KLAUDIUSZ BOBOWSKI

Akademia Pomorska
Słupsk
kbobowski@o2.pl

BECOMING ACQUAINTED WITH BRITONS AND THEIR COUNTRY: ATTEMPTS TO PROPAGATE "THE BRITISH WAY" AMONG POLES IN THE YEARS 1940-1948

It was relatively late in the 20th century when the British government undertook the challenge of British culture overseas.[1] By the early 1930s the French, German and Italian authorities had already established networks of agencies publicising their national achievements in various countries. However diverse their motives might have been, the material and intellectual return was noticeable and the names of the institutions responsible, be it the Alliance Française (France) – by far the largest, best organised and most powerful instrument of cultural propaganda that France possessed[2] – or the Dante Alighieri (Italy), subsidised by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had already managed to make evident publicity for their countries.

Until 1934, however, despite its position as one of the "Great Powers", Britain did not approve of direct involvement in such activities. Although many Britons at the time probably considered themselves special and possessing a certain superiority over other nations – a view that resulted from their cultural and historical heritage – common among them was scepticism towards spreading such values as language, the arts and literature. This attitude might have been connected with what Peter Ustinov once diagnosed as not having recov-

[1] The author wishes to thank his wife Agata for her help and patience, and the little Julia – just for being there.

[2] F. Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years*, Cape, London 1984, p. 3.

ered from the shock of producing Shakespeare.[3] It was not uncommon those days to hear that "good wine needs no bush". In the area under discussion it referred to the assumption that the real virtues of a truly mighty empire did not need any publicity, as everyone ought to have been able to recognise its achievements. Somewhat paradoxically, as a result of her imperial self-righteousness, Britain undervalued propaganda for a long period of time.

During World War I, through selective presentation of distorted and exaggerated war images, the British themselves established a most sinister connotation of the word propaganda – this might have resulted in the politicians' apprehensiveness of influencing and manipulating public opinion in the post-war period. What is more, British wartime innovations in the field later served as a model for Nazi German authorities.[4] Nevertheless, one ought not to be misled into thinking that contemporary British propaganda did not exist. It was more subtle than German propaganda and could be described as "mild" as it lacked the element of the desire to annihilate the enemies and their cultural achievements.

Although until 1934 several non-governmental bodies had been established with the goal of spreading British thought abroad, their activities were inefficient compared with the demand from abroad for such projects.[5] The Ministry of Information, set up in early 1918 under Lord Beaverbrook (a businessman and politician who was in strong opposition to the institution of the British Council and the Polish cause as such), remained the most significant and influential. Among its primary goals was distributing propaganda to allied, neutral and enemy states. It was the ministry under Beaverbrook that first used photography, cinema and commissioned leading artists to present successfully the "appropriate" pictures of war.

Through an examination of British propaganda techniques at the time, it is possible to notice their extensive knowledge of the fact that information flows best when channels are properly greased, that factual accounts must be tailored to suit different audiences around the world and that the power of facts to make an impression varies according to the media through which they are disseminated. Therefore, contemporary newsreels chronicled the most recent events, films included a substantial dose of patriotism and spirit of brotherhood, and books were frequently based on a glorious past, the universal need to co-operate and faith for the better.

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[3] P. Ustinov, quoted in F. R. Bryant, review of F. Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years*, Cape, London 1984, "Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies", vol. 18, no. 1 (1986), pp. 142-143.

[4] Hitler once stated that the English understood and used in a marvellous way the notion of no half measures [in propaganda] between love and hate, right and wrong, since these gave rise only to doubt. His government's tactics was to be based on systematically told lies (F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 13).

[5] Ibid.

Finally, the pressures placed on the British government by the dangerously unstable political situation in Europe and the still underestimated need to publicise their own country, led to the establishment of an institution responsible for undertaking cultural relations with other countries. The first meeting of the new organisation took place on 5 December 1934, when it was agreed to call it The British Committee for Relations with Other Countries, which was soon abbreviated to the British Council.[6]

In 1936, Stanley Unwin, the Chairman of the Books and Periodicals Committee of the British Council, initiated the publication of pamphlets on special subjects in a series called *British Life and Thought*. It was his intention for the libraries all over the world to bind those together in a single volume, and keep it for reference – as a means of cultural propaganda.[7]

At this point, the comforting words of Lord Lloyd (the Chairman of the British Council in the years 1937-1941) may be recalled, namely that the Council did not force people to "think British", but just offered them the opportunity to learn what the British thought.[8] The statement might be regarded as true as it sounds, were it not for the double role, both cultural and political that the organisation played.

Organised partly to combat Nazi and Fascist propaganda, since its very beginning the British Council also looked eastwards, not only towards the Far East, with its ever increasing cultural and political demand for Englishness, but also at spreading knowledge and appreciation of the English culture among the Slavs, many of whom led their lives in impoverished villages, dilapidated urban areas and were unaware of the possibility of acquiring an insight into the pattern of British democracy, which might have been implemented in their own reality.

It was as early as during its inaugural meeting, which took place on 2 July 1935 at St. James's Palace, London, that Lord Tyrrell, who had been appointed Chairman of the British Council with executive powers, referred to Poland as one of the Baltic countries receiving their attention.[9] However, it was not until December 1938 that Lord Lloyd appointed Mr Egerton Sykes as the first British Council Representative in Poland.

Within several months of the outbreak of World War II, in May 1940, Britain started to experience a wave of Polish emigrants –the Polish Govern-

[6] Ibid., p. 28.

[7] In doing so, leading publishers were invited to tender for the work of distribution on a commission basis. Copies were to be printed with the publisher's imprint and sold to booksellers, and the proceeds handed over to the Council. Due to the fact that the offer itself was far from attractive from the publishers' point of view, some of those approached refused to tender. In the course of events, Messrs Longman were selected and since that time the publisher has remained closely connected with the Council. Ibid., p. 36. (An example of a library resource: *British Life and Thought, An Illustrated Survey*, Books for Libraries Press, New York 1971.)

[8] C. F. Adam, *Life of Lord Lloyd*, Macmillan, London 1948, pp. 284-285, quoted in F. Donaldson., op. cit., p. 57.

[9] F. Donaldson., op. cit., pp. 29-30.

ment, civilians, and a number of soldiers who were to form the new Polish Army in exile. In the months to come, the hitherto rather ineffectively used and underestimated *British Life and Thought* brochures were to see an immense revival.

Polish troops who came to seek shelter on British soil had been drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. By and large, the officers represented urban intellectual circles, whereas the lower ranks comprised of men and women of all possible origins. The situation is referred to by Ksawery Pruszyński in *Polish Invasion*, whose reportage constitutes a rich source of information and remains one of the few referring directly to cultural relations between Polish soldiers and Britons at the commencement of their wartime co-operation.[10]

No sooner had they arrived than some of them wished to study more about their host country. There was hardly any sphere of life they were not interested in.[11] As a result, the pamphlets were frequently asked for to be delivered to all Polish units all over the country. It was also requested that they should be translated into Polish due to the fact that not many Polish soldiers were able to comprehend English, some being illiterate even in their mother tongue.

The many booklets covered practically every domain of British life, from agriculture and artefacts, to parliamentary institutions and technological achievements. They were intended to broaden the readers' horizons with "the hidden aim of political and commercial indoctrination", as stated by Duff Cooper, Minister of Information in the Cabinet of Winston Churchill.[12]

However innovative their methods and sincere their motives, the Britons were far from being unique in their selection of subjects for the series. It was a Pole – Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski – who as early as at the beginning of the nineteenth century called for certain adoptions from the British way of administering the country, and whose activity is presented by Wojciech Lipoński in his articles on the subject.[13] It was discovered that the Prince, being inspired by the British model of governing the country, had planned wide judicial, social and administrative borrowings, with an intention to implement those on Polish land and, as a result, to improve the status of Polish villages and peasantry.[14] Apart from doing so, it was also his idea to establish a British secret agency in Poland that would serve as a link between the two nations, spreading cultural knowledge.[15] Lipoński's article refers to Czartoryski's lengthy notebooks pre-

[10] K. Pruszyński, *Polish Invasion*, Minerva Publishing, London 1941.

