



Dear Reader, we are coming back after a longer than usual break. Please find on the following pages a selection of articles on the SPCA events between 2022-2024. Hope you enjoy the read and join us for future concerts, lectures and gatherings!

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Compiled by: Kiro Źabińska-Maclntyre

A number of online and live events will take place in 2025 but there are not yet confirmed dates.

All paid up members will receive full details by post or e-mail.

Check our website for updates!

www.scotpoles.co.uk

Yaniewicz Recitals

In 2023 there were two marvellous recitals featuring the Yaniewicz and Green square piano that had returned to its permanent home in the Polish House, following its loan to the National Trust for Scotland's Georgian House the previous year. Both of these offered highly effective evocations of the sort of musical events that regularly featured in the drawing rooms of Edinburgh's New Town in the nineteenth century.

The Spring Recital on 29th April was the fourth time that the piano had been used in concert at the Polish House, but the first in which an artist in addition to a pianist was featured. Fittingly, this was the soprano Magdalena Durant, a native of Wroclaw who has performed all around the world, but who is a longstanding resident of Edinburgh, where her professional activities include vocal tutoring at the University. She had entertained SPCA members on several occasions in the past - the 2018 carol concert being a case in point - and had recently broadened her commitment to the association by joining its committee. Making a welcome return as her accompanist was the versatile keyboard player Dr John Kitchen, who had given the previous year's Spring Recital. For many years he was a colleague at the University of former SPCA President Dr Colin Kingsley, and still serves as its organist, despite retiring from teaching duties in 2014. Magdalena and John had previously performed together on many occasions in both Scotland and Poland, but this was the first occasion on which the former had ever given a recital in which a square piano was the accompanying instrument.

The recital had a truly international flavour, and was enhanced by the informative spoken introductions given by the two artists. Appropriately, spring was a recurrent theme, and there were also several reminders of Yaniewicz's mixed Polish-Lithuanian heritage. Proceedings began in dramatic fashion with a recitative and aria from Mozart's great comic opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. That was followed by two songs by Stanislaw Moniuszko, who lived for 18 years in Yaniewicz's home city of Vilnius, serving as organist of the University church of SS John. These were well contrasted - a reflective Triolet followed by the instantly memorable *Przasnicka* (Spinner), a dashing, all-too-brief piece that the performers dispatched with superb aplomb. Next came two songs from Chopin's wonderful but slender output (numbering just 19 in total) in the genre. *Zyczenie* (The Maiden's Wish) has a splendid mazurka rhythm, while *Pionska Litewska* (Lithuanian Song) is a mother-daughter dialogue with an arresting piano accompaniment. Two original compositions by Yaniewicz followed - one of his rare surviving songs, *Go Youth Belov'd*, and a solo piece for piano, *Favorite Polacca*. The programme then moved to Germany, and two of the greatest masters of art song. Both the Schumann works, *Der Nussbaum* (The Nut Tree) and *Widmung* (Dedication) come from the cycle *Myrthen* (Myrtles), which the composer gave as a wedding present to his bride Clara Wieck, herself a major musical figure as virtuoso pianist and highly accomplished composer.

These were followed by two Brahms songs, *Wie Melodien* (Like Melodies) and *Von ewiger Liebe* (For Eternal Love). The former in particular dates from a time when the square piano had come to be regarded as an antiquated instrument, though there was little hint of this in the performance. With the song section of the programme at an end, John then played two sets of keyboard variations on popular Scottish songs written by Italians who settled in Edinburgh. The *Banks of Doon*, which he had also included in the previous year's recital, is a rondo by Domenico Corri, Yaniewicz's predecessor as Edinburgh's leading musical impresario. Corri's exact contemporary Pietro Urbani was, prior to a spectacular fall-out, a friend of Robert Burns, and used the latter's song *Sic a wife as Willie had* - whose words are outrageously sexist by present-day standards - for an exuberant keyboard piece. Another masterly operatic aria by Mozart, this time from *Così fan tutte*, provided a suitable tour-de-force with which to conclude.

