



„Wychowanie w Rodzinie” t. XXXI (4/2024)

Submitted: September 30, 2024 – Accepted: December 20, 2024

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Activities of the K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School of Native Subjects at the Polish Catholic Community in Croydon – Crystal Palace in the years 1950–2010

**Działalność Szkoły Sobotniej Przedmiotów Ojczystych
im. K. Chodkiewicza przy Polskiej Wspólnocie Katolickiej
w Croydon – Crystal Palace w latach 1950–2010**

Abstract

Introduction. The aim of the article is to present the 60-year history of the K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School of Native Subjects in Croydon – Crystal Palace. The research issues of this article include the didactic and educational activities of the school, the role of parents and teachers in the field of native education of children and adolescents, which had an impact on the formation of the Polish community in exile.

Aim. The aim of the article is to present the history of the K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School of Native Subjects at the Polish Catholic Community in Croydon – Crystal Palace in the years 1950-2010 and its didactic and educational activities over 60 years, the roles

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of teachers and parents in raising children in Polish culture and tradition.

Methods and materials. In order to present the School's history, the method of document analysis and the method of literature analysis and criticism were used.

Results. The result of the research is the presentation of the history, forms and methods of didactic and educational activities of the K. Chodkiewicz Native Subjects Saturday School at the Polish Catholic Community in Croydon – Crystal Palace in the years 1950–2010, in areas such as: management of the institution, organization of the didactic and educational process, cooperation with the family, and the social environment.

Conclusion. In the years 1950–2010, the K. Chodkiewicz Polish School of Native Subjects at the Polish Catholic Community in Croydon – Crystal Palace shaped the national identity of Polish children and youth in exile, cultivated Polish traditions, passed on cultural and religious heritage, introduced them to participation in the celebration of national and church holidays, etc. The teachers were committed to their didactic and educational work, both in the form of classes and extracurricular activities. Encouraging students to participate in various types of competitions, exhibitions and academies, dance groups, and scouting. In addition, from the very beginning, the school has closely cooperated with the Parent Committee and the parish, who supported the work of teachers by helping in managing the facility.

Keywords: native education, schools of native subjects, parents, child, school.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie 60-letniej historii Szkoły Sobotniej Przedmiotów Ojczystych im. K. Chodkiewicza w Croydon – Crystal Palace. Problematyka badawcza artykułu obejmuje działalność dydaktyczno-wychowawczą szkoły oraz rolę rodziców i nauczycieli w zakresie wychowania ojczystego dzieci i młodzieży, która miała wpływ na kształtowanie się społeczności polskiej na emigracji.

Cel. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie historii Szkoły Sobotniej Przedmiotów Ojczystych im. K. Chodkiewicza przy Polskiej Wspólnocie Katolickiej w Croydon – Crystal Palace w latach 1950–2010 oraz jej działalności dydaktyczno-wychowawczej na przestrzeni 60 lat, roli nauczycieli i rodziców w wychowaniu dzieci w polskiej kulturze i tradycji.

Metody i materiały. W celu realizacji problemu badawczego zastosowano metodę analizy dokumentów oraz metodę analizy i krytyki piśmiennictwa.

Wyniki. Rezultatem przeprowadzonych badań jest przedstawienie historii oraz form i metod działalności dydaktyczno-wychowawczej Szkoły Sobotniej Przedmiotów Ojczystych K. Chodkiewicza przy Polskiej Wspólnocie Katolickiej w Croydon – Crystal Palace w latach 1950–2010, m.in. takich jak: zarządzanie i kierownictwo placówką, organizacja procesu dydaktyczno-wychowawczego, współpraca ze środowiskiem rodzinnym i społecznym.

Wnioski. Polska Szkoła Przedmiotów Ojczystych im. K. Chodkiewicza przy Polskiej Wspólnocie Katolickiej w Croydon – Crystal Palace w latach 1950–2010 kształtowała tożsamość narodową dzieci i młodzieży polskiej na emigracji, kultywowała polskie tradycje, przekazywała dziedzictwo kulturowe i religijne, wdrażając do uczestnictwa w obchodach świąt narodowych i kościelnych itp. Nauczyciele z zaangażowaniem wykonywali swoją pracę dydaktyczno-wychowawczą, zarówno w formie zajęć lekcyjnych, jak i pozalekcyjnych, zachęcając uczniów do uczestnictwa w różnego rodzaju konkursach, wystawach i akademiach, zespołach tanecznych czy harcerstwie. Ponadto szkoła od samego początku ściśle współpracowała z Komitetem Rodzicielskim i parafią, którzy wspierali pracę nauczycieli, pomagając w kierowaniu placówką.

