

**FEATURES  
SECTION**

## Obituary



**ALAN COMPTON CAMPBELL, BDS, FDS, D. Orth,  
MRCS, LRCP  
1921–2008**

Alan Compton Campbell, the quiet man of British Orthodontics, died on 28th July 2008 at the age of 86. Quiet he was, but insignificant he was not. In spite of being dogged by ill health for the second half of his life, which precipitated his early retirement in 1981, he achieved much and had a far reaching influence on the orthodontic scene of this country.

Alan was born in Peterborough into a proud Scottish heritage; his Father had moved south from Glasgow but Alan was equally proud of his Mother's English lineage. He studied dentistry at Guy's Hospital and qualified in 1944. After serving as a Houseman in the Conservation Department he was called up as a Naval Dental Surgeon and joked that the only time that he went to sea while

serving in the Navy was on the Gosforth Ferry! One of his fellow officers whilst stationed at Royal Arthur in Corsham in Wiltshire was eventually to become the Duke of Edinburgh but I do not think that they kept in contact. On demobilization he returned to Guy's to complete his medical degree in 1951. He attained the D. Orth in 1954 and the FDS in 1955.

He liked to tell the tale of his joust with the examiners when he sat for the newly established Diploma in Orthodontics on the first occasion that the examination was set. At that time, the candidates had to do a band up on a phantom head. In those days, bands had to be made from a roll of steel tape and welded at the chair side. Alan demonstrated his individuality by being the only candidate to bring along his trusted Watkin welder, having declined the facility of the exciting new electronic welders recently installed at the Eastman Hospital. With some delight and a big grin, he said afterwards: 'while all the others were going click click, I was going clonk clonk'.

Subsequently Alan joined the staff of Guy's Department of Children's Dentistry until he was appointed a part-time Orthodontic Consultant at both St. Mary's and West Middlesex Hospitals. In 1966, he resigned from these hospitals on his appointment as Consultant to Guy's Dental Department for Children's Dentistry, to which he was delighted to return, and where he spent the rest of his professional career.

The role of a Guy's Consultant at that time involved not only orthodontic teaching and the supervision of cases being treated by the students but also responsibility for the minor oral surgical needs of the patients of the department, together with supervision of general anaesthetic sessions and the management of cleft palate babies. Alan was a dedicated teacher of undergraduates and his diagnostic teaching clinics included hands-on practical demonstrations which was quite a novelty at that time. He was a commanding figure, elegant, dignified and courteous. Always a good listener, he was approachable by students and junior staff alike being concerned for their welfare and progress. Alan never gave offence to anyone and was an example to all.

He involved himself actively in Hospital and student activities, being elected by the students as President of the Guy's Hospital Swimming and Water Polo Club, which he supported for many years.

His collaboration with Professor Jack Tulley, a very close friend, enhanced the teaching at Guy's. In 1960, they jointly published 'A Manual of Orthodontics' which they dedicated to their wives. It was a very helpful and practical guide for students and ran into three editions, the last coming out in 1973. Alan was also one of the contributing editors of 'A History of the British Orthodontic Societies (1907–1994).' His memory, research and superb command of English were of invaluable help to his colleagues.

In addition to his duties at Guy's Alan ran a part-time private practice in Harley Street and also saw some patients at his home.

As if this was not enough, his innate sense of duty and professional responsibility led him to take part in the management of the BSSO which in those days had no professional staff. He was elected Hon. Secretary from 1964–1968 and was in effect single-handedly responsible for the management of the Society and for the co-ordination of its activities during his period of office.

In 1975, Alan was elected President of the BSSO and gave a most thoughtful and far-sighted Presidential address entitled 'Responsibility and the Orthodontist'. In it he encouraged members to consider themselves an integral part of dentistry having recognized a growing tendency for some orthodontists to set themselves apart. He was the voice of reason and wisdom looking at the whole scene of dentistry of which orthodontics was an important part. His concluding words were: 'we are concerned with the whole patient and not just the teeth'. The paper was beautifully written and in many areas ahead of its time, for example, suggesting the introduction of continuing professional education.

During Alan's Presidency he attended that year's Conference of the British Association of Orthodontists. In a late night informal discussion with the Officers of the Association he persuaded them of the overwhelming advantage of the various orthodontic societies uniting and becoming a single powerful organization. It took another 18 years for this to come about but at the time it was a cathartic happening.

Alan agreed to be the Social Secretary of the third International Orthodontic Conference which took place at the Festival Hall in London in 1973 and which involved three years of preparation of a most successful

programme. Additionally he has taken responsibility as a Trustee of charities associated with the professional world. At Guy's he was a Trustee of The Friends of Guy's Hospital and he and Margaret were regular and enthusiastic contributors to the Friends annual Fete. In the wider field, he became a Trustee of the Speech.

Therapy Unit attached to City University which was funded by the Kingdon Ward Trust. His absolute integrity and clear thinking made him a natural selection for such responsibilities.

Alan's latter years were dogged by ill health, which he bore with courageous resignation. There were times when, following cardiac surgery, he became more physically able and for several years he was able to play bowls together with Margaret, his devoted wife, and he became Captain of his Bowls Club. Margaret and Alan were also members of the local Caledonian Society and sang together in the choir, from which they derived much pleasure.

To Alan his family meant everything. He was married to Margaret for 52 years of happiness, which were cut short 10 years ago when she died all too soon. Sadly his elder daughter Gillian predeceased him as well. His twin children, Jane and Neil, have always been a tremendously loving and caring support to him. In these latter years, his partner Joan Ritchie, another retired orthodontist, has been a stalwart and wonderful friend – a relationship which has been a comfort for both of them.

Alan was one of nature's gentlemen. He was a much respected member of his profession and was loved by his patients, colleagues and many friends. It can be truly said of him that he was one of those who will be sorely missed from their place in the world.

Jeffery S. Rose

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following who generously supplied me with information for this obituary: Stephen Challacombe, Ian Crossman, Hans Eirew, Neil Campbell, Stephen Gould, Iain Hathorn, Jane Kilvin, John Levason, John Metcalf, Joan Ritchie, Iain Robinson, Chris Stephens and Geoff Webb.