

Iain Macintyre [ORCID: 0000-0003-2716-8500]

Retired surgeon at Edinburgh University

THE POLISH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Corresponding author:

Iain Macintyre

Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL

e-mail: iainmacintyre@blueyonder.co.uk

Abstract

The Polish School of Medicine in Edinburgh, 1941–1949, was a unique academic establishment. Although located in Scotland it was governed by Polish academic regulations, conferred Polish degrees and most of the teaching was by Polish academic staff. In this article the author presents the historical background of the School, its activities and its impact on Scottish and Polish medicine.

Key words: Polish School of Medicine in Edinburgh, history of medicine

Introduction

After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, a Polish army in exile was formed in France under General Sikorski. Following the fall of France this army retreated to Britain and the 1st Polish Corps was deployed to Scotland to help protect the east coast of Scotland from the anticipated German invasion. Among the 17.000 or so officers and men were doctors and medical students

who had little or no opportunity to use or update their skills and knowledge. In order to rectify this, Colonel Kurtz, the Director of Medical Services of the Polish Forces in Scotland and Colonel Archer Irvine-Fortescue, the Deputy Director of Medical Services, Scottish Command, arranged hospital attachments for the exiled medical officers to introduce them to British medical practice, to improve their English and maintain their expertise and interest. In this way over 300 Polish doctors visited Scottish hospitals in the three months from September 1940 [1]. One such visit was to prove particularly important. The commanding officer of the military hospital at Edinburgh Castle was Lt Colonel F.A.E. Crew. Before the war Crew had been appointed as the first Professor of Animal Genetics at the University of Edinburgh to which he had attracted a distinguished team of academic geneticists who were to establish Edinburgh as a major centre of research in genetics. As a member of the University Faculty of Medicine, Crew had been actively involved in undergraduate medical education (Figure 1) [2].



Figure 1. Lt. Colonel F.A.E. Crew in uniform outside the McEwan Hall (photograph courtesy of Professor Christopher Todd).

He realised that the Polish doctors and medical students represented a large medical resource whose knowledge and experience could be best used in a formal setting. Regular clinical attachments at the military hospital in the Castle

were arranged and this led on to a tutorial system for trainees and students organised by senior Polish officers. Crew convinced the University of Edinburgh to become involved and support the teaching. From here it was a natural step to consider introducing examinations for those students whose education in Poland had been interrupted by war and so the idea of a Polish School of Medicine in Edinburgh was born [2].

In this paper the author presents a short history of this unique academic establishment.

The Medical School is created and staffed

In the discussions which followed, the University of Edinburgh was represented by Professor Crew and Professor (later Sir) Sydney Smith, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. Smith was the Professor of Forensic Medicine who had a distinguished career as a forensic scientist and had acted as an expert witness in high profile murder trials. Leading the discussions from the Polish side were Professor Kurtz and Professor Antoni Jurasz, who had been Professor of Surgery at Poznan University. Before the war Jurasz had been president of the Society of Polish Surgeons and president of the Polish Red Cross [3]. The Polish members of the organising committee included several who had been professors in Poland before the war, namely Professor Jerzy Fegler (Physiology), Cracow University; Professor Wlodzimierz Koskowski (Pharmacology), Lwow University; Professor Leon Lakner (Stomatology), Poznan University; Professor Tadeusz Rogalski (Anatomy), Cracow University and Professor Jacob Rostowski (Neurology), Lwow University.

These were to become the nucleus of the new medical faculty, but the teaching staff of the School would also include seven docents (non-professorial academics) namely Dr. Adam Elektorowicz (Radiology), Warsaw University; Dr. Antoni Fidler (Medicine), Warsaw University; Dr. Marjan Kostowiecki (Histology), Lwow University; Dr. Edmund-Mystkowski (Chemistry), Warsaw University; Dr. Henryk Reiss (Dermatology and Venereal Diseases), Cracow University; Dr. Bronislaw Slizynski (Biology), Cracow University and Dr. Wiktor Tomaszewski (Medicine), Poznan University.

Completing the Polish teaching staff of the School were ten specialists namely Dr. Bernard Czemplik (Physicist), Poznan; Dr. Jerzy Dekanski (Toxicology), Warsaw; Dr. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (Ear, Nose and Throat), Poznan; Dr. Jan Kochanowski (Radiology), Warsaw; Dr. Zdzislaw Malkiewicz (Pediatrics), Cracow; Dr. Roman Rejthar (Surgery), Poznan; Dr. Jan Ruszkowski (Ophthalmology), Warsaw; Dr. Tadeus Sokolowski (Traumatology), Warsaw; Dr. Wacław Stocki (Pathology), Poznan; Dr. Czesław Uma (Gynecology and Obstetrics), Cracow [4].

