

Polish-Australian Connections

Our shared history and experiences



Introduction

On 20 February 1972, Poland and Australia announced the establishment of diplomatic relations. This decision led to the official opening of respective embassies in Canberra and Warsaw, although relations had existed between both countries for much longer.

Poland and Australia enjoy a proud and significant tradition of cooperation which reaches far beyond that official date. The length of the diplomatic relationship between our two countries does not reflect the breadth and depth of interconnections, mutual exchanges and interaction, and shared features and history, linking both countries and their societies. Fifty years of diplomatic relations pale in comparison to the long history of Polish settlement Down Under and to Polish-Australian bonds of friendship forged over centuries.

It is worth remembering that the establishment of official diplomatic relations occurred when Poland was under communist rule. The Polish community in Australia, represented by the Polish Community Council of Australia, actively supported the fight of the Polish diaspora around the world for freedom and democracy in Poland. Promoting the Polish cause in Australia, the majority of Polish organisations refused to have any official contact with the Polish Consulate in Sydney or the Embassy in Canberra till 1989. At the same time the Australian government provided constant assistance and shelter for thousands of Polish migrants and refugees escaping communist Poland. This turbulent history cannot be erased but it provides a lens through which we can better understand and appreciate the relevance of the changes which have taken place since then.

Against the background of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, and to highlight the importance of the personal dimension of Polish-Australian relations, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Canberra has joined forces with the Polish Community Council of Australia, the peak representative body of the Polish community in Australia, to present a small selection of interesting and often little-known facts, as well as curious and inspiring stories which demonstrate the deeply rooted affinity between Poland and Australia.

This publication aims to provide a glimpse into shared history and experiences, including various Polish contributions to multicultural Australia. We intend to use this anniversary to reflect on the development of relations between Poland and Australia, and to celebrate these achievements, at the same time encouraging you to further explore the many layers of warm friendship between both countries that continues to drive forward and enrich the partnership.

We trust you will enjoy this journey through *Polish-Australian Connections*, which champions people-to-people ties, placing community links at the heart of relations between Poland and Australia.



Embassy
of the Republic of Poland
in Canberra



The First Polish Footsteps

Willem de Vlamingh's ships, with black swans, at the entrance to the Swan River, Western Australia, coloured engraving (1796), derived from an earlier drawing (now lost)

Wikimedia



The first Poles to arrive in Australia were ten Polish sailors, who sailed into Western Australia on a Dutch ship in 1696, and together with Captain Willem de Vlamingh, explored the west coast of Australia.

The first known Pole to settle in Australia was the convict Jozef Potaski, who, together with his family, came to Hobart, Tasmania in 1803. Over the next forty years, a dozen Polish citizens settled in Australia – mainly members of the Polish nobility and army officers. Among them was Sir Paul (Paweł) Edmund Strzelecki, an outstanding explorer, cartographer, geologist, researcher and scientist, travelled to Australia shortly afterwards. During his four year stay (1839–1843), Strzelecki explored the highest continental mountain range – the Great Dividing Range – where he climbed the highest peak, Mt Kosciuszko. Strzelecki was the first to discover gold in Australia, and also explored and named the land of Gippsland. He also compiled a detailed geological map of New South Wales and Tasmania. He wrote the monumental work entitled *A Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, which for many years was the main source of knowledge about Australia.



P.E. Strzelecki's portrait by Maria Niewiadomska Polish Embassy in Canberra

Shaping the Australian Landscape



Mount Kosciuszko with snow, viewed from Guthega Peak

Wikimedia: Martin John Budden Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

Mount Kosciuszko Marks on the landscape

The highest mountain in mainland Australia, Mount Kosciuszko (2,228m) was named by the famous Polish explorer Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki. In 1840, Strzelecki, together with James Macarthur, were the first Europeans to go on a historic journey from Sydney to Melbourne. On 12 March

In addition to Strzelecki's legacy, there are other place names in Australia with strong Polish roots. A periodic freshwater lake, located in the Gibson Desert in Western Australia, was discovered by a Polish cartographer, Colonel Jerzy Gruszka (pictured). It was named Lake Gruszka. Another place is the Australian town of Cracow in Queensland. Located 485 km north of Brisbane, its name refers to the former Polish capital Kraków. However, the reason for this resemblance is largely unknown, and it is thought that Polish settlers probably lived close to Cracow. Lastly, on the New England Highway just outside Maitland, stands the Private P. Z. Trzecinski Bridge. Private Trzecinski, born in Poland, lived in Australia from 1954, serving in the Australian Military. He was the only Maitland man not born in Australia to be killed in the Vietnam War.



J and T Dobrostanski archives
Courtesy of Bogumila Zongollowicz

Monument honoring Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki, located on the Lake Jindabyne foreshore, NSW
Courtesy of Fr Wieslaw Slowik

1840, Strzelecki and Macarthur stood on Mount Townsend, where Strzelecki made geodetic measurements and found the neighbouring mountain to be slightly higher. Then he took his hat off and solemnly named the highest mountain Mount Kosciuszko to commemorate the Polish hero, General Tadeusz Kosciuszko, who fought for freedom, independence and equality in Poland and the United States.

