



An odontological centenary

Henry W. Noble

Earlier this year the Glasgow Odontological Society celebrated the centenary of its inauguration on March 3, 1902. When the society celebrated the jubilee of its formation in 1952, three of the eight founding members were invited to join in marking the occasion. This year, the founding members are all long gone and it is the continued success of the spirit enshrined in the aims and objectives of the constitution of the society which was being celebrated. Dentists require to associate for a variety of reasons and the emphasis placed upon meeting to discuss scientific aspects of dental treatment in a sociable manner is a formula which has obviously stood the test of time and carries the society confidently towards its second centenary.

It cannot be claimed that such confidence has always been present. There have been numerous occasions when the council has felt the need to adopt special measures to encourage the enrolment of new members and at least one occasion; following the interruption of activities during the Second World War; when a referendum was called to decide whether the society should be disbanded or not. Fortunately these hurdles have been overcome and the society has survived with a total membership fluctuating between 150 and 200, an average attendance at meetings of from 30 to 40 members, and an attendance at the annual dinner of 80 or so, including spouses, guests and speakers. It has been noticed that these figures bear no relationship to the number of dentists in practice in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, which has grown considerably over the period and that other factors appear to determine the extent to which such a society can grow.

Sister societies exist in Edinburgh and Dundee in the form of the Odontochirurgical Society of Scotland and the Dundee Dental Club and the enquirer would discover that similar societies exist side by side with the local branch of the British Dental Association in most cities south of the border where a dental school is to be found. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the society is merely an appendage of a local dental school. In Edinburgh, the Odontochirurgical Society has always been more closely linked to the Royal College of Surgeons while in London the odontological section of the Royal Society of Medicine has other links. In Glasgow, however, there can be no doubt concerning the close relationship between the Glasgow Odontological Society and the incorporated Glasgow Dental Hospital and School which, with the inception of the National Health Service in 1948, became both a hospital under the Greater Glasgow Health Board and a teaching department of the University of Glasgow. This development had no effect on the fact that almost every meeting of the society has been held in the lecture theatre of the dental school and that the staff of the hospital and school has been the source of many office bearers. An awareness of the undesirability of too close a relationship resulted for many years in the unwritten convention that the office of vice-president or president-elect should alternate annually between a general dental practitioner and a member of the hospital clinical or teaching staff.

The president of the year has perhaps the greatest influence upon the content of the programme for his year of office as well as the personal contribution of his presidential address. A slightly more permanent contribution is made by each council member who

serves for a period of three years or so. The greatest assurance of continuity has been provided by successive secretaries and treasurers who have often served for periods of ten years or more. This has enabled them to develop initiatives, become adept at inviting and looking after speakers and organising the annual dinner and the annual general meeting.

The society has availed itself of several opportunities of contributing to the welfare of the dental hospital when the occasion has arisen. In 1952 when a clinical "at home" was organised as a joint effort by the society and the clinical staff of the dental school, a financial contribution was made by the society. Later when the extension to the hospital was opened in 1970 a lectern was provided for general use in the magnificent new lecture theatre. The opening of the West of Scotland Centre for Postgraduate Dental Education was an opportunity for the society to donate a painting by of boats by Norman Edgar which decorates the foyer of the centre.

The history of the early beginnings of the society was admirably and humorously documented in the booklet issued to every member upon the occasion of the semi-jubilee of the society which approximately coincided with the opening of the purpose-built new dental hospital and school at 211 Renfrew Street in 1932. A complete series of minute books since the founding of the society records the council meetings and the six or so ordinary meetings each year on the third Tuesday of each month from October to March including the annual general meeting. This record of the activities and interests of a group of dentists from Glasgow and the West of Scotland is an important archive which has already been used by historians and will continue to illuminate the past as the profession moves into the future.

It is proper upon this occasion of the centenary of the founding of the society to put on record some of the developments since the jubilee which are in danger of being forgotten with the passage of time. The society crest, embodying elements of the coat of arms of the City of Glasgow, which is still used upon the notepaper and syllabus of the society, has an interesting history. Mr John Bone, whose firm Bone and Hulley, printers, was used by the society during the first three quarters of its existence, was a guest of the society at the jubilee dinner in 1952. He informed the society that the crest had originally been drafted by his brother the famous artist Sir Muirhead Bone.

The jubilee of the society in 1952 was also the occasion when it was decided that the president should have a presidential badge of office. The hospital possessed a die which had been used to strike the bronze medals which were awarded in many subjects to the top student in class examinations before the Second World War. Mr James Johnstone, the hospital registrar, was in charge of a small irregular source of gold, in that sweepings from the parquet flooring in the conservation hall were always carefully collected in a padlocked chest which was intermittently dispatched to Johnson and Mathey, a London firm of precious metal refiners, who recovered the gold from the countless gold foil pellets which slipped from the probe or tweezers on passage between the chairside annealing tray and the tooth cavity in the days when 20 cohesive gold pluggings were part of the work required from each student. The Glasgow jewellers, Edwards, were finally involved in the production of a silver and gilt badge adorned by a maroon ribbon and in its valuation for insurance purposes. Thus it was that at the first meeting of the Jubilee year 1952-53, Dr J. Forbes Webster, one of the founder members of the society was invited to invest the president, Mr Hamish A. Anderson, with a presidential badge of office. The council subsequently acknowledged a gift by Dr Webster which covered all the financial costs associated with the production of this presidential badge.

In 1952 the council decided to assemble a collection of photographs of each member who had served as president and to ask future presidents to provide a photograph for this collection. Subsequently, during the term of John C. Thomson as secretary, a grateful patient who also happened to be a skilled bookbinder, provided a splendid red leather-bound album in which a copy of the early history of the society was inscribed together with pages on which the photographs of each president could be mounted. This album, which is placed on display at each annual general meeting and annual dinner, is a magnificent record of the history of the society and those who have served as president.

The award of a prize for competition by students is another institution which has stood the test of time. Originally it was awarded for the restoration of a mouth to dental health. Then followed a period when the final year students competed over two sessions to produce the best cohesive gold plugging. This was replaced by a competition for the best restoration of a tooth by a cast gold inlay. Even this requirement became too difficult to organise within the crowded curriculum and the prizewinner is now the student who scores the highest combination of marks for a series of tests of a clinical nature. It is interesting to note that the "prize" remained at a princely two guineas for the greater part of the century but is now appropriately inflated as is also the membership subscription and the cost of a ticket for the annual dinner.

It was therefore entirely appropriate, on the occasion of the centenary of this society which has served members of the dental profession in Glasgow so well, that the corporation of the city should have invited the present members to a reception in the City Chambers as a mark of their appreciation of the way in which the city had benefitted from their efforts.

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