In the few specialities which had no Polish lecturers, teaching was performed by staff of the University of Edinburgh including Professor Alexander Murray Drennan (Pathology), Professor Thomas Mackie (Bacteriology) and Professor Sydney Smith (Forensic Medicine).

Professor Jurasz became the first Dean of the new School (Figure 2).

Before the start of the first academic year the teaching staff were all given access to the wards of the main teaching hospital, the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, so that they could familiarise themselves with local medical practice. They were also able to use the large Central Medical Library and a Polish medical library was set up, with the initial 60 textbooks donated by the surgeon Douglas Guthrie, who became a noted medical historian after the war.



Figure 2. Professor Antoni Jurasz (centre), who became the first Dean of the School, seen here with colleagues in Poznan before WW2 [3, p. 2169].

The formalities are completed

The School was formalised by an agreement between the Polish Government-in-exile and the University of Edinburgh, which was signed on 24 February 1941. Under this agreement the Polish School of Medicine was to be governed under the academic rules and regulations of Polish universities. In this way the school was given the power to award undergraduate and postgraduate medical degrees.

The new School was officially opened on 22 March 1941 by Wladyslaw Raczkiwicz, the President of the Polish Government-in-exile and Professor Kot, the Polish Minister for the Interior, in the presence of British representatives [4].

The Paderewski Hospital

Much of the clinical teaching took place in Edinburgh's main teaching hospital, the Royal Infirmary. At an early stage it was appreciated that the new School should have its own hospital, staffed by Polish doctors and caring for Polish patients. A former children's convalescent home in the grounds of the Western General Hospital was selected. The hospital had some 80 beds, caring for all specialties except surgery, whose 60 beds were located in wards in the main hospital, giving easier access to the X-ray department and to the operating theatres.

The hospital was equipped with financial help from the United States through the "Refugees of England" Anglo-American Committee, and in particular the Paderewski Testimonial Fund. This charitable fund commemorated Ignacy Paderewski, classical pianist, composer and former Prime Minister of Poland. As this trust was by far the most generous supporter of the new hospital, it was named the Paderewski Hospital in his honour. It was staffed by the Polish specialists, professors and docents of the School of Medicine (Figure 3).

The Paderewski Hospital was opened on 17 October 1941, at the start of the second academic year of the School. General Sikorski, Edward Raczynski, the Polish ambassador and later President of Poland, and Minister Stanislaw Mikolajczyk were among the 300 people who attended. By 1946 some 40.000 patients had been treated at the hospital [5].



Figure 3. Staff outside the Paderewski Hospital (photograph courtesy Lothian Health Services Archive).

The School fulfils its promise

In the first academic year 70 undergraduates enrolled and by session 1944–1945 this had risen to 246, as students from liberated Poland joined the School.

The first student to receive his diploma was Konrad Bazarnik, who before the war had been a medical student at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. In Britain he became a fighter pilot serving with a Polish squadron of the Royal Air Force. Such was the need for pilots that despite his new qualification, he returned to his fighter squadron after graduating (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Konrad Bazarnik (centre), serving as a fighter pilot, became the first graduate to receive a diploma. He is seen outside the McEwan Hall after the ceremony. Photo source: Historia Hufca Lubliniec, Konrad Bazarnik, 20.02.2017, <http://www.historia.lubliniec.zhp.pl/index.php/8-biografie/261-konrad-bazarnik> [dostęp: 4.07.2020].

By 1945 there was still demand for places, many from individuals who had been released from concentration camps. From 1946 the School's activities were wound down. Like other British medical schools Edinburgh faced increasing demand for places from demobilised British forces and school leavers. There were not enough staff and not enough beds to provide clinical teaching for all, so in 1946 many of the School's third year students had to transfer to other universities including Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bristol, Dundee, Leeds and Newcastle [2].

Over the eight years of its existence some 330 students matriculated and of these 227 graduated with medical diplomas equivalent to the University's MB ChB. These diplomas were not, however, recognised by the UK General Medical Council until 1947 when, under the terms of the Medical Practitioners and Pharmacists Act, graduates of the School were allowed to register and work as doctors in the UK. Poland had now become part of the Soviet bloc and stories of Stalinist atrocities began to emerge. Life and medical practice in Poland under communism now seemed much less attractive so that fewer than 10% of the School's graduates returned home. The majority stayed on in the UK, while others found posts in countries around the world, many in North America [1].

