

A look back in time. The training of dental students in Sheffield before the opening in 1953 of the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital

K. H. Figures¹

A review of the archive material held by the School of Clinical Dentistry at the University of Sheffield has revealed how the dental training facilities in Sheffield were arranged before the opening of the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital in 1953. The archive also provides an interesting insight into some of the priorities of dental training in the first part of the last century. This archive information was then supplemented by discussions with four local dentists who qualified in the late 1940s and early 1950s and provides some interesting personal reflections on what it was like to be a dental student during and immediately after the Second World War.

The earliest teaching of dentistry in Sheffield can be traced back to lectures given by Dr Henry Merryweather who lectured on various topics in dental surgery to medical students from 1864 to 1881. These lectures then lapsed for an unknown reason in 1882 but a small number of local dentists then formed the Sheffield Association of Licentiates in Dental Surgery. These were local dentists who had obtained the LDS qualification from one of the Royal Colleges rather than following the apprenticeship scheme which was still possible in those days. Over the next ten years members of this group pressurised the authorities of the general hospitals to appoint qualified dental surgeons to their staff. As a result, in 1892 the Council of the Medical School decided that it would appoint lecturers in dental subjects as soon as one of the hospitals in the city could create a dental department recognised by the Royal College of Surgeons of England and Edinburgh for training purposes.

The establishment of formal teaching in dentistry therefore commenced in Sheffield

in 1897 in the Dental Department of the Royal Hospital which was situated on West Street after the department had been approved by the Royal Colleges as being suitable for professional training. In the following year three unpaid honorary lecturers were appointed. For dental anatomy it was Mr F. Mordaunt; for dental mechanics it was Mr J. Pike, and for dental surgery and pathology it was Mr J. S. Allen. These appointments were followed quite quickly by the formation of the Dental Department of the Medical School in 1900. One local dentist who at this time had worked hard for a dental training course to be started in Sheffield was Frank Harrison MRCS LDSRCS (Fig. 1). He was a dynamic individual who not only designed dental instruments, some of which he patented, but was also keen to deliver public lectures on dentistry as he wished to lift the profile of dentistry in the minds of local people. The archive actually contains one of the lectures he gave entitled 'Our teeth and why we should take care of them' which was delivered on 8 February 1906 at the newly formed University of Sheffield which itself had only just received its Royal Charter from King Edward VII in 1905.

By 1908 Frank Harrison was working as Dental Surgeon to the Sheffield Royal Hospital and Lecturer at the University of Sheffield in addition to running his practice which was sited a short walk away. Interestingly, he was also one of the

IN BRIEF

- Reflection on the establishment of an academic course in dentistry in Sheffield over 100 years ago.
- Pinpoints when the University of Sheffield started to award dental qualifications.
- Highlights how the funding for the building of the current Dental Hospital in Sheffield was secured.
- Reveals some thoughts on what it was like to be a dental student in the late 1940s.

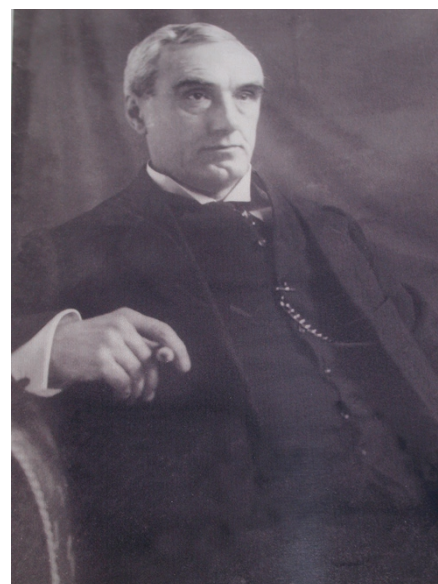


Fig. 1 Frank Harrison MRCS LDS RCS taken in 1898

pioneers of dental radiography in Great Britain and wrote the very first papers on the use of X-rays in dentistry.^{1,2} On the building where his practice was located there is now a blue plaque to record this fact. Sadly Frank Harrison died while still a young man in May 1912 and this was a great loss to the newly established dental school and of course the dental profession as a whole.

