



Refreshment and Catering in the Glasgow Dental Hospital and School.

Bill Smith *

The above title headed an unpublished and incomplete article by Doctor Henry Noble which was found amongst his papers after his death in October 2004. Henry was the founder and first chairman of the History of Dentistry Research Group and with typical enthusiasm and seemingly inexhaustible energy, published many articles in its newsletter and so it is perhaps fitting that this piece should be included in this current edition. Although I am too well aware that I lack Henry's ability to apply his meticulous and accurate method of recording detail to any research that he undertook, I am pleased to have the privilege of adding this foreword to his article and to attempt, admittedly with the aid of a rapidly failing memory, to complete this publication. For the first two decades following the opening of the Incorporated Glasgow Dental Hospital and School in Renfrew Street in 1932, there was little need for any form of organized refreshment capability in the institution. Patients were only treated between the hours of 2 pm and 6 p.m. The only member of staff, permanently on site, was the engineer Mr. Slade a retired R.N. engineer who lived with his wife in a flat on the second floor of the building and was responsible for the maintenance of general services. Tea-making facilities were restricted to the nursing staff; a theatre sister (Sister Stewart) and one nurse (Nurse Paterson) The latter could, and did, provide a cup of tea in an "emergency" situation, in a recovery alcove off the main operating theatre on the ground floor of the building.

There was a common room for the students in the basement and a small room in which the committee of The Glasgow Dental Students Society met. The Common Room was furnished with a few tables and chairs, a table tennis table centrally and a piano which emitted a few false notes because, as rumour had it, certain of its strings had been used for orthodontic appliances.

Since many forenoon lecture courses were delivered at St Mungo's College to the East or Anderson College to the West, a wide spread of Restaurants were patronized by students at lunchtime. The nearest were Craigs who had a large restaurant and "The Rhul" in Sauchiehall Street and smaller tea rooms at Charing Cross and Woodlands Road. Skinners, another baker had a large restaurant upstairs at Charing Cross while the Regal Cinema and "Jean's" across the road were also very handy for the Dental Hospital. During the war years, self-service restaurants were a new concept and Ferguson's, a grocer near The Central Station, developed one which provided a nutritious lunch in its basement.

The end of the war saw the retiral of Dr J Forbes Webster as Dean of the Dental Hospital and School and the appointment of Mr James Aitchison as his successor. It also saw the change in status of the Dental Hospital from a privately funded charitable institution to a National Health Service Hospital and the more gradual change in the teaching curriculum as Glasgow University assumed responsibility for provision of the lectures and examinations leading to the degree of Bachelor in Dental Surgery. All these factors produced a profound change in the way of life of all associated with the functions of the Dental School and Hospital.

Before and during the War, the two diplomats who were appointed annually as House Surgeons, were only employed during the hours when the Hospital was open to receive patients, that is, from 2 until 6 p.m. each week day. They were expected to find work in the forenoon, as assistants in a dental practice. The same working hours applied to visiting surgeons.

It is at this point in the article that I must rely on my own recollections on the catering services provided by the Hospital and School for its staff and students. I paid my first visit to the Hospital in 1951 while on leave from the R.A.F. My purpose was to visit my friend Bob Caldwell who was serving as a full-time house officer in the Department of Oral Surgery. During that visit I was to enjoy a cup of tea in the basement "canteen" previously mentioned. It appeared to be well patronized by both students and junior staff with the occasional visit from a member of the senior staff, seeking some quick refreshment between teaching or clinical commitments. The aforementioned table tennis table was still there and seemed to be in good use. The discordant piano was gone, a victim of orthodontic technology? Our tea was dispensed by a delightful friendly lady: Mrs Sadie Etherson who had been appointed in 1950 to the post of canteen Manageress by members of the Dental Students' Council. Retired Consultant Oral Surgeon Hugh D Campbell recalls being a member of the appointment committee. I have written elsewhere about how this remarkable lady was to become one of the most popular and well-loved members of the Hospital Staff. She had a splendid sense of humour and a superb memory for names. During the Centenary Celebrations I observed her address several former students, who had reached the top of their profession, by their Christian or indeed, student nickname and in some cases reminding them that they still owed her for a "fag and a cheese special!" Sadie retired in 1987 having been awarded The B.E.M. in November 1980 for her long and excellent service to the Dental Hospital, its staff and students. She was also made a life member of the Glasgow Dental Alumnus Association.

