



The best of GB
Racibórz

THE TOWER AND THE DEFENSIVE WALLS



The tower has been the symbol of Racibórz for many years. It is decorated with the logo of the town and the logo of non-centenary (1108-2008) celebration. In 2007, together with a stylised ribbon in the background which resembles the River Odra it was placed on the reverse of the two-zloty coin "Racibórz" in a coin series "Historical Cities of Poland" of which one million pieces were issued by the National Bank of Poland.

The tower was built in 1574 in Renaissance style. Apart from the walls, it is the only preserved fixed element of the town's fortifications. In the upper part it has an attic with loopholes and four turrets. The building gave shelter to defenders. It was also used as a prison tower. It is known from the historical references that here was the so called "cold room", where prisoners were

kept on the floor lined with straw. In the 17th century insubordinate master butchers accused by the municipality of overpricing spent several winter months here.

A fragment of Gothic defensive walls, which have existed in Racibórz since 1299, was preserved at the tower. The fortification system of the old town was extended in the 14th century. A number of defensive towers and three gates were placed there. A deep moat was dug in front of the walls. The fortifications were reinforced in 1663 in connection with the threat of Turkish invasion. From the 18th century they were gradually eliminated. Between 1764 and 1771 the moat was filled in. Nowadays parts of old fortifications can be seen at the roads: Basztowa, Batorego, Drzymały, Lecznicza, and Drewniana.



THE CASTLE CHAPEL – THE PEARL OF THE GOTHIC



Fot. WAW

The first mention of Racibórz appears in 1108. We learn from the Chronicle by Gallus Anonymus that it was taken from the Moravians by Duke Bolesław Wrymouth's army. It became the seat of Polish castellan, and in the second half of the 12th century of Mieszko called Tanglefoot, lord of Racibórz and Opole, ruler of Poland. After him dukes from Upper Silesia resided here, among

others Casimir, grandfather of Polish king Władysław the Elbow-high.

In the first half of the 13th century the first stone parts of the castle were started, replacing the wooden city foundations, which dated from the time of the Gołczyce tribe, mentioned in the *Bavarian Geographer* (year 845). About 1290 Duke Premislas commissioned the building of a Gothic chapel, which was visited by Thomas Beckett of Canterbury, the English martyr, who was killed by Henry II. The visit commemorates a dispute between the bishop of Wrocław Thomas II and Henry IV Probus. Its end was described by Jan Długosz in *Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland* and took place in Racibórz. The castle, where the bishop was hiding, was

surrounded by Probus' army. Finally the hierarchs were reconciled and the bishop established a collegiate at the chapel. Canons stayed here until 1416.

Experienced history experts have no doubt that the two-level Gothic chapel is the most precious building of that kind. It is called the pearl of Upper – Silesian Gothic, or because of its similarity to the famous French chapel – the Silesian Saint-Chapelle. A beautiful cross-rib vault, canon sedilia (seats) and original window stonework are well-preserved there. It is known from the old records that holy relics used to be housed and revered here, most probably the remains of the canonized bishop from Canterbury.

In the 1980s in the ave-bell on the roof of the chapel, a map from the first half of the 19th century was found, where the builder called Schneider created a mysterious passage under the Odra leading from the castle to the Holy Ghost Dominican Sisters monastery. The entrance to the dungeon is in the basement of the old tower, hidden under the south-east angle of the castle courtyard.



Fot. WAW

ST. JACOB'S CHURCH – THE FIRST SENTENCE IN POLISH

In 1241 the lands of southern Poland were invaded by the Mongol horde. The crucial clash with Genghis-Khan's warriors took place at Legnica. The Polish army was severely defeated there. Commander-in-Chief, Duke Henry the Pious was killed there. Only regiments from Opawa and Racibórz led by Duke Mieszko II the Obese did not suffer heavy losses in the battle.

