

# The growth of general dental practice in a developing Sussex seaside resort 1885–1916 – Part 1: the early settlers

Paul Hellyer<sup>1</sup>

## Key points

Describes the background and qualifications of the first dentists in Bexhill-on-Sea.

Describes their political and other contributions to the development of the town.

Discusses the relative wealth and status of general dental practitioners at the end of the nineteenth century.

## Abstract

During the late Victorian and Edwardian period, the local landowner, the 7th Earl De La Warr, instigated the development of the rural Sussex village of Bexhill into the fashionable seaside resort of Bexhill-on-Sea. Famous at the time for the introduction of mixed bathing and the first motor races to be held in the United Kingdom, the resort had a population of around 15,000 people by the outbreak of the Great War. This 30-year period also coincides with the development of dentistry from an apprenticed trade to the beginnings of a regulated profession. There has been little previous research into the lives of those who entered the profession in the early stages of its development. Using primary sources, such as census records, local directories and newspapers, as well as the dental register and journals, the ebb and flow of general dental practitioners into the rapidly growing coastal resort from 1880 is described. The family origins, qualifications and entrepreneurial nature of these dentists are discussed.

## Introduction

For over 1,000 years, Bexhill was a rural hamlet of no particular significance, set on a hill in agricultural land one mile inland from the Sussex coast, 60 miles south east of London and five miles to the west of the ancient fishing port of Hastings. Not much disturbed its peace, from the time of the Domesday book to the late Victorian era, except for smugglers and, in Napoleonic times, becoming the site of the barracks for the King's German Legion, preparing for the battle of Waterloo. In 1846, the railway arrived and a small halt was constructed to the south, halfway between the village and the sea, on the London-Brighton and south coast line between Lewes and St Leonard's. With the construction of the

railway, Hastings grew rapidly as a popular seaside resort, its population quadrupling in the second half of the century to 65,000.

In 1880, the Bexhill landowner, the 7th Earl De La Warr, decided that the land to the south of the railway line could be developed into a seaside resort and he commissioned John Webb, a south London builder, to build a sea wall. Webb was paid partly in money and partly by a transfer of land ownership. Land to the east of Sea Lane (now Sea Road) which ran down directly to the sea from the old village, remained as the earl's estate to develop. Land to the west of Sea Lane was transferred to Webb and what is now the town centre rapidly developed (Fig. 1). As was the norm in other Victorian developments, Webb, as the landowner, leased or sold plots to individual developers or builders, and a range of terraces, detached houses and shops were constructed by speculative builders, hoping for a profit either from a sale or from rental.<sup>1</sup> The rapid development of Webb's Egerton Park estate took the impetus away from the De La Warr estate, which had envisaged a town of grand

villas and hotels to attract the metropolitan elite of the day.<sup>2</sup>

From a rural hamlet of 500 in 1870, by 1900 the town, now renamed Bexhill-on-Sea, had a population of about 12,000 people. The De La Warr estate attracted some of the wealthiest holidaymakers of the day, with the first motor racing in the country along the seafront and the introduction of mixed bathing for the first time in England. The development of Webb's Egerton estate attracted florists, ironmongers, butchers, milliners... and dentists.

## Dentistry in the late Victorian era

By the second half of the nineteenth century, dentistry was changing. Previously, tooth care had largely been a trade, handed down from father to son, or by apprenticeship, as a side-line to another trade, such as 'barbers, wig-makers, blacksmiths, silversmiths or apothecaries.'<sup>3</sup> A small number of qualified surgeons also practised dentistry and it was they who pressed the Royal College of Surgeons in London for a formal qualification. The Licentiate in Dental Surgery (LDS

<sup>1</sup>University of Portsmouth Dental Academy, Hampshire Terrace, Portsmouth, UK.  
Correspondence to: Paul Hellyer  
Email: paul.hellyer@port.ac.uk

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**Fig. 1** 1899 street map of Bexhill-on-Sea, showing the sites of the practices of: 1) Morris De Courcy Dickinson; 2) Joseph Miller; 3) William Meads; 4) The site of the Wilton Court Private Hotel and Mansions; and 5) Sea Road, dividing the De La Warr estate to the east, from the more densely developed Egerton Park estate to the west

RCS in England) was first awarded in 1860, coinciding with the development of the first dental hospital and schools. The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh was first licenced to award diplomas in 1879. Those of a non-college background formed the College of Dentists of England, and initiated their own qualification: the Membership of the College of Dentists of England (MCDE), however this was short-lived.