Strzelecki's legacy

Paul Strzelecki left a lasting legacy in Australia, with numerous places named in his honour. Some of the more well-known places named after Strzelecki include the Strzelecki Ranges in Victoria, Mount Strzelecki (636m) in the Northern Territory, and Mount Strzelecki (756m) located in the Strzelecki National Park on Flinders Island. There is also the Strzelecki River and the Strzelecki Desert in South Australia, as well as the town of Strzelecki in east Victoria.

Polish Hill River

One of the very first Polish settlements in Australia is located in South Australia, not far from the state's capital. The small town of Polish Hill River, 133 km north of Adelaide, was the first place in Australia where Polish migrants lived together and cultivated their native traditions. In the 1850s, the first Polish settlers came to Australia to settle in the eastern part of Hill River. Community life was focused strongly around the Catholic parish, led by the Polish Jesuit priest, Leon Rogalski. Rogalski helped to create a strong sense of community, with religious, social and cultural ties to Poland. Currently, the area around Polish Hill River is also famous for its world class wines.

Polish Hill River church and museum Photo by Malgorzata Kwiatkowska



World War I, the interwar period and World War II

Despite the Polish community being a relatively small migrant group in Australia during the interwar period, there was a strong relationship between Australia and Poland. Polish organisations existed in Sydney and Brisbane, with a less formal community active in Melbourne. The first Polish community centre in Australia was established in Brisbane.

During World War I (WWI), a Polish relief fund was established and active around Australia. Its role was to fundraise for Polish war victims. Dame Nellie Melba GBE, a prominent Australian operatic soprano, held a special concert in aid of the relief fund at the Sydney Town Hall in 1915. A large number of Polish-born men joined the Australian army and took part in active service on the battlefields of Europe.

The relief fund was reactivated again during World War II (WWII). It focused on fund raising as well as sending parcels to war-torn Europe. The Polish diplomatic corps were also active, advocating for the needs of Poland, as was the Consulate until the Polish government-in-exile lost international recognition.

Top: Polish Relief Fund Dame Nellie Melba concert poster
Yarra Ranges Regional Museum Collection

Right: Polish Relief Fund volunteers
Polish Museum and Archives in Australia

Polish Museum and Archives in Australia



Polish diaspora in Australia



*International Refugees Boarding boat in Europe en route to Australia
Courtesy of Edward Dudzinski/History SA 2015*

Post-war waves of migration

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, until 1947, about 6,500 people born in Poland lived in Australia. The first great wave of migration began after WWII, when over 50,000 Poles immigrated to Australia from 1947–1954. As these displaced Poles could not return to Poland for political reasons, they were known as the political emigration, not only here, but world-wide. At the same time, Australia was seeking new migrants as part of Arthur Calwell's 'populate or perish' policy. These Polish emigrants quickly assimilated and took up various paid jobs. Many Poles found employment in large infrastructural projects such as the construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme complex in New South Wales and the Hydro Electricity Scheme in Tasmania. Other jobs Polish migrants undertook were: cane cutting in Queensland or coalmining, and fruit picking and timber industry works in Victoria. Some Polish soldiers were sent to Manus Island in Papua New Guinea to strengthen the labour force on the island. Others worked on public projects such as railway building in South Australia and Western Australia.

The next wave of migration took place in the years 1957–1966 (almost 15,000 Poles) and in the years 1980–1991, when over 25,000 Polish citizens came to Australia following the imposition of martial law. More Poles preferred to live in Melbourne (33%) than Sydney (25%) or other cities (Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Newcastle, Hobart).

Polish communities and culture

According to the 2016 Australian Census, 183,968 people of Polish origin live in Australia, including 45,368 people born in Poland. On a daily basis 48,083 people communicate in Polish at home. In recent years, there has been an influx of young people to Australia who take up studies or come on a contract to work.

As an ethnic group in Australia, Poles are well organised with numerous organisations, churches, schools, folkloric dance groups and theatre groups. They cultivate Polish traditions and culture, preserve and celebrate Polish history, achievements, heritage and promote a positive image of Poland within the Australian community.

One of the main organisations representing the Polish diaspora is the Polish Community Council of Australia, which was established on 6 January 1950 and is one of the oldest ethnic peak organisations operating in the country. It brings together 22 Polish state-wide community organisations, collectively representing over 10,000 community members.



*PCCA first convention, held in Sydney
Polish Museum and Archives in Australia*

Polish-Australian Mateship



Australian and Polish Rats of Tobruk

The Siege of Tobruk cemented relationships between Polish and Australian soldiers. During WWII, Polish soldiers participated in military action along with the Australians. They served in Britain's Royal Air Force, taking part in the Battle of Britain and in Bomber Command operations. They were also brought together as brothers in arms in the desert trenches around Tobruk in Libya, which was besieged by German and Italian troops in 1941. The Germans mockingly referred to the Australian, British and Polish soldiers fighting to defend the fortress as the *Rats of Tobruk*, a name later reclaimed as a badge of honour. After the war, the Rats of Tobruk Association lobbied Australian politicians, advocating on behalf of the Polish Carpathian brigade, to consider the Polish *Rats of Tobruk* as potential migrants to Australia.