Also Jan Iwanowic, adjutant knight of Duke Henry survived the defeat. He got to Racibórz, where his account of the tragic events at Legnica was written down in a monastery chronicle by the Dominicans' from Racibórz priory Wincenty from Kielczy, famous for writing two hagiographies of St. Stanislaus and a hymn *Gaude Mater Polonia*. The chronicle is considered to be lost, but in the 15th century it was used by a Cracovian canon and famous historian Jan Dlugosz. From that source he transferred the words of Duke Henry at Legnica to *The Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland*. These were the words: gorze szo nam stalo, which means: calamity happened to us. The ruler uttered these words when he saw Upper-Silesian army escaping from the battlefield. This is the oldest Polish sentence, almost 30 years older than notes from 1270 in a famous *Book of Henrykow*.

In 1241, when Wincenty was writing Iwanowic's account, Dominicans from Racibórz did not own a church and monastery. They most probably resided in a middle-class house, where they served in a small chapel, and where they built St. Jacob's Church between 1246 and 1258, and a monastery next to it. The convent existed until 1810, when it was abolished by the Prussians. The monastery's buildings were pulled down, but the church stands still in the north-east corner of the Marketplace, in a shape after reconstruction because of fire in 1300. A famous, richly ornamented gradual from about 1500 comes from the Racibórz Dominican monastery, which is now stored in the Museum.





ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH – SORROWFUL JESUS SANCTUARY

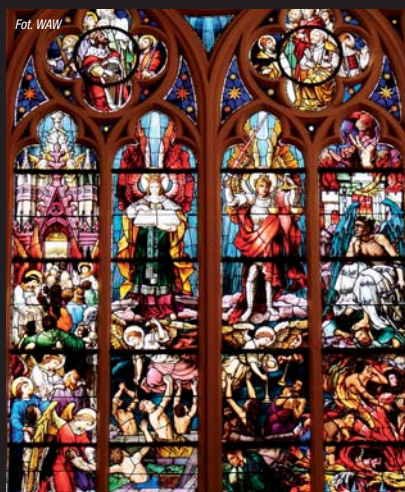
The first mention of St. John's Chapel in Ostróg comes from 1307. At first it was a wooden church, while the present brick one was built in 1856-1860 according to the project by architect Wincenty Statz from Cologne. It is one of the prettier Upper-Silesian Neogothic temples, patterned on a cathedral from the 13th century in Freiburg im Breisgau in Baden-Witttemberg, which is considered to be the masterpiece of Middle Aged Gothic.

In the 19th and 20th century the church in Ostróg was the aim for pilgrims, who came here to see the full of grace picture of Sorrowful Jesus, placed above the side St. Cross altar. The painting on board made in the end of the 17th or the beginning of the 18th century was made by an anonymus author, patterned on works of Italian masters Volterrano and Palloni. The incredibly suggestive and horrifying face of Jesus showing the wound in his side made one family of princes von Ratibor fund a copy of a picture with much more gentle face of the Savior in 1827. It was placed in the main altar, below the artistic painting by Jan Bohenek depicting the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan.

The cult of Jesus from Ostróg, also called the Racibórz Sufferer, and the miracles that happened here because of Him are proved by numerous source materials and

