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## *The route of wooden churches in Olesno County – a sketch*

Olesno County (*Powiat*) is one of the twelve counties in the Opole Province (*Voivodship*) (Fig. 1), located in its south-east corner. This is the area of the former Duchy of Opole, the Land of Wieluń, and Silesia where one can notice different wood architecture traditions from the south of Poland.



Fig. 1. Location of Olesno in Poland, Fig. by author

Il. 1. Położenie Olesna w skali kraju, ryc. autor

As a result of the administration reform of Poland which was implemented a few dozen of years ago, Olesno County was incorporated into Opole Province (Fig. 2), and its area was also changed. Compared to its original borders, the County 'lost' Lasowice Wielkie Commune

(*Gmina*) which was connected to the neighboring Kluczbork County and 'gained' the area of Rudniki and Praszka



Fig. 2. Map of Olesno County, Fig. by author

Il. 2. Mapa powiatu oleskiego, ryc. autor

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Fig. 3. Map of locations of wooden churches in Silesia  
(developed by: J. Kleszcz)

Il. 3. Mapa rozmieszczenia drewnianych kościołów na terenie Śląska  
(oprac. J. Kleszcz)

Communes which historically always belonged to Wieluń Upland.

That is why this paper presents all churches located at present within the borders of Olesno County, and not on the basis of their location in historically independent areas. Historically, this area with the main city – Olesno Śląskie was located at the junction of two trade roads important for the region – the Amber Road from the Baltic Sea through Moravia to southern Europe and the Salt Road from Kraków through Wrocław to the western part of the continent. A well developed network of settlements provided good conditions for the development of a large number of wooden churches [13].

In 1871, in his paper on wooden churches in Upper Silesia, Luchs listed 194 such churches in that area [11, pp. 109–121]. 137 of them have survived until today in Upper Silesia (Fig. 3), 18 of which are located in the area of Olesno County. Still at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were 20 of them, however, several of them were destroyed in a series of fires and thefts.

A few characteristic types can be distinguished among wooden churches in Olesno County on the basis of their foundation. They were parish or filial churches founded by the church or private founders; cemetery churches located by existing or newly established cemeteries and votive churches characteristic of the times of wars and epidemics, including a special type of the so called bubonic church.

All wooden churches in the area of Opole Region built between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were log structures. The churches built after 1742 had towers which were timber-framed (post-and-beam) or frame structures because of the

regulations introduced in Prussia on reduction of the use of wood which was needed for the development of industry [1].

The location of churches depended on a number of social, political, and historical factors as well as geography and nature. There are two main types of location – inside and outside a village. In the case of the latter, churches were located on hills [16]. This type of location was noted by German researchers of that area already before World War II as providing the best view and it was easy to defend, and in respect of liturgy – as the most exposed and the easiest to find. Such a location was also important for the spatial composition of the whole settlement by providing an increased scenic exposure and a landmark. The purely construction aspect should not be ignored either. It is important to choose a location for wooden structures which is less exposed to water, has a better exposure to wind and sunlight, and undoubtedly a location on a hill provides such conditions. There are also other types of location which cannot be explained by rational reasons. In such cases it is often the history of specific places which is connected with some past events often incorporated in legends or miracles as in the case of the Church of St. Anne in Olesno.

The distinctive features of the churches presented in this paper included their towers whose design was connected with the whole building. For historical reasons, as mentioned earlier, all church towers which have been preserved in the area of the County are post-and-beam or frame structures.

*The crowning achievement of all wooden churches with annexes is the Church of St. Anne in Rosenberg. Due to the name of the city of Rosenberg the part of the building with chapels was built in the shape of a rose with five petals. Its builder – the carpenter master Sempek from Gliwice at first intended to build those “rose petals” in a round form. However, as wood does not submit to bending, he designed the chapels with a two-sided end* [9, p. 15–16].

For static reasons typical tower walls were slightly tilted, which feature is much more frequent than much simpler towers with straight walls. It was Dienwiebel who first described the characteristic features of the towers and systematically divided them into types [3] (Fig. 4).

The floor plans of the churches could differ greatly. They demonstrate, however, a few characteristic features taken directly from the Latin liturgy. As a rule, with very few exceptions, the sanctuary was much narrower than the nave. This caused a number of difficulties in the wooden structures and that is why the researchers were surprised with its consistent use. However, it has not been determined whether the pattern for wooden ecclesiastical buildings in Poland was taken directly from the Western European masonry architecture or from the wooden architecture which was much more popular in those times. This opinion is shared by the Polish researcher of wooden ecclesiastical architecture in Silesia, Józef Matuszczak [14, pp. 11–12].

