

Paweł Cieślak (1926-1994)



To my darling Rita – from 'Pawel' - late 1940s

Paweł Cieślak was born on the 11th of May 1926 in the village of Cisownica, Ustroń in Southern Poland, on the slopes of Mt. Czantoria, near the Czechoslovak border. He was the eldest in a family of two brothers and came from a rural part of the country where he worked on the farm. When war broke out in 1939 and Germany invaded he was only thirteen. During this time he witnessed atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis, who rounded up people from the surrounding villages before taking them to the forest to be shot. In 1943, at the age of seventeen, he left behind his home and family whom he would not see again until many decades after the war had finished. Before the end of the war, he joined the Polish army and travelled through Italy, and into France. Paweł was in the Polish 2nd tank division, where he served as a driver of a tank carrier. One of his duties was to collect diesel barrels and load them onto the truck.

In England, Paweł was incorporated into the Polish Resettlement Corps, which was an organisation set up by the British government in 1946, as a holding unit for members of the Polish Armed Forces serving with the British Army. It was intended for Poles who did not wish to return to a Poland which had been taken over by Communists, at the end of the Second World War. The organisation was conceived for the purpose of easing their transition from military into civilian life. It also maintained Poles under military control until fully adjusted to British life. The British Army was in sole charge of this organisation. Paweł ended up in Rotherham and

was based at Clifton Park, where the army barracks were located. It was here that he first met his future wife Rita Spacey. He quickly settled into civilian life taking employment as a miner in 1946. At this time he lived in the Herrinhorpe Miners' Hostel, generally worked in the pits in the Rotherham area, particularly Barrow. He married in 1950 and his best man was Antoni Jałowiczor – also from the same region in Poland. Contact with the family in Poland did not occur for many years and finally came about with his brother Józef's visit in 1980. The family then visited Poland for the first time since the war, in 1981, during the Solidarność interval of 1980-81; returning the visit made by brother Józef Cieślar the previous year. It was an interesting reception in Poland – the landing was at an air-base outside Kraków that was allowing flights from the West for the first time. The passengers even received an armed escort from the base!

1993 saw Paweł's retirement from a working life that had lasted for 47 years: he received compensation for lung disease contracted from his time down the pits. Unfortunately, his retirement wasn't too last long, as in the following year he died. Summer 1994 was a very sad time for the family, as his son Paul accompanied by the rest of the family took his father's ashes to Poland for burial. However, the sombre mood was lifted somewhat when they spotted a celebrity whilst waiting at the airport in England: the person in front of Paul turned out to be none other than Sean Connery himself who was flying to Scotland! Paweł Cieślar was greatly affected by the War and did not speak much about it during his lifetime, therefore this story is fragmentary.

He left behind his wife Rita Cieślar (who passed away in 2005), daughters Carol and Lynn and son Paul. This account has been drawn up after extensive discussions with son Paul and Paweł's sister-in-law Gwen Spacey.



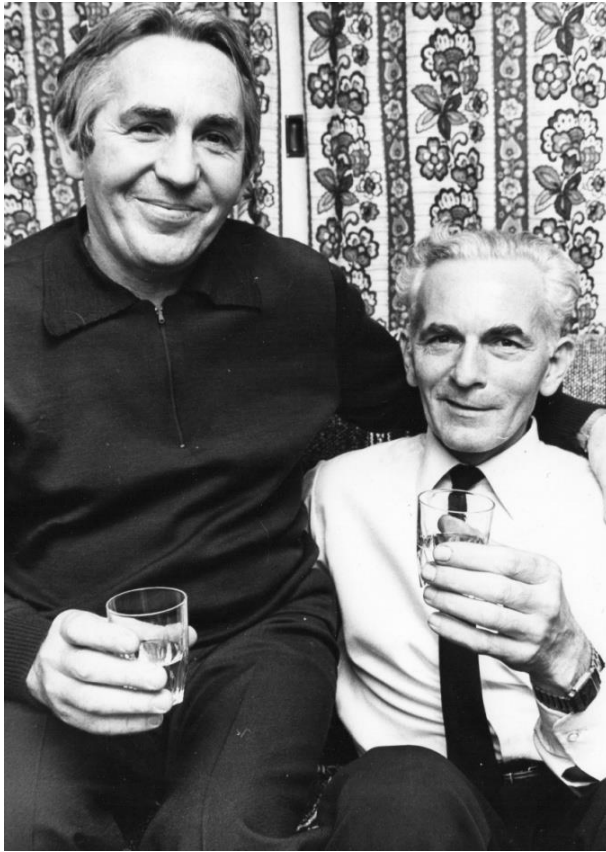
Memorabilia from Paweł's time in the Polish army.



