



# CITY MONUMENTS



## COAT OF ARMS OF THE CITY OF OŚWIĘCIM

The monuments and other attractions of the town  
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– Route 1 – yellow

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– Route 3 – blue

**routes:**



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The settlement on the castle hill in Oświęcim existed already in the eleventh century, however, the name of the city was mentioned for the first time in the documents of the twelfth century. There was already a large castellany here at that time. The town was surrounded by a fortified earth rampart. The town and the settlement beyond the town walls along with the parish church were destroyed in 1241 by the invasion of Tatar troops which were moving towards Silesia under the command of Baidar. As part of the town reconstruction after the invasion, the construction of a brick fortified tower - preserved to this day - began on the castle hill. At that time the settlement in Oświęcim was a part of the Duchy of Cieszyn. It is not known exactly when the settlement was granted a town charter, however, it could possibly happen around 1291. On 3 September 1291 the city rights were confirmed by Mieszko I, the Duke of Cieszyn. Following the division of the Duchy of Cieszyn in the period 1312-1317, an independent Duchy of Oświęcim with its capital in Oświęcim was set up. It was ruled by dukes of the Silesian Piasts. The first residing duke was Władysław - the son of Mieszko I the Duke of Cieszyn, who together with his wife Eufrozyna founded and built the Dominican church and monastery in Oświęcim. The Chapel of St. Jack is the one that has preserved from that time. The Son of duke Władysław - Jan I the Scholastic in 1327 paid homage to John the Blind, the King of Bohemia, and as a result the Duchy of Oświęcim was dependent on the Czech crown for more than a century.



Document of 1324 with the seal of the Dutchess Eufrosyne, a wife of the first duke of Oświęcim; the document held by the Cisterian Monastery in Mogiła; photo: Paweł Pomykański.

From the end of the thirteenth century Oświęcim was an important point on the salt route - it held the privilege of storing and trading the best quality salt from Wieliczka, and it even had its own salt measurements called "bałwany oświęcimskie". The city also had the judicial privilege and the right to store and trade in lead, right to collect tolls on two bridges on the Vistula river as well as the right to maintain customs chambers. The town of Oświęcim was also known for trade in fish which were supplied from here even to the royal court in Krakow. In 1445, the Duchy of Oświęcim was divided into three parts, each for one of the three sons of duke Casimir. Three duchies were created then: the one of Oświęcim, Zator and Toszek. Jan IV became the duke of Oświęcim and in 1453 he paid homage to the King Casimir Jagiellon. The gentry and the burghers of Oświęcim did the same a year later. In 1457 the duke Jan IV sold the Duchy of Oświęcim to the King of Poland, and through the person of the king it was incorporated into the Crown of Poland. The full incorporation of the duchy into the Kingdom of Poland took place in 1564 based on the incorporation act issued by the King Sigismund Augustus.



*The map of the Duchy of Oświęcim and Zator by Stanisław Porębski, 1592; the map in the collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

In 1503 a large part of the town and the castle were destroyed by a great fire. The King Alexander I Jagiellon exempted Oświęcim from taxes for 15 years and ordered to restore the whole castle and fortifications along with the system of towers, as well as to repair the city walls. Reconstructions works lasted until 1534. The oldest part of the castle and a part of the defensive wall with bastille on the eastern wall of the fortified tower originate from that period.

The sixteenth century was very favourable for Oświęcim. Within the walled city there was a parish church with a cemetery, market square, town hall and the Dominican church. Outside the walls, at the intersection of Jagielly and Królowej Jadwigi streets there was a hospital - a poorhouse with the wooden church of St. Nicholas and the cemetery.

In the second part of 16th century first Jews came to Oświęcim and formed the Jewish religious community with a synagogue and a cemetery. Their stable legal and economic situation was determined by the privileges granted by the successive rulers of Poland. The main means of income for the Jews of Oświęcim was trade (e.g. salt, oriental spices such as saffron and pepper) and income from the production of alcohol and lease of inns. On the eve of the First Partition of Poland in 1765 there were 133 Jews living in Oświęcim.

The period of prosperity and well-being of the residents was over when the city was conquered by the Swedes in 1655. Although they were driven out of the city by the troops of Jan Grzegorz Toryskiński, two months later they conquered the city again - destroying and burning it in retaliation. Only twenty houses remained out of five hundred, only six craftsmen survived out of two hundred, the salt storage ceased to operate, the castle and the St. Nicholas church were in ruins. In 1676, the city was inhabited by 114 people only. About 30 years later a plague claimed more than three hundred lives, and the fire destroyed the buildings at the market square. For nearly 200 years Oświęcim could not recover after the Swedish Deluge and the disasters that followed.

In 1772 the Duchy of Oświęcim, as a result of the First Partition of Poland, became part of the Austrian partition as part of Galicia. Ten years later, by the emperor's decree on the cessation of orders, the Dominican convent in Oświęcim was liquidated. Also, the parish cemetery at the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was liquidated and a new cemetery was created outside the city. A crucial period for Oświęcim was half of the nineteenth century, when it became an important railway junction on the Krakow-Vienna route. Until the outbreak of World War II, industrial plants were emerging and operating here, including the roofing paper, chemicals and asphalt factory of Emil Kuźnicki, a tannery, vodka and liqueur factory of Jakub Habermeld, "Agrochemia" - the factory of artificial fertilizers and other chemical products, "Ostryga" and "Atlantic" - the canned fish plants, "Potęga-Oświęcim" - the agricultural machine plant, "Praga-Oświęcim" - the machinery and vehicle factory. The vehicle factory assembled - initially based on the chassis imported from the Czech Republic - three types of "Praga-Oświęcim" cars: Piccolo, Alfa and Grand. There were about 1700 vehicles produced in total, which were known for their ro-



*"Praga-Oświęcim" car, used by Jan Kiepura, among others, photograph in the collection of T. Firczyk*



*Fragment of the company's envelope of Zjednoczona Fabryka Maszyn i Samochodów S.A. in Oświęcim; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

bust construction and reliable performance. "Praga-Oświęcim" cars were used by the famous tenor Jan Kiepura, cabaret actress Zizi Halama and renowned painter Wojciech Kossak. One of the car models preserved to this day is Piccolo, to be seen in the Automobile Museum in Otrębusy near Warsaw.

In 1867 the first Jewish councillors appeared in the City Council. In the interwar period Dr. Emil Reich became a deputy mayor. Moreover, the majority of factories and businesses emerging at that time were set up by Jewish merchants and industrialists. For example, in 1910 this community accounted for 53% of the population, and just before the outbreak of World War II - nearly 60%.



*Postcard in the collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim*

In the nineteenth century the city experienced several serious floods and fires. Two more floods, in 1805 and 1813, resulted in the subsidence of the hill castle - nearly 25 meters of the courtyard with buildings and defensive wall collapsed into the Sola River, which then changed its riverbed. The ruined castle was then scheduled for demolition by the Austrian authorities. Fortunately, this decision was not executed. Additionally, the fire in 1863 claimed two-thirds of the city's buildings - including the tower of the parish church, two synagogues, the town hall and the hospital - a poorhouse. In 1881 another great fire swept over the parish church, presbytery, curate's house, the school and the hospital.

In 1910 the Starosty of Oświęcim was established, with the offices located in the reconstructed castle. After regaining independence in 1918, the castle also housed the offices of the governor of Oświęcim political district, which in 1919 got included into the Cracow province.



*Crest with a replicated order of Piasts of the early 20th century on the eastern facade of Oświęcim castle.*

During World War II Oświęcim was under German occupation. The city was annexed to the Third Reich and designated with the German name of Auschwitz. In the spring of 1940 on the city outskirts the Germans established a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners. Since 1942, the place also served as the site of mass extermination of the European Jews. The heaviest repression against the city inhabitants were associated with the construction and expansion of KL Auschwitz. The massive and brutal displacements of Poles began in the area of Zasole, which was



*The bridge over the river of Sola blown up on 3 September 1939 by the retreating Polish troops; photograph in the collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*



directly adjacent to the camp. In 1941 all the Jewish residents of Oświęcim were displaced to Będzin, Chrzanów and Sosnowiec. Nearly 90% of them were killed, mostly in KL Auschwitz.



