

**'WAGGA BOASTS A MODERN PIMPERNEL':
DAME MARY GILMORE, JOHN ALEXANDER
CAMERON AND JEWISH EMIGRATION TO
PALESTINE, 1920 TO 1923**

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A DEATH AND AN OBITUARY

The death at ten minutes to one in the morning on 3 March 1949, in Glasgow, Scotland, of John Alexander Cameron, retired journalist, aged 76 years, went unremarked other than in the official record.¹ But several months later, on 31 August 1949, the *Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser* published an obituary written by Cameron's sister, Dame Mary Gilmore. Dame Mary, poet, author, radical socialist, journalist and grand old lady of Australian letters, 'has now passed into Australian legend'.² Her brother is virtually unknown today. In contrast, Dame Mary's obituary suggested in his adventurous life he was not without achievement, recognition and reward. Yet, how much of what she wrote was true? A characteristic of her ostensibly non-fiction prose was that it contained many 'fabrications', particularly when it came to her own family.³ Was her obituary for her brother similarly embellished?

A key claim among those Dame Mary made about her brother's life gave rise to the headline above the obituary: 'Wagga Boasts a Modern Pimpernel'. It was while he served in the British diplomatic service that John Cameron, 'one of Wagga's outstanding sons', 'played the role of a Scarlet Pimpernel', said the *Advertiser*, 'and rescued hundreds of Jews from firing squads'. Dame Mary provided more details:

When war broke out in 1914 he left his publications [including two seasonal ones in Berne, Switzerland] to a manager ... and went as a London special correspondent to the Italian front. This war ending he was appointed as British Vice-Consul to Schaffhausen, on the border between Germany and

Switzerland. ... From Schaffhausen he was sent as Consul to Czernowitz ... Here *he surreptitiously saved the lives of as many as 500 Jews at a time* [italics added]. Men women and children were being pogrommed by Czarist Russia, who was our ally. They were lined up on trenches which the men had to dig for their mass graves, and the guns were then turned on them. Some of those he saved came to Australia and told me this. The heads of Jewry (he later told me) were so grateful they said his name was to go into the Golden Book at Jerusalem directly next to the signatories of the Balfour Declaration.⁴

How much of Dame Mary's story is true? Did John Cameron, the bush-born son of an itinerant farm worker and self-taught builder, educated at a local 'bush' school at Downside, on the road north from Wagga to Coolamon, and later at Wagga Wagga Public School, some time school teacher and, later, journalist and war correspondent, really become a member of the British diplomatic service, and was he responsible for saving hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews from Tsarist Russian firing squads? If so, was his name inscribed by a grateful Jewish community in a 'Golden Book' in Jerusalem? How much, instead, is one of Dame Mary's 'historical inaccuracies, distortions and fantasies'?⁵ Answering these questions, even if only partially, requires not only research into Cameron's life but also to the strategic great power politics of his time.

CONSULAR SERVICE

The truth of John Cameron's diplomatic - or rather consular - service is readily verified. Though it appears he lied about his age (giving his date of birth as 21 March 1872 rather than 1869, the correct year) John Alexander Cameron is recorded in *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book for 1934* as indeed joining the consular service during the First World War, serving as Vice-Consul at Schaffhausen, Switzerland, from 12 February 1917 until January 1919 and then temporarily at Bâle (Basel), before being appointed Consul at Czernowitz (now Chernivtsi) on 1 August 1920. He remained at Czernowitz until 10 December 1923 and subsequently served in Detroit, USA (1924-1930) and the League of Nations-administered Free City of Danzig, at the head of the Polish Corridor between Germany and Poland (1931-1933). He was made a member of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) on 3 June 1933 and retired with a pension on 1 November that year.⁶

In being able to pursue a new career in 1917 Cameron might have been lucky to have been where he was. The Foreign Office and

Diplomatic and Consular Services were exclusive 'clubs' prior to the First World War, in which 'only a very small and wealthy elite entered'.⁷ In 1915 the British Civil Service Commission's report on the services recommended significant reforms, including abolition of the requirement that candidates for the Diplomatic Service possess 'private means ... at a minimum of £400 a year'. For the Consular Service the Commissioners recommended entry by open competition, followed by appropriate training and then service under an experienced Consul 'to learn practical work'.⁸ But the war may have provided its own impetus for the widening of entry. Schaffhausen, for example, was a city in the German-speaking, northern Swiss canton of the same name through which repatriated British prisoners of war from Germany passed on their way to the United Kingdom. As a British subject, familiar with Switzerland as a result of his publishing experience in Berne, and probably German-speaking, Cameron may simply have been the best man on the spot to fill an important, but unusual and temporary, position.⁹ His Australian origins may have caused some hard thinking, but at least by 1919, a background from the Dominions within the Empire was not thought an impediment:

... what is, or should be, the Imperial nature of the service should not be forgotten. It should be felt by the Dominions to be their service and to represent them as well as the United Kingdom. This object will only be fully attained if candidates, whose qualifications are up to the standard, are able to enter direct from Canada, Australia, and the other Dominions.¹⁰

His employment in the British Consular Service established, the question remains why was he posted to Czernowitz? Why, indeed, was there a British consulate at Czernowitz at this time at all?