The School maintained high academic standards. Some 49 students dropped out of the School and 23 were expelled because of unsatisfactory progress. Doctors associated with the School published no fewer than 121 scientific papers in medical journals. In addition 19 doctors obtained an MD degree or postgraduate doctorate.

The Paderewski Hospital closed in 1947 although the name remained associated with the building until it was demolished in the 21st century. Professor Jurasz, who had played such a crucial role in the creation and success of the School, resigned as Dean in 1947 and from then the School continued to reduce its activities until its final closure in March 1949 [6].

The School's legacy

After the war many of the School's graduates and staff continued to meet in Edinburgh every five years. At these meetings they would demonstrate their loyalty and affection for the University and the city which had offered them hospitality and friendship at a dark time in Polish history. At the reunion meeting in 1983 Lord Swann, former Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, spoke of the pride which the University had for the School and the affection in which its graduates were held.

No one [he declared – I.M.] [...] who knows Edinburgh can fail to be struck by the gratitude that the members of the Polish School of Medicine have always shown to the University. But I believe that a greater debt of gratitude is owed by the University to them. For it was they who came here to continue the struggle alongside us. And in all its 400 years the University cannot, I think, have acquired a group of alumni more splendidly loyal to their Alma Mater [2].

Today in Edinburgh there are several lasting tributes to the School.

The Polish Medical School Historical Collection was established in the University of Edinburgh in 1986, on the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Polish School. The moving force behind this was Dr Wiktor Tomaszewski who had been a member of staff at the Polish School and after the war became a GP in Edinburgh. Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh, Chancellor of the university, formally opened the collection in May 1991 (Figure 5) [7].

The collection contains medals of medical interest, paintings, photographs and books about the School, and other artefacts. A prominent part of the collection is a series of five bronze sculptures by the last Dean of the School, Professor Jakub Rostowski. Many of the items were gifted by Polish medical universities, former students, staff and graduates of the Polish School and by Dr Tomaszewski himself. Part of the Collection is on view in the Chancellor's Building in the new medical school at Little France. Dr Maria Dlugolecka-Graham MBE, the University's Polish School of Medicine Coordinator, is the current honorary curator of the collection (Figure 6) [8].



Figure 5. Dr. Wiktor Tomaszewski meets the Duke of Edinburgh at the opening of the collection in 1991 (photograph courtesy University of Edinburgh).



Figure 6. The Polish Room, location of the Historical Collection in the Chancellor’s Building in the medical school at Little France (photograph courtesy University of Edinburgh).

The Polish School of Medicine Memorial Fund was set up in 1986 by former members of staff, graduates, alumni and friends of the School to commemorate the School and to foster academic links between The University of Edinburgh and Poland. The fund provides scholarships to enable Polish medical doctors and medical scientists, within 10 years of graduation, to undertake a period of further study or research at the University’s Medical School before return to Poland. The aims of these scholarships are to allow Scholars to acquire skills to further enhance and develop Polish medicine and thus foster academic links between Polish Medical Universities and Research Institutes and The University of Edinburgh [9].

In addition the fund supports the Antoni Jurasz lectureship, under which a University of Edinburgh academic is funded to give a lecture in Poznan and one other Polish medical university (Figure 7).

Prominently displayed on the wall of the quadrangle of what is now the Old Medical School in Teviot Place is a plaque commemorating the School. Here is inscribed the following tribute:

In the dark days of 1941 when Polish universities were destroyed and Polish professors died in concentration camps the University of Edinburgh established the Polish School of Medicine. This memorial was set up by the students, lecturers and professors of the Polish School of Medicine in gratitude to the University of Edinburgh for the part it played in the preservation of Polish science and learning [2].

These words provide a moving tribute to the Polish School of Medicine, reminding us of the dark days that led to its formation and emphasising the critical role it played in the history of Polish Medicine.

