

2. A Biography of Maurice Porter LDS RCS

The Maurice Porter Embouchure Exhibition was launched with a biographical introduction from his son Robin Porter:

The Life and work of Maurice Porter (1909-1986)

“A hundred years ago this year, a 14-year-old boy and the fifth child in a poor immigrant family, left school and started work in a furrier’s warehouse, in the East End of London, to help his family’s finances. This young boy, who had taught himself to play the penny whistle and later the clarinet, got himself an evening job at the Hoxton Cinema, playing the clarinet to accompany silent movies.

This was an inauspicious start to my father’s career as a dentist and to becoming a leading authority on the embouchure problems of wind and brass musicians.

His part-time work at the Cinema helped to fund his education and he gained matriculation and a place at the London Hospital Dental School. After graduation as a dentist in 1933, he worked in several dental departments of hospitals and clinics in East London.

In 1937, he returned to the London Hospital to gain an additional qualification as a doctor, but with the outbreak of World War II, he ended his studies and volunteered to join the British Army Dental Corps, as he felt that that was more important than gaining further professional qualifications.

Initially, posted to the Army’s Dental Department at Edinburgh Castle, with the rank Second Lieutenant, in 1940, he was then sent to Ceylon and South Africa on the Queen Mary Ocean Liner.

My father’s concern was always for people less fortunate than himself. He wrote in his diary during the voyage that he was upset that, officers like him, were served with nine course meals, while people at home in the UK were subject to wartime austerity.

At the end of 1940, my father was posted to Palestine. He was promoted there to “Officer in Charge” of the Dental Department of the Middle East Military Hospital and achieved the rank of Major.

He remained in Palestine for the rest of the War, where he treated soldiers with serious facial injuries, some of whom had been wounded at El Alamein. He was particularly emotionally touched, when treating a severely injured army bugler, who pleaded with him to restore his facial musculature and dentition, so that he could recover and play the bugle again.

This episode greatly influenced my father personally. As an accomplished amateur wind musician, he decided to specialise in the dental problems of wind and brass musicians and their treatment.

His posting in Palestine was an important for another reason, because there he fell in love and married his wife Danuta, mother to me and my brother Stephen. She was a young refugee from Poland, who, along with her parents, was working as a Red Cross assistant looking after wounded Polish soldiers.

On my parents’ return to London at the end of the War, my father set up dental practices in Stoke Newington, in North-East London, and later in Harley Street, in the West End.

However, my father never abandoned his roots in the East End and would treat his old patients at his Harley Street practice, without charging them.

He continued to develop his major interest and passion, the research into the embouchure and the treatment of wind and brass musicians.

In the early 1950s, the British Dental Journal published a series of my father's articles about the dental problems encountered by wind and brass musicians, and how to treat them, a subject which had been largely ignored by the profession up to that time.

These articles attracted much interest and were followed by numerous other articles in a wide range of dental, medical and music publications in the UK and abroad, such as *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, *The Conductor*, *Woodwind Magazine*, *World Medicine* and the French publication, *L'Information Dentaire*.

In 1967, he wrote the highly acclaimed book on the subject, "*The Embouchure*", which was published by Boosey and Hawkes and later translated into Japanese. "*The Embouchure*" is still a recognised authority on the subject.

In addition to his writing, my father gave many lectures, both in the UK and in America, to dentists and musicians. Also, he acted as Honorary Dentist to music teaching schools and other institutions, to give much needed advice to musicians. A major part of his practice was treating musicians and music students, who had embouchure problems, often caused by injury, or inappropriate dental treatment or orthodontic issues.

Through his wide reputation as an expert on the embouchure, my father would receive and reply to correspondence from all over the world from dentists, musicians and those who teach wind and brass instruments playing.

I have read through the extensive and wide-ranging correspondence in my father's papers. I was particularly touched by a letter he received from a nun, in America, who was a music teacher, whose student my father had advised.

She wrote "*...my sincere thanks for your generous response to my request. You will be remembered in my prayers, asking God's blessing on you and your work...*"

Extracts from other letters are included in the Exhibition and the accompanying website, and they demonstrate my father's commitment to helping musicians with embouchure problems and their dentists.

As my father's reputation as a specialist grew, he was treating more musicians with dental problems. His patients ranged from keen amateurs, bandsmen and music students to well-known classical and jazz musicians.

Because he was a talented clarinet player himself, it was not uncommon for him to play with famous musicians, such as Jack Brymer and Benny Goodman. My brother, Stephen, and I have many happy memories of hearing my father play his clarinet in our lounge with these musicians.

In recognition of the important services my father provided to musicians and the dental profession, he received numerous awards and was elected to various honorary positions.

For all his achievements, my father remained, a modest, gentle and generous man, who was much liked and respected by his patients, his professional colleagues, musicians and all who knew him.

He was also a wonderful father to my brother and me, and we miss him greatly.

I wish to thank those who have made this exhibition possible:-

My wife Shirley for the many hours she spent with me sifting through the boxes of my father's papers and artifacts, which I inherited after my mother's death and for helping me prepare written content for the Exhibition and website. (Amazingly, she knew about my father's work before I met her, as she comes from a dental family!).

The BDA, and in particular Rachel Bairsto and Brian Williams, and all the other people involved in creating the Exhibition and the website for their encouragement, enthusiasm, and commitment in making this project possible.

Rachel and Brian have gone far beyond what I thought would be possible. This includes obtaining exhibits and videos which illustrate my father's work and to bring the topic up to date.

We are proud that this Exhibition that the BDA has so kindly created, and the website they are launching will provide a lasting legacy for our father's life and work that will encourage more dentists to develop this specialism which will help musicians."