CZERNOWITZ

Czernowitz (Romanian Cernauti between the two World Wars) was the Austrian name for the capital of the province of Bukovina, situated to the east of Hungary, bordering Russia and the Ottoman Empire (independent Romania after 1878). Populated mainly by Romanians and Ukrainians (often also referred to as Ruthenians), the Austrian Empire gained Bukovina in 1775 as a result of the decline of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. Austria encouraged German settlement in the territory, and Czernowitz grew into a Germanised city which was a social and cultural centre in an otherwise relatively backward rural province. By the second half of

the nineteenth century, a large proportion of the German-speaking population was Jewish, and the Jewish community was the largest single community in Czernowitz from around 1870, comprising about one third of the city's population. The community was culturally German and looked to Vienna for its inspiration, perhaps understandably because the Austrian Empire was the most benign regime for Jews in central and eastern Europe at the time, having granted full emancipation in 1867.¹¹ Czernowitz 'had a thoroughly assimilated upper class' and 'the assimilated Jews considered themselves Germans, with the caveat "of Mosaic confession"'.¹² An additional reason for strongly associating with German culture was the relative animosity of the two other major cultural influences in the region – Russian and Romanian. The loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy demonstrated by the Jews of Bukovina:

was associated with their recognition of the fact that they enjoyed a much better social position in comparison to the adjacent areas of Russia and Romania. Life on the border of countries whose governments were notoriously hostile to Jews engendered, as its mental consequence, an attitude of rejection of their cultures.¹³

These sentiments combined to make the Jewish community enthusiastic supporters of the Austro-Hungarian cause in the First World War, which 'provided the Jews with the perfect opportunity to assert this Austrian identity'. The Jews of Czernowitz were 'gripped by war fever' in 1914 – 'This patriotism ... engendered by two generations of imperial rule, under which the Jews had attained equal rights and high positions in public office.'¹⁴

Notwithstanding its local pre-eminence within Bukovina, Czernowitz would seem unlikely to be a place considered appropriate to establish a British consular post in 1920. Reform of Britain's overseas representation, begun in 1914 and 1915, had stalled during the war but was resumed in 1918 and 1919: 'if the need for reform was great at the beginning of the war', said a report on the matter in March 1919, 'it is infinitely greater now'. The focus for the Consular Service had shifted to trade:

the whole conception has gradually altered of the services expected from a Consular officer. It is now rightly required that he should actively assist trade. ... Foreign trade for other countries is a luxury; for the United Kingdom a necessity. But if our Foreign trade is to be restored and developed, our commercial service abroad must be made into a really efficient instrument.^{xv}

Bukovina was not considered useful as a place for a trade-oriented post and Czernowitz did not appear in the report's list of recommended locations for a consulate. Its omission may have been influenced by the assessment of Bukovina in a 1919 Foreign Office paper as 'a poorly developed province' with 'practically no products of commercial importance, though there is some exportation of agricultural and dairy produce'.¹⁶ This assessment would appear to have been later vindicated, as, although there was a branch of the Anglo-Austrian Bank there in 1922, by 1924 London *Times* correspondent Stephen Graham could report that he met only one Briton in Czernowitz, 'a redoubtable Scot buying Bessarabian eggs'.¹⁷

However, despite the heavy influence of trade matters on both the focus of the service and of the locations for posts, other considerations were also factored in – 'It must not ... be imagined', continued the March 1919 report, 'that the only considerations that need to be considered are commercial. ... Political interests may require the presence of a Consul ... [and] political needs ... have necessitated the presence of consuls whose functions have largely been political and judicial'.¹⁸

The decision to establish a consulate at Czernowitz may indeed have been the result of later political events and considerations the report anticipated:

Certain assumptions have had to be made on some points which will have to be decided at the Peace negotiations. When these negotiations are ended, and experience has been gained during the next few years by the new Commercial Counsellors and Secretaries, some adjustments may be found desirable, but they will not affect the validity of the distribution of posts as a whole, nor the actual allocation of more than a minute fraction of them. It is claimed with confidence that no better distribution of posts, at once scientific and practical, could have been made.¹⁹

Despite the city's lack of commercial promise, a political consideration already existed of equal geopolitical significance to the peace negotiations, which may have overridden trade issues and led to the British presence at Czernowitz – the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent civil war in Russia.

RUSSIA'S CIVIL WAR

The First World War's Eastern Front passed through Bukovina, and Austrian and Russian troops occupied it at different times. It was the Russian Empire that first collapsed, when in October 1917 the

Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky. The Provisional Government had followed the Tsar's abdication seven months earlier but had made the mistake of attempting to continue the war against the Central Powers, alongside Britain, France and their other allies. However, Bolshevik authority was limited and the new government fought a civil war against a variety of armies in its north, south and east. In the south west they were confronted from 1918 to 1921 at different times by Ukrainian nationalists, anarchist forces and the 'White' (former Tsarist) Volunteer Army under Generals Anton Denikin and later Pyotr Wrangel.