*Top left: Soldiers of the 9th Australian Division welcoming two of the Polish infantrymen who have just arrived in Tobruk
Australian War Memorial*



*Top: German bombs explode during one of the heaviest air raids on Tobruk, 1941
Imperial War Museum*

*Centre: Soldiers of the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade in the trenches during the defence of Tobruk, 1941
Museum of the Second World War, Gdansk*

*Bottom: Soldiers of the 9th Australian Division, assisted by Polish soldiers, digging new positions soon after the arrival in the area of the Poles
Australian War Memorial*

Australian pilots help the Polish underground resistance

Australian pilots flew dangerous, night time missions to airlift aid to Warsaw during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against the Nazi German occupiers. From 1 August–2 October 1944, the Polish underground resistance led by the Home Army unsuccessfully tried to oust the Germans and seize back control of Warsaw, before the city was occupied by the advancing Soviet army. Courageous Australian pilots with the Royal Air Force Halifax and Liberator squadrons, flew from southern Italy over German-occupied Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and back again. They delivered vital supplies to Poles fighting for Warsaw and greatly uplifted Polish morale.

Plaque along the Federal Highway, RAAF Memorial Grove, Canberra, honoring Australian Airmen who supplied the Polish Home Army during the Warsaw Uprising Polish Embassy in Canberra



An Australian airman in Nazi German occupied Poland

Flight Lieutenant Allan Hunter Hammet was born in Melbourne in 1921. Allan enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in 1939.



On the night of 16–17 August 1944, on the return from his third Warsaw operation, his Liberator KG-933 was attacked near Krakow, by an undetected German fighter-plane and set on fire. He and two of the six-man crew bailed out and survived. Thanks to the help received from locals, he managed to recover while staying undetected by the Germans. Later Allan joined the Polish Underground (under the name of 'Stefan Erbe', as issued by the Home Army) and married Jadwiga Wielowiejska, widow of Polish officer Jan Wielowiejski. After the Soviet Union's Red Army reached the territory of Poland in early 1945, Allan with his wife and her daughter from the first marriage, managed to return to England. From there, they travelled by sea to Australia. Allan was discharged from the RAAF in November 1945.

Portrait of Flight Lieutenant Allan Hunter Hammet at RAAF Overseas Headquarters Australian War Memorial



Australia representing Poland in the Soviet Union

In 1943–1944, long before establishing official diplomatic relations, Australia took over the representation of Polish interests in the Soviet Union. The Katyn Massacre of April 1943, where 22,000 Poles (mainly officers) were killed by Soviets, led to the termination of Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations. The Polish Embassy was subsequently closed, leaving Polish interests and hundreds of thousands of Polish exiles unprotected. Between May 1943 and August 1944, Australian diplomats stepped up and represented Poland. This helped to positively influence the lives of countless Poles in the USSR, and shaped the perception of Poland and Russia in the Australian diplomatic corps for the following decades.

The Australian Legation in Kuibyshev in 1943, where the Soviet Government was stationed during the early part of the war DFAT CC Attribution 4.0 International

Children fundraise for Mount Kosciuszko

In 1940, exactly one hundred years after the naming of Mount Kosciuszko, a commemorative plaque was placed on Australia's highest peak. The Polish Honorary Consul-General, Ladislav (Władysław) Adam de Noskowski, unveiled the plaque in the presence of the Attorney General, Sir Henry Manning, representing the NSW Government, and about four hundred other attendees. The event became a symbol of Australian sympathy for Poland during WWII. Interestingly, school children in New South Wales participated in a fundraiser to cover the cost of the plaque. In the late 1990s, the plaque was replaced to correct the spelling of Mount Kosciuszko. The original plaque is now on display at the Polish Embassy in Canberra.

Plaque unveiling during Mount Kosciuszko centenary celebrations, 17 February 1940 Courtesy of Bogumila Zongollowicz



Australian help during communist rule

In 1981, the *Help Poland Live* appeal raised A\$2.3 million for Poland, including A\$1 million donated by the Australian government. After martial law was declared in communist Poland, the Polish community in Australia organised various grass-roots initiatives to support the Solidarity movement in its struggle for democracy. The *Australian National Committee for Relief to Poland* was set up, under Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's patronage. In November 1981, he launched a fundraising appeal named *Help Poland Live*. This initiative successfully reached the broader Australian community, who were more than ready to extend a helping hand to Poles in need.

Prime Minister The Right Hon Malcolm Fraser (seated on left) at the official launch of the *Help Poland Live* campaign, November 1981 with Polish Community Council of Australia President Krzysztof Lancucki (at the lectern) Courtesy of Krzysztof Lancucki



Right: Polish volunteer firefighters during the ceremony of handing over the funds raised for the restoration of Kosciuszko National Park to the Australian Ambassador to Poland, Lloyd Brodrick on 13 February 2020 at the Polish Presidential Palace



Eliza Radzikowska-Bialobrzewska/KPRP



Left: Polish Ambassador Michał Kołodziejcki on a field trip to Kosciuszko National Park in February 2021, one year after the Polish fundraising efforts Polish Embassy in Canberra

Indigenous Australians visit Poland

Indigenous Australians did not know much about the figure of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, after whom Mount Kosciuszko is named.

In 2017, the Australian Polish community, invited a delegation of Ngarigo people to a joint celebration of the 200th anniversary of Tadeusz Kosciuszko's death, which took place in Krakow. It was an opportunity not only to visit distant Poland but also to learn more about Kosciuszko as an international hero who attached great importance to the ideals of freedom and tolerance, claiming that everyone is equal. Moreover, ahead of his contemporaries, he argued that women enjoy the same rights as men.

Visit to Kosciuszko Mound in Krakow Kosciuszko Heritage Inc.



