

Gertruda Biernat (1923–2016)

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Gertruda Biernat (1923–2016)

Professor Gertruda Biernat passed away on 1st March, 2016 at the age of 93. She leaves two sons.

Gertruda Biernat was born in Opole in eastern Poland on 17th March, 1923. She lived in Starogard Gdański until 1939, and then was forced to flee to Warsaw, where she spent the war period, taking part in the 1944 uprising as a member of the sanitary service. She got her M.Sc. from the University of Poznań in 1950. In 1953, after a short period at her mother university and at the Museum of Earth in Warsaw, she was invited to take a position at the newly created Laboratory of Palaeozoology (now Institute of Paleobiology) of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a position she kept until her retirement in 1998.

The first director of the Laboratory, Professor Roman Kozłowski, is the author of a classical monograph on “Gothlandian” (late Silurian to early Devonian) brachiopods from Podolia. Afterwards he switched to the study of graptolites but wanted the brachiopod studies to be continued in Poland. Gertruda Biernat started to work on Devonian sections from the Holy Cross Mountains, her first paper dating from 1953. In 1959 she published her Ph.D. thesis on taxonomy and ontogeny of Middle Devonian orthides, which remains an internationally recognised and cited monograph. Two additional monographs are especially worth noting, one from 1966 on Middle Devonian brachiopods from the Bodzentyn Syncline (a continuation of the 1959 work) and another from 1973 on Ordovician inarticulate brachiopods from Poland and Estonia. Gertruda Biernat published most of her research papers in the *Acta Palaeontologica Polonica*: she authored seven and co-authored another nine papers spanning from 1957 to 2003. Her last publication was a conference abstract dated 2008.

Gertruda Biernat was the conceiver, organizer, and member of four palaeontological expeditions to Spitsbergen in 1974, 1975, 1976, and 1979. During the first expedition in 1974 to Hornsund (southern Spitsbergen) a temporary summer field station (named the Palaeontology Hut) was built at Treskelen peninsula. After more than 40 years the station still serves as a home for generations of Arctic explorers.

Gertruda Biernat was the supervisor of Andrzej Baliński and Grzegorz Racki on their doctoral degrees and of Adam T. Halamski on his M.Sc. All three remain active brachiopodologists.

Gertruda Biernat gained international recognition in a period



when scientists in Poland suffered restrictions of contact with the West imposed for political reasons. She was among the authors of the first brachiopod *Treatise* published in 1965. In 1985, she was invited to be a member of the Honorary Committee of the first World Brachiopod Congress in Brest (Brittany, France). The brachiopod genera *Biernatium* Havlíček, 1975 (Devonian orthide), *Biernatella* Baliński, 1977 (Devonian athyridide), and *Biernatia* Holmer, 1989 (Ordovician acrotretide) were named in her honour.

Friend with the late Helen Muir-Wood and Sir Alwyn Williams, Gertruda Biernat belonged to a more refined period when a certain elegance was de règle; she wore gloves even in summer. With her death, an era in palaeontology has ended.

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