



BDA Dental Museum

Was your ancestor a dentist? Information for genealogists

Each year the BDA Dental Museum receives over a hundred requests for research varying from genealogists to TV producers to academics.

We actively encourage research into objects in the collection and into individuals associated with dentistry in order to deepen knowledge and to make that knowledge more widely accessible.

Where direct access to material is not possible we will make alternative arrangements (e.g. through the use of catalogues and photographs) to assist you.

What information is available to genealogists?

The main source the museum holds for genealogists are the *Dentists Registers* (1879 – 2005). They record the name, address and qualification of every UK registered dentist practitioner. Today the *Dentists Register* continues to be compiled by the General Dental Council and the current year is available on-line.

The register was started in 1879 as a result of the *Dentists Act* of 1878. This was the first legislation which aimed to restrict the giving of dental treatment and advice to qualified dentists. The LDS (Licentiate in Dental Surgery) of the Royal College of Surgeons of England was the first professional dental qualification and was first awarded in 1860. Prior to this most practitioners learnt their skills through apprenticeship, formal or informal. Practitioners who could prove they had already been involved, prior to 1879, in the bona fide practise of dentistry, (alone or in conjunction with medicine, surgery or pharmacy) were allowed to register on the basis of their experience. Only dentists listed in the *Dentists Register* could use the protected titles of 'surgeon dentist' or 'dental surgeon'.

However between 1878 and 1921 the number of unregistered practitioners was larger than the numbers of registered dentists. This was mainly due to a loophole in the law which restricted the use of the above titles but not the actual practise of dentistry. Unregistered practitioners could advertise their services as ‘dental rooms’ or ‘false teeth here’. This does not necessarily imply that all unregistered practitioners were charlatans. Many skilled practitioners did not see the need to register, nor wanted the expense. The *Dentists Act* of 1921 finally tightened this loophole: since 1921 anybody entering the profession has had to have a recognised qualification although (like in 1878) they let in any unqualified persons who could prove they had been practising dentistry pre-1921.

From the *Dentists Registers* you can find out

- If the person registered as a dentist
- What qualification they obtained (if any) and from which institution
- When they qualified
- When they first registered
- At what address/es they registered

This information only applied to dentists – the equivalent information was not compiled legally for dental nurses and dental technicians until 2008. The museum does have a list of dental technicians compiled in 1938 – this was a voluntary list so it does not list every dental technician in the UK.

Prior to 1879 there are very few records available as apprenticeship records are often scattered and held by local history libraries or archive offices. We can do a search of the BDA library catalogue for you to see if a dentist has an obituary or wrote a book/article.

How you can access the information

You are very welcome to visit the museum in London to undertake your own research. If you are unable to visit we can undertake the research for you.

If you would like to visit to undertake your own research, please give us at least ten working days’ notice. When you contact us please tell us your name, contact

address/telephone/email, associated institution (if any), the nature of your research/purpose of visit, dates on which you wish to visit.

We prefer researchers to avoid the museum's public opening times (Tuesdays and Thursdays 1pm – 4pm). Museum staff are available during normal office hours, Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm (with an hour for lunch, normally 12noon – 1pm).

Due to limited space we can only accommodate one researcher at a time (or a pair visiting together and sharing desk space).

If you have any specific needs to help you access information (e.g. magnifying glasses, help lifting objects or turning pages) please tell us when you request your visit so we can make provision

We will provide an acknowledgement of your enquiry within two working days. If you request that we carry out the research for you we will indicate a timescale and any potential fees – research taking up to 30 minutes is free and we aim to provide a full reply within 4 working weeks.

Your visit

A map and travel directions are available on the museum leaflet or the museum webpages at <http://www.bda.org/museum/about-the-museum/visit-the-museum.aspx>

We will make a space available to you in the museum. A member of museum staff will be on hand to assist you, for example getting out copies of the Dentists Register.

The oldest Dentists Register dates back to 1878 so some of them can be quite fragile. Please **do not** lean on or mark items. We check the material at the beginning and end of research visits to look for damage. If you notice any damage please let a member of staff know.

Please **do not** use pens. Pencils and laptops are allowed for making notes. Laptops cannot be plugged into the mains so please ensure you have enough battery power.

A photocopying machine is available. The cost is currently 15p per A4 sheet. Please abide by copyright law – details are next to the photocopier.

If you would like to take photographs please ask a member of museum staff first. Generally we allow photos, without flash, for research purposes only. If you would like to

use photographs in a published work the museum prefers to supply these. We can give you details of our image reproduction procedures. For items under copyright law responsibility for obtaining permission from the copyright holder lies with the researcher.

Please **do not** bring drinks or food into the museum. Free water and hot drinks are available in the BDA foyer and there is a seating area.

Toilets, including an accessible toilet, are available on site.

We do not have a computer and/or internet access available for public use in the museum.

For more information about your visit please see the museum's general leaflet or the website www.bda.org/museum/about-the-museum/visit-the-museum.aspx

At the end of your visit/research

We are always looking to improve our service. We would be grateful if you could complete our feedback form to help us in this quest.

We keep a record of your enquiry and contact details on our computerised database. This enables us to contact you should any subsequent information come to light. We remove your personal details after three years. If you do not want your contact details to be kept once your enquiry is completed please let us know and they will be immediately removed.

Generally there is no charge for making use of museum resources for research but donations are encouraged to support the work of the museum. Donations in the form of cheques should be made payable to the 'BDA Trust Fund'.

We hope your research is successful.