



Scientologists deny misleading council on 'overcrowding'

Cult prosecuted over safety of commune

THE Church of Scientology, one of Britain's largest cults, is being prosecuted by a local authority for failing to ensure one of its largest communes is safe for human habitation. The *Independent* has been leaked documents from the church headquarters that show it may have misled safety inspectors over the number of adults and children living in the commune.

The church, founded by L Ron Hubbard, an American science fiction writer, after the Second World War, has its European headquarters in East Grinstead, West Sussex. It owns a number of large mansions around the town, many more than 100 years old. One communal house burnt down two years ago and since then Mid-Sussex District Council has made regular inspections of cult properties.

The cult has persistently denied overcrowding in any of these communes and says they are fit for human habitation. It has, however, been confirmed that environmental health officers from Mid-Sussex are prosecuting the cult for failing to keep Stonelands, one of its largest communes, safe.

Susan Barton, chief environmental health officer, said the cult had ignored an improvement notice issued last year that called for a number of changes, including better fire

TIM KELSEY
and MICHAEL RICKS

safety. She confirmed the council was taking the church to court over fire regulations. The first hearing is expected next month.

A spokesman for the church said the property had passed previous fire inspections but conceded that "the fire standards can be upgraded; we are in the process of making improvements."

Ms Barton also confirmed that cult officials had led her during a recent inspection to believe that only about 50 people lived permanently in the main house at Stonelands. According to a document in the possession of the *Independent*, the total is about 130. The document is a copy of an internal inspection of the premises by cult members on 18 September. In all, there are 190 people listed as living in the main house and in various outhouses, including a boathouse.

Among these are at least 24 children who live in dormitories separate to their parents. The cult official who inspected these rooms noted: "Smell of wet beds and bleach ... smell of wet beds needs to be handled."

Ms Barton, who has asked for a copy of this document, said: "If I've

been misled over the number of people living in the house, obviously this is a matter for considerable concern."

The church said last night it had not misled the local authority. A spokesman said: "Maybe a staff member was asked and he said 50 people or something — it might have been said offhandedly." He said the authorities knew more people lived there.

Mr Hubbard's basic idea was that through a series of "therapies", an individual could achieve peace of mind and eventually immortality.

Two former cult members, who asked not to be identified, lived for several years in the commune. Both were senior officers in the cult, members of the organisation that administers it.

One said that cult children at Stonelands were encouraged to participate in Scientology. He said his own daughters were encouraged to perform "Training Routine 0" in which two people stare at each other for prolonged periods of time without moving. They also participate in the "ethics" system of Scientology, which is another word for discipline. This involves, for instance, informing on friends and parents for having "bad thoughts" which could include saying something critical of Mr Hubbard.

NATION

Petition bares Scientology assets

Bid for tax-exempt status shows church worth nearly \$400 million

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Church of Scientology holds assets of nearly \$400 million, including a cruise ship used as a "seagoing religious retreat," according to a detailed portrait of the group's financial network provided to the Internal Revenue Service.

The papers, which fill nine file boxes, were submitted by the church as part of its 39-year effort to gain tax-exempt status. The documents became public after the IRS granted an exemption to more than 20 Scientology organizations on Oct. 1.

The papers offer an unprecedented public view of the huge organization, which includes two publishing houses, a 2,845-acre California ranch used as a school for the children of church staffers and more than 45 buildings on 500 acres in Riverside County, Calif.

Other assets include reinforced vaults designed to preserve the church's teachings in case of earthquake or nuclear attack, the documents said.

The assets reported in the various documents filed with the IRS totaled \$398 million.

The Los Angeles-based church does not keep combined balance sheets but "the combined total, if kept, would be somewhere in the range you list," Scientology spokeswoman Leisa Goodman said in a written response to questions.

The church was founded in 1954 by science

fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, whose best-selling "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health," advocated the use of an "electropsychometer" — a lie detector-like device to purge negative images from people's minds.

The IRS recognized one branch, the Church of Scientology of California, as a tax-exempt religious organization in 1957. But it revoked that status in 1967, questioning, for example, the way the church charged for classes that are part of the religious practice.

None of the IRS letters in the files explained the legal reasoning behind granting tax exemption this year. Some noted, however, that the IRS found no evidence of "inurement," or private enrichment, which is barred under the tax law governing religions and charitable organizations.

IRS spokesman Frank Keith said the agency concluded the church "is operated exclusively for religious and charitable purposes."

According to the documents, most church officials receive modest salaries. David Miscavige, director of the Religious Technology Center and holder of the highest ecclesiastical position in Scientology, was listed as being paid \$62,684 in 1991 and \$34,779 in 1992.

Several Scientologists, however, earned six-figure commissions for raising donations to church entities, including the International Association of Scientologists, according to the filings.

One, identified in the documents as Barry

Klein, was paid \$217,694 in 1989 and \$201,314 in 1990, the records show. Another named in the documents as Ken Pirak made \$407,052 in 1991, and a third identified as Steve Grant earned \$339,978 that year, the records said.

Goodman called those figures "somewhat inaccurate" because "the amount paid to them represents commissions for themselves and all staff employed by them." She said the commissions could be divided among as many as five or 10 staff members.

