



Volume XXII 2019

ISSUE no.1

MBNA Publishing House Constanta 2019



Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy

SBNA PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

A foreign office inspection report at british consulate in Cernauti in 1940

To cite this article: [M. Zidaru](#), *Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy*, Vol. XXII 2019, pg. 128-133.

Available online at www.anmb.ro

ISSN: 2392-8956; ISSN-L: 1454-864X

doi: 10.21279/1454-864X-19-I1-017

SBNA© 2019. This work is licensed under the CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 License

A Foreign Office inspection report at British Consulate in Cernauti in 1940

Associated Professor Phd Zidaru Marian¹

Abstract. In April 1940 a British inspector arrive in Cernauti to inspect the activity of the British consulate in this city. During the inspection activity he checked the stage of the building and equipment, the security of the consulate, accounts, Consulate's correspondence, the passports and visas issued by the consulate, the situation of British community in Cernauti, the activity of the British Council in Cernauti. The aim of this article is to present how control took place and what were the conclusions of this inspection.

Key words: British Consulate, Cernauti, inspector, passports, security.

Bukhovina around 1940 year

Between 1918 and 1940 the city of Cernăuți was part of the Kingdom of Romania. In the interwar period, despite the existence of some malfunctions in the report of the minority-authorities, the Romanian state, through its institutions and through the adopted legislative measures, sought to grant as much freedom of action and tolerance to ethnic minorities, avoiding, as much as possible, the transformation of Romania into a subject of controversy on the external level.

That things have been so is proved by the existence and operation in Chernivtsi of a British consulate.[1] After the start of World War II, the British Consul in Chernivtsi submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Food in London to reduce the German influence in Bukovina. Even though the London Ministry of Food did not seem too enthusiastic about the proposal from LFL Pyman, the British Consul in Cernauti it is worth pointing out that there was a plan coming from the British Legation in Bucharest through they wanted eliminating the German influence in Romania in the respective agricultural field soybean cultivation.

According to the aforementioned consul, it was proposed that before the spring of 1941, a British company similar to that established by the Germans in Bucovina would be operational. It was not intended to add another area to the existing one already in this province, of almost 1,000 hectares, but to persuade local growers to abandon the preliminary contracts concluded with "Soy SAR" so that they could then sign contracts for the benefit of Great Britain. Since most of the Bukovinian soybean cultivators were Jews and the rest were Romanians and Ukrainians, the proposal seemed viable, but the lack of willingness to involve the government in London and, in particular, the evolution of the international situation made all these plans to remain only at the stage projects.[2] In April 1940, the British Consulate in Cernauti received the visit of an inspector from the Foreign Office. At the end of the visit, the inspector drew up a report which we present in the following:

Performing the inspection

Premises. The British consulate was very well placed at 51 Street Iancu Flondor, on the ground floor of a small block of flats. It had three good rooms, one used by consul, one by Pro-consul, while in the third the office boy, placed behind the fine counter, interprets the

¹ **Romanian Society of Historical Science,**

needs of the visiting public. There are minor rooms as the back which was occupied by a refugee Pole, who was in Mrs Pyman's private service with his family. Inspectors have instructed Mr Pyman[3] to send a translation of his lease, or that gist of it, to the Foreign Office.

Equipment. The office has been well furnished, at relatively small cost, from local resources. Mr Pyman was preparing a list of the furniture which he will submit through his superintending officer. Among the articles supplied from the United Kingdom were 4-drawer vertical steel filing cabinets. One would have sufficed at this post. There were also three 4-drawer card index cabinets, of which one was lent by Galatz, and according to the correspondence, not required there. It is certainly not required at Cernauti.

The post possesses a new Imperial typewriter 50 no.225611 with a 15" carriage. Mr. Pyman uses a private machine in addition, but the official allowance of one machine was adequate. His Majesty's Consul has purchased on authority given by the Legation, a Philips wireless receiver. He has had it installed in his office and uses it for receiving news from England. The cost have been charged to the Ministry of information.

His Majesty's consul possessed in addition to his, private car, a Chevrolet car acquired with the authority of the Legation from Polish refugees. It has been put in good running order and provided Mr Pymen can obtain with the assistance of his Majesty's Legation papers to protect it against requisition by the military, it would served with his own private car for the evacuation of the consular staff and archives in case the Russians cross the frontier, no more than twenty miles away at the nearest point.

Security. His majesty's consul has done well to install reliable family in the unused rooms of the consular premises. The combination safe, a Samuel Whitere 2' 10"x1'10" and 1'8" inside, fitted with a Sargent Greenleaf Combination Lock, was received only prior the Inspector visit. His Majesty's Consul has not had a pedestal and the inspector have suggested that he had do so, wood and labor being cheap. The combination is known to consul and pro-consul and was changed regularly.

The inspector checked the confidential book and found them correct according to the list presented to him. Inspector observed that no copy of the instruction regarding Foreign Office ciphers has been supplied so far. Besides the confidential books and files, the safe contained fee stamps and cash, and a stock of blank passports. There is a telephone in the Consul's and the Pro Consul's rooms. Mr Pyman will have his remove on his desk, and will keep it on a side table, inside the box when not in use.

