

In this extract Peter Long is talking about his general dental practice in Hertford

TRACK 07 – 00:05:51 – 00:08:51

Now were your patients drawn from the farming community? What sort of people lived in Hertford at the time? I'm imagining that it wasn't the dormitory town that it is now for London, although perhaps that was developing.

They were very nice patients, middle class, shop keepers and a few farmers, not that many. I didn't have many farmers but we did have one incident which I think I will repeat because it shows how dentistry was in those days. A German prisoner of war called Fritz was working on the land here, after the war still, and liked staying in England; and he came to see me and I have never seen so many bad or rotting teeth. I had to take these out for him and he said, "Well you see, when I joined the German army, they gave me a toothbrush. I saw what the rest of the soldiers' teeth were like, so I threw the toothbrush away and I've never used one since." That was fine, I treated him. That night, unfortunately his mouth was pretty inflamed, he was bleeding so I had to go out to this little old farm cottage to stitch him up, and they'd just got a television set and they were gazing at this television set. I looked at his mouth and I went to suture it and I said, "Could I have some more light please, some lights on?" Oh yes, well they threw some more diesel on the fire and the fire blazed up and that was the only light I was allowed to stitch him up by. And that is how dentistry was at that time.

I remember when I came to the surgery, there was lino on the stairs, there was lino throughout so that on market day on Monday, the floors could be washed down.

Correct.

At the same time, and forgive me for leading, just how much infection did you see within the practice, secondary infection?

Very little.

Very little. The environment was far from sterile and yet...

Compared to today's standards, yes.

Compared to today's standards. What did you use for sterilisation?

A hot water steriliser, it boiled away for the time the nurse was told and that was it.

Yes. Disposables?

I think at that stage we'd started using disposable needles.