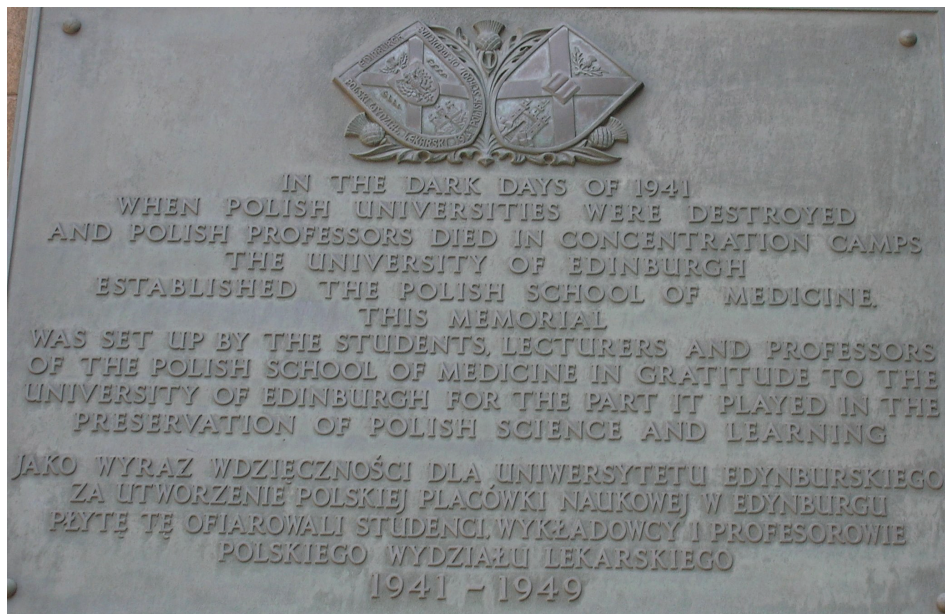


Figure 7. Plaque in the quadrangle of the Old Medical School commemorating the Polish School of Medicine (photo by the author).

Summary

The Polish School of Medicine in Edinburgh, created in 1941, was a unique academic establishment. Its legacy is still alive in Scottish and Polish medicine.

References

1. The University of Edinburgh. *The Polish School of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh (1941–1949)*, 23.06.2015, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/about/history/polish-school> [accessed: 4.07.2020].
2. Palacz M. *The Polish School of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh (1941–1949)*. Polish-Scottish Heritage, http://polishscottishheritage.co.uk/?heritage_item=the-polish-school-of-medicine-at-the-university-of-edinburgh-1941-1949 [accessed: 4.07.2020].
3. Magowska A. *A Doctor Facing Turbulent Times: Antoni Tomasz Jurasz, Citizen of the World*. *World J Surg*. 2011; 35, 2167–2171. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00268-011-1160-1>.
4. Jurasz AT. *The Foundation of the Polish Medical Faculty within the University of Edinburgh, Scotland*. *Proc R Soc Med*. 1941; 35: 133–140, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/003591574103500213> [accessed: 4.07.2020].
5. Wojcik WA. *Time in context – the Polish School of Medicine and Paderewski Polish Hospital in Edinburgh, 1941 to 1949*. *Proc R Coll of Physicians Edinb*. 2001; 31: 69–76, http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/journal/issue/vol31_no1/R_Time_in_Context.pdf [accessed: 4.07.2020].
6. Tomaszewski W (ed.). *Fifty Years of the Polish School of Medicine 1941–1991. The University of Edinburgh. Jubilee Publication*, [W. Tomaszewski], Edinburgh 1992.
7. Tomaszewski W. *Personal View*. *Br Med Jour*. 1981; 283: 669, <https://www.bmj.com/content/283/6292/669> [accessed: 4.07.2020].
8. The University of Edinburgh. Polish Medical School Historical Collection, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/about/history/polish-medical-school-collection> [accessed: 4.07.2020].
9. The University of Edinburgh. Polish School of Medicine Memorial Fund, 18.02.2020, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-funding/postgraduate/uk-eu/medicine-vet-medicine/polish> [accessed: 4.07.2020].

Polska Szkoła Medyczna na Uniwersytecie w Edynburgu

Streszczenie

Polska Szkoła Medyczna w Edynburgu w latach 1941–1949 była wyjątkowym ośrodkiem akademickim. Chociaż znajdował się on w Szkocji, podlegał polskim przepisom akademickim, nadawał polskie stopnie naukowe, a większość nauczania prowadzili polscy nauczyciele akademicy. W artykule autor przedstawia tło historyczne szkoły, jej działalność oraz wpływ na szkocką i polską medycynę.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska Szkoła Medyczna na Uniwersytecie w Edynburgu, historia medycyny