It was Herbert Dienwiebel who first classified wooden churches in his publication on wooden churches in Lower Silesia [3, pp. 88–93]. The churches built for Protestants have the most simple plan (Type A). The oldest churches, which one can come across now, are Type B churches with

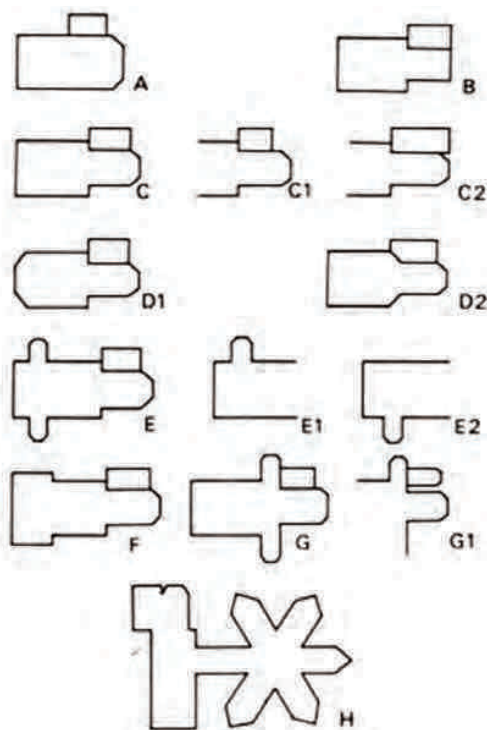


Fig. 4. Types of plans of wooden churches in Opole Silesia, [3, pp. 88–93]

Il. 4. Typy rzutów kościołów drewnianych na Śląsku Opolskim, [3, s. 88–93]

a rectangular nave, sanctuary, and sacristy. The most popular was Type C where the sanctuary has a three-sided end and slightly shorter or elongated sacristy in relation to the sanctuary. There are also examples of naves with three-sided ends from the east or from the west (Type D). Those most simple types of floor plans were the basis for further variants with additional chapels from the side of the sanctuary or the nave which could be extended [29]. However, the most original floor plan was undoubtedly that of the Church of St. Anne in Olesno with radiating chapels on a plan of a rose with five petals (Type H) which was already distinguished by Dienwiebel [3, p. 91] (Fig. 5).

It is even known how much money was paid to the carpenter for his work. It was *80 Thalers, each with 36 Groshens, each Groshen with 12 Silesian Halers, and also 480 liters of rye, 480 liters of wheat, 240 liters of tartary buckwheat, 240 liters of barley, 30 liters of millet groats, 30 liters of peas, 30 quarts of butter, 2 cuts of pork fat, 3 threescores of cheese, 4 barrels of beer* [4, p. 48].

The journey around the area of almost over 970 km<sup>2</sup> should begin from the most precious historic monument of the Land of Olesno – the **Church of St. Anne in Olesno** (Fig. 6). It is the only church in this area built as a pilgrimage filial church of the parish in Olesno. The origin of that church, located in a little out-of-the-way place right outside of the town, is connected with a romantic legend about the daughter of a townsman from Olesno who was miraculously saved as a result of St. Anne's intervention and a pine tree hid the girl with its branches from robbers who were chasing her



Fig. 5. View of the radiating chapels in the Church of St. Anne in Olesno, Fig. by author

Il. 5. Widok na wieniec kaplic kościoła św. Anny w Oleśnie, ryc. autor

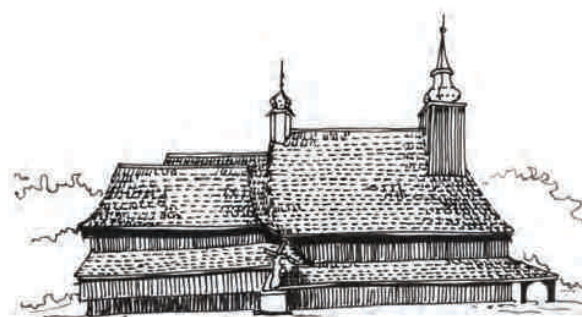


Fig. 6. View of the body of the Church of St. Anne in Olesno, Fig. by author

Il. 6. Widok na korpus kościoła św. Anny w Oleśnie, ryc. autor

[8]. Still today one can admire that pine tree trunk built into the church's high altar. The first mention of the shrine built in the place of that miraculous salvation comes from 1444. The first wooden church built in that place, or actually right above that earlier shrine, dates back to 1518. According to accounts, the shrine was built by Marcin Snopek – the carpenter master born in Kraków who was living in Gliwice. Historical sources mention three forms of his last name: Snopek, Sempek, and Senepek [4, p. 48], [7, p. 310]. As the number of pilgrimages grew, it became necessary to extend the existing structure [7]. In 1668, the body of the church was annexed by five radiating indulgence chapels on a hexagonal plan, with its sixth side being the connection to the body of the church, and a wooden copula topped by a turret located above the central part. The heads of the windows both in the nave and in the sanctuary were semicircular, whereas the forms of the windows in the radiating chapels allude to the symbolism of a rose in the coat of arms of Olesno, being one of the most interesting forms of Baroque in wooden architecture, featuring squares and semicircles. In 1707, a sacristy was built from the north-east side of the sanctuary (Fig. 7).

The whole church has a number of features characteristic of wooden architecture of the region: above the choir supported on two columns there is a wooden tower topped by a bulbous cupola, whereas the nave and the sanctu-





Fig. 7. View of the Church of St. Anne in Olesno, Fig. by author

Il. 7. Widok na kościół św. Anny w Oleśnie, ryc. autor



Fig. 8. View of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Stare Olesno, Fig. by author

Il. 8. Widok na kościół św. Marii Magdaleny w Starym Oleśnie, ryc. autor

ary have a flat wooden ceiling [5]. The sanctuary with a three-sided end is partly blocked by a longer sacristy. A small flèche marks the place where there is a high altar. The church's roof goes low around the nave, the sanctuary and the connection, providing overhangs supported by columns. The whole building is covered with a shingled gabled roof.