On 19th November, Poland's Independence Day was celebrated by a recital on the square piano given by Dr Anna Debowska of the Music Academy of Krakow. For the past seven years she has been heavily involved with the Jane Stirling Project, the co-sponsors of the recital. As such, she has given recitals in both Scotland and Poland in honour of Chopin's Scottish pupil and benefactress.

It was Anna's second appearance in Edinburgh in 2023: in celebration of Poland's National Day she had played the modern Steinway piano in St Giles Cathedral on 16th May. The first half of that programme consisted of solo pieces by Chopin and Paderewski, while the second, accompanying the soprano Katarzyna Oles-Blacha of Krakow Opera, was of songs by Moniuszko, Janiewicz, Chopin, Paderewski, Ludomir Rozycki, Franciszek Maklakiewicz and the Ukrainians Borys Lyatoshynsky and Mykola Dremlyuga. Her solo programme at the Polish House provided an excellent contrast with the Spring Recital held at the same venue. It was entirely devoted to Polish composers, beginning with a set of variations by Yaniewicz on the song Hope Told a Flattering Tale. (The same work had been performed by Steven Devine at the very first recital on the newly restored piano back in November 2022.)

Next came a Polonaise - subtitled Farewell to the Homeland - and a Minuet by the aristocratic composer Michal Kleophas Oginski. This brought back memories of the recitals given in Edinburgh under the auspices of the SPCA at the start of the previous decade by Oginski's great-great-grandson, Iwo Zaluski, who did much to revive his ancestor's reputation. A Chopin Mazurka was followed by two pieces in the same form by Moniuszko, then a Waltz by the latter. Two of Chopin's Nocturnes - in C sharp minor and F sharp minor - provided what was unquestionably the greatest music of the evening. Anna's programme concluded with a set of variations on an original theme by Josef Deszczynski, a younger contemporary of Yaniewicz who was likewise a native of Vilnius.

Both recitals were memorable occasions that deservedly attracted appreciative audiences, with every seat in the hall occupied. They extended the auspicious start of the square piano's residence in the Polish House, which will hopefully lead to many more similar events in the future.

Gordon MacLachlan

Mikołajki 2023

Traditionally in early December we celebrate the tradition of St Nicolas called, in Poland, Mikołajki (pronounce like Mikoyalkee). Last year on Sunday 4 December the Scottish Polish Cultural Association organised the Mikołajki party at the Scouts Hall near Cameron Toll. Chairperson Mrs Izabella Brodzinska welcomed all guests and was delighted to see such a great crowd of the Scouts who provided the entertainment. Our partners in organising the event were the Scouts groups led by Izabela and Parzenica: The Polish Folk Dance and Song Ensemble.

The Scouts group of She-Bears are based in Edinburgh and use the Scout Hall regularly for their weekly meetings. They were founded in 2019 under the name of the She Bears – in Polish “Niedźwiedzice” named after the Stars constellation the Great Bear which is the symbol of power. The group run various activities for children to develop their creativity and engagement in teamwork. They already took part in previous editions of Mikołajki in 2021 and 2022 showing their musical talents.

The PARZENICA Polish Folk Dance Group is a vibrant ensemble dedicated to preserving and showcasing the rich heritage of Polish folk culture through dance and music. Founded in 2022 in the central belt of Scotland by Renata Carter with her husband Anthony, the group has become known for its performances that beautifully capture the essence of traditional Polish dance styles, costumes and music. Committed to authenticity, the Parzenica group meticulously learns and preserves various regional dances, including the lively Krakowiak, Slask and Polonez.

Over the short time since the group started to perform, the Parzenica folk dance group has participated in numerous festivals, cultural events and international showcases, earning acclaim for their skilful performance. Through their artistry and passion, they continue to inspire audiences and foster appreciation for Polish folk traditions across Scotland and beyond.