There are several stoves on the premises where secret papers can be quickly destroyed. If destructions become necessary it may have to be done at the very short notice. Inspector suggested that Mr Skelton should sleep on the premises during periods of tension, where he could receive instructions either from his Majesty's Legation or from Mr. Pyman by telephone.

Accounts. Inspector checked the fee stamps and found them correct. The fee taking so far was:

December quarter 1939 28,2 pounds Od.

March quarter 1940 23,19 Od.

The rate of collection was prescribed by circular from His Majesty's General Consul at Galatz.

Mr. Pymen service in Persia gave him but scant opportunity to learn to how to presents the consular accounts. When he was sent to open this post, moreover, his first months were passed amid the turmoil which followed on the invasion of Poland and he was therefore

unable to give much time to routine matters. Bearing these facts mind, Inspector didn't consider that Mr. Pyman did badly in the matters of accounts and he found nothing which could not have been quietly rectified by semiofficial correspondence with the superintending post. Inspector preferred however to reserve his comments on the communications about accounts addressed to His Majesty's Consul General at Galatz.

In the meantime Mr. Pyman has received necessary instructions and with the experience of two quarters behind him, was acquiring knowledge of account keeping. He may not even become an expert accountant, but Inspector was confident but he will become sufficiently competent for consular purposes.

Neither the clerk nor the messenger has been bonded. There appears to be likelihood that the messenger will handle money, while that time Mr. Skelton holds no more than a very sum as petty cash.

1. **Passports and visas.** No passport had been issued up to date, and there have been only two renewals and one endorsement. Visas applications were referred to the passport control officer at Bucharest.

Correspondence. Between January 1st and April 20th, 378 telegrams were sent and 324 received. The files were kept in accordance with the system adopted at Galatz and described in Galatz dispatch no. 74 of December 7th 1938 to the Foreign Office. The Office was open to the public from 10 to 1, and 3 to 5 in the winter, but the staff generally worked longer hours. The summer hours were 8 to 1.

The British community consisted of five families, including the consular personnel and the teacher appointed by the British Council. No entries have been made in the new Births and Deaths registers[7].

Staff. Inspector attached particularly Mr. Skelton who was formerly employed by the Danube Commission; he speaks the language and had a good knowledge of the country as a whole, but was not yet an expert of Cernauti and his problem. He was nevertheless in all the circumstances a good choice for his post, there being no suitable candidate available locally, and he will no doubt acquire local contacts and a greater knowledge of local problems in time. He was a man of good education painstaking and loyal, but unfortunately burdened with a sickly wife.

Mr. Skelton's salary of 35,000 lei a month is shirking in purchasing power as prices rise and His Majesty's Consul may have to apply for an increase on cost of living grounds. Inspector trusts that, if Mr. Skelton's salary does come under review, the conditions under which he has to live and work may be remembered are continuously under the strain of knowing that they may have to abandon their homes and flee at short notice. The messenger comes of a local family of British nationality. He speaks English adequately well.

Ministry of Information. His Majesty's Consul has explored the possibilities of presenting the British viewpoint. He asked the Press Attaché at His Majesty's Legation for films which could be shown locally and received a reply dated 13th December which was encouraging, but since then has heard nothing. On April 5th he repeated to the Press Attaché as urgent the request of a local newspaper for material for an article about England, to appear in the Easter number. At the time of my visit, no reply had arrived. On March 13th he reported having received from his French colleague a copy of the "Bulletin Britannique de l'Information" and asked for 200 copies, but these had not been received up to the time of Inspector's visit, nor did Mr. Pyman know whether the bulletin was still being issued. The Press Attaché was extremely busy, Inspector understands, no doubt with matters more important than publicity in Cernauti; Inspector cites these instances merely to show on what grounds Mr. Pyman feels in

Cernauti is outside the orbit of active British press work. The Germans issue twice weekly a news summary in Romanian. The French issued one daily in French .

He receives too many photographs, however, and this which cannot be used. He had drawn attention to this waste.

Inspector found in the files a letter from the Ministry of Information, Foreign Division, marked F.P/3074 and date March 26th, 1940, asking for first hand information, under eleven heads, regarding conditions in occupied Polish territory. His Majesty's Consul referred the request to His Majesty's Legation and the Ministry was informed by a Chancery letter that the required information had already been furnished to the Foreign Office. Inspector suggested that such requests for information should be sent to consular officers through the Foreign Office. Apart from the question of the propriety of giving information of a political character to any other department than the Foreign Office, compliance with the request would have involved considerable labor.

The British Council. The British Council has sent a teacher to Cernauti, and financed the formation of an Anglo-Romanian Society. Mr. Pyman and his wife shared actively in the work, which appears to be well received in the town.

The Council has made an allowance of £19 a quarter for the upkeep of the club rooms, etc. His Majesty's Consul does not wish to receive payment in sterling direct, and would prefer, if it could be arranged, that he should received lei from His Majesty's Legation.

