

KRESY FAMILY COMMEMORATES

Last Saturday 9 February, Kresy Family marked the anniversary of the 1940/1 forced deportations with a lunch at the Polish Social and Cultural Centre in London.

The event attracted over a hundred people across three generations including a number of survivors, former members of OROK - Ognisko Rodzin Osadników Kresowych [Association of Families of Borderland Settlers].



Also a number of organisations were represented including

- Konsul Radosław Gromski representing the Polish Ambassador Arkadiusz Rzegocki,
- Rysiek Grzybowski, former president of OROK,
- Irena Godyń president of Koło Polaków Isfahan/Liban [Circle of Poles from Isfahan and Lebanon
- Wanda Kuraś president Koło Polaków z Indii [Circle of Poles from India].



Dr Hubert Zawadzki, academic and historian who has written three books, spoke movingly about his mother's experiences which are documented in his latest book **A Polish Woman's Experience in World War II**. He acknowledged that her story was familiar to many present but also unique, and



every story needed to be told. In her case, the Soviets evicted her from the family home and instead used it as a hospital. Her mother and sister left for Warsaw and she never saw them again. As a qualified nurse she worked in that hospital before the Soviets identified her as bourgeoisie and allocated her a physical job repairing roads. Following a show trial for laying flowers at the local church, she was deported to Siberia in the 4th wave in 1941. Under the amnesty later that year, she was evacuated to Nazareth and worked as a nurse in a Polish school before transfer to Egypt. Expecting to be sent to Italy, she was barred for having a knife on her person outside the camp and instead was sent to the UK and finally found herself in Scotland.



After a well prepared and tasty lunch provided by Łowiczanka restaurant staff, the second half began with a poem, written and recited by Irena Godyń on the subject of the beautiful Kresy countryside, forever in one's heart and memory, and the pain of loss. Pani Irena herself is a survivor and poet.

Next, the audience was brilliantly entertained by baritone Wojciech Hinc and musician Jurek Pockert.

Wojciech is a member of Ave Verum - <https://www.aveverum.org> - the firmly established choir from South London that was formed in 1999 by its Musical Director, Jurek Pockert. He accompanied Wojciech on the piano. Since 2010, Wojciech has sung both bass and tenor parts in the choir and is now making his mark as a solo performer. Also present at the event was the Artistic Director Ewa Kwaśniewska. Wojciech sang the popular *Marsz Sybiraków* but also other unusual, relevant songs with a modern style.



In complete contrast Iwona Januszajtis, mezzo soprano, accompanied herself on the piano and delighted with a spirited rendition of traditional songs such as *Hej Sokoly* and *W Zielonym Gaju* in which everyone could join. A surprise item for one member of the audience - Danuta Gradosielska - was *Mundur Miałymy Zielony* [We wore a green uniform], a song composed by Irena Orłowska and first performed in 1979 in POSK to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Polish ex-service Women's Association. Pani Danuta served in



316 Transport Company. Servicewomen were nicknamed *Pestki* [fruit stones], small but hard. The song was sung by a group of women from the Company who later formed a group called "Zespół 316" which performed sketches songs, monologues, etc about their lives in the army and their early years in the UK. The group toured all over the UK and even took their show to the USA and Canada. They continued until 1997.



Pani Danuta Gradosielska wearing her Siberian Cross medal awarded by the Polish government to deportees. Family members are entitled to wear the medal but on the right side.

Iwona ended with a very special treat singing her own highly original but beautiful composition *Where Are We Going*, a haunting tune with moving lyrics inspired by her mother's experiences of deportation. A recording of the song will be available this spring by download. Iwona studied piano and singing at Trinity College of Music and has appeared all over the UK performing with companies such as Wexford, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Pegasus and Opera Brava. Apart from her operatic roles, she is in demand as a concert singer. For many years Iwona has performed for the Polish community across the UK, supporting a range of organisations and former combatant groups. She is a member of Kresy Family and we were proud to have her sing at our event.

A valued element of the afternoon was the opportunity to share personal stories around the tables; to meet people who had experienced a similar fate or whose parents or grandparents had originated from Kresy and learn how it was that they were born in the UK to parents who came from a far and distant land. It is a personal way of learning history directly from those who lived it.



Kresy Family would like to thank the former members of OROK, especially former President Ryszard Grzybowski, for their great help in organizing the meeting. The Management Committee is committed each year to marking 10th February, the anniversary of the first forced deportations; to keeping alive the memory of all those who suffered loss of home and livelihood, deprivation, hunger and for some, end of life.

They still live because we remember them.







