

## **Tam Mieszkalis̄my – Tweedsmuir Polish Resettlement Camp exhibit opens at Tilford Rural Life Centre, 28 August 2012**

Surrey Heritage were thrilled to be part of the opening of a major new exhibition celebrating the Polish community that settled in Surrey after World War 2 – *Tam Mieszkalis̄my, We Lived There*.

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Surrey Heritage and Waverley Borough Council, the Tweedsmuir Polish Camp exhibit at the Rural Life Centre, Tilford, has been two years in the making and was inspired by some 80 families who lived in Tweedsmuir Polish Resettlement Camp, near Thursley. Their history is told in a vivid presentation which includes original artefacts, photographs, specially commissioned models, a booklet and a DVD. A large number of English and Polish volunteers, including local school children, have contributed to the exhibition.

Brothers Wies and Zen Rogalski lived in Tweedsmuir as children and were the instigators of the project. On an uncharacteristically sunny Bank Holiday Sunday, Wies welcomed a hearty crowd of guests, volunteers, and family and friends of those who lived at the camp. The barrack block was officially opened by Panis Stachurska, consul at the Polish Embassy, to rapturous applause. Guests viewed the fascinating array of artefacts and photographs, including former Tweedsmuir resident Maggie Lee, n̄e Adamek, who grew up in Tweedsmuir and moved to Elstead when the camp closed. She recognised friends and family in the photographs and recalled childhood memories.



**Former Tweedsmuir resident Maggie Lee, n̄e Adamek recalls childhood memories**

Many people have donated or loaned documents and photographs to the project and these will eventually be part of the Surrey History Centre archive collection, preserved for posterity and available to all for research. A travelling exhibition celebrating the project will come to the History Centre next year.

Superb Polish traditional dancing and rousing folk songs entertained the crowd and drew audience participation following a swift Polish lesson! The audience marvelled as historical military re-enactment group 'First to Fight' described how they bring the WW2 uniforms and weaponry of the Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade to life.

The day drew to a close with a mouth-watering Polish banquet including traditional dishes, canapés and delicious apple strudel!



**Left: Di Stiff(Surrey Heritage), Wies Rogalski, Chris Shepherd (RLC), Cllr Liz Wheatley, Mayor of Godalming & Mr Wheatley**

### **Tweedsmuir Camp – a brief history**

Completed in Nov 1941, Tweedsmuir Military Camp was originally built for the growing number of Canadian troops in the county. The camp was named after Lord Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, 15th Governor General of Canada (1935 - 1940), better known

as John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-nine Steps*. The Camp was presided over by a detachment from the Lorne Scots (Peel, Dufferin and Halton Regiment), and between 1945 and 1947 it became a demobilising depot for Canadian Repatriation Units.

However, one unforeseen consequence of the war in Europe was the large number of displaced people who, for one reason or another, were unable to return home. The Polish Forces, who fought with the British Army in North Africa and Central Europe, were a major part of this 'displaced population', and along with families who had been forcibly deported during the occupation of Poland, the number of displaced Polish people in Britain after the war reached 200,000. Around 150,000 of these agreed to settle in this country and were temporarily housed in the now empty military camps as personnel of the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC); Tweedsmuir Camp was used to house one such group from 1947. Over the next decade, the Polish families living there began to integrate into the wider community and by early 1960 the camp was dismantled.



For further details see the project website at <http://www.tweedsmuirmilitarycamp.co.uk/Index.html>

More about the exhibits at the Rural Life Centre can be found at <http://www.rurallife.plus.com/rlc/index.html>