

# Sir, help me save family from Nazis

ALAMY; HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

An appeal to Times readers by a doughty duchess helped a Vienna bookseller escape Hitler's clutches, writes **Mark Bridge**

It was the original crowdfunding campaign. An indefatigable dowager duchess appealed to *Times* readers to rescue a family from Nazi-ruled Austria.

The story, which has been researched by a relative of one of the escapers, began only weeks after the Anschluss — the annexation of Austria by Germany in March 1938.

Lady Millicent Hawes, the widow of the 4th Duke of Sutherland, arrived in Vienna to see her teenage granddaughter who was at school near by. Aged 70, she stayed at the stately Hotel Imperial and, feeling restless on her first evening, went to the hotel's bookshop. There she found only "shelves and shelves" of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

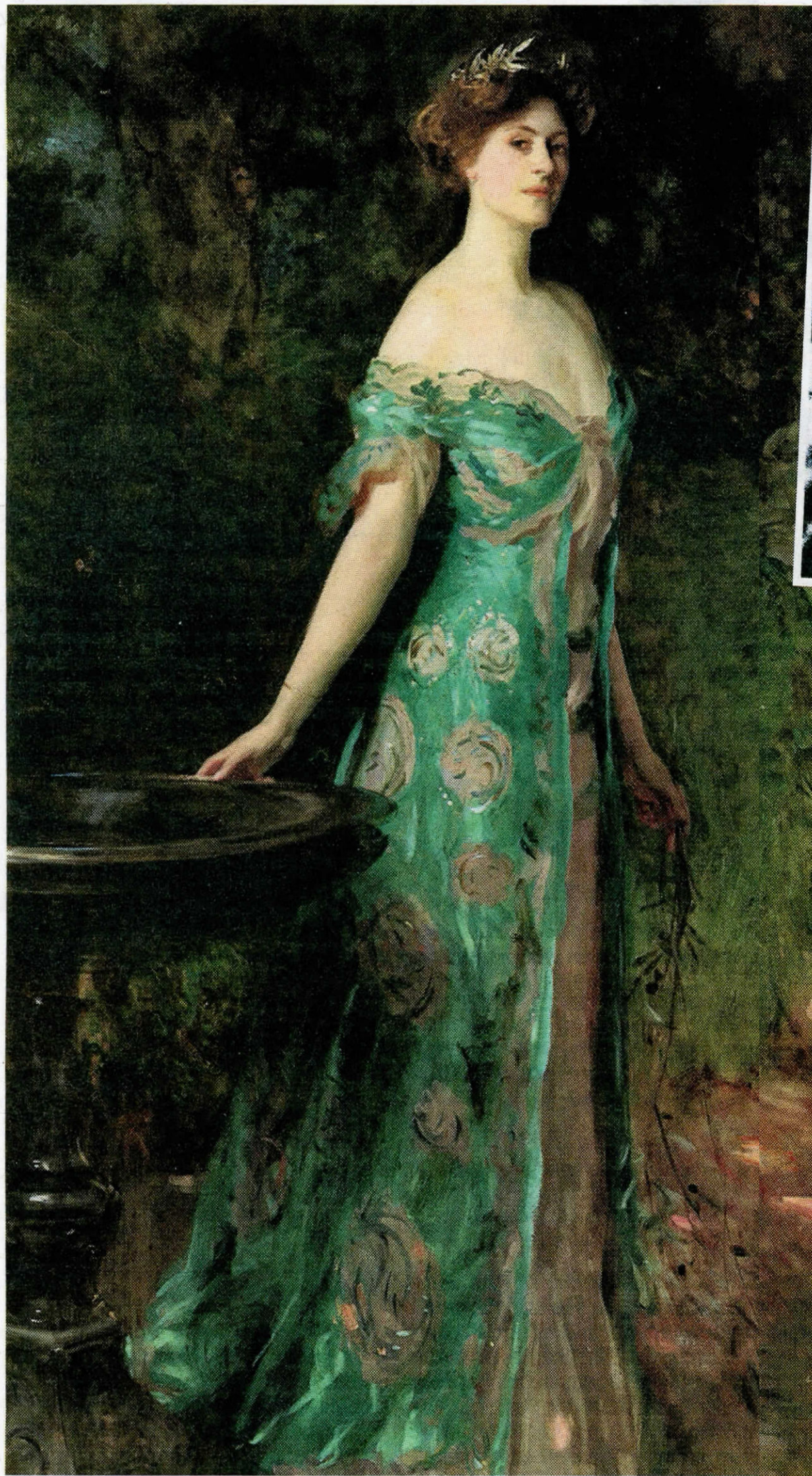
The shopkeeper, a solidly built man in his forties wearing large spectacles, appeared "very distraught", she recalled in a 1943 article in *Homes & Gardens* magazine. She bought the evening paper and a days-old copy of *The Times*.