[11] H. Wood to Parkinson, 1st July [1941], PRO, BW 2/229, quoted in F. Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

[12] D. Cooper to Churchill, 7th Feb. 1941, PRO, PREM 4/20/3, quoted ibid., p. 78.

[13] W. Lipoński, *The Influence of Britain on Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski's Education and Political Activity*, "Polish-AngloSaxon Studies", vol. 1 (1987), pp. 33-67 (Part I); and "Polish-AngloSaxon Studies", vol. 2 (1991), pp. 31-68 (Part II).

[14] W. Lipoński, op. cit. (Part II), p. 33.

[15] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

senting the proposed changes.[16] Striking to the reader might be the fact that both the Prince in the early nineteenth century, and the British Council over one hundred years later in their pamphlets shared similar views with regard to publicising British thought abroad. This may best be noticed through comparing the titles of his notebooks and the Council's publications. While Czartoryski wrote *O układzie sądownictwa w Anglii* (On the Composition of the Judiciary in England), *O prawie angielskim* (On English Law), *O składzie policyj i administracyj w Anglii* (On the Composition of the Police and Administration in England), *Raptularz dzieła o procedurze angielskiej* (An agenda of the book of English Law Procedure),[17] some of the titles published by the Council include: *British Agriculture*, *The British System of Government*, *The Police of Britain*, *British Justice*, or *The Face of Britain*. However unrealistic Czartoryski's schemes were and regardless of how they were viewed by his contemporaries, the identical nature of the choice of fields presented by the Council is striking. Such ideas might have succeeded in 1918, when a new political and social model of the country was being created. Unfortunately, at the time Czartoryski's projects were not referred to. The Prince's dreams were partly fulfilled in the late 1930s, when the British Council opened its branch in Poland and initiated their East European chapter, only to be closed down in 1939 and re-opened in 1946. Nevertheless, the closure of the Polish branch of the British Council caused by the outbreak of the war did not mean an absolute withdrawal from their attempts to propagate British culture among Poles. The relationships between the two countries tightened after Britain joined the war, which created new opportunities in the field.

The Polish-British alliance that lasted from the very outbreak of the war until its end vastly contributed to the Allied victory. In addition to their extensive involvement in direct combat, Poles, whose substantial contribution to the triumph remained disregarded for years, played an important role in the defeat of the Third Reich through innovative technical research and highly effective intelligence work. The report of the Anglo-Polish Historical Committee of 2004, presenting the countries' intelligence co-operation, is a comprehensive work on the subject as it portrays the true involvement of Poles in the war effort and persuasively documents the role of Polish intelligence and British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).[18] The study clarifies that, without Poles and Britons working together on the invisible front, the struggle against Nazi Germany would have lasted much longer – and claimed many more lives.[19]

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[16] Ibid., p. 34.

[17] Ibid.

[18] T. Dubicki, , D. Nałęcz, T. Stirling, and J. Ciechanowski, eds., *Polsko-brytyjska współpraca wywiadowcza podczas II Wojny Światowej* (Polish-British Intelligence Cooperation during World War II), vols. I-II, Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, Warszawa 2004.

[19] It is estimated that in the years 1940-1945, the SIS received approximately 45,000 intelligence reports from across Europe, almost half of which originated from Polish sources. This made the Poles a valu-

During the second stage of the war, it was the aim of the Soviet Union to ensure its predominance in Eastern Europe through making it its exclusive zone of influence. This could only have been achieved by excluding any Western activities in the area. The situation that arose in the spring of 1943, after the Nazis announced the discovery of graves of thousands of Poles murdered by the Soviet NKVD in the Katyń Forest, allowed the Soviet government to sever diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile, thereby providing a means to test the extent to which the Allied Powers were prepared to resist Soviet expansionist policy.[20]

Apart from regular military actions and diplomatic activity during World War II, there was also a less violent, though crucially important front line – culture. True in this respect becomes the popular phrase "total war", for it not only involved professionals trained at the art of war, but also communities of the sides engaged.

Anthony Polonsky, cited by Madajczyk, asserts that World War I had shaken the artistic circles in Great Britain to a greater extent than World War II did, arguing that the situation was the result of a departure from a static (trench) war that enabled writers to sense and express suggestively the macabre nature of wartime, to a war based on highly mobile techniques.[21] He also takes into consideration the fact that the English, with their imperial type of thinking, treated realistically the possibility of the outbreak of war from the mid-thirties, while in 1914 they were taken by surprise.[22] Nevertheless, according to Madajczyk, wars can play a culture-generating role.[23] One cannot disagree with his opinion that World War II required, perhaps more than previous ones, the popularisation of the products of culture, but only those that were woven on the theme of a conflict and made possible the shaping of consciousness from the point of view of the needs of the struggle.[24] Thus it is clear that at the time and in the period that followed, culture itself became a weapon, albeit an unusual one, serving the purposes of both the Axis countries and the Allies. And, following Polonsky, the development in arts and music in society resulted, to a certain extent, from care for the morale of both society and the army, and from propaganda activities. However, it may be assumed that it did not occur at the

able source of information, perhaps even one worth fighting for – especially in the context of the Soviet expansionist policy (see Address by Adam Daniel Rotfeld, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, on the occasion of the official presentation of the Report of the Anglo-Polish Historical Committee, London, 4th July 2005. http://www.msz.gov.pl/files/file_library/29/adress_londyn_11541.html, date of access: 20 June 2007).

[20] As time showed, the Polish question was settled without active participation of the Polish side, despite numerous protests of the Polish Government in London.

[21] Cz. Madajczyk, Foreword, [in:] *Inter Arma Non Silent Musae: The War and the Culture 1939-1945*, ed. Cz. Madajczyk, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1977, p. 9.

[22] Ibid., p. 29.

[23] Ibid., p. 9.

[24] Ibid.

same time as the outbreak of the war; it developed gradually, imposed by propaganda requirements.[25]

The British Council's activities took multiple forms, ranging from publishing booklets and brochures, through organising concerts and presentations, to employing inventions such as the radio and motion pictures. The undertakings originated as part of a "non-political", educational programme specifically designed to spread knowledge of the English language, British arts, science, parliamentary institutions, technological achievements and the way of life.[26]

The British Council re-opened its French and Italian Offices in 1944, when the war was not yet over. It would have been a grave mistake not to take advantage of Britain's immense popularity at the time, when any cultural asset was highly appreciated by societies tired of atrocities. The demand for cultural input was such that one of Greek Ministers of Culture confessed in 1982 that "the intellectual life of Athens after the war was formed by the British Council".[27]

The calls for culture were similar in a number of countries, including those liberated from the East by the Red Army. The Soviets had no political excuse not to allow British Embassies to be established within their areas of influence. Such was the case with the Embassy in Warsaw. After its opening, Cavendish Bentinck (British Ambassador to Poland) dispatched reports presenting the Polish demand for "Britishness", stating in one of them that "people of all sorts have expressed their desire for a speedy resumption of cultural relations with the West,"[28] and in other that "the yearning for British cultural material is pathetic".[29] Nevertheless, it was not until 1946 that the Council opened its branch for the second time in war impoverished Poland, in Warsaw.

