

# A fine life in dentistry

By Kate Quinlan



Margaret Wilson is being awarded Life Membership by the British Dental Association (BDA) in this year's round of Honours and Awards celebrating excellence in dentistry. Life Membership celebrates long and valuable service to the BDA, often at Branch, Group or local level.

In a long and wide-ranging career, Margaret graduated BDS from Liverpool in 1972 and after 'house jobs' worked in Community Dental Services, lectured in restorative dentistry, completed a PhD and specialist training in restorative dentistry, and later became Director of the National Advice Centre for Postgraduate Dental Education. She retired in 2013 and became Honorary Curator of the BDA's Museum and Editor of the Lindsay Society journal *Dental Historian*. In 2015–2016, she was President of the East Lancs & East Cheshire Branch of the BDA.

## How does it feel to be awarded Life Membership of the BDA?

**MW:** I feel greatly honoured by being awarded Life Membership of an organisation that I have been a member of for over 50 years.

## Was it a surprise that you were nominated?

It was a huge surprise and most unexpected and I certainly didn't see this coming. Although I have nominated people in the past, I had no idea that anyone had put forward my name for consideration.

## Why did you originally pursue a career in dentistry – were there dentists among your relatives?

In the sixth form at school I read about dentistry and liked the idea of providing quite intricate treatment for patients. I had a great uncle by marriage who started off as a technician and became a dentist and of course my brother and sister-in-law were orthodontists and my husband and father-in-law were dentists.

## Were your parents strict about cleaning your teeth and not eating too much sugar when you were growing up?

My mother always ensured that we cleaned our teeth in the morning and before bedtime. If you go to the BDA Museum you can see the sort of toothpaste we used, in a round tin and unfortunately no fluoride. I consumed a fair amount of sugar when I was a child, which was the main reason that I have a mouth full of dental amalgams all

completed to a standard GV Black design (no minimal intervention in those days). Unfortunately, I belong to the dental heavy metal generation.

## Did your family support your decision to apply for dentistry?

My career decision was mine alone and my family did not try to influence me at all.

## Did you always want to go along the education route rather than general practice?

My undergraduate dental course was four and a half years long, so when I graduated, I realised the limitations of my knowledge. I therefore decided to apply for hospital appointments in order to gain more experience. I also worked in the community dental service, but treating small children was not for me. I realised I had to sit my Fellowship examination and go back to my original plan of restorative dentistry which had just been made a specialty. I remained in this specialty for the rest of my career.

## How did you come to be a visiting professor to universities in the US?

Whilst studying for my PhD in biomaterial sciences and being part of the largest clinical trial into visible light curing dental materials, I met dentists and material scientists from around the world. I was invited to the material science departments of Southern Illinois and Baylor and carried out collaborative research which was extremely enjoyable.

## Have you enjoyed your long involvement with the BDA?

The BDA has been an important part of my dental career. In the early days as a newly qualified dentist I waited eagerly for the *BDJ* to arrive as this was where jobs were advertised. During my Masters programme and studying for my PhD, access to dental journals was a huge help. Being part of this organisation was important not only for education but also for the social aspects of meeting colleagues and being able to discuss problems and successes encountered when treating patients.

### Have you always been interested in dental history?

I became interested in dental history when I worked in Manchester. I went to an antiques fair and found two dental graduation certificates for sale. I didn't think this was appropriate so I bought them and took them into work the next day. I discovered that although there had been a museum in Manchester Dental Hospital, it was defunct. I started to revamp the museum and was fascinated by some of the old instruments and discovered that Manchester has a very rich and interesting dental history. When I retired from clinical dentistry I was very fortunate to be appointed as the Honorary Curator of the BDA Museum. The Museum is, in my opinion, a jewel in the BDA Crown and it is certainly the best dental museum in Europe. We have Rachel Bairsto as Head of the Museum Services and a group of former dentists who volunteer for a wide variety of activities in the museum. We also work closely with the BDA Library, where Helen Nield and her team help us with the many enquires that arrive in the museum. Readers of the *BDJ* will know that items from the museum are often used as illustrations for the front cover. Anybody that would like to join our museum volunteers would be welcomed with open arms, just get in touch.

### What do you consider to be the highlights of your career in dentistry?

Passing my Fellowship exam, which in those days involved a multiple-choice exam with negative marking, written papers and a practical exam, and had a very low pass rate. I also would include being appointed as a consultant in restorative dentistry. Nowadays, using

my cumulative knowledge and experience in my roles as Hon Curator and Editor of the *Dental Historian*. National and international invitations to lecture have opened up new opportunities to interact with colleagues with similar interests in the history of our profession. In April, I have been invited to contribute to the celebrations on the occasion of the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of Temple Dental School – the second oldest dental school in North America.

### Would you like to comment on the current state of UK dentistry?

The state of NHS dentistry is probably the lowest I have known for 50 years. I think it is a national disgrace that the greatest numbers of admissions to hospital for under fives is for GA extraction of teeth. Some way should be found to reward NHS dentists for a prevention service and not a service for treating the ravages of largely preventable diseases.

### Would you recommend dentistry as a career to young people today?

Yes, I would recommend dentistry as a career as I think there are lots of opportunities to increase knowledge and new skills.

### What are your interests outside dentistry?

I love plants and gardening. I think every horizontal surface in my house holds a plant pot, and at the moment seed trays. I am waiting for the last frosts to finish so that tender shrubs can go outside. I volunteer with a local community group and take part in local RHS competitions and litter picking. ■

health assured

**BDA**  
British Dental Association

## BDA Member Assistance Programme

Free, 24/7 confidential counselling and emotional support for you and your immediate family - online, over the phone or via the My Healthy Advantage app.

LEGAL  
INFORMATION

MEDICAL  
INFORMATION

DOMESTIC  
ABUSE

WHAT CAN I  
USE THIS  
SERVICE FOR?

CHILDCARE  
SUPPORT

RELATIONSHIP  
ADVICE

RETIREMENT

HOUSING  
CONCERNS

TAX  
INFORMATION

FAMILY  
ISSUES

CONSUMER  
ISSUES

ALCOHOL OR  
DRUG ISSUES

GAMBLING  
ISSUES

FINANCIAL  
INFORMATION

STRESS & ANXIETY

BEREAVEMENT

My Healthy Advantage app



Access Support today

[bda.org/healthassured](https://bda.org/healthassured)  
0800 030 5182

The BDA is owned and run by its members. We are a not-for-profit organisation – all our income is reinvested for the benefit of the profession.