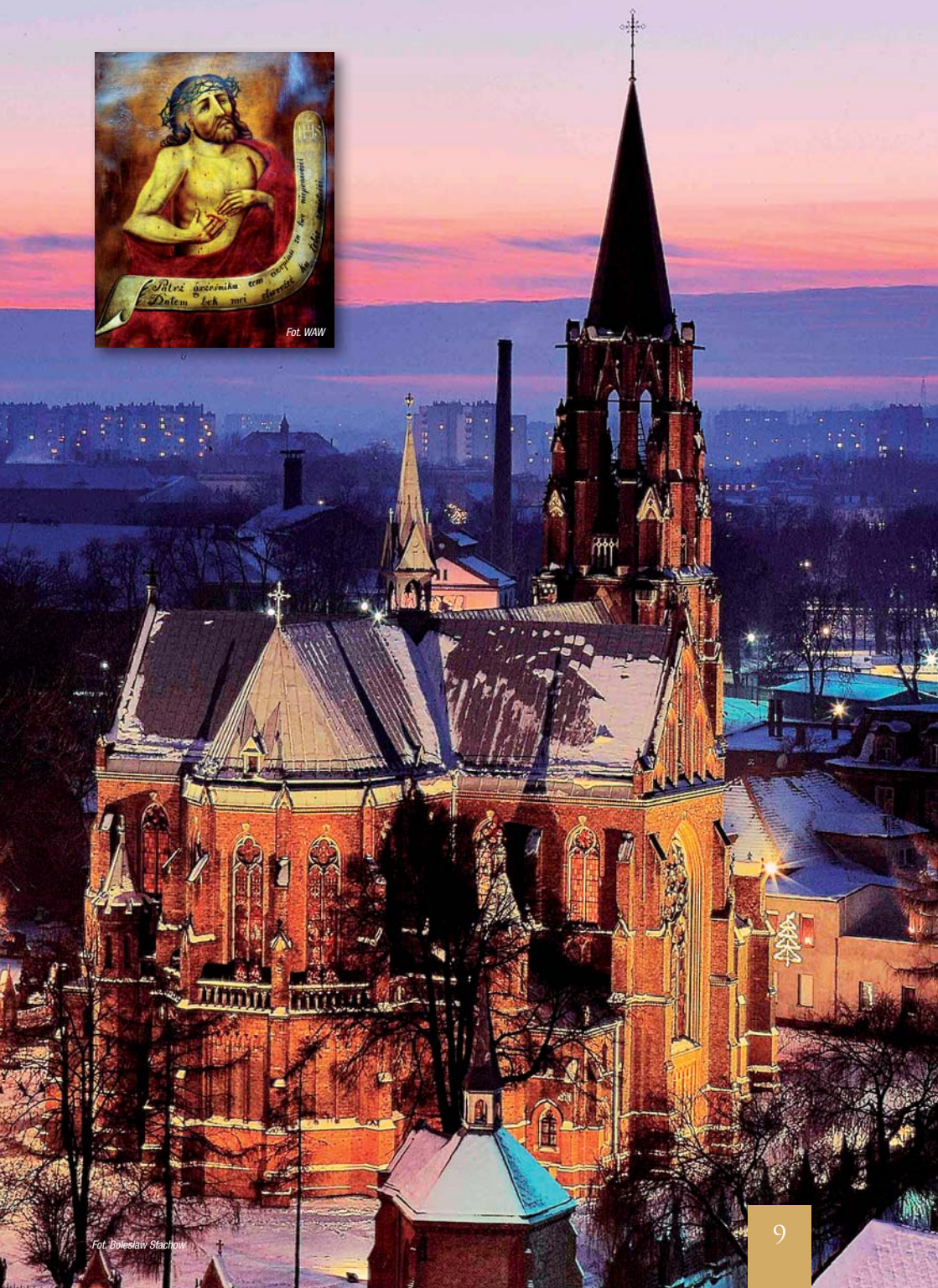
votes of thanksgiving. A famous Polish traveller and ethnographer Lucjan Malinowski put Ostróg next to the sanctuaries in Piekary Śląskie and Częstochowa.

In the transept in the church there are beautiful stained-glass windows from about 1900 made by reputable workshops of Otto Lazar from Racibórz and master Franz Borgias Mayer from Munich. These are unique masterpieces in Silesia. The iconography on Lazar's stained-glass window depicts: St. Anne with a girl Mary, St. Edward a king carrying a man on his back, St. Catherine with a wheel and St. Stanislaus a bishop with Piotrowin. Below the people there are: a shield with an inscription: "for God to be praised", coat of arms of dukes of Ratibor, the coat of arms of Racibórz and the emblem of Poland. The company from Munich made an incredibly meaningful "Judgement Day".





Fot. WAW



Fot. Bolesław Stachow

EGYPTIAN MUMMY – AN ECCENTRIC BARON'S GIFT

About 1860 a rich Jewish banker, baron Anzelm von Rothschild, lord of Chałupki and Szilerzowice, went on a journey to Egypt and bought numerous souvenirs, among others a complete burial of an Egyptian woman, which was supposed to be a present to his fiancée. However, the peculiar gift was rejected. Nonetheless, in the palace in Szilerzowice, in the presence of Rothschild's guests invited to a social party, two sarcophagi were open, the cartonnage was cut open, and the embalmed corps was unwrapped from the bandages.

