



Recollections of the Norwegian Invasion of Glasgow*

When Tom Brown Henderson invited me to contribute some lines on the Norwegian dental students for his excellent book - The History of the Glasgow Dental Hospital and School 1879-1979, I was pleased to accept for several reasons. The main one being the respect and affection I held for these young people, now distinguished colleagues, with whom I shared my student years in the 1950s.

Much of that respect was engendered by the fact that they not only cheerfully coped with a fairly demanding course which was presented to them in a foreign tongue but that they also managed to take part in the corporate life of their chosen university. They were as successful in sporting and social events as they were in their academic achievements. Friendships formed during those salad days have endured and strengthened over the years. Because of the splendid hospitality experienced across the North Sea, I now consider Norway my second home.

The disruption of Norwegian academic life by the German invasion of 1940 referred to in T Brown Henderson's book, resulted in a limited intake of undergraduates during the recovery period in the 1950s. Before the Second World War the Norwegian health authorities had started to plan and implement a scheme for free dental treatment for all school children throughout the country. For that reason they planned to increase the intake of dental students by opening a new dental school in Bergen. The outbreak of war meant that these plans had to be abandoned and as the Germans decided to close all the Norwegian universities in 1943, no dentists qualified during a period of three years.

In the Spring of 1951, it was decided as a temporary solution that students who had applied for admission to the Dental School in Oslo should be encouraged to apply to foreign dental schools of good reputation. Schools in the USA were prohibitively expensive and other Scandinavian countries had only capacity for their own nationals. The Dutch and German schools were yet to be rebuilt consequently these factors together with the general affection felt for Britain by the Norwegian people made the British universities a natural choice.

The friendship between Professor Aitchison and Professor Selmer-Olsen, Dean of the Oslo Dental School also played a part and as a result, in the Autumn of 1951 the first of the Norwegian dental students, Kolbjorn S Urbye, Kjell Grimstad and Torgeir Roynstrand matriculated at Glasgow University.

All in all, forty eight Norwegians students were to train at Glasgow of whom only three failed to complete the course. Most of those who obtained the BDS qualification returned to Norway where they pursued distinguished careers. Kolbjorn, one of the first three graduates, recently retired as a consultant

orthodontist in Oslo where he combined both a private and university career. Torgeir, who was in general practice, has also retired. Sadly, Kjell is no longer with us. He married a Scots lass and for a time lived in Norway. Later they returned to Scotland where he became a successful general practitioner in Girvan right up until his recent death.

The Norwegian students took an active part in undergraduate activities both social and sporting. Norwegian house parties particularly those immediately following a final year dinner were awesome in their convivial hospitality and one usually departed from them on a pinnacle of alcohol induced euphoria. This was inevitably followed by the conventional "never again!" syndrome, but that was quickly forgotten and one looked forward to the next Viking thrash. I recall Svein Korshaven playing some excellent jazz guitar music at the University Union while Billy Lambert's band 'took five' and there was even some entrepreneurial efforts in the field of commerce such as Pal Sitjes venture into the purchasing and exporting to Norway of grandfather clocks. On the sporting side, a generous inclusion of talented Norwegians into the rugby and soccer teams ensured that Glasgow won a considerable share of the inter-university Field Day cups. Outstanding was Gunner Haugen a skilled soccer player who found a place in the University of Glasgow team.

Kjell Grimstad was not alone in taking a Scottish bride. Others included Ola Haugejorden and Bjorn Eckness. I recall that during the 1979 Centenary Celebrations of the Glasgow Dental School many of the years took the opportunity to hold class reunions and it was during one of these that Arne Strohn Slotsvick proposed to class-mate Margaret McLatchie and after a happy and charming wedding held in the University Chapel, Margaret and Arne returned to Norway. We lost a delightful and distinguished periodontologist, but Glasgow's loss was Oslo's gain. Margaret has settled well in her chosen home and even mastered what is not an easy language. Apart from her own letters I also receive news about her from my good friend Koljborn who valued her skill and charm in the treatment of his patients.

As expected the Norse graduates made a significant and important contribution to their homeland's dental health and it is pleasing to record the names of some who have achieved distinction. Steinar Kvinnsland occupies the Chair in Anatomy at Bergen University and is I understand, due to retire in the near future. Ola Haugjorden who qualified in 1961 has a Chair in Social Dentistry or "Samfunns Odontologi," as they say across the North Sea. Steinar originally specialised in orthodontics as did Fin Steianr Mjorud who was head of the orthodontic department of the School Dental Service in Bergen.

Another successful Glasgow graduate was Helge Lande who took what is the equivalent of a British master's degree and was an external examiner at the University of Bergen for a number of years. But as well as contributing clinical expertise many played a major part in the political affairs of the profession. One such is my old class-mate previously mentioned, Gunner Haugen who has done sterling work in the Ethics Committee and also served on the General Council of

the Norwegian Dental Association receiving several honorary awards for his efforts. Two others worthy of mention were Odd Heine Aase and Akon Kiterod, both have been presidents of their [Norwegian Dental Association] branch councils. The former was also president of a large athletic club which from time to time has had a team in the Norwegian Premier [soccer] League while the latter is a member of the [Norwegian] General Dental Council.

Their British counterparts were delighted when a large number of our Norwegian colleagues returned to Glasgow for the Centenary Celebrations. It was good to renew old friendships and share reminiscences, and as a formal token of the close relationship between our two countries, Jan Odegaard on behalf of the former Norwegian students presented Dean James Ireland with a fine impressionist painting by a famous Stavanger artist. Another mini Viking invasion occurred during the recent BDS Jubilee Celebrations and once more it was a pleasure to meet old friends, most of whom appeared to have changed little over the past twenty five years.

While preparing these reminiscences for T Brown Henderson's book, I thought that it would be wise to check on the conferring of the award of the Order of St Olav, Knight First Class on Professor Aitchieson for his services to Norwegian dentistry. I should add that during my early days in general practice the Norwegian Consul and his delightful family were patients of mine when they were domiciled in Glasgow. So, I telephoned the Consulate in Edinburgh and politely requested some details of the Order. I was answered by a somewhat impatient Scottish lady who told me that she had little information to give me but she could tell me that no mere professor would receive such a high and exclusive award. My attempts to refute this were brushed aside but just before she replaced the receiver I managed to interject a request to speak to the Consul. "He's far too busy to speak to you" I was told and, "in any case he'll only confirm what I've just said." "Would you at least tell him that his dentist Bill Smith is on the line?" There was a long pause and the 'phone was put down. In about a minute the lady was back on the line, "I'm terribly sorry Mr Smith" she said in much softer tones, "You are absolutely right, how can I help you?" Ah! the power of the profession!

Old friends goes the saying, are the best friends and none could be better or closer than my distinguished colleague Koljborn Urbye. I first visited Norway as a guest of his parents in our early student days and recently my wife and I enjoyed a delightful holiday and superb hospitality at the lovely home of Koljborn and his wife Renee. I am indebted to him for much of the information contained in this article. He too appears untouched by the passing years, his memory unlike my own sieve-like structure is as good as ever. I count myself most fortunate to have studied and qualified in the Glasgow Dental Hospital and to have enjoyed over the years the friendship of my Norse colleagues. I salute them and their beautiful country.

* Recalled by William Smith BDS FDS RCPS (G). This account was written originally for inclusion in T Brown Henderson's The History of the Glasgow Dental Hospital and School 1879-1979.