In the Polish army during the war @ 1944. In the second photo, Paweł is in the beret.



Paweł's Polish regiment, where he is in this photo is unknown, Italy 1944.



Brothers Josef (left) and Pawel Ciesler celebrate their reunion after 37 years apart at Pawel's Masborough home. (E.8990).

Brothers say 'hello' again

Rotherham Advertiser, 1980.

Spirits were high when two long-lost brothers met up in Rotherham after 37 years.

Pawel Ciesler, a miner of James Street, Masborough, was 17 when he left his home and family in Poland to join the Army during the Second World War.

His brother, Josef, was 10. Since that time, the two men lived many miles apart.

Pawel came to Rotherham in 1947 when he became a miner and took up lodgings in a miners' hostel at Herringthorpe.

Josef stayed in Poland. He now runs an electrical installation business in Cisownica.

But despite the lost years, the brothers recognised each other when they met at Heathrow Airport.

"I knew him when I saw him," said Pawel, now 54. "And he knew me because he said I look like my father."

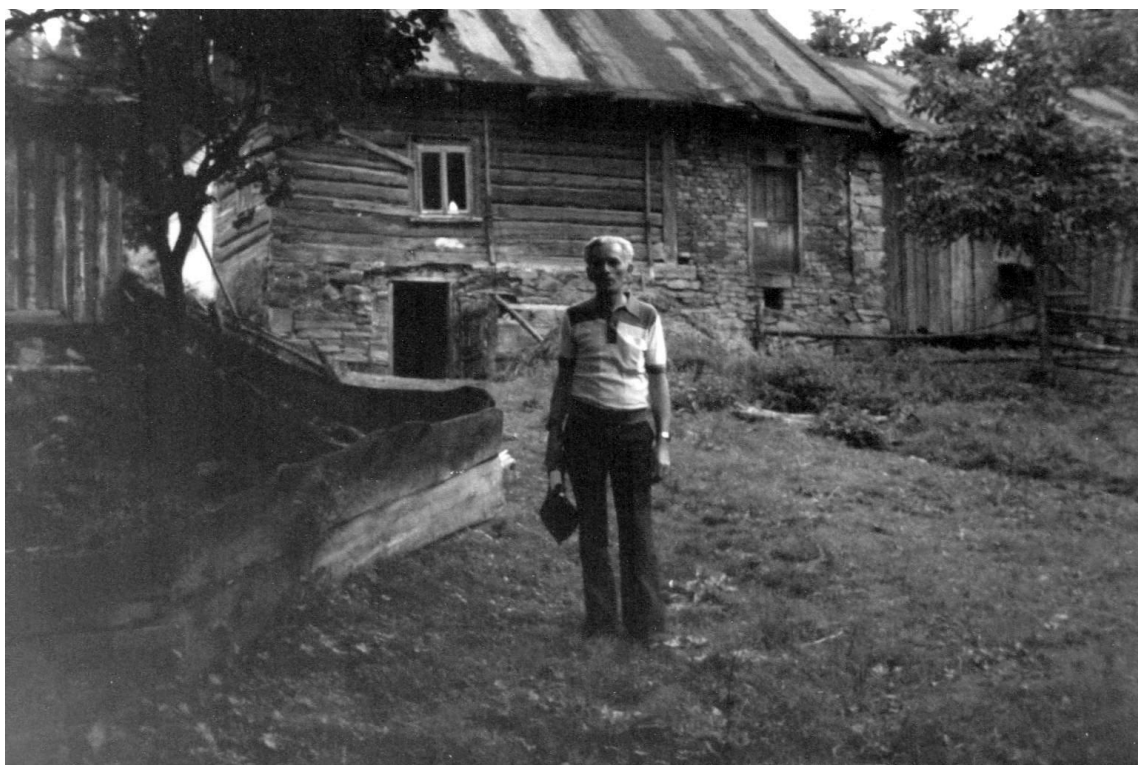
After Josef's arrival, he was whisked to a warm welcome in Rotherham, where Pawel's wife Rita and their family joined the brothers in a toast of Polish vodka.

