

NEWS FEATURE

The maker of a programme on Scientology says he has been the victim of 'subtle harassment'. TOM UTLEY reports

Detective on trail of TV pair

AN American private detective, hired by attorneys acting for the Church of Scientology, has approached friends and relations of the makers of a British television biography of the Church's founder, visiting home addresses discovered by trickery.

He has then spread allegations that the film-makers may be implicated in an international conspiracy of extortion and money-laundering.

Simon Berthon, the executive producer of the film about L Ron Hubbard, shown in the *Secret Lives* series on Channel 4 last night, condemned the detective's activities yesterday as a "peculiar and subtle form of harassment".

He said the Scientologists' agents had somehow managed to establish which telephone numbers he and the film's producer-director, Jill Robinson, had recently rung on their private lines.

Those numbers had then been rung by a woman claiming to be conducting a survey of television-viewing habits. The woman promised a year's free magazine subscription to those who took part in the survey — thereby

luring the film-makers' addresses. Soon afterwards the detective, Eugene M Ingram, of Los Angeles, arrived on the friends' doorsteps, saying that he was inquiring about Mr Berthon and Ms Robinson in connection with an international conspiracy of extortion and money-laundering.

Mr Berthon said that the allegations appeared to have sprung from a payment of £2,000 that his company had made for access to an archive of material on the Scientologists.

Ms Robinson, 45, said yesterday that about eight of her friends and associates in England, including her parents and her hairdresser, had been visited by Mr Ingram. Four of those had earlier received telephone calls from a woman claiming to be conducting a survey of television-viewing habits.

She said that she and her crew had also been followed by detectives in the United States, Canada and England, ever since they started making the film last June. "It's a bit spooky," she said. "I just don't see what it is they hope to achieve, except they seek to intimidate me."

Mr Berthon said that when friends began to complain that they had been visited by

12 friends and relations whom he had recently telephoned from home.



L Ron Hubbard, church founder, and film producer Jill Robinson, who said friends and relatives had been telephoned

Picture: ERIC ROBERTS

for his daughter. She said: "Last Friday afternoon a man rang on the doorbell showing me his private investigator's licence and then asked me if I knew someone he was trying to get in touch with."

"He showed me three photographs of a man I had never seen before and said this guy was wanted for some kind of offence to do with getting money fraudulently. I had no idea what it was about. Then he mentioned Simon Berthon's name. Did I know him? I said 'Yes, our children are friends.' I then

had told me a couple of days earlier that she had been rung by someone purporting to do be doing research on our television viewing habits, offering her a year's subscription to her favourite magazine and asking for our address."

Miss Joll said that Mr Ingram had not mentioned the Scientologists.

Another of Mr Berthon's friends who was asked to take part in a telephone survey was Dorothy Byrne, the editor of ITV's *The Big Story*. She said that Mr Ingram had telephoned her at her office at 20.20 Vision, saying

that he was a private detective investigating extortion, and asking for information about Mr Berthon and Ms Robinson.

"I told him that Simon was one of the most highly regarded people in television. I also told him that in Britain we don't really appreciate private detectives hanging around outside people's houses."

"Then on Friday I received a phone call from a woman saying that she was doing a survey of TV viewing habits. I told her I didn't want to answer her questions. She said she represented an orga-

nisation called Clark TV, which makes TV programmes. I thought it was peculiar that they would be doing surveys of viewing habits."

Bernard Clark, chief executive of Clark TV Productions, said yesterday that his company never conducted surveys of that sort. "There is no way we would ever do TV-viewing surveys," he said. "They have made a mistake by using our name."

Another friend of Mr Berthon's who preferred not to be named, said the family au pair had received a telephone call last Thursday

ment made by Mr Berthon and dismissing all allegations against Mr Ingram's conduct as false.

In it, Mr Abelson said that he had hired Mr Ingram to investigate international conspirators who were trying to extort money from Churches of Scientology with help from the media.