In 1864 the baron decided to get rid of the souvenir from his journey, and thanks to that the mummy went to the antiquity department of the Royal Evangelical Gimnazjum in Racibórz, which was in the old Dominican Sisters' Monastery. In 1927 the relic was formally taken over by a new Town Museum, which was situated in the former Dominican church next to the gimnazjum. Yet, for over a dozen years it was disputed with the museum in Gliwice, which borrowed the mummy and refused to give it back to Racibórz. It was not returned until 1934. The an-



cient exhibit happily survived World War II.

The half-bandaged mummy, sarcophagi, and richly ornamented, extremely colourful cartonnage as well as three original canopic jars to keep the viscera of corpses brought before the war from the Museum of Antiquity in Berlin are nowadays the greatest attraction of the Museum in Racibórz drawing thousands

of tourists a year. A permanent exhibition entitled *In the land of Osiris* is in the former Holy Ghost Dominican Church.

Scientific research on the mummy done by the famous German Egyptologist Charles Richard Lepsius revealed that the Egyptian woman lived during the 12th dynasty (946-722 B.C.). Her name was Džed-Amonet-ius-anch, which means: goddess Amonet said she would live. She was a rich married woman, probably daughter of priest and barber from Thebes. She died young at the age of about 20. The reason for her death, according to the contemporary radiological researches, was most probably pregnancy complications.



Fot. Marek Krakowski - Muzeum Racibórz

THE PIAST AND THE PREMYSLIDS NECROPOLIS

According to the old records, the former monastic Holy Ghost Dominican Church keeps the remains of not only nuns and benefactors of their convent, but also graves of Upper-Silesian rulers from the Piast and Přemyslids dynasty. The burials were discovered during archeological works in the 1990s. While doing researches for several years in the chancel of the temple and in St. Dominic's chapel (not existing now, it adhered to the northern wall of the church) several crypts with women, men and children's remains were discovered.



Fot. Marek Krakowski - Muzeum Racibórz

The most interesting were ducal burials from St. Dominic's Chapel, belonging most probably to parents and sibling of saintly Ofka Piastówna, daughter of duke Přemysl, prioress of Dominican Sisters from Racibórz. In the chancel a grave was discovered belonging to Duke Walenty Přemyslid, the last representative of this dynasty ruling in Racibórz, who died in 1521. A broken sword found in the ruler's tomb is the symbol of the end of the dynasty.

The discoveries in the chancel were adapted for the needs of museum exhibitions revealing the interior of Middle Aged tombs. It is unique in the whole country. It was enriched with a number of monuments found in the graves, among others holy medals, crucifixes or elements of outfit.

The rank of the discoveries in the former Holy Ghost Church is upgraded by the results of the researches done here by Cracovian anthropologists. On the skulls of the women buried in the temple a number of cases with a rare genetic illness were identified. The illness is defined as HFI (*Hypertostosis frontalis interna*). Two of the skulls belonged to relatives, which was recognized as a sensation and was later discussed during prestigious international anthropological symposia.





MOTHER OF GOD SANCTUARY – SOBIESKI ASKS FOR VICTORY

The legend says that a courageous Stephen from Racibórz stood guard in the suburbs knowing the order to alarm the citizens in case of Hussites invasion. When he recklessly fell asleep under a big oak, he was captured and tied up. Hussites wanted to hang him on the tree but they escaped in a hurry when Mother of God and an angelic knight appeared to them. Stephen was very grateful for the rescue and to give thanks he went on a pilgrimage to Częstochowa. He brought a copy of the miraculous picture from there. The picture was hung on the oak tree, and the masses were said by the starowiejski chaplain. According to tradition, in 1432 a church was built in this place, funded by Hungarian count, who was praying before the Mother of God picture and received healing grace for his terminally ill wife.

Historical sources certify the temple in 1445. At first it was made of wood, in 1723-1736 it was replaced by the present, brick one, built in Baroque style. The picture of Mother of God is in the main altar. Crowns sacrificed by Pope John Paul II were placed in the picture. The Polish Pope's monument by Prof. Czesław Dźwigaj was built in front of the church in 2006.