It is vital to note that the war did not stop the Council's work. On the contrary, since 1939 its energetic representatives had been working hard all over the world influencing both the Allies and neutral countries. The Middle East, Persia (Iraq), Turkey, Egypt, China and South America were of paramount importance to the British Government and indirect initiatives providing amenities such as books, films, information on the country's achievements were the

[25] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

[26] What the Council undertook in pre-war Europe was certainly not restricted to sending brochures to libraries. Other activities included records with British music shipped to broadcasting companies, which additionally organised musical events supervised by the Music Committee under the chairmanship of Ernest Makower. Among the artists who travelled abroad were an outstanding pianist and patriot Myra Hess, who toured Scandinavia, Thelma Reiss and John Hunt, who performed in the Baltic States and Poland, Keith Faulkner and Cyril Smith, who propagated British cultural thought in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Also, the Lecturers Committee, chaired by the Poet Laureate John Masefield, sent its lecturers to many European countries (F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 38).

[27] Ibid., p. 147.

[28] Cavendish Bentinck to Foreign Office, 28 August 1945, PRO, FO 924/210, LC 3547/1695/452, quoted ibid., p. 151.

[29] Cavendish Bentinck to Foreign Office, 6 September 1945, PRO, FO 924/210, LC 3724/1695/452, quoted ibid.

best means of affecting the attitudes of these peoples as well as boosting the troops' and refugees' morale in the target countries.[30]

In spite of all their noble intentions, the Council's staff were under pressure to gather intelligence information to be passed on to the Foreign Office, therefore unofficially and at times acting as "secret agents". In Eastern Europe they were also, in the late 1940s and in the years that followed, referred to as a sort of cultural fifth column.[31]

The activity of the Council in liberated Europe was regarded as very valuable by British authorities as the opportunities for direct political influence in the East were likely to be limited.[32] Indirect influence on the intelligentsia in the enemy countries behind the future Iron Curtain served as a means of achieving certain long-term goals connected with Britain's foreign policy. The attempts to establish mutual trust were accompanied by reports on current internal affairs regularly delivered to His Majesty's Representatives. Not only did they include current cultural affairs and press summaries, but also detailed notes on parliamentary sessions and extensive summaries of the trials against public enemies, commonly referred to as "spies".[33]

Since its very beginning, the Council has frequently been criticised both in Britain and abroad. During the first half of the twentieth century, in Britain, the accusations concerned mainly its rapid growth and the expenses that accompanied it. A report on the activity of the British Council expressed the opinion that the organisation did not show any tendency to restrict the limits of its own work.[34] Neither did it protest against demands imposed by the Whitehall, which lead to some overlapping with the responsibilities of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information.[35] The attention of British public opinion was frequently directed towards the unjustified spending of public funds. An event that angered the readers of the *Daily Express*, for instance, was connected with an official visit of Mr Wallace, a deer controller, to Spain, where he was supposed to advise the Spanish Tourist Agency on game preservation.[36] Apart from financial issues, which could well have been scrutinised by the sharp eye of the

[30] Eden to Kingsley Wood, 22 June 1943, L3219/116/410/ PRO, T161/1153/S35581/03/43, quoted ibid., p. 127.

[31] Extract from BBC's *Summary of World Broadcasts* No. 84, 20 Feb. 1950, BW 51/10, 314875, S/POL/680/1, NA (National Archives, Kew, England).

[32] 2 January 1945, Finance and Agenda Committee (109th meeting), paper A, PRO, BW 69/10, quoted in F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 141.

[33] British Council Archives 1948-1955, BW 51/10, S/POL/680/1, NA.

[34] During the war, the government spent lavishly on it and the scale of operations expanded accordingly. The post-war years, however, produced an endless number of commissions to recommend cut-backs. Parliament continued to recognise the value of the Council, but was reluctant to fund the operation. This was so until the 1960s when the government finally realised that the English language was a highly marketable commodity (F. R. Bryant, op. cit., pp. 142-143).

[35] Montagu-Pollock and Hedley, *Sir Findlaster Stewart's Report on BC*, 26 Apr. 1945, PRO, FO 924/113, quoted in F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 134.

[36] Churchill to Eden, 26 Nov. 1944, PRO, FO 924/17, LC 1589/451, quoted ibid., p. 131.

watchful citizens, the Council's inefficiency was another commonly raised issue, especially by the media directly connected with Lord Beaverbrook. The scurrilities lasted for many years, gradually influencing the common view of the Council and the efforts undertaken by its representatives, who were presented as "long-haired, effeminate and ineffectual old school masters (…) not always very cultured and not at all at their ease in dealing with foreigners of all professions".[37] Similar was the stereotype circulated by the Eastern Bloc countries, with the difference that such persons would also have to act as spies, trying to undermine the power of the people's democracies.

The accusations might partially have resulted from a deficiency of appropriate candidates who could be employed in the home and overseas offices. At the time, the most valuable males "were seeking to get into the armed Forces", as a result of which the Council had no other alternative but to employ for their posts people who "would certainly never have been selected in the first place, and for which they would not normally be chosen (…)."[38]

If Lord Beaverbrook's aim was to create a negative image of the British Council, it was also among the aims of communist Poland's hostile foreign policy towards Western countries. Despite both the eagerness of the society in their drive for British culture, as well as the efforts undertaken by the organisation's staff, the contemporary Polish authorities were more than reluctant to provide necessary assistance.[39]

The tensions, uncertainties and hopes connected with the future of the British Council in Poland can be found in confidential reports (revealed to the public by The National Archives in London at the author's request) dispatched to the British Embassy by the Council's Representative George C. Bidwell. In June 1948 he reported on his conversation with Mr Zbigniew Mokrzycki, Director of Awir – the largest private publishing firm in Poland, who expressed his anxieties related to the amalgamation of the communist Publishing House "Książka" (Book) with the socialist "Wiedza" (Knowledge), which meant there was practically no future for private publishing houses in Poland, and informed Bidwell about the coming times when anyone who would attempt to use the American or British Information Centres or the British Council Library would be arrested – confidential information received from a certain Major Jackowski.[40] In the same document, Bidwell referred to Mokrzycki's point of view as very pessimistic, and noted that in the past six months the Council had achieved more than in any equivalent period since they had come to Poland, a statement that remains in opposition to Mokrzycki's subsequent assertion that

[37] "Evening Standard", 22 March 1948, quoted ibid., pp. 142-143.

[38] Montagu-Pollock and Hedley, *Sir Findlaster Stewart's Report on BC*, 26 Apr. 1945, PRO, FO 924/113, quoted ibid., pp. 135-136.

[39] See J. Witkowska, *The Image of the United Kingdom in Poland during the Stalinist Period*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2009.

[40] Polish Publishing Developments WAR/0261/1, BW 51/10, S/POL/680/1, NA.

the period of ups was definitely over and they should only expect downs in the future.[41]

A grim period approached soon after, when on 27 May 1949, G. Bidwell decided not to support Britain in her dissemination of Britishness, renounced his British citizenship and, in the atmosphere of an international scandal, became a Polish citizen. The unusual situation evoked contradictory interpretations of Bidwell's decision. He was condemned and accused of bigamy in Britain (Bidwell re-married in Poland),[42] whereas in Poland he became a hero who contributed to the building of a better world, a world of progress. Bidwell's justification for his decision is included in his book *Wybrałem Polskę* (I Chose Poland) which, although written from a communist-approved point of view on the issue, may provide a valuable source of information on the Polish propaganda activity targeted towards Britain.[43]

Bidwell's decision was not unique. A Council employee in Prague, Dr Arna Rides, announced that she could not reconcile herself to the policy of the institution and, having resigned her post there, submitted a request at the same time to the Czechoslovak government for refuge in this country.[44] Dr Rides asserted that she had arrived in Czechoslovakia not to help enemies of the people and had been faced with a dilemma whether to betray her ideas or to act as the director of the British Council in Poland.

Faced with frequent accusations and virtually unable to parry the blows of hostile Polish propaganda, the cardinal point of the British Council's policy became not to fall on their own sword. It was also stated that it was not the policy of the Council to leave the country of its own accord, but to do even a small amount of work, as Poland was considered a country of great political importance.[45]

In the light of this, it is possible to appreciate the significance of the *British Life and Thought* series as a means of distributing elementary democratic ideas in enemy territory. It can only be guessed that the publication served as a form of intellectual asylum for readers who were imprisoned in political fetters of a hostile regime.[46]

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[41] More observations on the topic may be found in Bidwell's autobiography *Wybrałem Polskę* (I Chose Poland), Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1950.

