



## A Glasgow Dentist, an Edinburgh Legacy

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*A shortened version of the Menzies Campbell Lecture given by Dr Geissler at Glasgow Dental Hospital and School on October 11, 2001*

John Menzies Campbell was born in Paisley on June 9, 1887, the son of John, an Inspector of the Poor, and his wife, Agnes. His schooling was at George Watson's College, Edinburgh. Having gained his Leaving Certificate he then studied dentistry at St Mungo's College and the Glasgow Dental School.

At that time it was customary to apprentice oneself to, or become a pupil of, a registered dentist. For this pupilage a fee had to be paid and this was usually in the region of £50 to £100 (one must multiply this by 100 for modern prices). John Menzies Campbell became a pupil of J.G. Angus, LDS. Following his graduation as LDS in 1911 he then went to Toronto where he graduated DDS (cum laude) in 1912.

Then followed 42 years as a highly respected dental practitioner at 14 Buckingham Terrace, Glasgow. During this period he developed an intense interest in dental history, assembling a unique collection of books, artefacts, pictures and advertisements. In 1964 he bequeathed his collection of books and historic dental advertisements to the Royal College of Surgeons of England, while he donated the pictures and artefacts to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

John Menzies Campbell died on June 27, 1974, aged 87. His wife Margaret continued an interest in dental history until her death in 1990 at the age of 97.

The display of this bequest presented problems of space and presentation that were not resolved until 1994 when the College constructed and opened a purpose-built museum, now called the Menzies Campbell Dental Museum. At the same time the Edinburgh Dental School was closing to undergraduate teaching and thus a considerable collection of dental artefacts was suddenly available from this source and could also be displayed.

The new museum is open to the general public; the visitors may be dentists with a specialised knowledge or lay persons with no knowledge of dentistry. Thus the concept is to interpret the displayed material, showing representative items rather than all the objects and to explain their use. This is a break from the past when everything was displayed, with little or no explanation.



*A French dentist showing a specimen of his artificial teeth and false palates.  
Thomas Rowlandson, 1811*

The collection of pictures is very extensive and forms an impressive and intriguing representation of dentistry, as practised by competent and incompetent operators. The earliest pictures date from the sixteenth century but most are from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although some are more modern. The display was developed for the "Art of the Dentist" exhibition for the Edinburgh Festival of 1999.

As would be expected many of the pictures deal with the rigours of tooth extraction; the standard of the painting varies. This is the period before dentistry was regulated, and some of the pictures show charlatans with their stage shows. The blacksmith dentist is shown as well as the "properly trained" surgeon dentists.

Among the latter is a portrait of Bartholomew Ruspini, attributed to Nathaniel Hone, R.A. Born in 1728 near Bergamo in Italy, Ruspini trained as a surgeon in Bergamo, then studied dentistry in Paris, at that time the centre of surgical and dental excellence. He came to England, practising in London from 1766. Through his connections, and having adopted the Anglican faith and become a freemason, he quickly became a very fashionable dentist and was dentist to the Prince of Wales, later George IV. The hereditary title of Chevalier was bestowed on him in 1789 for his professional skill and charitable works with foreigners and the poor. A Rowlandson coloured lithograph showing tooth transplantation from a young sweep into the mouth of a fashionable lady dating from 1787 pokes fun at him.

Political cartoons using a dental theme to press home the point also appear in the collection, in particular "A Pair of Wirtembergs" which lampoons Lady Buckinghamshire who, along with others, was tried, convicted and fined for running an illegal gaming house.

Extraction instruments are well represented with pelicans and keys, as well as forceps. The pelican was a brutal instrument with a pad or bolster, which was placed on the buccal side of the gum below the tooth to be extracted and a beak or claw which engaged the lingual side. A downward twist of the handle tore the tooth out of the mouth. The key was basically similar, but had a handle similar to that of a corkscrew and enabled the instrument to be used more comfortably from the front of the mouth instead of the side. The 1860s had superseded these with

forceps, which engaged the tooth more anatomically and extracted with much less damage. Nevertheless the naval surgeons still had extraction keys in their kits in the 1880s.

Ivory dentures from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some exquisitely carved and fitted with natural teeth, are displayed. The source of these natural teeth, either from battlefields or as a result of body-snatching (prior to the 1832 Anatomy Act) usually gives the visitor a frisson of excitement and horror.

Mouth examination and tooth preparation require the use of mirrors and drills. The mirrors date from the early to the late nineteenth century and show the development from polished steel surfaces to oval glass and the magnifying mirrors with German silver frames and ivory handles. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century little importance was attached to the eradication of caries. Credit must be given to Chaplin Harris (1806–1860) who insisted that all traces of caries should be removed before the insertion of a filling. For tooth preparation, the very early drills were rotated in the fingers. Archimedian screw drills were devised, as well as bow-drills. This latter consisted of a drill with a string (later replaced by gut) wound round it, and rotated by a bow.

An interesting exhibit is a Harrington clockwork drill of 1864. This was the first time continuous rotation was possible for a drill (four minutes). The drill is heavy and very unbalanced for practical usage. It shows remarkably fine engraving on the body. Its success was, however, short lived as in 1870 the foot engine was introduced which was the forerunner of the modern electric drill.

At the end of the eighteenth century it was customary for persons in the upper stratum of society to possess elegant silver toothbrush sets. These would consist of a brush, compartments for tooth powder and a tongue scraper. There is a fine example in the collection.

Dentures were very expensive prior to the introduction of vulcanite. Hence the elderly edentulous in the apple-growing parts of the country were unable to eat their favourite fruit. Apple scoops were used to macerate the apple and allow them to be enjoyed. The scoops were made from silver and ivory but more usually from the bones of animals.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was customary for dentists to visit patients in their homes. On such occasions they used cases of instruments for removing salivary calculus, filling and filing teeth. There is a splendid set of six such instruments on display, dating from the late eighteenth century, mounted with gold ferrules and beautifully ornate mother-of-pearl handles.

An article like this can only mention one or two of the artefacts on display. There are tokens; there are ornaments and many more. A visit to view the collection is very rewarding.

When one contemplates the many instruments on display, one cannot but admire the craftsmanship, the skill and the dedication of our forefathers. But sterility? G.K. Chesterton once wrote: "Our fathers were large and healthy enough to make a thing humane, and not to worry about whether it was hygienic."

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh has been truly enriched materially and in knowledge by the generous gift of the Menzies Campbell Collection.

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