Parzenica took us on the terrific journey in the spirit of St Nicholas' traditions, singing the carols with emotional charge so characteristic for this type of songs.

Lots of fantastic photographs were taken showing happy faces of those little performers who were receiving Chocolate Santas from Santa Claus. Younger children while making Christmas decorations were carefully supervised by the older Scouts leaders. We were all highly impressed with the quality of performance and the enthusiasm and joyfulness displayed by the young Scouts.

Refreshments were served. There was a raffle with a range of great prizes donated by various donors including the Polish Consulate which raised much needed funds for our organisation.

The event was successful and SPCA is looking forward to this year's edition of Mikołajki on Sunday 8th December at the Morningside United Church. As last year, tickets will be available online from the SPCA website. Hope that you will join us there. All ages welcome.

Jola Debicka-MacLennan

Cracovian Cribs

In January 2024, as part of the Kraków Edinburgh cultural exchange programme, the Scottish Polish Cultural Association teamed up with the Museum of Kraków to provide our members with a special opportunity: a virtual presentation and live tour of the Cracovian Cribs, which had recently been awarded in the 81st Cracovian Nativity Scene Competition and were on display at the museum. The event was hosted on Zoom, with Anna Stasiak from the Museum of Kraków introducing the Museum and the exhibition. Filip Fotomajczyk, a talented crib creator and multiple award winner in the Nativity Scene Competitions, took us through the fascinating history and contemporary significance of these intricate cribs, offering live commentary throughout the tour.



His presentation explored a variety of topics, including the materials used, the symbolism embedded in each crib, and their historical role in fostering patriotic spirit. Thanks to the wonders of technology, participants had the chance to enjoy a showcase of over fifty cribs of all kinds—big, small, simple, ornate, traditional, and abstract.

We're excited about the possibility of further collaboration and are hoping to organize a crib-building workshop in 2025 or 2026, so stay tuned for more updates!

Kiro Żabińska-MacIntyre

Katy Carr Concert

On 17 March 2024 in the Polish House, in Edinburgh the SPCA organised a very interesting Spring Recital with Katy Carr. Katy is an award-winning British recording artist with Polish roots and has released 6 albums. An Ambassador of Polish history in Great Britain, her recent albums *Paszport* (2012), *'Polonia'* (2015) and *Providence* (2020) are inspired by the Polish WWII experience. In 2016, Katy was awarded the Pro Patria medal for her humanitarian and musical work. A musician, aviator, and multi-instrumentalist, she has performed her music internationally.



Katy Carr has a warm magnetic personality that draws the audience to her. The concert that Katy did deliver in the Polish House was to commemorate two significant anniversaries: the Battle of Monte Cassino and the Normandy Landings. She sang with passion and deep emotions reflecting the significance of those events. People were deeply moved by the performance, many had tears in their eyes, Katy encouraged the audience to sing along and many people did. After the concert during the reception she had a crowd of fans singing in promptu some famous songs. Some would describe her singing as melodic history lessons. Katy Carr is an unusual and original singer songwriter. She is fascinated by history, has a gift for strong, upbeat melodies and manages to match research with emotion which reflect this.

Before Katy sang we had a very interesting talk delivered by Alexander Smaga the architect. In 2019 Alexander designed and built The Polish Air Force Memorial for D-DAY 75 in Normandy, France dedicated to the Polish Fighter Squadrons No. 302 "City of Poznan" Polish Fighter Squadron, No. 308 "City of Kraków" Polish Fighter Squadron and No.317 "City of Wilno" who provided an air shield to the Allied troops during Operation Overlord and the Allied offensive in France. Located on the north coast of France in Plumetot the PAF memorial is located near Sword beach and the then secret landing pad codenamed "B 10".

Alexander Smaga is proud to have Polish roots. He lives and works in London and Vienna. The talk was very engaging and it showed a tangible connection between the past and the present in the form of the monument.

