

Biography of Andrzej Przewoźnik

Jan Andrzej Przewoźnik was born on 13 May 1963 in the village of Jurków, 45 kilometres from Kraków.

The village is 15 kilometres from Limanowa which, along with Gorlice and Przemyśl, was one of the most famous scenes of conflict on the Galician front in the First World War. In December 1914, thanks to the self-sacrificing resistance of the Tenth Hussars, the Russian Third Army was repulsed by around thirty to forty kilometres during its advance on Kraków. An outstanding role in the engagement was played by members of the Tenth and Eleventh Hussars, who dismounted and charged the Russian line on foot. The commander of the Tenth Hussars, Othmar Muhr, was laid to rest in the chapel built in his honour in the military cemetery created on Jabłoniec Hill nearby. Andrzej Przewoźnik would have heard of Othmar Muhr and the heroic deeds of the Hungarian hussars, and no doubt this knowledge brought Hungarians to his attention.

Andrzej went to secondary school in Kraków between 1977 and 1981. His teacher, Krystyna Lahfahl, played a major role in the development of his personality during these years.

After leaving school he passed the entrance exam to study History at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and he graduated in 1988. This period was that of martial law (introduced in December 1981), reprisals, and the driving underground of Solidarity, culture, book publishing, and intellectual life. In essence the end of martial law did nothing to improve the situation: Solidarity operated underground until 1988, while the faltering, duplicitous economic and political reforms of the Jaruzelski era met with one failure after another.

Between 1981 and 1989 Andrzej Przewoźnik operated in underground organisations associated with Solidarity. Among other bodies, he was a member of the pro-Solidarity Citizen's Committee of Zwierzyniec (a district of Kraków).

As someone preparing to be a historian of the Second World War, he formed strong relationships with the soldiers of the Home Army. The contact person was Major Stanisław Dąbrowa-Kostka, who guided Andrzej in the direction of 'living history'. Through the Major he was able to get to know many soldiers and officers, among them the so-called 'Damned': those who took up arms against the the sovietising regime of the early 1950s. As Major Dąbrowa-Kostka was active in the Kraków division of the governor-generalship created by Hitler in autumn 1939, he came into contact with several soldiers from the occupying Hungarian army, who offered the Home Army various forms of assistance. (The Major keeps the pictures of many Hungarian soldiers who cooperated with the Polish resistance.) In addition to Major Dąbrowa-Kostka, the other person who brought the history of Hungary during World War II to Andrzej's attention was the university lecturer Waclaw Felczak (having been imprisoned until 1956, the communist regime would not allow him to take up the title of professor. In May 1940 Waclaw Felczak – who had won a scholarship to Eötvös College in the 1938/39 academic year – was sent undercover by the Home Army to Hungary, and he took the post of deputy commander of the Budapest courier service. He played a major role in contacts between Warsaw and London. He was sentenced to death in 1951, but the sentence was not carried out. Andrzej Przewoźnik was in awe of this man with his reputation of unapproachability, and we still have the notes that Andrzej made to prepare for a conversation with him. It was thorough him that Andrzej Przewoźnik was to lead the 'Historians' Club' between 1986 and 1990. In this club the newest 'banned' and 'tolerated' subjects in Polish history were discussed, and he got to know representatives of the wartime resistance who had been sentenced after the war. In 1989 Andrzej also invited to the club Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, the famous 'Polish courier', organiser of the Radio Free Europe Polish Service, and later its director for decades. Although this was the year of political transition, Andrzej Przewoźnik was even more in the sights of the internal security forces.

Andrzej was married in 1988.

After graduating he started work at the Kraków Voivodeship Office in September 1990, first working in the Department for Citizenship, and then in the Social Affairs Department.

In 1992 he became Secretary General of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites – a post equivalent to that of state secretary.

His most famous cause was the uncovering of the mass graves of murdered Polish prisoners of war and police officers at Katyń, Miednoje and Kharkiv, and the creation of cemeteries at those sites. Under his direction the Cemetery of the Lwów Eaglets – which had been bulldozed and turned into a landfill site in the 1970s – was restored in 2005. He oversaw the construction of more than ten cemeteries in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Iran, where there are the remains of

the soldiers in General Anders' divisions, which were forced out of the Soviet Union. He saw that memorials were unveiled marking the locations of camps for Polish civilian refugees and children in various African states – the Republic of South Africa, Tanzania, Egypt and elsewhere. He ensured the restoration of their cemeteries. He also contributed to the restoration of military graveyards on the World War I Galician front.

A particular mission for him was the restoration of the cemetery in the Polish village of Adampol, set up in Turkey in 1842. Andrzej Przewoźnik also assisted greatly in the erection of the sculpture to Hungarian – Polish friendship in Győr.

Without his support there would be no monument in Párkány (Štúrovo in Slovakia) to Jan III Sobieski, who took part in the liberation of Esztergom. This was not supported by the Polish Embassy in Bratislava, which was a matter of some controversy. (It was perhaps no accident that the Hungarians of Párkány were the first to inaugurate a memorial plaque to Andrzej Przewoźnik – in the autumn of 2010.) Andrzej restored the Polish section of the Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery in Budapest. He commissioned memorial plaques in Eger, Pest and several other places where Polish Second World War refugees to Hungary settled. The best-known example of his work in Hungary is his support for the planning and construction of the Katyń Park in Óbuda, Budapest.

He organised ceremonies for the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, at which many leaders of European countries participated; it was under his leadership that they commemorated the murder of Poles from Podolia and Volhynia by Ukrainian nationalists. He also built the cemetery and commissioned a plaque to the memory of the Jews massacred by Poles in Jedwabna in June 1941. He took part in the organisation of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2006.

He was co-organiser of the Underground Polish Archives Foundation, operating between 1956 and 1939. He was a member of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Institute of National Remembrance) for many years; he also held the post of Vice President and Secretary of the Commission for the Commemoration of Victims of the Katyń Massacre under the Council of Ministers. He was also vice president of the society charged with organising memorial events for the 60th anniversary of the Katyń Massacre. He was a member of the British-Polish Historians' Committee; he chaired the Polish-German government commission, which aimed at cataloguing the cemeteries of World War II; and he was a member of the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Issues. He coordinated work concerning the establishment of the European network of 'Remembrance and Solidarity', and was a negotiator at bilateral and multilateral negotiations related to the preservation of war graves, cemeteries and memorials.

In addition to the above, he was an honorary member of many social and veterans' organisations: a member of the Kraków Catholic Intellectuals' Club; a member of the Polish Committee of ICOMOS; and Chairman of the Warsaw-based Józef Piłsudski Institute, studying

the modern history of Poland. He was a participant of the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Affairs of Expatriate Poles and the Inter-ministerial Committee for National and Ethnic Minorities; a member of the Council of the KL Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau; a member of the Warsaw History Museum's Council; Chairman of the Museum Council of the Polish Army's Chaplain Service; and Chairman of the Council of the Polish-German Foundation for Peace.

The great achievement of Andrzej Przewoźnik's life was the survey and creation of the Katyń Cemetery. The airplane disaster and his tragic death intertwine with the history of his family as well. His interest in Katyń was inspired by his conversations with former war veterans as a student. Keeping contact with veterans also meant the development of a spiritual connection with Katyń.