The most precious treasure in the church was a winged altar from the Wit Stwosch (*Ger. Veit Stoss*) workshop [20] but this masterpiece was stolen in 1994. The main panel of the triptych presented St. Anne with her family surrounded by the church founders and the town councilors. Its wings showed four scenes from the life of the Sacred Family – the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi.

The side chapels were also richly decorated; different private founders cared for each of them. The first chapel from south-east was dedicated to St. Anne. It was under the patronage of Prior Michał Ochotski. The next chapel, founded by Waclaw Slabonius, presented the scenes of the Elevation of the Holy Cross. The chapels dedicated to Fourteen Holy Helpers and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary were cared for by the monks, Professor Jerzy Istl and Priest Grzegorz Istl. The last of the chapels, dedicated to Our Lady of Częstochowa, was cared for by the hermit Wawrzyniec Chylek.

Another church on the route is the **Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Stare Olesno** (Fig. 8). Built in 1680 as a filial church of the parish in Olesno, it served as such until 1911 when it became a parish church. Renovated in 1955–59, it charms with its simplicity. The church is a typical example of wooden architecture in the Opole Region. Geographically oriented, it has a log structure with the front tower connected with the nave which has a post-and-beam structure, covered with a shingled gabled roof. The tilted walls of the tower are covered with wood board siding, the tower had a spire with a pyramid roof. Additionally, above the nave, there is a small, four-sided flèche. The rectangular sanctuary, narrower than the nave, has a square end which adjoins the sacristy. Small storage rooms are located on both sides of the west tower. The tilted walls of the tower are covered with pine tree boards. The remaining walls and the roof were covered with wooden shingles.

Its interior has exquisite ceiling decorations – the sanctuary has a false barrel vault, and the nave has a flat ceiling. The choir supported on two columns is a typical solution employed in this area as is cladding with horizontal boards. The west bell tower is crowned with an octagonal pyramid roof.

The **Church of St. Lawrence in Wachów** (Fig. 9), a filial church of the parish in Wysoka, is located south



Fig. 9. View of the Church of St. Lawrence in Wachów, Fig. by author  
Il. 9. Widok na kościół św. Wawrzyńca w Wachowie, ryc. autor



Fig. 10. View of the Church of St. Valentine in Dobrodzień, Fig. by author  
Il. 10. Widok na kościół św. Walentego w Dobrodzieniu, ryc. autor

of Stare Olesno. It was first mentioned in 1408. The next structures were built in the place of the original church from 1560–80; the present building comes from 1706. Just like most other churches in this area, it is oriented; the body of the church has a log structure and the front tower has a post-and-beam structure. The four-sided tower with tilted walls is crowned with a four-sided cupola covered with metal sheet. The nave and the sanctuary are surrounded by overhangs supported on columns, covered with wooden shingles, just like the multi-ridge roof. Similarly to most churches in this group, the nave has a flat, wood ceiling, whereas the sanctuary has a false barrel. The sanctuary has a polygonal end with Baroque decorations of the high altar. The walls and ceilings are covered with rich polychrome by J. Marchwica from 1952.

The **Church of St. Valentine in Dobrodzień** is located furthestmost to the south in Olesno County (Fig. 10). It was first mentioned already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though the present building is dated to 1630. The present building was renovated and remodeled a number of times which to different extent changed its original shape and furnishings. The church suffered the greatest damage, however, during World War II; it was restored after the war. Located by a cemetery, inside the village, at present it serves only as a cemetery church.

The church has a log structure with its front tower fused in the vestibule whose width is the same as that of the nave. From outside, the whole building, including its roof and the walls, is covered with wooden shingles. The tower with a small pyramid roof is topped by a bulbous cupola. Behind a rectangular nave, there is a narrower sanctuary with a three-sided end and a four-sided sacristy, adjoining it from the side.

The sanctuary, which is covered with a false segmented vault, has late-Baroque decorations inside. The nave and the sacristy have a flat ceiling, and there is a choir supported on two columns from the side of the entrance. Similarly to most churches in that area, except for the church in Olesno, the windows have segmented heads.

In **Radawie**, which is west of Dobrodzień, there is the **Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross** (Fig. 11). It is one of the oldest buildings in this area. It was first

mentioned in 1305. It became a parish church already in 1500. It was extensively remodeled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its present shape has been preserved ever since. In 1650–1944, it was a filial church of the parish in Ząbkowice, and at present it is an independent parish. After 1945, it was renovated a number of times and to a different extent. At that time, the building, which is also a log structure, in order to provide a better protection and stiffness was moved to a new foundation and placed on a masonry base course. Its external walls are covered with wood boards and to some degree also with shingles. Above the nave, there is a small hexagonal turret with a bulbous cupola. In the west part of the nave, there is an octagonal tower built as a post-and-beam structure, covered with vertical boards, topped by a bulbous roof and a blind lantern. The nave begins with a vestibule which is the base of the tower. Behind the nave, there is a narrower polygonal sanctuary. It has a sacristy adjoining it from the north with a lodge upstairs.

