



**As the storm clouds gathered:  
recollections of Glasgow Dental Hospital and School  
1935-1939**

George Fleming\*

In 1935 Glasgow Dental Hospital was a comparatively new building having been formally opened in 1932. The architectural layout and equipment was of the highest order for a modern dental hospital at that time. A photograph of the 1935 intake of students, of which I was one, hung on the wall of the Secretary's office and I remember at the time of the Centenary in 1979 being able to recognize quite a few of the unidentified faces. Perhaps it is still there.

My recollection of the building, the Staff and Students is still surprisingly vivid despite the passage of over 70 years.

The Dean, Dr. J Forbes Webster, was a formidable figure. He ruled the hospital with a "rod of iron" and no one attempted to trifle with him. Nevertheless he had the reputation of always being fair and helpful and was highly respected. I can still remember from his Dental Surgery lectures his emphasis on "there is no regeneration of the dental pulp" and "capping is not an option."

Fergie Mac (Dr. W. F. Mackenzie) lectured in Dental Anatomy. He had a brilliant demeanour, superb vocabulary and a general air of aplomb as well as a most detailed knowledge of his subject.

Professor J. Aitchison (Jimmy) had a commanding presence. His subject was Dental Histology. He also practised in Glasgow's South Side. He greatly admired the Dean's work and often quoted his remarks. Professor T. C. White (Tommy) had just commenced his lectureship in Orthodontics. "Expansion of the Arch" was the great panacea at the time. Dr. J. Campbell (Johnny) is remembered for his methodical and diligent teaching of basic cavity preparation and similarly Johnny Orr (Dr. J. A. Orr) was known for his dexterity in assisting students in the extraction room.

Dr. Charles Read (Charlie) lectured in Dental Radiology and was responsible for valuable early work in this field. He had a distinctive way of speaking which fascinated the students. He was a member of the well-known Glasgow "Read Dental Family." His brother, Professor Talmage Read, is recalled for his jovial personality and was the highly respected Dean of Leeds Dental Institute for many years.

My recollections of work in the Mechanics Laboratory are more light-hearted. In 1935 the lab was under the supervision of an aging tutor (Dr. Malcolm Gibson was not appointed until 1937.) In order to ensure that students remained at work, the lab doors were locked. However the numbers present at the tables mysteriously diminished throughout the afternoon as agile youths escaped via the windows to ensconce themselves in the adjacent Regal Cinema. It was also the case in this lab that students wore their "white" coats until

they were ragged and greying and items such as plaster knives, switched ownership at an alarming rate. However with the appearance of Dr. Husband, behaviour instantly improved and clean white coats suddenly appeared. Dr. A. P. Husband was held in considerable awe and trepidation and a compliment from him about a student's work was greatly prized.

The distribution of patients in the Conservation Department also often caused a degree of fun. The allocation of smart young ladies gave rise to furtive glances among waiting students. The number of patients requesting conservative treatment was inexhaustible and for this, students were very fortunate. Treatment was either free or for a small charge. The Sir Thomas Lipton Fund provided money for "the necessitous poor of Glasgow" to be provided with dentures, which of course also provided students with valuable experience in designing, making and fitting them.

It is interesting to remember that in 1935 the ratio of male to female students was ten males to one female. It is also of note that all tuition fees payable to the Dental School, and the Anderson and St Mungo Colleges of Medicine were self-funded. The Dental Board awarded very few bursaries and there was only a small sum of money available to students from the Carnegie Fund which recipients were requested to repay when they were in a position to do so.

Most of my year qualified in the autumn of 1939 – at the commencement of the 1939-1945 War. Our careers were thus influenced by the war-effort and many of us became Officers in the Dental branches of the Armed Forces.

\* George Fleming LDS RFPSG, retired dental practitioner, York

\*\*\*