



Józef Oberc
July 28, 1918 – November 22, 2008

IN MEMORY

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“The scientist must be ready to accept that others will live in a house that he has been constructing”. These words by Ludwik Hirschfeld accurately apply to Professor Józef Oberc, who spent his entire academic life constructing the house of geological knowledge for the benefit of students, science in general and, indeed, for human progress. Professor Oberc passed away on the 22nd November, 2008.

Some 90 years previously, Józef Oberc had been born on the 28th of July, 1918, in Jasło but shortly thereafter moved to Kamionka Strumiłowa where he attended primary school between 1924 and 1928. He continued his education at Kamionka Strumiłowa by attending the Kornel Ujejski State Gymnasium up to the 4th course. In 1932, after his father died, his family moved back to Jasło where he completed his schooling at the King Stanisław Leszczyński Gymnasium in 1937. Following school, Józef Oberc studied geology at Jan Kazimierz University in Lvov between 1937 and 1941, graduating by passing the state final exam in June 1941. He then embarked on an MSc thesis at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, under the supervision of Professor Wojciech Rogala. The resultant thesis – *Podole within the geological context of the Russian Plate* – was based on available literature in the library of the Geology Department of Lvov University, and Józef Oberc was awarded his MSc in July 1945.

During the second half of 1942, Józef Oberc was employed in the geological branch of the petroleum trust Karpathen Öl AG Lemberg. Working in the oil fields near Gorlice he collected materials for his PhD thesis.

After World War II, between November 1945 and June 1946, he worked as a senior assistant in the Department of Geology and Palaeontology at Poznań University. In 1946, Józef Oberc obtained a senior assistant position at the University of Wrocław, which was then headed

by Professor Henryk Teisseyre. Józef Oberc became only the second person after the war to defend a PhD at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Wrocław: on 10th May, 1947, he successfully defended his PhD, publishing the essential findings later as *Fałd gorlicki i brzeg płaszczowiny magurskiej na wschód od Gorlic* [*The Gorlice Fold and the Edge of the Magura Nappe East of Gorlice*] (*Biuletyn Instytutu Geologicznego*, 1950: 7; 1–55). Thereafter, he remained in Wrocław and taught at the University of Wrocław for the rest of his very long life.

The period 1946–1950 was, for Józef Oberc, a time of concentrated study on the Sudetes, a region geologically very different from that of the Carpathians where he had grown up. As this was just after the war, Józef found himself immersed in intense organizational work, rescuing rock and mineral collections and organizing library and map collections so that these could form the basis for modern teaching and research.

Over a period of fifty years, Józef Oberc progressed through all the ranks of a University professional career. He started as a senior assistant in 1946, followed by an adjunct position in 1948–1952, then became an “independent researcher” in 1953–1954, an assistant professor in 1954–1955, a docent in 1955, an extraordinary professor in 1963, and, finally, a full professor in 1975. From 1947 on, he was a permanent member both of the Council of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Geological Sciences at the University of Wrocław. Between 1954 and 55 he was a Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences. And in 1961 he founded the Department of Physical Geology at the University of Wrocław and was its head until 1990.

Józef Oberc was a great and prolific scientist. He authored 260 scientific publications and several geological maps. Most of his research was devoted to the geology of SW Poland, in particular to tectonics, ore-deposits and tectonic terminology (see also the article “Józef Oberc: a Unique Scholar” in this volume). The first period of his scientific work took place during 1947–1956, when his research interests, as well as those of most geologists from Wrocław at that time, focussed on the geological problems of sedimentary rocks: these acted as a sort of continuation of the Carpathian studies. During the long period of 1954–1972, Józef Oberc performed both reconnaissance and systematic studies on most of the metamorphic units of the Sudetes. This period of his career saw him author many new publications and monographs. Some of the most important publications were ones in which there was a synthesis of the regional geology. Professor Oberc’s expert knowledge of the geology of Lower Silesia and its adjoining areas, his wide interests and a comprehensive

ability to understand all aspects of geology meant that he was in a unique position to address many of the most important geological problems of Lower Silesia. The publications of the late 1950s and the 1960s ultimately led to his landmark work, *Budowa geologiczna Polski, t. IV. Sudety i obszary przyległe* [Geology of Poland, pt. IV. The Sudetes and Neighbouring Areas] (Wydawnictwa Geologiczne, Warszawa, 1972; 307 pp). That monumental book by Professor Oberc was, until recently, the most systematic synthesis of the regional geology of SW Poland and was a work that inspired many studies and searches for new and improved geological models of the region.