The Dentists Act was passed in 1878, restricting the use of the titles ‘dentist’ and ‘dental practitioner’ to those on the register. Registration was open to those with a formal qualification and those who were already ‘in bona fide practice of dentistry’ at that time. The act did not, however, prevent the practice of dentistry under other titles. The first register was published in 1879, and had 5,291 registrants, only 10% of whom held an LDS.<sup>3</sup>

### Visiting dentists

In 1887 the Bexhill Chronicle, began publication. Within the first few issues, Benjamin Hamilton, dental surgeon, of Warrior Square, Hastings, was advertising his services in Station Road, Bexhill, at Mrs. Gower’s (a florist) and also at Mr Brisley’s, the chemist: ‘some time first dispenser at Allen and Hancock, Lombard Street, London’. By 1892, W. Edwards of the London and Sussex Dental Institute, Hastings offered his services at Mr Batchelor’s, an upholsterer and cabinet maker, on Devonshire Road, Bexhill.

Later, between 1898 and 1901, Benjamin Lewin Mosely (1837–1912?) advertised services as a dental surgeon in the trade directory at Perrett and Routley, chemists at 25 Devonshire Road, Bexhill, one of the main shopping streets of the developing Egerton Park estate. He had been in attendance in Hastings since 1879 but

advertised a London address at 312 Regent Street, where his father was also in practice.

Mosely was part of a large dental family, whose practices were spread from Alnwick in Northumberland, through Yorkshire, the Midlands to Hastings and latterly, Bexhill. This, and other family firms, became a ‘by-word for quackery... as they spread their malevolent tentacles into the provinces.’<sup>4</sup> He is listed in the first dentists register of 1879, as ‘in practice before 22/7/78’ and from 1881, states that he qualified LDS RCS (Ire). In 1891, the LDS RCS qualification disappears from the register and his qualification for registration returns to ‘in practice before 1879’. However, in all of his Hastings Observer advertisements, he claims the MCDE.

The use of chemists’ and others’ premises for the provision of dental treatment was not unusual in the Victorian period but, after a

**Table 1 Dickinson households 1871–1901 census data (The National Archives, refs RG10/1034, RG11/1031, RG 12/767, RG 13/874)**

Year	Head	Spouse	Children	Other	Servants
1871	Morris de Courcy	Ellen	4	Mother	Housemaid Cook Nurse Servant
1881	Morris de Courcy	Ellen	6	Dental assistant	Cook Housemaid Nurse
1891	Morris de Courcy	Ellen	4 adults 2 children		General servant
1901	Morris de Courcy	Ellen	2 adult		General servant

short time, most of the visiting practitioners ceased to advertise. Their services were presumably used less and less, as the resort developed and as dentists moved in to the town to live and to practise. Mosely was an exception to this and, even at the age of 63, he presumably saw an opportunity for practise in the growing town of Bexhill-on-Sea, but the tentacles of the family firm withdrew after only four years.

## Resident dentists

### Morris de Courcy Dickinson LDS RCS (Eng) (1841–1911)

Dickinson opened a branch practice in Upper Station Road, north of the railway line, on the corner of Clifford Road in 1894.<sup>5</sup> He was in attendance 'daily before 9 or after 6 or by appointment; Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons regularly' but could make appointments available at other times if necessary. Dickinson had a long-standing practice in Verulam Place, on the seafront in Hastings, which remained his 'principal professional address' after moving to Bexhill.<sup>6</sup> He had been appointed the dental surgeon to the Hastings, St. Leonard's and East Sussex Hospital in 1870, describing himself as a 'member of the Odontological Society of Great Britain and dental surgeon to the Ladies Convalescent Home'.<sup>7</sup> He is listed in the first dentists register of 1879.

Dickinson was born in Barnstaple, Devon, the son of a 'gentleman'. By 1861, he is living in Hastings, described in the census as an 'articled pupil/dentist'. He obtained his LDS in 1862. In the 1860s he was a marksman with the local volunteer rifles and shot at Wimbledon, winning several trophies. However, pressure of business later forced his retirement from the pastime. He later helped to found Conservative

Associations in both Hastings and Bexhill.<sup>5</sup> Dickinson was married in London in 1863, and had six children, born between 1864 and 1876.

