

# A Pole Apart? Polish and German Material Culture in South Australia

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*This paper looks at the differing reactions to immigration by two groups of people from the same area in Europe, and how these different responses to their new cultural landscape are reflected in their material culture. The main case study used in this paper is a Polish settlement in mid north South Australia. The settlement of Polish Hill River was unique for several reasons, including the fact that it is believed to be the second Polish rural settlement outside Europe to be established in the nineteenth century. The community existed from the mid-1850s until the early twentieth century when it appears that all Polish customs were discarded and the settlement was for the most part abandoned.*

The study of minority cultures within Australia has become more common in the discipline of archaeology as a general public awareness of the multi-culturalism of Australia has grown. While a number of cultures arriving in Australia made attempts to 'blend in' with other cultures of the time, others took pride in maintaining their own customs and traditional ways of life. Learning about these different cultures and how they are represented in material remains is essential to an understanding of past Australian society and its development.

Since the 1980s there have been an increasing number of studies done linking archaeology and ethnicity overseas (see Clark 1987; Cornell & Hartman 1998; Dawdry 2000; Diehl, Walters & Thiel 1998; Graves-Brown, Jones & Gamble 1996; Hodder 1989; Jones 2000; McGuire 1982; Mullins & Paynter 2000; Praetzelis, Praetzelis & Brown 1987; Schuyler 1988; Shennan 1989; Staski 1990). However, this trend has been slower to penetrate Australian archaeology (exceptions being Hill 1998; Jack, Holmes & Kerr 1984; Lydon 1999; Smith 1998, 2003). Furthermore, work that has been done in Australia usually concentrates on cultures that are highly visible in both historic and material records, such as the Chinese.

The main focus of this paper is the nineteenth-century settlement of Polish Hill River and this community's reaction to living in a new cultural landscape. Sadly, the last Polish resident of Polish Hill River died in 1999, and there are no living descendants of these families who retain information about nineteenth-century Polish traditions. Thus information about the community's reaction to their new cultural landscape has to be found from their material culture and the historical documents they appear in.

Settled in 1856, the remains of Polish Hill River are situated in the lower northern area of South Australia, 120 km north-northeast of Adelaide and 3 km east of the town of Sevenhill (Fig. 1).

This settlement was the first and largest Polish settlement in South Australia, however over time, small pockets of Polish settlers made their home across the lower and mid north of the state. Paszkowski (1988:735) has written that Polish Hill River 'was a unique example of a Polish "colony" in Australia because [the people] maintained their language, cuisine, customs and even a different style of architecture and decoration of houses'. Yet, despite this traditional way of living, the cultural residues (both material and social) of the Polish in the lower and mid north are elusive.

## ETHNICITY AND MATERIAL CULTURE

This paper examines how ethnicity is manifested through material culture at a specific historical site. In its broadest sense, ethnicity refers to the characteristics a group accepts as pertinent to them. This means that a group of people, either a nationality such as the Polish or groups of different peoples such as the Celts or Gypsies, share enough physical and/or cultural characteristics to define themselves as 'us' and everyone else as 'them' (Jones 1996:66). This paper takes its definition of ethnic identity from Jones: 'that aspect of a person's self-conceptualisation which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and or common descent' (Jones 2000:xiii).

Historical archaeologists usually study ethnicity in one of three ways: assimilation, studies on ethnic pride, or the material correlates of ethnicity (McGuire 1982:161,162). McGuire (1982:163) states that of these three, material evidence of ethnicity is likely to be hardest to find in the archaeological assemblage. This is because of the same reasons known to most archaeologists: only the durable items survive, and people do not usually dispose of valuable (culturally and monetarily) objects. Many symbols of ethnicity are either archaeologically intangible, such as

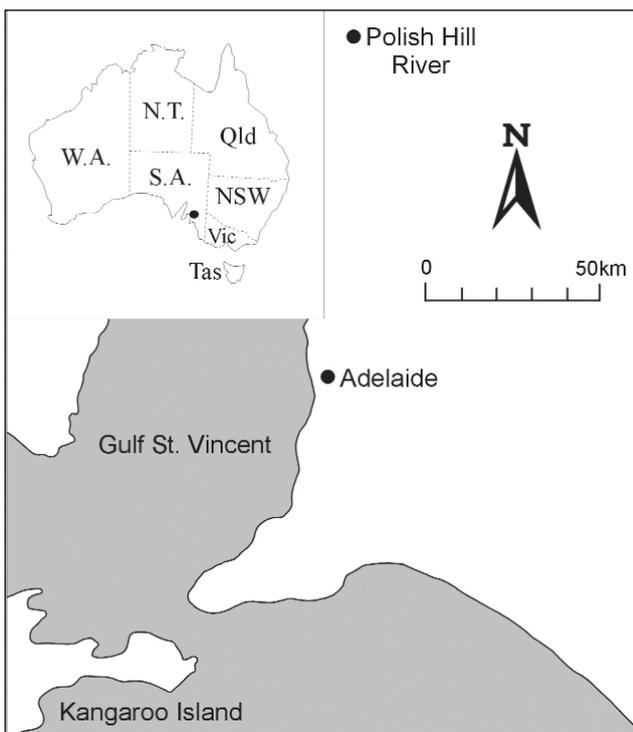


Fig. 1: Partial map of South Australia showing Polish Hill River.

clothes (except for fastenings such as buttons) and cooking recipes, while other items that might reveal ethnicity, such as letters, photos and religious symbols/items are not generally thrown away, have a long use life or do not survive archaeologically. This does not mean that evidence of ethnicity through material culture cannot be found at a site. Rather, often some other sort of evidence, such as historical records, are needed to contextualise the material culture that is found, and to assist in the identification of a specific ethnic presence at that site.

Ethnicity and the culture that lie behind are not fixed: they are flexible and can change, adapt and are adjusted as people become accustomed to different environments or social situations (Barrett 1990:59). These changes are represented in the material culture people choose, use and create and is both representative of their culture as well as being active in its creation, maintenance and transformation (Lydon 1999:191).