Other significant scientific achievements between the late '60s and early '70's was Professor Oberc's contribution to the Polish tectonic dictionary, his publication of geological maps of several regions of the Sudetes, and his geological and tectonic maps of Poland. He also developed skills in ore deposit management and often acted as a consultant in that field.

In addition to what might be termed "standard geology", Professor Józef Oberc was also open to non-conventional scientific theories. In the mid 1970s, within the *Global Tectonic Processes* project, he encouraged one of his younger departmental colleagues to investigate the expanding Earth theory. Under his patronage, the international conference *Problems of the Expanding Earth* was organized in Wrocław in 1994, which included the most prominent promoter of that theory, Professor Warren Carrey (Australia), as an invited lecturer.

Professor Józef Oberc was an outstanding teacher for many generations of geology, geography and biology students. From the very start of his employment at the University of Wrocław he gave lectures on physical geology. He was an excellent lecturer and a demanding examiner, characteristics that will be remembered by thousands of his students. A special characteristic of his lectures was that he frequently gave multiple solutions to geotectonic problems. This flexibility of approach derived from a deep knowledge of geology and created a similar degree of deep thinking among his students.

A further substantial pedagogical contribution by Professor Józef Oberc was the publication in 1951 of an academic handbook of physical/general geology [*Przewodnik do ćwiczeń z geologii dynamicznej*]. Re-edited several times, this handbook was intensively used by geology and geography students for several decades.

For more than 30 years, Józef Oberc guided geological field courses during which he taught students the difficult skill of fieldwork. And under his supervision, 89 students completed MSc theses, 12 scientists defended PhD theses, and two received habilitation degrees.

Professor Józef Oberc was a scientist who declared his independent political and world outlook during the hard times when Poland was governed by the communists. He supported the independent trade union movement of "Solidarity"; among his younger colleagues were several Solidarity activists. He was also a regular participant in Christmas Eve geology meetings that started during the martial law period of the early 1980s and that continued for many years after.

Those fortunate enough to get close to Professor Oberc – beyond the official meetings for his "legendary" physical geology exams – soon discovered that the Professor loved travelling the world. With great enthusiasm, and accompanied by a group of his friends, he made journeys across the Himalayas and across India, South America and Africa. The most unusual trip was a student expedition to Iceland in 1981 that was organized and supervised by the Professor. This unforgettable adventure created strong bonds of friendship between Józef Oberc and the other participants.

The scientific community in Wrocław knew Professor Oberc through his longstanding membership (from 1962 on) of the Wrocław Scientific Society. The wider Polish geological community knew him through his membership of the Scientific Council of the Polish Geological Institute and, at various times, as a member of many other scientific councils: he was president of the Tectonic Group of the Committee on Geological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS); president of the Geological Research Group of the Earth Sciences Commission of PAS; a member of the Polish Geological Society (PGS) (and a honorary member from 1985 to his passing); and president of the Wrocław Branch of PGS for many terms, as well as the organizer of several general meetings of PGS and other scientific conferences. Furthermore, he was a founder and honorary member of the Society of Geologists-Graduates of the University of Wrocław.

For his pedagogical achievements, Professor Józef Oberc received the Medal of National Education Commission and the Medal of Meritorious Teacher. For his scientific achievements and for his work in the Lower Silesia region, he was decorated with the Order of Polonia Restituta, Cavalier Cross (1973) and the Medal of Meritoriousness for the Wrocław Voivodship. Wrocław University granted him its most prestigious prize – the Gold Medal of the University of Wrocław – and, in 2006, Professor Oberc received the Honorary Insignia of "Meritorious for Polish Geology".

