



Editorial

Robert McKechnie

A founder member and stalwart supporter of the Group, Bob McKechnie died suddenly while on holiday in France on the 23rd June. The loss of such a lively and energetic man just before his eightieth birthday came as a great shock to family, friends and colleagues who had thought of him as years younger. Sadly he did not live to take up the Chair of the Lindsay Society, his election to which we referred to in the last issue. The large attendance at his funeral in Paisley Abbey testified to the affection and respect he inspired in all who knew him. The tribute from the profession which David McGowan gave at the funeral is reproduced below. Obituaries were published subsequently in 'The Herald' by Sir David Mason (5th August), and in the 'British Dental Journal' (12th August) by Bernard Caplan. At its autumn meeting in Liverpool on September 24th the Lindsay Society chose another member of our Group, John Craig, as the new Chairman in place of Bob. John accepted the nomination with pleasure while expressing his great regret for the circumstances.

Memorial tribute given at Paisley Abbey on 6th July 2006

Good afternoon everyone. I am honoured to have been asked by Beth and the family to say a few words about Bob - so that we can together pay tribute to his life of dedicated professionalism.

As Alastair mentioned, Bob qualified from Glasgow Dental Hospital and School in 1949, and his first job - in the then newly created NHS- was in a practice in Bournemouth, before undertaking national service in the RAF. Then came appointments as a Dental Officer first with Hampshire County Council, and then back home to Renfrewshire (a move made for reasons more compelling than dentistry!). He trained in orthodontics part-time with Prof. White in Glasgow for six years and obtained the DDO Diploma in 1960. There followed fourteen years as County Orthodontist and Chief Dental Officer for Renfrewshire – overseeing a period of steady improvements in dental health and rising patient expectations. When the Scottish Health Service was radically re-organised in 1974 the newly created Health Boards were empowered to appoint Chief Administrative Dental Officers and the first of these to be appointed was Bob McKechnie - to the largest and most prestigious job - at Greater Glasgow. There were high hopes for the new system, dental services were to be integrated and preventively based and the challenge of Glasgow's dental health problems, which were amongst the worst in the UK, would be addressed.

A central thrust was to be the fluoridation of the public water supply, which the Board were persuaded to support, but a legal challenge from the 'anti' lobby led to a High Court case - then the longest and most expensive in Scottish legal history. Bob spent the large part of every week for almost two years in supporting the Board's case and the argument was won – a judgement of international significance. Sadly however, the judge also found the existing law insufficient to permit the introduction of this much needed public health measure, which is still awaited. Still, other ways were found to address the problems and to contribute to the transformation in dental health we see today, and The British Association

for the Study of Community Dentistry made him their President in 1986.

Whether he anticipated it or not a major role for Bob at GGHB was to be as an advocate for dentistry – for the profession and for the Dental Hospital and School. He was in the unenviable position of carrying everyone’s hopes and expectations, however unrealistic they might be. Unfailingly courteous and receptive, his diplomatic skills were superb. He never lost patience and his calm deliberative manner won him the respect of the Board and its officers, and enabled him to achieve much for dentistry and our concerns, despite the turmoil of conflicting financial priorities, political changes and disparate personalities. The award of the Fellowship in Dental Surgery by his alma mater, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow was, in part, recognition of these endeavours. Aside from his formal employment Bob gave a lifetime of voluntary service to his professional association - the BDA. Ever willing to take on the jobs to be done, as secretary, as chairman or as representative, he spent a large part of his life working on his colleagues’ behalf at local, Scottish and UK levels, and the Association showed their collective appreciation by awarding him the rare distinction of it’s Fellowship.

Typically, he continued in retirement as the local benevolent fund representative and even - in a unique initiative - set up and ran a retired members group, which meets regularly to lunch together and to hear presentations - on anything but dentistry!

Bob was also a co-founder of our History of Dentistry Research Group and contributed in a major way to its success. A feature of the Group’s half-yearly newsletters is a series of “verbal history” reminiscences, and it is fortunate for us that in the last issue the tables were turned and Bob himself was the subject. Just one of the sad aspects of his untimely death is that he will not now take office as the Chairman of the Lindsay Society, the national dental history group - who elected him to this post at their last meeting in Malta.

It must be clear from what I have said, how much we will miss such a vital and energetic colleague, and while we know the gap in the family circle will be the widest one, we hope that Beth and his loved ones will gain some comfort from being assured of the great affection and respect we all had for him. The phrase “I never heard a bad word spoken of him” has never been so true.

Bob McKechnie’s work was dentistry - his hobby the BDA - but his greatest pride was in the achievements of his family – a very proper sense of priorities.

Dr WN Mason

We also regret to report the recent death of another member of our group. Willie Mason headed a large general dental practice in Paisley and Linwood, and he was for many years in charge of the teaching and practice of dental radiology at Glasgow Dental hospital and School. He was a pioneer in the achievement of national recognition of the specialty and was one of the first to be awarded the Diploma in Dental Radiology by the Royal College of Radiologists

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