*Oświęcim under German occupation, photograph from the collection of T. Firczyk.*

On Saturday 27 January 1945, KL Auschwitz and the city of Oświęcim were liberated by the Soviet troops belonging to the 60th Army of the First Ukrainian Front. The longed-for freedom came with new challenges and problems for the citizens. The first thing to do was to clean up - remove the debris from squares and streets, fill up the pits formed by bombs, get rid of German inscriptions, restore Polish name of the city - Oświęcim. In the period from February to May 1945 the city authorities helped the residents to secure food supplies. Also, several workplaces started to operate. A handful of Jewish Holocaust survivors returned to the city. In 1947 the Polish Sejm passed a law on the establishment of the State Museum in the territory of former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp. In the early 60s of the 20th century the last Jewish families moved out of Oświęcim.

In 1951 the district of Oświęcim was established, which until 1975 was included in the Cracow province (voivodship). As a result of the administrative reform in 1975 the district ceased to exist and the city was incorporated into the newly created province of Bielsko. Since 1999, Oświęcim has been again the capital of the district and, like several centuries ago - it is included the Małopolska province with its capital in Cracow.

## THE CASTLE

The present building of the Oświęcim castle was erected at the beginning of the 16th century and later repeatedly restructured. The original castle, the seat of a castellan (the governor of a castle) in the 12th century, was probably wooden, just like the whole complex of buildings built on the castle hill around 100 years earlier. During archaeological excavations around the defensive tower, archaeologists discovered a large fragment of what was probably a road made of wooden poles. The town was fortified; it was surrounded with a wooden earthen wall with a palisade. In 1241, during the reign of the duke Mieszko II of Opole, Oświęcim was destroyed by the Tatars. The burnt-down town was rebuilt and the construction of a brick fortified tower commenced.



*Castle. The seat of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*  
[www.muzeum-zamek.pl](http://www.muzeum-zamek.pl)

The first duke to live in the castle was Władysław, the son of Mieszko I, the Duke of Cieszyn. During his reign, i.e. in the first half of the 14th century, the construction of the tower was completed, and from the funds provided by the Duke and his wife, the Dominican Church and Monastery were built. There are, however, no historical or iconographic documents of the castle. We do not even know its exact location on the hill, which was surrounded by defensive walls in the 14th or 15th century. At that time, the castle entertained many eminent visitors. Oświęcim, situated at the junction of the main communication routes, was a convenient stopover place. The first records mention Elżbieta Rakuszanka, the future wife of King Casimir IV, who at the end of January and the beginning of February 1454 stopped at the castle in Oświęcim on her way to Kraków. She was accompanied by lords of Bohemia, Austria, and Moravia.

Since the sale of the Duchy of Oświęcim to the King Casimir

Jagiellon by the duke Jan IV in the sixteenth century, the royal castellans have resided in the castle. At that time, from 27 to 29 July 1471, unusual guests visited the castle: King Casimir IV with his wife Elizabeth, three Polish bishops and seven Silesian dukes wanted to say farewell to the King's son, Prince Władysław, who was on his way to Prague, after his rights to the Bohemian crown had been recognised by the Bohemian Parliament. They stayed in Oświęcim for three days, accompanied by 7 thousand cavalry and 2 thousand infantry, probably accommodated in the nearby villages.

Three years later, in 1474, Wacław, the Duke of Rybnik, stopped at the castle. He was looking for help and shelter as he was running away from the forces of Matthias Corvinus, the King of Hungary.



*The Castle in Oświęcim, woodcut by P. Boczkowski, 1878; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

The medieval castle burnt down in 1503 together with the parish church and a major part of the town. It was rebuilt within 5 years on the order of King Alexander. Reinforcement and reconstruction works on the walls lasted until 1534. A fragment of the defensive wall in the northwestern part of the hill and the oldest southern part of the castle has survived until today.

In 1510, the reconstructed castle was visited by a papal legate, who came to Poland on a special mission.

Several years later – on 11 and 12 April 1518, Bona Sforza d'Aragona, accompanied by a long train of noblemen and clergy, stopped at the castle on her way from Bari to Kraków, where she was to marry King Sigismund I and be crowned.



*View of the castle in Oświęcim, woodcut by K. Sosiński based on the drawing by L. Łepkowski, 1892; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

In addition, the future wife of Sigismund II Augustus, Elizabeth of Habsburg, stopped in Oświęcim at the end of April 1543. She was welcomed by a delegation of wives of the Polish dignitaries from Kraków.

Probably on the night of 18-19 June 1574, the castle gave shelter to king Henry of Valois, who was secretly running away from Poland to France.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the castle was again destroyed by fire. During reconstruction work, it was extended; the eastern wall was moved two metres towards the edge of the hill.

During the Swedish invasion in the 17th century, the castle was captured twice and finally burnt by the Swedish troops. That time marked the beginning of the castle's slow decline. In spite of a parliamentary resolution ordering renovation work, it never regained its former splendour. In 1765 the castle was surveyed – the report describes the terrible condition of the buildings and defensive walls: "On our entering the castle we can see a bridge, and a gate with double doors (...). Behind the doors there are walls on both sides of the passage leading onto the ward; the walls are scratched (...) on the ward, there is the town archive, with iron doors (...) a window with iron bars (...). Next there is the kitchen (...), the pantry with a lock (...) behind it there are wooden stairs leading to the second floor, where there is a wooden gallery (...). On the right, there is a room with a window and a ceramic stove (...). Next, there is a hall (...) with scratched walls. An empty chapel. A small room (...). A brick tower in the corner." Out of all these buildings, only the tower has survived over the centuries.

At the beginning of the 19th century two floods occurred, both catastrophic in their impact. In 1805, the River Soła changed its course



*View of the Piast Castle from the period of the starosty in Oświęcim; postcard in the collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim*

right under the castle hill, and eight years later, it rose so rapidly that almost half of the hill together with the buildings collapsed into the water. The ruined castle and tower were then used as a salt warehouse. Several years later the Austrian authorities decided to demolish the castle, but the ruins were bought at auction by Kajetan Russocki, the former adjutant of Napoleon Bonaparte, who established an administrative office and a post office. His daughter, Leokadia Dąbska, inherited the castle; her children later sold the mortgaged building to three Jewish tradesmen: Landau, Schnitzer and Schönker. The new owners converted it into commercial storage rooms.

In 1904, the castle was bought by Karol Kaszny – a railway clerk, who renovated both the castle and the tower and turned them into a hotel called Zamek (The castle), a wine-vault and a beer-house. At that time the castle was extended – another floor was added, on the eastern wall a coat of arms was placed featuring a stylised Piast eagle with a letter „O” on its breast, a reference to the history of the Duchy of Oświęcim.

In 1910, Kaszny leased the castle to the newly created Oświęcim Starosty. After Poland regained independence in 1918, the castle housed the offices of the starosty. The next owner of the castle was Jacob Habermeld, who converted it into a warehouse for vodkas and wines produced in his factory.

In 1926, the Biała Krakowska District Department bought the castle and in the years 1928-1931 carried out its renovation. Between the tower and the castle, the former single-floor building was replaced by a two-floor building featuring a neo-renaissance attic with a metal crowned eagle. For the last several years, a copy of the eagle has again adorned the attic.



*The Castle and the Piastowski Bridge; postcard from the 1930s; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

In the years 1929-1932, the castle was the seat of Oświęcim District self-government. In 1932, the Biała District Department put it up for sale. However, until World War II nobody wanted to buy it. During the war, it was the seat of the German occupational authorities, after which the castle provided offices for the gmina local district authorities and since 1952 – the District National Council in Oświęcim. In the years 1975-1987, the castle accommodated Oświęcim's municipal authorities. Since 1993 the castle has housed – among others – The Historical and Ethnographic Museum, which exhibits documents and items connected with the town's history.

