

Wolverhampton ring road tramp was not a Nazi

[Mar 17 2008](#) By Rhona Ganguly

Rumours that the Wolverhampton ring road tramp had a secret past as a Nazi have finally been laid to rest after Israeli sources rejected claims he was ever a member of the SS.



Josef Stawinoga was found dead in a tent in October last year, aged 87, after living on the central reservation for 35 years.

The Polish immigrant, known locally as Fred, became a Facebook phenomenon when a group set up in his honour on the popular social networking website attracted thousands of members.

But after his death, rumours suggesting he was once a member of Hitler's SS in Poland began to circulate. It was claimed he could not face his past and so turned his back on society.

These rumours have now been dispelled by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, an international Jewish human rights organisation whose work includes the prosecution of Nazi war criminals.

A spokesman from the Israeli office of the NGO, said there was "no evidence of his service with the Germans".

Dr Efraim Zuroff said: "Poles were not allowed to serve in the SS. It is simply not true."

Meanwhile, the Government is attempting to trace Mr Stawinoga's family members, as it is believed he may have left up to £90,000 in unclaimed pension.

Wolverhampton City Council tolerated Mr Stawinoga's lifestyle as he had a phobia of confined spaces. Officials looked after him through the authority's social services department and pension money due to him was kept in trust for decades.

But because he did not leave a will, the treasury solicitor, who deals with property without an apparent owner or claimant, said any relatives who may be entitled to the cash.

The treasury solicitor has advertised in a local newspaper to help track down his relations as any unclaimed money will go back into the public purse.

This advert has since sparked a number of searches, including one by Celtic Research, a company who locates missing heirs across the globe to help people recover unclaimed assets.

Peter Birchwood, co-owner and manager of the company based in Wales, said he had successfully tracked down a number of Mr Stawinoga's family members in Croatia through international partners and was in the process of contacting them.

He said: "We have made progress in that our Polish agency have found every member of the family.

"His mother died two to three years after he was born and his father remarried soon after so he has half brothers and half sisters. They, however, are not alive.

"He has nephews and nieces in Croatia. I'm not too sure how Croatia is connected to him."

As part of its research into Mr Stawinoga's background, Celtic Research has also able to shed some light on his past through his army records.

"He is listed in having being in the Polish army under British control in the Polish Resettlement Core," he said. "That was something set up immediately after the war to transfer Poles of military rank into a specific unit, where they were provided with schooling in English.

"In 1949/50, the resettlement core eventually disbanded and Poles in it found work here, or if they didn't like the country, they went back to Poland.

"Most of the Poles who came over here disliked the communist regime as much as they disliked the previous Nazi regime in Poland."

After the Resettlement Core, Mr Stawinoga moved to Wolverhampton and got married. He split up with his wife after a year and later moved to the St Johns Ring Road after quitting his job in a Black Country steelworks.

The site of his tent has now been completely cleared after it became infested with rats.

Have your say on news, business and sport in our [Forums](#)

Keep up to date with the news. Receive our free [E-Newsletters](#)

Ads by Google

[Birmingham](#)

[Midlands Mafia](#)

[Midlands News](#)

[Midlands Today](#)

Get Involved

We want your local stories, videos & pics.

[Send your stories](#)

- [Send your pics](#)

- [Send your videos](#)