Mr Berthon and Ms Robinson had been in touch with some of these people, said Mr Abelson. "Consequently I have retained Mr Ingram, as part of his investigatory duties, to determine whether individuals including Ms Robinson and her producer

Simon Berthon are know-

LEGAL MOVES

THE SCIENTOLOGISTS are considering taking legal action against Channel 4 following last night's highly critical programme on the activities of their founder, L Ron Hubbard, writes Victoria Combe, Churches Correspondent.

The movement, which has a following of Hollywood stars including John Travolta and Nicole Kidman, has enlisted the services of the libel solicitor, Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners.

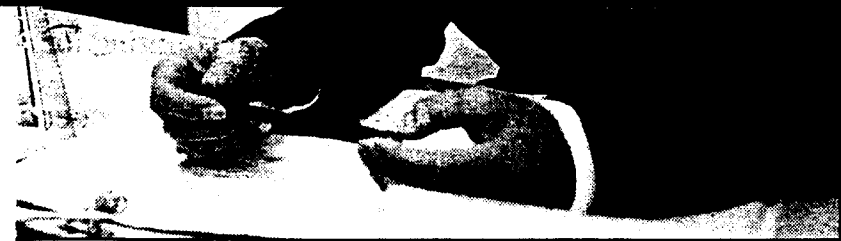
The Scientologists claim that the programme, in the *Secret Lives* series, was "grossly unfair" and amounts to a "character assassination" of L Ron Hubbard.

Their solicitors have written to the Independent Television Commission attacking the methods used in making the documentary and demanding "immediate intervention".

The Scientology movement is now recognised as a church by the United States tax authorities.

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nisation called Clark TV, which makes TV programmes. I thought it was peculiar that they would be doing surveys of viewing habits." Bernard Clark, chief executive of Clark TV Productions, said yesterday that his company never conducted surveys of that sort. "There is no way we would ever do TV-viewing surveys," he said. "They have made a mistake by using our name." Another friend of Mr Berthon's who preferred not to be named, said the family au pair had received a telephone call last Thursday from a woman telling "a cock-and-bull story about a survey". The au pair had been promised a free magazine subscription and had given her address. On Sunday Mr Berthon's friend answered the door to a man who said he was a private detective, trying to find a man who had put money into a laundering account. He showed her a photograph of Mr Berthon getting into his car and asked if she knew him. He then said that Mr Berthon had put the money into the "laundering account" and that this was an offence. The friend said: "I said I was surprised to hear that because he was an upright citizen with a good reputation. He did not mention the Scientologists once. "I thought 'how the hell did he get my number?' Then we worked backwards. "The thing that worries me most is how they can get particulars of the numbers Simon had rung." Asked about these facts this week, the Church of Scientology said: "It sounds very intriguing. It sounds bizarre." Graeme Wilson, public affairs director of the Church in the United Kingdom, said that Mr Ingram had been hired by an American attorney, Elliot J Abelson of Los Angeles, which acted for the Church. He faxed to *The Daily Telegraph* a letter from Mr Abelson to DJ Freeman, Mr Berthon's solicitor, replying to a complaint of harass-

ment made by Mr Berthon and dismissing all allegations against Mr Ingram's conduct as false. In it, Mr Abelson said that he had hired Mr Ingram to investigate international conspirators who were trying to extort money from Churches of Scientology with help from the media. Mr Berthon and Ms Robinson had been in touch with some of these people, said Mr Abelson. "Consequently I have retained Mr Ingram, as part of his investigatory duties, to determine whether individuals including Ms Robinson and her producer Simon Berthon are knowingly acting in furtherance of the intentions of the suspected conspirators."

Mr Abelson said in the letter: "Mr Ingram is pursuing his investigation candidly and openly in direct contrast to Ms Robinson's inquiries in the United States. Any complaints about his activities in this regard from your clients are rejected."

For the Church, Mr Wilson said that in preparing the documentary, Mr Berthon's 3MB Television had made no attempt to contact either the Church of Scientology or Mr Hubbard's authorised biographer. Instead, Ms Robinson had travelled around America interviewing the "worst possible detractors she could dredge up".