Polish support of Australian bushfire relief

During the 2019–2020 Australian bushfire season, Poland raised over A\$150,000 for the rehabilitation of Kosciuszko National Park. Due to bushfires, an approximate 33% of Kosciuszko National Park was destroyed, threatening many unique and previously endangered species with extinction. Polish volunteer firefighters from Poreba Spytkowska in southern Poland organised a fundraiser, and in February 2020, a donation of over A\$150,000 was symbolically handed to the Australian Ambassador to Poland in the presence of the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. The Polish community in Australia also held its own fundraising appeals and funds raised continue to help the long-term rehabilitation and protection of Kosciuszko National Park.



Australian Ambassador Lloyd Brodrick at the Warsaw Airport supervising the dispatch of vaccines Australian Embassy in Warsaw

Solidarity in fighting the pandemic

Poland was the first country in the world to support Australia in the fight against COVID-19. In August 2021, the Polish government provided Australia with one million doses of the Pfizer vaccine, reselling its surplus on a non-profit basis. The decision to give Australia priority was made by the Polish government due to the outbreak of the Delta variant in Australia. The agreement was officially announced on 15 August 2021 by Prime Minister Scott Morrison. According to modelling by the Burnet Institute, in New South Wales alone, the additional doses sourced from Poland prevented an estimated 254 deaths.



Above: Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison meeting in November 2021
Krystian Maj/KPRM
Right: Tweet by Prime Minister Morrison

Scott Morrison @ScottMorrisonMP
An extra 1 million Pfizer vaccine doses will soon land in Australia after we secured a deal with Poland.
These extra doses are on top of the 40 million Pfizer doses we have already secured for 2021. It will provide a big shot in the arm to our vaccine roll-out.
Przetłumacz Tweets



Making marks in Humanities and the Sciences



Dr Karl Kruszelnicki
Photo by Ross Coffey

Making science quirky and popular

One Polish-Australian, son of Polish Holocaust survivors, has been instrumental in popularising science for children and adults alike. Karl Sven Woytek Sas Konkovitch Matthew Kruszelnicki, known as 'Dr Karl', accidentally immigrated to Australia with his parents, as they inadvertently boarded a ship to Australia, instead of the United States. In Australia, he studied and worked as a physicist designing a steel testing device, and later designing and building a machine for receiving electrical signals from the human retina, allowing various eye diseases to be diagnosed. Aged 32, he graduated from medical studies and worked in various hospitals around Sydney. Currently, Dr Karl popularises science using modern communication tools (TikTok, Twitter, etc), and is best known as an author (47 books) and science commentator on Australian radio and television.

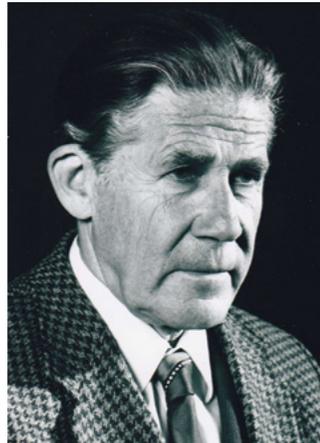
Star gazing

When looking at the night sky in Australia, there are marks that were made by Polish astronomers. Most famously, the star *HD 101065*, known as Przybylski's Star, was discovered in 1961 by a Polish astronomer working Mount Stromlo observatory, Antoni 'Bill' Przybylski. Przybylski's star is an unusual star that fascinates astronomers to this day. Its main features are a very slow rotation period around its axis (about 188 years, compared to 24 hours for the earth) and its unique chemical composition. Additionally, the robotic telescope at the Australian Siding Spring observatory is part of the *Solaris* project, started in 2010 by Polish researchers from the Nicolaus Copernicus Astronomical Centre, at the Polish Academy of Sciences. The project aims to search for extrasolar planets in double star systems.

A humble researcher and writer

Polish-born writer, journalist, author, editor and researcher **Lech Paszkowski** worked for a living, and devoted his personal free time to research and write about the history of Poles in Australia. He arrived in Australia in 1948 with the help of his relative, Stanislaw de Tarczynski, already based in Melbourne. Paszkowski's works are not only historically important but also regarded as literary works in themselves. Due to his work carried out over decades, the significant contribution of Poles to the history of Australia has been documented in English. Being immensely humble, he refused to receive numerous awards offered to him through his lifetime.

Lech Paszkowski
Tadeusz Dobrostanski CC BY3.0



Our environment and COVID-19 research

Poles have also made their contribution in the field of environmental protection and COVID-19 research. **Professor Lidia Morawska** has been a collaborator and adviser to the World Health Organization (WHO) for many years, and for over two decades she has co-created WHO recommendations related to air quality. Based on results of the team led by Professor Morawska, WHO updated its recommendations to fight the coronavirus. She was on the list of the 100 most influential people for 2021, published by Time magazine.

Additionally, **Professor Katherine Kedzierska** was also instrumental in leading research about COVID-19. In March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, a team led by Professor Kedzierska identified four types of immune cells involved in fighting the COVID-19 virus.

Professor Lidia Morawska
Queensland University of Technology



Professor Katherine Kedzierska
The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity

Multiculturalism in Australia

Two Polish-born sociologists had a significant impact on the birth of multiculturalism in Australia. Known as the *father of Australian multiculturalism*, the Polish-Australian sociologist, **Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki** was born in Krakow in 1920, arriving in Australia in 1955. An outstanding sociologist, intellectual and advisor to the Australian government, as well as an ardent Polish and Australian patriot, he founded Australia's first Department of Sociology at the Australian National University. He was also a long-time member of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences.

