



## Memories of Glasgow Dental Hospital and School in the 1930's

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I was just a schoolgirl and a member of our church Girl Guide company when we were asked if we would help to raise funds for a future Glasgow Dental Hospital. It was to be erected on a site up the hill of Renfrew Street, overlooking Sauchiehall Street. The site was at that time occupied by a stonemason who made gravestones and when you viewed it from the yellow tramcar in Sauchiehall Street, all you could see were rows of white marble slabs awaiting inscriptions. (Had somebody associated this with dentures?)

Our Guides troop was asked to take part in a pageant based on the history of Glasgow. It was to be performed in the Garscadden Estate. The Guides had to set about learning the footsteps of a dance to the tune 'Greensleeves'. We also had to make our long skirted and sleeved frocks, half of us in scarlet and half in white. Dance rehearsals were eventually perfected at Garscadden - by the famous Jean Milligan, the country dance expert. Dress rehearsals soon took place, incorporating hundreds of players. The 'High Society' of the area were a picture in their beautiful costumes, riding magnificent horses, and often leading Borzoi Russian wolfhound dogs. Unfortunately we were not blessed with fine weather and were soon dancing in Wellington boots on a very muddy area, which had been green grass! A visit from Royalty honoured our efforts and meant an extra daily wash and iron of our outfits. I do not know how much money was raised but the tramcars travelling up to the Estate were always 'standing room only'. (2)

I left school, with Highers, in 1932 and in the thirties depression employment and openings for professional training were usually reserved for males. It was my own Dentist, A.P.Husband, who mentioned that the Dental Hospital, where he was on the Staff, was looking for a clerkess. As I was taking classes in shorthand and typing I applied for the job and got it. Hours were 3p.m. until 7p.m. with pay five shillings per five day week, later raised to seven and sixpence. The new hospital fronted on to Renfrew Street and had three entrance doors. The main entrance was in the centre, a left-hand entrance door and a right-hand exit. Inside the main-doorway was a time clock, which everybody had to sign on and off, each day.

My 'office' was in a large open area just inside the patients' entrance and consisted of a glass-enclosed square with a front sliding window where I sat writing names etc. and with a small side window where I took in cash. I was well placed for a view upstairs and downstairs. The square entrance hall consisted of rows of wooden Forms where the patients took their place. They faced the reception room in which were a few dental chairs and it was staffed by house surgeons who examined each new patient and decided on appropriate treatment.

On Mondays, especially, I dreaded the long queues outside awaiting the 3 o'clock opening. The uniformed commissioner opened the doors and controlled the patients of all ages as they entered. I then entered each patient's name and address in a large leather-bound volume. First time patients then took their place on the wooden forms and waited nervously until it was their turn for an examination. If this was found to require a simple extraction the patient was given a white chart with the tooth, or teeth, marked then directed back to my

side-window where the chart was stamped after I had 'extracted' a sixpence for each tooth! The patient then walked round, on the same level, to the back of the Hospital where they again queued until a student under supervision removed the offending tooth. New patients who needed fillings were allocated a student who escorted them upstairs. Patients who already had an appointment for fillings etc. presented their cards which I noted in full together with the name of their student. Usually there was a group of dental students awaiting their particular patients and it was then that I was able to put a name to the different faces. One busy day not long after I started work I had been so busy I had not time for my five-minute break and when I went down at 7 p.m. I got a shock to see my face a mass of spots. On a visit to my G.P. on the way home I was told I had German measles! When I reported the situation the General Secretary he laughingly said I must have been across the road, as opposite the entrance door was the German Embassy, next to the Keir Hardie Institute.

As patients for fillings were always directed 'upstairs' I went up one day to see for myself. One stair up was a huge room which had rows and rows of dental chairs each festooned with drills. The room above that was filled with rows of aluminium heads, jaws apart with a small barrel full of old teeth at the side, awaiting the future dentists attempts at fillings. I used to say they should have been fitted with mechanical groans! As every patient's name appeared on my ledger, I was at the end of the day able to report 'how many'. Once or twice it was over the 1000 mark which is over 4 per minute but I was also attending the money window. However on these occasions I was supposed to 'bell' the General Secretary, Mr Johnston, for help. No wonder I sometimes got writer's cramp!