Its interiors are all covered with plaster and have flat ceilings. The choir is unusually supported on four columns.

The **Church of St. Roch in Grodzisko** is also unusual for the area of the county. It was first mentioned in the church documents in 1710 [2]. It has always been a filial church of the parish in Olesno. It was built near the village on a hill where a small group of townsmen from Olesno hid during the plague in 1708. It is the only votive church in that area which was erected as a result of a lot of effort and with the funds from the townsmen who survived the plague. There is a town document from August 18, 1711 which confirms the costs incurred on its construction [6], [22]. This is how its unusual design can be explained. The church does not have a tower. Its walls above overhangs are covered with wooden shingles and boards in their lower section. The whole building is covered with a gabled roof with a steeple crowned with a helm. The sanctuary with a three-sided end opens on the side to a sacristy with a founder's lodge upstairs. The date 1708 and the inscription "bubonic plague" were burned there. The whole church was built on a masonry base course, as a log structure. The masonry base course is contemporary and comes from 1960 when the building was thoroughly renovated [28].





Fig. 11. View of the Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross in Radawie, Fig. by author

Il. 11. Widok na kościół Podwyższenia Krzyża Św. w Radawiu, ryc. autor



Fig. 12. View of the Church of St. Anthony of Padua in Sowczyce, Fig. by author

Il. 12. Widok na kościół św. Antoniego z Padwy w Sowczycach, ryc. autor

At the end of the nave, there is a choir supported on four columns. The body of the church which has a flat ceiling contrasts with the false barrel vault in the sanctuary. Also the shape of the windows is unusual, which testifies to a closer reference of the style to the church of St. Anne in Olesno than to other churches in the county. The windows in the nave do not have typical polygonal heads, and they differ from the windows in the sanctuary. The nave has windows with semicircular heads, whereas the sanctuary has circular windows. The interior decorations correspond to the times when they were made – Baroque altar comes most probably from the times when the church was built.

A little further to the east of Grodzisko, in the village of **Sowczyce**, there is the **Church of St. Anthony of Padua**. It differs from the other churches described above by the simplicity of form which is unusual for this area. The building has an eventful history. It was first mentioned in 1586. The present church was built in 1786. It was a filial church of the parish in Wysoka and originally it was built in the village of Łomnica. However, already in 1917, it was moved to Sowczyce (Fig. 12). In 1962, it stopped serving only as a filial church of the parish in Łomnica and became also a cemetery church.

Built as a log structure on a new base course, it has walls covered with wooden boards. Its gabled roof with one ridge covers both the nave and the narrower sanctuary with a vestibule annexed to it. On the other side, along the nave and the sacristy, there is a wood clad addition too. The church does not have a tower, and there is only a little, four-sided flèche covered with a shingled gabled roof above the nave. The choir, supported on two straight columns, has a flat ceiling.

Further to the east of Sowczyce, there is the **Church of St. Martin and Bartholomew located in Borki Wielkie**. The church was first mentioned in 1697 and that very building has been preserved until today. Originally, it was a filial church of the parish in Olesno; at present it is only a cemetery church. Originally, it did not have a tower. In 1789, the carpentry master Szymon Stadko built a simple tower surrounded by overhangs and wood cladding above

them. The massive tower has a pyramid roof with wooden shingles, a lantern with a bulbous cupola covered with metal sheet. Above its straight nave which has a gabled roof, there is a small hexagonal flèche with a bulbous cupola. The sanctuary with a three-sided end was annexed by a sacristy.

There are wooden flat ceilings inside with no additional painting decorations. The choir with a flat parapet, supported on two columns, was extended along part of the walls of the nave. The windows, just like in the church in Grodzisk, have semicircular heads.

The **Church of St. Hedwig in Biskupice** was mentioned already in 1415. The first building erected in that place comes from that period. The present building was built in 1718 by Jan Mixta from Krasków [21]. Until 1945, it served as a parish church. After that year, it became a filial church of the parish in Olesno. Its construction is typical of the area of Opole Region. The body of the church, which has a log structure, was annexed by a four-sided tower with slightly tilted walls topped by an octagonal bulbous cupola covered with metal sheet (Fig. 13). Above the nave which has a gabled roof, there is a small hexagonal flèche topped by a bulbous cupola. The sanctuary was annexed by a vestibule, and the tower by two storage rooms on its sides.

The circular windows in the sanctuary have outside polygonal frames. The nave has a typical flat ceiling, whereas the sanctuary has a false vault with a flattened arch. The interior has late-Baroque furnishings which date back to the times when the church was built.

The **Parish Church of St. Martin in Żytniów** was first mentioned in 1312. The building burned down several times, and the present church comes from 1817. Only its sanctuary has survived the fires. For some time, the sanctuary served as a chapel. The present building actually comes from Trzcinica [18]. After it was disassembled and moved to Żytniów, the church was put back together in 1837 by the carpenter Jakub Ośródk. This is the only church in the county which has a log structure on a cross plan with two side chapels attached to the body of the church and the sanctuary much narrower



Fig. 13. View of the Church of St. Hedwig in Biskupice, Fig. by author

Il. 13. Widok na kościół św. Jadwigi w Biskupicach, ryc. autor



Fig. 14. View of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Jaworzno, Fig. by author

Il. 14. Widok na kościół św. Trójcy w Jaworznie, ryc. autor

than the nave. Both the chapels and the sanctuary have three-sided ends. The whole building has a gabled roof covered with wooden shingles with two ridge beams. In the place where the nave and the sanctuary meet, there is a two-staged, hexagonal *flèche* with a bulbous cupola covered with metal sheet. There is a vestibule annexed from the north.