Britain and her allies strongly opposed the Bolshevik decision to seek peace with Germany – which was concluded by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 – regarding it as a betrayal. They were also stung by Bolshevik publication of secret treaties the allies had agreed relating to the division of the spoils of victory after the war. Troops were sent to north Russia to fight against the Bolshevik army, in support of the Whites, and other support was provided elsewhere. Britain continued to assist the Whites after the First World War ended, scaling down its military intervention only in 1919. Bolshevik communist internationalism and brief communist revolutions in Hungary, Bavaria and Berlin gave further impetus to British fear and suspicion of Bolshevik intentions, and the new and expanded Eastern European states, such as Romania, were seen as a *cordon sanitaire* against them. The April 1922 Treaty of Rapallo between Germany and the newly formed Soviet government gave further cause for anxiety for those still suspicious of the two countries.²⁰ Bukovina, separated from the dismembered Austrian heartland of the old Empire by now independent Hungary, had become a part of 'Greater Romania', which had been significantly enlarged by the post-war settlement in 1919 and 1920.²¹ 'The least ethnically Romanian' of the new provinces,²² its Ukrainian, German and Jewish communities were unhappy with, and viewed with suspicion by, the new regime.²³ Nevertheless, it was relatively safe and centrally located in the *cordon sanitaire* near the Russian, Polish, Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Romanian borders – a good location from which to observe the course of the Russian civil war's south western theatre. The possible significance of this justification for the establishment of the consulate in Czernowitz is highlighted by its closure in February 1924, shortly after Cameron left in December 1923, by which time the civil war was over and Bolshevik control in the former Russian empire was well established.²⁴

Czernowitz, despite its integration into Romania, was, at least as far as its Jewish community was concerned, still German-speaking.

Dame Mary wrote in her obituary of her brother's time in Czernowitz that 'there he had 14 languages (owing to refugees) and spoke two.' The two he spoke, based on his earlier experience, were almost certainly German and French, as well as his native English. And if Cameron had demonstrated a capacity for gleaning military and other intelligence from repatriated and escaped prisoners of war in Schaffhausen, he may have had ample opportunity to do so in Czernowitz also, from refugees escaping from the civil war just a few kilometres away. A large element within those refugees was Jewish.

ANTISEMITISM, THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR AND POGROMS IN THE UKRAINE

Although Bukovina remained for many years into the twentieth century associated with benign inter-community relations,²⁵ the partnership there between Germans and German-speaking Jews was declining by the 1890s, as it was at the centre of the Austrian Empire. For example, Bukovina Jewish community leader, Dr Benno Straucher, a supporter of accommodation between German and Jewish national aspirations, when elected to the Parliament in Vienna in 1897 'was immediately confronted with massive and verbally aggressive antisemitism'.²⁶ The same year Karl Lueger was elected to the office of mayor of Vienna, considered a major watershed in the popularisation of antisemitic politics in Austria.²⁷

It was also his experiences in Vienna, as well as Paris, that turned the previously liberal secular Viennese journalist, Theodore Herzl, into the founder of the modern Zionist movement – dedicated to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, the Jewish community's *Eretz Israel*.²⁸ Zionism was established early in Czernowitz – pre-Zionist Jewish national organisations had existed since 1891 at the University²⁹ – and the community was very active politically. Three Bukovina representatives attended the first Zionist Congress at Basle in 1897, among them Doctor Mayer Ebner, the most prominent of Bukovina's Zionist leaders up to the late 1930s. Other Jewish nationalist movements were well represented and the first Yiddish language conference was held in Czernowitz in 1908. Indeed, the variety of approaches to the future of eastern Europe's Jewish communities – assimilationist, nationalist European and nationalist Zionist – was the cause of considerable and intense factionalism.

With the break up of the Austrian Empire in 1918, Bukovina and neighbouring Bessarabia were absorbed into the kingdom of Romania. Unfortunately, the position of Jews in Romania was not as secure as it had been in Austria; they were the target of religious discrimination and it was only belatedly that Jews were granted citizenship rights in

1923. The 'Jewish question' was a much debated one in Romania. While the problem has been characterised as more to do with 'an assertive Romanian nationalism on the offensive against the resilient particularisms of Bukovina's ethnic minorities and regional outlook' as 'the Romanian state ... had to assert itself not so much against non-Romanian ethnic groups as against the regionalism Bukovina derived from its Austrian heritage'. Nevertheless it is conceded that 'Jews were ... most affected by the policies of centralization and integration enforced in the 1920s' and that 'Bukovina's Jews interpreted the attempts at Romanizing the provinces as anti-Semitism'. For the Jewish community, Romanian occupation of Bukovina 'threatened their future like a spectre' and 'brought still unsuspected dangers with it'; subsequently, these included restrictions on citizenship, land use, business opportunities, civil service positions and education – for 20 years after 1918 'during the whole time Bukovina belonged to Romania the Jews fought a difficult fight for their citizenship. As stateless people, the Jew was a "stranger" subject to expulsion and the loss of his existence without notice.'³⁰ *The Times* of London reported Romanian opposition to international treaty provisions, which protected the rights of minorities in the new countries created after the First World War, which Romania regarded as 'remarkable chiefly for the great solicitude which it shows for Jews'. In a double-handed insult to both its Jewish and Romanian populations, the Romanian government's position was characterised as believing the Jews were so commercially astute and avaricious and the Romanian peasantry such a 'careless, illiterate, thriftless folk', that 'it was necessary to penalise them [the Jews] until such time as the native inhabitants were able by their own efforts to keep Romania for the Romanians'.³¹