Jola Debicka-MacLennan

Sangs an Clatter

On the sunny evening of the 21 May 2024, the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh opened its doors to members of the Scottish Polish Cultural Association, their invited guests and other lovers of culture who came to the third edition of Sangs and Clatter / Piosenki i Gwar, a series of concerts run over the last few years to celebrate the works of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns, and more generally the music, poetry and dance of Scotland, Poland and Ukraine.

The arriving guests were welcomed by SPCA Chair Izabella Brodzińska and Vice-Chair Keith Mullins-MacIntyre. This year, we were honoured by the presence of Edinburgh's Depute Lord Provost Lezley Marion Cameron, the Consul General of the Republic of Poland, Łukasz Lutostański, the Ukrainian Consul General Andrii Kuslii, the Holova of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) Hannah Beaton-Havryluk and the chairman of the Polish House in Edinburgh, Marek Straczynski and his wife Teresa.

After the event was opened by Keith Mullins-MacIntyre, Depute Lord Provost Lezley Marion Cameron in her speech emphasised the importance of Polish-Scottish cooperation, taking into account the role of Edinburgh and Kraków as partner cities, connected by economic, cultural and educational cooperation. Consul General Łukasz Lutostański referred to the topic of relations and community of interests of Poland, Scotland and Ukraine, both in historical perspective and at the present time, in the face of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, emphasising the importance of the support provided for European security.

After the speeches, Tetiana Hordiienko, Oksana Saiapina, Anastasiia Boiko and Inna Semeniak from the group 'Kvity Ukrainy' (Flowers of Ukraine) appeared on stage, presenting the Carpathian dance, one of two dances prepared for the evening. Its melody echoes hear motifs common to all three of our countries - the sounds of mountains, highlands and rivers, wind and rain, and the freedom that is so important to all of us.

The dance group was created by professional dancers who, through artistic expression, wishes to show their love for their home country here in Scotland. The main purpose of the group's existence is to preserve and promote Ukrainian culture, first performing in December 2022.



The next performer was Natalya Ditkivska, a talented violinist and pianist, educated both in Ukraine and in Poland, studying at the University of Warsaw and the Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music. Natalya played in chamber groups and symphony orchestras, and for us she presented viola solos by JS Bach: Prelude, Allemande and Sarabande from his Suite in D Major, and BWV 1007.



After Natalya's beautiful, moving performance, actor and writer Dave Robb, a stalwart of previous Sangs and Clatter concerts, took the stage and regaled the audience with a new monologue, the ghost story The Last Time I Saw Auntie B, which alternated between sending ripples of laughter through the audience and sending shiver down listeners' spines. Dave has adapted the works of Marquis de Sade and Edgar Allan Poe, and has performed at a variety of venues and festivals in Scotland and England.

The cheerful mood in the hall was enhanced by another performance Kvity Ukrainy with the Hopsa Dritsa dance, which the dancers also invited our official guests to join in with on stage, to great confusion and amusement.

The next point on the program was the performance of Nicola Alexander, a talented actress and singer from Glasgow with a keen interest in the work of Robert Burns, which could be easily recognized during her performance - and by the title of her show at the 2024 Fringe Festival, 'She Burns'. Nicola presented a humorous and heartfelt performance of four of Burns' most beloved songs: My Love is Like a Red Red Rose, Lassie Lie Near Me, The Silver Tassie, and Ye Banks and Braes.



The culmination of the evening was the performance of our special guest from Krakow, visiting Edinburgh as part of the continuation of cultural exchange between our cities and the promotion of Polish culture in Scotland. Tamara Kalinowska, author, singer and poet, one of the long-time pillars of Krakow's legendary Piwnica pod Baranami cabaret club, and a woman full of passion and inner warmth, performed for us a beautiful mini-recital of her old and new songs, including Waltz , Two Steps Above, The Last Woman, It Can't Be So, When a Woman's Weeping, You Call Me a Lady, and I Forget. On the occasion of her arrival in Scotland, Tamara sang both in Polish and, for the first time in her career - in English. This nice gesture was met with an exceptionally warm reception by the international, multicultural audience gathered in the Storytelling Centre.

