the back on an armoured column:

“We covered the ground very quickly. In the totally flat and treeless countryside a camp appeared with its watchtowers and its barbed wire fence...everyone drove up to the main gate, but I turned off some 200 metres to the side. My [driver] leapt out of the jeep, and ran right up to the wire, Sten gun in hand...

The historic shout of one of our soldiers can't sum it up. 'O rety, ile tu bab!' ('Oh cripes! What a crowd of birds!'). He was right. There was a huge crush of women. And how well they looked. After four years of looking at pale and skinny Scots girls, we thought every one of these women was a picture of health and beauty. The intense joy of liberation made them all look absolutely marvellous. It was impossible to believe in the cold and hunger which, in reality, had ravaged that penal camp - for that is what it was.”

What a coincidence! The women soldiers from the Warsaw Rising had been liberated by the men of Gen. Stanislaw Maczek's division.”

II.

Jerzy Machlejd and his brother Józef are remembered symbolically by two pillars at the Machlejd family tomb in Warsaw's Powązki cemetery.

You can also see the names of Jerzy and Józef Machlejd on the Katyn memorial wall at the electronic museum at the following address:

http://www.electronicmuseum.ca/Poland-WW2/katyn_memorial_wall/kmw_M.html

III.

Wanda Machlejd fought with the 'Piorun' (lightning) battalion of the Home Army during the Warsaw Uprising under the overall command of Romuald Radziwiłłowicz (nickname "Zaremba").

The following text was found at:

www.powstanie-warszawskie-1944.ac.pl/zgr_zaremba_piorun.htm

...The team of messengers and telephone/radio operators under the command of second lieutenant Jadwigę Odyniec-Zawadzka (nickname "Dudę"), consisting of three patrols totalling sixteen women, some of whom were: Irena Kokoczyńska-Ostrzeszewicz (nickname "Irena"), Wanda Machlejd-Symonowicz (nicknamed "Mira", "Wanda I" and "Kogucik" (meaning Rooster))...

Wanda would later return to Warsaw in the early stages of post-war Poland where she would become a translator. Moira Macleod maintained contact with Wanda until Wanda's death in 1994.