



Update

The Picts have long been a source of fascination for everyone with an interest in Scottish history, and now it appears that the dental characteristics inherited from them may help us to identify different genetic traits in different parts of the country. Last summer the Group helped to sponsor a visit to Scotland by a young American researcher in dental anthropology, Alma Adler-Beck, of Arizona State University, who has written a report for us on her investigation of dentitions at Whithorn and several other medieval sites. An interesting hint of a North-South divide emerges from her research, with one trait (mandibular torus) being found significantly more frequently at sites with an influence from Pictish ancestors than at Whithorn. Ms Adler-Beck concludes that more extensive analysis needs to be done, and English sites examined. We certainly think that this significant piece of research deserves to be followed through at an early stage.

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The Lindsay Society has lost one of its most distinguished members with the death of Ronald A. Cohen at the age of 94. Professor Khursheed F. Moos, who knew him well, contributes a personal appreciation of this great scholar, dental historian, teacher and dental surgeon.

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Stuart Taylor has taken on the considerable task of cataloguing the 56 bound volumes of the *Transactions of the British Society for the Study of Orthodontics*, published between 1908 and 1970, which provide important source material. He will prepare abstracts of some of the more interesting papers, which provide a valuable picture of the development of orthodontics in the United Kingdom. In this newsletter he reports on his work and describes the origins of the society, which is the oldest dental specialty society in the UK.

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The history of dentistry is not a narrow subject, as the contents of this newsletter demonstrate: they cover everything from early medieval dentitions to dentistry in detective fiction. We are also extending our reach, thanks to the steady increase in the number of visitors to our web site recorded by Carol Parry in her Web News. From New York State Dr Malvin E. Ring, well-known author of "Dentistry – an Illustrated History", emailed us to congratulate the Group on "this fine periodical" and to offer to contribute to our next issue. Dr Ring, who edited the *Bulletin of the History of Dentistry* (now the *Journal*) for more than 20 years, used to correspond with John Menzies Campbell and later with Margaret Menzies Campbell. We look forward to publishing his article in the next issue. Meanwhile, he has sent us a copy of his article on Solyman Brown (1790-1876), which was published last month in the *California Dental Association Journal*. Brown, who did much to put American dentistry on a

professional footing, was also known as the "Poet Laureate of Dentistry". He wrote an epic poem warning of the sad consequences of dental neglect:

*. . . For when her parting lips disclosed to view,
Those ruined arches, veiled in ebon hue,
Where love had taught to feast the ravished sight
On orient gems reflecting snowy light,
Hope, disappointed, silently retired,
Disgust triumphant came, and love expired!*

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In a folder in the British Library can be found a bundle of articles by Menzies Campbell, who apparently sent them to the old British Museum collection. They are in a pretty poor state. At its March meeting the Group formally agreed to give authorisation in principle for money from the Menzies Campbell Fund to be spent on rescuing this valuable archive by having the papers bound in two volumes.

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Lively conversation is always guaranteed on Wednesday mornings at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. An increasing number of regular attenders (including some from our own Group) have been attracted to this informal but highly informative series of "Library Conversations" on the history of medicine. The result is a diversity of expertise and interests leading to illuminating (and often amusing) exchanges. Some recent topics have had a dental dimension - Victorian diet, X-rays in Glasgow, and the development of plastic surgery in the city. Leading the conversation on the last topic Professor W. H. Reid recalled, as part of his more general story, how the cleft palate clinic was started in the mid-1950s when the plastic surgery unit acquired beds in Glasgow Royal Infirmary for patients over the age of 12. Jack Tough and Kerr McNeil from the Dental Hospital started the monthly clinic, which also involved the plastic surgery unit's own dentists and surgeons. This evolved eventually into a weekly cleft palate and cranio-facial clinic at Canniesburn Hospital, involving an array of specialists.

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Clean your teeth twice a day and have regular check-ups - Stirling's first resident dentist, Leon Jablonski Platt, gave advice which would still be sound today. Linda M. Chapman writes in this newsletter on the remarkable life of this dentist with a musical background, and Douglas S. Herd, a partner in Platt's old practice, reviews his book, "A Domestic Guide to a Good set of Teeth", published in 1862. Doubtless Platt would have approved of the sentiments in Solyman Brown's poem, even if his own literary style was not quite so high-flown.

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Moves are afoot to have a blue plaque put up outside Lilian Lindsay's birthplace in Holloway, North London. The medical historian Ruth Richardson, who lives just round the corner, is putting in an application and would welcome the support of dental

history societies and groups. She has helped obtain plaques before, including one for Byron's doctor, John William Polidori. Support for the idea was expressed at the Group's March meeting.

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It's always good to hear of untapped sources of material. Alistair G. Tough draws our attention to some worthwhile ones in his article on the NHS Greater Glasgow Archives.

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The forthcoming meeting of the Lindsay Society in Belfast on May 4-5 will include a lecture on the history of Belfast Dental School by Professor Des Eccles. It will be the turn of Edinburgh to host the September meeting, when the programme will include a visit to the Menzies Campbell museum at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

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Recently we were asked by the author Jill Paton Walsh for information about 1930s women dentists. She is writing a book, to be published in the autumn, in which the central character (who, she feared, might not altogether appeal to the Group) is a woman dentist, 1930s vintage, who goes around accusing people in the village of being German spies. Eventually, however, she hooks a genuine one, who gives himself away every time he opens his mouth - not because of his accent but "because of the excellent German dentistry."

Does this mean that British spies in Germany were similarly at risk because of inferior fillings? Jill Paton Walsh tells us that she understands that British agents had their teeth made over, German style, by refugee Jewish dentists in London before being sent behind enemy lines. But what were the differences in reality? Was British dentistry really worse? Comments would be welcome for the next issue.

The book is partly based on an idea by Dorothy L. Sayers, whose short whodunnit, "In the Teeth of the Evidence," is our latest choice for the Word of Mouth series of fictional extracts.

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