



BDA Dental Museum

Was your ancestor a dentist?

The museum can help you trace your dentist ancestors. Our main source of information are the Dentists Registers. These annual volumes were started in 1879 and continue today. They record the name, address and qualification of every dentist working in the UK. Today the register is compiled by the General Dental Council.

Brief history

The Dentists Register was started in 1879 as a result of the Dentists Act of 1878. This was the first legislation which aimed to restrict who could provide dental treatment and advice. In order to register a dentist had to be qualified. The LDS RCS Eng (Licence in Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England) was the first professional dental qualification in the UK. It was first awarded in 1860. From 1878 the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland all issued their own LDS. In order to take the LDS examination a dentist had to undertake several years' mechanical training (e.g. making dentures) and a period of study in a dental school alongside clinical practice in a dental hospital or dental department. Before the introduction of dental schools and qualifications most practitioners learnt their skills through apprenticeship.



Initially when the Dentists Register started dentists could register without a qualification if they could prove they had been working in dentistry for five years prior to 1878. Some of them had combined their dentistry with medicine, surgery or pharmacy. All new entrants to the register after 1879 had to be qualified. Only dentists listed in the dentists register could use the title of 'surgeon dentist' or 'dental surgeon'.

This left a loophole in the law. People could practise dentistry providing they avoided the protected terms. They could use signs like 'dental rooms' or 'dental treatment here'. This does not imply however, that all unregistered practitioners were charlatans. Many skilled practitioners did not see the need to register. Between 1878 and 1921 the number of unregistered practitioners was larger than the numbers of registered dentists.



In 1921 a further Dentists Act tightened up this loophole so that only qualified dentists could practise dentistry. However again they let those who could prove they had been working (unregistered) in dentistry pre-1921 continue without a qualification, as long as they registered. The last unqualified dentist stopped working in the 1970s.

What can you tell me about my ancestor?

If your relative appears in the Dentists Register we will be able to tell you the following information:

- first and last date of registration
- their qualification and from which institution it was obtained
- all addresses at which he/she was registered (home or practice address) and the dates they changed

We will also search for obituaries or other articles in the dental press. Prior to 1879 there are very few records available as apprenticeship records are often scattered and held by local history libraries or county records offices.

We request a donation to support the work of the museum. Please make cheques payable to the 'BDA Trust Fund'.

To contact us with your enquiry please telephone 020 7563 4549 or email museum@bda.org