

# DRESS, IDENTITY AND IMMIGRATION

## One Polish refugee family's journey to a life in England - 1940-1969 - told through a national identity dance costume.

Dance costume, 1967- 68, made by Mrs Helena Pogoda (née Kubik,) born in 1908 in South East Poland for her grand daughter, Elizabeth Morris (née Elzunia Tanska) - a member of the *Krakowiak Dance Troupe*, of Little Chalfont, Bucks. Elizabeth's family lived from 1948-1958 at Hodgemoor Polish Resettlement Camp, Bucks. She was born in 1954 and grew up with Polish as her first language. She remembers her grandmother making the costume and that:

*'My granny, – my maternal grandmother - was a professional dressmaker. She loved sewing. Helena Pogoda, my 'Babcia', was an extremely talented lady.' ... I joined the dance group in 1968 aged 14 and continued to the age of 17. We were a group of [Polish] young people, aged between 14 and 21. Whenever there was a 'Polish event' like a dance, festivity or celebration of some kind, then we would perform a few dances (the Krakowiak, the Mazurek or a Polonez – various dances from different regions of Poland). ... This was never a professional dancing troupe – purely amateur. It kept the Polish youth community together at the time ... but as we all grew up, the dance group disbanded. We married and moved away or went our own ways.'* Helena Pogoda died in 2001 in Amersham, aged 83.



The costumes that the dancers wear were made by themselves or their parents in the case of the boys. The black see-through waistcoats worn by the girls are known as 'gorsets' and were brought from Poland. The boots are bought in England. By dancing in Italy this year the Krakowiak have dances every month in Great Missenden and they also dance at many local London Polish festivities.



- TOP *The Krakowiak Dance Troupe* (*Bucks Advertiser*, Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> 1969;
- BELOW: Elizabeth Morris, in 1969.

### **Family Life in Poland: 1904-1941.**

When Helena Pogoda was born in 1908, Poland was divided between Russia, Austro-Hungary & Germany. She grew up in the Krakow-Rzeszow region of S. E. Poland, under Austro-Hungarian rule. The ancient city of Krakow was the cultural capital of divided Poland till 1919 when after WW1, Poland regained its independence. Helena married 'very happily,' living with her family on a farm in the Lvov region of Galicia, S. E. Poland. She was taught tailoring, eventually becoming a professional dressmaker.

Regional, rural dress, especially from the Krakow district, became a symbol of Polish, independent, cultural identity from 1890-1939, and was used as the basis of design for textiles, graphics, ceramics, posters etc.





[Zofia  
Stryjenska  
*, Dance  
from the  
Krakow  
Region,  
1927.*]

## **The Pogoda Family's eight year journey as refugees to England:**

Following the signing of the Ribbentrop–Molotov non aggression pact in September 1939, Germany and Russia both invaded Poland. Large areas of Eastern Poland were annexed by the Soviet Union including Helena's home region, Lvov, Galicia, (now Lviv

in Ukraine.) Hundreds and thousands of Poles were deported to Siberian labour camps, including Helen Pogoda and her family.

In June 1941, after Hitler attacked Russia, a Polish-Soviet treaty allowed both the release of Poles in Soviet labour camps and the formation of a Polish army in exile, although many were unable to leave. In 1942, the Polish Anders army and civilians were evacuated from Siberia to British-controlled Iran. This was the journey taken, separately, by Helena Pogoda, her husband and 2 daughters - four months by train to reach only as far as Uzbekistan. Conditions were fearsome and Helena's five year daughter died of malnourishment. During time spent in 1943 in various transit camps in Teheran (then in Persia) Helena survived typhoid. United with her husband in 1944, a daughter was born once the family reached Lebanon in 1945. They were cared for by UNESCO and the Red Cross. In 1948, the family, including her eldest daughter, Wladyslawa, travelled from Beirut by ship to Liverpool.

After their eight year journey, the family was finally housed in the Polish Resettlement Camp at Hodgemoor near Amersham, Bucks, in empty wooden barracks, formerly used by Canadian and American forces. They lived here from 1948 for ten years.