[42] Extract from unpublished account of G. Bidwell, attached to letter from John B. S. Jardine (the British Council Representative, Poland) to Overseas Division C, 8 February 1950, BC, CF/POL/680/1, quoted in F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 151.

[43] G. Bidwell, *Wybrałem Polskę* (I Chose Poland), Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1950. Bidwell became a highly regarded writer in post-war Poland. His books are still read.

[44] Extract from BBC's *Summary of World Broadcasts* No. 84, 20 Feb. 1950, BW 51/10, 314875, S/POL/680/1, NA.

[45] Letter from John B. S. Jardine to the Division, 28 Feb. 1950, BW 51/10, S/POL/680/1, NA.

[46] Apart from the series, various British publishers printed sets of booklets narrower in their scope, e.g. *Longman's Pamphlets on the British Commonwealth*, *Science in Britain*, *Britain Advances*, *The World To-Day*, *Britain in Pictures*, *Britain and Its People*, *Oxford Pamphlets on World Affairs*.

THE FACE OF BRITAIN

Each of the pamphlets from the *British Life and Thought* series consists of a description of a number of individual features concerning British achievements in the various fields, which simultaneously serve as their titles.

The Face of Britain, by L. Dudley Stamp,[47] might have been an important step in the process of familiarisation with the country, thought there is no evidence suggesting an order in which to read the booklets. Most probably, they would be selected randomly from (military) libraries that were dispersed around the country (within the range of activity of Polish troops), and the reading criteria might have oscillated around their availability at a certain moment – though there could have been individuals with more motivation to organise their reading.

The booklet presents an account of the physical and economic geography of Britain, emphasising the contrasts to be found in the country. In a brief review of the salient features of each of the chief regions into which Britain was divided by nature, mention is made of points of scenic and historic interest, as well as of facts regarding economic development that foreigners ought to have been made familiar with. The publication strives to present a considerable amount of information about what Britain looked like at the turn of the thirties. With the probable aim of simplifying the comprehension of the location of geographical regions, the booklet is divided into several sections outlining the aforementioned features.

A general distinction between the regions, as well as comparisons with continental Europe, prevail over the opening pages. Newcomers are suggested not only to taste Lowland Britain, but also to attempt to assess the contrasts between the wild, almost inaccessible fiords or lochs of the north-west Highlands of Scotland, the Dutch-like scenery of the drained fens of parts of Lincolnshire, the rolling downland of Salisbury Plain, the secluded, heather-covered glades of the New Forest, the rugged crags of North Wales, the smiling orchard-land of Kent, the grimy, narrow, congested valleys of South Wales, and the desolate almost uninhabited moorland of Sutherland. Such reference to unspoilt scenery and rural countryside was most probably addressed to those who valued the natural beauty of their own country (just like the British) and wished for traces of it to be found on the foreign soil (e.g. Polish war immigrants).

The fundamental distinction is made into Highland and Lowland Britain. It is remarked that, at the time, human settlement tended to be essentially discontinuous in Highland Britain. On the other hand, Lowland Britain is presented as a land of grass fields, farms and villages, a land of intricate but continuous

[47] D. Stamp, *The Face of Britain*, Longmans, Green and Co., London 1940.

patterns. As a result, the land boasted an entirely different history from the Celtic fringe of Highland Britain. Not only nowadays, but also in the early forties, the Highland peoples – the Scots, the Welsh, the Cornish, and indeed the Irish – were perceived as distinct in their traditions, dialect, and outlook from the Lowland English. Thus, the visitors were faced not only with a new language (English) that they were supposed to grasp a knowledge of, but also with its local variations – dialects, whose existence was an inherent feature of the country.

The booklet does not say much about Ireland, which is presented as belonging to the Highland part of the British Isles and retaining its Highland character, in spite of the fact that the island comprises a great central plain. The question may be asked, what the purpose of providing readers with such topographical information might have been. Due to the fact that a visit to any place in the world was usually connected with an appreciation of its natural surroundings, the visual presentation of the variety of countrysides available on the Islands was an invitation for the readers to experience more than the ordinary camp or city life.

Pride from the Roman presence on the island, and the Norman contributions to the system of governing the state flows from the pages of *The Face of Britain*. What is more, a note on immigrants is made, in which Flemings and Huguenots are presented as groups that enriched the country both culturally and economically. Certainly those who visited the country for the first time in the early 1940s might have been at a loss to comprehend the marked local variations omnipresent in such a small area, in terms of speech, manners, customs and, to a lesser extent, in religion, dress, and even physical characteristics. This diversity within the unity of Britain could ideally be observed by the examination of the country region by region, which the booklet attempts to provide. What is more, it can be deduced that, through direct reference to the diversity of their predecessors and due to the number of cultural dissimilarities, the British were able to co-operate, and to produce and govern a creation as intricate as their own Empire. It is apparent that those who decided to learn about the scenery of the British Isles were simultaneously presented with messages intended to demonstrate the spirit of British brotherhood that prevailed over regional differences and disputes.

Many people would have associated Britain with the sight of high white cliffs formed out of the chalk of the North Downs reaching the shores of the Strait of Dover between Folkestone and Dover. The unforgettable view is reflected in the name "Albion", often applied to Britain as a whole. The journey from Dover to London is presented as one through the "Garden of England" – the beautiful county of Kent, which, along with the counties of Surrey and Sus-

sex, share the region of the Weald.[48] It is also stated that the region – Chalk Downlands – at the time numbered among the areas of the most beautiful scenery in the whole of Britain. The place is advertised to all Charles Dickens lovers, who would definitely have found satisfaction visiting Rochester, with its East Gate House and Bull Inn (still existing as a hotel), or Cobham with its Gad's Hill and Leather Bottle Inn (visited by the author), of *Pickwick Papers* fame, which nowadays provides travellers with a touch of history and nostalgia for bygone times (additional fees are charged for a night spent in the historic surroundings).

The brief account of East Anglia portrays the agricultural region as of little touristic interest, the countryside being most attractive in August, when the great fields of golden grain, separated by green hedges, are ready for harvest. The area is also associated with the famous Broadland, with its shallow stretches of water allowing for unforgettable sailing experiences and unconventional holidays where fresh air and water would constitute the chief ingredients. The area is contrasted with the desolate heaths and young forests of Breckland in the west, and a visit to the many parks is suggested, with the unique possibility of being able to see the royal residence of Sandringham in the north-west.

Britain indeed might have represented a substitute homeland for all those who wished to assist the country in its war effort. Pruszyński asserts that Polish troops appreciated the natural beauty of the host country, whose civilised and friendly people were always pleasant and courteous towards their eastern allies.[49]

Apart from searching for resemblances to the Polish countryside, one might long for other experiences while becoming acquainted with the country. Should they search for otherness, readers are suggested to taste the Dutch character of Fenland – a part of the east coast of England in the county of Cambridgeshire, where marshlands – the Fens – were reclaimed, creating unique views that from the air closely resembled parts of Holland, with its long drainage ditches, multitude of smaller drains between the fields, roads following the main embankments, and farm cottages along the roads.

The conjecture that the pamphlet might serve as a guidebook is supported by its subsequent sections, which form a logical (at times too detailed) description of both the key features and landmarks of various British regions – an approachable companion during potential trips to any of them, or even, time permitting, travelling around the country.

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[48] The word "weald" (Anglo-Saxon) is related to the German "Wald" (forest), and refers to the once densely forested character of the Weald. The ancient routeways followed the more easily cleared uplands; as late as in the Elizabethan times the oak forests of the Weald supplied timber for the ships of the British Navy. The final destruction of the forests came through the use of the timber in the making of the charcoal for the once great iron industry.