Notwithstanding their difficulties, the Romanian Jewish community was significantly better off than the community resident in the former Russian Imperial province of Ukraine, just a few kilometres from Czernowitz, across the Dneister River. Here, after the 1917 revolutions had overthrown first the Czarist regime and then its short-lived successor, civil war approaching anarchy persisted until 1921, and the region, already devastated by the battles of 1914 to 1917 between the Austrians, Germans and Russians, experienced periods of supremacy, if not stable government, by the Ukrainian nationalists, anarchists, Denikin's White Volunteer Army and the Bolshevik army. A bitter and confused civil war built on a tradition of antisemitism and pogroms, and 'in 1919 and 1920 mass murder of Jews took place on a scale that was surpassed only during the Second World War'.³² Old rivalries and grievances re-emerged, together with opportunities to revenge old scores, and the Jewish community was again the most affected:

All subjects of the old Empire suffered, but the Jews were again an exceptional case ... Traditional anti-Jewish enmities and fears were joined by new modern strains of anti-Semitism ... The visibility of Jews like Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev among the Bolshevik leadership offered whatever confirmation skeptics might require. ... [it was] a time of Jewish suffering ... unparalleled in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust itself.³³

The anti-Jewish violence began slowly after the revolution but gained pace in 1918, peaked in the middle of 1919 when the White Volunteer Army controlled much of the Ukraine and continued, declining in intensity, through 1920. Victims were shot, bayoneted, hung, burned or buried alive, and drowned. Many were 'raped, maimed, orphaned or had their property and livelihood destroyed' and 'thousands died of hunger, disease or exposure' as a result.³⁴ Although the pogroms were not systematic, they were made much worse because they were perpetrated by organised elements of large bodies of armed soldiers. The violence did not cease until the Bolshevik regime established control in the countryside in 1921. All the groups who exercised any control over Ukrainian territory during this period, including the Bolsheviks, were guilty of atrocities against Jewish communities. However, it was the Bolsheviks who least offended, and who did most to suppress antisemitism within the territories they controlled. The Whites were worse, being responsible for perhaps half the deaths which occurred, antisemitism being endemic among the White officers.³⁵ Ukrainian nationalists under Simon Petliura and anarchist bands, including the Black Army under Nestor Makhno have also been accused of responsibility for a proportion of deaths.³⁶ Described as the 'most vicious anti-Semitic attacks' in 300 years, these pogroms killed perhaps one in thirteen of Ukraine's 1.5 million Jews, left tens of thousands injured or diseased and hundreds of thousands homeless. There were over 31,000 officially recorded burials, but past scholarly estimates put the death toll at 50,000 to 60,000. However, a 1920 report by Jewish organisations in Soviet Russia indicated there were more than 150,000 reported deaths and up to 300,000 victims, when the wounded are included.³⁷ It has been said this period was characterised by an attempt at Jewish extermination, which 'appeared for the first time in modern Russian history, and indeed for the first time in 20th-century Europe'.³⁸

The plight of those left alive was dire, with the effects of years of war and civil strife having crippled the regional economy in the Ukraine. Newspaper reports carried accounts of tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of displaced people and orphaned children. As late as September 1923, the Chief Rabbi in Britain was reported in

the *The Times* of London as speaking to the Federation of Ukrainian Jews, saying:

their brethren had been killed not only in 1919, 1920 and 1921, but even in the middle of 1922. Thousands of Jews had been tortured and massacred. ... Only a fortnight ago *The Times* pointed out that there were 1,500,000 waifs in the Ukraine. Of these waifs 300,000 were Jewish children. They lived without food, died without hope, and were buried without shrouds. ... They had to deal with the four catastrophes – war, pogrom, famine, and anti-Semitism.³⁹

On 20 July 1921 the *New York Times* carried an account by a Jewish social worker and President of the Russian Joint Board of Jewish Societies, Dr Joseph Kreinin, of spreading famine, continued programs, and mass flights from Russian territory:

the Jews rushing to all borders and especially to Rumania, where there are 40,000 families camping along the frontier, hoping to find refuge. Among these ... at least 100 persons daily are dying from exposure and hunger.

Clearly, a humanitarian tragedy had unfolded in the Ukraine, especially among the Jewish community, after the end of the First World War, and had continued through the period of John Cameron's posting at Czernowitz.⁴⁰ A focus of that humanitarian tragedy was the concentration of displaced people on the new Soviet-Romanian border, which followed the Dneister River and passed very closely by Czernowitz. Despite early attempts by Romanian authorities to stop refugees from Ukraine entering their new regions – Romanian border guards were reported to have arrested and interred or expelled, shot or allowed to drown Jewish refugees from Ukraine attempting to cross into Romania⁴¹ - many did make their way to Romanian territory. At one point it was reported that over 6,000 refugees from Ukraine had reached Czernowitz, and required support from the local Jewish community, which, with the help of international organisations, formed committees to provide aid and assistance.⁴²

EMIGRATION AND ZIONIST PIONEERS

Despite the extent of the tragedy which had unfolded in the Ukraine, and the huge effort required to manage its consequences in Czernowitz, the position of Romanian Jews themselves remained a

significant concern, especially for the Zionists. Motivated both by their situation in post-war society and the on-going ideological conviction of Zionism for the creation of a Jewish home in *Eretz Israel*, people movement of another kind gathered momentum from 1919. Known as the Third *Aliyah*, or third wave, this was the emigration of Jews to Palestine, a movement strongly supported in Czernowitz.

