

Maria Mars (1923-2009)



Maria soon after her arrival in England in 1947.

Maria was born on the 8th of January 1923 in the small village of Słopiec to the east of Kielce in Poland. She was the second youngest in a family of two brothers and three sisters. The children were orphaned at an early age; the children lost their father first, followed by their mother along with their eldest sister. Aunts and Uncles took in each of the remaining children and, as life was extremely hard in the farming communities, the orphans had to be resilient in order to survive.

In 1939 Germany invaded Poland and each farmer had to set aside grain, pigs, cattle and horses to feed and transport the German war machine. As the war progressed, there were frequent “łapanki” (round-ups) of young people to be used as slave labour in farming and industry in Germany. These raids would often be made in the early evening when families would be at home. The youngsters would leave their homes and spend the night in the surrounding forests in order to avoid being taken. One of the ways Maria and her friends earned money was to gather blueberries and mushrooms in the forest which they would sell at the market in Kielce. It was on one such trip that the Germans took Maria.

She and the others were taken to a distribution centre in Kielce, and from there loaded into cattle trucks and transported into Germany. After a journey lasting two days and nights with very little food or water and with only the clothes she was wearing, she arrived in Arendsee (Germany) and was met by the German farmer to whom she had been allocated. Maria was to be a replacement for a male farm hand called up to fight in Russia.

From Arendsee railway station, with Maria following the farmer on his bicycle, they arrived at Thielbeer (a village and a former municipality in Northern Germany). This was to be her home for the next two years. Here she did every type of farm work, from harvesting to planting, animal management and food preserving. Maria never complained about this period of her life, in fact she learned German efficiency, and could not wait for the war to finish so she could implement these methods back in Poland. As Germany began to disintegrate, the Russian armies were pressing in from the east and Americans from the west. The farmer, anxious not to be caught using slave labour, freed all his workers. Maria now moved from place to place, sleeping in barns and stealing food. She was told that Poland had been totally destroyed: there was nothing to return to. However, American soldiers urged her to make for the port of Wilhelmshaven (Northern Germany) where a Polish unit was stationed. The Polish unit was in fact the First Polish Armoured Division, which had fought its way from Normandy into Belgium and Holland, and was now the occupying force in the area around the ports of Wilhelmshaven and Cuxhaven.

More paragraphs available in the book.

This account was produced in kind collaboration with Derek Mars, Maria's son.



Maria's last photo before the Germans took her; she is second from the right, Poland 1942.



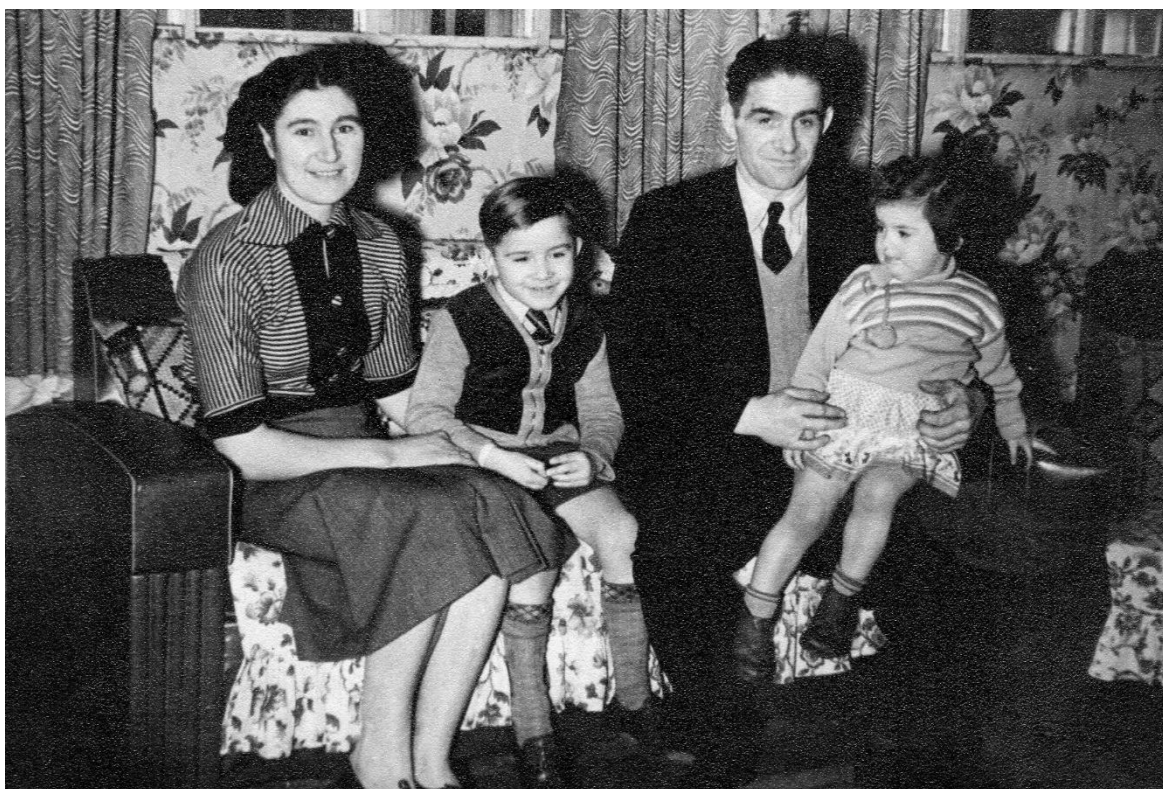
With the Polish Army, 1945.



In the UK: Maria (left) with newly born son Darek (in the pram) in one of the re-settlement camps in Southern England, March 1948.



From left: Mrs Maślanek, Władek and Maria Mars holding Lucyna, Antoni Jałowiczor and Darek Mars, Harley Displaced People's Camp, 1952.



Maria, Darek, Wladek and Lucyna, Harley Displaced People's Camp, 1954/55.



At Wladek Grabowski's Polish Club; Mrs Stachowa (left) and Maria (right), 1960s.