[49] K. Pruszyński, op. cit., p. 14.

The name of the ancient kingdom of the West Saxons, Wessex, which disappeared centuries ago, covers the counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, parts of Surrey and Gloucestershire and conveniently, on frequent occasions, denotes South Central England. With its prehistoric (Stonehenge) and Roman roots, which are retained in the names of cities and villages (e.g. Chichester), as well as Bristol and Southampton being major export and passenger ports, and Salisbury Plain, which at that time provided Britain with its largest military camps and training grounds, the region must have been of potential interest to Polish immigrants. Visitors were also recommended to sample its traditional English rural character.

Also the county of Lancashire used to be regarded as a region of great agricultural importance (though nowadays overshadowed by industry). Situated in this area, the Cheshire Plain used to be world famous for both its dairy pastures and dairy cattle, as well as its output of cheese, which was marketed in "normal times" as C.C.C. – Choice Cheshire Cheese.

The area of Devon and Cornwall in the South West is argued to have been more agriculturally developed than other parts of Highland Britain and was described as the home of lay farming (or alternate husbandry).[50]

Although the majority of Polish troops were quartered in Scotland, they were not able to grasp much knowledge about this area from the booklet. Apart from basic information presenting Scottish topography, climate and various industries, there were no further details or practical and interesting facts. It may be supposed that the readers were more than welcome to appreciate the written word, but trips disturbing the natural way of life were not among the most highly recommended forms of passing their leisure time, which in any case would have been spent reading.[51]

Regardless of the agricultural advantage, and notwithstanding its involvement in the war effort, it is industry that dominates the pages of the booklet, making it appear to have been the pride of the British nation and a strong point to be relied on in times of an increased demand for optimism. Therefore, guests had to be informed about the prosperous industrial background. Description of the natural beauty of the landscape are frequently paired with geological information concerning the deposits of coal or iron ore. It is highlighted that in antiquity Phoenician traders were attracted by the tin ore of the Cassiterides (the Scilly Isles), and though many mines had already been depleted, the mining

[50] A system where the field was alternately seeded for grain and left fallow; each field was cropped for three years and left in grass for five, seven or more years.

[51] It is in Scotland that the region of Kilmarnock can be found, famous for the most widely distributed brand of blended Scotch whisky in the world – "Johnny Walker". Interestingly, this fact that was concealed from the readers. British alcohol had long before been valued among Poles (see W. Lipoński, *Polska a Brytania 1801-1830. Próby politycznego i cywilizacyjnego dźwignięcia kraju w oparciu o Wielką Brytanię* (Poland and Britain, 1801-1830: The Attempts to Elevate a Country by the Intervention of Great Britain), Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 1978, p. 119).

towns of Cambome and Redruth were still charged with training mining geologists for distant fields, and many Malayan tin companies had their English offices in the old Cornish towns.[52]

It is evident that the booklet was written in the spirit of admiration for the mighty British Empire. The presentation of the island's geographical regions appears to be an account of a tourist journey taken by a knowledge-thirsty entrepreneur, rather than an informative essay for anyone wishing to grasp a basic knowledge of the country. On the other hand, the lusciousness of the descriptions included stimulates imagination and allows for colourful images to appear in front of eyes longing for natural beauty. Nevertheless, there is a notable absence of advice on how to communicate with local residents, and a dearth of practical tips connected with everyday life. As a result, the booklet often resembles more a school textbook than a guide for immigrants from Poland. In fact, given a scarcity of adequate resources, it could have been treated as supplementary source of information during English language classes for more interested students during the war and in the years that followed. Those who decided to follow this path would certainly have found in it a portrayal of British natural resources and topography as well as appreciation and admiration of the country's industry, the power of which was emphasised and probably included with an intention to raise the fighters' morale and reinforce a conviction in the positive outcome of the conflict.

In order to emphasise the impression of the state taking care of the country's environment, Stamp cautions against the misuse of the natural resources with the example of Northumbria, which had already began to suffer from its early reliance on industry. The coal seams in the shallow western part of the field were largely exhausted, and although it would have been profitable to close down a number of small old collieries, unfortunately, the action was considered as infeasible due to the network of villages, towns, and roads that had arisen in the area and would have been left without any industry, therefore sentenced to extinction with its residents moving to other places and probably joining the ranks of lumpenproletariat. Sympathy expressed towards the people and their habitat was certainly socially appropriate in the time of struggle against Nazi Germany.

With the flow of time, however, the spread of industry led to an industrial invasion of the more agricultural Lowland Britain. It is highly probable that ecological awareness was far from being among the top priorities of the then contemporary industrialists. The South Staffordshire coalfield became Britain's Black Country with the advent of the industrial revolution. Using local coal and clayband iron ore, a quiet countryside was converted by the iron masters into

[52] W. Lipoński provides a comprehensive study of the etymology and location of the Tin Isles (see W. Lipoński, *Narodziny cywilizacji Wysp Brytyjskich* (The Birth of the Civilisation of the British Isles), Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2001, pp. 81-87).

"one of the ugliest wastes ever created by man." Such information would have been more than a sufficient reason for not visiting this part of the country, especially for those of the immigrants who came from Polish industrial regions and wished to occupy their leisure time with something that would leave positive reminiscences connected with less military or industrial aspects of their visit to Britain.

Another stop on the journey across Britain was Birmingham, a leading industrial centre with its copper, brass, and other metal industries, its jewellery, electrical machinery, cars, cycles, and food industry. Birmingham took advantage of its central position and of it being a focus of the of the canal, rail, and road networks. Outstanding among the food products from the city were chocolate and cocoa, for Cadbury's, at their model estate of Bournville, set a new standard in housing for workers and the provision of social services.

Towards the northern margins of the Midland Plain was Burton-on-Trent, where water from wells possessed the right degree of permanent hardness to favour brewing. At the southern entrance to the Pennines, Derby exemplified the significance of its nodal position by its railway workshops and motor car works – where the world-famous Rolls-Royce engines and cars were made.

In the northern part of the island, the capital of Scotland – Edinburgh – has long held the title the "Athens of the North", information that could not have been withheld from the romantic Poles. For years it has been both the capital and cultural centre of the country, possessing those industries particularly associated with a university city, such as printing and publishing, as well as a varied range of light industries so typically associated with London.

Apart from only reading about scenic countryside, the booklet encouraged more active forms of appreciating the surroundings. The famous golf course of Gleneagles, one of the innumerable courses devoted to the national game of Scotland, lay in the valley with glorious views of the Highlands to the north and up Glen Eagles of the Ochils to the south.

Nevertheless, there might have been a certain discomfort among the Poles stationed in Scotland. Although the troops realised the importance of their mission in Scotland – which might have been invaded by the Germans from Norway, and in spite of their enthusiasm in carrying out their duties, a number of them might have found it difficult to get accustomed to a place where oat porridge and cakes had long remained the staple articles of the local diet, and of a sparsely populated land where deserted graveyard remains indicated the sites of once prosperous crofting settlements.[53] What perhaps eased the transition and compensated for any inconvenience was that it was a modest country with a very rich history and hospitable citizens.