At the end of the evening, everyone sang Auld Lang Syne together, along with its Polish equivalent, known to many Poles who had spent time in the Scout movement, *Ogniska już dogasa blask*. Finally, full of contentment and culture, the audience returned home.

We would like to express our special thanks to the employees of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, in the hope of future cooperation, to Agata Mierzyńska and the City of Kraków for enabling Ms. Kalinowska to perform, to Consul General Łukasz Lutostański for supporting our event, to all the performers for providing a packed house with superb entertainment, and to the members of the SPCA Committee, led by Izabella Brodzińska, for their persistent promotion of the event in both Polish and Scottish circles.

Kiro Żabińska-MacIntyre, Keith Mullins-MacIntyre
Fot. Jola Debicka-MacLennan, Anna M. Ruszel

Dunblane Cathedral and Museum

On Saturday, June 8, 2024, our SPCA group had the pleasure of taking a half-day trip to the lovely town of Dunblane. We began our visit at the stunning Dunblane Cathedral, where we marvelled at its impressive architecture. With an hour to explore, we immersed ourselves in the rich history of the site, admiring well-preserved artefacts and even catching a snippet of a rehearsal on the cathedral's majestic organs. A poignant moment came as we paused at the memorial stone—a heartfelt tribute to the victims of the tragic school shooting in 1996.

Next, we headed to the museum, where we were greeted warmly by Irene Godfrey, the curator. She shared fascinating insights into the museum's history and current exhibitions. Among the highlights were displays from World War II, featuring framed buttons belonging to a Polish soldier stationed nearby—items graciously donated to the museum by our SPCA. We also explored rooms filled with relics from the Jacobite rebellions and a collection of communion tokens. Our visit concluded in a special room honoring tennis stars Andy and Jamie Murray, who hail from the area. Afterwards we took a leisurely stroll along the charming streets of Dunblane before enjoying a delicious late lunch at The Riverside.

Kiro Żabińska-MacIntyre
Fot. Anna M Ruszel

Maria Dlugolecka-Graham's Memorial

On June 20, 2024, the SPCA Committee representatives attended a celebration of the life and work of Maria Dlugolecka-Graham, MBE MD PhD, a cherished long-term member who passed away unexpectedly in October 2023.

Maria's academic journey began at the University of Edinburgh, her professional path led her through Wales, Dorset, Canada, and Colombia. After retiring early, she took on the role of Coordinator for the Polish School of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh, overseeing the school's Historical Collection and managing scholarships. Maria dedicated time and effort to foster meaningful collaborations between the University of Edinburgh and Polish medical universities.

The remembrance event took place in the Chancellor's Building. Professor David Kluth, Acting Head of Edinburgh Medical School, and Reverend Dr. Urzula Glienecke, University Associate Chaplain, warmly welcomed the attendees. Colleagues and students who had the privilege of working with Maria, including Ms. Chloe Kippen, Director of Philanthropy and College Advancement, and Dr. Jacek Kwiecinski, a former scholar at the Polish School of Medicine, shared their memories. Each speaker highlighted Maria's incredible work ethic, her unwavering dedication, her infectious sense of humor, and her readiness to assist others.

Two musical pieces, Chopin's Etude, Op. 10 No. 3 and Schubert's Ave Maria, added to the emotional atmosphere. Following the memorial service, attendees viewed a memorial plaque in the Polish Boardroom.