When she returned the next day, the proprietor, Karl Buchberger, told her: "Madam, terrible things are happening in Austria. We haven't one book to sell but this *verdammtes* book... They took away all my other books. They burn them... You have a kind face," he added. "May I tell you of my trouble?"

Naturally, Lady Sutherland agreed. As a young society beauty — born at Dysart House, by Kirkcaldy, Fife, the eldest daughter of the Conservative politician Robert St Clair-Erskine, 4th Earl of Rosslyn — she had been derided as "Meddlesome Millie" by the tabloid press for her reforming work and desire to help others.

Mr Buchberger told her of the danger his family faced because of the Jewish origin of his wife, Mitzi. Although the couple and their 18-year-old daughter, Herta, were Catholics, Mrs Buchberger was classified as Jewish under the Nuremberg racial laws. Later the duchess returned to the hotel and barged through a line of stormtroopers to find "foolish schoolgirls" in the lobby awaiting the arrival of Joseph Goebbels. As he entered, she noticed Mr Buchberger discreetly turning his back.

Before leaving Vienna for her home in France the duchess promised him that helping his family emigrate to North America would be her "preoccupation". Sure enough, she began a battle with red tape. "I have all the necessary



Millicent Hawes told Karl Buchberger she would save him after the annexation of Austria by Hitler, pictured in Vienna with Hermann Goering. Her letter led to his escape with his wife and daughter, Herta, below left with husband, Jack Bryan

## EMIGRANTS TO CANADA

### TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—You were good enough six months ago or more to publish a letter of mine appealing for refugees.

So much has been written about them since, so much has happened, but may I thank those who added to my own money and enabled me with £400 to send a little group, weeping with gratitude, to Canada? It has been dreadfully difficult to obtain visas and permits, but Scottish tenacity ever succeeds does it not?

Many who sent small sums—and they were really the small sums that made the large one—were strangers to me.

May God bless them and forgive the tears of gratitude with which we all parted at a Paris station on April 8.

Yours faithfully,

MILLICENT SUTHERLAND.

Froidefontaine, Avrillé, Maine et Loire.



funds," the duchess remembered lying to one French official.

Soon afterwards a letter she sent to *The Times* was published that would make the funds a reality. She had appealed successfully to readers 20 years before to help a Red Cross hospital in France during the First World War.

Cheques duly arrived and the Buchbergers were able to leave Austria and sail from Cherbourg to Canada before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The duchess wrote to *The Times* in April 1939 to thank readers for the £400. She said: "It has been dreadfully difficult to obtain visas and permits, but Scottish tenacity ever succeeds does it not?"

Herta's daughter-in-law Rose Zgodzinski, a graphic designer in Canada who has researched the escape, said: "They moved to Toronto where Karl was interested in setting up a bookshop again. Herta married a flight-lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The duchess was able to leave [occupied] Europe and make her way to New York... By the spring of 1941, Mr Buchberger had established his own bookshop that he called the Old Vienna Bookshop and the duchess went to visit the Buchbergers in Toronto."

Mr Buchberger died of a heart attack in 1943, aged 49. The duchess died in France in 1955, aged 88. Tributes in this newspaper described her as "indefatigable", with "inborn moral courage".