

Robert Graham Hunt



Robert Hunt died at the age of 95 on 9 April 2007. For many years in the second half of the last century he had been a loyal servant of the profession and the BDA.

Robert followed his father and grandfather into dentistry qualifying at Guy's in 1935. He played in the successful Guy's first fifteen rugby team at a time when its fixture list boasted such opposition as Blackheath and Bristol. After being a house surgeon to William Kelsey Fry he set off to Chicago on a Guy's Travelling Scholarship. He studied successfully for his DDS at the North Western University Dental School and in his letters home tells of his enthusiasm for the excellence of US dentistry and his incredulity that some 8,000 dentists registered for the Chicago Dental Society's Annual Mid-winter meeting. He returned home to join his father's practice in Torquay where over the years he established a well-earned reputation as an expert dentist.

In 1936 he became a member of the BDA and thus began a relationship that was to last for the next 70 years. Shortly after the war and at a time of great turmoil for the profession he became the Honorary Secretary of the Western Counties Branch and, as such, a member of the Representative Board. During the discussions and negotiations with the Ministry of Health on the new National Health Service Act, it was desirable to have a body that could speak for the entire profession, but The Articles of the BDA excluded from membership dental practitioners registered in the Dentists Register as 'Dentists 1921' with no other registrable qualification. This long-standing difficulty was resolved when, in January 1947, members attending an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association voted to cancel this Article thus paving the way, in December 1949, for the amalgamation of the Incorporated Dental Society and the Public Dental Service Association with the BDA. In his book *The Western Counties Branch of the British Dental Association* Alexander Woods wrote, '*Beyond doubt it was in the minds of many that complete amalgamation could not be effected by the simple process of passing a resolution in London. It was to be at branch and section levels that professional esprit de corps would be developed and focussed. During this epoch making period the branch was again fortunate in its Honorary Secretary, Robert Hunt. His agreeable personality, tact, and energy were at their best in the negotiations and arrangements that culminated in amalgamation.*'

These qualities obviously stood him in good stead. He was elected President of the Western Counties Branch in 1959. He served as a member and as chairman of a number of BDA committees and in 1967 was elected Chairman of the Representative Board. He was an excellent chairman; fair, impartial, offering encouragement to the less experienced member and firmly controlling the more verbose. At the end of three years he was

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re-elected for a second term serving until 1973. In 1972 he was appointed an OBE for 'services to the dental profession' and, in 1975, he was installed as President of the BDA. During his Presidential Year he visited almost every Branch and travelled to the Annual Session of the American Dental Association where he was able to renew acquaintances with some of those whom he had met 30 years earlier at North Western. His membership of the Representative Board continued when he was elected a Vice-President and until a few months before his death he would assiduously read all the papers, occasionally exasperated and often commenting that history was being repeated.

During this time he continued to work in his practice. He would treat all his patients with the same mixture of expertise, respect and deference. He saw many a family over the years and it gave him great satisfaction to see the young offspring of patients whom he had first seen as children. There were many other contributions he made to the local community. At various times he had chaired the Local, District, Area and South West Regional Dental Committees and sat on the Devon County Council Health Committee. He was the Vice-Chairman of the Torquay and District Hospital Management Committee and for 15 years he was the Chairman of the Rowcroft Convalescent Home Trust. He played a large part in the establishment and early success of the local Rowcroft Hospice becoming a Governor and a Vice-President.

He was a magistrate and became the Deputy Chairman of the Torquay Bench and Chairman of the Juvenile Court Panel. He was the founder Chairman of the Torquay Round Table and President of the Torquay Rotary Club in 1952.

By way of recreation sailing was his first love. He sailed in dinghies and small cruisers in local regattas in and around Torbay. He was very involved in the organisation of sailing in Torbay and much respected as a Race Officer and Chairman of Protest Committees. He had been a Commodore of the Torquay Corinthian Yacht Club before its amalgamation with the Royal Torbay Yacht Club; an amalgamation in which he played a large part. He subsequently became a Commodore and, finally, he was elected Admiral of the Royal Torbay Yacht Club; a position of which he was very proud and which he held at his death.

Robert Hunt's wife, Pat, a nurse whom he had met while at Guy's, supported him with great dedication during his professional life until her sudden death 20 years ago. Both were pleased that two of their four children followed their father into the profession which he so loved and to which he contributed so much.

C. K. M. and J. M. G. H.