In 1889 it is reported that he treated 61 cases at the hospital. By 1902, 620 cases were reported to be have been under his care there, a ten times increase over 13 years. Publicly at least, Dickinson appears to have a life devoted almost entirely to his dental practices. He had a number of assistants over the years. Census records in 1881 show that Frederick Colwill (1852–1893), who later moved away to set up his own dental practice in Ilfracombe, Devon, was listed as a dental assistant. Newspaper reports in 1889 state that 'J. H. Redman, a youth (formerly) apprenticed to Mr. Dickinson, sat for Brighton at a meeting of the Representative Board of the British Dental Association', a meeting also attended by himself. William Edward Meads (discussed later in this article) was his assistant at one point in time.<sup>8</sup> Dickinson's son Robert is recorded as a dental student in the dentists register of 1887 and 1888, and as his father's assistant in the census records of 1901. Robert, however, never qualified and died of consumption in 1907. None of Dickinson's other children appear to have been introduced to a dental career.

Morris De Courcy Dickinson moved out of Bexhill in January 1910. His house and other effects were advertised for sale by auction, including 'superior bedroom, dining and drawing room furniture, fine-tuned pianoforte by Kirkman, London, dentist's chair, valuable paintings and engravings, china, glass, curtains, linen, tallboy chest, inlaid cabinets and usual household effects.' Verulam, the house, on the corner of Clifford Road and Station Road, was advertised as a 'long leasehold residence'.<sup>9</sup> These effects would seem to indicate the trappings of a comfortable existence, with furnishings of some quality and expense.



**Fig. 2 1 Cantelupe Road, the residence and practice of Joseph Miller**

Verulam became the residence of Paul Hodgkinson, a local ironmonger. His son, Paul Allan, speaking in the early 1990s, recalls that around 1911, he, with his four brothers and sisters, moved into the house on the corner of Clifford Road and Station Road. He recalls that his mother, despite the five children, 'still only had one living-in maid'.<sup>10</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Dickinson family also had one live-in servant (Table 1), although this was fewer than in previous years. Verulam has since been demolished and replaced with a modern block of flats but from one faint photograph (not shown), it appears to have been a house not dissimilar to 1, Cantelupe Road (Figure 2).

Dickinson died in 1911 and the probate records show that he left an estate valued at £237. Despite the apparently comfortable lifestyle, a lifetime of dentistry does not seem to have generated great wealth for him.

### Joseph Miller LDS RCS (Edinburgh) (1852–1917)

In 1895, Joseph Miller moved into 1 Cantelupe Road (Fig. 2), a large villa on the western edge of the De La Warr estate, where it adjoins the Egerton Estate (Fig. 1). This was the first settled dental practice in Bexhill which was independent of any practitioners from Hastings.

Miller was born in London, the son of a master fishmonger. In 1871 he is recorded as being a 'traveller to a merchant' in London, but by the publication of the first dental register in 1879, he is entered as a dentist 'being in practice before 22/7/78'. He worked in London from 1879 to 1885, qualifying LDS RCS (Edinburgh). He was one of the first to



graduate from that college, on 27 January 1881. From 1886 he lived in Calcutta, India and married Lilla Maud Soundy, 22 years his junior, in Mumbai on 2 January 1892. He appears in the Bexhill directory for the first time in 1896. A daughter was born in 1899 and a son in 1903.

Miller was a keen fisherman.<sup>11</sup> He was admitted as a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers by patrimony in 1876 and became a liveryman in 1878. He served as a junior warden in 1895 and was elected to the court in 1909. He resigned as a senior warden in 1915 due to failing health.<sup>12</sup>

Within a year of arrival in Bexhill, in March 1897, Miller stood for election to the local council. He was described as 'a man of some experience in the ways of the world and the usages of public bodies. He has held most responsible positions in connection with the Court of the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers, one of the great City Companies' and that he is 'acquainted with most of the health resorts on the Continent, and the knowledge he has gained in his travels would doubtless prove useful in a town like Bexhill, which is now regarded as one of the principal health resorts in the United Kingdom', even though he will be 'unknown to many people in



**Fig. 3** The Turret, 48 Sea Road (renumbered to 70 today), both the practice and boarding house of William Edward Meads