However, just because the outward visible material aspects of a group's culture may change, it does not mean that the more subtle inner aspects of culture and their meanings do not stay the same over long periods of time (Kelly & Kelly 1980:133). It is possible that a distinctly Polish world view was translated into patterns of non-Polish artefacts. Some archaeological theories detail how artefacts can look the same as everyone else's, but have different meanings and interpretations in different contexts. Different immigrant groups brought with them their own ideas about what the world was like when they immigrated, but had to use foreign material to express these ideas. Thus, the same material culture is used by different cultural groups in different ways (Mullins 1999:30).

So, how are ethnic communities identified when the symbolic markers that make them different alter and change to represent different ideas and situations? There are three areas of self that are important cultural markers: food, language and social contacts (Johnson 1969:26). Waters (1995:519) has added to this list: dress, political units, residential patterns and religion. By keeping or discarding these things a community or individuals can include or exclude themselves or others from the society around them. By speaking only Polish a group can exclude those who do not speak Polish; by learning English they can include themselves in the surrounding community. By cooking only Polish food they can keep their ties to their homeland, but by cooking 'British-Australian' food they are expressing the wish to create ties to their new homeland by appearing to be *less* different. By socialising and marrying within their community they can keep their culture untouched by any other, by social contacts outside of their community they can experience the differences and feel free to keep their own culture or adopt a new one.

## HISTORICAL SETTING

Historic records tell us that a major factor in the eventual immigration of the Polish to Australia was the complete decay of the constitutional and socio-economic system of Poland in the eighteenth century (Wandycz 1974:7). The country was experiencing a decline in the production of all goods, increasing poverty, limitation of domestic markets, a rise in prices and a general economic recession. In 1780, the revenue of Poland was purportedly 40 times less than France and ten times less than Russia (Wandycz 1974:7). It was no surprise that with Poland in such a state, her neighbouring countries were watching closely. In 1772, 1793 and 1795 Prussia, Russia and Austria annexed Poland's land and divided the country between them with little resistance (Wandycz 1974:10). Russia had taken 62 per cent of the land containing 45 per cent of the population, Prussia received 20 per cent of the land and 23 per cent of the population, while Austria

appropriated the remaining 18 per cent of the land and 32 per cent of the population. These new borders did not correspond with any geographic, ethnic, economic or historical claims (Wandycz 1974:11).

Almost all the Polish from Hill River emigrated from Prussian occupied Poland, with approximately 90 per cent coming from the crowded province of Poznań/Poseń (Polish/German), plus a small number from Great Silesia and Pomerania (Paszkowski 1988:10).

'Prussian Poland' is the official term used to describe the Grand Duchy of Poznań, however, its popular use has come to encompass all the land that Prussia received from Poland, including Posnania, West Prussia, South Prussia, New Silesia and New East Prussia (Davies 1982:112). In 1815 Poznań consisted of approximately 29 000 km<sup>2</sup> and had a population of 850 000, which grew to 1 340 000 people over the next 30 years (Reddaway et al. 1951:344). Eight out of ten people in the Grand Duchy spoke Polish as their native language (Davies 1982:120).

Under the partitions, all three colonising powers attempted to enforce conformity and their own values on the conquered Polish people (Zamoyski 1987:290). However, while the Polish nation did not officially exist, the Polish national spirit remained strong (Davies 1982:122). Occupation of Polish land by Russia, Prussia and Austria only increased peoples' resolve to keep their traditions, language and religion alive. This determination led to revolts and attempted revolutions against all three partition powers. The 1846 uprising in Galicia against the Austrian partition government dramatically changed the life of Prussian Polish people in Poznań. Fearing a similar revolt, authorities dissolved Polish societies, Germanised schools and bought Polish land with the intention of promoting German immigration (Reddaway et al. 1951:354). The failed 1848 insurrections in Berlin and Poznań against the Prussian partition government caused even stricter measures of control to be adopted.

Over the next 50 years, life grew increasingly difficult for the Polish in Prussian Poland. A speaker at the Frankfurt Parliament called Poland a 'nation of lesser cultural content' (Zamoyski 1987:301) and the Polish began to be treated as such. However, the suppression of the Polish people had the opposite effect to that which the Prussian Government intended (Gronowicz 1976:40). Despite all the measures by the Prussian Government, the German speaking population of Poznań fell from 41 per cent in 1860 to 34 per cent in 1890 (Zamoyski 1987:305).

## Polish immigration

The suppression of Poznań's Polish population, along with economic factors such as drought and lack of land, saw emigration from Poland peak in the second half of the nineteenth century. Political emigrations began in the late 1700s and continued at regular intervals up until Poland's independence from the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in 1989. Years of significant political emigration were 1772, 1795, 1831, 1848, 1864, 1905 and 1944 (Davies 1982:275), and for the most part coincided with the partitions or revolts against the three partition countries.

Economic emigration began in the 1840s and differed from political emigration in both cause and content. These immigrants were poor, mostly illiterate and the majority were peasants, small craftspeople or miners. They left their homes deliberately. Economic emigration was not a move by a number of individuals, but a mass departure encouraged by a need to find better economic opportunities, a higher standard of living and a greater degree of economic security (Zubrzycki 1956:10).

Nineteenth-century economic emigrations established Polish communities in the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Germany and France. Tentative emigration figures suggest that by 1939 over 195 000 Polish immigrants had settled in Brazil, 456 000 in France, 250 000 in Canada, 1 500 000 in the United States and over 2 000 000 in Germany (Davies 1982:279). However these figures cannot be corroborated, as up until 1918 Polish people were not listed as Polish when arriving at their destinations, they were listed under the nationalities of the three partition countries (Davies 1982:278). Prior to 1918 fewer than 1000 Polish people immigrated to the Australian colonies, probably because of the greater distance from Poland (Kaluski 1985:8).

Most of the Polish arriving in Australia in the nineteenth century came from towns in the Wielkopolska region in the province of Poznań, such as Wielka Dabrowska, Miedzyrzec, Zbaszyń, Babimost and Pardyż (Paszkowski 1987:10). They probably decided to emigrate because of bad harvests which had hit the Poznań province between 1853 and 1855 (Reddaway et al. 1951:412).