In these early days students who undertook this local training programme eventually sat for the LDS of one of the Royal Colleges. The course would have been in the region of four years long and the records

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show some students had to repeat years or eventually leave to study elsewhere due to 'unsatisfactory progress'. Of course there was still at this time the opportunity to do an apprenticeship by working alongside a dentist for a few years to learn the competencies, as we would now refer to them. Once gained it was then possible to put up your brass plate and start practising. It is interesting to reflect that there was no regulator equivalent to the General Dental Council which oversaw dentistry in those days of the early twentieth century.

This fledgling dental school at the Royal Hospital continued with unpaid teaching staff for the first two decades of the twentieth century. There were few students between 1914-1918 due to the First World War and so its rooms were eventually taken over for military purposes and could not be released for a year or two after the end of the war.

However, things started to change in 1922 when the University of Sheffield obtained powers to grant dental degrees and a diploma in dental surgery. This was just after the introduction of the 1921 Dentists Act, which required all dentists to attend a dental school and pass a qualifying examination of a university or Royal College. This training was to be offered in the Royal Hospital, but it needed re-equipping and upgrading. Professor J. B. Leathes, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at this time, applied himself to the problem and he was assisted in this task by Dr George Henry Froggatt, a local dental practitioner and business man who had also qualified in both medicine and dentistry. The result of their efforts was the provision of more space and new clinical equipment including seven new dental chairs which were paid for by the honorary dental staff. The design of this new training facility can be seen in the plan shown in Figure 2 and was next door to the casualty department. The main training room which contained a total of ten dental chairs for treating patients was known as the Long Room and is shown in Figure 3. This is where conservative dentistry was taught. All students at this time sat for the LDS with the first four students gaining LDS Sheffield in 1923. The first BDS awarded by the University of Sheffield was conferred on Jack Blackshaw in 1934 after he had gained his LDS in 1933. The archive

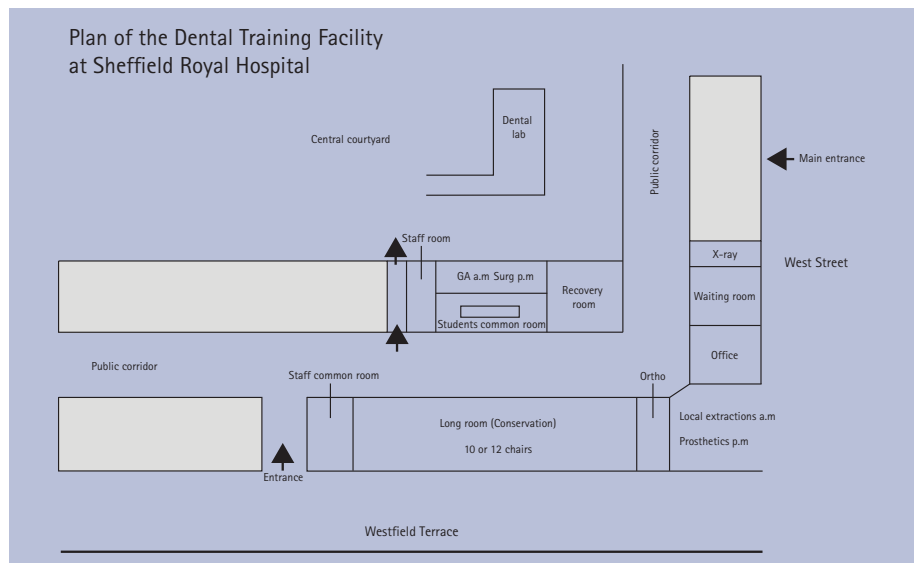


Fig. 2 Plan of the dental training facility at the Sheffield Royal Hospital in 1930 (recalled by David Salliss)

