

Obituary

Geoffrey G. T. Fletcher



Geoffrey Fletcher, a former member of the staff of the orthodontic department of the Institute of Dental Surgery and Eastman Dental Hospital, died in December 2005 after a long illness.

He made a significant contribution to the development of British orthodontics during his long association with the postgraduate courses held at the Eastman Dental Hospital. Many consultant orthodontists and former overseas graduates benefited from his expertise and guidance. He achieved wide international recognition following the publication, in 1981, of his book *The Begg Appliance and Technique*, which was, and still is, regarded as the definitive text on the technique.

Geoffrey was educated at Lancing College, Sussex. He entered Guy's Hospital Dental School in October 1936, but transferred to the Royal Dental School in 1939 when the Guy's pre-clinical departments were evacuated to

Tunbridge Wells. He later returned to Guy's to complete his training, qualifying LDS, PCS (Eng), in June 1942. Whilst awaiting conscription into the Royal Navy as a Surgeon Lieutenant (Dental), he joined the staff of the Eastman Dental Clinic and was called up in 1943. Fortunate in his service postings he emerged from the war unscathed. Following his discharge from the Navy in 1946, he returned to his part-time appointment at the Eastman, combining this with working for the Middlesex County Council School Dental Service in Hendon, North West London.

When the Institute of Dental Surgery and the Eastman Dental Hospital were established in 1948, he was appointed as Lecturer and, subsequently, Senior Lecturer, in the Orthodontic department. His principal duties were instructing and training postgraduate students in various techniques and diagnostic procedures. Following retirement in 1983, he was invited to lecture on the Begg technique in various European university centres. These were very well-received and he formed a number of close friendships there.

Geoffrey was extraordinarily talented in many fields: an excellent draughtsman who illustrated his own textbook, and a gifted painter using both watercolours and oils, his preference was for landscapes, but he occasionally undertook commissions to do other work. He was a superb modeller and made accurate scale models of the 'Queen' ocean liners and several British warships, including his masterpiece, HMS Vanguard.

When younger, he was an athlete of outstanding ability, representing London University at the International University Championships in Paris in 1938 in the 440 yards/400 m events. He competed in the Amateur Athletic Association championships in London from 1937 to 1939 and, but for the war, he would have been a strong contender for inclusion in the British team for the cancelled 1940 Olympic Games.

He was also good at many ball games and was an enthusiastic golfer. He partnered Colonel Legge, Referee of the All England Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Club, in competitive amateur golf tournaments both in the UK and in Europe.

Geoffrey was a generous benefactor to the British Orthodontic Society (BOS), and in 2001 established a prize to enable trainee orthodontists to further

their education by visiting overseas centres. The Geoffrey Fletcher Prize has been awarded annually ever since.

Blessed with an excellent sense of humour and a ready dry wit, he was always good company. Although good-natured, he was not gregarious, never seeking public acclaim or prominence. His lifestyle separated his professional and private relationships, and although he never married, he had lifelong friendships with many of his own generation.

Geoffrey was a modest man and, although good at everything he undertook, really excelled whenever he was passionately committed.

All the members of his immediate family predeceased him, but he will be greatly missed by more distant relatives and his many friends.

Geoffrey was born on 14th December 1917 and died on 30th December 2005.

Stephen Gould

In memory of Geoffrey G.T. Fletcher

Geoffrey Fletcher recently passed away at home in Horsham, Sussex, well into his eighties. A former teacher in orthodontics at the Eastman Dental Hospital, London, he is internationally best known as the author of *The Begg Appliance and Technique*, which appeared in 1981. This compact book is the best that exists on the Begg technique; clear, objective and well written, a critical appraisal born from long experience as an all-round clinician and lecturer. I started to read the last pages and was gripped by the statement 'the Begg appliance is both comprehensive and versatile, but it is only an instrument, which like a musical one, can be played to good effect only by those with the talent, training and perseverance to do so. Discord and disharmony will haunt those who do not possess these characteristics. It is the operator, not the appliance who produces the results acceptable or otherwise directly in accordance with this ability.'

In 1984 I took the initiative to come into closer contact, the start of regular correspondence, reciprocal visits and many years of good friendship; we often regretted that we had not met before, since our work showed so many parallels and similar experiences. Older orthodontists agree on so many aspects. I often quoted parts of his letters; here a revealing sentence from his first letter: 'I am more interested these days in why, every now and again, orthodontists produce spectacular results in severe malocclusions which would not have been expected to respond fully. Their personal mastery or their technique is usually given the credit. Yet these same orthodontists can at other times be found puzzled and defeated by what appears to be a much easier problem. The answers it would seem will be found in a study of growth vectors, quantities and balance. Bad technique can be expected to spoil the standard of result, but first rate technique does not necessarily mean a first class result if growth factors are adverse.'

He was good company with a special sense of humour. In his house the rugs were worn, but the furniture was Chippendale; his paintings and perfect scale naval models were remarkable, being his own work, and showed how skilful he was. And if the Olympic Games had not been cancelled because of the war, he could have won an Olympic medal as a short-track runner.

His former students, scattered all over Europe from Norway to Italy, speak of him with great sympathy and esteem. He lectured to the Dutch Society of Orthodontics on his visit to the Orthodontic Department in Groningen when already retired.

During his last year letters became rare. On December 5th, 2005 he wrote 'My writing has reached the point where even I can't read it. I may not be capable of writing again.' Let us keep his memory bright. We lost such a good friend!

C. Booiij