

Albert Edwin William (LOMA) Miles (1912-2008)

Extracts from Personal Letters on Dental Matters

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Abstract

Professor Miles (1912-2008) was a key player establishing dentistry as an academic subject. In the many letters he wrote to Helen Liversidge and me, he describes his involvement as Hon. Curator of the Odontological Museum, Editor Archives of Oral Biology, Assistant scientific editor of the BDJ. He writes about his association with Robert Maxwell and the Pergamon Press and his interests and friendships.

Keywords: Dental Research, Odontological Museum, Archives of Oral Biology, Assistant scientific editor of the BDJ.

Introduction

This is a second instalment of abstracts from letters that A.E.W. Miles, Loma, wrote between the years 2000 and 2006 to Helen Liversidge (HL) and myself (BB) in which he describes his involvement with the early stages of establishing dentistry as a recognised academic subject. He gives interesting insights into many of the personalities he met.

Regarding the Odontological Museum (to HL on 13th November, 2000)

One thing you asked and I never completely answered was how I became Hon. Curator of the Odontological Museum. It was a slice of luck for which Lilian Lindsay was definitely responsible. Sir Frank Colyer was in his late 70s in about 1947/48 and looking for a successor. Lillian was a contemporary but more in touch with what was going on in the Dental Schools through the BDA library. I think I was already Assistant Scientific Editor. She must have told Colyer, Miles is a studious type worth keeping an eye on. Basically with the right qualifications, dentistry and medicine – no PhDs were thought of yet. – The BDS was only beginning to replace the LDS. The first BDS qualified at RDH in my time. Colyer might have heard of me from Sprawson with whom I had a lot to do at the LHDS, but he is unlikely to have recommended me for the Curatorship because I happen to know he saw himself in that role in due course. (Colyer and Sprawson textbook you may know of). Colyer asked me to call and see him in the museum and, after briefly indicating it was to find a successor, straight away offered to make me Assistant Curator from which it would naturally follow I would succeed him in a few years. He wanted more time to watch cricket at the Oval (he lived in Clapham in a huge Victorian house). I need only spend half a day or so a week, present new specimens or talk on something at the annual visit of the Odont. Section to the College – to inspect their museum. I think I said yes straight away and all was set in motion to get the College to agree, until I realised that Sprawson was going to be, and indeed was, upset. (I have never told this bit to anyone before because many

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people knew and loved Sprawson at LH and it is not entirely to his credit so keep strictly to yourself). I wrote to Colyer immediately and asked him to make me simply assistant to the Hon. Curator or his personal assistant, subtly different from being Assistant Curator. I had to go and see him and explain why. He said 'pshaw, I would never have appointed him!' I was surprised because he and Sprawson had, I thought, worked so closely on several editions of Colyer and Sprawson. Although Colyer alone produced the first edition. It may have been more that he saw the need to appoint someone young with potential to develop the museum in line with modern trends – perhaps not yet envisaged – instead of just some recently retired and distinguished dentist. Colyer was only about 28-30 when appointed. Sprawson died a few years later – before Colyer who died 1953/4. Curiously, the College took well over a year to decide to appoint me. I suspect some senior bloke about to retire fancied it as something to grace his years of retirement. I regarded it as a real workplace as Colyer had in his early years – he doubled its size.

As a codicil, some years later I did discover a letter to Colyer from Rushton, saying I am flattered by your offer and would have loved to accept but just appointed to Nuffield Chair in Dental Medicine at Guy's that requires all my effort, and I must say no.' So I was second choice. Rushton gave me a lot of support and took interest in what I did in the Museum, but never gave any hint that Colyer had offered it to him!

That is a story about Colyer and Sprawson, essentially, and only incidentally involves me so not self-indulgent!!