Słowa kluczowe: wychowanie ojczyste, szkoły przedmiotów ojczystych, rodzice, dziecko, szkoła.

Introduction

The question of Polish schools in exile has been discussed in articles and publications since the Second World War, but until now no article has appeared on the history of the K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School of Native Subjects, which organised by the Board of the Church Committee in Croydon – Crystal Palace, chaired by parish priest Walerian Gajecki and named after a borderlander, Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz. The aim of the research undertaken was to bring closer the origins of the school, which, despite many difficulties encountered, shaped the national identity of Polish children and young people in exile, cultivating Polish traditions and cultural and religious heritage. The topic is and very important, because the influence of the Polish educational system abroad has had, and continues to have, an impact on the formation of the national identity of generations of Poles, both at home and abroad.

Source materials collected in foreign archives have been used for this article: Archive of the Polish Educational Society in Great Britain, the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London and The National Archives (Kew). Printed sources were used – one-volume jubilee publications (Rush, Ożóg, Trzebiatowska, 2010), yearbooks of Polish émigré educational magazines published in the UK: “Wychowanie Ojczyste,” “Orzeł Biały,” “Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza.” Works on the origins and history of Polish education in exile during and after the Second World War, including those by Marek Ney-Krwawicz (2014), Jacek Pietrzak (2012), Tadeusz Radzik (1991a, 1991b), Agata Błaszczyk (2018), Tadeusz Kondracki (1996) and Olga Zamecka-Zalas (2022a), were also helpful. *The Lexicon of Polish Home School Teachers in London 1950–2010* (2012) also proved useful.

In September 1939, Germany and Russia struck Poland. After heavy fighting, uneven and heroic defence, part of the Polish army made its way through the Carpathian Mountains to Hungary from German and Russian occupation. Thousands of Poles were deported to Siberia in February, April and June 1940. The agreement of 30 July 1941, signed between Poland and the Soviet Union, provided for the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the creation of a Polish army in the USSR under Polish command. The treaty was signed by the Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile, General Władysław Sikorski, and the USSR Ambassador to London, Ivan Mayski. The so-called Sikorski-Mayski Agreement guaranteed an “amnesty” on the part of the USSR government for Polish citizens, political prisoners and exiles in Gulag prisons and camps. After the so-called “amnesty,” those who survived the harsh conditions of Russian captivity joined the Polish Army in Russia under the command of General Władysław Anders in 1942 and left for Persia (Iran), leaving the “inhuman” land forever (Pietrzak, 2012). The British deployed the families of the soldiers, mainly children and young people, in their colonies, mostly in India and East Africa (*Education in exile*, 1956), where 22 camps were set up, housing some 19,000 Poles. There, they spent several years (Ney-Krwawicz, 2014). Most centres of Polish wartime exile were in the Middle East, followed by the United Kingdom, which became the political and military centre of Polish wartime emigration (Zamecka-Zalas, 2022a). At the end of the Second World War, there were tens of thousands of Poles in the British Isles (Radzik, 1991a).

The Polish Armed Forces found themselves in a very difficult situation after the end of the Second World War. As a result of the Yalta resolutions and the surrender of our homeland to the hegemony of Soviet Russia after the end of hostilities, Polish soldiers could not return to a country with a Communist regime. They had to disperse around the world to start life anew. In 1946–1947, after the Italian campaign, the Polish army under the command of General W. Anders arrived in the UK, and with them their families. The decision to stay abroad was very difficult for the Poles, who spoke little English. They had to find work and accommodation. Living conditions proved to be very hard. Most of them worked physically, in low-paid jobs. Better paid was the work in mining or steel mills, but at the same time, it was heavy and harmful to health. For many years, Poles lived in the hope that the international situation would change; unfortunately, many of them did not live to see life in a free Poland (Błaszczuk, 2018).

The origins of the school and its organisational framework

Groups of Polish emigrants settled at Polish parishes in the UK, forming Catholic communities. The concern of parents in exile was to put their children in school to provide

education and a proper upbringing.