Professor Oberc was on several occasions honoured by his peers and colleagues. To jointly celebrate his 70th birthday and for 40 years of scientific research, the geological community dedicated a special festschrift of scientific papers in his honour (*Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis No 1113, Prace Geologiczno Mineralogiczne XVII, Wrocław, 1989*). Another celebratory volume was prepared on the 30th anniversary of his founding of the Department of Physical Geology (*Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis No 1375, Prace Geologiczno Mineralogiczne XXIX, Wrocław, 1991*). And in 1997 a special celebration was organized at the University of Wrocław: the renewal of Professor Józef Oberc's doctorate (i.e., the 50th anniversary of his PhD defence).

The last 60 years of geology in Wrocław and in Poland will forever be connected with Professor Józef Oberc. Generations of senior researchers and of young students alike all feel a deep gratitude to Józef Oberc for sharing with them his phenomenal knowledge, dedication to creative work, and scientific honesty.

Ryszard Kryza (University of Wrocław)
(based on information provided by Teresa Oberc-Dziedzic)

Józef Oberc: a Unique Scholar



Prof. Józef Oberc at the renewal of his PhD defence, Aula Leopoldina, 1997 (Photo by A. Stryjewski)

Professor Józef Oberc passed away on 22 November, 2008, aged 90. Yet, even in his early to mid 80s he was, remarkably, still involved in research and teaching. Only in his late 80s did he finally start to take life a bit easier. Now, on his passing, we, his colleagues, would here like to take the opportunity to offer an overview of the extraordinary academic career of one of Poland's most outstanding geologists.

Józef Oberc's geological training started at the Lwów and Kraków schools of Carpathian geology. His PhD thesis was on an important structural and economic aspect of that geology: the oil-bearing Gorlice Fold, on which his thesis offered valuable new interpretations. However, his professional career after World War II was devoted mainly to the geology of Lower Silesia, a region that was little known to Polish geologists at that time and a perfect area for the young Oberc to make his research mark. Indeed, it was where he created his own school of regional studies. In over 260 scientific publications, Professor Oberc addressed a plethora of geologic problems of the Sudetes and the Fore-Sudetic Block, including stratigraphy, geotectonics and ore geology.

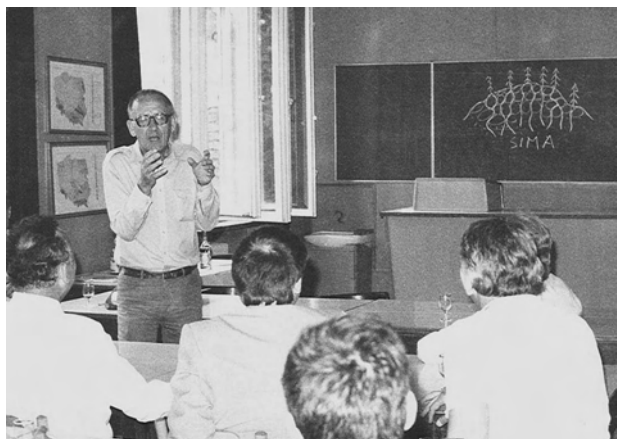
In the Sudetes, Professor Oberc questioned the view, then prevalent among German geologists, that Lower Silesia was a region unique in Europe and that it was composed of a mosaic of small crustal elements of various ages and derivations. Józef Oberc was first to argue that this "mosaic" was really a set of Precambrian structures that had been severely overprinted by Palaeozoic ones. The development of this idea allowed him to create a tectonic model of the Sudetes whereby he could correlate Sudetic structures with structures in other parts of the Bohemian

Massif. From this, the Sudetes could be considered as part of a much larger fragment of the global-scale Baikalides/Cadomides/Brasilides orogenic belt that itself was later reconstructed and incorporated into the orogenic belt of the Variscides of Western and Central Europe. This model, after further refinements by Professor Oberc and his colleagues, was to become the basis for numerous interpretations of the structure and geological evolution of the Sudetes and its neighbouring areas.

During the late 1950s, Professor Oberc started his research on the Sudetes by investigating the Bardo structural unit, a succession of unmetamorphosed, but structurally deformed, Ordovician through Carboniferous sedimentary rocks. In this sequence, he identified more than 50 disharmonic fold structures and realised that these folds resulted from the underlying basement strongly controlling the nature of the deformation in the overlying sedimentary sequences. Until relatively recently, three of his key publications from this time – the monograph *Region Gór Bardzkich (The Bardo Mountains Region; 1957)*; the 1:50 000 map of this region (attached to that monograph); and the subsequent 1:25 000 map (*Detailed Geological Map of Poland, Bardo Sheet*) – provided the basis for all geological work in that area and a reliable foundation for the development of new concepts of Palaeozoic evolution of the Bardo basin. Professor Oberc's Bardo research presaged his authorship of many other geological maps during his career and started his very influential development of Polish tectonic terminology.

