

Polish cemeteries in Koja and Massindi

During the Second World War over 18 thousand Polish citizens were displaced into the regions of East and South Africa. 22 camps were established, with the biggest one in **Tengeru**, located 1200 meters above the sea level, which hosted over 5,000 people. The second biggest one was in **Massindi** hosting more than 3,000 people, followed by **Koja** at the Vitoria Lake where 3,000 orphans found their shelter. The living conditions were extremely challenging at first, however, with the time being the local community has developed relatively good facilities with comfortable beds, housing and good schooling system. Many teenagers could participate in variety of sport classes or join local scouts, fraternities or other communities. Many people stayed in camps until the mid 1950s. Nevertheless, a large fraction of Polish Community in Africa died under the British Surveillance, mostly suffering from the tropical diseases. To commemorate the deaths of our citizens, these former camps were transformed into *Cemeteries* or *Memory Halls*, where hundreds of people were buried.

Koja Cemetery

More than 3,000 people were living in that camp. It used to be a lively, cultural place that provided variety of work places and good educational opportunities. When the Polish Community left Africa, the **Koja Camp**, situated at the Victoria Lake, was closed down and razed to the ground. Nowadays the cemetery is the only memory that has remained. Yet, it is extremely devastated and requires full renovation.

After the war, when the Polish Community moved out, the new owners decided to completely destroy the cemetery and set up a farm instead. In the 1990s a Polish priest managed to rebuild parts of the cemetery with the help and support offered by the Polish Embassy in Nairobi. The remains of the dead bodies were all gathered together into a Mass Tomb, where additionally 97 names were listed. The Memorial is continuously being renovated, however, the graves of all the victims were replaced with memorial crosses.

The execution of the task was supervised by the clergyman Ryszard Józwiak, who is largely cooperating with the youth as well as is in charge of the shelter for the 'kids of the street' in the areas of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. There are numerous renovation works still to be held at the cemetery. The Polish Authorities with the support from the local NGOs, societies and relatives of the victims are working together to bring the cemetery to its most representative state. Since many years Mr. Edward Wakiku (who is Ugandan) has been taking care of the cemetery. He also possesses plenty of Polish documents, photos that he received as a donation from the Polish families.

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Massindi Cemetery

In years 1943 – 45 the first Polish church was established on the grounds of Massindi camp. On the cemetery, next to the church there are 43 Polish graves. The church in Nyabyeya is run by Ugandan priests and gathers mostly Ugandan believers. Yet, the church is still considered to be Polish and the local community pays respects to the Polish Citizens by organising formal gatherings in special circumstances e.g. Smolensk air crash or death of the Polish pope John Paul II.

For further assistance and information regarding Massindi Cemetery please contact the following parties:

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