



## Summary of Elizabeth Fudakowska's life story

Interview by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) May 2017

Elizabeth (Elżbieta) Fudakowska was born in 1929 in the town of Włocławek on the banks of the River Vistula in central Poland. Her father was a landowner who joined the Polish Cavalry as a reserve officer in 1939 and was then interned in Lithuania following the German invasion in September that year.

He escaped and travelled via Sweden to France where he joined Polish forces there before the collapse of France in 1941. The Poles were then shipped to Liverpool in England and onto Scotland where he was based for two to three years. His wife and youngest child, Elizabeth, with her two brothers remained in occupied Poland near Lublin but after the war came to England via Vienna in 1946.

Times were difficult but she found her new country very welcoming with a lot of support from the Polish émigré community. She spoke some English with a French accent having been educated at a French Lycée in Vienna. After her secondary schooling she studied at the University of London and gained an Honours degree in French which she followed with a post graduate diploma in Librarianship and began her career in that discipline. Her first job was in the library at the London of School of Economics and after five years there she spent two years on an exchange programme at Hamilton Arts College in upstate New York.

Upon her return to the UK in 1962 she found a job advertisement for a position at the newly-formed University of East Anglia but had to look for Norwich on a map. She was successful in her application and joined the staff which at that time included only the Chancellor, a vice-Chancellor, two professors and a librarian; there were no students. She helped establish the library at Earlham Hall in a room that had a few shelves with some encyclopaedias and dictionaries. As the first two Schools were English Studies and Biological Sciences, they bought in a stock of reference books pertaining to those subjects.

By June 1963 the library had a team of eight people housed in prefabricated buildings in West Earlham, which also included lecture rooms, labs an assembly hall and refectory for the students. There was a great ambition to grow the UEA and building began on the main campus (previously a golf course) in the mid-1960s, with the first phase of the library opening in 1968 with its completion in 1974.

Elizabeth worked at the UEA for thirty years – “the best and happiest memories of my life”. The work was hard but there was a great team spirit. Her work was her life, with little time for other hobbies and most of her friends came from within that academic environment. Now retired she enjoys gardening but has loved living in Norfolk, exploring its natural beauty and learning about its fascinating history although, over the years, she has made numerous return visits to her Polish roots.

She has sympathy with the most recent influx of Poles to this country in their search for employment and believes they have contributed positively to the economy. She acknowledges that there is a sense of anxiety about the future within the Polish community but that they still seem happy to live and work here.

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