All those seeking a more varied countryside were advised to visit the charming Lake District situated slightly to the south. Visitors to the Lake Dis-

[53] L. D. Stamp, op. cit. p. 32.

trict had a choice between pleasant little towns in the south, such as Windermere, Ambleside, and Grasmere (with the famed cottage home of Wordsworth), from which they could reach the treeless fells to the north whilst looking on the wooded limestone hills of the south, or the little town of Keswick in the heart of the mountains, under the very shadow of Skiddaw (the fourth highest mountain in England). As Stamp put it, "England's Lake District is small but very beautiful."[54]

Dissatisfied with the charms of what remained of the virgin countryside, one might have desired for more civilized and mundane human excitement. Lancashire could exhibit several examples of a remarkable phenomenon that was characteristically British. The cities of Blackpool and Southport existed in peacetime for no other purpose than to provide amusements for millions of British workers who flocked to the seaside for their annual week or two-week holiday, or for the smaller number who retired there. Blackpool, in particular, is said to have been a town of hotels, apartment houses, amusement parks, cinemas, swimming-pools, and all the multitude of human creations designed to attract and amuse the holiday-maker. Only a few miles away was Fleetwood with a specialisation of a different kind — the main modern fishing harbour on the west coast. Similar entertainment and leisure centres were located in numerous parts of the country (e.g. the world famous Brighton, Scarborough, and Whitby) both along the coastline and inland.

Taking the lead in the art of entertainment and being the Heart of the Empire – London in a certain way shaped the world's image of contemporary Britain. In the early forties, the metropolis was inhabited by approximately ten million people, nearly a quarter of the population of Britain. Stamp familiarised his readers with the opinion, shared by many in the middle of the twentieth century, that the city had become too large, with commerce and business pushing residents out of London and into the towns of Dorking, Redhill, Reigate, Watford, St. Albans, Hertford, Aylesbury, which began to function as London's dormitories.

The Romans who invaded the island realised of the importance of the crossing-place of the Thames. Whether or not there had already existed a village was not exactly known, but soon the Romans encircled the two hills with a wall and established there the commercial and administrative centre of Londinium – with traces of Roman times remaining until these days.

In modern times, the quays of the late-thirties were congested and much of the off-loading was midstream into lighters, and so began one of the distinctive features of London Port, the use of lighters.[55] It is noted that most of the pre-

[54] Ibid., p. 43.

[55] A lighter is a type of flat-bottomed barge used to transfer goods to and from moored ships. Lighters were traditionally unpowered and were moved and steered using long oars called "sweeps", with their motive power provided by water currents. They were operated by highly skilled workers called lightermen and were

war London docks handled only certain specialised cargoes. The West India Docks handled the sugar and rum for which they had been built over a hundred years before, the East India Docks – tea and silk from the East. The Royal Albert Dock handled meat, and the Royal Victoria Dock wheat and flour. Most passengers disembarked or embarked at Tilbury.

One of the outstanding features of the growth of London noted in the booklet was the development of "functional zones" – changing in area rather than location, with the result that each part of London had its characteristic features. Commerce, banking, insurance, and business generally were concentrated in the City, in the old walled area; industry was specially situated in the East End; the post-World War I expansion was in the areas on the northern and western outskirts and to a lesser extent in the south. Administration was concentrated in the city of Westminster, especially in Whitehall; retail shopping in the West End, which was also the centre of social life, with theatres, cinemas, restaurants, hotels, etc.

London's housing inconveniences were merely suggested by mentioning its citizens' yearning for open spaces, which were provided by the south-west area of Surrey (Bagshot, Woking, Cobham), where the poor, uncultivated land provided magnificent spaces of scenic beauty, allowing an escape from the smoke and fog. The booklet advised the reader that excellent relaxation was offered by the River Thames, which enters the London Basin through the beautiful Goring Gap – a stretch of the river that deserves to be seen in early summer by every visitor to Britain. Lower down, the river sweeps by such attractive towns as Henley (famed for its Regatta), Maidenhead, and Windsor, where the Royal Castle faces the playing-fields of Eton on the north bank, before passing on through the centre of London itself – the heart of the Empire.

The image of Britain presented in the booklet is dominated by its author's fascination with various types of industry. In *The Face of Britain,* foreigners were provided with a picture of a flourishing country where inconveniences caused by rapid development were being suffered in a good common cause, occasionally compensated by rural scenery and marvellous sights, but probably only for those who could afford such pleasures. The impression of a cheap, though reliable guidebook, or a schoolbook, remains.

THE PEOPLE OF BRITAIN

Having experienced the defeat in September 1939 by both German and Russian armies, and having endured months of hazardous wanderings through Europe,

a characteristic sight in London's Docks until about the 1960s, when technological changes made lightering largely redundant.

on numerous occasions risking their lives, Polish soldiers and other Poles emigrated to France and, after her fall one year later, to Britain.

Cultural relations between Poland and Britain could not be compared to those with France or Italy. Although Britain was Poland's ally in the war against Germany, and despite the Polish enthusiastic attitude towards that country, which most probably derived from political publicity rather than cultural awareness, there was insufficient understanding of the British, their customs and way of life to really share the joys and sorrows of the fight on the island. Naturally, it would be wrong to assert that, before the period in question, there were no sources presenting Britain to the Poles.[56] However, the sources that existed were not popular among a wide range of Polish society and were appreciated by very few. The situation was changed by the war and the need to seek refuge in the hardest of times. It is true that World War II necessitated the development of various forms and methods of education targeted at newcomers. They had to be acquainted not only with the language, but also with contemporary ways of governing the country and with its cultural legacy, which would assist the newcomers in finding answers to their queries or solutions to their own national dilemmas.

The majority of Polish refugees to Britain knew very little about their host country. The language was bizarre, seemingly unpronounceable to the ordinary man, and the customs were complex, including the unnatural driving on the left. Pruszyński reports on one of the first encounters of the sons of the Slavic Polish nation and the Celts from the north of Great Britain on the day of the flight from France as an unusual cultural experience. The meeting of the people from the Vistula plains, the mountains of Podhale, the forests of Pomorze (Pomerania) and the rich fields of Poznań with the people of the Highlands, of the Clyde and the Tay is compared to the startling discoveries made by Columbus or Cook on their voyages. "A Pole, a village boy from Sandomierz, could not understand it [the difference between an Englishman and a Scotsman] at all. People knew little about the world in his village (…)".[57] The British also comprehended very little about their visitors. Mutual knowledge about each other was limited, and what they knew was often untrue. The one took the other for a kind of Englishman and was rewarded by being taken for a kind of Russian.[58] But in a sense war was a great teacher, helping to appreciate the world and its differences and broadening one's horizons much faster than any school or college would have been able to.

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[56] Multiple were the motives that for centuries directed Polish steps towards the British Isles. While some came in search of education at fine universities, others wished to establish economic relationships for material gain rather than spiritual profit, and still others performed their diplomatic or military duties in a variety of forms. See Dąbrowski, J., *Polacy w Anglii i o Anglii* (Poles in England and about England), Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1962.

[57] K. Pruszyński, op. cit., p. 4.

[58] Ibid.

Bitterly disappointed by the attitude of the French, in their struggle against German invader, thousands of Poles found themselves on British soil. Among them, one could distinguish both troops, who arrived in their thousands after the unsuccessful French campaign, which was a bitter re-enactment of their recent tragedy and tore open fresh wounds, and civilians, whose will to fight, or simply to survive, had led them to that very place.

The majority of Polish soldiers were stationed in Scotland in order to defend the Northern coast of Britain. There were so many of them that accommodation was provided in various temporary camps in suburban parks, on former exhibitions grounds, racecourses, in the courtyards of abandoned factories or in large farms.[59]

No sooner had they settled in on the new grounds than the host nation attracted the visitors' attention. The situation might have resulted from several circumstances. The simple and monotonous soldiers' life might have contributed to the rise of interest in British culture and language. Visits to pubs and socialising with local inhabitants were not uncommon due to the popular view that one got to know them (the locals) in a bar of theirs, "drinking that yellow vodka",[60], that is whisky. The first stage of making acquaintances predominantly occurred through exchanging views on alcohol distillation techniques and the ways of alcohol consumption. Furthermore, Poles were sincerely advised to slap back if they were slapped on the back, and to say "yes" or "no" if they heard something similar from the mouth of their foreign friends.[61] The local alcohol – whisky – was viewed as an "all right kind of herb vodka",[62] which was far from the Polish "czysta" (pure vodka), but it was still a man's drink.

