

Max Nepolski

The Refugee Who Helped to Build Chaddesden

Mordecai Nepolski was born in the Jewish ghetto of the Russian town of Omsk around 1863. When the Cossacks made one of their raids one night in 1886, Mordecai finally snapped and dragged the leader from his horse and administered some grievous bodily harm. He was thus a marked man so his family and friends gathered a few coins together, gave them to him and insisted he flee for his life.

Making his way to the nearest port, he bought a steerage ticket to New York, but boarded the wrong ship and landed in Liverpool instead. Mordecai was a bear of a man and he earned his living as a casual labourer and wrestling at fairs, taking on all comers. With the help of a marriage broker he met his future wife, changed his name to Max and later moved to Nottingham where he made an enormous success of his business as a builder and developer.

Max Nepolski's last project was to build the Wood Road estate in Chaddesden in the late 1930's. He named Max Road after himself, Gertrude Road after his eldest daughter and Marjorie Road after his youngest daughter. He had another daughter, Celia, but no street bears her name. The Majestic Cinema on Wiltshire Road, was another of Max's creations and it is said that the neon light on its 70 foot tower could be seen for miles around.

In an interview with the Derby Evening Telegraph in February 2003 Max's grandson, Derby Crown Court Judge Brian Appleby QC revealed more details of his grandfather's life. As well as arriving without a penny in his pocket he could not read or write English but he went on to teach himself, and then he developed a keen interest in British justice. He would never speak of, nor see his family in Russia again.

Max went on to become a very rich man with an office in Nottingham and a house that he built for himself in the city. Although he turned his back on Russia he never forgot his roots and tended to be a bit of an autocrat within his family, what he decided was law and nobody argued with him. He had a Rolls-Royce with chauffeur but he never travelled in it. When asked why he did not use it he said, "I never ride in it in case I forget who I am". It even followed him to and from his office everyday whilst he walked, and when asked why he owned it, and he said that he had seen important Englishmen with theirs and he wanted one.

He was in his eighties when he died in 1945 and he left his estate to be administered by the Public Trustees. The tenants of the 700 plus houses he built in the area around Wood Road and Max Road were given the opportunity to buy their houses for around £800 although some had already been sold at auction for between £1400 and £1700. A London investment company purchased 500 of the houses for £300,000 in 1952.

That a man who escaped the revenge of the Cossacks, fled to England, taught himself to read and write, built up a building and development company and is commemorated by the houses he built in Chaddesden gives testimony not only to the man himself but to a past English way of life that allowed him to do it. AJB.

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Max Road at the junction with Wood Road