The miraculous icon is the destination for numerous pilgrimages. Mother of God in Racibórz is famous for many miracles,

especially for women who want progeny. In 1683 king Jan III Sobieski prayed to her on his way to Vienna, asking for victory in fighting Turks at Vienna.

The picture has not been researched yet, but according to some opinions it comes from 16th/17th century. It is interesting that the painting of Mother of God saving Racibórz from the fire is on the so called *Mensa Mariana* – a painting from the beginning of the 18th century, which is placed on the back of the picture with Black Madonna of Częstochowa in the Jasna Góra Monastery.

Fot. Bolesław Stachow



THE GOTHIC PARISH CHURCH – THE FORMER COLLEGIATE CHURCH

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Church, called the parish church, is the oldest in Racibórz, built according to the tradition in 1205, when duke Mieszko ruled, the founder of Upper Silesian Duchy, lord of Racibórz and ruler of Poland. The temple was built by people from the Netherlands – Flemings and Walloons. The original temple burned down in 1300. Shortly after that it was rebuilt. From that period comes the nave with starry vaults in the east part and chancel with unique features of early Silesian Gothic.

In 1416 canons from Racibórz settled at the church and now they reside at the castle chapel. In the new place the collegiate was richly furnished by a cruel duke of Racibórz Jan Żelazny (Iron), who wanted to redeem himself. A chapter-house and a treasure-house were built on to the southern wall of the chancel. In 1654 the chancel was furnished with impressive canon stalls patterned on artistic stalls from St. Mary's Basilica in Cracow. Many parsons from Upper Silesian parishes were canons at the parish church in Racibórz.

Inside there is an impressive main altar made in 1656-1660 by master Salomon Steinhoff from the foundation of prelate An-

drew Scodonius and Literary Brotherhood – the oldest Upper-Silesian brotherhood. In the niches among the columns there are sculptures of the saints: John the Baptist, Jadwiga, John the Evangelist, Elisabeth, Wenceslas, Sebastian, Roch and Florian. At the end stands the statue of St. Marcel, who is the patron of Racibórz, as the legend says he saved the town from the Scythian

invasion (Ruthenians and Tatars). At the altar there are also two precious pictures: Blessed Virgin Mary's coronation from the first half of 17th century and the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary from 1890 painted by master Jan Bochenek.

From the west side to the nave there is a Polish Chapel from the 15th century, a place of cult of saintly Eufemia Ofka Piastówna also called the blessed, duchess from Racibórz, local Dominican Sister praised by order of preachers in the whole world.



Fot. WAW





MARY'S COLUMN – THE END OF THE WORLD ANNOUNCEMENT

It is an exceptional Silesian Baroque art monument made by master Jan Melchior Österreich from 1727. The monument was located in the place of Middle Age merchant's house with funding from Mary Elisabeth Gaschin and councillors from Racibórz as a thank-you for rescuing the town from a terrible cholera epidemic. On a three-sided stone pedestal on the top there are funders' coat of arms in the form of three saints: Pope Marcel – patron of Racibórz, St. Florian – intercessor during fires, and St. Sebastian – patron protecting

from pestilential air. On the very top there is a statue of Mother of God the Immaculate Conception.

The column miraculously stayed intact despite the great fire in 1945, though all the area around was ruined. Tradition says that each time someone decides to dig around the monument Racibórz will be flooded (that happened before the disastrous flood in 1997). It is also said that the end of the world will come very soon if none of the inhabitants of Racibórz makes the sign of the cross before the column.



FORMER DENTIST TECHNIQUES – EXTRAORDINARY COLLECTION

The Sterańczak family's passion caused the Museum in Racibórz to own and be proud of an exhibition of former dentist techniques, unique in Europe. Collecting historical dentist chairs, tools and devices used in the past by dentists and prosthetists was started by Kazimierz Starańczak, a former worker in Maxillofacial Surgery Clinic at Medical University of Silesia in Zabrze, prosthetist rationalizer and inventor. Soon his son Wojciech, also a dentist started to

share his passion. Together they collected unused equipment from the surgeries.

Hence the impressive collection, which is permanently in the Museum, causing many visitors to start to shiver. For it is difficult to feel any different when we see a dentist's drill from the 19th century or a peculiar device to pull a tooth called "goat's foot".