In the years 1999-2000 the stairway joining the castle with the tower was demolished. Archaeologists carried out work within the area. In 2004, Oświęcim City Hall, with the support of EU subsidies, carried out a major overhaul of the monument which ended in 2006. On 1 January 2010 a cultural institution under the name of „Muzeum Zamek w Oświęcimiu” („Castle Museum in Oświęcim”) started to operate based on the existing historical and ethnographic collection.



*The Castle in Oświęcim - present view*

## **DEFENSIVE TOWER**

"The castle in Oświęcim has a brick tower, fairly tall and slender, dominating over it. It would be easy to capture the whole town, if you only captured the tower," wrote Jan Długosz, a famous Polish chronicler, in the 15th century about Oświęcim's most valuable monument. The Gothic defensive tower is one of the oldest brick structures in Małopolska and the tallest Gothic wall preserved in the south of Poland.

Its construction was probably started after 1241, during the repair work after the castle had been burnt by the Tartars. The first element of the structure is an ashlar stonewall, which today is below the level of the ward. A fragment of the never completed wall at the corner of the tower probably comes from the same period. The wall might suggest that, originally, the tower was supposed to be part of a bigger – never completed



*Fortified tower,  
mid-13th century  
- early 14th century.*



*A detail of the tower walls.*



– defensive system. The tower was built on a square plan with about four-metre-thick walls. The construction was interrupted for unknown reasons. The work was taken up again at the beginning of the 14th century and construction was completed, no longer with the use of stone but manually formed brick.

The tower was built as a freestanding structure, the so-called tower of the last defence. Its lower part was inaccessible from the outside and there were no passages inside it. Initially, there were two or three upper floors. We do not know what the highest floor and the roof looked like – we can only suppose that it resembled the image of the tower on Oświęcim's coat of arms. The only original entrance to the tower, with a stone pointed-arch portal, is 10 m above the ward today. In the past, there was a flight of wooden steps leading to it. On the level of the entrance, there is a residential hall with a cloister vault, restructured in the 16th century, a fireplace in the corner and a window in the eastern wall, where we can still see a fragment of a platform for archmen. Today's floor is a temporary wooden platform. Until the 19th century this room had an opening in the floor, which was used to climb down a rope to the lower level, where prisoners were sometimes kept. Higher floors are accessible by a flight of stairs embedded in the wall. In the 16th century, the tower was raised by another floor, which has not survived. The top floor was covered by a shingle roof crowned with a copper sphere. After the Swedish invasion, the tower and other buildings on the castle hill gradually fell into ruin.



*The view from the castle tower.*



In the 19th century, a new entrance to the tower was added at the ground level and a temporary wooden staircase was built inside. At the beginning of the 20th century the castle's owner, Karol Kaszny, had both the castle and the tower renovated. He received a subsidy from the Kraków Conservation Office on the condition that he would donate all excavated artefacts to the museum in Kraków. Kaszny repaired the tower walls and covered the upper floor with a tiled pavilion roof.

In the years 1928-1931, the tower was joined to the castle by means of a two-storey building, thus losing its original character of a freestanding construction.

During the conservation works carried out in the years 1984-1986, the roof and stairs inside the tower were replaced. In 1997 the garages built in the 1950's were demolished, thus exposing the northern wall. During further archaeological works between 1999-2000 the staircase adjacent directly to the tower was demolished. In 2010 renovation works were completed, aimed at making this important and attractive part of the castle available to the visitors.

## DEFENSIVE WALLS

At the north-eastern end of the castle hill there is a six-meter-long fragment of the defensive wall with a circular structure adjacent to the corner of the tower. These fortifications come from the period when the castle was being reconstructed after the great fire of 1503. The wall, ca. 2m thick, was built from brick and rough stone. It is clearly visible that it was repeatedly restructured and repaired. The circular structure, which was an element flanking the fortifications, was built on the plan of a circle 4.5m in diameter.

## HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND PASSAGES

According to Jan Stanek, "the local legend says that the castle in Oświęcim used to be joined with the former Dominican monastery by means of an underground passage." The monastery now belongs to the Salesians. Perhaps there is a grain of truth in this legend, as the Dominican church and monastery were located on a hill towering over the Soła river, which is a location naturally difficult to access. During the Nazi occupation, according to what J. Stanek wrote in 1959 in his book *Z dziejów ziemi oświęcimskiej* – "during the work around the old Jewish temple at ul. Berka Joselewicza (...) a tunnel was discovered leading from the castle to the monastery." Today only archaeological excavations could prove the legend true.

There are two underground passages at present; they intersect ca. 11m below the castle's inner ward. Their history is, however, much shorter. The older one, a narrow tunnel running along the east-west axis, has been traditionally called the "long" or "Austrian" passage. It was probably built around 1914. Initially, its openings were located on two opposite sides of the hill. At present, the only opening can be found on the western slope, at Bulwary Str. along the Soła river. The tunnel has a pear-shaped profile and brick walls. About 22m away from the opening is a well, which was originally accessible from the castle ward, and which reached below the subterranean water level. The other tunnel, north-south oriented, was carved out by the Germans in the years 1940-44 and it is called a "cross passage". Its walls were made from ferroconcrete shells with the cross-section of incomplete ellipses. It was used as an anti-aircraft shelter. Its construction was never completed, and as a result, after several decades, its ceiling collapsed in several places, thus endangering the structure of the castle. In 1984, intervention and archaeological works were started on the castle hill. The collapsed structures were filled up, the tunnel's construction was reinforced and the most damaged fragments reconstructed.

## CHURCH OF OUR LADY HELP OF THE POOR

The history of the Salesian church goes back to the first half of the 14th century, when Duke Władysław of Oświęcim and his wife Eufrozyna, built, or to be more precise, completed the construction of the Dominican monastery complex in Oświęcim, begun by his father, Mieszko II of Oświęcim. According to Jan Długosz, it was the fourth Dominican monastery in Poland, which stood out from among the others thanks to its size and beautiful location on a hill over the



*Postcard of approx. 1907, showing the ruins of the Dominican Church (wrongly called the castle) and the chapel of St. Jack; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

River Soła, "a notable construction built from burnt brick."

The monastery complex consisted of the oriented Gothic Church of The Holy Cross and the adjacent quadrilateral cloister surrounded on all sides by the monastery buildings.

The only surviving parts of the old Dominican monastery are the Gothic chapter house (present-day St. Jack's Chapel), and fragments of the Church walls, restructured by the Salesians at the turn of the 20th century.

The Gothic Church of the Holy Cross was a single-nave structure with a rectangularly-closed choir. It was ca. 55m long and the nave walls were about 21m high. The nave was covered with a wooden ceiling and the choir – lower and narrower – with a cross-ribbed vault. The church was oriented; the entrance for the congregation was located on the northern wall, the entrance for the friars – on the southern wall, i.e. from the cloister. Inside, there was the high altar and three side-altars: the altar of St. Nicholas, St Madeleine and Our Lady of the Rosary - at present the painting from this altar can be seen in the Church of the Assumption in Oświęcim. Under the choir, there is a crypt where, according to Jan Długosz, dukes and castellans of Oświęcim were buried.

Since 1782, the Dominican buildings gradually fell into ruin, as upon the decree on the dissolution of religious orders issued by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II, some of the friars had to leave Oświęcim, while all the possessions and lands belonging to the monastery were confiscated. Six friars, who refused to move to other monasteries outside of the Austrian sector, remained



*The Salesian Complex;  
the buildings of the early 14th century, rebuilt at the turn  
of the 19th and 20th century - eastern view.*

in Oświęcim. They were, however, unable to maintain the church, the monastery buildings, or for that matter themselves. In 1845, the church roof, which was in danger of collapsing, was demolished, and the vault over the choir collapsed. Władysław Łuszczkiewicz relates, "The white church walls were now and again decorated with polychromy, and through the charming rosettes of slender Gothic windows, which had by now almost turned into ruin, sun rays stole into the building, playing on the greenness of the church floor."

The abandoned Dominican buildings often changed hands. Kajetan Russocki, who, in 1819, inherited the monastic property bought by his uncle, Idzi Russocki, the parish priest of Oświęcim, used the ruins as stables for post horses and as warehouses for hay and straw. In 1872, two Jewish tradesmen, Landau and Schönker, bought the ruined buildings and set up storage rooms for their merchandise there.

