

The papers of Sir Arthur Amies and Dr William Tuckfield

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Introduction

The papers of two well-known yet strikingly different figures in local dental history—Sir Arthur Barton Pilgrim Amies and Dr William John Tuckfield—have recently been listed. This project, which has made these records held by the University of Melbourne Archives more accessible, was made possible with a grant from the Melbourne Dental School and was undertaken by freelance archivist Bruce Smith, with assistance on the Tuckfield collection from Suzanne Fairbanks, Senior Archivist (Collection Management).¹

Dr William John Tuckfield (1881–1969)

William Tuckfield was born in Belfast (Port Fairy), Victoria, in 1881, and was one of a small group of graduates from the Australian College of Dentistry in the early 1900s. He commenced his dental training a decade or so after the establishment of the *Dentists Act* of 1887 and eight years after Charles Pearson, in the first, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to initiate the formalisation of dental education in Victoria, proposed a lectureship in dental surgery within the Medical Faculty of the University of Melbourne.² Prior to

the establishment of the Australian College of Dentistry in 1897, dental education comprised a five-year apprenticeship; a training that focused on the restoration, extraction and (when the client could afford it) replacement of missing teeth with a set of finely carved ivory dentures.

In 1902 William Tuckfield registered as a dentist with the Dental Board of Victoria, having graduated a short time earlier with a Membership of the Australian College of Dentistry (MACD).³ He established a private practice and not long after, in 1908, joined

the teaching staff of the Australian College of Dentistry and the Faculty of Dental Science at the University of Melbourne.⁴ His engagement by the University inaugurated an enduring career which would ultimately extend beyond private practice to include teaching, research, writing and editorial roles with the *Australian Journal of Dentistry* (1914–1956) and the *Australian Dental Journal*. Tuckfield—or ‘Tucky’ as he was affectionately known—retired in 1952, having witnessed immense changes in the development of both dentistry and dental education in Victoria.



Opposite: Dr Tuckfield (centre) with colleagues, rear of the Australian College of Dentistry, Spring Street, c.1950. Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, University of Melbourne.

Right: Northwestern University, Evanston–Chicago, Certificate conferring the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa* on William John Tuckfield, 15 June 1925. Series 1/8, W.J. Tuckfield Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



Records

There are two document boxes, one film and one textile box of material relating to William Tuckfield held in the University of Melbourne Archives. This small collection contains examples of the key achievements and interests in Tuckfield's academic career and life. The material is in five series: certificates 1944–1965, objects 1911–1965, professional articles and teaching materials 1945 and 1950s, personal papers 1868–1964 and photographs c.1964.

Among the professional articles and teaching materials, and perhaps most indicative of Dr Tuckfield's professional and academic interests, is a proof copy of the second edition of his book, *Full denture technique*.⁵ Preventative dentistry in the early years of the College was still a fledgling area of study, whereas a significant component of the course work was in prosthetics; in learning the techniques for the creation of crowns, bridges, partial and full dentures for a community whose oral health was overwhelmingly poor. Tuckfield's book, for which he was awarded the Doctor of Dental Science at the University of Melbourne on 16 December 1944,⁶ became the standard text on dental prosthetics for dental students at

Melbourne for the remainder of his career.

Tuckfield's qualifications following his original training were largely honorary (which in itself tells us something about our subject) and the collection of certificates contains a number of the degrees awarded to him. They include the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*, Northwestern University, Evanston–Chicago, 15 June 1925; Fellow in Dental Surgery, Royal College of Surgeons, England, 29 July 1948; and Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* at the University of Melbourne, 23 May 1963.

Amongst the certificates, and of particular interest, is an address bound in a brown leather cover and embossed in gold letters: *W.J. Tuckfield*, from the Melbourne Dental Students' Society. This was presented on the occasion of Dr Tuckfield's relinquishing the Chair of Dental Prosthetics at the University on 19 October 1951. The following extract reveals the genuine fondness and regard with which Tuckfield was held by the students: 'Your significant achievements, your outstanding ability and above all your qualities of kindness and understanding have won for you a place of deep affection and respect in the hearts of all students.'⁷

The collection also includes a black doctoral bonnet and purple and gold hood, assumed to be from the conferring of the honorary DSc at Chicago in 1925. There are pages from Tuckfield's family register dating from 1868, a small collection of photographs (mainly of Tuckfield with family and colleagues), as well as a film, not viewed by this writer but thought to be of both the interior of the Dental Hospital and the University grounds. There is also a bronze plaque presented to Tuckfield on the occasion of his delivery of the second Ernest Joske Memorial Lecture in 1943.

