

## Britain's secret mission to expose Scientology leader as 'fraud'

British diplomats compiled evidence 30 years ago that the founder of Scientology, L Ron Hubbard, was a "fraud", according to National Archive papers.

By Alastair Jamieson

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Whitehall officials discovered the science-fiction writer, who invented a religion now followed by celebrities such as Tom Cruise, awarded himself a PhD from a sham college he had acquired in California.

The information was gathered in secret by workers at the British consulate in Los Angeles on behalf of the government, which feared a libel action following its 1968 decision to ban followers from entering Britain to visit the sect's headquarters in East Grinstead, West Sussex.



L. Ron Hubbard, founder of the Church of Scientology, uses his Hubbard Electrometer to determine whether tomatoes experience pain, 1968. Photo: HULTON ARCHIVE

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The documents show Britain was not alone in probing Scientology. The dossier of evidence, gathered during the 1970s, included the extraordinary claim by an American official that the sect had sent bogus doctors to hypnotise a legal investigator and declare him 'mentally ill' to thwart his inquiries into their activities.

The Department of Health files, many of which were classified until 2019, have been released by the National Archive following a Freedom of Information request by *The Times*.

They include a signed statement by former senior Scientologist, John McMaster, who said Hubbard and others faked 'qualifications' in Dianetics, the spiritual 'science' behind Scientology.

He said: "I understand it is asserted that L Ron Hubbard was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Sequoia University on February 10, 1953, in recognition of his outstanding work in the fields of Dianetics and Scientology and that the said degree was recorded with the Department of Education of the State of California.

"The position is L Ron Hubbard (and others) acquired premises somewhere in Los Angeles which they had registered as a university called Sequoia and immediately awarded each other doctorates."

The inquiries were initiated by Whitehall officials who sent an urgent telegram from London to the British consulate in LA.

A reply on April 26, 1977 said: "After exhaustive enquiries we have now tracked down organisation named which was closed down by state authorities in 1971 and all documents impounded. The facts are that it neither has nor ever had approval and its status is not recognised in California ... It is a 'will of the wisp' organisation which has no premises and does not really exist. It has not and never had any authority whatsoever to issue diplomas or degrees and the dean is sought by the authorities 'for questioning'."

The archives also show that American officials were investigating the origins of Hubbard's qualifications. A letter from the California bureau of school approvals about the Sequoia university states: "This institution has never been approved or recognised by this office. Repeated attempts have been made to obtain compliance with the legal requirements. None of these attempts have proved successful."

A further telegram of evidence, dated May 18, 1977 and written by Louis Sherbourne, of the British Consulate-General in Los Angeles, said: "We

have now come up against the usual brick wall of missing files and silence, each and every person and organisation treading very warily for fear of a libel or slander action."

Mr Sherbourne added: "United States Internal Revenue Services tried hard to obtain firmer evidence but appear to have failed. A recent attempt to resurrect the enquiry resulted in all the papers from 1939 to 1963 being sent to Sacramento to the office of the State Attorney General.

"By 'an amazing coincidence' the Deputy Attorney General dealing with them was taken ill and after seeing some 'doctors' was retired 'due to his mental health'. My very incensed informant in the California Department of Education is convinced that the 'doctors' were scientologists who hypnotised him into mental ill-health and he feels very bitter but can do nothing about it."

A spokeswoman for the Church of Scientology told *The Times* that the suggestion Scientologists had hypnotised a deputy attorney general was "simply reflective of how astronomically paranoid they were".

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