Economic Warfare. No more than 18 certificates of origin and 13 undertakings hand been dealt with up to the time of Inspector's visit. Due care is taken in the scrutiny of the cases, and measures have been adopted by the Commercial Secretary to "follow up". Arrangements for collecting war trade intelligence have not been neglected.

Political reporting. The importance of the post at Cernauti is mainly political. Mr. Pyman does his best to interpret opinion in the various groups of which the population is composed – the ruling Romanians, the Ukrainians, the Jews, the minority Germans and Poles,- and he understand that His Majesty's Minister finds his reports useful. He has a few friends and acquaintances who put to him their several viewpoints and no doubt both he and Mr. Skelton will acquire further sources of information as time passes. Mr. Pyman had training in political observation while in Persia, and was happy in the work of his present post. His wife gives him good support. Neither of them, I am glad to say, shows any sign of nervousness, despite recurrent periods of alarm when rumors suggestive of Russian invasion sweep this town.

His Majesty's Consul, like all officers at outlying posts, was concerned lest he lose touch with the Legation view of the local situation, and asked Inspector whether he could support a request that he be given copies of political dispatches submitted to the Secretary of the State by His Majesty's Minister, following the practice in Persia. Such as distribution would normally be desirable, Inspector thought, but in view of the position of Cernauti, and the difficulty in securing safe means of communication, Inspector hesitated to support the request at that moment. Whether or not it can be allowed, Inspector suggested that Mr. Pyman should be encouraged to pay an official visit of two or three days in Bucharest once a quarter, when conditions at his post permit.

There were three career consular officers at Cernauti, the British, the German, and the Polish. There were honorary Dutch, French, Swedish and Swiss officers. His Majesty's Consul finds his Polish colleague well informed and useful and is able to use the weekly Polish bag for other than strictly secret communications to His Majesty's Legation. He cooperates so far as possible with his French colleague, who was a local business man.

Inspector arrived at Cernauti by train from Bucharest on the morning of April 20th and left by the night train for Bucharest on April 21st. Inspector would have gone from Cernauti to Cluj direct had it been reasonably convenient to do so, but he found that the journey would be a difficult one. Inspector took this opportunity state that the arrangement whereby His Majesty's Consul was to reside at Cernauti, and make occasional visits to Cluj was not a practical one. In summer the journey by car would be a pleasant adventure, but between October and mid-April this last winter it would have been risky to attempt to go by car. The cross country journey by train was tedious and uncomfortable and takes some thirteen hours in the most favorable circumstances.[4].

The departure of the British consulate

The political events of the summer of 1940 led to population displacement, the province losing 60% of the population registered in 1930. The population of the territory remaining in the Romanian state was predominantly Romanian, but the area remained a multiethnic and multiconfessional[5].

Romania decided to give up Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, on June 28, 1940 the Soviets occupy the capital of Bucovina, Cernauti, and cause serious incidents to Herta - which did not seem to be given to them; killed a captain, several civilians, and went 11 km further to the demarcation line they claimed [6].

Occupation units moved to the evacuated territory much faster than they had anticipated. On 29-30 June they were on the Prut and opened fire on Romanian troops, disarmed the military, took prisoners, captured military material; on the other hand, the Herta region, which was not part of Bessarabia or Bukovina, was occupied in the advance of the Old Kingdom. With all the protests of the Romanian party, the situation remained unchanged[7].

With the Soviet occupation of Cernauti, the British consulate in Cernauti ceased its activity, and diplomats and their families were evacuated to Romania.

References

- [1] Victoria Camelia Cotos, *Populația Bucovinei în perioada interbelică*, Iași, Casa Editorială „Demiurg”, 2009, 274 p. + 17 hărți, grafice, tabele (Rodica Iațencu), p. 83
- [2] Sorin Arhire, *Relații economice româno-britanice 1939-1940 (II)*, https://www.cclbsebes.ro/docs/Sebus_8_2016/16_S_Arhire.pdf
- [3] Lancelot Frank Lee Pyman was born on August 8, 1910 and studied at Dover College and King's College, Cambridge. After taking an examination, on November 1, 1933, he became a trainee in the Consulate of the Levant. From May 11, 1936, he was deputy to Bushire, Persia, today Iran, and then, in 1937, for a few months, the interim consul at Kermanshah. Since January 7, 1937, he has served as Deputy Consul in Tehran, and is also ranked as the third secretary in the diplomatic service. Also in 1937 he was the interim consul in Tabriz, and in June 1938 he was appointed assistant secretary in Tehran. Between May 16 and June 12, 1939 he was the interim general consul in Galați, so that on August 8, 1939, he was appointed consul in Cernăuți. (The Foreign Office List 1940, p. 393)
- [4] Pro Kew Gardens. FO 360/2557, f. 273/1-7.

- [5] Victoria Camelia Cotos, *op. Cit* 83
- [6] N. Ciachir, *Basarabia sub stapanire tarista (1812 - 1917)*, Bucuresti, 1992, p. 102
- [7] Aurelian Lavric, *Ținutul Herța: Cauzele ocupației sovietice din 28 iunie 1940*, în *Glasul Bucovinei* , 2012, No. 3–4 Year. XIX. No. 75–76 , pp. 27-36.