

DR. ZDZISŁAW ANDRZEJ DERWIŃSKI (1956–2021)



Dr. Zdzisław Andrzej Derwiński was a distinguished Polish-born historian, journalist, community leader, and one of the most influential figures in preserving Polish-Australian heritage. He is best remembered as the founder and long-serving president of the Polish Museum and Archives in Australia (MAPA/PMAA) in Melbourne. Through decades of work, he dedicated his life to documenting, safeguarding, and promoting the history of Polish migration and community life in Australia.

Early Life and Education

Zdzisław Andrzej Derwiński was born in 1956 in Bogatynia, Lower Silesia, Poland. He studied history at the University of Wrocław and later pursued postgraduate research through the Polish Academy of Sciences. He completed his doctoral degree in history in 1987. His research focused on the foreign policy activities of the Polish Government-in-Exile under Stanisław Mikołajczyk.

Migration to Australia

In June 1987, Dr. Derwiński migrated to Australia and settled in Melbourne, Victoria. Soon after arriving, he became deeply involved in Polish community organisations and institutions. His arrival coincided with a period of expanding Polish migrant activity and cultural organisation in Australia.

Community and Cultural Leadership

Dr. Derwiński became a central figure within the Polish-Australian community. He played an active role in numerous organisations, including cultural associations, welfare initiatives, veteran groups, publishing ventures, and ethnic broadcasting.

His most enduring contribution was his leadership in establishing and developing the Polish Museum and Archives in Australia. Under his guidance, the institution collected documents, photographs, personal records, publications, and artefacts that recorded the experiences of Polish migrants and organisations across Australia.

He understood that migration stories and community records were often fragile and easily lost. Through his efforts, valuable collections were preserved for future generations.

Journalism and Publications

Dr. Derwiński also contributed extensively to Polish-language media in Australia. He served as editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Polski* in Melbourne from 1998–2002 and contributed to numerous historical and community publications.

He co-edited historical chronicles and actively promoted research into Polish migration history. His broad historical knowledge earned him a reputation as one of the foremost historians of the Polish diaspora in Australia.

Recognition

In recognition of his contributions to Polish culture and community life abroad, Dr. Derwiński was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in 2018 by the President of Poland.

Death and Legacy

Dr. Zdzisław Derwiński passed away suddenly on 3 October 2021 at the age of 65.

His passing was deeply felt throughout Australia and internationally among Polish communities. Many remembered him not only as a historian and leader but as a mentor, supporter, and guardian of community memory.

His legacy continues through the Polish Museum and Archives in Australia and through the countless historical records and stories he helped preserve.

His life's work ensured that the history of Polish Australians would not be forgotten.