Smile please

Depending on your point of view, few occasions are either more utterly dreary and pointless or more exciting and historically invigorating than the team photo. **Stephen Hancocks** says 'cheese'.

There are not so many professions that immediately attempt to invoke a grin in the way dentistry does. Choreography is one. 'Oh for goodness sake smile' shouts the frazzled movement teacher as their miserable charges trip droopily across the stage all far too consumed with trying to remember the steps to be able to look as if they're enjoying it as well. And another is, of course, photography.

'Smile please' is as clichéd as it comes but it comes frequently enough, especially on that special occasion, the day of the 'team photograph'. Whether a day scheduled specifically for the purpose or one of those spontaneous 'as we're all together let's get a snap', type of occurrences, it can leave as many people cold as it does whooping with delight.

The organised ones can be a nightmare of planning. How often is everyone all in the same place at the same time, especially in a busy practice? For a start there are the part timers. Mornings-only staff feel excluded if

it's to take place in the afternoon, while afternoons will kick up a considerable stink if the reverse is true. Which only leaves a lunchtime compromise when it's not really convenient and everyone is hungry, resentful and generally not looking their best.

This is precisely why any team photo that you have stowed safely among your own possessions has always got someone missing. Years later you look back and wonder where 'so-and-so' was that day, or if the picture was taken after 'such-and-such-a-body' had left the area, but no, they were probably just off that day, ill, or on holiday, answering the phone or making an appointment at the precise moment the camera shutter captured (almost) the whole team for posterity.

And isn't it strange how, no matter when a picture was taken, you can always date it instantly to a particular period, even if you weren't there?

Fashions are the greatest leveller though. 'Just look at Mummy's old glasses' squeal your children in delight. 'What on earth pos-

sessed me to think that that beehive/ skin-head/ mullet/ bob/ plaits hairstyle made me look anything other than dopey?' you wonder as you gaze back in soft-lit nostalgia. And the footwear - geeze! Well, just a blessing that most team pictures are from the knees up.

Still, when all is said and done, there is a certain something about a team picture which comes to define at the least, the moment, and at the most a period or stage in our life or career, without which what record do we have? In years to come when we re-meet old colleagues and drag out the snaps, there will always be someone lurking in the bushy shadows of the picnic, or the outer table of the restaurant who we've otherwise forgotten, or lost touch with or who trips a recollection of some morsel of tasty scandal or gossip. And, well bless me, can you believe it, while we've all been poring over the glossy prints someone's whipped out a camera and is about to - 'oh, no I'm not ready'- commit us to team pictured posterity once again...smile please...darn!