

The Beginnings of the BDA Library (a short history)



Lilian Lindsay in the first BDA library at Russell Square

The BDA was founded in 1879 but did not find a proper home until 1904 when it set up its headquarters at 19 Hanover Square. As far back as 1909 at a meeting of the Representative Board Mr W H Dolamore moved “That the question of the formation of a Library by the Association be referred to the General Purposes and the Finance Committees for consideration and report.” This motion was carried but in the event the General Purposes Committee turned down the proposal.

However, with the move to 23 Russell Square and larger premises in 1919, plans were made to allocate space for a BDA library. A report on the new offices at a Representative Board meeting on May 16th 1919 states that, “On the ground floor is a large room – 28ft by 20ft, suitable for a library and reception room, and accommodation for offices.” In the event the library ended up in a smaller area on the second floor of the building! Its establishment was assured at a meeting of the Representative Board in January 1920, where Mr J A Woods moved “That a Library Committee be now appointed, whose function shall be to establish and maintain a library of dental and allied literature...and that the necessary steps be taken to alter the By-laws so that the Committee become a Standing Committee of the Association”.



At one of the Committee's first meetings it was decided that efforts would be directed to, "the acquisition of dental works of rare and historic value; modern dental text-books in their most recent editions; medical and surgical works of a like nature; and books of reference in scientific and general literature of recent date."

The first collection of books came from donations by members as there was no budget as such for the library to purchase books and the British Dental Journal was used as a vehicle to request members to donate books for the good of the dental profession. Library committee reports during 1920 contained phrases such as, "There were many books in the possession of members which, although interesting to them, would be very much better in the library, and would be welcome gifts" and, "To a book-lover a book is a choice companion not lightly to be parted with. Still, we hope many will force themselves to face the wrench, for the good of the community...If, perchance, someone has a rare book, let him send a postcard to the librarian. A postcard is such a simple thing. We may have got the book and need not take it from its present shelf. If not, the card will have eased the parting; at least it will bind the giver to the pleasure of giving."

Lilian Lindsay was made honorary librarian. The first woman to qualify as a dentist in the UK she had to take her LDS in Edinburgh as no English dental school would accept a woman. She qualified in 1895 and spent ten years practicing in London paying off a bank loan that had enabled her to study. In 1905 she married Robert Lindsay whom she had met in Edinburgh. The two practiced there together for 15 years until moving to London when Robert Lindsay became the BDA's Dental Secretary. Mrs Lindsay served as honorary librarian until her retirement in 1946 when she became the first woman president of the BDA.



The Russell Square library

Mrs Lindsay visited a number of different libraries to find out the best methods of arranging the books and obviously, as a dentist herself she would have had no problems with categorization. At first only members who visited the library could borrow books but in 1922 a postal service to country members was initiated with £5 being set aside to cover the postage. This postal service is a member benefit that continues to this day. By the time of the Annual Report for 1922 the number of volumes in the library had reached well over 1000 and an exchange of periodicals and transactions of dental societies had been instituted with other dental libraries.

In 1923 a set of rules was prepared for those wishing to borrow books from the library:

- 1) Books shall only be lent to members resident within the United Kingdom
- 2) A member desiring to borrow by post a book or periodical shall forward an application to the Librarian in writing, together with a sum of 1s. for each volume required by him or her, to cover the cost of postage and packing.
- 3) A member borrowing a book or periodical from the Library shall be required to sign and return to the Librarian a form of receipt, agreeing to be bound by these Rules, such receipt to be filed by the Librarian and returned to the borrower when the volume has been received back into the Library.
- 4) No member shall retain a book borrowed from the Library for a longer period than fourteen days without a special permission of the Librarian, and all books borrowed from the Library shall be returned carriage paid.
- 5) If a member after receiving three days' notice from the Librarian shall fail to return any book or periodical borrowed by him or her within the time limit in Rule 4, he or she shall pay to the Association the sum of a 1s per day for every day after the expiration of such limited time as aforesaid during which he or she shall fail to return such book.
- 6) If any book shall be damaged while in the possession of a member, or while in the course of return by post or otherwise shall receive injury due to careless or insufficient packing on his or her part, he or she shall, upon the demand of the Librarian, repair or replace the same at his or her own expense.
- 7) If any book be lost while it is on loan to a member, he or she shall pay to the Association the expense of its replacement.
- 8) No member shall borrow from the Library more than one volume at a time.
- 9) No new edition of a work shall be removed from the Library until after the expiration of three months from the date on which it was placed on the shelves; but such volume may be consulted in the Library.
- 10) Unbound parts of current volumes shall not be removed from the Library without the permission of the Librarian.



As the Association continued to grow it became clear that the Russell Square building was not big enough and plans were made for a move to 13 Hill Street. The library was named the Robert Lindsay Library and later on Lilian Lindsay's retirement the Robert and Lilian Lindsay Library. The latter's portrait was hung on the wall and we still have it today in the current premises.

The space allocated to the library at Hill Street was much more extensive and this time it was placed on the ground floor in what had been the oak-panelled dining room. A description of it in 1935 reads, "a room more beautifully adapted and fitted for its purpose would be difficult to find. Here for the first time will be arranged in the most convenient manner for use and reference perhaps the finest existing collection of books relating to the specialty of dentistry, with ample accommodation in the main room and adjoining stores for very extensive additions." The space was much needed as the shelf and floor space in Russell Street had long since been exhausted and use had even been made of a coal scuttle to house the pamphlet collection!

The Robert Lindsay Library was officially opened on the 12th April, 1935. Sir Norman Bennett declared that "one of the things which were new when the Association moved to Russell Square was the Library. There had been no library before that time, but in the space of fifteen years there had grown up a Library which was as good, he thought, as any dental library in the world."



The BDA library after its removal to Hill Street

One of the rooms became the home of the rare book collection. A collection which today comprises over 600 early dental and medical works the earliest being a 1536 edition of Zene Artzney, a compilation of writings of previous authors on dentistry.

On its removal to the Hill Street headquarters an experimental late opening was begun on a Wednesday evening with the library being open until 10pm on that night – a day chosen



because it was a cheap fare day on the railways. It was hoped that country members might then have more of an opportunity of visiting the library. However, in May 1936 the experiment was discontinued because it had “not resulted in the attendance which was expected”. The library today is now open again late on a Wednesday but only until 7pm.

One of the innovations made by the BDA library was to build up a collection of packages of articles on different dental topics that could be consulted by members. A Representative Board Library report from May 1936 declares that “the Package Library had created a considerable amount of interest and the demand for packages during the past year had been no less than 232, which was a considerable increase upon previous applications.” We now have over 500 different subject packages which are loaned to members with new titles added as new trends and techniques appear in the dental world.

Despite the extra space the library continued to grow apace so that during the 1950s and 1960s other rooms had to be used for storage, including the garage. The Hill Street lease was coming to an end and in 1961 a decision was eventually made to erect a building on the current Wimpole Street site. In September 1967 the BDA library moved in to its purpose built premises and the headquarters was officially opened by the Queen on March 13th 1967.

Since that time the library collection has continued to grow as has our ability to reach out to members throughout the UK and beyond with the library catalogue now online and accessible 24 hours a day through the BDA website and the introduction of document supply by email.

A BDJ editorial from March 15, 1922 states, “...this development of our activities, begun in a happy hour shortly after our settlement in Russell Square...assures to the Association, in due course, the possession of a valuable property, at once an effective aid to the satisfactory discharge of its functions, and an ornament to its premises.” The BDA library as it exists today continues to uphold this ideal.



The BDA library at Wimpole Street in the late 1960s – note the painting of Lilian Lindsay on the wall

