



## John Gray Houston

### Stuart Taylor\*

John Houston died in the spring of 2003; as far as I am aware no obituary or account of his dental career has so far appeared and I would like to make good that omission. I knew John for something in excess of thirty years, for the first half of that period we were consultants in the Orthodontic Department at the Glasgow Dental Hospital and for the second half we kept in touch in retirement. John was born and spent most of his life in the West of Scotland. Having elected to study dentistry he entered Anderson College in 1941 and qualified LDS, RFPS, Glasgow, in October 1945, just at the end of the European phase of the war. National Service followed immediately, John opted to serve in the Royal Navy and took a short service commission lasting five years. He spent time in the Mediterranean and also the Far East at the time of the Korean conflict.

Demobilisation was followed by a period spent at the Eastman Dental Hospital in London, then the recently formed Institute of Dental Surgery of the British Post-Graduate Medical School. Following the Eastman John returned to Glasgow to work in the Orthodontic Department under Dr T.C. White. Orthodontics at this time was under the control of a triumvirate consisting of Tom White as Head of Department, John Campbell, whose interests were formerly in restorative dentistry but now lay in the field of temporomandibular joint pain, and Hamish Anderson, a visiting surgeon who carried out orthodontics at his practice in Sauchiehall Street.

Orthodontic patients were referred to the Dental Hospital for advice, not just from Glasgow, but from all over the West and South West of Scotland. On Tuesday mornings an open diagnostic session was held and patients were seen without appointment, the consultants and junior staff saw the patients and provided hand-written treatment plans, which were conveyed back to the referring dentist. It became obvious that it would be beneficial to establish peripheral clinics and John was responsible for setting up clinics in Dumfries and Castle Douglas, later adding Prestwick, Ayr and Greenock to the list. His orthodontic colleagues later opened similar clinics in Oban, Stirling, Falkirk and Strathclyde Hospital in Lanarkshire. It was realised that oral surgery patients would similarly benefit from a local service and a regional oral surgery service was based on Heathfield Hospital in Ayrshire.

Eventually these visiting sessions were replaced by the appointment of consultant oral surgeons and orthodontists but, in Argyll, John continued to travel to Oban, Lochgilphead, Campbeltown and Islay until he retired from the Dental Hospital in 1986. Even after retirement he undertook locums in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire hospitals and even managed to add visits to the Isle of Arran to his tally of centres visited: he could truly be described as peripatetic.

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow introduced the Diploma in Dental Orthopaedics in 1949 and John was one of the early diplomates, qualifying in 1956. He was awarded the Higher Dental Diploma in 1956 and the Fellowship in Dental Surgery in 1967. For many years John acted both as registrar and examiner for the Diploma and in

retirement continued to act as an invigilator for other College examinations. The Orthodontic Department in Glasgow quickly became involved in post-graduate orthodontic training and John Houston played an active part in the teaching programme.

A great fund of stories exists about John; he was a great advocate of DIY and took a particular interest in the maintenance of the Dental Hospital, much to the chagrin of the maintenance engineers. I remember one occasion when an exasperated hospital engineer told him to look after the teeth and leave the \*\*\*\*\* plumbing to him. In the early 70s the Dental Hospital underwent several reorganisations and various new committees were set up. John became the Chairman of the Safety Committee, I think they hoped this would keep him out of mischief, but how wrong they were. He managed to use this role as an entry to every nook and cranny of the hospital. He was very conscientious, particularly with regard to fire practices, and on many occasions he had the whole hospital, patients and staff, standing in the rain in Renfrew Street. When I came to Glasgow in the early 70s it seemed to me that John was dental advisor to all the senior members of the Glasgow Archdiocese, many of these people were often seen in the department. He arranged for the late Cardinal Winning to be treated by a colleague and on one occasion when he attended his dental records were missing. They were eventually traced, they were not filed under his name, but as 'Archie Bishop', that being his title at the time of the incident. On a further occasion John and I had to fly to Nottingham to look at new equipment for the department, ever on the lookout John spotted a loose screw on the aircraft door and I fully expected to see him produce a screw-driver and effect the necessary repairs.

His last years were spent living, with Jo his wife, in Arisaig, at the home of one of his daughters. Arisaig had been a regular holiday haunt many years previously, in the days when he toured around in a VW camper van. It was to Arisaig that I travelled to John's funeral. Leaving Helensburgh in pouring rain by the time I was through Fort William the sun was shining and on to the service held in the small church of Arisaig. The congregation was made up of family members, local people whom he had come to know and former friends and colleagues from his many years in Glasgow. Jim Reid, who worked closely with John in Glasgow, gave the eulogy; he provided a humorous but accurate assessment of John's character. We finally attended his internment in the adjacent graveyard, set on the hillside overlooking the bay with Rhum, Muck and the other small isles in the distance. It was a deeply moving occasion.

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