Yours, Loma

On Dental Research (to HL 15th November, 2000)

There were hardly any research facilities before the war, except a lab and technician that E W Fish had at RDH in early 1930s, stimulated by Gottlieb's work in Vienna and which I saw close-to in about 1938 when I was assistant in his Parodontal Clinic. I was given some paid 'research sessions' at LH in about 1946 which were really to enable me to get teaching material in dental histology and pathology together to replace Sprawson's teaching the next term. I managed to get published a few oddities, clinical (Unilateral Giantism: a case. 1944). By 1950, I had gathered some examples of chondrosarcoma of maxilla, described their structure and made use of my embryology by discussing in detail the possible origins of cartilage in the region of the maxilla.

Embryology had always fascinated me; at King's College London where I did anatomy for the medical course, there was an inspiring teacher of the subject who was obviously researching, and who covered blackboards with elaborate drawings in coloured chalks. My interest was fortified in the 1940s because of the influence of Dixon Boyd, the Professor of Anatomy and Angus Bellairs when he joined the department in 1944. I learned how to make graphic reconstructions from serial sections and applied it to a study of a full term human cyclops foetus, which had a tooth erupted. Guided by Dixon Boyd as joint author, I wrote up the erupted tooth part (can't find any offprints) but the rest lies somewhere among my papers, another oddity!

Shirley Glasstone I got to know about this time; she had researched before the war but not within a dental school. There were temptations for me to stay in embryology or anatomy. I did explore the possibility of picking up one of the

Nuffield scholarships to do a PhD but was a little too old and was settled on a promising path in general direction of pathology and was within the confines of marriage! Nevertheless my interest enlarged, especially in the experimental side of embryology, although Boyd was strictly morphological, like Cave, Professor of Anatomy Bart's Hospital, earlier at RCS, Angus began culturing lizard embryos. Boyd was well aware of work on the neural crest and emphasized to me the evidence that it was involved in tooth development as well as many other things, so I switched to be involved with the experimental work I was aware of going on in Sweden. I was put on an MRC Dental Committee, with Lady Mellanby, Rushton and Darling; I was supposed to be the tooth development chap. Gaunt, a zoologist, external MRC worker at Royal Holloway College with Percy Butler, was put under my supervision on behalf of MRC. At one time they explored the possibility of giving me a Unit but I was not ready for such a big development. By 1966, I had plenty of non-path, research going on in my department mostly with MRC Grants, Meredith Smith and Peter Shellis. I began to get an international team to work on what became Structural and Chemical Organization of Teeth that appeared in two volumes in 1967. If you look at it, you will find Chapter 4 'Fundamental Aspects of Tooth Morphogenesis' by Gaunt and Miles; I wrote the first part which dealt with neural crest and the exciting, experiment work that had gone on mostly abroad in the 20-30 years before and Gaunt wrote the latter part bolstered with his own elegant studies of tooth development in the mouse. Neither of us contributed much to this field subsequently (he sadly died suddenly) but I believe our chapter stimulated a lot of people to work in this area (Kollar in USA, Lumsden in UK) and certainly the work on 'enamel' in non-mammalian vertebrates, which Meredith Smith, Shellis and I did, started a raft of papers, mainly Scandinavia and Japan. I doubt whether I had enough basic training to have done more, so I have no regrets.

I must tell you sometime of the visit I paid to Stockholm to see Sellman who during the war years had done as his PhD some pioneer work on transplanting bits of neural crest in amphibia; teeth developed wherever he put them. In the meantime he had been appointed Dean of the school and, although I had written to him, he rec'd me as yet another foreign visitor come to see the new school to find out how many dental chairs they had. It was on that visit I met Orvik the palaeontologist and his ideas about the origins of dentine.

Best wishes,

Loma

Regarding the Archives of Oral Biology (to BB a copy of letter to editor BDJ 5th September 1987)

Madam, You were kind enough to refer in the journal (BDJ August 8) to the special issue of *Archives of Oral Biology*, which paid compliments to my editorship of it for many years. I hope you will allow me to record that it was under one of your predecessors, Bryan J. Wood, that I served my apprenticeship in the art of editing. He it was who not only took the journal through the difficult war years but brought it into the new dawn of the post-war period. It is a part of the history of the journal that ought not to be forgotten, and your note prompts me to highlight it by some personal reminiscence.