*Polish refugee camp, 1943, Teheran, Iran.*

[United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teheran, Iran\]](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teheran_Iran)



## **Life in the Polish Resettlement Camp at Hodgemoor, near Amersham, Bucks, 1948-54**

**Hodgemoor became a home for Polish refugee families connected to the Polish 3<sup>rd</sup> Carpathian Rifle Division who fought as part of the British Eight Army, in North Africa and Italy in 1941-45. The**

camp, one of many in the area, had its own chapels, community hall, Polish school, store, bar and busy social life. Polish festivals were celebrated and Polish Catholic traditions passed on to the new generation born at the camp. Adults worked in the local area - Helena in a Marks and Spencer's sewing factory in High Wycombe. In 1951, Helena made a wedding dress for her daughter, Wladyslawa, who married at Beasonsfield R.C. Church. Elizabeth, Wladyslawa's daughter, was born in 1954 and grew up with Polish as her first language. The camp was closed in 1962. Helena died in 2001 in Amersham.

*[Information from [www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk](http://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk): ]*

*Elizabeth writes today: My mother, Wladyslawa [Tanska] is 86 with an amazing memory [and] fond memories of my 'dancing days.' She considers herself Polish and sang polish lullabies to my sons (now 35 and 30) and to her 4 great grandchildren. She would never return to Poland to live – her home is here in England where she brought up her family, but keeping a lot of the [Polish] traditions going i.e. Christmas Eve (Wigilia) with all the wonderful food, carols and festivities.'*

*... I try to keep up the traditions, but I live in a very cosmopolitan land, I enjoy other cultures and cuisines and always look forward to any positive change. It's my turn now, to pick up the crochet hook (I recently made a baby blanket for my youngest grandson's christening.) ... My granny taught me to sew, knit and crochet and left me with a wonderful legacy which I will try to continue.' - - -*

- Photo: First Communion at Hodgemoor camp, [nd];
- Wladyslawa Pogoda's wedding day, 1951, with her youngest sister. Both dresses made by Helena Pagoda.
- Helena Pagoda and Elizabeth, her granddaughter, at Elizabeth's Confirmation Day, 1964. Dress made by Helena.

[\[http://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk\]](http://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk) and family archives.







From Przylek, Poland, to Amersham, Bucks.

Oral Testimony from Helena Pogoda, née Kubik, born 1908, Przylek, Poland, *Died >>*, taken by her daughter, Wladyslawa Tanska and extended by her grand daughter, Liz Morris, wearer and donor of the dance costume.

**Mrs Helena Pogoda** (nee Kubik- 1908-2001) – dressmaker – born 1908 in Przylek, Poland. Second eldest of eight children (Jan, Helena, Maria, Zofia, Stefania, Bronislawa, Eugenia and Zbigniew). Originally from Mielec, near Rzeszow, just east of Krakow.

After WW1 in 1920, with her parents, she moved to south-East Poland near Brody – Lwow. When she got married, she lived very happily with her family on their own private farm between Brody and Zlowczow. After the Russian invasion of East Polish territories in World War 2, by February 1940, she and her family were deported to Siberia, Russia,” locked in a cattle wagon in appalling conditions and taken to a labour camp and having to work very hard.”

“After nearly two years, when Hitler started war with Stalin, there was amnesty. Polish government in France. (Those who managed to run there: General Sikorski asked Russians to release all Polish prisoners and labour camp people so they could fight the German army but outside Russia. Polish army was formed. All men and some women joined and families were always nearby.’ Helena, with her two daughters and husband (in the army), taking four months on a train (!) arrived at Guzar, Usbekistan. Very malnourished, very weak.” Helena fell ill as did her youngest daughter. They were taken to hospital. Her older daughter was taken to an “orphanage”. Helena survived but her little 5 year old daughter did not. Helena was from then on always ill because of insufficient food and poor conditions. “In 1943 transported with hundreds of other Polish people to Iran (Persia) transit camp.” There she was re-united with her older daughter,” after traipsing through various transit camps in Teheran, Ahwaz.” In Ahwaz she was re-united with her husband! In 1944 she survived typhoid and other sickness and disease. In 1945 Helena along with her family was transported (again) to Lebanon after an extremely long journey.

