



Newsletter, October 2000

Rankine Crerar LDS RFPS (Glas)*

RANKINE Crerar, a prominent figure in dental politics was the third of four sons of a father who turned to dentistry after studying first law then medicine at the University of Edinburgh. His father's medical degree meant that he only required to study dentistry for two years before qualifying LDS RCS (Edin) in 1895. He set up practice one of the oldest in Paisley, in 1901 at 1 Gauze Street,.

Rankine was sent for his schooling to Glasgow High School and was two years into his dental training when the start of the Second World War caused him to be called up as a member of the Militia and sent for training in the Tank Corps. However after six months he was released from army duties and instructed to continue his dental training, presumably because of a perceived future shortage in the profession. He returned to Glasgow Dental Hospital and School and qualified in 1942.

Rankine's training was unique in that he believes he was one of the last students to learn practical dental mechanics (now prosthodontics) in the workshop of his father's practice rather than in the Dental Mechanics Laboratory of the Dental School. Whereas 2,000 hours were required of the student in the Dental School laboratory, 4,000 hours was expected of the pupil or apprentice in the workshop of a practice.

Almost every practice had a laboratory and his father's had an excellent reputation employing two top-notch technicians. Rankine believes that the practical experience he obtained was invaluable. He recalls attempts with the use of "Hecolite," at this time, a denture material popular in the 1930s, which were quite successful as long as the denture was processed properly and blistering of the surface of the material was avoided.

In those days it was possible to choose between Anderson's College and St Mungo's College for pre-clinical training and Rankine chose St Mungo's College to take advantage of anatomy lectures given by Professor Battersby and physiology with Professor Osler. He does not have any special memories of the advent of penicillin but recalls the 'wonder drug' of the time as M & B 693; a form of sulphonamide.

After serving in the Royal Army Dental Corps from 1942 to April 1947, Rankine returned to Paisley to find that his father's practice had moved to 28A High Street. He has pleasant memories of the single year he spent in practice before the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS). He would see about five patients each day and whilst conservative dentistry accounted for 90% of his income, denture work paid well at £30 to £40 for

complete upper and lower dentures. The average dentist would earn approximately £400 per annum before the advent of the NHS.

In retrospect Rankine is strongly of the opinion that " the War made dentistry." By this he means that the dental treatment provided by members of the dental branches of the armed forces to those called up for service introduced them to the benefits of modern dental treatment in a way, which would never otherwise have been possible in the restricted financial climate of the pre-war years. Such dental treatment revolutionised the attitude of a significantly large proportion of the youth of the Country to dental treatment and materially influenced the attitude of the future parents of the nation's children. No better introduction to the benefits of modern dental treatment, soon to be available under the NHS could have been devised.

When looking back at other major events which fashioned the many changes in dentistry which occurred in his life time, he cited the advent of the air rotor drill which at once made cavity cutting so much faster, less unpleasant and infinitely more accurate than with the slower electric drill.

An understanding of the effects of fluoride was another factor which he experienced during his working life, this he considered had a major effect on the pattern of dental disease. He recalls the way in which those expectant mothers who came under Dr Wallace Barr in the Queen Mother Hospital in Glasgow were always prescribed fluoride tablets at a time when few medical practitioners in general practice were advocating this measure. The dramatic reduction in the early carious destruction of the first permanent molars in children was a consequence so striking that no dentist required statistical confirmation of the improvement which resulted in dental health.

Rankine was a member, as were most other Paisley dentists of the Public Dental Service Association (PDSA) joining the British Dental Association (BDA) on the amalgamation of the two bodies in 1950. He served on many BDA committees and later succeeded J Marshall Banks as Scottish Secretary of the BDA. In 1976-77 he was elected President of the West of Scotland Branch of the BDA and his involvement in dental politics continued as a consequence of his activities with the Renfrewshire Local Dental Committee (LDC) following the introduction of the NHS in 1948.

Following the inception of the NHS, dentists found themselves in regular communication with departments of health and this gave rise to the establishment of LDCs, one in each County. Representatives elected from these served on a National body, the Scottish General Dental Services Committee, which was recognised by the Department of Health as representatives of the General Dental Practitioners. Similar bodies were set up to represent and negotiate on behalf of other main groups of the profession such as Hospital dental staff and later Community Dental Service staff.

Rankine was elected a member of the Scottish General Dental Services Committee and later became its Vice-Chairman and Chairman. He also served on the Dental Rates Study Group.

Just before his retiral, the BDA experienced a crisis at its London headquarters and Rankine was asked to take over the duties as secretary, a position which he held from 1984-1986, travelling to and from London every Monday and Friday. For many years attendance at most meetings was not remunerated but latterly payments of up to £150 per day at some meetings were made.

His hobbies are a mixture of golf, gardening and fishing. The Crerar dynasty will be carried on by a grandson in the second year of the dental course and a granddaughter in her fourth year, both at the University of Glasgow.
