



Update

The delicate craftsmanship of some early dental instruments makes a poignant contrast with the grimness of some of the treatment of ages past. Chisels with ornate mother-of-pearl handles doubtless brought more joy to dentists than to patients; a finely engraved clockwork drill must have been easier on the eye than on the sensory nerves. Instruments such as these form part of the Menzies Campbell collection, which was described and discussed by Dr Paul Geissler when he gave the twentieth Menzies Campbell lecture in Glasgow earlier this month. An abridged version of the lecture appears in this newsletter.

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John Orr, the first consultant oral surgeon to be appointed to the oral surgery department of Glasgow Dental School, made himself responsible for every patient who came into his department – and taught his juniors that it was a privilege to be in a position to treat a patient. In the latest in our "Reminiscences" series Bill Smith contributes a vivid and affectionate portrait of his old teacher and friend, who will also be remembered appreciatively by many readers.

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Dental history is not made by dentists alone. Although it was not until the mid-1980s that all dental schools in the UK had schools of dental hygiene within them, the origins of the discipline are to be found early in the twentieth century. In Glasgow Dental Hospital and School, the first intake of students was at the beginning of 1980, as Eveline Gray records in her valuable account of the history of dental hygiene in Glasgow in this issue – surely an appropriate companion-piece for Shirley Zangwill's article on the father of preventive dentistry, George Cunningham.

A major initiative is being undertaken by Norman Muir, archivist of the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland, which celebrates its centenary next year. To mark this occasion a history of the union is being planned, which will encompass developments in its associated professions. The story will not simply be one of statistics and landmark judgments but will have a human dimension reflecting the rich vein of medical and dental humour. Together with Dr Rufus Ross, Dr Henry Noble is making contributions on various themes in dental history, one of which we print in this newsletter. Others will appear in subsequent editions.

A historical bibliography of dentistry would be a considerable boon, since no comprehensive compilation exists at present. Preliminary discussions about the possibility of compiling one have now been held by Mr James Beaton, librarian of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, Dr Helen

Marlborough, subject librarian for dentistry at Glasgow University Library, and Dr Henry Noble, HDRG chairman. The idea is that the bibliography should, to begin with, be Scottish in scope and that rather than just being a bare list it would be a guide to resources, providing information about location and provenance. As Dr Marlborough pointed out at the group's August meeting, it could also be used to help build up the university's own dental history collection – a possibility that is emerging with the prospect of improved storage space which would enable it to be gathered together at a location outwith the main library. More news from this front in the next newsletter.

Doc Holliday, remembered for his part in the notorious gunfight at the OK Corral, was handy with a dental probe as well as a six-shooter. Inevitably, myths and misconceptions have grown up around this hotshot dentist, but a more authoritative account is possible on the basis of family records. We print a shortened version of the paper on this subject read by Dr Rufus Ross to the Lindsay Society at their autumn conference in Lancaster. At the same meeting another member of the group, G. Stuart Taylor, gave a talk entitled "The Transactions of the British Society for the Study of Orthodontics – the Early Years."

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More people are now reading our web page on the RCPSG site, judging by the number of "hits" recorded in recent weeks. Carol Parry provides the details in her Web News column.

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The William Dall collection, with its porcelain inlay work and other artefacts, was put on display at Glasgow University not long ago but is normally housed in the BDA museum in London. We are pleased to learn that the BDA has made a "significant commitment to improvements in the storage, care and interpretation" of its sub-collections, which will ensure that they are "cared for by the museum for future generations and made available for the benefit of the dental profession." The curator, Roxanne Fea, adds: "I welcome further opportunities to work with your group and dental heritage collections to achieve these ends."

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Several members of the group have been enjoying the informal Wednesday morning "[Library Conversations](#)" at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Each week a different member of the group leads the conversation, and topics have ranged from "Glasgow medical instruments" to possible espionage activities on the part of a medical student during the Crimean War. The most recent discussion was led by R. McKechnie, of the HDRG, who introduced a topical note by examining the background of Colin Powell. Coffee at 10.45 am; conversation at 11. Highly recommended.

Also in informal mode, our own group will in future meet half an hour earlier to allow time for a short presentation before meetings. Stuart Taylor will be first, on November 26.

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From the Minutes

In his treasurer's report Professor John Kerr noted that 43 subscriptions had been received to date (26th March, 2001). . . . The interest on the Menzies Campbell bequest was £4277.97, available to spend. . . . It was generally agreed that the funds available could be used to provide some form of display for items of dental interest.

The secretary reported that James Beaton had requested that attention be drawn to the Wednesday morning conversations (with coffee) held in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow to which all members were invited.

An X-ray machine dating from the 1930s had been offered to the group by Ian Rew, son of the late general dental practitioner W. Rew. It was decided that this would be accepted provided that storage space could be found and that transport charges would not be too great. . . . Professor Moos had been offered a stained glass panel and the group decided that this too would be accepted.