In about 1947, Bryan Wood persuaded the Association to agree to provide him with a part-time Assistant Scientific Editor. Mainly, I believe, through the influence of Dr Lilian Lindsay, who had noted me reading diligently in the BDA Library, of which she was the devoted Honorary Librarian, this new appointment was offered to me. As there was a salary, I think of £300 per annum, attached to the post and I was an impecunious part-time teacher at The London Hospital Dental School aspiring to become a full-time teacher/researcher, this was like being thrown a life-line, and I gladly accepted. Bryan Wood explained to me that one of my main functions was to build into a major two or three page feature a section of the journal at that time called Notes on Dental Periodical Literature which consisted of abstracts of articles mainly from foreign journals kept going during the war and afterwards by Dr Lindsay and the then Dr M. A. Rushton. The idea was that this section should become the means whereby readers would be kept in touch in a comprehensive fashion with scientific advances of knowledge.

I also had the opportunity to attend various exhibitions and functions and to write short accounts of them for the Notes and Comments section of the Journal. I well remember visits to the British Scientific Film Society and attending, as a reporter, the open days and prize-givings of the London dental schools. There were other dividends, precious to a young academic aspirant, such as a call on Professor Martin Rushton, who explained with characteristic charm and apparent casualness what I was to take over from him. On the left side of his desk was a pile of journals. He explained that when he had a spare moment he would take one and endeavour to reduce it to an abstract or two to add to the smaller pile on his right. Nevertheless, the pile of journals on his left continued to grow and from time to time a clean sweep had to be made. He had just been appointed Nuffield Professor of Oral Medicine and told me he had yet to work out exactly what this meant; he supposed it was his function to concentrate on the study of what the mouth could contribute to medicine as a whole and how systemic disease might be reflected in the mouth.

Bryan Wood could not always arrange his holidays to be present on make-up day, or putting to bed of the journal as he called it, so for several years I performed that function by arriving at the journal office in Hill Street early one day in August and spending it sitting in the editor's chair while Miss Messer, Bryan's faithful secretary and general assistant, brought me confusing sheaves of galley proofs which I had to manipulate with scissors and paste. The flexible points in the journal were Notes and Comments, Abstracts, and Letters to the Editor, and my main task was to select items that fitted the pages or ended in the right places. Often it was necessary to render down bits to a smaller compass or the more constructive, and therefore more difficult, task of writing new bits of appropriate length. There came the time after a few years when I reluctantly had to give up what was a delightful appointment though I continued to enjoy many of its associations by being a member of the Editorial Committee, consisting of Dr Lindsay, Professor Rushton and Dr Ronald L. Emslie, an aspiring academic who succeeded me as Assistant Scientific Editor. We met once a month in front of the editor's desk, latterly Mr Leslie Godden. However, my main purpose is to pay a tribute to Mr Bryan J. Wood, with whom I was privileged to work quite closely for several years. I was enormously impressed with his devotion not simply to the interests of the Journal but to precision in the use of language, especially as the essential

accompaniment of the precision of science. I learned from him the traditions and techniques of editing and printing, and he set for me a standard I have always aimed at but, lacking Bryan Wood's patient, philosophic nature, have rarely achieved.