The concept of upbringing encompasses all the efforts of the family, the church, society and the state to prepare the young generation for entry into life. Polish families living in exile could not provide their children with an education and upbringing in their own schools with Polish as the language of instruction. The upbringing of children and young people in exile was subject to foreign influences (*Education in exile*, 1956), and the native factor necessarily took second place. This is why the Polish upbringing of children based on the values of national culture was so important (Goławski, 1955). This possibility was created by the so-called Saturday schools, in which classes for Polish children in the Polish language, religion, history and geography of Poland were conducted on free days (Saturdays) (Radzik, 1991b). Educational activists urged the organisation of such establishments. In the pages of the periodicals *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza* (Mai, 1947) and *Orzeł Biały* there were discussions about the necessity of preserving the young generation for Poland; it was considered the most important task and duty of every Pole. “[...] in exile no Polish child should be left alone in the sphere of action of a foreign environment. [...] by rescuing the young generation from the anxieties and dilemmas of today’s life, we increase the chance of finding themselves in a foreign country” (Mękarska, 1948, p. 3). Initially, comprehensive schools and courses in native subjects were created spontaneously by parents, priests, teachers and social associations and emigration organisations, such as the Union of Polish Teachers Abroad and the Association of Polish Combatants. Teaching was carried out in private homes and teachers worked selflessly. Over time, courses evolved into schools for native subjects – the first Saturday school was established in Edinburgh in 1948 on the initiative of the Polish Teachers’ Association. Until the early 1950s, schools were established spontaneously, without coordination from central social organisations. In the 1950s, the organisation and coordination of school activities passed into the hands of such émigré institutions and associations as the Association of Polish Teachers Abroad, the Association of Polish Veterans, the Polish School Society and the Society of Friends of Children and Youth (Adamski, 1976).

In the 1950s, a group of Poles of about 300 people settled in the vicinity of the present Polish Parish in Croydon – Crystal Palace. In 1950, Father W. Gajecki, appointed by the Polish Catholic Mission as parish priest, arrived there. Rev. W. Gajecki founded the Polish Catholic Community together with the Nawrocki, Wędzich and Brzeski families. Concern for the young generation and upbringing in the Polish spirit and tradition was paramount for first parishioners. For this reason, the first Saturday school was established in September 1950, organised by the Board of the Church Committee, chaired by parish priest W. Gajecki. This school was named after a borderlander, Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz. The school was looked after by the Circle of the Association of Polish Veterans 123 London-South (Kondracki, 1996).

School activities

Initially, lessons were held in private homes, including those of Mr and Mrs Nawrocki, and then in a room at St Mary's Church and at the Catholic English School "Coloma" (where they continued until 1963). Religion, Polish language, history and singing were taught

In September 1953, on Mrs Bokiewicz's initiative, a second Saturday school was established in Croydon – Crystal Palace, which was named after Queen Hedwig. Classes were held at St Anthony's Catholic English School in Genoa Road, London. In 1963, the two Saturday schools merged and were named after Charles Chodkiewicz. Their governing board drew up a new constitution. The headquarters of the school became the parish house at Oliver Grove, South Norwood, purchased by Jan Brzeski and given to the Polish community. The Polish Veterans' Association Circle resigned from the management of the school (Adamiak-Pawelec, 2012).

In 1966, the Parish Hall was rebuilt and in 1985, after the purchase of the parcel of land at 8 Oliver Grove, a Polish church was built with the help of the Polish community and Father W. Gajecki. The honoured position of school manager was held for many years by Mr Wnuk. Subsequently, the school was managed by the teaching staff under the direction of Father Walerian Gajecki and Danuta Dudzicka, who was deputy head of school and a long-time teacher. In the 1990s, Rev. Aleksander Ożóg took over as head of the school, while Irena Markowska was appointed as her deputy. Following her retirement in 2002, the role of deputy head was taken over by Grażyna Smith (Rush et al., 2010).

The school's teaching and educational activities were based on the Polish Educational Society's curriculum and its own (Podhorodecka, 2003). The number of pupils in the school averaged 150. After 2004, i.e. after Poland's accession to the European Union, the number increased to 250. In 2010, 245 pupils attended the school and 24 teachers and 10 helpers taught. The organisation of the school was as follows: primary school (grades up to III) – coordinator Maja Jaśko, secondary school (grades IV-VIII) – coordinator Barbara Trzebiatowska, matriculation classes – coordinator Maria Andrych. Lessons were held on Saturdays from 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. (4 lesson hours). The final lesson was the teaching of church singing and patriotic songs. For older young people, preparing for their matriculation exams, classes were held on Friday evenings.

The Saturday school abroad was not only a place where native subjects were taught but also a cradle of Polishness, where Catholic values and Polish traditions were nurtured by involving students in plays, academies, and concerts celebrating religious and national holidays. In addition, film screenings were organised, events of an entertaining nature, such as revenue plays, for which rooms were hired at Stanley Hall, Clyde Hall and St. James's Hall. Excursions along the routes of Polish London and trips

to the theatre at POSK were also very popular. On the occasion of Christmas, meetings with Santa Claus and *workshops* were organised, during which Christmas tree decorations were made and parents talked about Polish Christmas traditions. On the occasion of Easter, Easter eggs were painted. Bus trips to Laxton Hall to participate in the Polish Children's Fun Day were also popular.