Also, the newcomers' attention often shifted to more subtle issues, demanding more of gentleness rather than battlefield courage and not as much language abilities. It was humorously noticed in the 1950s that the people on the continent have sex lives, whereas in England they use bed warmers to heat up their beds.[63] In fact, during the war years it was commonly believed that the British never spoke about love – it was thought of as improper, immoral and even unmanly.[64] Unlike the islanders, the Poles, who were perceived as exotic, did not try to avoid the subject or big words or declarations – phrases so frequently omitted by the British in their interpersonal relations. Although they came from a country that was not as far away from Scotland as India or Canada, they lived too far away for anyone to comprehend anything either positive

[59] Ibid., p. 7.
[60] Ibid., p. 11.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] G. Mikés, *Cudze chwalicie...* (How to Be an Alien), Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1958, p. 28.
[64] K. Pruszyński, op. cit., p. 39.

or negative about them, and the stories of the battles they had fought in Poland, Norway (Narvik) or France, combined with the cruel martyrdom their country had suffered, as well as with the fact that they were Allies and guests – all made them rather more attractive as far as male-female relationships were concerned than the better paid British soldiers.[65]

However, not only were the visitors curious to get to know the local population, but also there was something more about the country that made them feel like home. The grass, fed by the rich moisture of the ocean, was more luscious than what they had seen in France; the houses seemed mellowed by age and at times reminded them of the ones they had left behind; and "the stars during the fresh nights were exactly like those they had seen in Poland."[66] It is very difficult to state when exactly the surge in the demand for knowledge about the host country was initiated. It can be supposed that individuals demonstrated their interest in the field from the moment they set their feet on British soil. Troops of all ranks had their initial notion of the country, but their expectations as to what they wished to acquire differed significantly, which was predetermined by the men's social and educational background. Hence, fortunate were the military units with individuals schooled enough to provide them with essential information on English art and literature, or the status of the Empire and the main lines of British policy. Unfortunately, the unavailability of such people necessitated reliance on the sources provided by the British themselves. These were predominantly pamphlets that comprehensibly presented various aspects of Britishness. Due to an insufficient number of representatives, which was a result of typical wartime deficiency of qualified staff, it was probably much more convenient for the local authorities to distribute books than to organise meetings or film shows.

One of the main bodies responsible for propagating British thought among the newcomers was the British Council, whose Regional Officers supplied the Allies with cultural propaganda. The work they carried out might be compared to modern day sales representatives and their attempts to sound the market out. Whether consciously or not, their aim was to sell the knowledge of their own country. Following the thought presented, it can be stated that Britain had become merchandise on her own, and there were tens of thousands of potential customers awaiting for an appropriately targeted wide-ranging advertising campaign. True in this respect are the words of Duff Cooper (Minister of Information under Winston Churchill), which he addressed to Churchill. He stated that the popular view was that the British Council existed only for cultural, and not for political propaganda, but then he called the organisation's activity "mere camouflage" as "no country would be justified in spending public money on

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., p. 18.

cultural propaganda unless it had also a political or a commercial significance."[67]

It was Harvey Wood (the British Council's Regional Officer for Scotland) who had been seconded hastily from Edinburgh University to work with the Polish Army in Scotland. Having been asked to report on the educational and cultural needs of Polish troops, he discovered an immense demand for English teaching and cultural education.[68]

The co-operation between Harvey Woods and the Polish units came to fruition in 1941, when the Exhibition of Allied Art was organised by the British Council in the National Gallery of Scotland, in Edinburgh.[69] At the same time, in the early 1940s, the British Publishers' Guild published, on the Council's behalf, a set of *International Guild Books*. These were booklets printed in the languages of the various allied communities. In the meantime, Longmans Publishing Company issued the *British Life and Thought* series outlining the essential areas life in Britain, ranging from British history to agricultural research or trade unions.[70]

There are many various points from which one may start learning about a country. Some commence with a historical overview, others with geography or scientific achievements. We can try to adopt the potential point of view of a typical representative of the Polish community in Britain. Such an individual might have desired to acquire an insight into their hosts' character before exploring the country's cultural legacy. They might have wished to know what kind of people they met every day in the streets, churches or pubs. Those amiable local citizens, whose tongue they were trying to grasp, were oftentimes the primary factor determining the willingness to do any further type of study.

The English and Their Country, by Thomas Burke,[71] differs from the remaining titles in the series. Although all the pamphlets were written in a chatty

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[67] D. Cooper to W. Churchill, 7 Feb. 1941, PRO, PREM 4/20/3, quoted in F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 78.

[68] He also noted that the Polish Army had become a full-time responsibility for him, with regular visits to Polish units all over the country. Describing his work, Wood stated that teachers had had to be found in considerable numbers, to teach English to Polish troops, to Polish airmen, and to the crews of Polish warships. Many of the teachers had never taught English as a foreign language before, and some of them had never taught English at all. He highlighted the teachers' commitment notifying his superiors that, in order that the continuity of their teaching should not be interrupted, some carried out their duties aboard destroyers and submarines, and occasionally went to sea with their "pupils" (F. Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 119-120).

[69] F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 120. "The Exhibition was predominantly by Polish artists, but there were contributions from Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia, Holland and Norway."

[70] F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 121. The series of pamphlets were not the only relevant publishing activity of the British Council. Among its publications there were dictionaries and self-study books (e.g. *Basic English for Polish Students* (Evans Brothers Limited, London 1940), with the foreword by Polish Ambassador to Great Britain Edward Raczyński, in which he encourages Poles to learn English so that they would be able to comprehend and appreciate the culture, customs and character of one of the world's greatest powers. The institution also was involved in various teaching schemes among which, apart from teaching English, there was also university or technical training, whose aim was assisting in post-war reconstruction of the stutents' own countries.

[71] T. Burke, *The English and Their Country,* Longmans, Green and Co., London 1941.

and accessible style, this one includes examples of the English sense of humour, which would have made it an optimal prologue to a stay in Britain.

Judging by the work, the English would have liked to be perceived as a nation that have adopted the virtues of all the peoples that had ever inhabited, invaded or visited Britain. Common in the series are references to the Early Britons, the Romans who overthrew that civilisation and for over four hundred years imposed their own way of life, the Danes and Saxons, and the Normans who came in 1066. Each group of invaders left something with the indigenous peoples, without ever having truly "conquered" the whole of the land.

The booklet itself contains numerous references to both history and geographic varieties of the region being described and differentiates between the melancholic people in tune with their landscape inhabiting the damp Fen country of Lincolnshire, the kindly voiced, red faced inhabitants of the western counties and, occupying the south-western extremity of the storm-beaten rocks of Cornwall, the hardy but saturnine Cornishmen. The division expands, separating the island into the industrial north and northern midlands, where the people were said to be generally harder and more energetic but of simpler tastes than their southern counterparts.

Although Burke suggests that one ought to try to find out who the people really were, one also ought to be aware that trying to provide a clear analysis of the English within the booklet's few pages would be trying to achieve what many volumes have not succeeded in the past. As a result, he quotes an unknown European observer of their ways: "The English – are they human?"[72] The answer is supported with numerous examples outlining the (extra)ordinariness of the islanders' character, frequently abolishing negative stereotypes – which was probably a covert goal of the pamphlet. However, it can be argued that the readers were not advised to regard the booklet as a guide providing an unsophisticated explanation as to "How to treat the English" (known for their frigidity and stiffness), but rather as a source helping to view them as cultured hosts. According to Burke, negative features exhibited by the English are simply a "cover" assumed by them to conceal the fact that they were, in principle, shy.[73] The arrogant pioneer and blustering adventurer who had built an Empire is presented as a boy, with a boy's characteristics, which were far from frigidity and stiffness. It was not commonly recognised that he was highly emotional, but at the same time ashamed of showing emotion; keenly sensitive, but taught that being too sensitive was a sign of weakness. He wanted to be liked, but would never let it show. Such features distinguished him far from the hard-headed John Bull.[74] The justification for certain short-

[72] Ibid., p. 15.