In Lebanon the UNESCO and Red Cross organizations looked after the Polish “refugees”, Helena managed to save a little money and purchased a sewing machine (a Singer treadle). She was so pleased! She made clothes for her children.

In 1948 from Beirut, after a two week journey by ship, Helena and her family arrived in Liverpool (*my mother cannot remember the name of the ship*), then by train to Fairford, near Cirencester to an army transit camp. After a quarantine period, the family arrived at Hodgemoor Camp near Amersham, Bucks where she lived for ten years. Her thoughts were always “we will go back to Poland soon, here we are for a short stay.....”. But she could NOT go back because of the pact at Yalta Conference – the region of Poland where she lived was annexed to Russia, so Poland was not a free country. She always yearned to visit Poland but her travel documents stated 'any country but Poland'. She was very upset.

Helena was very religious and patriotic. Poland was not free. She never received any compensation from Russia. Her home, its contents and most importantly her freedom, all lost – no amount of money could ever compensate. Helena died in 2001 in Amersham.

This is only a very short story of what she had been through.

Here in England she had worked in many places; one was a sewing factory in High Wycombe where they made clothes for Marks and Spencer. She always made dresses for her family and friends. One special costume was the Polish National Costume (from Krakow region in Poland). It was made for her granddaughter, Elzunia (Liz Morris)".

*Now back to me...Liz Morris...*

*'The Singer treadle machine was maintained (oiled etc) by my grandfather (Franciszek Pogoda). It always amazed me how she 'worked' the footplate and smoothly guided the material through the needle foot! And at a great pace too! I'd had numerous 'go's on it but never managed to keep my hands still, always going backwards and forwards in time with my feet. There is definitely an art to it!*

*The machine had arrived in England in a wooden crate, following the family's journey to Liverpool and it was used very regularly (the family still have it, but I know it's not used).*

*Helena was a professional dress maker. She had been taught by a tailor in Poland before the war. She could 'size by eye' an individual, take their measurements, and then structure a pattern for a jacket, dress, anything for either an adult or child. I had many beautiful dresses as a child made from scraps of material, I remember at the age of 5 attending the local primary school, not speaking much english as polish was my first language, but I was always dressed well in very good clothes. I have enclosed a couple of photos of me in these dresses.*

*The sequins on the waistcoat (gorset – the g pronounced as in garden) all hand sewn. The blouse, skirt, apron all stitched on the wonderful treadle machine. The string of beads hand linked onto coil and sewn into place with the ribbons. The red leather boots (made for dancing and not fashion boots) were bought in Poland. White stockings/tights and white bloomers completed this outfit (the tights/bloomers no longer exist). A small flower garland was on my head and the hair would have been braided or in two ponytails. The other members of the group also had either homemade garments or ones that had been bought or imported from Poland.*

*The dancing group I belonged to was called 'Krakowiak' (masculine)– literally translated means a person from Krakow (Krakowianka is female). I joined the group in 1968 aged 14 and continued to the age of 17. We were a group of young people (aged between 14 and 21), we trained for two hours once a week on a Sunday in the local village hall in Little Chalfont, Bucks and whenever there was a 'Polish event' like a dance, festivity or celebration of some kind, then we would perform a few dances (the Krakowiak, the Mazurek or a Polonez – various dances from different regions of Poland). We did dance in Italy when on a holiday which was organised by the local Polish Community Parish Committee! This was never a professional dancing troupe – purely amateur. It kept the Polish youth community together at the time,- there was also a Polish School on Saturday mornings and a Polish Youth Football team, but as we all grew up, the dance group disbanded, we married and moved away or went our own ways.*