Kiro Żabińska-MacIntyre



Young Talent Concert

This year marked the 27th edition of the Young Talent Concert, proudly sponsored and hosted by the Scottish Polish Cultural Association in September 2024 at the beautiful venue of the Edinburgh Society of Musicians on Belford Road in Edinburgh. Open to budding musicians between the ages of 5 and 17 from schools in and around Edinburgh. The youngsters are invited to perform any musical piece on piano, violin, guitar, cello, flute, even the bagpipes. The concert welcomes participants of all abilities, encouraging each to give their best, whether performing a brief solo or a longer piece.

This year's audience was thrilled by the diverse range of performances, and every young musician received a special reward to celebrate their efforts. It was an inspiring evening that highlighted the incredible musical talent of the next generation.

Keith Mullins-MacIntyre welcomed all the participants and guests. Anna Ruszel and Magdalena Durant spoke about the importance of music in our lives and thanked all for attending.

Youngsters performing this year were:

- Borys Krauze, piano, age 10; Heart and soul, Million dreams
- Lily Grabsztunowicz, piano, age 11; Joe Hisaishi, Merry-Go-Round of Life, Magnificat in D minor (piano version)
- Michał Kosman, piano, age 11; Nocturn F. Chopin
- Eliza Grabacz, piano, age 12; Allegretto - Antonio Diabelli, Changed my mind - Eliza Grabacz
- Natalia Naumowicz, piano, age 12; Heart & Soul, Carol of the Bells
- Antony Kaldowski, piano, age 12; Sonatina C-Dur, cz1 (Daniel Steibelt), Blazny/Clowns (Dymitr Kabalewski)
- Piotr Matysiak, piano, age 18; Love Story

The Scottish Polish Cultural Association is delighted that this year His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh has become Royal Patron of the Edinburgh Society of Musicians, organisation founded in 1887 and a long-time partner of the Young Talent Concert.

Michael Borland

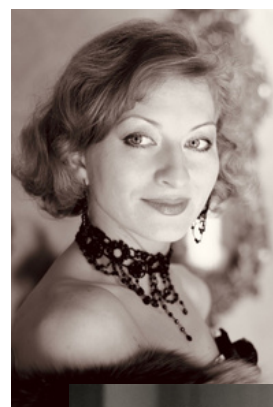
Poland Independence Concert

On Sunday 17 November our Association organised a Poland's Independence Day cabaret concert. It took place at the Polish House, courtesy of Mr Marek Straczynski who has been a great help in setting up the venue. There were two great talents entertaining us: Magdalena Durant and Michal Jesionowski. Three months ago I asked Magdalena whether she would be interested in performing something different than classical singing. I knew that she has a repertoire far beyond the classical. To my absolute delight Magdalena agreed, was available and the project took off.

Why Magdalena chose to sing Ordonka? – because she sang those songs when she grew up with her parents in Wroclaw. There was no hesitation that Michal Jesionowski would provide a piano accompaniment as he is a prolific versatile musician who plays such music. Magdalena was dressed in a period style singing with panache and emotional charge that the songs are filled with. The audience easily recognised the catchy melodies of "When the white lilacs bloom again..." or "The Forgotten song" or "Love will forgive you everything". The song of Hemar "Only is boozing worth" exemplified the deep analytical skill of Hemar in search for human soul. The repertoire included songs of George Gershwin "The Man I love" in Polish version and the original. Musical skill of the accompanist Michal Jesionowski amplified the performance. The artists built a happy enjoyable atmosphere which culminated in the encore.

You may ask why Ordonowna and Hemar the two artists from the Interwar era were chosen? What is the connection between them and Poland's Independence day? Ordonka and Hemar were the torch bearers of freedom, never lost appetite for life despite the extreme trauma of the WW2 that both went through. Both artists Hanka Ordonowna and Marian Hemar were very accomplished entertainers in the times before WW2 from the early 1920s throughout the war and after.

Ordonka was an actress, dancer, charity worker and entertainer. During the WW2 she joined the Polish army organised by General Anders in Russia and they were forced to leave Russia travelling east through Kazakhstan, to Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Italy, where they took part in the Battle of Monte Cassino. Ordonka was actively involved in entertaining the Polish troops on the way. There is something else that Ordonka did. She rescued hundreds of Polish orphans in Russia and helped to move them to safe places.