From the beginning of the school, priests Walerian Gajecki, Henryk Poślusznny, Witold Maślanka, Aleksander Ożóg and Roman Kowalski prepared children for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Every year the school organised Advent and Lenten retreats for children and young people (Adamiak-Pawelec, 2012). The school was supported by parents' fees and subsidies from the local authority, as well as income from organised events. It also had Parents' Committee, which, with great determination and dedication, raised funds for the school's activities by organising cultural and entertainment events, taking care of the school's equipment and overseeing duty during breaks (Zamecka-Zalas, 2022b). Subsequent presidents and presidents were Markowski, Pawulski, Nowakowski, Konop and Przednówek, as well as Irena Markowska, Smith and Angelika Garczyńska (Rush et al., 2010).

The school also owes its existence to the activities of organisations such as the Polish Combatants' Association and the Ladies' Circle, which supported the school financially. The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London provided assistance for the purchase of learning aids, and the Polish Community in Warsaw provided financial support for investments in the school. It should also be emphasised that the dedicated work of the teachers contributed to the teaching and educational achievements of the pupils, and the most meritorious ones received decorations: Medal of the Commission of National Education – 8 people, Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta – one person, Commemorative Medal of General Anders – 7 people, Gold Badge of PMS in England and Wales – 4 people, Exuli Bene de Ecclesia Merito Medal –one person (Adamiak-Pawelec, 2012).

In the first 30 years of the school's activity, Mieczysław Lisowski, founder of the school choir and organiser of many performances, rendered great service to the school and was remembered by the pupils as a smiling, warm and welcoming person. It is worth mentioning that singing was a very important educational factor. When it was introduced in Saturday schools in the form of teaching Polish songs, it had a positive impact on developing children's patriotic feelings.

The child finds great joy in learning songs. A children's choir with a well-performed song has a chance to move the listener no less deeply than a song performed by a male or mixed choir. A song according to its mood evokes on the face of a sensitive listener the exact reflection of its expression. A sad song evokes a tinge of sadness on the face, a lively one stimulates with its rhythm the movements of the body, arms and legs.

A cheerful song is applauded by the amused audience with a roar of applause rarely seen in any other kind of artistic performance (Ekkert, 1957, p. 12).

In 1978, on the initiative of students and young Poles born and brought up in England, the Karolinka folk ensemble was established at the K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School, with Maura Kuterba as its founder and long-serving manager and Jerzy Pokiert as its musical director. In 1986, the so-called Young Karolinka was founded, led by Maura Kuterba and her daughter Jolanta Kuterba-Tucker. From the 1990s, the Karolinka ensemble was led by Anna Szpek, and the toddler group by the aforementioned Jolanta Kuterba-Tucker. The music for the ensemble was prepared by Krzysztof Kramek. Since 2008, the ensemble has been led by Aneta Gęca and assisted by Anna Bukaczewska (Rush et al., 2010). The ensemble was an inspiration and a pictorial lesson in Polishness. The aim of its existence was to learn and pass on Polish traditions and customs through song and dance to younger generations born abroad. The rich set of folk costumes was the result of the work of all the members of the ensemble and its enthusiasts – the work was directed by M. Kutreba, who has great knowledge in the field of ethnography. The Karolinka ensemble worked closely with the Saturday school, helping the pupils to learn dance and singing in the youngest classes, as well as taking part in all school celebrations. Karolinka has had more than 30 years of experience in Polish folklore culture and continues to attract children and young people (Rush et al., 2010). The high artistic and technical level of the ensemble has brought it recognition not only in Poland and the UK but also at folk festivals in many European countries and Canada. The ensemble has won awards and first prizes, danced in front of Pope John Paul II and the royal family, and often appeared on Polish and foreign television. For its 30th anniversary, it gave a gala concert at the market square in Krakow. In 2008 Polish Community Association awarded him the Gold Medal of Merit for promoting Polish culture abroad (Rush et al., 2010).