The church in Żytniów is the only wooden church in Poland with masonry crypts with the tombs of the Sieradzki family and an underground vestibule joining the church with the rectory.

The interior decoration of the church comes from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the church was decorated in neo-Baroque style. At that time, a bell tower was also added. The nave was covered with a groin vault and the sanctuary with a typical false barrel. The window heads, which are all pointed, also testify to the unusual design of the building. Both the choir with no columns and the whole interior was covered with richly decorated polychrome.

The wooden **Church of the Holy Trinity in Jaworzno** is located furthestmost to the east in Olesno County. Although the date of its first location is unknown, it was first mentioned at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a church located in the place of the older one. In 1570–1660, the church served as a Roman Catholic church of the parish in Parzymiechy (Fig. 14). The church was remodeled many times, including the addition of side chapels. The most important remodelings took place in 1767 and 1921–23 [21].

A tower with its post-and-beam structure was added to the nave which has a log structure. The whole body of the church was covered with one shingled gabled roof, whereas the tower was covered with a pyramid roof with a metal sheet lantern. In the place where the nave and the sanctuary meet, there is a *flèche* with a pyramid cupola. The polygonal closure of the sanctuary was not remodeled, unlike the nave which, during the remodeling in 1921–23, was extended to the west by one bay. Additionally, at that time the width of the nave was extended north and south and two chapels were added, one on each side. A sacristy divided into two levels was also added to the body of the church. In this way an additional room was connected with the sanctuary by a window.

Covering its interiors with flat ceilings or false barrel is typical of the churches in this area.

The **Church of St. Leonard the Prior in Wierzbie** is located furthestmost to the north. Although the exact date of its construction is unknown, a wooden church dedicated to St. Leonard in that area was first mentioned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most likely from before 1522. The first description of the church comes from 1668. The church was extensively renovated for the first time in 1797 (replacement of wooden shingles) and then in 1889 as well as in 1949. It was totally remodeled in 1971–1974 [19].

According to various sources, the building is an example of a late-Gothic variation of a wooden church (Greater Poland type) or of a narrower category of *Wieluń* type of churches [25], with such characteristic features as a common location and time of construction (the 16<sup>th</sup> century). The *Wieluń* type of churches were built in a different way than the *Opole* type of churches from larch wood and they are log structures. The single-naved, oriented church in Wierzbie has wood siding (Fig. 15). The church's sanctuary is significantly narrower and shorter than its nave. The whole building is covered with a shingled gabled roof with two ridge beams. The only difference is the lack of a tower which would be an extension of the nave to the west with a characteristic form. Although the tower of the church in Wierzbie, which is designed on a square plan, is in fact added to the nave, it has a post-and-beam structure and its walls are slightly tilted. It has a pyramid roof also covered with wooden shingles. The church has two side sacristies, one made of wood and the other masonry with monopitch roofs. The latter was annexed with an extension built during renovation in 1949. Above the end of the nave, there is a small *flèche* on a square plan topped by a bulbous metal sheet roof. Two vestibules are from the front and the side of the nave. Special attention should be drawn to its side entrance with a wooden portal, unusual in the area of Olesno County, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century divided in two, its upper circular section inserted on a rectangular door frame [24].

Inside, the nave and the sanctuary have a common flat ceiling. The sacristy, however, has a different barrel and groin vault. The sanctuary is separated from the nave by a wooden, carved rood beam [27]. The choir, also made of wood, which is supported on two carved columns with



Fig. 15. View of the Church of St. Leonard the Prior in Wierzbie,  
Fig. by author

Il. 15. Widok na kościół św. Leonarda Opata w Wierzbju, ryc. autor



Fig. 16. View of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin  
Mary in Uszyce, Fig. by author

Il. 16. Widok na kościół Wniebowzięcia NMP w Uszycach, ryc. autor

the parapet projected in its middle section, is a subtle confirmation of the early-Baroque origin of the church. That part is additionally decorated by the sculptural presentation of angels playing instruments [26].

The **Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Uszyce** is located in the furthest north corner of the county. It is also one of its oldest buildings. It was first mentioned in 1386, and it existed in its present form already in 1517 when the church was consecrated. In spite of being remodeled a number of times, it did not lose its original character. In 1677–1821, the significance of the church diminished. It became a filial church of the parish in Zdziechowice [21]. In 1934, it became a parish church again. The church, which has a log structure, has a front tower which has a post-and-beam structure covered with boards and a massive pyramid roof. The external finish of the walls and the gabled roof are typical of the region. The walls are covered with pine tree boards, reinforced with special clasps, whereas the roof is covered with wooden shingles. Above the end of the nave, there is a hexagonal flèche covered with a metal sheet bulbous roof (Fig. 16). This is also a bell tower. Its bell was cast in Wrocław in 1606. It has an inscription in Polish. The sacristy with the founder's lodge upstairs which opens to the sanctuary was added to the sanctuary which has a three-sided end and is narrower than the nave. External roofed steps lead to it. The choir, which is located from the west, does not have any columns. There is a vestibule going inside from the south.

