

Today the 5th of July 1977, Dr. Bird of the London School and I arrived at the Gables, 30 Kingswood Road, Shortlands, Kent, to see Miss Gonin, daughter of Dr. Gonin one-time owner of a Rife microscope. The premises were difficult to identify, as they lay behind a high ramshackle wooden fence with no number on the large double gates, which are in a bad state of disrepair. We arrived by appointment at 11.15 a.m. to find Miss Gonin sitting in a summer house in the garden.

We were with Miss Gonin for about four hours, during which she gave us ample hospitality and told us many interesting things about her family and her home. The residence is a very large building, which was built by Trollope and Colles in 1877, almost 100 years ago. It originally stood in ten acres of ground. Several oak trees were felled while the house was being built, and from them the doors and oak panelling of many of the rooms were made on the spot.

Since then, inroads have been made into the property, which at one time included a goat farm, and Miss Gonin now possesses a mere two acres of what appears to be heavily wooded garden which was originally laid out by the then Director of Kew Gardens. The house is immeasurably complicated inside, and is rather like a country mansion built on about ten levels. As one went in, a flight of steps led to a door simply labelled "Gentlemen". All the rooms downstairs appeared quite massive. Miss Gonin's study appeared to be about twice the size of our Museum's working area. One of the rooms, she explained, was haunted, her father having seen an extraordinary pig-like creature with cloven hooves there, on waking from sleep.

The basement, which appeared to be a wine cellar, was immense and rather damp. Miss Gonin showed us some dry rot and explained that since the death of her mother several years ago, she had been plagued with legal proceedings over property, death duties and other matters. It was not difficult to see why this should have been. Apart from the value of the house itself, the furniture was of a kind that one usually associates with Royal Palaces. Lunch was served on a Louis XIVth table and behind us stood an enormous showcase which seemed to me to date from the French Renaissance. There was a bow-fronted chest in the corner of this room, which Miss Gonin pointed out, apologising that it was not Louis XIVth but Louis XVth, and not quite as good as one which had recently been sold at Sotheby's for £92,000.

Most of the working session took place in a vast room with a chandelier which hung low, and from which was suspended a large Japanese lantern. In the gentlemen's, on the floor in an oak frame carved with fleur-de-lis, stood an autographed photograph of Edward VIIth when he was Prince of Wales.

When we arrived Miss Gonin took us into the room with the Japanese lantern, where on a carved mahogany table about twelve feet long, lay the basic part of the Rife Microscope; alongside it on a velvet cloth was a collection of bits and pieces belonging to the microscope, including the barrel, engraved "designed and built by Royal R. Rife 1938". We began to ask Miss Gonin about the origins of this instrument and she made it clear that her father had in fact collected the microscope from the United States during a visit in 1956, the year before his death.

She said he was always having trouble with it and worked in seclusion in his laboratory, which was lined, so she said, by black cabinets with dials and switches and needles which went backwards and forwards. Her father was very secretive about the work, but at one time was visited by one or two gentlemen from the Rife Company, one of whom she thought was Mr. Crane.

After talking to her for about an hour, she spontaneously offered us the microscope, saying that she had had a visit from Mr. Martin Weir and that she did not want to get involved with American complications. She strongly refuted any suggestion that her father owed Rife any money, although she did not exactly explain how much he had paid for it in 1956. After some discussion, it was agreed that she should voluntarily make the microscope over to Dr. Bird and he in turn would lodge it with the Wellcome Organisation, so that the optical system could be thoroughly explored, the microscope cleaned and assembled to see whether it would work, and, if so, whether its potential was as described by Hubbard and Weir.

We spent a long time making an inventory of the various items, and then went to have lunch on the Louis XIVth table in another room. Miss Gonin, by this time, was very hospitable and explained that her husband was a descendent of Louis XIVth by one of his mistresses. They were a strong Huguenot family, and the father was much attached to the bar sinister on the family crest. Miss Gonin, who is a good amateur historian, however discovered that Louis XIVth had legitimised all his children and the bar sinister was therefore removed.

Miss Gonin is an enthusiastic naval historian, and is particularly interested in an Admiral by the name of Keppell, which happens to be the street in which the London School of Hygiene exists. She was a fascinating raconteur and told us many interesting things about her father. He was born, as she said, on Clapham Common in 1874, about 6 years earlier than my estimate. He went to a

University near Toronto to study forestry and became interested in botany, before he returned to this country to do medicine at St. Mary's Hospital, where he was centre-forward and Captain of the Association Football Team. He had consulting rooms in Welbeck Street, but his laboratory work was done in Shortlands. We asked if we could see the laboratory. Miss Gonin, who had a perfect answer for every occasion, assured us that this was impossible, as it had now been turned into a printing works, which, as she said, was owned by a BOAC pilot who came from a very distinguished family.