Fot. Marek Krakowski - Muzeum Racibórz

ŁĘŻCZOK RESERVE



It is a unique, protected area in the old riverbed of the Odra, over four hundred hectares big. It covers breeding ponds founded by Cistercian monks in the 13th/14th century, peatbogs, multispecies, rare in Poland natural riparian forest and paths with trees, also monumental trees, like the famous 400-year old Sobieski oak. The monarch was going this way to Vienna in 1683 (there is a tourist track in the reserve called Polish Hussars Path). In the 19th century the Duke of Ratibor's visitors hunted here, also Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, hunted here twice.

The flora of the reserve comprises almost 540 species of vascular plants, thirty of them under protection. Under strict protection are the following plants: white

water-lilies, yellow water-lilies, salvinia natans or water caltrop. Very unusual is a rare species of orchid – *epipactis albensis*. More than 210 species of birds dwell here (out of 435 recorded in Poland), mainly waterfowl, birds of prey, among others grebes and cormorants, white-tailed eagles and ospreys. During passages some rare species like purple heron or black-winged kite (the only in Poland) were observed. Also some reptiles dwell here (*vipera berus*), amphibians (European fire-bellied toads, newts, toads), mammals (musk-rat, badger and ten out of 22 bats recorded in Poland, including the lesser noctule, recorded in the *Polish Red Book of Animals*) dragonflies, bumblebees, weevils and butterflies.

ARBORETUM OF MORAVIAN GATE – OLD DUCAL FOREST



The old ducal forest called for many years Obora was sold to the inhabitants of Racibórz in 1928 by Duke Victor von Ratibor. This rich nobleman kept the spring spurting in the northern edge of the forest for himself. The water, famous for exceptional features, was routed through a wooden waterwork to the Racibórz brewery, and used to brew excellent beer. The legend says that here used to live a hermit in Obora. His loyal dog brought him food given by the town's inhabitants to the hermitage. The grateful anchorite pulled out a huge tube every evening, directed it to the town and said to his benefactors: God bless you and good night.

Nowadays on the 160 hectares of the hilly area there is a (rare in Upper Silesia) original mixed forest, rich in interesting specimens of flora, fauna and mushrooms. There are oaks here, 4 meters in circumference, ravines, springs and brooks as well as specially arranged plant collections. *Hacquetia epipactis* was discovered here in 1830 and is represented on the logo. Vis-

iting the arboretum is made easier through two labelled educational paths: dendrological and ecological.

The forest is the place where the inhabitants of Racibórz love to relax. There is a mini-zoo here, an obstacle course, a sledge track and a small ski jump. Also, there is a swimming pool near the Arboretum. In the 1960s a group of archeologists from Cracow researched barrows from 5th to 8th century in Obora. Military lovers can notice traces of fortifications from the times of the uprising. Besides, in the housing estate in the forest there is a bunker from II World War times.



Foto: MAAW

URZĄD MIASTA RACIBÓRZ
ul. Stefana Batorego 6, 47-400 Racibórz
tel. +48 32 75 50 600, fax +48 32 75 50 725
www.raciborz.pl, e-mail: boi@um.raciborz.pl



RACIBORSKIE CENTRUM INFORMACJI
ul. Długa 2, 47-400 Racibórz
tel. +48 32 415 72 39, Fax +48 32 414 94 57
www.rck.com.pl, e-mail: imprezy@rck.com.pl
raciborz@travel.pl, raciborskieck@wp.pl

Godziny otwarcia:
pon.-pt.: 9.00-17.00



PUNKT INFORMACJI TURYSTYCZNEJ NA ZAMKU PIASTOWSKIM
ul. Zamkowa 2 (budynek Bramny), 47-400 Racibórz
tel. +48 32 414 02 33, 32 700 60 52, 32 700 60 50 wewn. 105
www.zamekpiastowski.pl, e-mail: it@zamekpiastowski.pl

Godziny otwarcia:
pon.-pt.: 9.00-16.00
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Grzegorz Wawoczny
ul. Pod Widokiem 20, 47-400 Racibórz
tel. 605 685 485
e-mail: ziemia.raciborska@wp.pl
www.wawoczny.pl
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