Despite the limited scope of the collection, we can still draw a number of conclusions, in particular from others' observations of Tuckfield. Perhaps the overwhelming view of him to emerge is that of an endearing teacher and colleague, highly regarded by students, fellow academics and members of the profession, someone of boundless energy and a devotion to teaching, who left a lasting impression on those he encountered. This view is articulated in the citation admitting Tuckfield to Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* at the University of Melbourne, which describes him as 'famed for his clinical science' and 'highly respected but greatly loved by the dental profession in Australia'.⁸



Left: The Sears Studio, *Melbourne University: 18th Students' Representative Council, 1924.* Amies is in the back row, second from the left. Black and white photographic print, mounted on grey board. Series 4/001, A.B.P. Amies Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Below: Professor A.B.P. Amies demonstrating new methods to delegates of the ninth Australian Dental Congress, Sydney, 1937. Left to right: Professor A.B.P. Amies, Sir James Barrett, Messrs H.S. Spier, A.L. Peattie, J.C. Christophersen and A.D. Craven. Black and white photographic print. Series 13/019, A.B.P. Amies Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Sir Arthur Barton Pilgrim Amies (1902–1976)

Arthur Barton Pilgrim Amies was born in Perth in 1902, the same year William Tuckfield gained his registration as a dentist. Amies represented a new generation of dentists who were university trained and qualified. He initially studied dentistry at the University of Melbourne (BDS_c 1924) and then medicine at Edinburgh University, where he graduated in 1928 (LRCP, LRCS). After his studies in Scotland he returned to Melbourne and set up in private practice. In 1929 he embarked on further studies, receiving the DDS_c from Melbourne and later the Diploma of Laryngology and Otolaryngology (1933), from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.⁹

In 1933, Dr Frank Clare Wilkinson (1889–1979), the first Professor of Dental Science at the Australian College of Dentistry, resigned. He was succeeded by Arthur Amies, whose appointment as Professor of Dental Science at the University of Melbourne made him 'dean of the faculty, principal of the Australian College of Dentistry and [later] dean of the Dental Hospital'.¹⁰

Amies' professional interests and activities were numerous and varied, too various to mention here, but from

the time of his appointment in 1934 he worked actively and devotedly to raise both the standard of dental education and the status of the dental profession. Amies lobbied the State government for the establishment of a new dental hospital and school; he participated vigorously in the fluoridation debate, joining the Premier Sir Henry Bolte in passionate opposition to its introduction. With Professor Harold Down he initiated the Children's Department of the Dental Hospital of Melbourne and

campaign tirelessly for improved dental education for the community at large.

Records

The 17 archival boxes in the Arthur Amies Collection were transferred to the University of Melbourne Archives from the School of Dental Science over several years. The 13 series include subject and personal correspondence, photographs, student notes, textbooks, publications, papers, talks and lectures, newspaper cuttings



Dr K. Adamson, Professor H. Down, Professor A.B.P. Amies and Professor H.F. Atkinson on the steps of Parliament House, Melbourne, after the Queen's birthday levee, c.1958. Sepia-coloured photographic print. Series 13/038, A.B.P. Amies Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



and other documents, all relating to the broad orbit of Sir Arthur Amies' interests and professional responsibilities.

Amies is a fascinating subject for researchers and there is a great deal to ponder and discover by delving into any series in the collection. The documents in 'Subject correspondence c.1918–1977' shed much light on the activities of the Australian College of Dentistry. They show the striving of the College to attain prestige and to overcome prejudices about the status of the profession. The papers include the seeking and granting of two additional professorial chairs, one in dental prosthetics and one in conservative dentistry, an outcome which did much to enhance the standing of the College.¹¹

Interspersed in the correspondence and subject files is substantial material written about Amies which adds greatly to knowledge of Amies on the one hand, and dentistry in the middle decades of the 20th century on the other. In one paper D.A. Hall describes the conditions of the Australian Army Medical Corps Dental Service in Tobruk (Western Desert) and Kantara (Canal Zone) where Major Amies was serving.¹² The primitive and challenging conditions faced, the nature of the work, the shortages of tools and

equipment, and the relief when the Dental Section was presented with a much needed 'claw hammer and screw driver' are all articulated. The paper also provides insights into Amies' work ethic, describing how Major Amies and Captain Clarke were 'kept at the grind solidly—the only respite being the enforced rests during the air-raids'.¹³

There is an absorbing collection of photographs,¹⁴ which show Amies as physically imposing, easily singled out due to his height. The photographs capture Amies as a young student and member of the Melbourne University 18th Students' Representative Council, 1924; demonstrating to delegates of the ninth Australian Dental Congress, Sydney, 1937; participating in numerous conferring ceremonies; and in academic dress on the steps of Parliament House after the Queen's birthday levee, c.1958, with colleagues Professors Henry Atkinson and Harold Down and Dr Kenneth Adamson.

