



**Obituary - Henry W. Noble**  
**24th May 1925 - 10th October 2004**



Henry William Noble was born in Glasgow and attended Dunoon Grammar as a wartime evacuee. He chose to study dentistry, attracted, like many another, by the combination of academic study and fine manual work. In 1942 aged 17 he began an association with dental education in Glasgow which only now has ended. He was a prize-winning student and qualified LDS RFPSG in 1947. He was one of a remarkable year who were the last group to qualify before the affiliation of the Glasgow School with the University in 1948, and whose annual reunions have continued ever since.

While a house surgeon in Glasgow Dental Hospital he also undertook teaching duties as a demonstrator in pathology and dental bacteriology, and subsequently in dental histology - the field which was to become his life's work. Interrupted only by two years National Service in the RAF he served the University of Glasgow as Lecturer, and then Senior Lecturer, in Dental Anatomy and Histology for thirty-six years. He was awarded the HDD of the RFPSG in 1948 (the predecessor of the Fellowship) and then became an FDS RCPSG in 1967, and an FBACA (Fellow of the British Association of Clinical Anatomists) in 1978. He served the College for many years as examiner and organiser of the Primary Fellowship examinations at home and abroad. President of the Glasgow Odontological Society in 1972 he served as the society's editor for many years and was elected an honorary member in 2002. The Glasgow Dental Alumnus association also benefited from his input from its inception at the 1979 centenary celebrations.

Henry's PhD, awarded in 1962, was on the innervation of dentine and utilised what were then novel observations using electron microscopy. He championed the importance of basic science in dental education through many changes in circumstances and curriculum evolutions and revolutions. He was an enthusiastic teacher, well known and well loved by generations of Glasgow dental students and post-graduates. His lecturing style was dramatic and memorable but he particularly enjoyed group and practical sessions and introduced many innovations now commonplace but groundbreaking in their time. From group microscopy through audio-visual techniques to computerised instruction, Henry was always

eager to enliven his classes by the latest methods. He was for many years responsible for the organisation of the student electives and was very proud of their achievements in this period. Never a self-publicist nor a grant-grubber, Henry and his laboratory were the nursery for the research of generations of young colleagues whose early steps he guided and encouraged.

Transfer from a full to a part time appointment in 1986 gave him the opportunity to respond to invitations to developing dental schools abroad, in Jordan and in Trinidad. In addition to undertaking a substantial teaching and examining responsibility there, he recapitulated his early Glasgow experiences in the foundation of oral biology laboratories and the initial training of new technical staff.

In retirement Henry brought all his academic skills and his meticulous scholarship to the study of the history of dentistry. He was the founder of the group which became the History of Dentistry Research Group at the University of Glasgow, and which has flourished under his energetic leadership. The group, now one of the largest and most active in the field, meets regularly and has published a twice yearly newsletter since its foundation in 1996. Its members have produced a steady stream of historical articles and three doctoral theses, and all would acknowledge their debt to Henry's support and encouragement. His contributions in this field, and also to the Lindsay Society and the BDA Museum, were recognised in 2003 by the award of the Tomes Medal. This was celebrated at a dinner in his honour given by the West of Scotland Branch, and pleased him enormously. Particularly because, as he told us, "Old Tomes was always a hero of mine." Just recently he was recommended to receive the Lillian Lindsay Memorial Medal which, sadly, he did not live to accept personally, though he knew about the award.

In his family and personal life Henry showed the same qualities of boundless energy, unstinting enthusiasm, and practical and kindly support - whether it be in boat building and sailing, or in the home, the church or the local community. He and Audrey married in 1954 and celebrated their golden wedding in 2004 with their four children and ten grandchildren. In recent years his activities continued unabated even when conducted by e-mail from his mobile home in Portugal or Austria - the camper van with a motor scooter for extra mobility where they escaped the worst of the Scottish winter.

Henry died in the Ayrshire Hospice on the 10th October after an illness which had developed and cut short his travels this summer. There was a large attendance at his funeral service in St John's Church, Largs, set beside the Clyde - the river which ran through his life. Henry Noble was cast in a classic mould - a gentleman and a scholar, and we are all the poorer for his loss.

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