Multiculturalism was also a passion for **Professor Jerzy Jaroslaw Smolicz** (known as JJ George Smolicz). Born in Warsaw in 1935, he and his family were deported to Siberia, later migrating to Scotland, and then Australia. He worked at the University of Adelaide as a teacher, specialising in the sociology of education. Professor Smolicz was a key figure in the development and implementation of Australia's multicultural and linguistic policy. He was a senior multicultural consultant to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, and for twenty years, Chair of the Multicultural Education Committee in South Australia. In recognition of his services, an award in the field of languages and multicultural education was posthumously established in his name.

Culture and the Arts



PolArt 2018
PolArt Inc.

PolArt: the largest Polish festival outside Poland

The PolArt festival is one of the most eagerly awaited cultural events on the Polish-Australian calendar. This triennial visual and performing arts festival brings together hundreds of performers and artists from across Australia and New Zealand. Originally held in Sydney in 1975 under the name Art-Pol, it has now taken place in all the capital cities of Australia (Sydney – 1975, 1991, 2003, 2022; Adelaide – 1981, 1994, 2009; Brisbane – 1988, 2000, 2018; Melbourne – 1984, 1997, 2015; Hobart – 2006; Perth – 2012). PolArt is currently regarded as the largest Polish cultural festival held outside Poland.

Young dancers at
Brisbane 2018 PolArt
Photo by Jola Szymczyk



Polish classical music in Australia

Polish pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski toured Australia in 1904 and 1927, performing in all capital cities. In 1927, Paderewski donated all proceeds of his two final concerts in Sydney and in Melbourne to support orphans of the ANZAC soldiers killed in Gallipoli. He also planted a tree in the Melbourne Royal Botanic Garden.

Since 2010, the Australian International Chopin Piano Competition has regularly promoted Chopin's music to Australian audiences. Organised by the Friends of Chopin Australia, the event includes an elite international piano competition, a composition competition for young Australian composers, as well as various accompanying activities to promote Chopin's music. So far, three editions have taken place, in 2011, 2014 and 2017.

The Polish Music Competition Australia (PolMusica) promotes the work of Polish composers and is open to young musicians living in Australia. It has been organised annually since 2019 at Deakin Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne. Winners are awarded prizes from the Ewa Malewicz and the Stanislaw de Tarczynski Foundations.



Above: Paderewski's photo published in 'The Review of Reviews for Australiasia' on 20 July 1904
Polish Central Archives of Modern Records



Cartoon published in Australian journal 'Free Lance' on 17 September 1904. Caption: 'He hadn't heard Paderewski. Mr Baldtopp: So this is the chap what runs the hair restorer! I wonder if it would do me any good!'

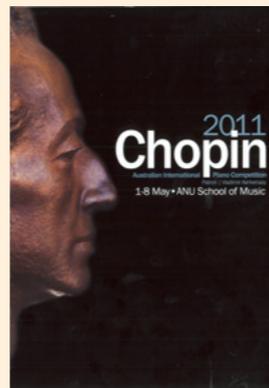
Polish Central Archives of Modern Records

Below right: Louise Turnbull PolMusica 2019 winner
PolMusica



Above left: The winner of the 2014 Australian International Chopin Piano Competition, Kotaro Nagano performing with the Enigma String Quartet during Prize Winners Concert
Peter Hislop courtesy of the Friends of Chopin Australia Inc.

Right: Program cover of the first Australian International Chopin Piano Competition in 2011
The Friends of Chopin Australia Inc.



Other Polish cultural festivals

Polish-Australians proudly showcase their cultural heritage with numerous cultural events and festivals, held regularly across the country. Australia's largest annual Polish cultural festival is held in Melbourne – the Polish Festival @ Federation Square. Polish tastes, sounds and traditions are showcased to appreciative Australian audiences. Other significant and regular cultural events are the Harvest Festival (Dozynki) in Adelaide, Polish Spring (Polska Wiosna) in Brisbane. Polish Christmas at Darling Harbour in Sydney was held eleven times between 2003–2016. It is now held as the Polish Festival at Polonia Sports Club in Plumpton. Smaller cultural events are held in Canberra, Hobart and Perth.



Above left: Polish Festival @ Federation Square, Melbourne

Right, above and below: Dancers at Federation Square

Polish Festival Inc.



Musical talents

An outstanding contemporary Australian pianist with Polish roots is David Helfgott (below), who from an early age showed above-average musical abilities. As a child, he won six state competitions, including the ABC Instrumental and Vocal Competition. He was a scholarship holder at the prestigious Royal College of Music in London. For many years he struggled with health problems, but with the help of his relatives, he returned to the stage where he mostly presents romantic music. The Oscar-winning film *Shine* is based on his biography, which tells the story of David's life and his relationship with his father.