*I am now 61 and have an older and a younger brother. I have two sons, two step-daughters and two grandsons. As each generation unfolds, the cultures change, or merge with other methods, thereby weakening the initial thread. To try and change this natural pattern would be extremely hard, as we know that since the 40's, 50's and 60's, lives and expectations are so very, very different to now. Not wrong, just vastly,overwhelmingly 'at*

odds' sometimes....I think the word is **fast!** The pace for change is mind boggling. I've travelled to quite a few places, but my home is here in England, my birthplace. I try to keep up the traditions, but I live in a very cosmopolitan land, I enjoy other cultures and cuisines and always look forward to any positive change. It's my turn now, to pick up the crochet hook (I recently made a baby blanket for my youngest grandsons' christening), my sewing machine also conked out recently so I'm off looking for a new one. My granny taught me to sew, knit and crochet and left me with a wonderful legacy which I will try to continue.

My mother, (Wladyslawa Tanska) is 86 with an amazing memory and has written her memoir. She has very fond memories of my 'dancing days' and always encouraged me to dance or play a musical instrument. She considers herself Polish and sang polish lullabies to my sons (now 35 and 30) and to her 4 great grandchildren. She would never return to Poland to live – her home is here in England where she brought up her family, keeping a lot of the traditions going i.e. Christmas Eve (Wigilia) with all the wonderful food, carols and festivities.

My granny (Babcia) – my maternal grandmother loved sewing (she did an enormous amount of alterations for friends and neighbours and never asked for a penny - she could have made a fortune!) Her eyesight started to fail, but she still managed to use a crochet hook to make hats and 'sock slippers' right to the very end of her life. Helena Pogoda, my Babcia, was an extremely talented lady.

PS She also made a set of bedding for my wedding present, duvet cover and pillowcases with buttons and all the button holes beautifully handstitched – amazing! (The Poles – Europeans in general I think - never had blankets/eiderdowns on their beds, but huge goosefeather filled quilts – great as a child for taking a run and jumping down onto the bed! - like a huge meringue). It all seems so long ago.

My granny used to say how quickly everything was changing or had changed and I considered her 'old fashioned', but her words now ring in my ears as I too, consider everything moving at such a great pace and the years truly flying past. It is now I who is considered old fashioned and tragically a complete dinosaur when it comes to technology!

*“Fascination of a destination is all in the imagination...”*

*a saying ...by Elizabeth Morris – previously known as Elzbieta Maria Barbara Tanska*

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Krakow Region Polish Dance Costume, 1967- 68, made by Mrs Helena Pogoda, born in 1908 in South East Poland, for her grand daughter, Elizabeth Morris (née Elzunia Tanska) - a member of the *Krakowiak Dance Troupe* of Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire.

University of Brighton Dress History Teaching Collection.

DEAW 458.1-5. Given in 2015 by Mrs Elizabeth Morris, along with oral testimony details and press cuttings.

1: Blouse, white nylon with frilled, lace-edged collar and cuffs.

2: Waistcoat with tabbed peplum, black velvet embroidered with coloured sequins in traditional Southern Polish heart designs from the Krakow region, with hanging ribbons and strings of silvered glass beads. Embroidered by Helena Pagoda.

3. Skirt, fine wool, Polish fabric roller printed with flowers on red ground, in pink, green and white.

4 Apron, white cotton *broderie anglaise* with tie at centre back. Made by Helena Pagoda.

5 Pair of red leather calf-length boots, with small heels and red laces threaded through large metal eyelet holes. Made in state workshop in Poland, prob in Krakow. Date stamped inside '1967.'

Missing: hair garland of artificial flowers and long coloured ribbons, white petticoat, white cotton bloomers, and tights.

The costume was offered to the National Trust Dress Collection at Killerton Hall, Devon. Not matching their collection, at the suggestion of E-J. Scott ( MA Design History graduate, Univ. of Brighton and then Assistant Curator at Killerton,) the outfit was donated to us by Elizabeth Morris.

We extend our thanks to Elizabeth Morris for this generous gift.

(LT Dec 12<sup>th</sup> 2015)



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