### Polish Hill River

During 1856 a group of 25 Polish Catholic families from Prussia (approximately 100 people), arrived in Adelaide on the *August* and made their way up to the town of Sevenhill, where a group of German Catholics had already settled. They established a Polish settlement at Hill River nearby (Paszkowski 1987:9). By the early 1880s there were over 65 Polish families (approximately 400 people) living at Hill River, nearly all engaged in agriculture (Rogalski 1871:2; Migration Museum 1995:373). Their farms varied in size from sections of 80 acres, to a single section or part of a section, while other Polish owned no land at all (Szczepanowski 1987:14). As the Polish settled in an area where the land had already been surveyed and purchased, they had to buy land as it became available and when they could afford it. As a result, most of the Polish Hill River farms were too small to earn a viable income to support a family, and some Polish farmers supplemented their income by keeping orchards or vineyards, stripping wattle bark off trees to sell to tanneries or tendering for construction contracts from local councils to build roads in the area. Others established their own businesses, such as hotels or butchers shops, or took employment with people outside the community, while some women went into domestic service (Schmaal 1980: 61; Szczepanowski 1987:18; Johnson 1994:13).

The Polish attended mass every week, walking overland or driving the 3 km in carts to where they were welcome to attend the Catholic services at the German run St Aloysius Church in Sevenhill. All accounts indicate that the Polish and German communities in the area had no conflicts with each other, nevertheless, the Polish wanted to be able to worship in their own church (Johnson 1994:13). Thus, the community at Hill River decided to build a church and school. John Nykiel, a leader in the Polish community donated two acres of land and families began to quarry the necessary stone and build the church themselves (Johnson 1994:13). During construction in 1870, a Polish priest (Father Leon Rogalski) arrived at the Sevenhill Jesuit Church from Galicia in southern (Austrian) Poland and began to minister to the Hill River community in Polish. According to a former resident of the community, Fr Rogalski 'wanted to keep all Poles together and have a little Poland in Australia' (Młodystach Book Committee 1985:284). The church was formally consecrated on 30 November 1871 as the Church of St Stanislaus Kostka (Johnson 1994:13).

In addition to his preaching at the church (Fig. 2), Fr Rogalski taught Polish children in the school adjoining the church (Szczepanowski 1987:31, 35). The attendance book for

the St Stanislaus School from 1882–1885 shows at least 31 children attending the school, coming from 19 local families at Hill River, Sevenhill and as far away as Penwortham (7 km southwest) (Attendance Book 1883, 1884, 1885).



Fig. 2: Church and school with Polish Hill River settlers circa 1880 (Paszkowski 1987:xxiv).

The church and school (which also incorporated a Polish library) became the centre of life for the Polish families, through them the community were able to maintain their faith, language and traditions (Paszkowski 1988: 735; Migration Museum 1995:373). Polish women and girls living at Hill River favoured their traditional bright clothing and sometimes wore a bonnet headdress tied with long ribbons in a bow under the chin (Fig. 3), with flaps large enough to cover part of their shoulders (Simons 1944:23). Women usually only spoke Polish at home (Simons 1944:23), as it was generally regarded to be a sin to speak English in the house. It was only by enforcing such strict rules that their forbearers had been able



Fig. 3: Picture of a Polish woman from the village of Wielka Dabrowska wearing the Polish national costume from that region, taken in the late 1980s. Courtesy of B. J. Polomka.

to keep the Polish language alive in the midst of the enforced German culture in Poland (Młodystach Book Committee 1985:282–283). Historical events of Polish national importance were also commemorated, including the 200th anniversary of the Polish defeat of the Turks outside the gates of Vienna (9 September 1683). This event was celebrated at Polish Hill River with a thanksgiving mass and songs (Szczepanowski 1987:53). Reproductions of paintings of this battle were imported from Poland for the people of Hill River, along with a number of commemorative medallions made in Krakow (Szczepanowski 1987:53).

By the late 1880s the lack of new farm land, poor crops and a shortage of water in the area saw many of the Polish settlers head further northwards in South Australia (Paszkowski 1987:14) where larger areas of land were opening up and technological improvements for farm machinery made farming more feasible (Migration Museum 1995:373). By the 1890s many Polish settlers had left Hill River and the Polish became scattered over the greater lower, mid and upper northern regions of South Australia (Szczepanowski 1987:61; Johnson 1994:13).

After Fr Rogalski's death in 1906 the Church at Polish Hill River was used once a year, on the feast day of St Stanislaus Kostka and eventually closed in 1950. The attached school was taken over by the government and re-named the Sevenhill East School. However, it too closed in 1924 due to a decline in enrolments (Szczepanowski 1987:35). It appears that after Fr Rogalski died, the last influence of a deep-seated Polish identity in the area was gone, and the remnants of the community disappeared into the general mainstream culture of the area.

## SURVEY AND EXCAVATION AT POLISH HILL RIVER

While most of the original Polish Hill River structures have collapsed or been torn down, a survey of the area, aided by maps drawn by former residents, identified seven uninhabited surviving houses or house complexes (more than one house at the same site) built or owned by Polish immigrants at Hill River. These houses are: the Josef Borowicki house; the Bulla (also spelled Bula) house; the Drula (Deula) house; the F. Wyman complex (two houses); the Niemetz (Niemiec) complex (three houses); the Pawelski house and the J. Wyman house (Fig. 4). At this point it is unclear whether additional

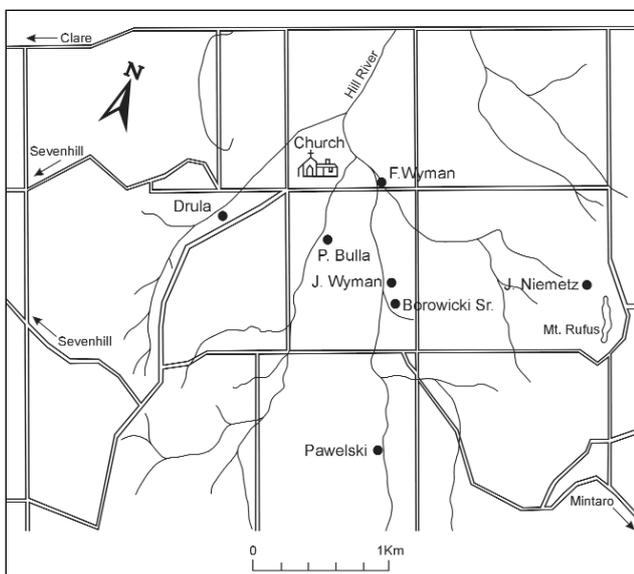


Fig. 4: Map showing the remaining houses at Polish Hill River. Map adapted from Szczepanowski 1987:15.

houses built at the Niemetz and Wyman complex sites were used by different members of each family concurrently or each house represents the replacement of an earlier house with a later one.