Up to 1914, Zionism had failed to win the support of governments in Europe and the Middle East for its re-settlement programs in Palestine. Then the First World War set aside consideration of any other issues for its duration. Migration had occurred unofficially, as the Zionists set up funds to purchase land and settle Jewish migrants on it. Circumstances in eastern Europe led to renewed support for the process again after 1919. There was a strong movement to encourage *Chalutzim* or *Halutzim* - 'pioneers' in Hebrew - to migrate to Palestine to help establish the Jewish homeland there. Given the nature of economic development in Palestine at the time, the focus was on agricultural development and the movement in Czernowitz provided training in farming skills as well as 'spiritual and physical *Hachschara* ('preparation' agricultural training farms) for the new life there.⁴³ The renewed emphasis on migration to *Eretz Israel* was in part motivated by yet another, third, geopolitical development - the settlement of the question of the government of the post-war Ottoman Middle East.

BRITAIN AND PALESTINE 1917 TO 1923

The contribution of the Jewish community in Britain to the war effort, the need to attract the support of significant Jewish communities in eastern Europe to the Allied cause, and a similar need to win Arab loyalty in the Middle East from the Turks led Britain to pursue potentially clashing paths with regard to the post-war position of Palestine and the 'holy places' of Judaism, Christianity and Islam there. Between 1915 and 1917 several commitments were made about the area. One, the Sykes-Picot agreement, was one of those secret arrangements the Bolsheviks published prematurely. Another such commitment, made on 2 November 1917 in a letter to the Jewish community of Britain, was that the British government 'looked favourably' on the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This became known as the Balfour Declaration, after its author, and sole signatory (although it was supported by the British War Cabinet), Arthur James Balfour, then British Foreign Secretary. In early 1920 it was decided that Britain would be granted a mandate to administer Palestine under the League of Nations (although the

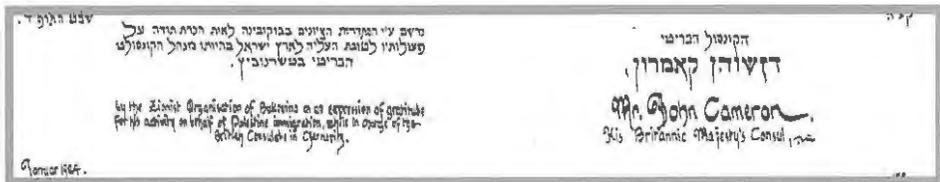
mandate was not finally endorsed by the League until July 1922),⁴⁴ and that the Balfour Declaration would be incorporated into the peace Treaty with Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire. But Arab opposition to Jewish settlement combined with differing interpretations of what exactly was meant by the declaration gave rise to dispute and disagreement between the British government and the Zionists. The administration in Palestine in 1920 was accused of being 'strangely anti-Zionist', and Britain was accused of unnecessarily restricting Jewish immigration on the spurious base of the limited economic capacity of Palestine to support increased population. Nevertheless, the British policy from at least October 1920 was that 'Jews, whose application is supported by the Zionist organization up to an agreed number, may receive visas from British Consular Officers throughout the world, for admission into Palestine, the Zionist organization accepting responsibility for their accommodation and maintenance in the case of failure to find employment'.⁴⁵ Problems in early 1920, particularly riots around the Muslim feast of Nebi Musa, the differing Zionist, British and Arab interpretations of the Declaration and the subsequent Treaties of San Remo conference and the Treaty of Sèvres which incorporated it, and the pressure to do something about the situation of Jews in eastern Europe nevertheless continued to bedevil relations between the British administration and the Zionist organisation which they had agreed would be the avenue for Jewish immigration.⁴⁶

These difficulties and continuing interpretative disagreements aside, British policy remained steady throughout the period in support of the principle of Jewish migration to Palestine.⁴⁷ As British Consul in Czernowitz, Cameron was authorised by his government to issue visas for that purpose. In doing so he was continuing the supportive example shown in March 1919 by the then British Consul in Bucharest.⁴⁸ The strength of the Zionist movement in Czernowitz and the desperate need of the Ukrainian Jewish refugees both provided strong incentive for him to do so. That he was enthusiastic in this effort is supported by the account of the time of Dr Chaim Ehrlich, writing later in Tel Aviv:

Much importance was attached to maintaining a good relationship with the English Council (sic) who had his residence in Czernowitz. So spoke Council Cameron, who was a friend of the Zionist cause, at a banquet which took place in November 1921 to celebrating the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration the following empathetic words: 'If I was a Jew and I was 20 years old I couldn't imagine anything more beautiful

and ideal than to go to Palestine as a *Chalutz* [pioneer, early Israeli settler. Plural is *Chalutzim*].⁴⁹