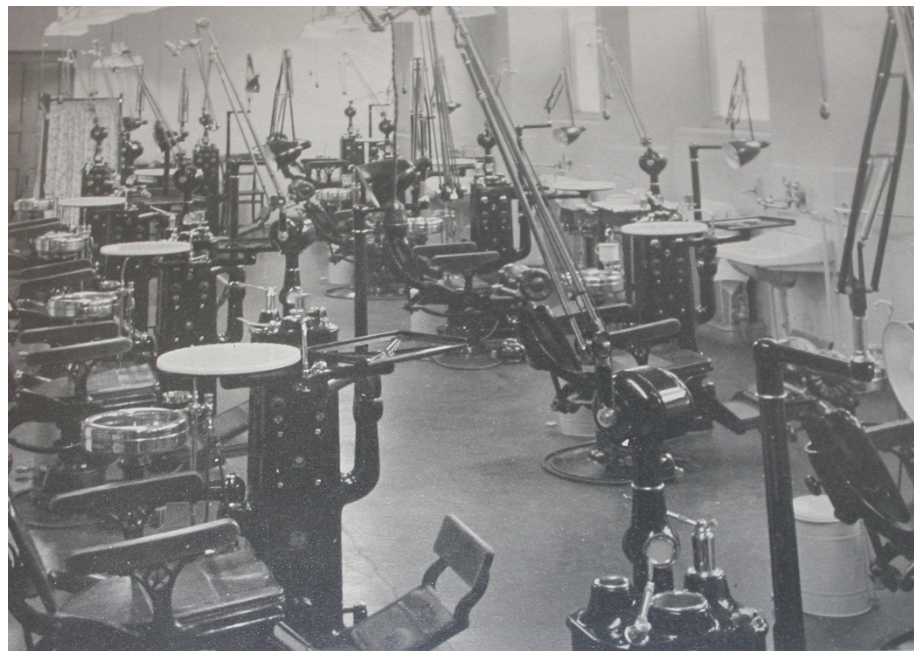


Fig. 3 The Long Room newly modernised and containing ten dental chairs in 1930

reveals that he subsequently went into general practice in Chesterfield where it would appear he stayed until retirement.

By the early 1930s it was becoming apparent that a purpose built dental school and hospital was going to be needed but finding funding and a suitable site was a stumbling block. By coincidence in 1934 a local dental practitioner and part time teacher in the dental school, Mr Harold Waldam, persuaded one of his patients, Colonel Sir Charles Clifford, who had been a member of the University Council since 1907, that there was an urgent need to create more accommodation to train dental surgeons in Sheffield. Charles Clifford

was the son of one of the original owners of the Sheffield Telegraph newspaper and was latterly its managing director (Fig. 4). Sir Charles generously presented to the University of Sheffield a large property with funds to provide an income for its maintenance. Plans for the house conversion were approved by the British Dental Board in 1936. Sadly this was on the day before Sir Charles died, so tragically he never learnt of that development. However, due to various planning issues with the conversion and additional plans by the medical school together with the possibility of war, further developments were halted to be revisited at a later date.³



Fig. 4 Portrait of Sir Charles Clifford which currently hangs in the foyer of the Dental Hospital



Fig. 5 Professor Roberts teaching students in the Long Room

The first professor to be appointed by the University of Sheffield was Professor G. L. Roberts who was appointed to the Chair of Dental Surgery in 1935. He came from a background in Liverpool where he was born and where he subsequently trained and graduated in both medicine and dentistry. After holding teaching positions in Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham he became at the age of 31, Professor of Dental Surgery and Director of Dental Studies in the University of Sheffield. He can be seen teaching in the Long Room in Figure 5. A second appointment then followed that when John Osborne became full time Lecturer in Dental Prosthetics in 1937. John Osborne was later to carry out important work on acrylic resins in conjunction with ICI and went on to become a distinguished Professor of Dental Materials later in his career.

The main components of the course in the 1930s and 1940s were the study of the anatomy of the whole body to include head and neck, thorax, abdomen, arm and leg. The arm and leg lectures were just for BDS students apparently. Quite a few of these lectures were conveniently shared with the medical students. The main clinical components of the course included conservation, exodontia under local and general anaesthesia and dental prosthetics which included studying dental mechanics which took place in the main red-brick university building on Western bank. LDS

students studied dental mechanics for over one year, and BDS students did nearly two years. Students were taught to construct dentures using purple acrylic so that they could not do work privately for the outside market! Vulcanite was still used and swaged stainless steel was used for partial dentures since cobalt chrome alloys were not yet in use. Cohesive gold restorations and gold inlays were taught and the casting of the gold inlays utilised the bucket and chain technique where swinging the bucket around the arm on a chain spun the molten gold into the investment to cast the inlay. There were no worries about health and safety in those days.