Courtesy David Helfgott

Two other Australian Polish-born musical talents are Cezary Skubiszewski and Wanda Wilkomirska. Skubiszewski, a film and television composer, has

received international acclaim for his work, winning numerous awards. He composed film scores, for among other Australian films, such as *Red Dog*, *Two Hands*, *The Sapphires*, *Blessed*, *Death Defying Acts*, and the TV series *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Wanda Wilkomirska (right), a violinist and music teacher, lived in Sydney between 1999–2012. Known for her classical repertoire, she toured Australia in 1969 before emigrating. In 1973, she was the first violinist to perform a solo recital in the newly built Sydney Opera House. She continued her musical career both in Australia and internationally, taking part in concerts, master classes, and competitions (both as performer and jurist). In Australia she taught at the Mannheim and Sydney music academies, the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and the National Academy of Music in Melbourne.



Unknown photographer, Public domain

Film and TV stars



Magda Szubanski



Yvonne Strahovski



Jacek Koman



Mia Wasikowska



Elizabeth Debicki

The Australian film and television scene has long showcased talents of actors with Polish heritage.

Magda Szubanski is perhaps one of the most expressive contemporary actresses in Australia, appreciated for her charisma and exceptional comedic talent. Magda decided to become an actress after watching her cousin act in the Polish film *Pan Wolodyjowski*, and her most recognised role was as Sharon Karen Strzelecki in *Kath & Kim*.

Polish-born Jacek Koman immigrated to Australia with his brother in 1982. He has starred in numerous films, TV series and theatre productions, both in Australia and Poland, most famously in Baz Luhrmann's 2001 hit *Moulin Rouge*. In 2011, he was nominated for the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Award for Best Supporting Actor in a Drama Series for his role in the TV series *Spirited*.

A furry Australian legend

Born in Krakow, Poland, Yoram Gross is an Australian director and producer of animated films, most famously the *Blinky Bill* TV series. He survived WWII in the Krakow ghetto and his family was on Schindler's list. Yoram's parents made a risky escape from the Nazis and changed their hiding place 72 times. Yoram moved to Israel in the 1950s, then to Australia in the late 1960s. For his extraordinary contribution to the development of the Australian film industry, he was awarded the *Order of Australia*, as well as the Polish decorations – the *Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland* and the *Silver Medal for Merit to Culture – Gloria Artis*.



Yoram Gross
Photo by Tom Koprowski



Blinky Bill
Alamy

Yvonne Strahovski (Strzechowski), the daughter of Polish immigrants, gained international fame with her role of CIA agent Sarah Walker in the TV series *Chuck*, and the role of Hannah McKay in the series *Dexter*. In addition, Yvonne has starred in over 20 film productions.

Mia Wasikowska, whose mother was born in Poland, owes her international recognition to her unforgettable performance of Alice in Tim Burton's film *Alice in Wonderland*.

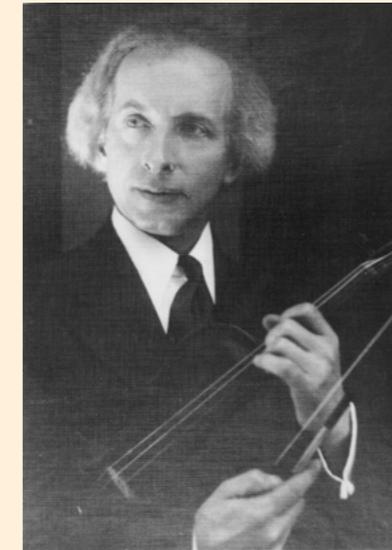
Elizabeth Debicki, whose father was born in Poland, made her acting debut in the Australian comedy *A Few Best Men*, before appearing in the Hollywood blockbuster *The Great Gatsby*. From 2022, she stars as Princess Diana in the Netflix blockbuster *The Crown*.

Photos: Magda Szubanski – Eva Rinaldi, CC BY-SA 2.0; Yvonne Strahovski – Joits, CC BY-SA 3.0; Courtesy of Jacek Koman; Mia Wasikowska – Diana Ringo, CC BY-SA 4.0; Elizabeth Debicki – Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 3.0

Violinist virtuoso and teacher

The internationally renowned violinist **Stanislaw de Tarczynski** was considered one of the best music teachers in Australia and was very popular in Melbourne in the music community. He came to Australia in 1912 as a tourist, but due to the outbreak of WWI in Europe, decided to stay. He taught at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, became the leader of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Adelaide ABC Orchestra and practically the permanent leader of all touring opera companies in Australia and New Zealand.

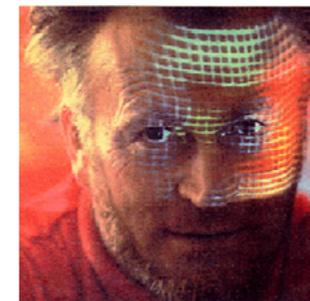
Tarczynski loved to tell stories and was known for his great sense of humour. The emerging interwar Polish community in Melbourne, including a Polish Saturday school, was active under his leadership. In 1949 the first Polish Association in Victoria was established in his home.



