



Town Hall 1831

A History of the Royal Leamington Spa Town Hall, Police Station and Polish Centre, High Street, Royal Leamington Spa

The land for the building was given by the Rt Hon The Earl of Aylesford and the Wise family. The building was designed by the architect John Russell, who also designed the now demolished Warneford Hospital and built by John Toone, who completed the project for £1900.00 in 1830. It was built specifically as Leamington Spa's Town Hall, for the Town Commissioners.

The building, although small, housed the Commissioners' meeting rooms and offices, a ballroom, a magistrates' court, and a police station with holding cells. It was built on what was then Leamington's main road, London Road, later High Street.

The Commissioners intended to construct a much larger civic complex around the Town Hall and to beautify the area with "ornamental buildings". The large building, formerly the Christian Bookshop and more particularly the extension to the former George Hotel on the corner of George Street, which is clearly aligned on the same symmetrical axis is meant to improve views from the "Royal Balcony" of the Town Hall.

After the present Town Hall opened on Parade in 1884, the entire building was taken over by Leamington Borough Police who occupied it for many years until they eventually sold it to the Polish Catholic Mission in 1968. The police lamp that stood outside the station is now in the Leamington Art Gallery and Museum.

The formation of the Polish community in UK was the result of population movements, brought about by World War II. The war itself started in Poland, with a co-ordinated attack by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. In eastern Poland, the Soviets embarked on a policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Prisoners of War were massacred at Katyn Forest, and nearly 2 million civilians were deported. Within 18 months half the deportees were dead.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941 resulted in the release of all survivors. 114,000 joined the Polish Armed Forces in the West, commanded by General Wladyslaw Anders. They then fought alongside the British in Italy. In the spring of 1946, the British Foreign Secretary wrote to every member of the Polish Armed Forces, inviting them to settle in Britain. When Monsignor Jozef Golab arrived in Leamington Spa in September 1960, the Polish community numbered 250. To enable the purchase of the Polish Centre in July 1968, the Monsignor loaned his own money, received as compensation for the years spent in Nazi concentration camps.

The post-war Polish community saw itself as an exiled political elite, an attitude which for most, manifested itself at a personal level in a refusal to accept any form of citizenship or ID. Political activity in support of the Government in Exile, and the democratic opposition in Poland, became an important part of their identity. Chief among them, was Prof Zbigniew Antoni Scholtz, chair of the Polish Centre for 20 years, who was also a minister in the Government in Exile.