Bexhill, [as] his residence here does not extend a long time back'. His election address, stating that he stood 'with the wish of many residents of all classes' was carefully laid out with bullet points offering himself to assist with the development of the town without distinction of class or favour, wisely administer the rates and to resist spending them on legal expenses, and to pay due attention to roads, lighting, water, sanitation and public health.<sup>13</sup> His list of supporters included the aforementioned Mr Brisley, the chemist and four local doctors, but no dentists. A local reporter on election day wrote that he saw a man with a sandwich board, urging voters to elect Earl De La Warr and Mr Miller. While in his address, Miller did not link himself to any political grouping, this canvasser clearly saw a connection between the local landowner and the newly arrived Miller. Of 3,715 votes cast, Miller received 335, just sufficient to obtain the final place of the five vacancies.

Miller spoke about a number of issues in council and at public meetings, in particular a diamond jubilee fund to build a cottage hospital, the building of a footbridge over the railway to improve access to the town centre from the north, the un-licensed removal of shingle from the beach and the funding of a new electricity supply. He gave regularly to local causes (lists of donors were published routinely in the local paper); £5 for a new school and 20 guineas to the diamond jubilee hospital fund, for instance.

When the time came for Miller to stand again in April 1898 his election address was very different to the previous year. In effect, he said, in a very brief statement, that he had done his duty, that he had been free of party commitment and if 'it is your pleasure to re-elect [him], he would carry on.'<sup>14</sup> Comment in the newspaper suggests that he was not quite as impartial and independent as he liked to think; apparently supporting the Earl De La Warr rather than the local ratepayers' interests on many issues and, despite assiduously attending the majority of council and committee meetings, he duly lost his seat on the council at the election. Conflict between the landowner and the growing body of ratepayers was not uncommon in developing seaside resorts.<sup>15</sup> In Bexhill in particular, the division was 'between those dependent on tourism and those of more independent means who found visitors to the resort an intrusion.'<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Miller, in being in trade as a dentist but living in the upper class part of town, was sitting on the fence, trying to please both sides of the divide, and failing.

Professionally, Miller had young dentists working with him as assistants. As volunteers went to war in South Africa at the end of the century, it was reported that 'Mr. Charles Baker, who has for some time acted assistant to Mr. J. Miller, dental surgeon, of Cantelupe Road... offered himself and was accepted the 17th Middlesex Rifles and left Bexhill on Tuesday afternoon.... in of his friends, and several young ladies, were at the Station to see him off [where] he had a very enthusiastic farewell'. Between 1901 and 1908, Miller had three young, qualified dentists successively working with (or for) him, George New, Herbert Highton and Horace Marsh; the latter two both having DDS from the University of Pennsylvania.

Also in 1909, perhaps in preparation to leave Bexhill, Miller advertised a motor car for sale: 'Four-seater motor car, two cylinders, 12-14 hp, powerful and fast, dual ignition, complete with lamps, tools and spares, in good running order, price 70 guineas, spot cash, a bargain, no offers; to be seen by appointment'.

Other reports in the local paper indicate that Miller applied for a patent for an improvement to the cooling system of motorcycle engines. Miller owned at least one other property in Cantelupe Road. He also owned a dog and was fined five shillings for allowing it to roam free and un-muzzled in the town centre.

In 1911 Miller and his family moved to Bournemouth where, according to his obituary, he set up another clinic. However, his registration address in the dentists register changed to 17 Upper Wimpole Street, London for five years before finally moving to Barnes, south west London before his death there in 1917. He left an estate valued at £6,274.

### William Edward Meads (1856-1939)

In 1897 William Meads established a practice at The Turret, 48 Sea Road, on the eastern border of the Egerton estate. Meads was born in 1856 in Henley-on-Thames, the son of a labourer. In the 1861 census it is recorded that his 12-year-old older brother was already working and no longer in education. By 1881, Meads is recorded as a lodging house keeper in Hastings, married with two young children, one servant and seven lodgers. By 1891, the census records that he was working as a dentist in Hastings on his own account. In 1896 he moved to The Turret, 48 Sea Road, Bexhill-on-Sea (Fig. 3). The Turret was listed as his practice address but was also run as a boarding house. The 1901 census, for instance,



**Fig. 4** The seafront Wilton Court Private Hotel (to the left) and Wilton Court Mansions (to the right), above the five shops, all developed by William Edward Meads and opened in 1900

lists seven boarders as resident. According to the weekly visitors list in the first three years of the century, there were on average six boarders resident at The Turret each week (range 0–20). Meads never acquired a dental qualification and only appears on a register after 1922, when it would have been illegal to practise without registration.