Near Uszyce, there is a village of **Gola** and the **Church of St. Nicholas** is in that village. It was mentioned already in about 1353, but its present form comes from the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. From the very beginning it was a filial church of the parish in Zdziechowice.

As one of few churches in this area, it has a bulbous roof above the tower with a lantern which is completely covered with metal sheet. A hexagonal tower, added to the nave, was built with the same height as the gabled roof of the nave. The sanctuary, which is significantly narrower than the nave, has a three-sided end. The walls, which are covered with vertical boards, were reinforced with spe-

cial clasps; the roof has two ridge beams and it is covered with wooden shingles. One of its distinctive features are the round windows in the sanctuary. There is a choir supported on six columns from the west.

One of the most precious treasures is the gravestone of Hans von Kuschenbohr from 1684 and a bell cast in the same year in Wrocław.

The church is very similar to the **Church of St. John the Baptist in Kozłowice** which was built around the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the foundation of Adam von Frankenberg.

The church, which has a log structure, was built on a new masonry base course. A short four-sided front tower, which has a post-and-beam structure and its walls are covered with vertical boards, was added to the nave. The octagonal roof above it is covered with wooden shingles. Similarly to other churches, the sanctuary is shorter and narrower than the nave, and it has a three-sided end. A sacristy with a three-sided end and a founder's lodge upstairs which opens to the sanctuary was also added to the sanctuary. External unroofed steps lead to the lodge.

Inside, there is an impressive false barrel vault lowered in the sanctuary. Rich interior painting decoration is also worth noting. Both the walls and the vaults are covered with polychrome. The older of them, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, covers the walls of the nave and the sanctuary, whereas the newer one, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was applied to the vault. The interior decoration is completed with Baroque and late-Baroque furnishings.

The **Church of St. Mary Magdalene**, built in 1679, is located in a small village of **Boroszów**, north of Olesno. Until 1757, it was a filial church of the parish in Sternalice, later, for a short time until 1775, it was a filial church of the parish in Biskupice. In 1896, after more than one hundred years when it belonged to Kościeliska, it returned to Biskupice [17].

Similarly to the buildings described above, this church has an exceptionally simple structure and very similar internal layout. Similarly, a short, massive, four-sided tower which has a post-and-beam structure with





Fig. 17. View of the Church of St. Margaret in Jamy, Fig. by author  
Il. 17. Widok na kościół św. Małgorzaty w Jamach, ryc. autor

slightly tilted walls covered with wood was added to the straight nave. The tower has an octagonal pyramid roof covered with metal sheet. Just like the other cases, the whole church has a log structure with outside wood cladding and a massive base course. Both the sanctuary with a three-sided end and the nave are covered with a shingled gabled roof with two ridge beams. A sacristy was added to the sanctuary from the side. All windows in the building have segmented heads, most simple and most popular in this area.

Inside, the choir supported on two columns has Rococo decorations. The nave has a flat ceiling, and the sanctuary, with a false barrel vault, has simple painting decorations in geometric fields.

The **Church of St. Margaret in Jamy** comes from the same period as the church in Boroszów. Although the exact date of its construction is unknown, the church was first mentioned in 1697 when it was a filial church of the parish in Gorzów Śląski. Destroyed in 1792, it was rebuilt from the foundation of Count Karol Zygmunt von Aulock. In 1956, it became a filial church of the parish in Kozłowiec.

What distinguishes this church from the other churches is its squat construction, with straight walls, which is a little higher and goes above the level of the nave roof ridge. Its flattened pyramid roof has a small onion cupola. The church is also unusual because it does not have separate ridge beams above the nave and the sanctuary with a three-sided end. Both parts of the church have equal heights and one roof with one ridge beam. On the side, there is a sacristy with the founder's lodge upstairs. External unroofed steps lead to it (Fig. 17).

The choir, whose parapet projects a little in its middle section, is supported on six columns. The choir was extended to the middle of the length of the side walls of the nave.

From among the churches described in this paper, the church in Jamy is the only one with square window heads and flat ceilings above both the nave and the sanctuary.

It should be noted that this group of churches includes also the church which until 1910 was in **Olesno**,

in the so called Małe Przedmieście in place of the contemporary, masonry **Corpus Christi Church**. The old hospital church, also dedicated to Corpus Christi, which was funded at first from the municipal and later monastic treasury, was built in 1635, which is confirmed by the inscription on the beam of the side wall. It was built in place of a much older church which burned down in 1624 together with a large part of the town. This church also burned down a few years after it was built in the fire of the town in 1642; it was, however, rebuilt in its original form already in 1645 [10, p. 21].

Of all the churches which existed at that time in the county, the plan of this church was the most simple. Its sanctuary with a three-sided end was as wide as the nave and it had a four-sided turret with a bell. A small sacristy was added to the side of the sanctuary. The whole church, which was built on a base course, has a log structure. Inside, it had flat ceilings, and the sanctuary with coving. Due to its specific function, there were no liturgical vestments or utensils in that church [6, p. 230].

