



**21 September 2011**

As part of this year's [Archive Awareness Campaign](#), theme *Culture & Diversity: What's Your Story?* a fascinating new exhibition at East Lothian John Gray Centre reveals the hidden story of Polish soldiers in Scotland during the Second World War.

### **For Your Freedom and Ours**

*For your Freedom and Ours* explores the plight of Polish soldiers who found themselves in Scotland after a long and difficult journey through Europe. The exhibition also tells the story of the contribution Polish soldiers made during the war and the difficulties they faced in the post war years.

### **Polish community in East Lothian, Scotland**

At the end of the war, with Russia having taken over vast swathes of eastern Poland and essentially in control of the rest of the country, the question remained 'what to do with the Poles'. The Polish army were kept in Europe as an occupying force. In Scotland, where the political mindset was steeped in socialist principles and largely supportive of Russia, there was an underlying anti-Polish sentiment. Finally the British Government decided to let the Poles choose whether to return to Poland, stay in the United Kingdom or emigrate to a Commonwealth country. Most soldiers decided to stay and settle in Scotland and set up homes in East Lothian, continuing the long history the two countries have enjoyed together.

Although the vast majority integrated into Scottish society, they still retained a strong Polish identity. Poles took up employment across the country. For example, many worked in coal mines and farms, those who had been doctors in pre-war Poland fitted into the new National Health Service, while lawyers retrained to learn Scots Law.

**Caroline Mathers, John Gray Centre Development Officer** said:

*"This exhibition brings to light the wealth of Polish material held in our Collections. It is a fascinating topic and very relevant to many people in the area. The John Gray Centre is a hub of cultural activity and our collections are accessible to everyone. Our rich heritage is brought to life through an exciting programme of temporary exhibitions and community learning activities. We are at the heart of East Lothian's cultural community and we welcome new and local visitors to the centre; there really is something for everyone!"*

## **The John Gray Centre**

The John Gray Centre is a new heritage facility based in East Lothian, Scotland. The centre will house the Haddington Branch Library, the East Lothian Archive and Local History Centre, a museum & temporary exhibition gallery and a community learning room.

The centre holds a wealth of material on every aspect of East Lothian's heritage, from archaeology and maps, to criminal justice and photography collections.

Visitors who would like to research more on the Polish army, genealogy or any other subject relating to East Lothian's history should email [localhistory@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@eastlothian.gov.uk) or visit [www.johngraycentre.org](http://www.johngraycentre.org).