

*This is an Email that I received after meeting with the publishers of Hidden Europe Travel Magazine in Berlin prior to my trip to Świdwin. It flushes out some history of the region. I.K.*

Hi Ian

Really enjoyed meeting you last evening.

The first thing I did this morning was to check Świdwin, and no wonder it sounds familiar. It is as I thought on the main railway route northeast of Szczecin. I cannot say I know Świdwin, though I've travelled through it quite often. Its train station may seem pretty derelict, but actually even all the fast trains stop there. So I don't know the town but I have explored the area around Świdwin a little.



It seems to me that the Prussian imprint on this Pomeranian landscape was not everywhere so very pronounced. In the 19th century, that area of Pomorze (translated into German as Pommern or into English as Pomerania) was extremely interesting for its cultural mix, with both substantial numbers of Polish and German speakers, and even a few Kaszëbë (Kashubians) as well. The landscape was and is essentially agricultural and rural, and by the mid-nineteenth century the area has a palpable veneer of Prussian authority. This would have been expressed in local administration, in land tenure with a growing number of rural estates headed by Prussian gentleman-farmers, in civic services such as railways and post, in financial services like banking, in maps – for cartography was an in-



strument in imposing both Prussian identity and control – and in some locations through the Evangelical Lutheran church. I think the sense of being Prussian in rural Pomorze (and in provincial towns like Świdwin, then always referred to on maps as Schivelbein) would have been far more muted than in major centres of mercantile wealth such as Szczecin (then called Stettin).

Pomorze has shifted hands as you know. The region around Świdwin, part of Zachodniopomorskie, while having a dominantly Polish history incorporates German and Swedish influences. It was rather unceremoniously snatched by Prussia in 1772 (following the Union of Lublin which dismembered Poland). Prior to that, during the Thirty Years' War (in the 17th century) it would have been Swedish. And even after the Prussian annexation in 1772, there followed another bout of Swedish occupation. Scandinavian influences remain evident today in some architectural details and in certain place names.



Świdwin had an interesting mix of Catholics and Lutherans. Members of the Kath family were baptised in the Lutheran church during the mid-nineteenth century. Being Lutheran did not mean having land. Many Pomeranian agricultural workers became Lutheran as a expedient to maintain good relations with their Prussian landlords. Improvements in agriculture led to a large amount of

emigration from Świdwin from about 1855 onwards, and particularly post 1868. Some peasants, no longer finding work on the land, moved to the US, particularly to Michigan and Wisconsin where farmland was available in landscapes that recalled the spirit of Pomorze. Others went to Chicago, electing according to inclination to integrate there into the German or Polish communities in the rapidly growing city.

So to define Świdwin as Prussian is a stab at the town's and region's history. A reasonable one. But it masks the fact that Pomorze (or Pomerania if you prefer) had, and still has, its own particular identity and cultural mix. It had a measure of Prussian authority imposed upon it. Taking a long view, over the last 1000 years, that Prussia 'overlay' was quite brief. But it is hard for us to be certain, at the time your forbears left some 120 years ago, quite how those individuals would have constructed their own identity. German?



Polish? Prussian? Pomeranian? It's very difficult to say. Very much the sort of issue we ponder in our writing for *hidden europe* magazine.

I hope these few thoughts are of interest. Enjoy your continuing travels around this part of Europe. If there is any way we can assist as you plan your travels, do please say. Susanne and I are full of admiration for your present project. You would surely find folk in Świdwin willing to talk about the town and its history. And there are German genealogists and historians like Dieter Schimmelpfennig and Manfred Pfleger who would surely love to give you a particularly German perspective on the town that they would both probably still insist on calling Schivelbein! Just a thought, but you may want to try and track them down.

With all good wishes

Nicky