These houses are all in a substantial state of disrepair, with missing roofs, fallen walls and collapsed chimneys. This is the result of natural decay and other factors, such as bushfires and the deliberate stripping of materials from these houses by people in the area.

After each house/house complex was photographed, surveyed and plans drawn up, comparisons were made between the remaining seven house sites and traditional Polish and Australian/British styles of architecture. It became clear that the houses at Polish Hill River are for the most part created almost entirely in the tradition of Australian vernacular architecture (see Evans 1983; Evans, Lucas & Stapleton 1984; Irving 1985; Moore et al. 1989 for discussion on traditional Australian vernacular characteristics).

Traditional Polish architecture from the Wielkopolska region would dictate that houses usually had a gable roof, thatched, with an additional gable panelled with wood. The angle and slope depended on the volume of rain and snow that fell in the area (Tłoczek 1958:19). A hallway should be located in the middle of both single and double roomed houses, while in double room plans (two rooms located side by side, between the front and back walls), the rooms were arranged around a central fireplace (Tłoczek 1958:18). The chimney is located under the roof ridge in the hallway which meant the development of an additional room that was turned into a white room (a room commonly used for visitors or as a bedroom, as opposed to a black room used for cooking and daily activities) (Florek 2002:1).

Six of these houses display traditional South Australian vernacular characteristics such as verandas, skillion extensions and fireplaces set into the side walls, and are constructed out of typical materials commonly used throughout the lower and mid northern are of South Australia, such as walls built of field stones, bricks and slate with galvanised iron or thatched roofing, and slate flooring (see Pikusa 1986 for discussion on traditional South Australian vernacular characteristics).

Only one house showed any design or architectural deviation from traditional South Australian vernacular house layouts. The Bulla house (Fig. 5) is the largest and most elaborate of the remaining houses located at Polish Hill River, and the only one that exhibits specific characteristics of

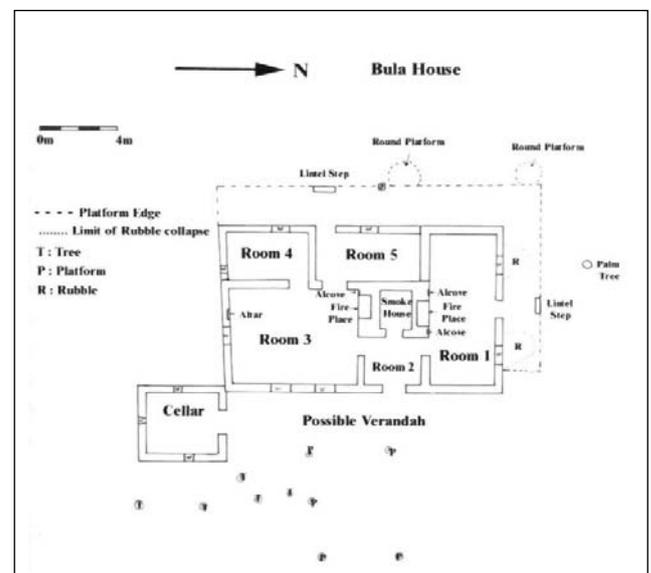


Fig. 5: Plan of the Bulla house, 2001.

traditional Polish housing. The house consists of five rooms (including a central internal smokehouse) and an attached cellar. The central smokehouse and the through-passage-kitchen plan both suggest the use of traditional Polish architectural traits (Fig. 6).

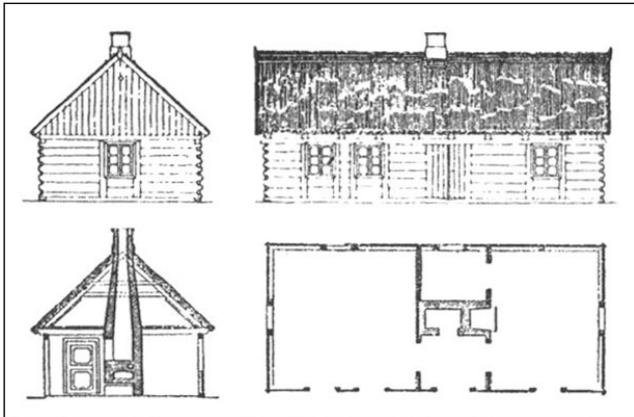


Fig. 6: Typical Polish Wielkopolska region cottage plan showing central smokehouse with connecting fireplace, as seen in the Bulla house (Tloczek 1958:30).

While no dates were able to be ascertained with certainty for the construction of any of these houses, the Bulla house did contain two dates engraved into the stone walls. Both these dates were '1883', and had been plastered over during the decoration of the house (bush fires caused the plaster to crack and fall away, revealing the dates). Whilst these dates can not be seen to be conclusive as a construction date, they are the best evidence available.

These dates would put the construction of this house 27 years after the village was settled, indicating that traditional building techniques were being employed at that stage. Yet, at what point after this were these techniques discarded, and why? These are questions that may never be answered due to the remaining lack of houses from Polish Hill River, and the inability to date the other six standing beyond using the most obvious architectural dating techniques.

### Niches

While six out of seven house design and external layouts were generally typical for South Australia, an internal feature was seen in at least four (possibly five) of the seven houses which was architecturally unusual; in fact it is not observed anywhere else in the lower or mid north region. These features are small rectangular or square holes built into the internal walls of some rooms and have been called 'niches'. These niches (Figs 7, 8), measuring anywhere from 20 cm in length, height and depth, to 50 cm by 60 cm by 20 cm, were recorded in the Bulla house (three), the Drula house (one), the second house in the F. Wyman complex (one) and the J. Wyman house (two). In addition, there is evidence to suggest that the second house in the Niemetz complex might once have had a niche in the southern wall that was filled in at a later date. Most of these niches are located next to fireplaces (although one was also located in a bedroom) and are all approximately 1 m–1.5 m above floor level.