Although we know that Meads was an assistant to Dickinson at some point, there is no evidence that Meads himself ever acquired an assistant. However, his oldest son, also confusingly called William Edward Meads, qualified LDS RCS (Eng) in 1900. The *Bexhill Observer* points out that he had only just passed the age of 21 when he passed the examinations, and was consequently one of the youngest ever to do so. The report continues that as he is 'a clever and studious youth, he enters upon his profession with every prospect of a brilliant and successful career'.

Although Meads (senior) became a town councillor in Hastings, he did not stand for election in Bexhill. He was, however, vocal about developments in the town, speaking frequently

at the town association about the need to improve the connection between the north and south side of the railway line, improvements to the station and the seafront. Like Miller, he was also involved in the discussions about the jubilee fund for a cottage hospital. Meads rarely appears on the lists of donors to Bexhill causes but he did donate an orange to each child participating in the town sports day in 1897. He objected to the possibility of a tramway, on the grounds that in his limited experience, properties along a tramway tended to depreciate.

In 1898 he obtained permission to build a block of five shops, business apartments and flats on the corner of Wilton Road and Marina, and tenders were accepted to begin foundation works that summer (Fig. 4). The total cost of the project was estimated to be in excess of £10,000. Simultaneously he was advocating the development of the marina seafront area and the development of a pier through speaking at meetings and writing letters to the local paper, claiming that visitors to his guest house frequently complained that they have to travel to Hastings or Eastbourne if they desire a sea trip.

By June 1900, Meads was advertising shops to rent at his marina seafront development. They were, he said, 'the best position on the seafront... adjoining De La Warr Parade'. The shops had the advantage of being 'adjacent to the proposed tramway terminus', so Meads had presumably changed his mind about the value of a tram service to the town. Above the shops was the Wilton Court Private Hotel and the adjoining Wilton Court Mansions. The hotel had 32 bedrooms and was planned to cater principally for golfing visitors who would be 'connected to the servants' department by speaking tube'.

However, all was not entirely well with the Meads' finances. He was sued by an architect for non-payment of fees in 1901, as he planned to develop another property in Upper Sea Road in 1899. The costs of building became too high as Meads was clearly still developing Wilton Court. He was unable to pay the architect's fees of £85 and they threatened to bankrupt him if payment was not made. Judgement was made against him but presumably, as the Wilton Court development was completed, he was able to settle the matter.

**Table 2 Dentists' households, including numbers of servants and boarders. 1901 census data (The National Archives, ref RG 13/874)**

Head	Spouse	Children	Servants	Boarders
Joseph Miller	Lilla Maud	1 child	Housemaid Cook Nursemaid	0
William Meads	Harriet	3 adults 1 child	Chambermaid	7
Morris de Courcy Dickinson	Ellen	2 adults	General servant	0
Benjamin Lewin Mosely	Florence	0	0	0

**Table 3 The relative value of the pound**

Year	Value
1895	£1.00
2019	£125.00

In 1907, Meads left Bexhill to return to Hastings to practise there, leaving his son in charge at The Turret. Meads died in 1939 on his 84th birthday, leaving an estate valued at £30,508,

**Discussion**

It is unsurprising that dentists in Hastings would see an opportunity to set up in Bexhill. The burgeoning resort would certainly have attractions as a catchment for new patients. Dickinson, while maintaining his practice in Hastings, chose to reside and practise in a house to the north of the railway line, where some new housing had already taken place.<sup>2</sup> The entrepreneurial Meads, however, appears to have abandoned his practice in Hastings and developed as a speculative builder. What attracted Miller to the town is not known. Its reputation as a high class resort, perhaps? Had he met someone in India who recommended the town as a place to bring up his young family? Apart from hotels, the dental practice in Cantelupe Road is the only long-standing commercial premise on the De La Warr estate and it could be speculated that he had some connection with the De La Warr family.