[73] A discussion of how the English were perceived by 19th-century Poles is included in W. Lipoński, *Poland and Britain*, pp. 97-102.

[74] John Bull – a fictional character supposed to personify Englishness and certain English virtues (and as such can be compared to Uncle Sam and the USA). He features in many 19th-century cartoons. His appear-

comings in his behaviour was that he based his conclusions more upon feeling than logic and, as a result, found it impossible to defend many of his views intellectually, while certain of his convictions. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the typical Englishman was sentimental, through and through. Another characteristic leading to the formation of popular negative stereotypes, was that the Englishman did not like to give his friendship freely to everybody – but when he gave it he gave it with all his heart. One learns that the much unpopular self-complacency did not in fact exist, and that, on the contrary, the impression arose as a result of the English being highly sensitive to their own continuous criticism of themselves. A permanent dissatisfaction, combined with unwillingness to confess to strangers what they really felt, made them oddities.

It is through courage, loyalty, sacrifice, personal honesty, the English way of life, the flag and the country that the English wished to be perceived by other nations. Still, loud expressions of patriotism, heroism, or sentiment were among things an English patriot abhorred and was embarrassed of whenever they took place in his presence, thus becoming objects of his laughter and irony. Adding to the English peculiarities, one might be amazed to hear the English call their children "brats", referring to the flag as "the duster", or speaking of an overwhelming victory as "not a bad show"; at the same time, they were outwardly serious only about trifles: cars, dogs, gardening, golf, stamp collecting, cricket, football, or racing (the order of these depending on personal preferences).[75]

The Great Britain of the booklet appeared to be a uniform country where everyone spoke English. Not too long after the war, a Hungarian writer stated that when he had arrived at Britain he thought he knew English, but after no more than an hour realised he did not know a word.[76] The same astonishment could be noticed in the reaction of a Polish private who, having being rescued by a white teethed, red haired and broad shouldered sailor, on thanking his English saviour heard that he was – Scottish.[77] The British took steps to educate foreigners about this aspect of their country's reality. They instructed the visitors that Wales and Scotland, divided from England by impalpable frontiers were, in physical features, moral characteristics and speech, separate nations. So diverse were they that an Englishman could not even understand Scottish without a glossary and an appreciation of Welsh literature or participation in Welsh poetic festivals (called Eisteddfods) would equal a task as impossible as comprehending hieroglyphics. Each county of this little island had its local

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ance is typical of an 18th-century country gentleman, evoking an idyllic rural past (see J. O'Driscoll, *Britain – The Country and Its People: An Introduction for Learners of English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997, p. 11).

[75] T. Burke, op. cit., p. 9.

[76] G. Mikés, op. cit., p. 30.

[77] K. Pruszyński, op. cit., p. 5.

dialect rooted in the remote past, and many of the pleasantries turned on this matter. All the people spoke English, but they did it in such different ways that a peasant from Cornwall could hardly understand his counterpart from eastern England, and a shepherd from the rugged valleys of the Lake District in the north-west could hardly talk to the shepherd from the smooth, rolling hills of Sussex in the south, while the Londoner on holiday had difficulty in comprehending any of them.

Another of the many features of English life that would puzzle strangers was the number of "classes" into which the social scene was divided. Most Polish guests were unfamiliar with the extended class system of Great Britain which the pamphlet undertook to explain. The largest of all these classes was the lower-middle class or "petit bourgeoisie", which – being mainly a town class – was the largest in all Western countries. The booklet states that the life of the countryman did not exhibit many divergences in comparison with other countries. The differences between nations and their way of life were perceived mainly in the town life, and the life of this large class in England was in many aspects sharply different from that of the petit bourgeoisie of other countries.

The booklet argues against the popular view, based on reading novels or seeing plays and films, that a typical Englishman was educated at a public school – Eton, Harrow, Winchester (or another school of this kind) – and at Oxford or Cambridge; that he lived in a comfortable house attended by servants; was a member of a well-known London club. The intention was to paint a picture of a simple nation living their simple lives, forced to face the atrocities of war and, just like the refugees, ready to take any measures to put an end to the ongoing evil.

As far as culinary habits are concerned, Burke alludes to certain behaviours that were distinctive for the English. The most prominent example, which did not need any explicit description, was the English breakfast. No other country began the day with such a meal as porridge, bacon and eggs, or fish or sausages, toast and marmalade and tea. The average Englishman's Sunday midday dinner of roast joint of beef or mutton, with vegetables, followed by an equally solid sweet, and succeeded by an afternoon sleep also aroused curiosity among foreigners. As the pamphlet states, no other country knew the English Sunday and its penitential atmosphere. Sunday was the day when more people were at liberty to be out and about than on any day of the week. It was also the day when the perplexing English, instead of increasing their transport, reduced it – when they kept most of their restaurants shut, and restricted their public entertainment to music, except in those towns where cinemas were allowed to open. Perhaps that was why Americans who visited Europe in peace-time always felt more at home in the countries of the Continent than in England – the way of life there was nearer to their own than England's.

Absurd or astonishing as many aspects of the English way of life might have seemed to newcomers, no Englishman could defend these illogical customs, and they did not try to, as these were all part of their individualism,

which was not an exaggeration but just the outcome of both the insular character and multinational influences that have been leaving their marks on the inhabitants.

It is these features that made the English an enigma to the populations of other countries, and their logic and values – incomprehensible. One could not tie them down to rigid formulas, nor be certain that in given circumstances they would behave predictably. An Englishman is said to be able to surprise at any time, and was always surprised to find that he was in any way surprising. To him, his proceedings were eminently sensible, and indeed they were, so long as it is remembered that they were based on the logic not of reason but of feeling – not of prose but of poetry.

Naturally, the patterns illustrated by Burke did not apply to all Britons. Still, his essay certainly provided a basis for better understanding between the hosts and their foreign guests.

World War II set its stamp on all the civilised world. For Europe it was also connected with a new division of power among the victorious states. There emerged the two opposing camps dividing the Old Continent. The economically better-developed countries of the West acted as a counterbalance to the Eastern Bloc – the countries of "people's democracy", including Poland. The latter, liberated by the Red Army, were made dependent on the communist ideology of the Soviet Union. During the period in question, both sides attempted to publicise their views and ideals among their rivals using all available media.

The motives for the launch of the British propaganda campaign targeted at Poles included the need to familiarise newcomers with the culture and customs of the host country; a willingness to demonstrate and impress with British achievements in a variety of fields; a desire to be understood; a need to spread Western thought among the guests from the East; and, though definitely not amongst the official aims, a need to win over supporters who in the future might oppose communism.

An examination of the Polish versions of the pamphlets revealed that they were of superior educational value and constituted a source of popular knowledge on a number of issues, as they presented a wide range of subjects in a comprehensive way. However, the struggle against the deadly enemy and the complex international situation influenced the content of the booklets and made them appear more impersonal and general rather than directed at specific nationalities.

Harmless as the content of the booklets appears to have been, these publications aimed at creating counterbalance for the aggressive communist propaganda, which in the post-war period was probably more determined to defame the United Kingdom in the eyes of the Eastern Bloc countries than the British was in propagating their ways. However informative and approachable the booklets were, there was certainly much more that their authors could have done to encourage Poles to appreciate "Britishness". With the minimum of

consultation with the Poles, the British Council representatives would have learnt the most efficient approach to the Polish audience and would have been able to pass their knowledge on to the authors of the individual pamphlets with suggestions as to how to adapt their content. Without explicit reference to Poles as their audience, the booklets definitely lost much of their authenticity and power of persuasion. Instead, they come across as typical guide books and appropriate material for teachers of English, which was also one of the initial aims of the series.

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