Stanislaw de Tarczynski with his violin
Both photos Polish Museum and Archives in Australia



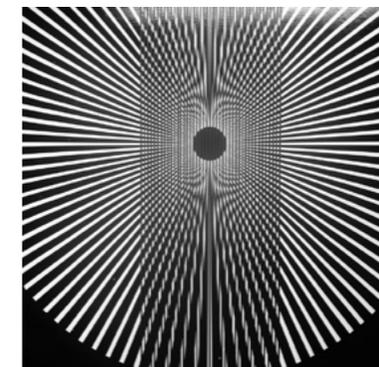
De Tarczynski with his wife Jadwiga



Top left: Self portrait
CC Attribution-ShareAlike
2.5 License



Top right: Photograph of two dancers, 1966
Stanislaw Ostoja-Kotkowski archive



Right: Ostoja-Kotkowski Moiré pattern artwork
State Library of South Australia

A world-class artist

Polish-born artist, Jozef Stanislaw Ostoja-Kotkowski, was an innovative artist, receiving recognition in both Poland and Australia for his works. Ostoja-Kotkowski immigrated to Australia after WWII, where he studied at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne. He used cutting-edge technologies in his art, for example, in the 1960s, he worked on transforming sound into colours and shapes. In 1975 he created the *Theremines*, or devices that produce music when in contact with the human body, and three years later, chromasonic towers were created, including the *Singing Towers* in Adelaide, which respond to traffic with a range of colourful, pulsating lights.

In 1992, Ostoja-Kotkowski received the Order of Australia for service to visual arts, and was also awarded the Polish decoration *Meritorious for Polish Culture*. His bas-reliefs, sculptures, frescoes and light structures can be found in public buildings all around Australia.

Sport



Stadium Australia during the 2000 Olympic Games
Jimmy Harris, CC BY 2.0

Sydney Olympic Games

In 2000, the XXVII Summer Olympic Games were held in Sydney, where Polish-Australians also left their mark. Stadium Australia in Sydney (now called ANZ Stadium), the main arena for the games, was built under the management of Polish engineer, **Edmund Obiala** (pictured below). Edmund was also the Olympic attaché of the Polish team during the Olympics.

Polish artist, sculptor and designer at the Royal Australian Mint **Wojciech Pietranik**, designed the medals for the Sydney Olympic Games. The first medal design had the Sydney Opera House on the reverse instead of a Roman amphitheatre, but the International Olympic Committee decided that the latter should remain.



Courtesy of Edmund Obiala

World-class athletes

World-class athletes **Michael Klim** and **Alicia Molik** are both of Polish descent, and have graced international sporting events with numerous victories.

Michael George Klim OAM is a Polish-born Australian swimmer, Olympic gold medallist, multiple world champion, and former world record-holder during the 1990s and 2000s. Michael won a total of two gold, three silver and a bronze medal for Australia at the Atlanta Olympic Games 1996, Sydney Olympic Games 2000 and Athens Olympic Games 2004. Klim was the only Australian who won a gold medal at both the Sydney 2000 Olympics and the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Alicia Molik, a former Australian professional tennis player, was born to Polish parents. She reached a career-high singles ranking of world number eight and won a bronze medal for Australia at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games in the women's singles competition. Since 2013 she has been the Australian Federation Cup captain.



Michael George Klim OAM
Courtesy of Wojtek Klim

Alicia Molik at the 2010 US Open
Robbie Mendelson, CC BY-SA 2.0



Australian football in Poland

With a growing connection and mutual migration between Poland and Australia, Poles have taken a liking to Aussie Rules Football. The beginning of Aussie Rules Football in Poland is connected with Australian expatriate and Geelong Cats supporter Gareth Smith, who in 2015 founded the Bydgoszcz Wildcats team. In 2019, AFL Polska, a governing body for the country, was established. Currently there are four regular AFL teams in Poland: Warsaw Boars and Warsaw Bisons, Wrocław Lions, and Fort Nysa. With another three teams to be established soon, the Polish AFL league is expected to be launched in 2022. The national team – Polish Devils AFL – has been competing on the European stage since 2019.



Top two images: Polish league matches
Centre: Polish Devils AFL
Right: Polish Devils AFL's young supporter
Courtesy of futbolaustralijski.pl



Passionate Poles

Canberra's 'Soup kitchen lady'

Stanislawa 'Stasia' Dabrowski ran a mobile soup kitchen for the needy for over four decades in Canberra. A Polish-born nurse, who migrated to Australia after WWII, would peel and cook 180kg of vegetables on a Thursday night, feeding up to 500 people every Friday night with her nourishing homemade soup. She became a Canberra icon, best known as the 'Soup kitchen lady', giving not only food, but kindness and compassion to all. Stasia was awarded the 1996 Canberra Citizen of the Year, the 1999 ACT Senior Australian of the Year and the 2017 ACT Local Hero of the Year.



Stasia serving the needy at her soup kitchen in 2016
Karleen Minney, The Canberra Times/ACN

Right: Krys Pawlowski with replica monument of her world record crocodile in Normanton, Queensland
 Courtesy of Bogumila Zongollowicz



Polish 'Crocodile Dundee'

Polish couple Krys and Ron Pawlowski were pioneers in the field of crocodile research in Australia. Initially crocodile hunters and breeders, they later dramatically changed their approach and became animal rights defenders, opposing crocodile hunting and the industrial use of crocodile skins. They also promoted the idea of keeping wild animals alive. In 1957, Krys hunted the largest crocodile ever recorded (8.63m), for which she was entered into the Guinness Book of Records. In 1965, they established Australia's first crocodile farm, where they pioneered research into crocodile hatching and breeding.



Far left: In 1966, the couple started the world's first saltwater crocodile research station at Karumba, but were eventually forced to close

Left: Krys with young crocodile hatchlings
 Both images courtesy of George Pawlowski

Supporting human rights

Seweryn 'Sev' Antoni Ozdowski was one of the few Poles who had a real influence on the policy of the Australian government. He arrived in Australia in 1975, and from the early 1980s played an important role in Australian institutions, defining key directions in areas such as multiculturalism and human rights. In 2000-2005 he held the position of Human Rights Commissioner and Disability Discrimination Commissioner. His interests include multicultural policy, people with disabilities and the mentally ill, as well as the protection of human rights, especially the issues of children detained in Australia and asylum seekers.