Marian Hemar was an extraordinary songwriter, a genius cabaret performer who wrote thousands of songs, a poet, with very poignant observations reflected in his works with a great sense of humour. He arrived in London in March 1942 and was “employed” by the Polish government in exile to comment on current political and social affairs. When Hemar settled in England after the war he threw himself into the world of entertainment, created a cabaret in London, wrote poems, cabaret plays, essays and joined the Radio Free Europe which was banned under communism in Poland. He worked in the London studio of Radio Free Europe as one of the channels of communication between the Polish diaspora in exile and the Poles in Poland. We remember that our parents listened to that Radio illegally as it was a breath of fresh air. Hemar left a plethora of famous songs which are still very current and reflect perfectly the state of human soul. Preparing for the concert I discovered that Hemar was in Scotland during the war visiting Polish troops and actively raised the spirits of the soldiers, giving them much sought after moral support by reading his works to them. This is a long answer why Hemar was chosen for the concert in the celebration of Poland’s Independence day.



After the concert everyone was welcomed to the reception downstairs. People had the opportunity to talk to our fabulous entertainers Magdalena and Michal.

Jola Debicka-MacLennan

Celebrating Polish-Scottish Friendship

During the Polish Independence Day celebration, attended by representatives of the Scottish Government, the Lord Provost, members of the diplomatic corps, and many distinguished guests, the Polish Professionals Forum (PPF) proudly presented the Polish-Scottish Friendship Award 2024.

Organized with the invaluable support of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Scotland, the award celebrates the outstanding achievements of the Polish community in Scotland and recognises individuals who have excelled professionally, demonstrated exceptional leadership, and contributed significantly to promoting a positive image of the Polish community. In addition, it honours Friends of Poland, celebrating British individuals who have shown remarkable support for the Polish community.



In 2024, the awards highlighted the achievements of exceptional individuals across eight categories, each exemplifying dedication and excellence. Among the honourees was Mrs. Izabella Brodzinska, Chairperson of the Scottish Polish Cultural Association (SPCA), who received the Princess Maria Clementina Sobieska Award. Mrs. Brodzinska has been the driving force behind the SPCA for over 30 years. Her unwavering commitment to building cultural bridges between the Scottish and Polish communities has left an indelible mark and serves as an inspiration for younger generations.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Mrs. Brodzinska and all the remarkable winners of this year’s awards, whose contributions continue to enrich the cultural tapestry of Scotland.

Anna M. Ruszel

The Brown Envelope: A Christmas Story

Nestled in an armchair with a steaming cup of Lady Grey and a few biscuits on the coffee table, Brenda gazed out at her garden. Lacey, her beloved King Charles spaniel, snoozed beside her, warming her hip and side. With her wrinkled fingers, Brenda gently stroked the soft, white and brown fur. Lacey had been her companion for seven years, a source of joy as a puppy and now a cherished friend, especially during the tough times that followed Jonathan, her husband, going to a care home. The woman and the dog spent countless hours together on countryside paths, and cherishing quiet moments in front of the fireplace. At Christmas they enjoyed visits from Sean, Brenda’s son, but lately, those visits had turned into video calls. Yet, with Lacey sniffing curiously around the Christmas tree and watching the decorations being hung, Brenda could still feel the magic of the season.



This, however, was to be their last Christmas together.

On Brenda's desk lay a letter from the NHS, inviting her for a treatment aimed at helping her regain mobility. The surgery would require a five-month recovery, and there was no one to care for Lacey. It had been suggested that finding her a new home would be the best option. After weeks of wrestling with the decision, Brenda had finally faced reality. Her only wish was to keep Lacey by her side through Christmas. Yet, the prospect of the holiday now felt heavy and daunting.