Mr Ingram could not be reached last night. In 1984 a British High Court judge attacked the Church of Scientology as "corrupt, sinister and dangerous."

"It is sinister," said Mr Justice Latey, "because it indulges in sinister practices both to its adherents who do not toe the line unquestioningly and to those outside who criticise or oppose it." Mr Hubbard died in 1986.

A Home Office spokesman said that he thought it was not a criminal offence to run a bogus telephone survey in order to discover addresses. "It is deceptive, but I can't see how it could form an offence of deception," he said.

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Why Channel 4 is haunted by Scientology

The sect has hired a private eye to follow the makers of a documentary film who, it claims, are out to destroy it

By Chris Blackhurst

JILL ROBINSON'S passion is horse-riding. As a busy director of television documentaries, she likes to relax by heading out of London to the horse she keeps in the Kent countryside.

A few days ago, her idyll was shattered when two American men turned up at the small, isolated stables. Purporting to be her friends, they asked the stable-owner if she knew where Ms Robinson was. The woman became suspicious and they left. The same day, a card was pushed through Ms Robinson's letterbox. It came from someone called Eugene Ingram, of Ingram Investigations, California, and said he was investigating a case of attempted extortion. Would she call him?

Ms Robinson knows all about Mr Ingram. For weeks this private detective and his colleagues have been keeping watch on her

Her car has been followed, her friends have been approached. Her colleagues have received visits and calls from Mr Ingram at their homes. And all because Ms Robinson is the director of a forthcoming *Secret Lives* programme for Channel 4 about the founding father of Scientology, L Ron Hubbard - a man who died 11 years ago.

Mr Ingram has been hired by the Church of Scientology to investigate the programme and its makers. To that end, Mr Ingram, who regularly works for the Church, has tailed Ms Robinson and her colleagues from 3BM, the production company, across America and, more recently, around the Home Counties.

The aim of Mr Ingram and his client is to prove that the pro-

gramme is the result of a conspiracy by people in America to extort cash from the church. Pay us, so the Scientologists' theory goes, and we will stop going to the media with stories harmful to your religion. Ms Robinson, who has produced negative reports before on Scientology, must, they feel, be more than a reporter going about her job, and be wrapped up in some greater web of intrigue.

Talk to the church and it becomes obvious that its senior members believe the plot ranges far and wide. Channel 4, they suspect, may also be involved. Senior church officials have visited Channel 4's offices, demanding to meet Michael Jackson, the station controller. Mr Jackson and his staff have been

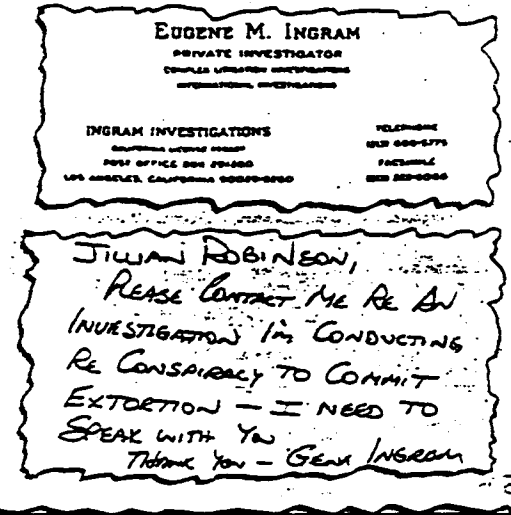
deluged with phone calls and letters from hundreds of members, including John Travolta, the actor, imploring them to stop persecuting the church. Several of the calls and letters make reference to Germany where the authorities are attempting to suppress Scientology.

When the Channel 4 programme appears, on 19 November, the howls of rage - and the church's deepening sense of paranoia - will only intensify.