During the 1960s, Józef Oberc's attention was drawn to the Karkonosze–Izera Block. His synthesis of his own studies (*Eastern Karkonosze and their position in the Sudeten Structure, 1960; An outline of the geology of the Karkonosze-Izera Block. Studies on the geology of the Sudetic Mountains, 1961*) not only placed this block into its regional context but also resulted in the block being tectonically subdivided in a way that is still accepted today. Furthermore, his interpretations of the small-scale tectonic structures clarified the structural relationships between these smaller units (*Dispersion of B-lineation in the Izera Mts Crystalline Massif, 1967*). His model of multiple folding, cited in many academic textbooks, became the standard to follow when tectonically interpreting other crystalline units of the Sudetes, particularly the area at the junction between the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland.

Expanding his studies further to include the Fore-Sudetic Block, Professor Oberc published his monograph *Geology of crystalline rocks of the Wzgórza Strzelińskie Hills, Lower Silesia* in 1966 in which he offered a systematic overview of the evolution of the eastern part of this block, one based on older German literature and on his own fresh observations. Here, he developed a nappe model to explain the regional geology of the Fore-Sudetic Block and he offered correlations with the East Sudetes. And once more, Professor Oberc's geological insight at the time pro-



Prof. Józef Oberc explaining the intriguing “model of the glacial origin of Mt. Ślęza” by Ludomir Mączka, 1980 (Photo from the archive of Prof. J. Oberc)



Prof. Józef Oberc celebrating the 50th anniversary of his PhD defence, Aula Leopoldina, 1997 (Photo by A. Stryjewski)

ved to be correct: this nappe model has been supported by later structural, petrological and geochemical studies. Not only that, but his early assumption of a Proterozoic age for the gneisses in the area was recently confirmed in a number of publications, and his interpretation of the boundary between the large lithospheric blocks of the West and East Sudetes (*The boundary between the Western and Eastern Sudetic structure*, 1968) and its exact location, more easterly than was assumed at the time, is also still correct.

Following the discovery of copper deposits in the Fore-Sudetic Monocline and some intense geological exploration of that area, Professor Oberc also took a keen interest in the geology of the monocline and its basement, and he made important contributions to understanding the genesis of the associated copper deposits.

A further important element of Professor Józef Oberc's investigations were the granitoid massifs of Lower Silesia, notably their tectonic structures and the relationships to their metamorphic envelopes. His studies were built on the classic works by Hans Cloos, and in his paper *The tectonic position of the Karkonosze Granite* (1965) he argued that this Sudetes granite is a flat-lying plutonic body concealed below the Izera gneisses.

As a result of all his 1950s and 1960s publications on the geology, and especially the tectonics, of the Sudetes, Professor Oberc significantly raised the standard of how to present fieldwork data via detailed maps and geological diagrams. These same mapping and presentation skills were also drilled into generations of his students, who benefited greatly.

The first 25 years of Józef Oberc's Lower Silesian studies were summarized in the monumental monograph *Budowa geologiczna Polski, t. IV. Sudety i obszary przyległe* [*Geology of Poland, pt. IV, The Sudetes and Neighbouring Areas*] (Wydawnictwa Geologiczne, Warszawa, 1972, 307 pp). The monograph contains, among its many themes, the results of Professor Oberc's work on the age relationships between the metamorphic complexes, defining magmatic cycles, the distribution and sequence of fold structures, and the development of fault networks. The presen-

tation of his new data on the relationships between Lower Silesia and the main orogenic systems in Europe was preceded by a critical historical overview of the earlier concepts. Before this monograph was published, no one person had undertaken, or perhaps could have undertaken, such a huge challenge in geological synthesis, one that required a detailed knowledge of the geology of all the Sudetic units based on years of systematic fieldwork. This monograph remains a unique work on the geology of the Sudetes.

