



Update

In this issue we turn our attention to Edinburgh! The historian Helen Dingwall, who is writing a history of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, contributes an account of the history of its dental wing. She shows how a number of influential Fellows promoted the cause of dentistry long before a separate Dental Council was finally set up within the College in the early 1950s. The College, she points out, played a significant role in persuading both doctors and the public that dentistry should have its place alongside medicine, surgery, and pharmacy within the increasingly regulated medical profession (particularly after the Medical Act of 1858). Dr Dingwall is the author of "A History of Scottish Medicine: themes and influences", published last year by Edinburgh University Press. Her other books include "Physicians, Surgeons and Apothecaries", published in 1995.

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How much do you know about late-Victorian dentists in Bath, the dental use of silver nitrate, and the history of dentistry in Islamic countries? These subjects cropped up in the most recent batch of enquiries directed at our Group. These requests for information, mostly in the form of e-mails, do not receive sufficient publicity and this leads sometimes to unnecessary duplication of effort. From now on the Newsletter will inform readers about the queries which have been dealt with since the previous issue. The first question-and-answer exercise is at the end of this Newsletter. We hope that readers will be able to offer further comment on the widely assorted matters raised.

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Dr Mike Dickson, lecturer in restorative dentistry and curator of Glasgow Dental School museum, has now delivered his first lecture on the history of dentistry to the third-year students. He has taken over from Dr H.W. Noble, who had delivered these lectures since 1984. It has been suggested to Dr Dickson that our Group would also be interested to hear this lecture, and he has agreed to present a synopsis at a future meeting.

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In the course of a surgery clear-out Paul Hellyer, a general dental practitioner in Bexhill-on-Sea, came across a complete set of student notebooks for the dental course at Glasgow in the mid-thirties and offered them to us. The student was George Forbes Forsyth, LDS, RFPSGlas (1936). It was decided to accept this generous offer and we now possess this record of the dental course from the early days of the new Renfrew Street building.

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Dr Alan Walker, who is in charge of the reconstruction of a crush area behind the lecture theatres at Glasgow Dental School, has expressed an interest in featuring a display of early items of dental surgery equipment in a cordoned-off area in this space. Dr Dickson is co-operating in making the chair, spittoon, foot engine, single dose N²O apparatus and small cabinet available.

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Can music be bad for your dental health? This unlikely question crops up twice in this Newsletter. The idea that loss of teeth could be an occupational hazard for a professional horn player is disputed in a postscript to our earlier article on Leon Platt, Stirling's first resident dentist. And in the article on the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh we learn that in 1890 one prominent member of the College, W. Bowman Macleod, gave a talk on 'The effects of bagpipe playing on the teeth'. Comments, please, for our next issue.

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Another recurring theme in this issue is nitrous oxide. Very unusually, at a time when it was still administered without concomitant oxygen and could therefore be applied for less than half a minute, it was apparently contemplated for use during extensive restorative treatment in the late-Victorian surgery investigated by Dr Malvin Ring. Perhaps even more improbably, nitrous oxide inspired P.G. Wodehouse with an idea for one of his novels, "Laughing Gas", on which Dr Rufus Ross comments in our "Word of Mouth" series.