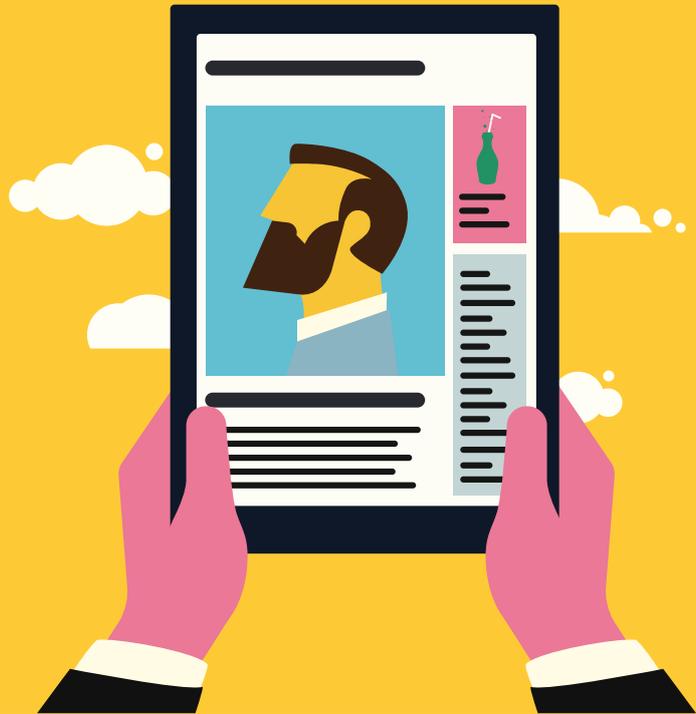


THE COMMUTER CLUB



A brief history of the British Dental Association, in the heart of London's medical quarter

The Harley Street area began its connections with the medical profession in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The reasons for this are unclear, but it was probably due to the expansion of the city of London westwards and the growing prominence of the West End shopping areas, which attracted notable medical professionals and their associated organisations.

Cavendish Square was a fashionable suburb of the West End, both residential and close to important shops. The large Georgian houses made ideal homes and dental practices. Leading dentist and dental reformer, John Tomes first established his practice in Cavendish Square where the College of Dentists also set up its early training institution. Reputedly, Thomas W Evans prepared nitrous oxide at the Langham Hotel. Further southwards, Samuel Cartwright (1788-1864) and later his son, Samuel Cartwright, junior (1815-1891) both involved in the professionalisation of dentistry (the latter dentist to Charles Dickens) had a flourishing practice

in Old Burlington Street. The Odontological Society was formed here. Between the 1880s and 1960s Harley Street and Wimpole Street became more prominent for leading doctors and dentists.

By the mid-19th century there was no unity, organisation or code of ethics for the dental profession. The number of practitioners making a living out of dentistry had increased dramatically.



Tugging at a (high) eye tooth, 1821
George Cruikshank (1792-1878)

Traditionally it was the barber surgeon, physician and blacksmith but now wig makers, jewellers and chemists and everyone else could all give advice and extract teeth. The introduction of anaesthetics promised a painless extraction for patients and the demand for dentures became affordable to more people.

Although the first training course for dentists had been introduced in 1860 (LDS Licentiate in Dental Surgery), graduate numbers were very small compared with the large numbers of unqualified and unscrupulous operators. Malpractice and incompetence were rife. By the 1870s leading dentists including Sir John Tomes and Sir Edwin Saunders (one of Queen Victoria's dentists) formed the Dental Reform Committee. This Committee campaigned successfully for the first legislation to regulate dentistry. The Dental Reform Committee also called for a nationwide meeting to establish a British Dental Association (BDA) in 1879.

Finally established in 1880 the BDA elected Sir John Tomes as its first President. The first, and much flawed Dentists Act was passed in 1878 and much of the BDA's early work involved prosecuting dentists in breach of it.

Further legislation to tighten the practise of dentistry resulted in the Dentists Act of 1921. This created the Dental Board of the UK to administer the Dentists Register. Prior to this it had just been one of the many responsibilities of the General Medical Council. With the advent of a Board focused specifically on dentistry, the BDA was freed from legislation, and rapidly



'Waterloo' teeth from the BDA Museum collection

became the leading consultative body and champion for the dental profession – the role of the BDA today.

In order to accommodate the increased number of services offered to members as the result of the introduction of the NHS and a growth in the nation's demand for dental treatment the BDA decided to find alternative accommodation. Since 1935 the British Dental Association had been situated in an 18th Century house at 13 Hill Street, just off Berkeley Square but by the early 1960s had outgrown the premises. A bespoke building at 64 Wimpole Street was built and designed to serve as its headquarters and was opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 13th March 1967.

The new building offered space for a larger library and museum and the work of these two functions continues today. The BDA library is the most comprehensive dental library in Europe. It was first opened in 1920 and was founded and organised by Lilian Lindsay CBE, the first woman to qualify as a dentist in the UK (1895) and the first female member of the BDA. Before marrying she ran a solo dental practice for ten years and continued to work in partnership with her husband after marriage. Her husband, Robert Lindsay was made BDA Dental Secretary in 1920 (the equivalent of today's Chief Executive) and they moved down from Scotland when he took up the post. She gave up practising at this point only to begin a completely new career as a dental librarian. She amassed a large collection of rare books and journals and the library continues to offer a wide range of print and online resources to support dentists at whatever stage of their career.

The BDA Museum was created in 1934 opening with objects that had been donated over previous years by its members. This is the best place to explore the sometimes gruesome but fascinating history of dentistry. Open to the public this small museum explores the development of dentistry primarily in the nineteenth century. This was the time when anyone could give you advice about your teeth or extract them for you for a fee and with little or no skill! Our visitors can see the famous and notorious Waterloo teeth. These were ivory

dentures made for London's wealthy, intricately carved from hippopotamus or walrus but with the inclusion of human teeth for a more realistic look. These human teeth were sourced from dead bodies and mortuaries and frequently the battlefields of Europe. Visitors can also watch vintage film footage and the chance to extract a tooth – using Victorian tools.

The BDA as a whole continues to be the voice of dentists and dental students in the UK both as a trade union and a professional body. It represents all fields of dentistry from those in general practice, to those in community dentistry, the armed forces, hospitals, academia, public health and research. It promotes their interests, and continues to provide its members with support and services from the heart of London's medical quarter.

**The museum is free to visit but please check for opening hours on the BDA website as these are subject to change:
www.bda.org/museum.**