One branch of the church, the Church of Spiritual Technology, reported spending nearly \$13 million in 1992 to preserve his writings and lectures.

It has designed gas-filled, titanium time capsules to hold Hubbard's teachings, and plans to place 10,500 of the capsules in three vaults, two built to resist earthquakes or nuclear attack, according to the documents.

Hubbard's writings will be preserved on 1.8 million stainless steel plates and his lectures on 187,000 nickel records that could be played back with a stylus as crude as a thorn in the event of some future cataclysm, the documents said.

This division also plans to place large, indestructible obelisks around the world covered with pictographs explaining Scientology "so that even a wandering savage will be able to understand and apply these principles," the documents said.

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Church assets are set at \$400 million

Scientology papers offer first look at group

By Kim I. Mills
Associated Press

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See CHURCH / Page A22

A-22 Wednesday, Dec. 22, 1993

CHURCH

From A1

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The 440-foot cruise ship Freewinds is operated by Scientology's Flag Ship Service Organization as "a safe, distraction-free environment for the ministry of the highest and most confidential Scientology auditing level," FSSO said in its application for tax exemption.

"Auditing" is a technique developed by Hubbard in which adherents are connected to an electropsychometer, which "measures the mental state and change of state in individuals," according to Scientology literature.

Documents valued the ship at \$12.5 million for insurance purposes, and said it can accommodate 300 passengers and a crew of 129. The filing described the Freewinds as having "very limited

recreational facilities — only one small pool, used four or five hours sporadically throughout the day; one volleyball court, used one hour a day, if that; one basketball hoop, which might be used a half-hour each day, and no shuffleboard or tennis courts. . . . Gambling is not permitted and alcohol is not served to either passengers or crew."

Several glossy, four-color travel brochures in the filings promise "a level of service second to none." They show pictures of people lounging at the ship's pool and attending evening events in formal wear.

Several church organizations are operated by members of the "Sea Org," or Scientology religious order. These members "must pledge the next billion years of their existence to the Scientology religion," according to the documents. They receive room, board, child care, medical and dental care and stipends of \$30 to \$50 a week — plus unspecified bonuses for good performance, the documents said.

The church has frequently garnered public attention.

Several of its officials were convicted of obstructing justice in a federal investigation of church activities in the late 1970s. In the mid-1980s, it paid an estimated \$5 million to settle 20 lawsuits by for-

mer church members who alleged they had been harassed, blackmailed and emotionally abused.

In his later writings, Hubbard said that seeds of aberrant behavior were planted in humans 75 million years ago because of an evil tyrant named Xemu. Church leaders have said the media distorted the writings.

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Scientists in court next month

Fire safety charge

THE Church of Scientology is being prosecuted for failing to carry out fire safety improvements to Stonelands, its centuries old property at Selsfield Road, West Hoathly.

Based at Saint Hill, East Grinstead, the organisation will be summoned before Haywards Heath magistrates next month.

In April last year, Susan Barton, Mid Sussex District Council's chief environmental officer visited the building and found it occupied by 135 people and lacking adequate means of fire escape.

An enforcement notice required the cult to carry out safety improvements,

By David Thompson

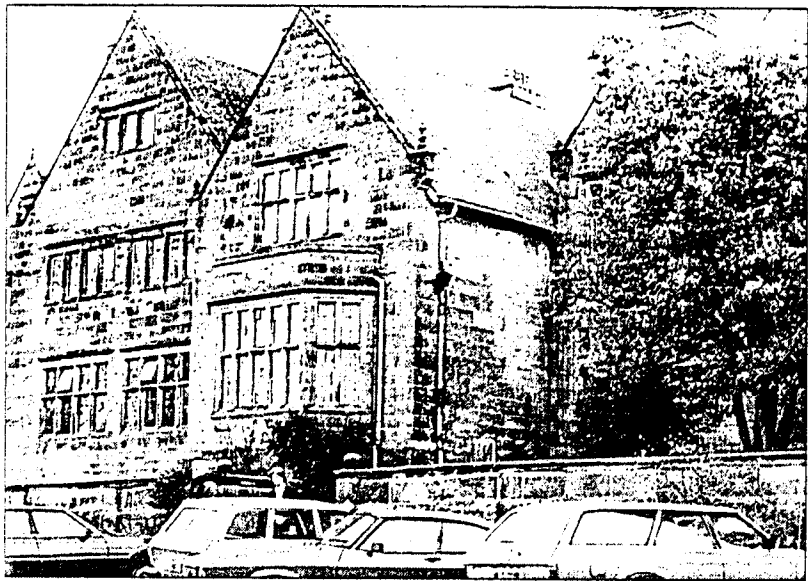
including fitting fire alarms, smoke detectors and fire doors, to start by December 1, 1992 and be completed within six months. But the work was not done and the council is prosecuting.

Stonelands is home to students who work at the Scientology headquarters at Saint Hill, East Grinstead.

Scientology spokesman Peter Mansell told The Courier: "We are at fault. We're not going to say improvements aren't needed."

He said delays were due to the cost and size of the improvements required.

He said the building had passed previous fire inspections, adding: "There's always been more than a hundred people there."



The Scientology hostel at Stonelands, West Hoathly

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