FORRY ACKERMAN knew it was time to quit Scientology when Nibbs Hubbard remembered what it was like to be a clam on a beach. According to the teaching of Nibbs's father, L Ron, we are all inhabited by immortal souls, or thetans in Scientology terminology. We die, but our thetans live on. As a result, claimed L Ron, it is possi-



Dogged pursuit: the Scientologists' private eye, Eugene Ingram (left), who is following Jill Robinson, and the message he left



here, are there past lives, are there future lives?"

The dead L Ron was absorbing this information like a sponge when a voice said: "He is not ready," and he returned to life. "I don't know how you die and the next minute you're bounding off an operating table," says Mr Ackerman.

The fruit of this fantastic encounter was *Excalibur* or the *Dark Sword*, the most secret text of Scientology. Hubbard said he rushed off and committed the beyond-the-grave "experience" to paper. Unfortunately, says Mr Ackerman, it was not true: Hubbard never died, as he claimed. *Excalibur* was based on a dream he had when under the influence of laughing gas while having two teeth removed.

Tellingly, many of the blows to Hubbard are delivered on camera by people who knew the man. Hubbard said that while serving at sea in the Second World War he had been blinded and crippled. But inspired by the same insights he'd had while "dead" on the operating table, he had been able to cure himself. By 1948, said Hubbard, he was able to pass a 100 per cent combat physical. Not so. His war record carries no mention of him being wounded in action. Instead, he was invalidated out because of a stomach ulcer. As for blindness, the nearest he came was conjunctivitis and short-sightedness. And so it goes on.

The programme is not all

hotted up. By some means, someone had obtained her shooting schedule: everywhere the film crew went, there were cars tailing them. The surveillance was coupled with calls in the middle of the night to the rooms of the 3BM crew.

On one occasion, in Denver, Ms Robinson and her team took a wrong turning and ended up in an industrial wasteland. The car behind them also took the wrong turning and ended up in the same desolate patch.

In San Francisco, her cameraman challenged the driver of a car watching them filming. He hid his face and sped off. In Florida, she and her crew went to a mall to do some shopping. They stopped a Volvo and asked the driver why he was following them. He said he was from New York and there were three of them on the job, getting paid to follow her around.

Back in England, Ms Robinson's fears intensified. While she was editing the film, her neighbour in Kent spotted a man loitering outside her house and called the police. He had not committed any offence and they let him go. His reason for being there was unconvincing. He did, however, tell police he was a Scientologist.

In all, Ms Robinson, Mr Berthon, the associate producer, the cameraman, the sound recordist, the picture editor, the assistant cameraman, even the composer of the music, have had



Hubbard: man of visions

tained Mr Ingram on behalf of the Church of Scientology to investigate a conspiracy to extort money from the church. "Mr Ingram searches for the facts and does it lawfully," said Mr Ackerson. "He will continue to do it and will continue to get to the facts."

Mike Kinder is the director of Special Affairs for the Church of Scientology International. He said that behind Ms Robinson's sources "were repeated threats against the church and demands for payments of tens of millions of dollars". Channel 4, alleged Mr Kinder, had missed the real Hubbard story - of his "solutions to the social ills of drugs, illiteracy and crime" and the "more than 40 million who have been touched by his non-religious moral code; and the many millions who hold his work to be the cornerstone of their lives."

Documentary evidence about Hubbard, said Mr Kinder, had been provided to 3BM and Channel 4. It was not true, he maintained, that the church had refused to co-operate - quite the contrary. The programme-makers had ignored the church's offers of access.

Alan Haying, the programme's commissioning editor, said that when the church did suggest co-operation, it wanted to share editorial control, something that was out of the question. He condemned the investigation into the programme as "deplorable".

By the time it is shown, the Scientologists will be in full cry - but L Ron will not be with them. On the programme, Robert Vaughn Young, Hubbard's former personal press officer, recalls how "dying suddenly made him very mortal, and the last thing we could have is for Hubbard to be mortal. So a story had to be designed, and the story is that he went off to research the next level. And what's amazing is how the Scientologists bought this - without any questioning, they bought it."

Channel 4 has not experienced anything yet.