In Polish rural architecture, niches were 'a feature found in Polish farmhouses and served a number of purposes such as keeping containers of food warm and dry, or some were cages for laying hens' (Barford 2002 pers. com.). This use was confirmed when further investigation located a former resident of Poland who stated that niches were found in his

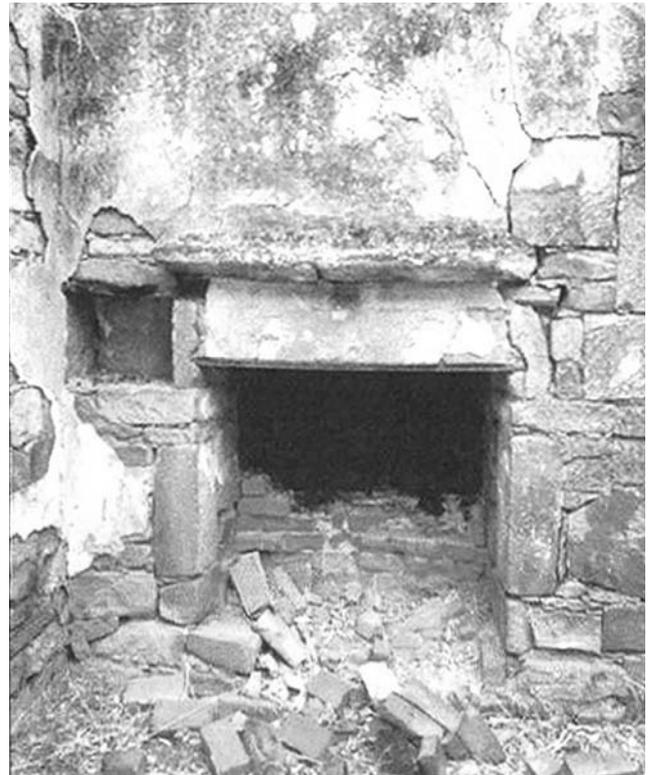


Fig. 7: Single niche located in Room Three, next to the southern fireplace in the Bulla house. Photo by author.



Fig. 8: Niche located next to the southern fireplace in the Drula house. The northern fireplace does not have a niche. Photo by author.

childhood home and were located next to or in the stove area. They were used to keep pots of food hot, while cooking other foods on the stove (Henneberg 2003: pers. com.). However, while this explanation fits perfectly for the larger niches from the Bulla house and the F. Wyman house; the three niches seen in the Drula and J. Wyman house are much too small (approximately 20 x 25 cm) for such a function, even though two are located next to the fireplace. It could be that these

smaller niches are an adaptation of the traditional larger niches, however, their function remains speculative at this point. It is possible that they were used to store and display items of personal value such as small religious statues.

Why are there niches built in at least three houses that were, for all intents and purposes, Australian in their overall architectural appearance (with the exception of the Bulla house)? One possible reason is that the Polish did not want to abandon a part of their traditional architecture in an environment where other traditional architectural features were altered for practical, environmental or social reasons. Perhaps because the niches were in a private internal space and thus, only seen by family and invited friends, they may have survived much better than external Polish traits which are geared toward public display (cf Mullins 1999).

### **Other Material Culture**

A great deal of movable and immovable material culture came to light during the walking surveys, including cemeteries with large numbers of headstones/graves belonging to former Polish Hill River residents. Generally this material culture was a typical array of materials seen at any historical site in South Australia, such as large amounts of coloured transfer-printed sherds, glass sherds and house debris such as door locks, padlocks and sieves. This was not unexpected. The trade network between the Polish at Hill River and people back in Poland was likely sporadic at best and no evidence has been uncovered for regular trading back and forth. While the Polish did correspond with family and friends back in Poland, and presumably did ask for some items to be sent over with others who were immigrating, there would not have been a great deal of extra space for non-essential items. Even Fr Rogalski found it difficult to maintain regular book deliveries for his parish mission from his brotherhood in Poland (Crowe 1884).

Two interesting items were uncovered during the surveys, both of which had been handed in by the owner of the property on which the J. Wyman house is located. Two hand-made stoneware bottles were found inside the Wyman house and bore what appeared to be a German maker's mark. The mark in the centre of the circle reads 'Pullna', while around the circumference of the circle are stamped the German words 'Bitter Wasser'. 'Bitter Wasser' translates in English as 'Bitter Water'. It is most likely that these bottles are water bottles made specifically for water from the mineral spring, Pullna, located in the current Bohemia region of the Czech Republic (formerly part of the pre-World War One Austrian Empire). This province is famous for its mineral springs, with over 200 located in the region. The water from the Pullna spring (known as 'bitter water') was (and still is) used for medicinal purposes.

Although the Pullna spring was formerly located in Austria, this does not preclude these bottles from having arrived with the Polish settlers. Austria annexed a part of Poland in the late eighteenth century, and the Polish Catholic priest who arrived to minister to the Polish Hill River congregation was from this region. Fr Rogalski could have brought the bottles of 'medicine' as a kind of preventative measure for any ailments he might contract in an unknown country. This is, of course, sheer speculation; any one of the settlers could have obtained this through trade networks with Europe prior to departure for Australia, or indeed purchased them from the German settlers living in Sevenhill or the Barossa Valley some 50 km away.

### *Graves*

All the Polish graves markers in evidence from the nearby Sevenhill Catholic cemetery and the Mintaro Catholic

cemetery (the Polish Hill River church had no cemetery) show only English inscriptions and general British/Australian trends in monument shape and decoration (see Martin 1998). These markers showed repeated use of a particular set of symbols such as wreaths, crosses, ivy, flowers or scrolls. In some instances there was no decoration at all, only the epitaph. They are simple, to the point, and convey no sense of a distinctive Polish identity.

There are a number of possible reasons for this. For example, there may have been no one in the Polish settlement with the ability to create and engrave headstones, although this seems unlikely as the Polish Hill River community quarried and dressed the stone for their Church. Possibly some people at Polish Hill River could not read or write Polish, and thus were unable to instruct the grave makers in Clare and Adelaide how to engrave Polish tombstones. Szczepanowski highlights that many of the Polish were illiterate and a number of marriage certificates and land tax returns from members of the Polish Hill River community were signed with an 'X' (Szczepanowski 1976:24). However this too seems unlikely as Fr Rogalski was teaching the children to read and write and any illiteracy of the original Polish settlers was probably not replicated in the generations that were taught after his arrival in 1870.

