



The First Orthodontic Diploma * **W John S Kerr****

THE advent of the Inter-Collegiate Membership in Orthodontics in the year 2000 will mark the end of an orthodontic diploma specific to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. The Diploma in Orthopaedics (RCPS) was the first orthodontic diploma in the United Kingdom. The fact that such a diploma has existed first as a DDO and latterly as the MDO (Membership) for some fifty years is remarkable in view of the relative infancy of most dental specialties and the fact that the General Dental Council has instigated a specialist register in orthodontics as recently as 1998.

The decision to develop an orthodontic diploma is recorded in the minutes of the Dental Committee of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow on 18 June 1948 and the regulations for an examination were subsequently approved by the College Council and the Dental Board of the United Kingdom (the fore-runner of the General Dental Council) later that year. There had been recognised orthodontists in the United Kingdom since the early part of the century acknowledged by the formation of the British Society for the Study of Orthodontics (BSSO) in 1907. Matthews (1944) however, stated that there were only ten specialists engaged in full time practice of orthodontics in 1944, although the BSSO transactions show that there were almost 100 members in London alone at this time. It is important to note however, that the professing of an interest in orthodontics was sufficient to become a member. Only five Scottish members were listed at that time.

The BSSO had earlier commissioned a committee whose remit was in part to make recommendations on postgraduate orthodontic teaching (1942). The majority report recommended the setting up of post graduate orthodontic training, either in dental schools generally or in one or two special centres. A period of one year's training was advised to be marked by the award of a diploma on completion. Perhaps due to the war and the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948, the report does not appear to have been acted upon in any meaningful way until the Glasgow diploma materialised in 1949 and simultaneously the opening of the Department of Orthodontics at the Eastman Dental Hospital in London. The Royal College of Surgeons of England however, did not establish a Diploma in Orthodontics until 1954.

The prime mover behind the Glasgow Diploma was Dr (later Professor) James Aitchison (figure 1) who was at that time Director of the Dental Hospital and a member of the Dental Committee of the College. The choice of name for the Diploma (Diploma in Dental Orthopaedics) remains something of a mystery except that the synopsis of the examination contains the phrase, "including

corrective exercises, cervico-facial orthopaedics and mechanotherapy." The idea of functional jaw orthopaedics had its roots in the belief that environment (or lack of function) rather than genetics was the principal cause of malocclusion and that exercises of the facial and oral musculature could produce effective and permanent changes in the occlusion and facial morphology.

This philosophy was popularised in Europe in the 1930s by Andresen and Häupl and would have been à la mode in the post-war period. It is interesting to note that this theory has undergone a renaissance in the past 10-15 years, the American Journal of Orthodontics changing its name to the American Journal of Orthodontics and Dento- facial Orthopaedics in 1986.

The Diploma examination was conceived in two parts - basic science and dental orthopaedics, as was the case until 1989. The syllabus was largely the same as the current one. For example, questions on the written paper of the first two diets relate to "Andresen" appliance, "Twin-Wire Arch" and the impacted maxillary canine. Whilst the appliances and approach have been superseded by new designs, techniques and treatment regimes, the questions posed are largely the same as in the contemporary examination. The same paper would still be appropriate by simply changing the appliance names to those in current use, such as "Twin Block" and "Straight-Wire Arch."

The first diet was completed on 21 June 1949 and the Register of Diplomates shows that Elizabeth Morrison Webster and James Aitchison were the first successful candidates. In the column marked "Signature of Examiner" each of these candidates has signed opposite their name. Legend has it that they examined each other!

This seems unlikely however as closer inspection of the Register shows that although subsequent candidates have an examiner's signature against their name the column was originally headed "Signature of Examinee." This has been altered by hand to read "examiner," presumably after the first diet. A panel of eleven examiners had also been set up during February and March 1949, including local examiners from the West of Scotland such as James Aitchison and Tom White, others from elsewhere in Scotland (e.g.. Russell Logan) and a number from England (Watkins and Rix) to avoid accusations of "parochialism." According to a contemporary editorial in the British Dental Journal supporting the setting up of the Diploma, parochialism was rife in British orthodontics. The Journal counselled avoidance of this in the new examination. Consequently, there was an ample choice of suitable examiners available to interrogate Dr Aitchison.

Perusal of the Register shows that Thomas Cyril White (later Professor, Dean of the Dental School and Convener of the Dental Council of the RCPS) was successful in the second diet held in November 1949 as was Geoffrey Hopkin

in 1950, for many years head of orthodontics in the University of Edinburgh Dental School. At this time there were 16 BSSO members in Scotland. By 1997 this number had risen to 83, 61 of whom possessed orthodontic diplomas. In June 1954, it seemed that a list of eminent orthodontists (figure 2) including Holly Broadbent, Sheldon Friel, Charles Nord, Clifford Ballard and some members of the examiners' panel (Rix, Watkin, Kemball and Marsh) had been awarded the Diploma "without examination and without fee."

From the outset James Aitchison had lobbied the College Council to have the Diploma awarded without examination to "dental surgeons of special distinction." At first the Council refused to accept this plea despite copious correspondence and meetings with Dr Aitchison. However by 1954 they relented but by then most of the local examiners, whom Aitchison no doubt had in mind as being of "special distinction" had already sat the examination. At the outset only six months full-time experience in orthodontics was required to sit the examination following upon two years post "LDS or equivalent" general dental experience.

At this time, the LDS was the norm as the primary dental qualification whilst the BDS was still in its infancy. The period of exposure to orthodontics is remarkably brief by present standards when one considers the average length of a course of orthodontic treatment. At the same time it is unlikely that many of the initial candidates were novices going by their ages as recorded in the Register - James Aitchison was 50 and Tom White 39. Three years full-time training became mandatory in 1989 when the Diploma became the Membership, coming into line with the requirements of the European Union. Prior to this the required training period had moved first to one year and then to two years in 1978.

When the London Diploma was introduced in 1954, excluding those without examination, there were 36 holders of the Glasgow Diploma. By the time the Diploma was superseded by the Membership this had risen to 245. Prior to 1954, apart from those closely associated with the Diploma there was no rush from the orthodontic establishment to submit themselves for the examination. Nevertheless, many of the orthodontists who were to become influential in the next twenty to thirty years obtained the Diploma, e.g./Barry Leighton, Peter Burke, Jimmy McEwen, who all became Professors in due course including Jim Keith from Dublin, later Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

The Edinburgh College introduced its Diploma in Orthodontics in 1987 and Membership in 1989. Since then there has been a degree of rivalry between Colleges in an attempt to attract candidates in an increasingly competitive market. It is fair to say that latterly the Glasgow examination has fared less well in this field than the other Colleges for a variety of reasons including lack of exemption to the written section of the examination and the retention of the practical element which has for some time been a unique feature. The Inter-Collegiate M.Orth. has arisen out of this rivalry in an attempt to produce a

national standard, although at present only the Glasgow and London Colleges are fully involved. It is to be hoped that the new qualification will enjoy as illustrious a future as the Glasgow Diploma has in the past.

References

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