"Ding, dong, ding, dong!" Lacey awoke with a start, jumped down, and dashed to the door, barking excitedly. "Coming!" shouted Brenda as she reached for her crutch and followed the dog.

"Hello, Brenda! We brought you some groceries," said Helen, one of her friends, standing at the door with a little blonde girl who immediately began to play with Lacey.

"Thank you, my dear," Brenda replied. "That's so kind of you. I'll transfer the money this evening. Would you like to come in?"

"Take your time, no rush," smiled Helen. "We'd love to, but I have a lot to prepare—my husband's family from Wales is visiting for Christmas. Come on, Ellie, we can come back after New Year. I'm sure there will be plenty of time to play with Lacey! Oh, what is it?" She noticed a shift in Brenda's expression, and the smile faded.

"No, it's nothing," Brenda replied, feeling a lump in her throat but steadying her voice. "I have to go through this long treatment in the New Year, so Lacey will need to be rehomed."

"Oh no," Helen gasped. "I thought someone had offered to look after her? It's just feeding and walks for a few months, right?"

"Yes, that's the plan, but no one was able to commit—I've already asked." Brenda turned away, fighting back tears that threatened to spill again.

"I'm so sorry, Brenda," the younger woman said softly, touching her hand. "I don't know what to say. I need to head out now, but I'll try to call you in a few days' time." She tugged gently on her daughter's sleeve. The little girl looked at Brenda with sad eyes, kneeling down to stroke Lacey's head.

The door clicked shut behind them. A few days later, Brenda stopped waiting for Helen's call. What would it change, anyway?

On Christmas Eve, the elderly woman prepared a simple lunch for herself and Lacey before taking a short walk to the private gardens where local dog owners let their pets roam. Getting there wasn't easy, but with her walking stick, she managed to make it. Watching Lacey play with the other dogs made the effort worthwhile.

That evening, as she sat by the fireplace, the flickering orange flames dancing, and Lacey curled up contentedly beside her, Brenda wished desperately for time to freeze, just so this moment could last forever.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang—a sound so unexpected it made her jump. Lacey jumped up too, barking at the door. "Coming!" Brenda called out, her mind racing as she wondered who would be visiting at this hour—she certainly hadn't anticipated anyone.

"Good evening, Mrs. Williams!" As she opened the door, Brenda was greeted by three smiling girls, with Ellie leading the way, and a middle-aged woman behind her, all bundled in outdoor jackets and hats. "We're sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Williams," the woman said warmly. "I'm Francesca Manzani, a Scout Leader for Ellie's unit. We came to bring you a little gift."

"Oh, do come in..." Brenda replied, taken aback. "But I don't have any treats to offer you... I... I wasn't really preparing for Christmas this year..."

"We'll be quick," Francesca said with a reassuring smile. "Ellie?" Ellie's face lit up and she eagerly handed Brenda a brown envelope. "We drew up a voucher for you," she explained, her voice shaking with excitement. Brenda's hands trembled as she pulled out a beautifully decorated piece of paper.

'A voucher,' it read at the top, 'for five months (or as long as needed) of dog care. Services include walks, feeding, and vet visits. Signed: 102 Edinburgh North Scout Group.'

"It took us a few days to assure it would work," the woman's voice faded into the background, "but it will—and everyone in the group is really excited about it. Would you like to accept the voucher?"

Brenda hardly remembered the rest of the evening; all she could recall was the sound of the girls' laughter as they played tug-o-war with Lacey and the Christmas lights that seemed to sparkle even brighter. As she drifted off to sleep on the sofa bed, Lacey's slow, steady breathing was a comforting presence.

And on the table beside the Christmas tree lay the brown envelope—the most wonderful gift she could have ever hoped for.

Kiro Źabińska-MacIntyre
Fot. Paweł Kenar, Pixabay

**The Scottish Polish Cultural Association
wishes you a joyous Christmas filled with
love, peace and laughter - and a
prosperous and healthy New Year too!**