In 1909 [15], a decision was made to move the church to the village of Gronowice (Kluczbork County) located in the parish of Stare Olesno and to build in its place a new, masonry church. It was also then that the dedication of the church was changed to St. Giles. The church was renovated in 1959 [23].

Unfortunately, the church does not exist anymore. It burned down on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1995. It was never rebuilt. A small, masonry temple was built in its place.

There is one more church which also should be mentioned. Namely, the almost completely forgotten church in the village of **Skrońsko**. Unfortunately, this church does not exist anymore either. It was a church dedicated to **St. Valentine and Bartholomew** from around 1600 which most probably was built under the patronage of Augustinian friars. The last time the church was thoroughly renovated and remodeled was in 1909–1910. On the night of September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999, it burned down almost completely, most probably robbers wanted to erase their traces.

This was one of the churches which had a simple form and shape. As all other churches it was a log structure; it had a nave as well as a narrower and shorter sanctuary with a three-sided end and a side sacristy. There was a vestibule on the other side of the nave. The whole church was covered with a roof with two ridge beams, and its small tower, which had a post-and-beam structure, was fused to the nave with a pyramid roof covered with wooden shingles. Above the nave, there was also a hexagonal, metal sheet turret topped by a bulbous metal sheet cupola. Inside, the church had two founder's towers and a simple choir with no columns. The whole interior had flat ceilings.

The interior of the church had real treasures of art. A Baroque high altar from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the sculptures of John the Baptist, Peter and Paul with a painting from 1850 by Maciej Madzior of St. Valentine on the back. There was a regency pulpit on the side. Inside the church, there were also epitaphs of the Skroński family – painted on board, presenting Joachim

Aleksander Skroński who died in 1657 as well as Gabriel Abraham and Jadwiga Eleonora Skroński, who died in 1664, as children, and the 15<sup>th</sup> century Gothic sculptures of the Mother of God with Infant, Mary Magdalene, and

St. Hedwig as well as Baroque sculptures of, e.g. John Nepomucen, Apollonia, and the Mother of God.

In 2003, the inhabitants of Skrońsko built a new, masonry church in place of the old one.

## Summary

When comparing the catalogs of historic monuments of the Olesno County published in different years, one can notice a slow but gradual disappearance of ecclesiastical wooden buildings. What is left of them is just photographs and accounts of the authors of catalog lists. The catalog of *Historic Monuments of Art in Poland* [12] from 1960 lists as many as 23 wooden churches. *Wooden Churches in Silesia* [14] published in 1975 lists only 21 churches. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only 20 of them still existed. At present, in 2011, that number dropped to 18. The churches are disappearing as a result of their age, their being “non-modern”, “non-commercial” or simply because of the desire to earn easy money or because of ignorance. Slowly, even imperceptibly, the most precious heritage of that land is disappearing.

Wooden churches are one of the most unique and varied architectural forms, and that is why it can be assumed that there are no two identical churches as too many factors affect the way in which they were built and their final appearance. However, from among many individual distinctive features, one can find those which are common in a specific small or big region. That is exactly why it was possible to distinguish a few groups of wooden churches which are typical of Silesia, Opole Region or Lesser Poland. The churches belonging to the Opole Region group, which undoubtedly includes the churches in Olesno County, with few exceptions such as the church in Wierzbie,

demonstrate many features which distinguish them from other churches not only in Poland but also Europe. These features are for instance the type of construction, building materials, forms of decorations and spatial layouts, which are not present in their specific arrangement anywhere else. That is specifically why the significant number of such buildings in such a small county should contribute to the growth of interest among both researchers and regular tourists in this inconspicuous treasure which has survived the turmoil of war in small villages.

What is amazing about those churches is also the fact that they survived despite being moved from hands to hands in the borderland area where several cultures and nations coexisted. In the past, it did not matter if a temple was located in Poland, if it was built by a German carpenter or if a parish priest was Czech. The multicultural character of this land which did not allow for the destruction of what was built at high cost by the closest neighbors was noticed by such German researchers as Dienwiebel or Luchs, many of whose ideas were denied after World War II, who noted in their publications the “Slavonic character” and “Germanic character” that coexisted in that area.

Saving those small masterpieces is possible because, after many years of efforts made by researchers from many countries, the general public became aware of the fact that they deserve to be saved as well as because of their impermanence they are especially priceless [26].

