

Ernest Bylica (1909- 1978)



To give his name in full: Ernest Walter Florentyn Bylica was born in 1909 in Bielsko-Biala, Upper Silesia, Poland against the picturesque setting of the Beskid Highlands. He married Hildegarda Bakowska in 1936 at the Church of the Divine Providence in Bielsko-Biala. His first son Franciszek was born in 1937, tragically Franciszek died in 1952 of meningitis while staying with his Aunt in the picturesque area of Jelenia Gora. Mikolaj, his second child was born in 1942. Before the war Ernest worked on the trams and later trained and became a locksmith.

During the Second World War, Ernest was separated from his Polish family when the Germans conscripted him into the German Army in 1942 under the title of Volksdeutsche. These were people that Nazi Germany considered to be of historic German descent. Borders had been altered at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 after the First World War which affected the lives of different ethnic peoples in Poland. From 29th of March 1942 he was conscripted into the 2nd Infantry Company replacement based at Koblenz. On the 1st February 1943 he received an injury to his arm in Krakow and was admitted to a military hospital in Luhansk, Ukraine. In late December 1944 he was sent to Denmark where he stayed for a while.

After capture in Alsace, France in 1945, he was sent reported to the Polish transit camp, Jolanda in Italy under British command from 05.06.1945. He continued in Italy for one year when together with the Second Polish Corp and was transferred to the United Kingdom.

After a gradual demobilisation of the Polish forces in the Resettlement Corps abroad he settled in the UK and lived for while in a hostel at Doncaster for demobbed Polish men and was then transferred to the Miners' Welfare Hostel based at East Herringthorpe, Rotherham. He was finally discharged in 1948. Afterwards he worked at Silverwood Colliery at Dinnington, Rotherham. He worked there for a number of years and due to a health problem, he worked as a porter at Badsley Moor Lane Hospital in Rotherham before moving on to be a groundsman at Herringthorpe playing fields.

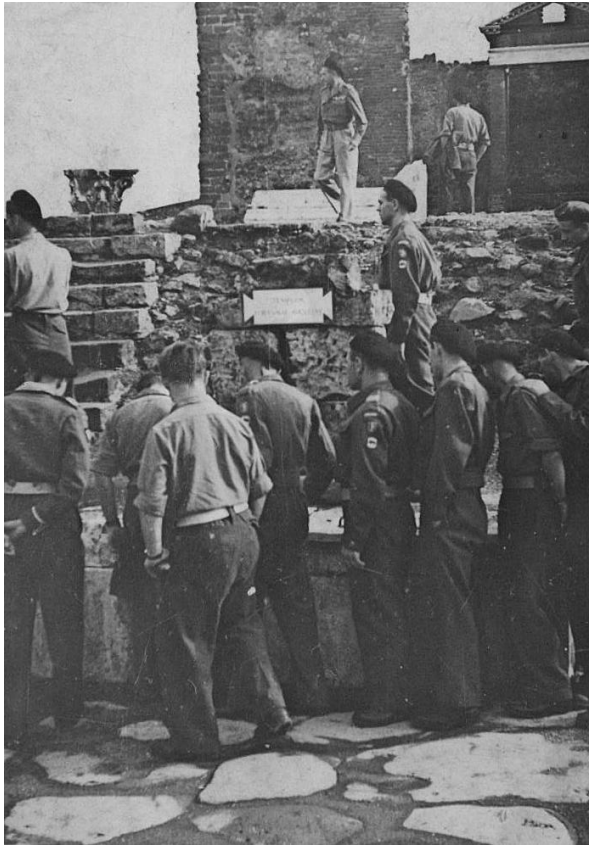
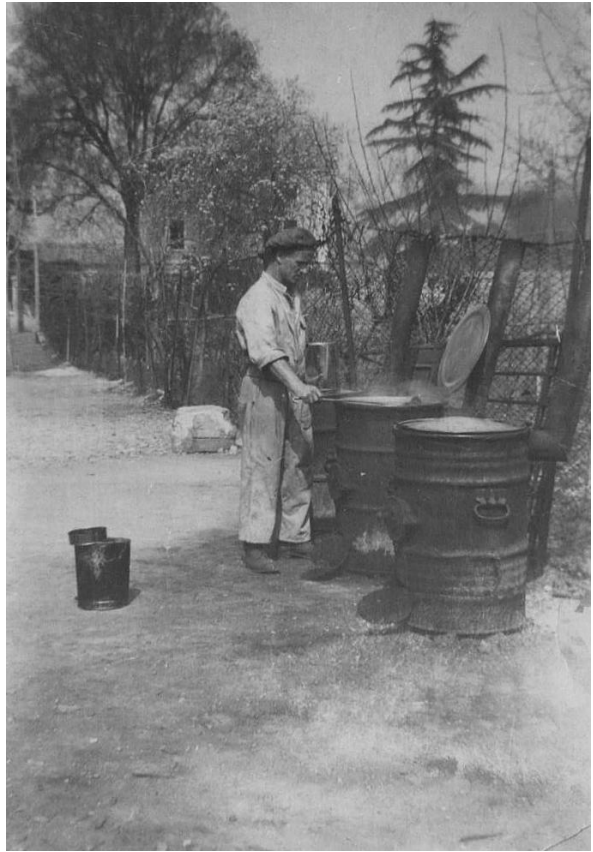
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A breakthrough in Ernest's life-story came many years after his death when daughter Christl was researching on the internet.

In 2012 Christl joined Ancestry, the genealogy web site to make connections and build your family tree. One day in 2013 she received an email from someone she did not know. The person wanted to know if she was related to Ernest Bylica. To which she hastily replied. The email was sent from someone called Maya Bylica. She wanted to know about her grandfather Ernest as much had been kept secret from her. Christl's half-brother Mikolaj (who she had never spoke to before) had said his father, Ernest had fought with the prestigious Anders army. This was more palatable than saying he had fought for the Germans. The family story told was he had met someone in UK (Christl's mother). Christl's niece wanted to know more about her Grandfather and over the next few months the correspondence increased day after day, enlightening each other about our lives, family, consequences and much more.... She understood why he could never return to Poland after the war

Christl's daughter subsequently visited Poland for the first time in 2013, meeting all the Polish family. In Mikolaj's home there were many pictures on the wall and one of them was of Christl's two English sisters – presumably sent by Ernest. It was very poignant moment. Christl's half-brother Mikolaj presented her with a bouquet of flowers as he came through the hotel doors. The embrace lasted for a long time. Walking around Bielsko-Biala, many of the churches were shown where Ernest had been baptised and married, where he had lived with his wife in a cottage beside the river and much more. Of course Krakow was on the list of visits. The following year Maya visited the UK, a memorable moment for everyone.

This account was very kindly provided by Christl Kettle.



Top lhs: Bielsko-Biala, 1945; top rhs and bottom two images with the Polish Army in Italy, 1946.



With the Polish Army in Italy, 1946



Doncaster, Askern Army Camp @ 1948.



Ernest with partner Muriel and first grandchild Jason, 1974.



Ernest with his two nieces from Germany with Christl on a ferry to a visit to Germany, 1959.



Christl meeting her brother, Mikolaj, for the very first time in Bielsko-Biala, Poland, 2013.



Ernest's legacy – the family back in the UK a year later, Rotherham, 2014.