

## Eugene Jenó Kenedy

Those who have read the foreword to the first volume of the school history will know that we had to research Eugene Kenedy's family history to establish copyright ownership. Although we managed that, we could not confirm the popular story that he had been involved with British Intelligence. Some parts were clearly unlikely - he was not smuggled out of Hungary during the Revolution, because he was already in London, marrying Marjorie Messervy in 1955, the year before.

Intriguingly, though, the National Archives in Kew had two files on him relating to his naturalisation application in 1954 – one “open” and one sealed for 100 years “to avoid embarrassment”. Initially we assumed there was nothing else we could do except wait until 2054, but we were then advised that we could apply to have them opened using a “Freedom of Information” request. So we did!

Although it still seems there is no direct link with MI5 (unless it is all an elaborate cover story), it does reveal a colourful and chequered history.

It gives a little more detail about Eugene's family: his father, Jenó, was killed in an air raid in 1945 and his mother, Ludmilla (née Kokesch) died in 1939. There was also a sister, name unknown, who was born in 1899 and died in 1918.

One family mystery contained in the “open” naturalisation document was mention of a wife called Judith, although we could not find any UK records to say when the marriage started - or ended - although the application was only a few months before his marriage to Marjorie Messervy. On a 1935 voyage to the US, he gives his wife's name as Mary, so we were unsure where Judith fitted in. Marjorie's family knew that an earlier marriage had been dissolved. We now know that there was a marriage to Judith Andorffy, daughter of a High Court judge, in 1933. Although she came over with Eugene to London in 1938, when they returned to Budapest, the marriage soon broke down. War intervened but they started divorce proceedings in 1946. In the chaos of post-war Hungary, Eugene conceded that he could not produce any definitive paperwork.

We still do not know how the brief mention of Mary fits in!

It is an earlier visit to London that seems to have introduced him to Marjorie Messervy. A cousin of hers, Edward Shields Forshaw, in a character reference says that he met Eugene in 1928, when he was staying at a guest house run by Marjorie and her mother at 10 Ladbroke Gardens in London. (In 1939, Marjorie and her mother are just round the corner at 108 Lansdowne Road although it is unclear whether this is also a guest house: Marjorie is described

as “Flatlet manageress, clerical and catering”.) In a hand-written footnote to the typed letter, Edward adds: “Mr Kenedy is highly cultured, could in fact be described with propriety as erudite”.

This was an unsurprising comment when Eugene’s educational history is examined. In 1924 he attended the University of Budapest obtaining a degree as a Doctor of Law. He then spent some months in Berlin studying tourist statistics. After that, he came to the London School of Economics studying transport economics for a year. (It was at this time that he was staying with the Messervy family and seems to have moved with them from Ladbroke Gardens to Lansdowne Road.) He got a job at the Hungarian Trade Mission in London at the completion of his studies in 1930. In this job, he travelled extensively, including 3 months lecturing in the US (as mentioned above, there is a passenger record in 1935).

He returned to Hungary in 1938 because he felt he had “fallen out of favour” with the current government and ended up in a series of clerical jobs and, for a time, running the family confectionery business. Judith followed 2 months later but they never lived together after that and they agreed to divorce.

He was called up in July 1943 and fought against Russia (in a penal regiment as he had been discovered listening to British radio broadcasts) until being discharged in October 1944. For a short time, he returned to the family business but was arrested by the Russians when they invaded in January 1945. In exchange for his freedom, he joined the “Hungarian Red Army” but managed to get discharged by feigning illness and returned again to the family business. He claims that he was advised by British Army officers to leave Budapest and he ended up in Austria.

On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1948, he arrived in Britain under a scheme called “Westward Ho!” which encouraged those resident on the continent (both sides of what became the “Iron Curtain”) to emigrate to the UK as “European Volunteer Workers”. Eugene was twice refused until he gave a false name (“Kenedy”!) and age. On arrival, he immediately confessed his deception and after a bit of wavering, he was allowed to stay.

There seems to be little that could be construed as “causing embarrassment”, although Eugene “confesses” to a fine after a motor accident in 1928. There is also reference to him being sued in 1944, although the complainants name has been redacted. There are no details and, although judgement was given against Eugene, he appealed but the eventual outcome has also been redacted!

There is reference in one document to an MI5 letter but that does not seem to be in the file. It is stated that he was “cleared from a security point of view” but was “specially submitted because of his possible use as a security informant”. The author is quoted as being in favour of

allowing Eugene to stay, as he is “pro-Western and anti-Communist”. But a further note insists that his wife is not allowed to register for naturalisation (unlikely as Eugene believes that, by now, he is divorced!).

Shortly after arrival, he is living in Beeston, then Chilwell before moving to Windmill Farm, Ockbrook in February 1954. The only employer mentioned in the paperwork is British Celanese, where he worked as a clerk.

We still have no evidence of working for British Intelligence - maybe he exaggerated a period working as a clerk for the British Army in Austria? He does offer to report on a gathering of Hungarian right-wing émigrés in 1951 but this seems to be limited to sending his invitation to Nottingham police.

And yet...

In 1935, the voyage to the US has only one other Hungarian on board: Albert Szent Gyorgyi. His main claim to fame is that he won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1937. However, during the war, he was active in the Hungarian resistance and was sent to Cairo to start secret negotiations with the Allies. Were they travelling together or was it just coincidence. If the latter, one wonders whether they met on board and, if so, what they talked about?!

Many in Spondon still remember being taught by Mr Kenedy and he seems to have been a popular figure. He does seem to have had an interesting past and we may still not have the full story!