The long period of research between 1970 and 1990 saw Professor Oberc publish further tectonic syntheses of the Lower Silesia region, this time against the wider background of Central Europe. He was, during this period, the first person to introduce into the Sudetic geological literature palinspastic reconstructions of deformed rock complexes of the Variscan belt. Such reconstructions restore the original geometry of a rock sequence before it had been deformed by thrusts and folds, but do it in a sequential way so the viewer can “see” the actual sequence of deformation events.

Yet another subject tackled by Professor Oberc were the Sudetic faults themselves. The paper *Main Sudetic diagonal dislocation and its significance for the position of the Variscan-Laramide Synclinorium* (1964) proposes a very intellectually attractive thesis of scissor-type dislocation, previously interpreted as a set of independent faults, which controlled the location of sedimentary basins during the late Palaeozoic and Mesozoic. He was the first to recognize the role of displacements along regional strike-slip faults and to relate the slip deformation with contemporaneous folding within one of the walls of the fault (*Early to Middle Variscan development of the West Sudetes*, 1980). Professor Oberc hypothesised that the whole evolution of the Variscides was due to strike-slip movements between individual lithospheric blocks, separated by fault systems. This powerful idea enabled him to explain the geological evolution of Central Europe without the need for subduction (*A role of lithosphere blocks and shifting movements in the premolasse development of the Variscides on the Bohemian Massif margins*, 1987). The concept of

strike-slip deformation as, perhaps, the dominant tectonic mechanism was also developed by several other authors and colleagues, and in the 1990s was the subject of several Polish and international research projects.

Professor Józef Oberc had the unusual ability to see geology “as a whole”. This is demonstrated by his ability to use any of the geological subdisciplines for detailed research and yet also have the ability to present grand geological syntheses. This talent also contributed to the success and the incredible quality of his lectures on general geology (known as “dynamic geology” in Poland), between 1952 and 1996. His own excellent field skills he passed on for over thirty years as he organized field courses and taught his students how to overcome the difficulties that

they would face as field geologists. It is a wonderful testament to Professor Oberc that many of his former students now occupy senior positions in a variety of academic and scientific institutions, as well as in many geological companies. Through his scientific, pedagogical, and professional duties, Professor Oberc quickly became, and remained, a major influence in Polish geology for much of the second half of the 20th century. He will be remembered as a truly gifted geologist and teacher and as a great friend who will never be forgotten by those of us lucky enough to have known him.

Ryszard Kryza (University of Wrocław)
Andrzej Żelazniewicz (Polish Academy of Sciences)

Józef Oberc: the Person



Prof. Józef Oberc at the “Iceland Group” meeting, Poznań, 2001. (Photo by A. Stryjewski)

Professor Józef Oberc lived a long, and very productive, life. He worked hard as a scientist, and he put a considerable amount of energy into his teaching of nearly 50 generations of geology students at the University of Wrocław. For many years after his retirement he would come to the institute every day, but, as the years passed, this happened less frequently until he could only visit sporadically. When we (his longstanding friends and students) visited him at his home, he would always start the conversation with the same question: “What is new in the institute?”. And this question referred not only to scientific issues but also to every-day, personal matters.

Professor Oberc was always surrounded by people, and his professional contacts often developed into close friendships. When his 90th birthday was coming up, we wished (with his approval) to celebrate it. So it was that on the 28th July, 2008, a large number of guests, including his closest relatives, arrived at Professor Oberc’s home in Wrocław’s Sobótka Street. The weather behaved itself for the occasion and Professor Oberc was in a happy mood and seemed in good health for his advanced years. The afternoon in the garden passed quickly, as we all talked, joked and even sang. Although we, his colleagues and friends, were a bit worried that perhaps we might be a little too boisterous, we nevertheless wanted to bring him some happiness because we enjoyed being with him. After a wonderful party, we said goodbye to our beloved Professor, unaware that very soon we would be saying farewell to him for ever.

Józef Oberc was a dedicated teacher and a wonderful lecturer: he lectured on physical geology, giving his first lectures in the early 1950s and his last in 1996. Students and fellow academics always paid attention to what Professor Oberc had to say, his lectures being carefully prepared and given with an authority that only comes from deep knowledge. But woe betide students who were late!

