

Sir Frank Lawton

Professor Sir Frank Lawton, who died on February 19 2000, was a most distinguished member of the dental profession. He achieved the double first in having been President of both the British Dental Association and the General Dental Council.

Frank Ewart Lawton was born in Crewe on October 23 1915 and was educated at Crewe Grammar School and the University of Liverpool where he graduated with first class honours in 1937. For nearly two years, he held an assistantship in Blackpool where the foundation for his knowledge of general dental practice was laid. He was appointed as lecturer in Operative Dental Surgery at the University of Liverpool in 1939. During the war years, he was responsible, under the direction of Professor Stones, for ensuring that the Liverpool Dental School and Hospital continued to function as an educational and treatment centre. This he did with all the dedication that was a feature of his entire professional career. Lawton spent a profitable year at Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago in 1947-48, and there can be no doubt that he was a stimulating influence on the other members of his class.

In 1956 he was appointed to the chair of Operative Dental Surgery at Liverpool and a year later succeeded Professor Stones as Director of Dental Education — a post that he held for 23 years until his retirement from the university after becoming president of the General Dental Council.

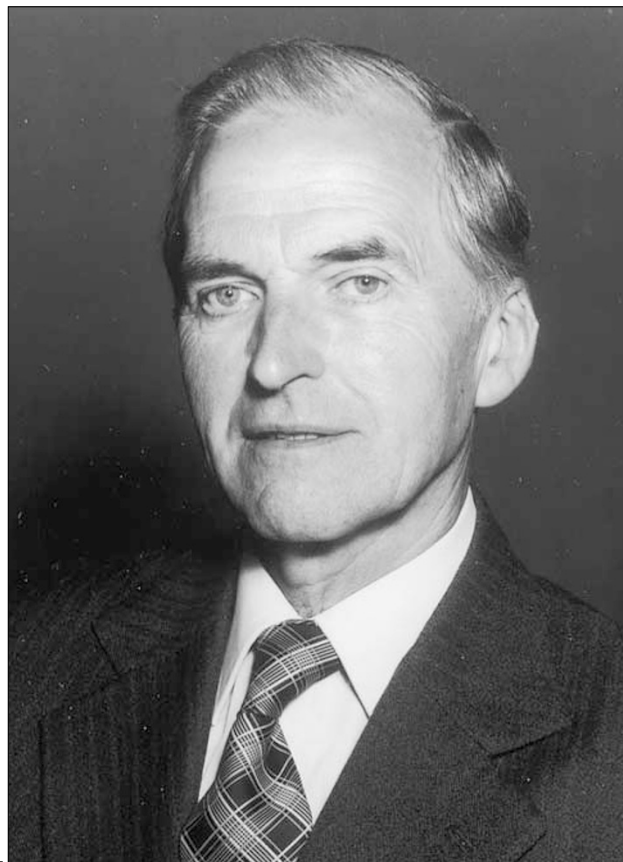
He worked closely at Liverpool with his professorial colleagues Desmond Farmer and Ronnie Hartles. This triumvirate was responsible for the planning of the new dental school and hospital building that was opened in 1968, and for the gradual change in direction of dental education.

Lawton had his rule of life. It was organised, it was demanding, but it was not displayed. Despite his many achievements, he was the most modest of men. There was a quality of inevitability about his character in his professional life. He built it steadily and quietly, stone by stone, and achieved a degree of success that comes to few.

He joined the General Dental Council as the nominee of the University of Liverpool in 1959 and left it 30 years later in 1989 having chaired several of its committees and served on all of them. He had also completed two five year terms as the GDC's president.

Lawton led the GDC through a very testing 10 year period. The general anaesthesia

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and sedation debate in 1983 which threatened the passage of the first new Dentists Act since 1956 caused the GDC to amend its ethical guidance to dentists in an area which had hitherto been the subject of loose, non-specific guidance. However, the GDC got much that it wanted including a Health Committee to deal with the problems of sick dentists.

In 1985 the GDC came under the scrutiny of the Office of Fair Trading which sought to relax the Council's strict 'no advertising' restrictions. Lawton was determined that it would not be in the interest of patients for the profession to go down this road and was prepared to challenge the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. However he demonstrated considerable diplomacy in persuading the Council to modify this view following a powerful approach from the hierarchy of the British Dental Association.

Lawton chaired the GDC and meetings of the Professional Conduct and Health Committees fairly and impartially. No unpalatable duty was ever shirked, no bias countenanced and standards were always rigorously upheld. Expediency was a word unknown to him.

Lawton was always a staunch supporter of the British Dental Association and he

enjoyed a successful year as the Association's President in 1973-74. He was a prominent member of the Fédération Dentaire Internationale and his name is on the List of Honour. Whilst president of the General Dental Council, he received honorary doctorates from the universities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Birmingham and Manchester.

Sir Frank's contributions to the dental literature were mainly through his editorship of the *International Dental Journal* from 1963 to 1981 and through his collaboration with Desmond Farmer in the rewriting of *Stones Oral and Dental Diseases* (Fifth Edition 1966).

In 1985 Sir Frank and Lady Lawton moved from Liverpool to Castle Bolton in North Yorkshire. It was there that they found much happiness and relaxation. Lawton was an accomplished pianist and organist. He played the organ at church services in the Aysgarth and Bolton-cum-Redmire Benefice.

Sir Frank is survived by his loving wife, Muriel; by his children, Margaret and Peter; and by his three granddaughters. Friends and colleagues extend the deepest sympathy to them all.

R.S., N.T.D.