Pawel has been busy translating, because his brother speaks very little English.

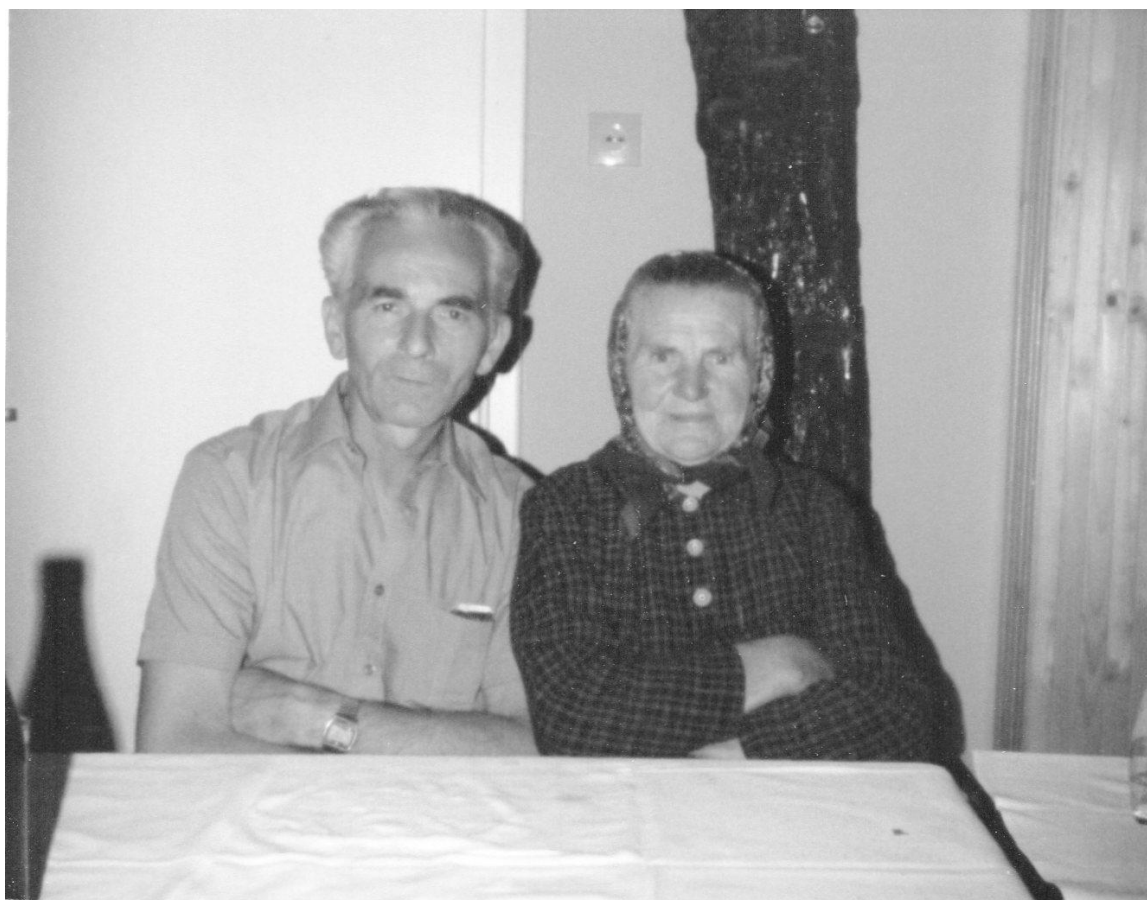
But the family have joined in celebrations. This week they took Josef to Blackpool, where he had his first close look at the sea. Josef's home is miles inland, and the only other glimpse of the ocean he had had was during the flight to England.

Josef must return in about a week, but next year it will be Pawel's turn to visit.

He and Rita are planning to fly to Poland where Pawel will see his mother. She is too old to make the trip to England.



First time outside his family home since the war, 1981.



Paweł seeing his mother in Poland for the first time since leaving home during the war: a few months after this visit his mother died. Paweł never saw his father again, 1981.



The follow-up visit to Poland, Paweł and son Paul with his brother Józef and his son Piotr, 1981.



Final resting place in Cisownica, Paweł's wartime memorabilia placed on a photo of his grave.