A wooden shack was put up to store kerosene in the church choir. Barrels with kerosene were rolled over a platform made from the medieval gravestone of Mikołaj Myszkowski, torn out from the choir floor.

In 1898, the ruins were taken over by the Society of St. Francis de Sales, invited to Oświęcim by Andrzej Knysz, who at that time was the chief priest in the parish of the Assumption. The remains of the residential buildings were demolished. The former Church of the Holy Cross, from now on the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, was rebuilt according to the design of Mario Ceradini.



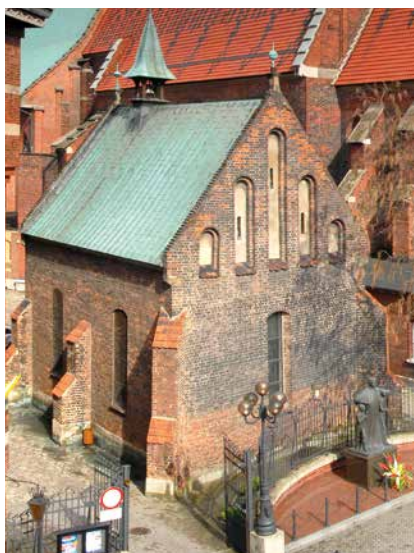
*Facade of the Church of Our Lady Help of the Poor (sanctuary walls of the Holy Cross Dominican Church).*

A new choir was added on the western side and the church was re-oriented; a new main entrance was made in the former altar wall at ul. Jagiełły. On 19 August 1900, the first mass took place in the reconstructed part of the ruins. In 1906, the work was interrupted because of a restaurateur's intervention. The reconstruction, the result of which is the present form of the church, was completed only in the years 1975-84. Nothing of the previous furnishings remained in the church.

In 1904, the high altar was decorated with a statue of Our Lady Help of Christians, presented by the Salesian Society from Turin, Italy. In 1907, the statue was replaced by a copy of the Turin image of Our Lady, painted by a local artist – Jan Szczyśny Stankiewicz. In 1906, eight side altars were set up. After the war, in 1958, an organ was built, and in the years 1962-64, the high altar was restructured according to the design of a Salesian friar, Jan Kajzer.

### ST. JACK'S CHAPEL

St. Jack's Chapel is the only building that remains from the Dominican monastery complex in Oświęcim. Its erection, like that of other Dominican buildings, was funded by the duke of Oświęcim in the first half of the 14th century. Originally, it had the function of a chapter house, i.e. the place where friars met and debated. Along its interior walls were wooden or stone pews, unfortunately, however, they have not survived. In 1594, the chapter house was transformed into the Chapel of St. Jacek Odrowąż, a Polish Dominican friar who had at that time been canonised and become the new

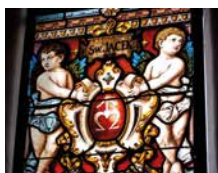


*The Chapel of St. Jack of the early 14th century.*

patron of the congregation. In the 19th century, the abandoned and ruined buildings were used as storage-rooms. St. Jack's Chapel was turned into a storage place for bones and rags. In 1894, the citizens' committee set up by Andrzej Knysz bought the chapel from two Jewish tradesmen. Thanks to the committee, the chapel was restored under the conservational supervision of Professor Odrzywolski and on 19 August 1894, St. Jack's Day, the building was consecrated. By that time the chapel had been partially reconstructed – the vestibule had been pulled down and its rose window placed above the entrance.



*The interior and decorative details of the chapel of St. Jack.*



Besides, the hipped roof had been replaced with a gable roof. Gables with blind windows had been added, windows enlarged and a small bell placed on the roof.

Apart from these changes, the chapel has preserved its Gothic character. It is a two-bay unplastered brick structure, built on a rectangular plan, with buttresses, a cross-ribbed vault, stone ribs and keystones. Nothing from the original fittings and decorations remained, apart from a seventeenth century marble memorial plaque of Mikołaj Mstowski in the chapel wall. During the reconstruction of the ruined Church of the Holy Cross, the bones of the people buried under the church choir were moved into the Chapel.

## CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY

It is likely that in the location of today's Church of the Assumption, already in the 12th century there was a wooden parish church for the inhabitants of the village around the castle.

Inside the town, on the castle hill there was probably a chapel. This first church in Oświęcim was burnt, just like the rest of the town and village, during the Tartar attack in 1241. In the second half of the thirteenth century, a new parish church, partially made of brick, was erected here. Its existence was recorded by Jan Długosz in his chronicles. The medieval church was de-



*The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary  
from the 16th - 19th century, eastern view.*

stroyed by fire in 1503 together with the castle and a large part of the town. It was rebuilt in early Renaissance style. The construction work was also carried out between 1527 and 1529. The portal from the sacristy to the choir with the inscribed date of 1529 comes from that period. From the medieval church only two relics remained. The first is the stone pointed-arch portal in the southern wall of the nave (the side of Dąbrowskiego Str.) with a plastered entrance, and an image of St. Christopher. The second relic is the pointed arch entrance, also built up, with forged iron doors in the western wall next to the church steeple. The choir of the 16th century church was covered by a barrel vault with lunettes. The nave and steeple walls up to the windows were made of brick, whereas the walls, the nave roof and the steeple above them were wooden.

In 1656, Swedish troops burnt the town, including the parish church. Its reconstruction took almost 25 years. The nave walls

were rebuilt fully in brick and covered with a barrel vault.  
In the 19th century Oświęcim was ravished by two great fires.



*The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Gothic portal with St. Christopher.*

In August 1863, two thirds of the town burnt, including the parish church steeple, whose bells melted. The reconstruction of the church and the whole town took 14 years. In June 1881, another fire devoured the church with the parish house and the vicarage. Again the church was rebuilt. This time the upper storeys of the tall church steeple were built of brick. The church silhouette has been preserved in an unchanged form until today.

The Church of the Assumption is an oriented structure with a nave and two single aisles, a rectangularly-closed choir, a steeple on the western facade axis and a chapel at the northern aisle wall. Inside, the vaults and pillars have been decorated with scagliola ornaments. The high altar, late-Baroque in style and decorated with life-sized figures of St. Peter and St. Paul, comes from the 18th century and was reconstructed in the second half of the 19th century. Apart from the altar, two beautiful crucifixes are worthy of attention: a seventeenth-century crucifix in the porch under the steeple, and an 18th century crucifix outside, on the eastern choir wall. In the passage from the nave to the choir, opposite the pulpit, there is a marble baptismal font with a metal lid from 1613. Initially, near the font there used to be marble memorial plaques, or epitaphs, plastered into the walls, after the renovation in 2001



they were removed and placed on the southern pillar and western nave wall. The oldest plaque comes from 1681; made from black marble, it is dedicated to Father Hieronim Russocki. The remaining epitaphs come from the 19th century.

In the church, there are also three post-Dominican paintings from the 18th century: the painting of Our Lady of the Rosary and two paintings featuring St. Jack and St. Dominic, an 18th-century feretory and chasubles, and several antique chalices.



*The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the main altar.*

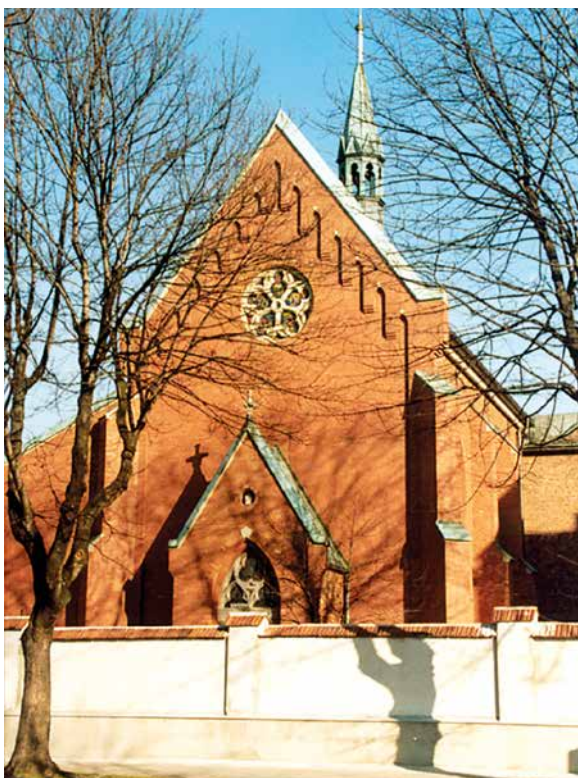
After the renovation carried out 2000-2001, the post-war polychromes disappeared. They were scenes from the Old and New Testament in a limited range of shades of grey, dull red and ochre and simple, almost cubist, style. Today the bright bare church walls are decorated only with gold ornaments on stuccowork.