The series 'Papers talks and lectures' canvasses the range of Amies' interests and the diversity of his audiences. The papers reveal Amies as an accomplished writer and keen student of dental history. In his address to the first session of the Dental Congress, *The advance of dental science and its relation to*

public health (date unknown), Amies devotes four pages to explaining the development of dentistry—illuminating the past in order to demonstrate the significant progress in education and professional practice. At the conclusion Amies writes about his desire for a 'national scheme of co-ordinated scientific and clinical research, supplemented by intense public education and adequate dental service for every member of the community'.¹⁵

The crowning achievement of Amies' eminent career was the opening in May 1963 of the new Melbourne Dental Hospital and School of Dental Science in Elizabeth Street. Much of his professional life was preoccupied with lobbying and planning for these. Series 11, 'Opening of "New" Dental Hospital, 23 May 1963', contains material relating to the much anticipated event. Towards the end of his career, a ward of the Melbourne Dental Hospital was formally named the Arthur Amies Ward; a ceremony held for the unveiling of the plaque was presided over by Sir Robert Menzies, who made the following observations:

When I go along Spring Street and cast a withering glance at the old Dental College Spring Street and then find myself being driven to the aerodrome past this



Delftware plate, Amsterdam, c.1963, glazed earthenware, diameter: 27.0 cm. Plate depicts the new Melbourne Dental School and Hospital as viewed from the corner of Royal Parade and Grattan Street. Presented by Dr Charles F.L. Nord to the Dental School of the University of Melbourne and the Dental Hospital of Melbourne in 1963, on the occasion of the official opening of the new school and hospital building. Reg. no. 443, Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, University of Melbourne.

magnificent place, I shall always, in future, now that I know more about it, say to myself, Amies and lift my hat to this tremendous development in which you played Sir, so great so powerful, so patient and so successful a part. And then over this same period look at the development that has occurred in the status and in the skills of the profession of Dentistry.¹⁶

Conclusion

This important project funded by the Melbourne Dental School to document the collections of records of Sir Arthur Amies and Dr William Tuckfield completes the listing of all material currently held by the University of Melbourne Archives relating to the history of dentistry and dental education at the Australian College of Dentistry and the University of Melbourne. Due to the limited records available, the project takes on even greater importance for future researchers and historians. Significantly, the records complement objects in the collection of the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, particularly in the case of William Tuckfield, from whom the Museum holds numerous teaching specimens, hand-coloured teaching slides and teaching films.

Considered alongside other dental records held by the University of Melbourne Archives, including material from the Australian College of Dentistry, the Odontological Society of Victoria and the Dental Hospital of Melbourne, the records represent a valuable resource for researchers in the development of dentistry and dental education in Victoria.

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Notes

- 1 The lists are available online at <http://tinyurl.com/2a8mj59> (A.B.P. Amies Collection; accession nos 1977.0013; 1979.0044; 1994.0067) and <http://tinyurl.com/24p5cvs> (W.J. Tuckfield Collection; accession nos 1978.0112; 1998.0055).
- 2 For a discussion of the development of dental education in Victoria, see James A. McL. Robertson, *The Australian College of Dentistry: A centenary of dental education in Victoria*, University of Melbourne, History of the University Project, working paper no. 4, Parkville: History of the University Project, University of Melbourne, 1998, pp. 4–11.
- 3 Robertson, *The Australian College of Dentistry*, p. 51.
- 4 H.F. Atkinson, 'Tuckfield, William John (1881–1969)', *Australian dictionary of biography*, vol. 12, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990, pp. 280–281.
- 5 W.J. Tuckfield, *Full denture technique*, Melbourne: Australian College of Dentistry, proof copy of 2nd edition, 1945. Series 3/9, W.J. Tuckfield Collection, University of Melbourne Archives (UMA).
- 6 W.J. Tuckfield, 'Full denture technique', DDSc thesis, University of Melbourne, 1944. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 7 Melbourne Dental Students' Society, Address presented to W.J. Tuckfield on the occasion of his relinquishing the chair of dental prosthesis at the University of Melbourne, 19 October 1951. Series 1/7, W.J. Tuckfield Collection, UMA.
- 8 University of Melbourne, Certificate and citations admitting W.J. Tuckfield to Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, 23 May 1963. Series 1/4, W.J. Tuckfield Collection, UMA.
- 9 H.F. Atkinson, 'Amies, Sir Arthur Barton Pilgrim (1902–1976)', *Australian dictionary of biography*, vol. 13, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993, pp. 39–40.
- 10 Atkinson, 'Amies, Sir Arthur Barton Pilgrim (1902–1976)'.
- 11 The Honorary Curator of the Dental Museum, Professor Emeritus Henry F. Atkinson, was appointed the first Chair of Dental Prosthetics in 1953. He is also the author of *In defence of ivory towers: The history of the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne*, Melbourne: H.F. Atkinson, 1990.
- 12 D.A. Hall, 'History of the 4. A.G.H. Dental Section June 1940 – Dec 1943. Also short articles: Interlude at Pilastrino, Tobruk night: A memoir', undated typescript, p. 3. Series 5/034, A.B.P. Amies Collection, UMA.
- 13 Hall, 'History of the 4. A.G.H. Dental Section', p. 5.
- 14 Photographs 1918–1964. Series 13, A.B.P. Amies Collection, UMA.
- 15 Arthur Amies, 'The advance of dental science and its relation to public health, address to the first session of the Dental Congress', (n.d.), p. 11. Series 5/048, A.B.P. Amies Collection, UMA.
- 16 'Ceremony for the unveiling of plaque and naming of the Arthur Amies Ward by Right Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, KT, CH, FRS, QC, Dental Hospital of Melbourne, 14th Nov 1967', transcript of official speeches, p. 5. Series 11/003, A.B.P. Amies Collection, UMA.