

Tree memories of the Second World War: a case study of common beeches from Chycina, Poland

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During the final stages of the Second World War, a trench was dug in woodland near a small Polish village, probably by prisoners of war. There are no eye witness accounts and very few artefacts survive. The only way the story of these prisoners can be told is through the material memory held by the woodland. This paper aims to broaden the concept of material culture by considering the archaeological record that is retained in the bark of living trees. The focus is on the beech trees of Chycina, which may hold the only record of the construction of a small section of the Festungsfront Oder-Warthe-Bogen in western Poland in 1944.

Keywords: Poland, Second World War, materiality, trees, memory, prisoners of war

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Catalogue of carvings

Beech I

1. P[...]LACY.
[...]944.
2. [...]E[...]
1944
3. T[...]
1944
4. Inside a square object:
O[...]
1944
5. ИВАНОВ.
6. П. А[...]
7. И
8. И
Д
9. Image of a person with the face turned to the left
10. Image of a heart
11. СТЕПАН
ШИ[...]КНА

Beech II

12. Grz. Kli[...]wicz
13. Kr. Turek
14. KOSTKA
15. WOLSKI
16. Kubiak
17. M W.
18. JU
19. A
20. 26 VIII 1944
21. XYИ
194[...]

22. XYИ [...]

23. Inside the image of a heart:

24. 8. 1944.

[...]oizi[...]

Lude[...]dorf

Rup[...]

1944

24. Image of a heart pierced by an arrow

Beech III

25. B U.

ŁÓDŹ

1944

Beech IV

26. W H

1944

27. [...]

194[...]

Beech V

28. [...] 1944

Beech VI

29. M W

30. A. E.

31. Image of a heart

32. Image of a heart

33. Image of a rhombus with a dot inside

Beech VII

34. W H

35. PKB

36. Five rows of vertical lines crossed by a horizontal line

Beech VIII

37. W H
1944

Beech IX

38. T [...]
39. KL [...]
40. W
H

Beech X

41. W. H

Carvings made before the Second World War

42. H 1915
43. Inside a square:
H.K
G.B.
1925
44. Inside the image of a heart:
H[...]
1922
45. A H
1930
46. Inside a square:
A H 1932
F R[...]
47. A H
48. A H

Carvings made after the Second World War

49. 19
46

50. Inside a square:

[...]

1949

51. [...]

1955

52. HAK

JÓZEK

1966/7

53. HAK

54. 1 VII. 75

55. 1990