Until the end of the 18th century, the Church of the Assumption was surrounded by a parish cemetery, around which there was a wall with several entrance gates. The cemetery was liquidated; some graves and gravestones were moved to the new cemetery established on what was then the outskirts of the town. The wall surrounding the cemetery was demolished by the Germans in 1941, who widened the street now known as Dąbrowskiego Str. right up to the church wall.

## CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF SORROW

The first building of the Seraphic convent in Oświęcim was erected in 1895. Two years later the foundation stone for the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows was consecrated. Paweł Muller, an architect from Bielsko, began the construction free of charge, "because of the nuns' poverty". The church was completed and consecrated in 1899.

It is a small single-nave brick building, neo-Gothic in style, unplastered, clasped with buttresses, with a narrower and lower choir closed with an apse. The gable roof of the nave is topped with a small belfry. The walls of the church and the cross-ribbed vault have been plastered and painted white. The neo-Gothic high altar, the pulpit and benches all come from the late 19th century. The side altars with the paintings of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua, the Pietà, the confessional, and the chandelier come from the very beginning of the 20th century.



*The Church of St. Mary of Sorrow from the late 19th century,  
western view.*



*Fragment of the tombstone of the mother-foundress - blessed Maria Małgorzata Szeńczyk inside the Church of St. Mary of Sorrow.*

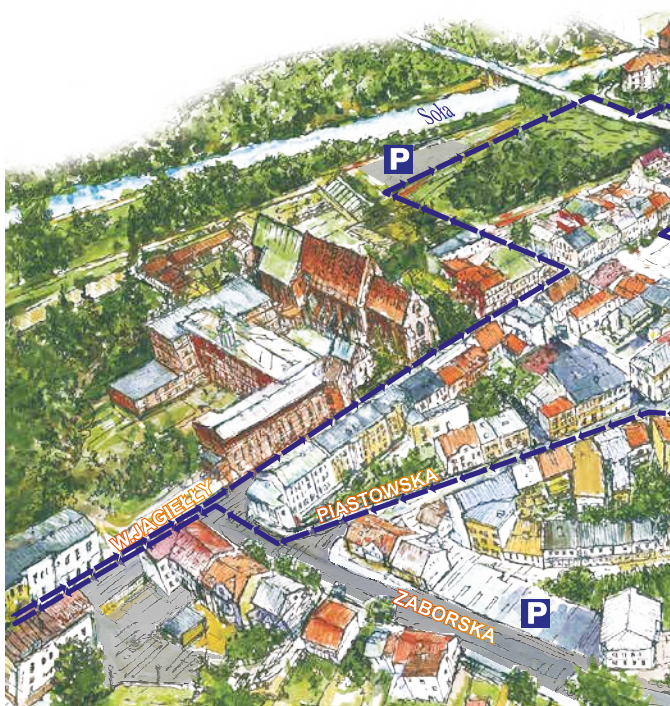
During World War II the church was partly destroyed. It was rebuilt after the war and in 1947 a figure of Mary the Immaculate was placed before it. In 1950 new stained-glass windows illustrating the seven sorrows of the Holy Virgin Mary were fitted into the church.

The oldest nunnery building in neo-Classical style was joined to the Church by means of a ground-floor passage. Another building matching in style was built in the 1950's. Within the complex there also is a turn-of-the-century building of Caritas (a Christian charity organisation) erected in 1905-10 and two kindergarten buildings from the 1930's. On its western and eastern sides, the complex is flanked by an orchard and a garden. In the monastery, there is a memorial chamber available to the public dedicated to the Blessed Sister Margaret Szeńczyk- cofoundress of Seraphic assembly, the first superior of the Order and the convent of Oświęcim.

## URBAN LAYOUT OF OŚWIĘCIM - THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

The urban layout of Oświęcim from the turn of the 15th century has been included in the Polish register of historical monuments. It includes "the building complex of the old town from the turn of the 20th century with its main dominants: the castle, the church and the monastery."

Oświęcim's urban development has had many stages. During the first stage, which probably started around the 12th century, the castle's lands extended over both banks of the Vistula River, including the region of Żywiec and in the east reaching over to the River Skawa. At that time, there was a fortified settlement on the castle hill surrounded by a defensive earthen rampart and flanked from its northern side by a village. There was also a market square. Around the square a trading settlement developed, which extended over the eastern part of the present-day town. The settlement was an oblong oval with a spindle-shaped market square inside – the area of today's Mały Rynek and Piastowska Str. On both sides of the square there were plots of land in a typical fan-shaped arrangement, whose traces have been preserved in the present arrangement of the buildings at Piastowska Str. and on the eastern side of Mały Rynek. At that time, there was a church inside



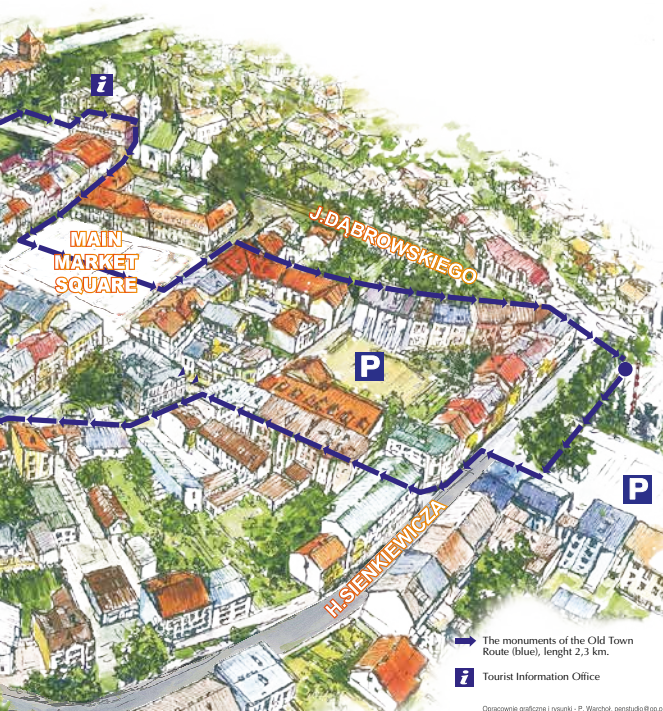


or outside of the settlement. It might have been located in the area of today's Church of the Assumption, but it is also possible that the first church in Oświęcim was St. Nicholas' Church, which no longer exists and which was located around today's Mikołajska Str.

It is most likely that the settlement was not surrounded by any defensive structure. The Tartar invasion in 1241 put an end to this stage of the town development, destroying both the town and the settlement. After it had been rebuilt, the spatial layout of Oświęcim was totally changed.

In the second half of the 13th century the town was granted the founding charter. Unfortunately, the exact date is not known, and the actual document has not survived. The surrounding of the town with a defensive structure in the first half of the 14th century can be considered the final stage of its medieval development. The main market square was finally established in the 14th century. The frontages of the square were marked by blocks of wooden buildings.

