



**John and Gibert Cadden \***  
**An Account of a Dental Journey to the Western Isles \*\***

Those who qualified in dentistry in 1939 did not really have any time to settle down in practice before being called to the Forces. John Cadden, newly qualified son of a dentist who practised in Partick, served first in the Royal Air Force and later in the Royal Army Dental Corps. In the later years of the war he was sent to North Africa to join the British Army in Algeria. The latter eventually united with General Montgomery's Eighth Army from Egypt which drove the German Army out of North Africa. From Salerno just south of Naples, the Army fought its way up through Italy and at the end of the war, John found himself in Austria.

Demobbed, he returned to set up practice in Partick as a practitioner in the recently established National Health Service. With colleagues from neighbouring practices he attended meetings of the Local Dental Committee (LDC) and it was some casual remarks at one such meeting that set him on course for the unique contribution the brothers made to dentistry in the Western Isles of Scotland. The Caddens had been brought up in a family which sailed on the Clyde and cruised extensively on the west coast in the summer months. So, when he learned at the LDC meeting of the need for a dentist in the less populated islands, the answer seemed obvious. They would combine business with pleasure and take dentistry to where it was needed. Branch practices were set up at Tobermory on Mull and on Tiree. But it was the purchase of a 60 foot ex-RAF pinnace, the MV Constance which really brought the idea to fruition. The aft cabin was fitted out as a fully equipped surgery with chair, electric engine, spittoon etc. The problem of power supply was overcome by converting the boat's 24 volt system to 250 volts by means of a transformer, enabling full operation of all the dental equipment.

The dental cruise of July to August in 1967 was captured on 8mm cine film and has subsequently been transferred to video tape providing a unique visual record of their experiences in providing dental treatment to the remote areas of the west coast of Scotland.

The film starts with the vessel being loaded with stores and equipment. Cylinders of compressed air for the air-rotor handpiece and air syringe, acetylene for casting and repairs and nitrous oxide and oxygen to provide general anaesthesia. Leaving McAlister's yard at Dumbarton for Bowling was but a short sail to load fuel for the twin Perkins engine developing 125 hp and an A.E.C amidships for which a total of 590 gallons of diesel were required.

Important members of the crew in addition to brother Gilbert were dental surgery assistants Pamela and Irene. John, doubled as cameraman, first officer and engineer as far as non-dental sea-faring duties were concerned. And so down river and through the Kyles of Bute and then up to Ardrishaig prior to the passage through the Crinan Canal.

In Crinan basin they meet the Duke of Edinburgh's yacht Bloodhound - and waxed lyrical over its immaculate woodwork and gleaming brass, no doubt with equipment to match. From Crinan it's up to Oban to check a mooring off Kerrera before continuing up the Sound of Mull to anchor in the bay at Tobermory. The surgery premises are among the many colourful properties which give Tobermory waterfront its unforgettable image. No time is lost and soon the surgery is up and running and for the next few days it is dental treatment as usual except that few practices can have offered their patients such delightful scenery as compensation for the less pleasant procedures.

When all requests for treatment have been met it is time to turn attention to the Small Isles and dental supplies and equipment are transferred to the surgery aboard M.V. Constance before setting off on a north west heading to round the fearsome Ardnamurchan Point.

The summer of 1967 provides favourable weather and the journey is accomplished safely with a landfall at the jetty at Eigg. A population of 80 live mostly on the sheltered north-east side of the island but with Constance moored comfortably off-shore the patients arrive and are ferried aboard by a tender with an outboard, hardly a conventional method of coming to a dental practice. The record shows a full range of dental treatment being carried out from simple amalgam restorations to extractions under general anaesthesia. One is quick to appreciate the benefits experienced by these islanders for whom dental treatment is only a short dinghy trip away rather than a lengthy trip to the mainland involving expensive overnight accommodation.

Medical treatment of the islanders is also featured and the film goes on to show Dr MacLean, the local GP. on his picturesque round against a background of breathtaking scenery. But by now the demands of the islanders appear to have been satisfied and Constance sets off for the short 5 mile trip to Rum anchoring in Loch Scresort in view of Kinloch Castle. Dr Maclean takes advantage of this opportunity and accompanies the dental team to complete a round of his patients on this Nature Conservancy island.

Charming scenes of tame young deer browsing in the distance prove too much for the camera operator to resist and the camera dwells on this rustic activity and only reluctantly returns to the world of dentistry. The camera now focuses on the families of the six children who live on the islands as they pay a visit to the floating dental surgery. For some it is minor fillings but for one an extraction under nitrous oxide, oxygen and trilene. John Cadden had attended a course on intra-venous analgesia at Aberdeen and for one patient this was the treatment of choice.

The island of Soay off the southern end of Skye and about 10 miles north of Rum has only a handful of inhabitants and had been visited on previous occasions, Canna however, about 10 miles west of Rum had been discovered to be populated largely by denture wearing edentulous patients and was usually given a miss.

Eventually Constance weighs anchor and heads south for Tobermory with magnificent views of Rum, Eigg and Muck on the journey before arriving in Tobermory Bay where supplies and equipment are returned to the surgery and the staff go off to enjoy a round of golf on the Western Isles Golf Course.

Tiree was usually visited by Gilbert who made the short trip by plane. His visits here and to the surgery at Tobermory would be made by more conventional methods at other times of the year. The dental services to these isolated communities provided by the Cadden brothers with their floating surgery, commenced in 1952 and continued until 1971. Their film provides a unique record of the provision of dental treatment to these outlying communities during this period.

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\* John Cadden IDS RFPS (G.) 1939

Gilbert Cadden LDS RFPS (G.) 1945

\*\* As told to Dr H Noble and Bob McKechnie