Professor Oberc hated late comers. He used to lock the door of the lecture hall by turning the knob to what became known as the “angle alpha” – the late-comers were not allowed in, and, to their consternation, lost the lecture. And missed lectures had a real impact because the exam was very hard and many students had to take it several times before they passed. Nevertheless, this exam is fondly remembered by all the former geology students at Wrocław. Professor Oberc took an almost fatherly attitude to his students when teaching the basic geology course because he included, for the student’s benefit, a certain amount of culture, manners, and respect. Under his guidance, students became adults.

For many years Professor Oberc held field courses that were exceptionally well organized, both with respect to the demands for a particular student group and for the specific teaching purpose. What is more, his teaching assistants had to maintain the same high standards. In the field, all his students had to be properly prepared and equipped, and this meant everything from wearing the correct type of footwear to having a properly sharpened pencil.

When arriving at the first exposure of a student field trip, Professor Oberc gave a general introduction to the local geology. Then everyone had to make a preliminary study the whole exposure, after which the students were grouped into pairs (in case of an odd number of students in the group, a “pair of one” was created). Each pair then had to describe the exposure in detail, draw a sketch and make an interpretation of a given section. Finally, the results of the work were presented in front of the whole party, using the “correct geological language”, and the students’ descriptions and drawings, in the field notebook, were carefully checked and corrected by the assistants. When walking to the next exposure, every student had to be aware of the cardinal compass directions and remember where the previous stop had been located. Furthermore, the whole group was guided to the next outcrop by a selected student who had to find his way using a compass and the map that he or she had been provided with.

One of Professor Oberc’s main aims when taking field classes was – in addition to providing geological education – to develop good field habits and techniques so that the students, as a result of the proper training, knew how to tackle difficult outcrops when on their own individual mapping assignments. Professor Oberc knew well that a sleepy student, improperly equipped for fieldwork, can easily be overwhelmed by the difficulties posed by mapping. Hence his demand that students go to bed early and be properly equipped for fieldwork (proper shoes, clothes, hammer, notebook and pencil) was nothing more than teaching them good field habits and a proper attitude to the work involved.

Professor Oberc supervised many MSc projects. At the beginning of each project, the student received a summary of the geology of the study area by the Professor, of



Student field course, Strzelin 1973. (Photo from archive of Prof. J. Oberc)

ten in conjunction with one of his assistants who might be working in the same region. Every student had to map an area of about 20 km², and there were no exceptions: both the girls and the boys got broadly the same size of mapping area. Having said that, the Professor did take some extra care of the girls, particularly at the start when accommodation was required. For example, on the way to the field, he used to stop the van suddenly in a village and go into a house that he liked the look of. After a while, he came back with the owner and we discovered that he had successfully organised the conditions of renting a room for the duration of the fieldwork. The rented rooms were always good quality, and the rental conditions very often included meals for the student. Nobody ever knew how Professor Oberc selected these places, because it appeared that he had never been to that particular house before. But he remained a demanding supervisor and at the end of the fieldwork he always came back to see the results of the geological mapping.

In 1981 Professor Oberc supervised a unique geological expedition to Iceland, organized over a period of some 8 months by the Student Geological Society whose president at the time was Antoś Stryjewski (nick-named Starosta). The expedition comprised students and researchers, including Ryszard Kryza and Andrzej Muszyński, of the Institute of Geological Sciences at the University of Wrocław. The journey to Iceland was made via an incredible one-month sea crossing in a sailing ship, the s.y. “Włodzjowski”, commanded by Captain Danuta Remiszewska and three professional sailors, two of whom also happened to be geologists. On the ship, Professor Oberc had all the appearance and confidence of someone who had been at sea all his life. The stay in Iceland itself presented many real physical challenges for the group: the members of the expedition had to cover long distances over roadless basaltic lava and tephra terrain; cross freezing glacial rivers, or still-hot lava flows; and climb the smoking crater of Hekla, the Icelandic gate to hell. But it wasn't all hard work: the expedition also enjoyed the occasional swim in some hot volcanic springs. It was an unforgettable adventure for all the participants of that expedition.