The Prosthetics Department was downstairs and payment for Dentures was £5 for a full set and £2.10.0 for a half set. This account could be paid by instalments of half-a-crown (2/6). We had many lascars from the liners as patients as Glasgow was a busy port in these early days. Many came to the hospital in groups with an officer who could speak English. Many of them just wanted rid of their old teeth and new ones they could put in and out, as they used to indicate by signs! I think they thought we kept rows and rows of ready-made dentures on shelves and you just tried them in till you got one that fitted! However once their own denture was ready and paid for, the lascars used to come up to my desk and with a wide grin they proudly showed off their new white teeth. I used to give them a 'thumbs up' and grinned back at their cheery smiles.

There was one small operating theatre complex with a qualified nurse where surgeons carried out 'generals' on special days. I had to book these cases and give them instructions. The words are engraved on my mind to this day. "Take a dose of medicine the night before, your breakfast in the morning, a cup of tea and a piece of toast at mid-day and nothing else. Bring two towels and a friend". When I was asked to repeat it I showed them it printed on the back of their form.

A very varied selection of humanity passed through the doors of the early Dental Hospital.. Mondays saw the poor souls who had wrestled all weekend with raging toothache and who from swollen jaws muttered "I just want this \*\*\*\*tooth pull't" I was also asked often for a distraction but time did not allow for that! There were the regular customers who took great care of their teeth and greeted you like an old friend. I remember one OAP who had an allotment and brought me a passionflower each day he came, as it only bloomed for one day.

In January 1937 I left the Hospital to become a school secretary to the headmaster of my old school. The students and staff in the Hospital very kindly presented me with a Rolex gold watch inscribed 'To Miss Baillie from G. D. Hosp. Jany 1937' It is still going but wearing thin which is to be expected after nearly 60 years. Come to think of it all these young lads and lassies I met as students are now OAPs like this Great-Grandma. However, I still receive a Christmas card from a former student and his wife when we remember the happy old days in Renfrew Street.

The present Dental Hospital and School is a wonderful place compared to the original, with its modern equipment and treatments. But, as Shakespeare says "There was never yet a philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently".

(1). Text reprinted, with permission, from *The Scottish Dentist*, 1996

(2). In his *History of the Glasgow Dental Hospital and School 1879-1979*, p 43, Tom Brown Henderson refers to this event, "There was now arranged a gargantuan programme of theatrical performances, whist drives, dances, musical recitals and flag days in aid of the new Building Fund. The greatest undertaking was a "Grand Historical Pageant" planned and written by Mr Eyre-Todd, to be held in Garscube Estate from 23rd to 29th June 1928. This was a mammoth undertaking. The "Special Committee" numbered a hundred and thirty persons of varying notability, and a willing army of seven thousand performers, singers, and dancers was enlisted. H.R.H. the Prince of Wales promised to attend one of the performances and there were high hopes that the Building Fund would benefit by a very large sum. An indication of the expectations of the Committee can be gleaned from the fact that the organiser was to be paid 4 per cent, on profits up to £15,000 and 31/2 per cent, on profits over that amount. Alas! rain fell heavily and almost continuously throughout the week of the Pageant, and even the presence of His Royal Highness could not avert a disastrous financial result. The Building Fund received nothing.



Final year 1934, from top left:- Hart, Walls, Owens, Ingles, Murray, Lock, McLean, McBride, MacDonald, Ralph, Taylor, Clay Dowie, Martyn, Dick, McNie, McIntyre, Henry, Johnstone, Miss Penman, Links, McKnight, Leitch, Watts, Moffat, M.T. Campbell, Miss Gibson, Stanger, Pollock  
Seated:- Hill, W. Campbell, Fitch, McDougall, Dr Webster (Dean), Martin, Straughan, Walker, Edgar, Nurse Kelly,  
Kneeling:- Johnston, Miss Baillie, Dr Black, Miss Millan, Miss Brodie.