In the 1950s, scout troops were also established at Saturday schools to provide educational activities for young people. Active scouting activists were involved in shaping the character of young generations of Poles. The goal of scouting was to bring up brave, righteous and capable of making sacrifices in accordance with the Scout Law and Promise, preparing young people for conscious, active and sacrificial service to God, Poland and neighbours. The upbringing of scouting youth was based on the principles of Christian ethics (IPMS, *Regulations*). The K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School also had scout troops. In 1952, scout Szwagrzak founded a scout team. This was the Twenty-second Jan III Sobieski Scout Troop, Warsaw Scout Troop, Great Britain Charge, which had its headquarters in the Parish Centre at Croydon – Crystal Palace. There was also the formation of the “Knights” scout troop, led by Bridesmaid Dana Bogdanowicz. During this time, the first Girl Scout troop “Vistula” was formed in the parish, followed shortly afterwards by the scout troop “Ladybirds.

“Vistula” and “20th” grew rapidly and created new squads, teams and strains. These teams ceased to operate in the 1990s due to a lack of people willing to work as team leaders (Zamecka-Zalas, 2022a). It was not until 2006 that the “20s” were re-established at the Parish Centre at Oliver Grove, thanks to the commitment of graft leader Ryszard Kolendo and Zdzisław Nowakowski. A year later, the “Knights’ Scouts” troop began operating, led by Scoutmaster Tomasz Marszewski. In 2007, the First Girl Scout Troop “Vistula,” Bałtyk, Great Britain Chancellor’s Office with troop leader Barbara Tulej resumed its activities. From September 2010, the “Ladybirds” group of scouts started its activities with team leader Edyta Szpekarska. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts met after school every Saturday (Rush et al., 2010). Educational work was carried out using scouting methods by: arranging camps, excursions, games and exercises, games, storytelling, organising competitions and contests, taking part in religious and national celebrations (Bednarski, 1977).

Scouting was very well regarded and supported by the parents of the children attending the Saturday schools. Great credit for the development of the scout teams went to the Tulej family. Barbara and Piotr, graduates of the K. Chodkiewicz Saturday School, came every Saturday for many years after its graduation to lead Girl Scout meetings. The following are parents’ statements about the activities of the Saturday school and the scout troop (Rush et al., 2010):

We always meet them where they are needed, where they can offer support or help to those who need it. So, once again, scout songs resound in our school and parish, gatherings are held, and we parents look with pride and joy at the growing troop of scouts. We know that scouting has made a glorious mark in Polish history, and we know that it has raised ranks of honest, solid Poles. We know that we can always rely on them. Scouting “Vigil!”.

I am very happy that my children are willing and able to attend Polish language classes at Oliver Grove [...] my children and others from the same generation are already the third generation from those who settled in London after World War II, they have an invisible but strong connection between them. It is very important in our family that they continue to have the opportunity to maintain their connection with Poland and the Polish community in London – Staś Smagała.

My brother and I went to a Polish School from 1990 to 2005, and we started our Polish education from kindergarten and finished with a big *matura*, or A-level. We were taught by my Mum in the Matura class and maybe that’s why we tried doubly hard to pass well. Our Mum passed on a passion for History and my brother and I both ended up doing History at University. There was an extremely family-

like atmosphere at school, it was just a big Polish family. To this day, my best friends and colleagues are from the Polish School and Karolinka – Hania Smith.

Living outside Poland, we believe that the Polish School is the only way to maintain Polish cultural, historical and religious traditions. Children have the opportunity to make friends and acquaintances by taking part in school and out-of-school activities [...]. It is also a weekly opportunity for parents to meet and talk in their mother tongue and exchange views on educational issues. We believe that the Polish School is a necessary organisation for us parents and for our children living outside their homeland. We wish these Polish traditions to continue for many years to come – Danuta Peto, Krystyna Dias, Anita Janowska, Grzegorz Seweryn, Alina Shephard-Thorn.

Summary

The activity of the Polish schools of native subjects was and still is a very important part of the native and religious education of the Polish child in exile.

Thanks to the generosity and action of the entire community of the Parish of Jesus the Merciful, headed by Monsignor Walerian Gajecki, Canon Aleksander Ożog, assisted by Father Roman Kowalski and the teaching staff, the K. Chodkiewicz Polish School of Homeland Subjects was able to operate for 60 years, teaching and educating in the spirit of faith and Polishness, passing on knowledge of Polish culture, the Polish language, history and geography of Poland, as well as religion. It educated young generations in accordance with the principles of the Catholic faith, tradition and national culture. Hundreds of children graduated from the school, who were instilled with what was most important to Poles – Polishness, patriotism and the speech of their fathers.

Many of the school's alumni, who have started their own families, continue Polish traditions in their homes. Thanks to the principles learnt at school, they bring their children to the K. Chodkiewicz School of Home Objects. Graduates of this school, like Karol Chodkiewicz, remain faithful sons of the Polish land.

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