I was to encounter Sadie again when I became a dental student. During the early 1950s the Canteen offered tea, coffee or soft drinks to its customers. Cigarettes were also on sale and for the sake of impecunious students, were sold singly if required. The staff had a common room on the ground floor and they too had access to tea, coffee and biscuits. If something more sustaining was required then outside sources were utilized. Several of the most senior staff had lunch at the Royal Automobile Club, others in nearby restaurants whilst the majority of students and many of the junior members of staff used the University Union or if female, the Queen Margaret Union. This was fine in good weather but in the winter months when weather akin to Asia's monsoon period descended on Glasgow, even the use of Glasgow's excellent electrically propelled transport system did not prevent one from receiving a soaking during the lunch break. It was with this in mind that Mr A .R. Whitelaw, Mr John C. O'Neil and myself, now members of the executive of the Glasgow Dental Students Society, sought an interview with Dean Professor Aitchison during which we asked if Sadie could be allowed to serve simple hot meals during lunchtime. The quick answer was a definite "No!" This building, explained the Dean, is a hospital - not a soup kitchen and I will not have it filled with cooking smells! Later in the day, I was summoned to Professor Aitchison who had relented. Perhaps on consideration, he found the smell of soup to be preferable to the rising aroma of damp students. Whatever the reason, he gave his consent and an electric cooker was installed in the bar of the common room, from which Sadie dispensed gastronomic delights such as soup de jour (courtesy of Messrs Heinz and

Co.), hot mutton pie and beans, bridie and beans and toasted cheese sandwiches (a cheese special came with beans of course).

The effect of all this was that the students were more comfortable in the afternoon, perhaps too much so. Without the need to brave the outside elements and with a large plateful of pie and beans inside them, it was not unknown for some students to nod off during the early afternoon lectures. Sadie continued to provide tea and coffee for the mid morning and afternoon breaks.

The catering facilities mentioned continued until the opening of the new building by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent in 1970. In accordance with the general policy of the Health Board, a dining room was designed to accommodate all members of the Hospital staff and Student body. Accordingly the old staff locker room in the old building was re-utilized. It was greatly missed by the clinical staff, not only for the chance it afforded to enjoy a quick tea or coffee when a break was available, but also for the chance to discuss, in relative quietness, a variety of topics with one's colleagues. The idea of one common dining and rest room for all did not seem a good idea to me. It was as though the armed services had decided to put the other ranks' mess, the corporals' club and the sergeants' and commissioned officers' mess all under one roof.

Fortunately for the clinical staff, a room which had previously contained the student library and museum became available and it was suggested that this room could be converted to a clinical staff dining room. This idea was favourably received by Mr Ian G. Dorward, the District Administrator and with his blessing the necessary conversion took place. Mindful of its original use, the room was renamed The Museum Club and was run as a dining club by a committee chosen from the ranks of its members. As well as serving lunches, tea, coffee and biscuits were available in the morning and afternoon on a self-service basis. Mrs. Agnes Drake, a member of Sadie's kitchen staff was the person in charge and quickly got to know the dietary requirements of the individual members. The food was exactly the same as that provided for the users of the main dining hall and was delivered to the Hospital from the kitchens of the Royal Infirmary. During the December festive period, a Christmas lunch, complete with all the trimmings could be ordered and on that day it was pleasant to see friends who had retired, coming back to eat lunch with their colleagues. The Club was opened in 1978. The first guest to be recorded in the visitors' book was Professor D. M. Chisholm - himself an alumnus of the Glasgow Dental School and a guest of Mr Jack Hammond, Senior Lecturer and Consultant in Prosthodontics.

The Club was also used for more formal events such as the Hospital Golf Society Dinner and to provide hospitality to the examiners, internal and external during the degree and final examinations. Staff farewell presentations, my own included, were also held in this popular club.

Time moves on and the day came when the Hospital's catering services were provided under a contract with a professional catering firm. Some of the original catering staff, including Sadie's two daughters were retained by this firm and so a few "kent faces" remained. Once more the policy of one common dining area was adopted and somewhere along the line, the Museum Club ceased to exist. A later development was the opening of dining facilities to the general public - mainly patients. One side-effect of this was an increase in the number of parents confessing, when questioned, that their offspring, intended for an out-patient

general anaesthetic, had indulged in: "just a wee sip of ginger at lunch time". "Ginger" being the Glaswegian generic term for any carbonated beverage!

There followed a period when there was some question as to whether the present Dental Hospital would continue to function on its existing site and for a time there was no official dining service available. Thus the wheel had turned full Circle as far as catering services were concerned.

I visited the Dental Hospital in May 2007, thinking to myself that over half a century had passed since my original visit in 1951. I am pleased to report that a new commercial catering service for the staff, students and the general public, is now in place. The dining room, which in my student days was part of the Department of Oral Surgery, has been tastefully redecorated. Dining chairs with a strong McIntosh influence in their design were grouped around solid wooden tables. The dining area is screened from the service-counter by a wall on whose service side are glass fronted cabinets containing sandwiches and other snacks and a variety of soft drinks which can be obtained on a self-service basis. On the side of the wall facing the seated diners, hangs a magnificent flat-screen TV set. I stood for a while indulging in an old man's reminiscences, thinking of my early years and of the happy times spent with old friends in the Canteen and later, the "New Dining Room." I studied the gleaming stainless steel service counter and nodded to a server in his starched white uniform, then made my way back to the clinical departments via the well-appointed staff lounge. "No", I thought, I don't see myself going up to that counter and requesting "A wee tea and a fag please!"

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