

## **Panel One: Community Building**

Although many inhabitants of Manchester think of Poles as the emblematic new migrants, Polish connections to Manchester actually date back to the nineteenth century. Poles started arriving in Manchester in the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly settling in Cheetham Hill. Networks from back home (at that time Poland was part of three different multiethnic empires) were reproduced in Manchester. Typically, Poles lived alongside Eastern European Jews, Lithuanians and Ukrainians. The first Polish Church (1903) was financed jointly by Poles, Lithuanians and Ukrainians and the first Polish community association was named the Slavic Club (1910). It was founded as a self-help group which supported its Eastern European members in case of illness or accidents at work.

The second wave arrived in the city in the first post-war years. These Poles - exiles rather than immigrants - were soldiers from Polish Armed Forces who fought under British Command in the Second World War and were allowed to settle in the UK rather than return to communist Poland. Polish soldiers were joined by their families brought from resettlement camps in Africa, Middle East and India and by Poles who arrived in the UK from Displaced Persons' camps in Germany and Austria under the European Voluntary Workers' Scheme. Community life was organised around the Ex-Combatants' Association, Polish Saturday School, Polish-English Association, scouts, choirs, sport clubs, educational societies, folk dance groups and the Polish Church. In 1958 there lived 4,000 Poles in Manchester, making the city the second biggest settlement of Poles in the UK. Between 1965 and 1975 the Polish Saturday School was the second largest Polish School in Great Britain, with 450 pupils.

The nature of the third wave, the post-2004 Polish migration to Manchester, is still emerging, with many Poles unsure whether to return to Poland or move to other countries in search of work. One clear characteristic of this migration is the astonishing speed with which commercial ventures from food shops to hairdressers and acupuncture centres have been opened. The diversity of these commercial ventures gives some indication of the dynamism of this group.

This presentation will argue two points. Firstly, that it is impossible to talk about one single Polish community in Manchester. Not only did every wave of Polish migration have different historical roots and was characterised by a different ratio of class, gender, age and occupation range, but each wave also displayed internal divisions concerning the daily life of the community. The most common differences included the approach to other ethnic groups, attitudes to communist Poland and contacts with the homeland, views on assimilation into the host society, stance on the role of the Catholic Church in the process of community building and how and by whom power should be exerted in the community. Consequently, each wave produced an internally divided Polish community with its members eventually choosing to settle permanently in different neighbourhoods, developing different kinds of social networks and contributing in many different ways to the life of the community and the city.

Secondly, members of the Polish community(ies) involved in associations committed to the cultivation of Polish culture, traditions and language contribute to the current reinvention of the city as a centre of knowledge, cultural exchange and dynamic civic life. They do so via participation in the creative life of Manchester, support for the supplementary education which has been striving to encourage learning and achievement, and through promoting participation in voluntary associations. Moreover, Polish community organizations form national and international networks making connections not simply as Poles, but as Poles from Manchester. In their own way Polish immigrants and, even more so, descendents of Polish immigrants who still strongly identify with Polish community(ies) bring Manchester closer to the world and the world closer to Manchester.