Professor Oberc's travel adventures, however, were by no means restricted to Iceland – he was a globetrotter. Many excursions to all parts of Europe and to selected regions in Asia, Africa and South America, provided him



Prof. Józef Oberc among his family and friends celebrating 90th birthday on 28 July 2008. (Photo by A. Stryjewski)

with opportunities to observe a wide variety of geological structures and processes. This wide experience helped forge his open mind to different theories and to hone his natural ability to see the clues necessary to solve a geological problem. He had the courage and knowledge to think of geology on a global scale. In 1971, one of his assistants, Jan Koziar, turned attention to the then poorly known, and definitely rather shocking, expanding Earth theory. Professor Oberc soon became very interested in that theory and supported Koziar's research on it, along with later contributions by Leszek Jamrozik. He expressed his support for the expanding Earth theory in two publications and arranged a research project at the Institute of Geological Sciences within which the theory was being developed. Professor Oberc's patronage of the expanding Earth theory resulted in considerable progress in a range of aspects of that theory and, consequently, allowed Jan Koziar to prepare original undergraduate courses on global tectonics that were given for several years starting in 2001. Even up to his last days, Professor Oberc remained interested in how research on the expanding Earth theory was progressing.

It only rarely happened that colleagues could get on a first name basis with Professor Oberc. For many reasons, calling him “Józef” was simply impossible, not least because the respect with which he was held demanded a necessary formality. But Professor Oberc was at heart a very sociable person. Although understandably somewhat “official” to undergraduate students, he mellowed significantly with his MSc students, and each graduate became his colleague. Younger members of staff became his friends. This he regularly demonstrated by looking after his younger colleagues not only scientifically but also as a person on whom they could rely: if it was necessary, colleagues could even borrow some money from him just before they got their monthly wages. And he always remembered the personal occasions of his colleagues, such as namedays and birthdays.

Every year, Professor's nameday was celebrated at the Institute, and this became a sort of regular happening in Wrocław geology. Usually he came to the Institute around

noon and soon afterwards the first guests started to arrive, individually or in groups from particular departments. Among the guests there were also representatives from other institutes of the university, from the faculty, and from other geological institutions in Wrocław. All came with greetings and bunches of flowers. Professor Oberc enjoyed these days and was an extraordinary host, always in a cordial mood, and treating everybody as a special guest. Inviting the guests to the table, he used to say those wonderful words: "please, help yourself, because nobody should leave the table with an empty stomach. It was always a merry occasion – serious topics were certainly discussed, but there were always stories and jokes, too.

Professor Oberc was an excellent discussion partner because he had that rare feature, the ability to listen carefully: sometimes so carefully that his discussion partner would be forced to think of every single word in order to keep the clarity of thought. He was always very interested in political changes in our country. His attitude to the communist regime was definitely negative, and after the change of the political system he did not accept the range of solutions that were imposed after the Round Table agreement. Even before the Solidarity Trade Union had been established, Professor Oberc helped fund underground publishing, later becoming a member of Solidarity itself. During the period of martial law in Poland, his colleague Jan Koziar was wanted and had to stay underground: Professor Oberc supported him and often met him secretly. One such meeting was outside Wrocław, in a

little wood near the Odra river, where, under hard field conditions, they prepared a paper for publication and a lecture to be given by Leszek Jamrozik at an international geological conference (The XIIIth Congress of the Carpatho-Balkan Geological Association, 1985). This meeting was a success, though the tensional-gravitational model of orogen evolution that was discussed has yet to receive widespread recognition.

One topic of conversation that always provoked fond memories in Professor Oberc was that extraordinary Iceland expedition. Upon the expedition's return to Poland, Professor Oberc remained on very friendly terms with its participants. He loved to meet the "Iceland Group" at his home and on various occasions such as his nameday. Over time, the original group allowed a privileged few others to join, despite their never having been to Iceland. These nameday parties at the Professor's home were always fine and friendly events, though often interrupted by phone calls because, as ever, a great number of people wanted to express their best wishes to Professor Oberc on such occasions.

We will always remember Professor Józef Oberc as a great scientist and a wonderful person, a man who had elegance, a man who could be very sensitive to the needs of others and who possessed wisdom and great sense of humour. And we will not forget his characteristic Lvov City accent or his closeness and friendship. And while all this is true, a certain aura of mystery will always surround him.

Students and Friends

Professor Józef Oberc – List of Publications

- 1949
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