Seweryn 'Sev' Antoni Ozdowski
 Courtesy of Sev Ozdowski

Overcoming obstacles to climb Mount Everest

A Polish-Australian electrical engineer, mountaineer, cyclist, mother and grandmother, Margaret Watroba, overcame significant personal adversity to scale the world's highest peak - twice. A passionate mountain climber from her early days trekking the Polish and European mountains with her family, she has always pushed herself to discover her limits. In 2013, aged 63, she became the only Australian woman to have climbed Mount Everest from both sides. Just ten months earlier, she suffered a significant cycling injury which left her uncertain of being able to walk properly again. Making four attempts at the climb - two successfully - she faced numerous adversities including a severe chest infection, and nearly dying after falling out of her tent at Camp Three.



Courtesy of Margaret Watroba

Consular and Diplomatic Relations



Embassy of Poland in Canberra

In a joint communiqué of 20 February 1972 establishing diplomatic relations, Poland and Australia agreed that the Polish government would shortly establish an Embassy in Canberra and a non-resident Australian Ambassador would be accredited to Warsaw. The first Polish Ambassador to Australia arrived in 1973, preceded by a *Chargé d'Affaires ad interim*. The present building of the Embassy was opened in 1977. In the 1970s, the Ambassador of Poland to Australia was also accredited to New Zealand. The current countries of additional accreditation are: the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Vanuatu, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Solomon Islands.

Right: Celebration of the 230th anniversary of the May 3rd Constitution in Canberra in 2021. Ambassador Michał Kołodziejka and Mrs Barbara Kołodziejka with the 'Lajkonik' Polish Song and Dance Ensemble of Sydney
 Polish Embassy in Canberra



Left: Celebrations of Polish Independence Day at the Polish Embassy in Canberra on 14 November 2020 with a concert of Frederic Chopin's music
 Polish Embassy in Canberra



Rondo 1 building, where the new chancery of Australian Embassy in Warsaw is located MichalPL, CC BY-SA 4.0

Australian Embassy in Warsaw

After the establishment of Polish-Australian diplomatic relations in 1972, the first non-resident Ambassador of Australia to Poland was based in Moscow. The first resident Australian Ambassador to Poland arrived in 1973, opening the Australian Embassy, which had its own building in Warsaw from 1975. Currently, the Australian Ambassador to Poland is also accredited to the Czech Republic and Lithuania.



Polish President Andrzej Duda and First Lady Agata Kornhauser-Duda with the then Governor of NSW and currently Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, H.E. General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) and Mrs Hurley during the state visit of the Polish President to Australia in 2018 Jakub Szymczak/KPRP

Rapidly growing youth exchange

The Work and Holiday arrangement between Poland and Australia allows 1500 young people annually to explore, work and study in both countries. The agreement signed in 2014 in Warsaw during a visit of the Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, initially allowed for only 200 visas a year to be issued. As a result of growing interest and positive experiences from the first years of this arrangement, both countries decided to increase the cap: first to 500 visas in 2017, and then to 1500 in 2019. This rapid increase is testament to strengthening personal links between the two nations. It provides more opportunities for cultural exchange and offers positive experiences for both Australian and Polish young adults.



Polish consular missions and a trade office in Australia

Poland has maintained consular relations with Australia since the early 1920s, with honorary consulates operating in Sydney and Melbourne before WWII. The Consulate General in Sydney headed by Władysław Noskowski existed until relations with the London-based Polish government-in-exile ceased in 1945. At present the Polish Consulate General in Sydney, which reopened in 1957, is headed by a career consul and covers the majority of Australia, except for the Australian Capital Territory (under jurisdiction of the Consul based at the Polish Embassy in Canberra). Next to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Sydney, Poland has a number of consulates headed by honorary consuls: in Melbourne (the Consulate General), Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, and Perth. The Polish Foreign Trade Office in Sydney, currently covering Australia and New Zealand, was officially inaugurated by the President of Poland Andrzej Duda during his state visit to Australia in August 2018. Apart from official Polish representatives, the Polish community in Australia has for decades served as excellent ambassadors of Poland.



The letterhead and an official stamp of the Polish Consulate General in Sydney from 1920

Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives/Polish Central Archives of Modern Records



Celebration of the 230th anniversary of the 3rd of May Constitution organised by the Polish community in Melbourne in 2021 portalpolonii.com.au



Polish President Andrzej Duda and First Lady Agata Kornhauser-Duda meet with the Polish community in Sydney during the state visit to Australia in 2018 Grzegorz Jakubowski/KPRP



Polish Scouts at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne during the state visit to Australia of Polish President Andrzej Duda in 2018 Grzegorz Jakubowski/KPRP



Acknowledgements

Project management and coordination: Malgorzata Kwiatkowska and Anna Niedzwiadek. Writers: Anna Niedzwiadek and Lukasz Graban. Research: Emilia Ilczuk-Krupa. Editors: Lucyna Artymiuk, Barbara Czech and Bogumila Zongollowicz. Graphic design: Leon Kustra from The X Factor Design.

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