



## **The Early History of the School Dental Service\*** **Archie Whitelaw \*\***

The first specialist school dental service was opened in Cambridge in 1907. Funded privately it was under the supervision of George Cunningham until 1909. A general school clinic working on similar lines to that established in England was instituted at Dunfermline in 1910-11. This clinic was not run by the School Board but was funded by the Dunfermline Trust and was housed in one of the Trust's buildings.

The Education Act (Scotland) 1908 made the medical inspection of school children the mandatory duty of the local School Boards. However, the Act made no reference to the provision of medical and dental treatment of school children if and when it was found necessary. Systematic medical inspection was initiated by the Govan Parish School Board in August 1907, the year before the act legalising inspection came into operation. Medical inspection as is known today began in the Glasgow School Board area in November 1909. In that month Principal School Medical Officers were appointed by these Boards to supervise the work of medical inspection in their respective areas.

In the report of the medical and dental inspection of 1909, the Principal Medical Officer stated that 88% of the children examined required dental treatment. He made the observation that if the examination of the mouth had been carried out by a dentist using a mirror and a probe the percentage would have been higher. This was due to the fact that the objective of the dentist is to discover decay at an early stage so that the lesion can be treated as soon as possible. The statistics of further annual reports continued to emphasise the necessity to provide dental treatment to school children whose parents were unable to afford such treatment.

The School Board of Glasgow decided to submit a test case to the Court of Session in order to obtain a definitive legal decision as to their powers to provide treatment under section 4.6 of the Education Act (Scotland) 1908.

In October 1911 the School Board reported that the Scottish Medical Officer would be in a position to submit a suitable case and that the Depute Clerk be instructed to present the special case to the Court of Session and that Miss Eliza S Allan (trustee of James Allan Sen. Trust) be selected as contradictor. The case was decided in the negative towards the end of 1912.

Early in the Autumn of 1912 information was received that the Scottish Education Department was able to provide a government grant from the Imperial Fund in order that the School Board could provide dental treatment for children who not only required treatment but whose parents were not in a position to pay for such treatment. In 1912, the Governor and Vice-Governor

of the School Board had a meeting with the Directors of the Glasgow Dental Hospital with the intention of renting premises for the treatment of the children. The following scheme was proposed:

Total cost	
Three part-time dentists working 3hrs per day over 5 days for a period of 40 weeks	£600
Nurses' uniforms	£80
Rent to Glasgow Dental Hospital	£175
Anaesthetists for forty weeks	£40
Stationery	£15
Materials	£40
Total cost	£950

However, the School Board decided to find their own premises either in schools or other buildings but not in School Board premises and to provide estimates for the establishments of such clinics. The Education Department had allocated £1,500 to the Board for medical treatments. The breakdown was as follows:

Dental Clinics Equipment	£190
Salaries of part-time dentists	£550
Anaesthetist	£40
Two nurses	£80
Materials	£30
Total cost	£890

The following funds were allocated to three other areas:

Skin clinic	£310
Eye clinic	£160
Ear clinic	£100

Premises were immediately available at Calton School annexe and it was thought that similar accommodation might become available at new buildings at East Park School.

A private house at 35 Elmbank Crescent was leased from the North British Railway for five years. It was decided that since a larger sum of money was at their disposal, the scheme should go beyond dental treatment and provide a broader medical range for the minor cases of skin disease, defective vision and diseases of ear, nose and throat. The clinic at Elmbank Crescent became known as the School Board of Glasgow Treatment Centre.

The Board made the following appointments for the implementation of their scheme: 8 part-time dentists, 3 anaesthetists, 3 oculists, 1 aurist, 1 dermatologist and 6 nurses. The dentists appointed were: Gerald Agnew LDS, Robert Austin DDS, Samuel Dunn LDS, Hugh Fraser LDS, MB ChB, William Hanson LDS, MB ChM, George Hart LDS RCPS (G), William F McKenzie LDS RFPS (G) MB ChB, and David Manson LDS, MB ChB. They commenced work on 22nd October 1912 and according to the terms of their employment were required to provide treatment for 4½ days per week. The anaesthetists were: Drs Fairlie, T Henderson and Napier.

Three complete surgeries had been provided so that three dentists would always be engaged at the same time. The equipment included a dental chair, spittoon, an electric engine, a specialised electric lamp a bracket table and a cabinet containing the usual surgical instruments. The dentists were employed in two centres, the one at Calton School annexe was for dental treatment only whereas the centre at 35 Elmbank Crescent in addition to dental treatment, provided medical treatment for the minor phases of skin diseases, defective vision and diseases of the ear, nose and throat.