The English inscriptions might have been chosen deliberately in an attempt to 'fit in' with the wider British/Australian society. Clark (1987:385) argues that 'ethnic individuals whose occupations bring increased income may strive to imitate more prestigious non-ethnic behaviour. Their consumer choices would be the same as those of non-ethnics'. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the Polish considered the consumer choices of the wider society to be more 'prestigious' than their own. Another explanation for the lack of Polish writing could be that at least some of the Polish graves are modern replacements for original markers written in Polish, which had deteriorated over the settlement's 60 year history.

### *Excavation*

A sample excavation was conducted at the J. Wyman house in an effort to uncover further evidence of Polish ethnicity from material culture. This house was chosen as the site of the excavation over the more traditionally designed Bulla house because there was clear surface evidence of material culture scatters around the house. Furthermore, two hand-made ceramic bottles had been found at the site and the house contains two niches/alcoves indicating Polish construction, while historical records indicated Polish occupation of the building. Moreover, the landowners had no objection to the site being excavated, and the Bulla house had original slate floors intact in all rooms, which the owners did not want removed.

Whilst slate floors are generally not a vernacular housing trait in South Australia, they are common in Polish Hill River. This settlement was located approximately 10 km from the Mintaro slate mine where off-cuts were frequent and could be purchased cheaply. Furthermore, the sub-surface rock deposit running through the northern end of Polish Hill River is slate, and the men at Hill River often excavated through this during road construction.

The excavation was carried out over a period of five days and comprised nine trenches located both inside and outside the house. The trenches were all located in places that were felt to have been in high usage during the lifetime of the house such as adjacent to the fireplaces of both rooms, next to the original front and rear doors, in the front and back gardens and in the forge to the southeast of the house.

The excavation revealed fairly small amounts of material culture, with the project database containing 425 entries. Four primary groups of artefacts were identified: ceramic, glass, metal and animal bone. Metal was the largest category represented, with over 142 artefacts uncovered. The majority of these are tools excavated from inside a small collapsed stone building located behind the house. They were found in a random jumble just under the surface along with charred wood, charcoal, melted glass and fallen stone. Recovered were a number of tools consistent with the building being a forge, such as farrier's pincers and tongs. However, there were also a number of random tools such as wood planes, files, saws, bits of metal and odd parts of cars (like radiator grills) and other machinery that indicate that this building was later used as a storage shed.

Glass was the next largest category, with 45 minimum numbers of vessels (MNV) of glass bottles or jars identified, as well as a large number of window glass fragments. The partial makers' marks found embossed on some of the bottles and jar fragments all came from local or British sources. Ceramic was the third largest category with a MNV of 25 ceramic vessels ranging from stoneware bottles to earthenware plates and porcelain teacups. No maker's marks were present on any of the ceramics. Due to the fragmented nature of the remains of the glass and ceramic, they were primarily identified, analysed and dated using a combination of colour, pattern and appearance.

The pieces of earthenware, porcelain and stoneware are typical of the array seen in nineteenth-century Australia. Of these, transfer-printed earthenware was the most common type of ceramic recovered, with 16 out of the 33 pieces identified as being transfer printed, including flow pattern. The rest of the earthenwares were a solid cream colour or a combination of cream and some other banded colour like blue, green, pink or black, as well as sponge-ware. There are a few fragments of porcelain, which could indicate that the owner was slowly accumulating more expensive items.

Animal bone is the final category of artefact uncovered during the excavation, with over 47 pieces catalogued. The majority of the bone was identified as sheep, with two bones each of rabbit and pig, and one bird, 14 pieces of bone remain unidentified. None of the bones showed any evidence of cut marks, and the majority was found scattered on the ground surface inside, and in the immediate vicinity of the house. The number of sheep bones recovered was not a surprise as this house has sheep freely grazing through it at certain times of the year, and the ground in the paddock all around the house is littered with sheep bones from field deaths.

The excavation uncovered four special finds: a coin, a handmade silver medallion and two buttons. One is a small brass four-hole button, known as a 'sew-through' button, which from its size (16 mm), was likely to be from a man's trousers (Ritchie 1986:515; Lindbergh 1999:50–57). It has a stamped brass sunken panel with 'J. Marshall & Co'. Adelaide on the front of it, indicating its point of sale (and possible manufacture). J. M. Marshall owned and operated a substantial Drapery firm, Importers, Cabinet Makers, Upholsters and Furniture Warehouse business in Adelaide from 1882 until 1928 (Boothby Almanacs 1882; South Australian Almanac and Directory 1928:1374). The second button is made of copper and is also of the sew-through type. It has the name 'C. Rowley' and 'Patent' engraved on the front of it. At this time the manufacturer 'C. Rowley' has not been located. The inner circle has two metal threads that form the holes used to attach it to the material with thread. This button is most likely a three-piece construction and this makes it machine made and thus post 1850 (Ritchie 1986:528). The size of this button (16 mm) indicates it was used for fastening

men's trousers, coats, jackets and pyjamas (Lindbergh 1999:51).

The coin (27 mm diameter) was identified as a British penny from the 1850s, however this coin could have been in circulation up until the time Australia began minting its own money in 1910 (Clarke 1971:4). It was found under the slate doorstep and this could mean its placement there was a deliberate house blessing/ritual, as this was not uncommon when building a new dwelling (Stankowski 2000). The more prosaic alternative is that it fell out of someone's pocket.

The handmade silver medallion (23 x 25mm) is interesting. A disk was cut from a larger piece of silver where a coat of arms was embossed on it. A hole was then punched into the top so it could be worn around the neck. Furthermore, the medallion is quite worn, with the silver being very thin, which seems to be a sign that it was worn frequently. This indicates that this medallion was probably very special to its owner. The coat of arms consists of four panels, two with possible lions on them and two with what appears to be spades (like in a deck of cards). It has not been possible to trace the coat of arms at this time.

While the excavation uncovered an array of material culture, none of this could be identified as being of Polish origin. This is not to say that these items were not purchased by or used by the Polish, they are simply not identifiable as being manufactured in Poland or by a Polish person. The artefacts excavated are a standard array of items that could be uncovered from any historical excavation around Australia. These ordinary items may have carried meaning for their owners/users, but there is no evidence of this meaning left for us, or any evidence that these items in any way helped members of the Polish community to shape or articulate their identity. Furthermore, the fact that the excavation revealed only locally manufactured materials would not necessarily have in any way have changed whatever cultural diversity was present at the site. All it means is that whilst the cultural diversity was still present, it was less visible because of factors such as the convenience, cheapness and dominance of available British and Australian trade goods (Staski 1990:126), and an inability to obtain any sort of regular supply of Polish goods from sources in Poland to Polish Hill River.