Yours

A.E.W. Miles, London SE11

International Abstracts of Biological Sciences I.A.B.S. (to BB 4th January, 2004)

Part of the revival of scientific literature after World War II was of the services providing classified abstracts, or lists of titles, of world periodical literature. My first experience of science publishing began in 1947 when I was appointed assistant scientific editor of the British Dental Journal. My main function was to provide abstracts of scientific advances. So, on a small scale, I set up an organization of young researchers to help by supplying abstracts, particularly from foreign language journals. This service became well known and popular. Probably as a result, when Vass and others began to resuscitate the pre-war British Abstracts of Medical Sciences in 1953, I was enlisted to organize a Section of Odontology. The rest of the story is told in brief in the Editorial I wrote for Archives of Oral Biology (1988) to celebrate the 40th Anniversary Year of Pergamon Press, which was also reproduced in the Pergamon Press, Robert Maxwell and Pergamon Press, of the same year.

Very soon, the title of Brit. Abstracts of Med. Sciences was changed to International Abstracts of Biological Sciences and, shortly after, Maxwell appeared on the scene and began to play a crucial part in the rebirth of the journal. He was still a highly controversial figure in the world of publishing; it was said that he had been unduly ruthless in handling, or taking over, a British publisher of ancient lineage, Butterworth or Simpkins, I am not sure. Some senior British scientists refused to have anything to do with him but there were some notable exceptions, at Fellow of the Royal Society level, who had been won over by him, his charm, rapid acquisition of an impressive command of perfect English and of science, and his general air of competence. He could have passed as a typical product of the British educational system, public school and Oxbridge. No trace of Americanism which all of us were becoming familiar with, whether or not we had been in the war Services. We gradually learned of his fluency in German and Russian but he was not the bragging sort, unless it was subtly done by casual remarks. It was not difficult to understand how he had impressed so many senior scientists as the potential reviver of British scientific publishing. However, as far as the members of the Board of Management of I A B S were concerned, we accepted with much caution what Maxwell appeared to offer. He was remarkably frank; admitted that he had some way to go to gain the confidence of the scientific world and that one of the reasons he was prepared to give time and his firm's resources to I A B S, even though it was run on non-profit making lines, was because it enabled him to demonstrate that making money was not his only interest; he was genuinely concerned to see British science prosper. This was made plain by his desire to see us compete with Biological Abstracts. He urged us that we had the potential to become the world leader in its place. Not many of us could rise to such heights of conviction but it helped to keep us from flagging. Maxwell was great at generating enthusiasm and inspiring confidence in others;

probably all successful entrepreneurs are but it was a new and impressive experience for all of us, especially the editors of sections who later came to see a lot of him. I greatly admire, however, Vass, Robinson, Dr Mer and others who played the dominant part over these years for the way they kept their heads and preserved our initial caution throughout. Maxwell became an MP in 1964.

Financially, the organization repeatedly faced crises and also publication delays; usually Maxwell appeared at meetings in the nick of time to present us with some way out, often at what seemed surprising cost to his firm and various accounting contortions seemed sometimes to be involved. We all suffered a severe shock when in 1969 it turned out that Maxwell or Pergamon had been out-smarted and taken over by an American company, Leasco; that there had been any such dealings at all seemed out of accord with Maxwell's patriotism. Within 6 months of being run by Leasco, we realised, as did the editors of Pergamon journals in general (I was editor of one, Archives of Oral Biology), that things were very bad. Leasco were inefficient and ruthless; they insensitively interfered with the policies of journals whereas Maxwell had faith in his editors, leaving them to get on with the job as long as they respected the part played by the publisher. Things got so bad that a majority of Pergamon editors exerted pressure to get Maxwell back. Leasco did disappear within two years and Maxwell was once again in charge. In 1972, the Council finally decided that the journal should cease publication. Maxwell, by the way, told us some time before that that he had invested in what we now call ITV, educational side in particular. This was at the time ITV activities were said to be a licence to print money!

Maxwell and Pergamon helped to keep going some of the bits and it is likely that some of those in due course passed to Elsevier when Pergamon was sold to them. I have been told that the journal, Current Awareness in Biological Sciences, that appeared in 1983, published by Elsevier, grew out of the wreckage of IABS. This journal is a classified list one that appears in 12 sections that can be bought separately, Microbiology; molecular cell biology; cancer (not botany, I think). I am afraid I am not in a position to research the origins of this journal and many other tail-ends of IABS but some library work, a look at the first issue of C A B S would reveal a lot.

