

My Perfect Secretary and my Perfect Book Restorer Title 274

Looking through my diary of 1977, I seem to have had an extremely busy and pleasant time. In London, appointment followed appointment with scientists to invite them to contribute to ISR, interspersed with visits to Heyden in Hendon in north London, regular meetings with my secretary Mrs Lyons, not far away from Hendon, and of course personal friends.

Mrs Ethel Lyons was my faithful aid and assistant throughout the 22 years I edited ISR. She was a perfect shorthand writer and typist. I visited her, and during an average week, about 30 letters went out, which I had dictated during my visit to her home and mailed the following week after signing. She had been for many years Secretary to the Chairman of Marks + Spencer, Marcus Sieff, later Lord Sieff, who had trained her mercilessly to perfection.

When I was away from London, I was able to dictate letters before leaving, signed 30 blank sheets of notepaper, and utterly relied on her to mail absolutely faultless letters. I can never be grateful enough for her help and after a few years, she provided a room in her house as an office for ISR and for me. All the publishers paid was a pittance in cash. In many ways she was old-fashioned, no PC and it was always 'Dr Michaelis' and 'Mrs Lyons' between us, in spite of several decades of closely working together.

My best friend during the years after my 60th birthday in 1976, was Frank Sondheimer, Professor of Chemistry at University College, London and a Fellow of the Royal Society. We frequently met for lunch at Bertorelli, an excellent Italian restaurant in Soho, where we talked about collecting old scientific books, a favourite pastime for us both, about world politics and anything else that seemed topical to us. Occasionally I also met his American wife Betty, and his step-daughter who tragically died of cancer. Typically of Frank, as soon as the diagnosis was made, he rushed to the medical library of his College, and read all available literature

Another common interest which I had with Frank was the book binding and book restoration work for both our collections which Mr Bernard Middleton FSA carried out to perfection. His workshop was in Clapham, and there, with the help of his wife and only one assistant, he had achieved a world reputation, been elected to the Society of Antiquaries, had written learned books about his craft and had examples of his work on permanent exhibition in the British Museum. He was regularly invited to the United States to lecture, and both Frank and I had many superbly bound books in our collections, due to his devotion and skill. He beautifully and uniformly bound the complete set of the 21 volumes of my collected volumes of I S R which I had edited. In 2000 the British Library published *Recollections, A Life in Bookbinding* by Bernard Middleton, a delightful record by a master of his important art form.