## **POLISH AND GERMAN COMPARISON**

The majority of the material culture found during both the survey and excavation of Polish Hill River was of typical British design and manufacture with concessions for location and changed climate conditions. The exception to this rule is the Bulla house which displayed tantalising glimpses of traditional architectural features and prompts the question: why did these traditional features disappear in favour of more 'Australian' features? To try and understand this obvious change, the Polish community at Hill River was compared to German communities living in South Australia. These German communities began their immigration only 17 years earlier than the Polish, from the same part of Europe and for the same reasons of political/social persecution. The German communities also used distinctive 'traditional' traits in the construction of their architecture in South Australia and were subject to the same environmental conditions and trade network difficulties as the Polish at Hill River.

### **The Germans in South Australia**

The Germans in South Australia 'worked very hard, considered that they had a duty (from God) to care for their land, strove to maintain traditions brought with them from Germany and believed that the Church was a vital part of their

lives' (Martin 1998:32). Originally, Germans chose to come to South Australia because of one of the colony's main founding principles of religious freedom, something they lacked at home, while later groups immigrated due to the economic benefits of such a move. In 1817 Friedrich Wilhelm III introduced a common church liturgy in Prussia in an effort to unite the Kingdom. However this did not work out quite the way he planned and many parishes continued to use the old Lutheran liturgy (Harmstorf 1988: 504). In 1830 Friedrich decreed that, by law, all congregations had to follow the Church Order and pastors who refused were imprisoned and had their property confiscated. Unable to see an end to the persecution, many Lutheran Germans decided to immigrate (Harmstorf 1988:504).

They arrived in large numbers, in fact in many cases entire communities immigrated to South Australia under the leadership of a parish priest. These communities used both the traditional German *hufendorf* and *strassendorf* town plans in South Australia to structure their settlements, with Lobethal and Hahndorf being the most well known *hufendorf* towns, although Hahndorf was later converted into a *strassendorf* (Young et al. 1981:84). A *strassendorf* was a dense settlement with the farmhouses placed close together on both sides of a road while a *hufendorf* was a settlement laid out in long narrow equal strips of land parallel to the road and river behind (Young et al. 1981:32). While the land the Germans settled on in Klemzig, Hahndorf and Lobethal had been previously surveyed and was leased from English businessmen, both these men (William Dutton and George Fife Angus) purchased enough sections of land so there was enough space for an entire town to be established. The German settlers of Klemzig rented 268 acres, while the settlers of Hahndorf rented 240 acres (Schubert 1985:113,114). Thus, while the Germans did rent and eventually buy previously surveyed land, they were able to acquire the entire area for their township in one go and thus divide up their land along the lines of their traditional towns back in Germany.

Along with their village designs, the Germans also brought their traditional house and barn architecture styles. The house designs used in the German settlements in South Australia remained distinctly German for at least 30 years after their arrival in 1839 (Harmstorf 1994:30). Traditional examples of German house designs were constructed and in some cases can still be seen at Hahndorf, Paechtown, Lobethal, Klemzig and in the Barossa Valley. The most common design used in South Australia was the *latter franconian* house, a one or two-roomed building with an extensive attic, which incorporated a complex arrangement of cooking hearths and ovens all linked together into a centrally located chimney. This type of house became known in the colloquial as the through-passage-kitchen house (*flurküchenhaus*) (Young et al. 1981:33).

Apart from the overall design of the houses, there are three obvious German features that can be seen in most of the historic German homes in South Australia. However, not all of these features can be seen in every house, as some dwellings contained only one or two. The first of these is the 'black kitchen' built entirely of brick, following rules laid out in the fire ordinances of nineteenth-century Prussia (Harmstorf 1994:19). Ioannou (2000:138) has detailed how the kitchen worked on two levels, with the ground level containing the food preparation area and a large brick chimney with space for meats (usually pork) to be hung from the ceiling rafters and smoked. These meats were accessed from the second level by a small trapdoor in the loft above the ceiling under the roof. The second feature is the extensive baking oven, sometimes incorporated into the farmhouse, or built as a separate structure in a farmhouse complex, such as at the Bretag

complex at Monarto (Owen & Steele 2001). The third feature, and the most obvious from the outside of the house, was the 45 degree gable of the roof, which enclosed an attic door, reached by an inside or outside ladder. The attic ran the length of the house and was used for storage and/or sleeping. This tradition stems from a European practice of sharing the house with domesticated animals, which were usually kept on the ground floor during the winter months (Harmstorf 1994:30).

It was not only the design, but also the construction techniques of the houses that were different. Many German houses and barns or sheds were constructed in the traditional *fachwerk* (half-timbered) style. In Hahndorf and Paechtown examples of this type of structure can still be seen. The manufacture of a *fachwerk* house was basically the creation of a timber skeleton, with both horizontal and diagonal timbers. The spaces between the timbers were then filled with wattle and daub or later by bricks (Young et al. 1981:159). The structure was whitewashed inside and out for weather-proofing.

Other instances of distinctive German practices were also maintained through early German tombstones in the Barossa Valley and at Burra which were engraved in German. Traditional German wagons, pottery, furniture, coffins, clothing styles and foods also remained unchanged for many years (see Ioannou 1995; Ioannou 2000).

### Polish and German differences

Water's (1995) study on six German immigrant groups in Europe and North America from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, highlights what could be the answer to the question about the lack of evidence for Polish culture at Hill River. He found that some communities maintained their traditions for many generations, while others did not. This was mostly due to the ability to transplant their economic base with them. If they could not, they were forced to look for work outside their communities, thus facilitating continued contact with outside influences. The occupations of the Polish men at Hill River were mostly as labourers and farmers, whilst the women often worked as domestic servants. Because of this the Polish had to seek outside help whenever they wanted anything they could not create, such as gravestones. This in turn led to their continued interaction with the wider community and their general lack of visibility in the material record.