Lunch consisted of sherry, beer and a large quantity of sandwiches of three different kinds which were served on a plate, which, as she said in a rather offhand way, was more than 200 hundred years old. The plate was being held by Dr. Bird at the time, and I made haste to assist him at the other end before he dropped the lot.

Towards the end of lunch, we were interrupted by the appearance of a remarkable gentleman whose name was Herbert. Herbert looks after Miss Gonin and, indeed, looks after everything else around the place. Whether he is a distant relation of the family, I never found out, but he was a strange man, about five-feet four inches tall with a red face and large ears. He had on several occasions helped Dr. Gonin in his laboratory, and Dr. Bird asked him whether he knew of any more equipment from Rife. This was a good question, because our researches had suggested that the microscope is incomplete. Whereupon, Herbert replied that "there might be some more bits and pieces among the other microscopes upstairs." Miss Gonin immediately shut him up by saying that all the microscopes upstairs were made of brass and that there were no more accessories to the Rife microscope. That was the end of that.

I then chipped in and asked Herbert whether or not Dr. Gonin had ever had any microscopical specimens and, if so, what had become of them. Miss Gonin now took charge of the conversation and said that after her father's death, her mother, being afraid of contagion, had had a hole dug in the garden and then had the specimens buried. I then asked Miss Gonin where the hole was. She came up with another pat answer, saying that it was part of the acreage that had been sold and that two houses were now standing where the specimens had been interred. Miss Gonin had a wonderful way of putting everything right.

As a parting shot, Herbert then asked whether we had seen the "electrical equipment in the cellar". This appeared to have been a genuine slip of the memory on the part of Miss Gonin, so we made our way down with a torch and examined the machine which

Herbert had described. It was brought back with a number of large glass jars which took Dr. Bird's fancy. There was also a small transformer made in England. The labels on the box indicated that this equipment had come from Mr. Crane in the United States. It seemed that this was the "beam ray" equipment for the microscope which is otherwise lit only by a small car bulb buried in the depths of the stand. Such a light source would be completely incapable of giving enough illumination for the marvels which the microscope is said to achieve.

Dr. Bird asked Miss Gonin to give him a letter of authority to take the components, and she did this very readily. She couched the letter in excellent phraseology and wrote very quickly in a good hand. Miss Gonin was born and educated in Canterbury.

We then took our leave, but when we got as far as Lewisham, we remembered that we had left behind two large spot beams. Dr. Bird and I discussed whether we should go back, and finally decided to do so. I went into the garden, where Miss Gonin and Herbert were once again sitting in the summer house, drinking beer and sherry, at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Miss Gonin, by way of polite conversation, indicated that at one time her father had lost £30,000 on the Stock Exchange in a single night. She informed us that this made quite a difference to the household at the time, but on looking round the wealth of art treasures which her house contained, it does not seem to have done much permanent damage.

Miss Gonin gave me a letter to keep from Dr. Bernard Gross of the Sea Equipment Advance Corporation in Santiago, California, to Martin Weir. Dr. Gross signs himself Bert and one paragraph is particularly revealing. "God willing, we will bring it (meaning the microscope) to Sea Corps, make it operational and up-date it by adding video-vision and scanning computers". This letter shed a great deal of light on what is going on in the United States. It is clear that the University of Buffalo wish to have this microscope and that is why Dr. Hubbard contacted Dr. Bird. Indeed he made an half-an-hour telephone conversation to Dr. Bird last month at four o'clock in the afternoon. So it seems that Dr. Bird is working on behalf of the University of Buffalo while I am working, via Martin Weir, for the Sea Equipment Advancement Corporation.

At last we know the true strength of the American interest, and it is very likely that representatives of either Hubbard or Gross will be coming to this country to procure the microscope. There is plenty of humour in the situation, because it is clear from the letter that the Corporation is looking for a microscope which was built by Royal Rife in 1933. This is the big universal, and nothing like the version which Gonin brought from the States which was manufactured in 1938.

All the equipment, apart from the glass bottles, is now in the Wellcome Museum of Medical Science, awaiting our investigation.

A. J. Duggan.

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