The full time paid teaching staff who were employed during the late 1930s and 1940s, in addition to Professor Roberts and Mr Osborne, were Mr Hampson (later Professor in Conservation), Mr Rastall (oral surgery) Mr Hodson (later Professor in Oral Pathology) Mr Turrell (prosthetics and dental mechanics) and Mr Gardiner (orthodontics).

The annual intake of students during the 1940s was between 5-8 and all applicants were interviewed personally by Professor Roberts. If you wished to take the LDS course it was 4.5 years whereas BDS was for 5.5 years. All students tended to do the LDS and then some went on to BDS but worked part-time in dental practice in the evenings to help with the bills. To gain entry to the course students had to sit

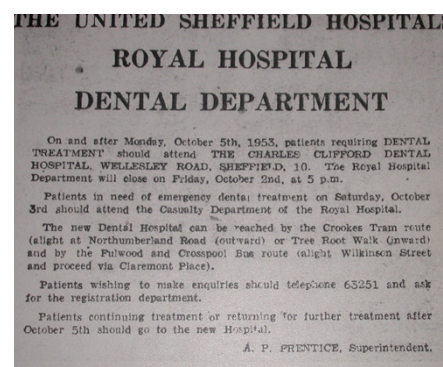


Fig. 6 The notice to patients informing them of the closure on 2 October 1953 of the Dental Department at the Royal Hospital. This was printed in the Sheffield evening newspaper

and pass a registration examination set by the university. During the Second World War more women entered the course and tended to do the BDS course whereas the men returning from the war from 1946 onwards would do the LDS preferentially as it was shorter. These ex-servicemen were able to claim their university fees from the military branch they served in during the war be it Navy, Army or RAF and they could also claim an annual salary of £169 a year. They had been demobbed and could claim this perk as ex-servicemen with no need to stay in the military or commitment to work for them as a dentist after qualification.

In discussion with the four local dentists who had trained in Sheffield in the late 1940s/early 1950s we discussed what is

was like to be dental student at that time. They could recall how cramped the general anaesthetic room was to work in but noted that Sheffield students had good experience of performing extractions under GA and also administering the anaesthetics. The emphasis was on conservation, prosthetics and exodontia with some limited exposure to orthodontics. The attainment of good technical skills was considered to be an essential component of the course. The student common room was a busy place and with many of the students after 1946 being ex-service personnel they had a poker school running on most days. This was a men-only pursuit but one of them (Joan) could remember being a keen observer of the tactics employed to win. One of the events in the social calendar in those days was known as the annual smoker when they all went out for an evening together. This would be held in a local hostelry and as students do they drank and smoked far too much (Jean's reflection).

Another student then (Bill) recalled that when he became a house surgeon two other house surgeons were appointed from another school to make the full complement of three who were appointed for a six month contract. After some discussion



Fig. 7 The newly completed Charles Clifford Dental Hospital photographed before its official opening in October 1953

among the senior clinicians it was decided that only Bill would be allowed to administer anaesthetics and the others should observe or operate as their experience of administering general anaesthetics on their own training course was considered to be limited. Bill also reflected that in those days 'general dental practice was largely a question of making dentures for nearly

a quarter of a million people (most of the population of Sheffield) who believed that teeth were either sound and in your mouth or unsound and in the bin'.

By October of 1952 the Dental Department at the Royal Hospital was due to be decommissioned due to the opening of the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital and a notice to patients (Fig. 6) records this event. This was definitely the end of an era for all concerned with the Royal Hospital but the start of a new one for dentistry in the city where all of the dental specialties could develop and grow in a building dedicated to dental education and the delivery of dental treatment for the people of Sheffield (Fig. 7).

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2. Harrison F. The x-ray in the practice of dental surgery. *J Br Dent Assoc* 1896; **17**: 624-628.
3. Hodson J J. The Sheffield Dental School. *Dent Pract* 1954; **4**: 152-156.