Adjacent to its southeastern corner was the square of the former oval settlement. It served as an additional market place. It is impossible to-



day to determine the location of the public utility buildings. The slaughterhouses were probably located within the main market square, the storage rooms for salt and lead in the northern part of the town. At the time, the town extended in the south over to the Dominican monastery built at the beginning of the 14th century. Being a mendicant order, Dominicans usually settled outside of town areas. Oświęcim was surrounded with defensive walls at the time when it was the capital town of an independent duchy. St. Nicholas' Church was outside the walls, and probably served as a church-hospital. The fortifications made of wood and earth had only two gates in the north-south axis, in the area of today's crossroads of ul. Górnickiego and Klucznikowska, and ul. Jagiełły and Zaborska. The town buildings at that time were probably wooden.



*Oświęcim panorama, view from the 19th century; illustration in the collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

A constant influx of people had a very significant influence on the further development of the town. In 1457, after the duchy had been sold to the King of Poland, many Jews settled in Oświęcim. In royal cities, the *de non tolerandis Judeis* law was not in force, and by that time Oświęcim had become a royal town. In 1563 Jews were prohibited from buying houses around the main market square, which resulted in creating separate Jewish quarters in the area of present-day ul. Berka Joselewicza and on the outskirts of the town, outside of the walls.

In the 16th century the network of roads was extended, the city walls were repaired and modernised, and after the great fire in 1503 the castle with its walls, the parish church and the Dominican church were rebuilt. Probably around that time a third gate was created in the area of today's crossroads of ul. Dąbrowskiego and Sienkiewicza. A town hall was built in the market square. It survived until the 19th century.

The 17th century marked the beginning of Oświęcim's slow decline. The Swedish invasion destroyed the town in 1656 and started its slow fall, which lasted for 200 years. Towards the end of the 17th century, probably during reconstruction work, the driveway to the castle hill was moved from the northern side to where it is today, up the southern slope of the hill. However, the castle fortifications had not yet been connected with the town fortifications. In 1772, under the treaty

on partitions, Oświęcim and its lands fell under Austrian rule. The town boundaries were then changed and held in force until 1939. All roads leading out of the town were regulated, the parish church cemetery was liquidated, and a new one established outside of the city walls. The Dominican Monastery was dissolved.

In the 19th century, brick buildings constituted only a half of all the buildings in Oświęcim. The economy was at a standstill, two most precious historical monuments were falling into ruin – the castle and the abandoned post-Dominican monastery. In 1863, a fire devoured almost 2/3 of the town, including the town hall, two synagogues and the church steeple. The town centre was rebuilt, mostly in brick, after the fire.

Not until the second half of the 19th century, thanks to the development of rail and the establishment of a railway junction in Oświęcim joining Kraków, Vienna and Katowice, did industry and trade start to develop in the area. This, in turn, resulted in the increase in the number of inhabitants and the expansion of the suburbs at the turn of the 20th century. The road from the railway station to the town centre was gaining in importance. In 1912, the town started the construction of the roads leading to a new bridge, which was to be built over the Soła River.

The bridge was to be located to the south of the castle and was opened in 1924. Today it is called Most Piastowski.

At the turn of the 20th century, major influence on the town deve-



*General view with the church; postcard of 1907 in the collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

lopment was exerted by the arrival of the Salesian Friars and Sisters. The newly erected nunnery, the Salesian school and the reconstructed post-Dominican church became the new dominants over the town's landscape, together with the castle and the steeple of

the Church of the Assumption. The church and the Surefire nunnery closed the eastern frontage of the New Market Square, at present Kościuszko Square.

In the years 1916-1917 a barrack settlement called a New Town (Nowe Miasto) was built in Zasole. It consisted of 22 residential houses and 90 wooden barracks. In the centre, the development extended towards the east, along ul. Dąbrowskiego.

World War II marked the development of the IG Farben chemical factory and the so called "concentration camp zone of influence". The historical town centre was only partially restructured, as the Germans did not manage to carry out their original total reconstruction plan.

After 1945, blocks of flats were built around the historical town centre, changing Oświęcim's layout. The function of the town's cultural and shopping centre was taken over by the Osiedle Chemików district. Over the past few years there have been attempts to bring back the original appearance and significance to the Old Town. In recent years, the attempts are being made to restore the Old City's former significance and appearance. The Main Market Square was rebuilt in the period of 2012-14.

## MAIN MARKET SQUARE

In the first half of the 14th century, the main market place (present day main market square) in Oświęcim was set up. The frontages of the square market consisted of wooden buildings, and their arrangement was largely identical with the current layout. We know that in the 16th century a two floor brick town hall was erected, but the buildings around the square were still wooden. In the 19th century the main square was described by Jan Nie-



*„Oświęcim. The Main Market Square – Ringplatz”; postcard of 1913; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*





*The view of the Main Market Square in Oświęcim after 1933; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

pomucen Gątkowski in his *Rys dziejów księstwa oświęcimskiego i zatorskiego* from 1867: "in the centre of the square formed mainly by rows of wooden houses, was a two-floor town hall, renovated in 1792 and fitted with a clock. The only ornaments of this small and simple square were aristocrats' houses, a statue of St. Jan Nepomucen and the municipal well – very deep, with a wheel to draw water, which nobody drank as several people drowned there. Next to the town hall there was a reservoir with water used for extinguishing fires." After two fires in the second half of the 19th century, the buildings around the square were rebuilt mostly in brick. During World War II the square was partially restructured by the Germans. The arcades at Plebańska Street and on the corner of the former Herz Hotel were realised according to a more complex restructuring plan. At that time, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the statue of St. John Nepomucen were removed from the square. The Germans cut down the trees planted in the inter-war period.

In the period of 2012-14 the Main Market Square was rebuilt within the funds from Oświęcim Strategic Government Programme. The fragments of the sixteenth century town hall walls were exposed and illuminated in the market square and the pre-war municipal well was replicated. The city fountain is a large attraction for all.



*The Main Market Square in Oświęcim, present view.*

## FORMER TOWN HALL

The Town Hall had stood in the middle of the market square since the mid-16th century. The building, at that time already 200 years old, was renovated in 1792. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire in 1863. The archaeological excavations conducted during the Main Market Square restoration resulted in the discovery of the fragments of the town hall wall. Currently, the work is underway to make the monuments available to the visitors.

In 1872 a resolution was passed to build a new Magistrate of the Royal Town of Oświęcim. The construction work started in April 1872 under the supervision of architect Leopold Michel. After three years, the local authorities moved to the completed building, which served them until the outbreak of World War II. After the war the municipal authorities moved to the castle, and since 1987 they have had their seat in the building at Zaborska Str. Today, the former town hall is planned to be renovated.



*The former Town Hall from the second half of the 19th century.*

In the building of the former town hall, we can distinguish references to various styles, but most elements are neo-Gothic. It is a brick, plastered building; it has a cellar, a ground floor and a top floor with a gable roof.

Its peculiar asymmetrical facade has a tower along the main entrance axis. The top of the tower features an attic with crenellation and two side turrets. A corresponding stringcourse above the gate separates the two floors. In 1876, a clock was installed on the town hall tower, which was replaced by a new one in 2001.

For many years, the building has not performed its original function. However, since 1993, it has displayed the official flag with Oświęcim's coat of arms and at noon, we can hear the official hymn – tune of the town – a fragment of a polonaise composed by Aleksander Orłowski.

## HOUSE OF THE ŚLEBARSKI FAMILY

At the beginning of the 19th century a spacious, two storey house was built in the northern frontage of the Main Market Square.

It was erected by Michał Ślebarski, who at that time was the chief priest of the parish of the Assumption.

It is a brick, plastered building, with cellars, a ground floor and a top floor, with neo-classical characteristics. A pillared porch on the main entrance axis protrudes before the building's facade on the ground floor; it is surrounded with a balustrade on the first floor, and up on the wall it is marked only by pilasters in-between windows and a triangular abutment (pediment) on the roof.



*The house of the Ślebarski family of the early 19th century.*

During World War II, the Germans slightly restructured the building, adjusting it to serve the needs of their municipal authorities. A small ridge turret was then added on the roof and the interiors were restructured. After the war, the building housed offices of the leading Communist party officials and today it is the seat of the District Court in Oświęcim.