Translated by  
Tadeusz Szalamacha

### *Annex – Buildings listed in the register of historic monuments [26]*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Biskupice – Church of St. Hedwig – 35/53 from 19.12.1953 (extract from the Register). | 10. Olesno – Church of St. Anne – 33/49 from 10.12.1949 and 158/78 from 14.02.1978.                          |
| 2. Borki Wielkie – Church of St. Martin and Bartholomew – 75/54 from 22.12.1954.         | 11. Radawie – Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross – 88/54 from 24.03.1954 (extract from the Register). |
| 3. Boroszów – Church of St. Mary Magdalene – 152/54 from 13.01.1954.                     | 12. Skrońsko – Church of St. Valentine and Bartholomew – 84/54 from 2.03.1954 (does not exist anymore).      |
| 4. Dobrodzień – Church of St. Valentine – 385/60 from 12.03.1960 and 74/78 z 1.03.1978.  | 13. Stare Olesno – Church of St. Mary Magdalene – 83/54 from 5.04.1954.                                      |
| 5. Goła – Church of St. Nicholas – 77/54 from 14.01.1954                                 | 14. Sowczyce – Church of St. Anthony of Padua – 89/54 from 24.03.1954.                                       |
| 6. Grodzisko – Church of St. Roch – 32/49 from 10.12.1949 and 149/76 z 10.02.1978.       | 15. Uszyce – Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 85/54 from 12.03.1954.                    |
| 7. Jamy – Church of St. Margaret – reg. no.: 79/54 from 13.03.1954.                      | 16. Wachów – Church of St. Lawrence – 86/54 from 17.02.1954.   |
| 8. Jaworzno – Church of Holy Trinity – 39/67 from 30.12.1967.                            | 17. Wierzbie – Church of St. Leonard – 974 from 30.12.1967.  |
| 9. Kozłowice – Church of St. John the Baptist – 81/54 from 13.03.1954.                   | 18. Żytniów – Church of St. Martin – 490-XIV-63 from 12.08.1949 and 977/67 from 30.12.1967.                  |

### *Annex – Buildings from 1960 per Catalog of Historic Monuments of Art in Poland [12]*

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|---|---|
| 1. Biskupice – Church of St. Hedwig                     | 3. Boroszów – Church of St. Mary Magdalene                          |
| 2. Borki Wielkie – Church of St. Martin and Bartholomew | 4. Chocianowice – Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary |

5. Goła – Church of St. Nicholas
6. Grodzisko – Church of St. Roch
7. Gronowice – Church of St. Giles
8. Jamy – Church of St. Margaret
9. Kozłowice – Church of St. John the Baptist
10. Kościeliska – Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
11. Laskowice – Church of St. Lawrence
12. Lasowice Małe – Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
13. Lasowice Wielkie – Church of All Saints
14. Olesno – Church of St. Anne
15. Radawie – Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross
16. Skrońsko – Church of St. Valentine and Bartholomew
17. Stare Olesno – Church of St. Mary Magdalene
18. Sowczyce – Church of St. Anthony of Padua
19. Uszyce – Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
20. Wachów – Church of St. Lawrence
21. Wędrynia – Church of St. John the Baptist

### Annex – Buildings from 1975 by J. Matuszczak [14]

1. Biskupice – Church of St. Hedwig
2. Borki Wielkie – Church of St. Martin and Bartholomew
3. Boroszów – Church of St. Mary Magdalene
4. Chocianowice – Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
5. Goła – Church of St. Nicholas
6. Grodzisko – Church of St. Roch
7. Gronowice – Church of St. Giles
8. Jamy – Church of St. Margaret
9. Kozłowice – Church of St. John the Baptist
10. Laskowice – Church of St. Lawrence
11. Lasowice Małe – Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
12. Lasowice Wielkie – Church of All Saints
13. Olesno – Church of St. Anne
14. Radawie – Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross
15. Skrońsko – Church of St. Valentine and Bartholomew
16. Stare Olesno – Church of St. Mary Magdalene
17. Sowczyce – Church of St. Anthony of Padua
18. Uszyce – Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
19. Wachów – Church of St. Lawrence
20. Wędrynia – Church of St. John the Baptist

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### Szlak kościółków drewnianych w powiecie oleskim – szkic

Zespół drewnianych kościołów znajdujących się w powiecie oleskim stanowi bogaty przegląd typów drewnianej architektury Śląska. Ze względu na swoje specyficzne położenie na granicy kilku województw i krain geograficznych jest on obszernym źródłem wiedzy o transformacjach i wpływach różnych technik i tradycji budowlanych.

W pracy omówione zostały uwarunkowania historyczno-geograficzne, jakie przyczyniły się do powstania grupy kościołów opolskich. Podstawą dalszych rozważań stała się analiza literatury tematu, obejmująca genezę zainteresowania tradycją śląskiego budownictwa drewniane-go, sięgająca połowy XIX wieku na terenie Niemiec. Dalszą część pra-

cy stanowi omówienie historii i architektury oraz wystroju wnętrzaśkie-go obiektów znajdujących się na terenie powiatu. W opracowaniu zostały również uwzględnione obiekty, które w ciągu ostatnich dwudziestu lat uległy zniszczeniu wskutek destrukcyjnej działalności człowieka. Ich historia dowodzi słuszności wszystkich działań konserwatorskich i zabezpieczających, które zostały podjęte w ostatnich latach dla ratowania zabytków jeszcze istniejących.

Aneksom do opracowania są listy zabytków będące świadectwem zmian, jakie zachodziły w okresie powojennym, obrazujące zarówno zmiany terytorialne powiatu oleskiego, jak i powolny proces niszcze-



nia drewnianej architektury tego regionu. Dodatkową informację stanowi wypis z rejestru zabytków województwa opolskiego, świadczący o podejmowanych zaraz po wojnie działaniach mających na celu ochronę dziedzictwa ziem odzyskanych.

**Key words:** wooden ecclesiastical architecture, protection of historic monuments

**Słowa kluczowe:** drewniana architektura sakralna, ochrona zabytków