This close, cooperative relationship was appreciated by the Zionist organisation in Bukovina. For some years prior to Cameron's time in Czernowitz a 'Golden Book' (*Sefer Hazahav*) had been maintained by the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael – Jewish National Fund in Jerusalem, to record contributions to the development of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Among those named in it was Theodor Herzl, and 'an entry in the Golden Book' was regarded as 'a mark of esteem and gratitude'.⁵⁰ In January 1924 Cameron's name was inscribed in the 'Golden Book' in recognition of the assistance he provided to the Zionist cause. The sponsor was the Zionist Organisation of Bukovina and the particular reason for it was 'his activity on behalf of Palestine immigration while in charge of the British Consulate in Czernovitz'.⁵¹



This description of Cameron's contribution is broad, perhaps sufficiently so to disguise a more 'pimpernel-esque' contribution in support of Jewish refugees under imminent threat in Ukraine – the Scarlet Pimpernel in Baroness Orczy's tale crossed into Republican France to rescue victims from the shadow of the guillotine – but the available record suggests that Cameron was simply doing his consular duty.

CONCLUSION

This outline of her brother's career and its circumstances in the early 1920s supports the overall tenor of Dame Mary's account. John Alexander Cameron was a member of the British Consular service from 1917 until his retirement in 1933; he did serve in Czernowitz in the period Dame Mary indicates. Czernowitz was close to the fighting in the Russian Civil War, across the border in Ukraine, and there was a significant antisemitic element to the war in this theatre. There was a refugee problem caused by the civil war, particularly for Jews, and the Bukovina Zionist Organisation established a range of organisations to deal with it. John Cameron was a supporter of those efforts and enjoyed good relations with the Jewish community in Czernowitz.

But there are discrepancies in the detail of Dame Mary's account. She was correct to emphasise the 'Czarist' (White) forces as the most guilty of mass murder, though not Tsarist Russia, which had ceased to exist by 1918. She also may not have been accurate in describing their methods. There is no reference in either contemporary Western newspapers or academic literature to mass graves of the kind Dame Mary describes. Where mention is made of Jews being forced to dig mass graves, it was to bury those already killed.⁵² Mass executions beside graves dug by the victims have been more closely associated with the Second World War. Dame Mary, by her own account aware from childhood of antisemitism in her own community, in ascribing these methods to the Whites, may, in 1949, be confusing accounts of terrible atrocities from different times.⁵³

This use of events and characters with which her family were sometimes very loosely associated to exaggerate or emphasise the family contribution occurs not only with regard to the Ukrainian pogroms. In her obituary Dame Mary states her brother, when a journalist in Coolgardie in Western Australia, 'helped in getting the famous water supply to the goldfields there'. Yet, the pipeline was commissioned in 1896 while up to the end of 1895 at least Cameron was still a schoolteacher at Exeter in New South Wales (his resignation took effect in February 1896).⁵⁴ By May 1897 Cameron was being described as a Perth, rather than a Coolgardie, journalist.⁵⁵ Dame Mary also states that when a war correspondent in South Africa in 1900 her brother was invited by the opposing Boer forces to attend the funeral service and burial of another correspondent killed when caught in an engagement between the two sides. Other sources indicate Cameron was led to the grave site only after the burial, and did not attend any ceremony.⁵⁶ Again, Dame Mary wrote that Cameron worked for a time on the *Freeman's Journal* in Dublin in the early 1900s, when the editor was Dwyer-Grey, who later became a Tasmanian politician and Premier. However, Dwyer-Grey had left the *Freeman's Journal* in the mid-1890s and was resident in Tasmania by the time Cameron would have been in Ireland.⁵⁷

While such examples bring some of Dames Mary's assertions into question, there is little doubt that, for his part, Cameron was both willing and able to provide support to the Bukovina Zionist Organisation, issuing visas that enabled emigrants to travel from Romania on to Palestine and possibly other destinations, including Australia. However, this was official British government policy, and, to that extent Cameron was simply doing his job. There is no indication Cameron took matters into his own hands and went into Ukraine to bring people back across the border, or that he rescued specific individuals from imminent death (which is the implication of

the Pimpernel reference). He was perhaps enthusiastic in his support for, and cooperation with, the Bukovina Zionist organisation, but there is no evidence that he 'surreptitiously' saved the lives of 500 people at a time as a result of his direct intervention. The balance of those who were granted visas between refugees from pogroms and Bukovina locals emigrating to Palestine as 'pioneers' is also unclear, because of the revived post-war push for emigration to *Eretz Israel* among Zionists around this time. The balance between refugees and local pioneers can perhaps only be established through the migration records of the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, which have not yet been studied for this purpose.⁵⁸

In the end, Dame Mary's account of her brother's time in Czernowitz, in the overall impression it gives and in its time frames, is accurate. However, there may be a significant element of hyperbole, particularly in the Pimpernel reference. Nevertheless, it remains true that Cameron's support for the Jewish community and the Zionist Organisation was appreciated by them and recognised in the best way then open – shortly after he left Czernowitz for his next posting his name appeared in the Golden Book in Israel, and remains there to this day.⁵⁹