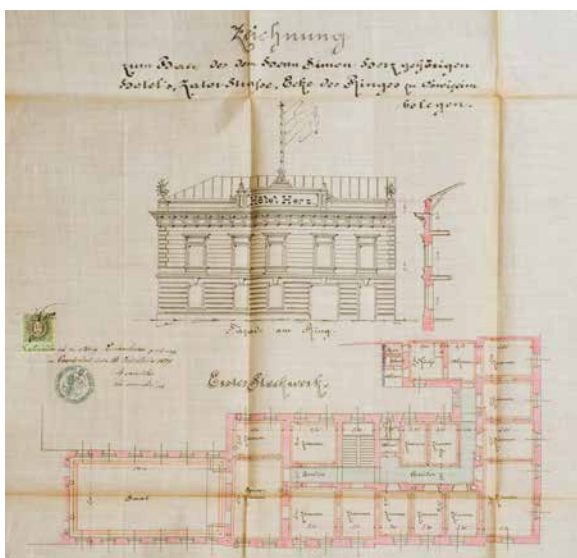


*Northern frontage of the Main Market Square with the house of the Ślebarski family of the early 19th century.*

## FORMER HERZ HOTEL

In the 19th century, on the eastern frontage of the main market square, a two-floor building was erected, which housed the Herz Hotel. It became famous when, on 7 February 1915, Józef Piłsudski, who at that time was a brigadier, stayed there together with the officer corps of the Polish Legions. He was there to celebrate the anniversary of the January Uprising, which had taken place in 1863.

It is a brick, plastered building with a cellar, a ground floor and a top floor. During World War II, the Germans restructured it in the so-called Heimatstil style, according to the design of Hans Stosberg. During the renovation, the arcades on the corner and mansard dormer windows were added, while the cornice under the roof-eaves and the attic with the name Hotel Herz were removed. For many years now, the building has housed a pharmacy.



The plan of "Herz" Hotel, 1879; collection of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.

The former "Herz" hotel, present view.

## PALACE OF WEDDINGS

Dr Antoni Ślosarczyk built his house between 1903-1912 at Jagiełły Str. Until the end of the interwar period, it was a private house.

Its style features many historical allusions, with the majority of neo-Renaissance and neo-Baroque elements. It is a brick building with two floors and a cellar, built on a rectangular plan, with a projection in the northwestern corner and a porch facing the garden. The porch is accessible from the outside through a flight of steps with a landing. The building is covered with a mansard roof; the projection has a broach roof. In the past, along the eastern wall of the building, there was a big garden, which is a car park today.

The house used to be called a "small castle" or "small palace"



*Pałac Ślubów - the mansion of A. Ślosarczyk of the early 20th century.*

thanks to the highly decorative mansard dormer windows and the projection resembling a turret.

At present the building is also called the Palace of Weddings, because after its conservation and modernization, the former Births, Marriages and Deaths Register Office was transferred here. On the top floor, there is a beautiful wedding room with a separate entrance from the garden. For the past several years, the building has also housed the seat of the Oświęcim Municipal Council.

## CHAPEL - MAUSOLEUM OF THE HALLER FAMILY IN DWORY

To the east of Dwory, there is a former castle complex from the first half of the 19th century. At present ul. Zwycięstwa divides it into two parts. There are some ruined castle buildings in the southern part. The northern part comprises a park with the only well - preserved building from the whole complex - the Chapel - Mausoleum of the Haller family.



*The chapel of the Haller family of the early 19th century.*

The construction of the chapel began in 1805, after Barbara Rottman née Haller had died. It was built in classicist style,

in brick and was later plastered. Based on a central plan, it is surrounded by Ionic pillars supporting the cornice and the cupola decorated with a metal cross. The arch over the main entrance is supported by two pilasters and it has a decorative keystone.



*The truss fragment of the chapel of the Haller family from the early 19th century.*

Initially, a large wooden statue of St. Barbara was placed on the altar. As it was very heavy, however, several years ago, it was replaced with a smaller and lighter statue of the Virgin Mary and the one of St. Barbara was moved to the side. There are some memorial plaques in the walls on both sides of the altar. One of the stones is dedicated to Major Cezary Haller de Hallenburg and another to Cezary Antoni



*St. Barbara of the Haller family's chapel in Dwory – a fragment of the sculpture of the early 19th century.*

Haller, the last member of the family, who died on 8 July 1972. In the floor, at the main gate there is an entrance to the crypt with tombs.

The chapel is surrounded with a park. Two rows of park benches have been placed in front of the main entrance. As the building belongs to the parish of the Assumption. In 2009 the chapel was renovated.



## PARISH CEMETERY

The Roman Catholic cemetery belonging to the parish of the Assumption in Oświęcim is located in the eastern part of the town. It was established in the first half of the 19th century and it was later extended in the second half of the 19th century, the inter-war period and after the war.

Before this now historical cemetery was established, there had been three Roman Catholic cemeteries in Oświęcim. The first, at the Church of the Assumption, functioned until 1784. There were also cemeteries at the two remaining churches.

The cemetery at the Dominican church was used until the end of the 18th century and the cemetery at St Nicolas' Church, demolished in 1749, was open until 1850's.

The parish cemetery was established on an irregular quadrilateral plan. In its centre and northern part, we can see traces of the original layout with the chapel, the mortuary, the main alley and the row of old trees along the original eastern edge.

The cemetery chapel comes from the interwar period. It is



*The historic tombstone of Olga Saganiak, mourned by her husband; from the second half of the 19th century.*

a brick, plastered building, built on a rectangular plan and covered with a broach plate roof. In the central part of the cemetery, there is a complex of over 200 of the oldest historical tombs. Many of them are beautiful examples of the sepulchral art, both those chiseled in stone and those forged. One of the oldest gravestones is the sandstone obelisk constituting a part of the Russocki and Dąbski family vault. Several gravestones of Austrian soldiers who fell in battle against the Prussian forces on 27 June 1866 can be seen. Four family vaults have been classified as monuments of cemeterial architecture. These include the neo-Romanesque Stankiewicz family vault and neoclassicist Wojciechowski family vault with a beautiful statue of a weeping angel.

Since 1986, the parish cemetery in Oświęcim has been listed in the register of historical monuments. Today, only the already existing graves are open for burials. The function of Oświęcim's main necropolis was taken over by the municipal (communal) cemetery situated outside of the town-centre, as it was in the case of the parish cemetery over 150 years ago.



*An angel on the historic tomb of the Radwański family.*

## SYNAGOGUE AND JEWISH MUSEUM

The only surviving synagogue in Oświęcim was built by the Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot association (in Hebrew, the Association for the Study of Mishnah), established in 1893 for religious and educational purposes. Until 1939, its presidents included Natan Silbiger, Abraham Kaufmann, Salomon Joachim Barber, and Jakób Singer. During the interwar period, the association's rabbi was Yekele Yankiel Zukerberg from Komarno, the son-in-law of a revered Jewish leader of Sasso-  
over, who was later replaced by Hayim Yehuda Yudel Halberstam. Initially, the Association did not have any premises of its own, and prayers took place in the prayer house belonging to the Chrzanover Hasidim (the Chrzanover shtibl) on Hospital Square (today Priest Jan Skarbek Square). In 1912, the Lomdei Mishnayot Association acquired a site from Józef and Gizela Glass. The association's synagogue was built between 1913 and 1918, and remained in operation until 1939. During the Second World War, its interior was completely destroyed and the synagogue was turned into a German munitions depot.

After the war, it was opened again for services (1945-1955) and the few survivors in Oświęcim prayed there. In 1977, the Chevra Lomdei



*The Synagogue and the Jewish Museum in Oświęcim, the Skarbek Square.*

*Mobile application Oshpitzin. A Guide to the Jewish History of Oświęcim (2014), available in App Store & Google Play.*

Mishnayot Synagogue was nationalized by the Communist government, and was used as a carpet warehouse from 1992 to 1997. In 1998, it was returned to the Jewish Community of Bielsko-Biała which, in the same year, donated the synagogue to the Auschwitz Jewish Center.