Yours, Loma

A Gift of Books- a personal touch (to BB 6th October 2005)

Hogarth is earmarked for you. Someone gave me the names of two reliable second-hand bookshops, but I want where possible to "bequeath" them to people in "memory" of me! Some of those of no merit are going to a church bazaar and some to Oxfam but I do not intend to render my house bookless. I love to be surrounded by them in the same way I like pictures on the walls. Many books I bought for the bindings and not the contents. I have a large collection I think of as political, ranging from books on the Russian Revolution, the later stages of which I can remember when I could just read newspaper headlines. And many others on the events leading to the second WW, the 1930s when I was a student and there were said to be communist cells among us; some certainly went off to the International Brigade in Spain. I am trying to offer these to political centres in Whitehall. I still meet the books that are no longer necessary. You can get it all on line. Maybe I mentioned before that a review of an autobiography of a distinguished writer mentioned

that this writer was born into a bookless household but when he was eight-years old stayed for several weeks with a literate uncle and there met books for the first time and fell in love with them and read avidly ever since. What chance is there of the young falling in love with reading in this day of the TV screen?

Must not forget that my purpose in writing is to ask you whether you got to know Alex Comfort at your time at LH and would you please make the same enquiry of Aubrey Sheiham? I was lucky enough to get to know Comfort well; he wrote several books of poetry and several novels of which most are on my shelves; I doubt whether they are much interest except to people who knew him. Copies of his later sex manual would go like hot cakes but my copy disappeared years ago! He went to UCL Biochemistry and wrote the pioneer books on ageing which was my interest at the time and partly because I knew him well. He called himself an anarchist, which he explained once meant he believed not only in independence for Scotland but similar units like Kent too; if nations were of that size they would never go to war. I remember also that he lost two fingers of his left hand making fireworks when at school.

You will perhaps remember Angus Bellairs in Anatomy, a close friend of Comfort's. I think they were at Cambridge together; Angus was an eccentric and we became close friends until he died a few years ago; I miss him still. I have always picked up unusual friends; I shocked my mother when aged about five I brought my best friend home to tea which he ate as if ravenous as indeed he probably was; he was scruffy not very clean and his bum was sticking out of a tear in his trousers. More respectable was a friend I remember well from when I was about twelve. He could draw wonderfully mostly in cartoon style; his name was Robinson and he was a nephew of Heath Robinson, the cartoonist, still famous. If I am relaxed my mind fills with such memories but for the recent it is hopeless.

Best wishes, Loma

Author Biography

Helen M Liversidge² MSc PhD BchD, Queen Mary, University of London; email: h.m.liversidge@qmul.ac.uk Reader in Dental Anthropology. Qualified in dentistry from Stellenbosch, South Africa. Research includes: quantifying the developing dentition, assessing age from teeth and global differences, development and eruption. Teaches undergraduate and postgraduate dental students in clinical paediatric dentistry.

Relationship with subject: He was a friend and mentor and research collaborator

Barry Brown¹ Emeritus Reader W A B Brown, MSc PhD LDS DOrth, Former Hon. Research Fellow in the History of Dentistry, KCL. Qualified in dentistry from Guy's Hospital 1950. Resigned 1971 as Senior Lecturer in Orthodontics from the Cardiff Dental School. Appointed 1971 to teach Dental Anatomy to students going on to King's College Hospital Dental School. Retired 1987. Continued publishing scientific papers up to 2005 and contributed six articles to the Dental Historian.

Relationship with subject: We became friends when he came as External Examiner to Professor J. H. Scott's dental students at Queen's University Belfast where I was a lecturer in Orthodontics, and by chance my family in England lived near to his weekend cottage retreat.