It is interesting to note that while the School Board of Glasgow established their clinics towards the end of October 1912, the Govan Parish School Board had two clinics opened and functioning by the end of June of that year. These clinics were at 27 Govan Road to serve the parish South of the Clyde and Eldon Terrace, Partick for the North, under the care of Mr J M Campbell. [The newly qualified J Menzies Campbell recently returned from Canada where he had been awarded a Doctorate in Dental Surgery from the University of Toronto. Ed.]

At the same time as the clinics were being organised to deal with carious teeth either by extraction or more rarely conservation, plans were put forward to establish a form of oral hygiene in schools. This was called 'Toothbrush Drill,' the precursor of present day Dental Health Education. Toothbrushes were obtained in large quantities and sold to the children at cost. A box of some simple and cheap powder, for example precipitated chalk was included in the price. Each child was also provided with a mug kept at the school, usually in the deprived areas of the City and used at the daily "Toothbrush Drill."

Opposition to this daily tooth brushing was expressed by some members of the School Board who felt it was interfering with the time allocated to the religious instruction of the children. A compromise was reached and not only was the daily tooth brushing allowed to continue but more schools (industrial) became involved.

The instructions given to the children were contained in Form 20 - *Recommendations for the Feeding and Care of School Children*. This was issued in order to encourage parents to provide a more satisfactory diet for their children, it also contained directions concerning the use of the teeth (mastication etc.) and on cleaning the teeth. By 1914 there were five clinics in operation; 35 Elmbank Crescent, Calton School annexe, East Park School, the clinic at 27 Govan Road and Eldon Terrace, Partick. The School Board of Glasgow managed the first three whilst the Govan Parish Board controlled the latter two.

Statistics obtained as the result of routine school inspections were still showing that 88% of children examined were in need of dental treatment. It was therefore decided that a systematic plan dealing with question of dental

decay be adopted and a full-time dentist be appointed. With effect from 1st January 1915, Mr Samuel Dunn LDS, was employed at a salary of £450 per annum With the proviso that he ceased private practice no later than 31st December 1915, thus giving him a year to dispose of his practice.

The Education (Scotland) Act of 1918 amalgamated the Glasgow and Govan Parish School Boards so that the combined areas became in May 1919 identical with the City area and under the administrative control of the Education Authority of Glasgow. In the first annual report of the newly formed body, it was stated that the dental staff now consisted of two full-time dentists, Mr Arthur Barrett and Mr Samuel Dunn. In addition seven part-time dentists were employed for one session per week for forty weeks. A session consisted of three hours and the rate paid was 8s 9d per hour. Of the six clinics now in use, Elmbank Crescent and Govan Street boasted complete X-ray units, apparently installed for the treatment of ringworm and favus [a type of ringworm caused by a fungus, Ed.] A clinic at Pollok Academy was used for dental treatment only.

In 1922, at the Sheriff Court in Glasgow, a parent was charged with neglecting his child by failing to provide the necessary dental treatment required and also in not allowing the Authority to provide it. Under section 12 of the Children's Act, 1908, the Sheriff imposed a fine of £5 with the alternative of ten days imprisonment. It was noted that in the following year there was a very marked improvement in the number of cases appearing at the clinic as a result of school inspections. This was mainly due to a paragraph citing the recent prosecution being included in the appointment cards issued to parents.

In the years up until 1930 there was both an increase in the dental staff and in the number of clinics. By November of that year there was one full-time 'Senior Dentist,' five full-time dentists and two part-time dentists. There were five regional clinics which provided both dental treatment and minor medical treatments, in addition two local medical clinics especially equipped, also provided dental treatment. In previous years there had been pressure from headmasters for removal of these clinics from school premises and it is interesting to note that of the twenty clinics now in use, nine were housed in buildings distant from the school, four were in school buildings but with separate entrances and seven were still accommodated within school buildings. The medical and dental inspection and treatment of school children continued to be carried out by the Education Authority of Glasgow until 15 May 1930 when the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1929 came into operation. This transferred the whole education administration including medical and dental inspection and treatment to the Corporation of Glasgow, Public Health Department, Education Health Service.

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\* Article based on the following sources:

1 R M Ross, The Development of Dentistry: A Scottish Perspective  
c 1800-1921, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow 1995

2 Minutes of the School Board of Glasgow 1910-1930

3 Annual Reports of the Principal School Medical Officer of the School Board  
of Glasgow 1910-1930

4 Annual Reports of the Principal School Medical Officer of the Govan Parish  
School Board 1909-1930

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