The synagogue is an example of a typical *bet midrash* (in Hebrew, a house of study) from the beginning of the 20th century, which was a building for both prayer and religious education. In the men's section of the synagogue there are two historic plaques. The first

one from 1928 is located on the *mehitza* (the wall dividing the men and women's sections) and bears the names of three *gabbaim* (administrators of the synagogue), Yakir Singer, Hayim Goldstein, and Alter Neuberg. It is the only original element from the prewar Cheura Lomdei Mishnayot synagogue. The second plaque, the *shiviti*, is located on the eastern wall of the synagogue, to the right of the *aron ha-kodesh* (in Hebrew, ark). It was created by Hinda Tzvetl to honor her late husband Shlomo Zalman Pelzman from Kęty, a rabbi and a teacher (b. 1907). The plaque was most likely mounted on the wall by local survivors soon after WWII.

The Jewish Museum, with the core exhibition *Oshpitzin: The Story of Jewish Oświęcim*, is located in the adjacent house. It commemo-



*Fragment of the exhibition at the Jewish Museum titled "Oshpitzin. The history of the Jewish Oświęcim".*

rates and educates about the Jewish history of Oświęcim. Through the core exhibition, *Oshpitzin*, visitors can explore the lives of the Jews of Oświęcim through photographs, artifacts, and survivor testimony as well as the Judaica excavated in 2004 from beneath the site of the Oświęcim Great Synagogue. Behind the synagogue is the renovated Kluger Family House, where Café Bergson is located. Located in the house of the last Jewish resident of Oświęcim, Szymon Kluger (1925-2000), the café combines elements of its original interior with minimalistic design, maintaining the soul of the family's home while making it modern and accessible. The Café brings together local culture and regional and traditional products in a relaxed, historic atmosphere. Café Bergson is also a space for temporary exhibits.

[www.ajcf.pl](http://www.ajcf.pl), [www.oszpincin.pl](http://www.oszpincin.pl)



## JEWISH CEMETERY

Oświęcim's first Jewish cemetery was founded circa 1588, but its location is unknown. Today, the only surviving cemetery is situated at the corner of Dąbrowskiego Street and Wysokie Brzegi Street. It was established at the turn of the 19th century. The cemetery was originally square, but the area that remains today is trapezoidal. During World War II, the cemetery was devastated by the Germans and part of its grounds were covered by Dąbrowskiego Street. In 1941, the cemetery was closed just after the Jews were deported from Oświęcim. In the first decade after the war, the Jews who returned to Oświęcim took care of the



*The Jewish Cemetery. Matzevot - tombstones.*

cemetery and in the following years, the wall surrounding the graveyard was repaired. In the 1980s, the cemetery was renovated thanks to the support of Asher Scharf of New York. Sections of tombstones were arranged into memorials. At the same time, the Scharf family's *ohel* (in Hebrew, a small building built over a distinguished grave) was reconstructed. The other *ohel* in the cemetery covers the grave of Szymon Kluger, the last Jew who lived in Oświęcim. Almost 1000 tombstones have been preserved in Oświęcim's Jewish cemetery.

[www.ajcf.pl](http://www.ajcf.pl), [www.oszpicin.pl](http://www.oszpicin.pl)

## MIKOŁAJ MYSZKOWSKI'S GRAVESTONE

The medieval gravestone of Mikołaj Myszkowski is one of the most valuable exhibits in the Castle Museum.

Initially, the gravestone was located in the fourteenth-century Dominican Church in Oświęcim. It was first mentioned in the book called "Rys dziejów księstwa oświęcimskiego i zatorskiego" written by Jan Nepomucen Gątkowski in 1867 who claimed that it was the gravestone of Wawrzyniec Myszkowski- one of the Oświęcim Castellans. Another piece of information comes from a book by Jan Stanek *Z dziejów ziemi oświęcimskiej*, written in 1959: "During the Nazi occupation, the gravestone was used by the Germans to reinforce the riverbed", and after the war „in 1948 the author took it out of the River Soła right next to the castle." It was probably carried over to the castle ward, sealed back with cement mortar and affixed to the southern wall of the defensive tower. After almost 50 years, the figure and inscription, exposed to changes in temperature and humidity, almost completely disappeared. In October 1999 after a two-year conservation work, the stone was placed in one of the rooms belonging to the Historical and Ethnographic Museum. In the year 2000, a letter was found, written by Andrzej Knycz in 1895, the head priest of the parish of the Assumption, and including two photographs of the gravestone. Przemysław Mrozowski from the Art Centre of the Royal Castle in Warsaw investigated the pictures to read the inscription on the gravestone and managed to read the date – April 1482 and the first name of the dead person – Mikołaj. Mrozowski also thinks that the gravestone is connected with the burial of Mikołaj Myszkowski, who was the chancellor of the Duchy of Oświęcim during the reign of John IV, the last Piast Duke in Oświęcim. The gravestone was made from Jurassic limestone; it might have come from one of the shops in Kraków. It is 92.5-inch long, 37.4 inch wide and 11.8-inch thick. It was made in bas-relief technique. With the present condition of the tombstone it is not possible to read its details, including the image of the deceased. It can only be done based on the photographs of the monument dated back to 1895. We can see a bald man standing with his arms folded, with a characteristic beard and a moustache, dressed in a long, folded robe, typical of *szlachta*, i.e. the Polish gentry, at the end of the 15th century.



*The tombstone of Mikołaj Myszkowski of the late 15th century.*

## THE AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU STATE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL PLACE

Auschwitz is a symbol of war, terror, genocide and Holocaust. The Auschwitz Camp was set up by the Germans in occupied Oświęcim as a camp for Polish political prisoners, whose first transport was brought on 14th June 1940 from a prison in Tarnów. Since 1942 Auschwitz-Birkenau was also one of the centres of Holocaust – a mass extermination of European Jews. In Auschwitz the Germans killed at least 1.1 million people, mostly Jews but also Polish and Romani people, soviet prisoners and people of other nations.

Since 1947 the area of the former German Nazi concentration and death camp has been the seat of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. This Memorial Place consists of two remaining parts of the camp: Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II Birkenau. In the museum there are camp facilities and ruins including the remains of gas chambers and crematoria. The museum is a scientific, research and educational institution. It carries out researches, collects, conserves and publicizes documents and artefacts connected with the camp. In recent years the museum has been visited by over a million people from all over the world each year.

In 1979 the area of the former concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was named a UNESCO World Heritage



*The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Memorial Place.*

Site. The camp Liberation Day (27th January) was declared the International Holocaust Remembrance Day by the United Nations.

[www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)



## OSWIĘCIM CASTLE MUSEUM

The Castle Museum was created on 1 January 2010. However, the beginnings of the museum are related to the activity of the Historical and Ethnographic Collection, which was created in 1993 at the Municipal Culture Centre, and from 1996 to 2009 operated at Oświęcim Culture Centre. From the very beginning, the purpose of the Historical and Ethnographic Collection was to propagate the legacy of the city of Oświęcim and the surrounding area. The museum collection grew thanks to the residents, collectors and supporters, who passionately endeavoured to create a city museum.



*Fragment of the exhibition titled "In the Royal City of Oświęcim", exposition of the Castle Museum in Oświęcim.*

Carrying out its mission, the museum gathers and stores the museum pieces related to the history of the city and the land of Oświęcim. The collection includes documents, stamps, coins, maps, books, photographs, everyday objects, archaeological artefacts. Majority of the exhibits are presented on permanent exhibition depicting the pre-war life of Oświęcim, household interiors and the daily life of inhabitants. The exhibition "The Royal City of Oświęcim" illustrates the most important historical events of the city, from the period of Galician autonomy until the outbreak of World War II in 1939. It shows the city that has been lost in the war and Nazi occupation. The exhibition features many innovative solutions, thoughtful educational elements and interactive multimedia.

The museum organizes also many temporary exhibitions to promote the cultural heritage of the land of Oświęcim and beyond. There are also educational activities and workshops for children and youth. The classes are conducted based on the museum collections and relate to the themes of past times, the history of the Duchy of Oświęcim, Polish traditions, customs and rituals. There are various events linked to the activity of the museum, including the regular ones: Castellan Fair, Night of the Museums, Days of Oświęcim and Castle Musical Evenings.

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