ENDNOTES

1. ScotlandsPeople.gov.uk, register number 232, 1949.
2. W.H. Wilde, 'Gilmore, Dame Mary Jean (1865 - 1962)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1983), Volume 9, pp. 14-16.
3. W.H. Wilde, *Courage a Grace. A Biography of Dame Mary Gilmore* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1988), pp. 437ff. For one 'fabrication' see Les Hetherington, 'History and Recollection: the death of Daniel Boon', *Murrumbidgee Ancestor*, No. 52, January 1997, pp. 10-13.
4. *Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser*, 31 August 1949. Elements of the story of John Cameron's life were also included in a letter Dame Mary wrote dated 17 December 1932 – see W.H. Wilde and T.Inglis Moore, *Letters of Mary Gilmore* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980), p. 95
5. Wilde, op. cit., p 437.
6. *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book for 1934* (London: Harrison and Sons, Ltd, 1934), p. 189.
7. Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 138.
8. *The Times* (London), 8 January 1915.
9. *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book for 1934* indicates Cameron's position at Schaffhausen was temporary and the post closed in January 1919; for the role of the post, see UK National Archives, FO383/381 and 397.
10. *Scheme for the Reform and Development of the Consular and Commercial Diplomatic Services*, March 1919, UK National Archives, CAB24/5 (G243/82), p. 317.

11. According to Hugo Gold, ed, *History of the Jews in Bukovina*, Tel Aviv, 1958 (volume 1) and 1962 (volume 2), translation project coordinator Jerome Silverbush, accessed at <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/bukowinabook/Bukowina.html> (hereafter Gold), the Jews of Bukovina and Czernowitz were very Germanised and held political positions until the 1890s as members of the Germau liberal party, not as Zionists or Jewish nationalists. German continued to be the language of political discourse among Zionist Bukovinan Jews; Zionist leader Dr Mayer Ebner's German-language newspaper, *Ostjudische Zeitung*, (1919 to 1938) was reportedly the chief Zionist organ in the region (see also <http://czernowitz.ehpes.com/czernowitz8/ebner/ebner-bio.html>). For the loyalty of the Jewish community to the Austrian Empire as a polity in which their identity as Jews did not conflict with their identity as German-speaking Austrians, see, for example, Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914. Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), pp. 154-55 and 'The Jews of Germany and Austria: A Comparative Perspective', in Robert S. Wistrich, ed, *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century: From Franz Joseph to Waldheim* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 5-9. 'Everyone was loyal to the Kaiser', wrote William O. McCagg Jr, in *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 173, despite the rise of Austrian anti-Semitism from the 1880s.
12. Prof Dr Herman Sternberg, 'On the history of the Jews in Czernowitz', in Gold, op. cit., volume 2, pp. 27ff.
13. Albert Lichtblau and Michael John, 'Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz: Two Divergent Examples of Jewish Communities in the Far East of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy', in Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, editors, *Jewries at the Frontier. Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1999), p. 57.
14. Marsha L. Rozenblit, 'Sustaining Austrian "National" Identity in Crisis. The Dilemma of the Jews in Habsburg Austria, 1914-1919', in Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit, eds, *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), p 180 and Dr Arie Leon Schmelzer, 'History of the Jews in the Bukowina *1849-1914', in Gold, op. cit., volume 1, pp. 67ff.
15. *Scheme for the Reform and Development of the Consular and Commercial Diplomatic Services*, March 1919, UK National Archives, CAB24/5 (G243/82), p. 317; in future *Scheme for Reform*.
16. See *Bukovina Handbook Prepared under the Direction of the Historical Section of the British Foreign Office*, London, February 1919 (at www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/bukovina/Bukovina.html), pp. 23, 26; and *The Times*, 11 August 1922 and 14 October 1924.
17. *The Times*, 11 August 1922 and 14 October 1924.
18. *Scheme for Reform*, CAB24/5 (G243/82), p. 317
19. *Scheme for Reform*, CAB24/5 (G243/82), p. 317
20. Doerr, op. cit, summarised from pages 15, 31-32, 49 and 66-67.
21. See Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974), pp. 281-85.

22. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 49.
23. Rothschild, op. cit., pp. 286, 288.
24. See *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book for 1934*; Cameron departed Czernowitz on 10 December 1923 and the post was closed on 8 February 1924. While the Whites were defeated in the Ukraine by the end of 1920, the Bolshevik and anarchist confrontation continued through 1921. These circumstances do not necessarily imply Cameron was working for British intelligence – the Foreign Office was ill-disposed to its consuls becoming actively involved in intelligence, and while Bucharest and Romania became a focus for British anti-Soviet intelligence activity, this seems to have occurred late in Cameron's time there and not to have been associated with him. See Keith Jeffery, *MI6. The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
25. See, for example, Melbourne's *Argus*, 15 April 1944, which headlined an article marking the Russian occupation of Bukovina by calling it 'A Small Country of Mixed Population, It Has Handled Minorities in [a] Model Manner'. Anna Reid, in *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), p. 94, wrote of Czernowitz's 'rainbow' and 'heterogeneous' population 'that gave it flavour' – Jews, Armenians, Hutsul peasants, Swabians and Gypsies – 'a dozen different nationalities' that 'used to fill its streets' and markets.
26. Lichtblau and John, op. cit., p. 52.
27. See Carl E. Schorske, 'Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Trio', in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), pp. 116-180.
28. For an account of Herzl's conversion and of the changing atmosphere in Austrian politics with regard to the Jewish community, see Schorske, *ibid.*
29. Lichtblau and John, op. cit., p. 53.
30. See Rothschild, op. cit., pp. 288-297 and Livezeanu, op. cit., pp. 87, 78. The Jewish community view is expressed in Dr Manfred Reifer, 'History of the Jews in Bukowina (1919-1944)', in Gold, op. cit., volume 2, pp. 27ff.
31. *The Times*, 15 March 1920.
32. Peter Kenez, 'Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War', in John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 293.
33. Klier and Lambroza, *ibid.*, p. 292.
34. Kenez, op. cit., pp. 299-302.
35. Bolshevik official opposition to antisemitism did not imply support for Jewish religious or cultural observance which contradicted their desire to create a New Soviet Man free from such capitalist power constructs.
36. The involvement of nationalist and anarchist troops in the pogroms is contested and indiscipline rather than tolerance by senior officers is given as the reason for atrocities that did occur. Petliura and Makhno both issued proclamations condemning attacks on Jewish communities.
37. For the pogroms in Ukraine during the Civil War, in addition to Klier and Lambroza, see W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory – A History of the*

- Russian Civil War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp 317ff; and Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), pp. 670-679. According to Oleg Budnitskii, in 'Jews, Pogroms and the White Movement', *Kritika*, 2 (4), 1-23, Fall 2001, the number of deaths was between 50,000 and 200,000, with tens of thousands more maimed, raped and robbed. Jewish analyses of the pogroms can be found at http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Russian_Civil_War_pogroms.htm and <http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/pogrom.htm>.
38. Budnitskii, *ibid*.
 39. *The Times*, 17 September 1923.
 40. The pogroms associated with the Russian Civil War were reported in the Australian press at the time, though in only limited detail. See for example, the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 13 October 1919, the *Hobart Mercury*, 29 March 1920 and the *Melbourne Argus*, 9 July 1921.
 41. *American Jewish Year Book* – Events in Romania in 5861 (1920-21), pp. 203-205.
 42. Reifer, *op. cit.* Also Dr Chaim Ehrlich, 'About the Characteristics of the Zionist Movement in Bukovina Between the Two World Wars (Sidelights)', in Gold, *op. cit.*, volume 2, pp. 133ff.
 43. Reifer, *ibid*.
 44. *Times*, 26 July 1922.
 45. Statement in Parliament by the British Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, reported in *The Times*, 28 October 1920. For the Balfour Declaration see R J Q Adams, *Balfour: The Last Grandee* (London: John Murray, 2007), pp.331-335; for an example of the accusations that the administration was 'anti-Zionist', see *The Times*, 27 April 1920, p. 17.
 46. See the 1922 British White Paper on Palestine – widely available, for example on avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/mideast.asp. For an Australian dimension to international pressure to accommodate Jews from eastern Europe in Palestine, see reports on the visit of Israel Cohen, 'Special envoy to Australasia from the Zionist Organization in London', in *The Argus* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 1920.
 47. See, for example, statements in the *Times*, 12 May 1920, 2 April 1921 and 8 May 1924.
 48. *American Jewish Year Book* 5679 (1918 to 1919), entry for 28 March 1919.
 49. Ehrlich, in Gold, *op. cit.*, pp. 133ff.
 50. See the website of the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael – Jewish National Fund at <http://www.kkl.org.il>.
 51. Permission to reproduce the entry in the *Golden Book* was kindly provided by the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael in Jerusalem, through the auspices of the Jewish National Fund of Australia.
 52. See Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 321
 53. See the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1938, for an account of an address by Dame Mary to the Australasian Conference of Jewish Women in which she recalled 'the disgust of other children when I played with Jews at school'.
 54. New South Wales State Records, Education Department, Teachers' Roll, volume 5, page 774.
 55. *The West Australian*, 29 May 1897.
 56. See, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February 1900 (which

refers only to 'a Western Australian correspondent') and R.L. Wallace, *The Australians at the Boer War* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976), pp. 108-09 which does not mention Cameron at all; there may have been some confusion as another of the visitors to the grave was a Tasmanian officer also named Cameron.

57. See R.P. Davis, 'Dwyer-Grey, Edmund John Chisholm (1870-1945)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1981), Volume 8, pp 390-391, which states that after 1898 Dwyer-Grey had 'severed his direct connexion with Ireland' and had settled in Tasmania.
58. Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, email 11 March 2010.
59. In relation to Cameron's later career, it is interesting to note that his next posting was to Detroit, in the USA, where Dame Mary states he became friends with Henry Ford. This was at a time when Ford was involved in a highly publicised court case deriving from his antisemitism (see David L. Lewis, *The Public Image of Henry Ford. An American Folk hero and His Company* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976, pp 138-147). Cameron's subsequent, and last, posting was to Danzig, just when the National Socialists were gaining political strength and, ultimately, in 1933, political power.