The overall difference in the continued visibility of each community's material remains in South Australia points to differences inherent to their identities and their methods of immigration. The Germans generally arrived as complete communities under the care of their priest, who usually had arranged land for them to live on in advance. They settled as a community on big enough allotments of land to support the entire group of people. In this way they were able to continue their traditions from Prussia, including their land settlement pattern, religion, food and clothing traditions, language, and most importantly for this paper, their material culture traditions. They were easily able to continue building their homes, furniture, headstones, wagons and even their coffins using traditional methods without having to go outside their communities, because they had people in their village with appropriate traditional skills.

The number of German settlers facilitated this, as did the closeness of their settlements to one another in Adelaide (Klemzig), the Adelaide Hills (Glen Osmond, Hahndorf, Paechtown, Friedrichstadt, Lobethal, Grünthal [Verdun] and Blumburg [Birdwood]), and in the Barossa Valley (Tanunda, Angaston, Nuriootpa, Bethanien [Bethany], and Lyndoch, to name a few) (Schubert 1985:144). During the nineteenth century, the Germans comprised the largest non-British

immigrant group in South Australia (Vamplew 1987:11), estimated at between 7–10 per cent of the total population of the state (Harmstorf 1994:18). If one community did not have someone of skill to make something in the traditional way, the next village did. Therefore they did not have to go outside their communities to negotiate their day-to-day lives; they could stay self-contained if that was their wish.

This was not the case for the Polish. They arrived here in generally small family groups, rather than as an entire community. More importantly, they could not afford to buy a parcel of land large enough to keep their village settlement patterns intact. They arrived without a priest to organise them and thus had to worship outside the community for many years. They were the only group of Polish in South Australia, and had no other Polish people to turn to if they needed help. Numbers also limited the settlers; being mostly farmers and labourers they could not support a community without outside assistance. If the Polish needed a wagon made or a will drawn up they had no one to do this inside the community, and had to seek assistance elsewhere. This is the overall main difference between the Germans and Polish in South Australia: their immigration patterns. And this is one of the major reasons that their settlements, and other material remains differed so much from each other as time progressed.

### The Empty Niche

When the first group of Germans arrived in South Australia, only three years after the colony's beginnings in 1836, they came into a landscape that had not been explored or utilised to any great extent by Europeans. Thus, they were able to find themselves a perceived 'empty niche' and fill it, not only in the cultural landscape, but also in South Australian society itself. South Australia was founded under the banner of a 'free settlement'. This meant two things, there were no convicts involved in its colonisation and it was a place where anyone could (in theory) settle and have both freedom of religion and way of life (Gibbs 1995:22, 26–27). The Germans were the first large group of non-British immigrants to put this political ideology to the test, thus filling a political niche in society as well.

The Germans entered a cultural landscape which did not have a firm colonial character established. They felt, and were, free to make their own imprint on the landscape and used their own background as the template. By contrast, when the first Polish arrived in the state some 17 years later, they moved into a landscape and a society where a British colonial character had already been imprinted. The 'cultural niche' had been filled and the Polish had to blend in with the established character of the landscape and society.

The differences seen between the German and Polish settlements and the relative visibility of each in terms of material culture can be broken down into several key factors. To maintain traditions and remain visible in both the archaeological and social records, immigrant groups need:

1. A good reason or necessary 'push' to leave their home country and move to a new one. This push can result from economic, social or political factors.
2. Sufficient immigrant numbers to maintain population levels.
3. A perception of an 'empty' cultural landscape, where there is enough room to be able to set up a community and practice important traditions without fear of retribution.
4. Sufficient money to be able to afford to purchase land and the necessary equipment to set up a community.
5. A 'leader', such as a minister, to make the arrangements

and make sure the community has a reason to stay together.

6. Links to the home country to maintain trade networks so traditional items can be imported.
7. 'Chain' migration or letters from the immigrants to those left behind urging them to immigrate, which keeps population numbers constant in the first few years.

The artefacts uncovered during the excavation point to a story of difference between the Germans and the Polish in South Australia inherent to their different immigration methods. This, in turn, affected their strategies for fitting into colonial society and, consequently, their visibility in contemporary and modern society.

### CONCLUSION

Historical information uncovered during this study, both about the history of the people in Poland and of the Polish at Hill River highlight how strong the Polish culture was: how the people fought to keep it alive and to practice aspects of it (such as the language) freely and without persecution in Prussia. It would be expected that this part of their psyche would have an affect on how they behaved when they arrived in South Australia. However, while there were obvious and continuous displays of Polish nationality and spirit reflected in the actions and material culture of the Polish at Hill River for quite some time, it was never overt. They never felt the need to 'boost' up their culture now that they had the chance to be Polish openly, and without fear. These people created a community that flourished for over 60 years, where the Polish language, religion and traditions were given free reign, and the Bulla house highlights this period in the community's life. This group had a strong sense of identity and unity of spirit.

In other respects these people were just like everyone else at the time: they worked hard, married, had children, went to church, died (not actually whilst attending Church), and the things they left behind also echo this similarity. They built their houses using the same stone, made their clothes out of the same cloth, and ate the same type of food from the same kind of plates, using the same kind of utensils as everyone else around them. They had the same type of grave markers and had to converse in the same language (English) as those outside their village as part of their daily transactions.

Generally, when two different cultures meet, there is a sharing and exchange of ideas and customs on both sides, (even though one culture may be dominant in many respects) with each culture maintaining core traditions. The Germans in South Australia influenced the culture of South Australia to such an extent that German words and types of foods are still in common usage today. The German festival, the '*Schützenfest*', is still held annually in Adelaide (previously held for over a century in Hahndorf) (Harmstorf 1994:29), and still draws crowds in the thousands. Hahndorf is now one of the most popular tourist attractions in the greater Adelaide area, and its German character has been substantially boosted to facilitate this.

This does not seem to be the case with the Polish at Hill River, where the flow of ideas appears to have been primarily in one direction, from the British to the Polish. This is not to assume that in the past the Polish culture did not influence and exchange ideas with the other communities around it, but if this did take place there is little evidence of this now. Today, in the lower north of South Australia there is no obvious Polish influence or traditions that seem to have lingered, although they retain a strong place in local folklore. Essentially, most material traces of the Polish are gone, but the memory of them remains.

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