**Background, registration and qualifications**

All three of the pioneering resident dentists were also of mature years before arriving in the developing town, with established careers behind them. While these cannot be considered representative of the profession as a whole at that time, they do illustrate the wide variety of backgrounds from which dentists were drawn. None had parents with a medical background but two came from families presumably of some wealth; a gentleman and a master fishmonger, about whom the census data state that he employed three people. Miller's father was clearly more than just a fish seller, but a businessman who also introduced his son to the livery company. Dickinson and Miller appear to have acquired formal dental qualification as soon as possible and both chose to register on the dentists register at the earliest opportunity. In contrast, Meads did neither. As previously mentioned, his father was a labourer and his younger brother was working by the age of 12, presumably to support the family finances. Despite this background, Meads was able to elevate himself beyond his impoverished upbringing either through dentistry or his keen entrepreneurship of property developing and boarding house-keeper.

The later visiting dentist, Mosley, also appears on the first register, with an LDS from Ireland. However, from 1891, that qualification does not appear in the register and his justification

for registration is 'in practice before 1879'. In his practice advertisements, however, he claims an MCDE. The reason for these anomalies is unclear. A further anomaly is presented by Miller, who, although recorded as resident and working in Bexhill from 1895, his address remains on the register as 35 Chowringhee, Calcutta, India until 1901. Again, the reason for this discrepancy is unknown. The reliability of the information held within the first dental registers is clearly open to question.

**Wealth**

There is no way of knowing how much these dentists earned from their practices. We can perhaps make a comparative judgement of wealth from their household arrangements. Muthesius suggests that, in Brighton at the turn of the century, professional men ('lawyers, successful doctors, top range clerks') earned in the range of £500 to £700 and would keep up to three female servants.<sup>1</sup> Next, he states that lower paid professionals (some higher clerks, for instance) earned in the region of £350 and would have one or two servants.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, life in service was hard. Sleeping arrangements often meant that servants slept in the bathroom or several to a bed.<sup>1</sup> Alice Eldridge described life in service in Cantelupe Road as 'cleaning flues' all day, for six and a half days a week, with alternate Sundays off, for which she was paid 2/6 (12½p).<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of servant numbers, of our three resident dentists, Miller was by far the wealthiest in 1901 (Tables 2, 3, 4). It is difficult to think that his wealth was acquired entirely from dentistry, which would be in line with his cosmopolitan background and well-travelled life.

The census data only show live-in servants. We do not know which of the households had day servants who lived elsewhere. The Meads' household, with five adults, one child and seven lodgers must surely have had some further help.

However, servant numbers were declining around this time. Alternative opportunities for employment, particularly for girls, were becoming available at the time and it could be imagined that in the growing town of Bexhill, shop work and other trades such as seamstress and milliner would offer competitive opportunities. It is also thought that servant numbers declined in households where adult children were present as they fulfilled these helping roles within the household unit.<sup>17</sup> In this small sample of four dentists, the numbers

**Table 4 Decimal and pre-decimal currency**

	Pre-decimal currency	Decimal currency
£1	20 shillings (s)	100p
1 shilling	12 pence (d = old pence)	5p (new pence)
1 guinea	£1/1/0 (One pound, one shilling, no pence)	£1.10
Half a crown 2/6	2 shillings and 6 old pence	12½ new pence



of servants does appear to decline in relation to the numbers of resident children and therefore may be a poor comparator of wealth. However, Miller's probate value of more than 25 times that of Dickinson would appear to confirm the greater wealth of the former.

### Dental practice

None of the three resident dentists in Bexhill advertised their services. The early visiting dentist did, largely in the Hastings newspaper, and these give an idea of how much dentistry cost. Mosley states that consultation is free of charge and 'single teeth' cost from five shillings and a 'set' from five to 30 guineas. However, he offered work for servants and those of limited means at greatly reduced fees. Without the reduced fees, a stopping or a scaling cost the weekly wage of a servant girl.

### Legacy

Meads, with his income streams from dentistry and the boarding house, was also a speculative builder and his legacy to Bexhill is both in bricks and mortar and in leaving his son to continue the practice at The Turret.

Miller and Dickinson, however, seem to have left a legacy of many younger people whom they introduced to the profession. Both had assistants at one time or another, many of whom seem to have gone on to either gain qualification or successful careers. There appears to be a difference between the types of people they had as assistants, however. Dickinson seems to employ unqualified young people, perhaps following the master/apprentice model of earlier years. Miller, on the other hand, worked with young, newly qualified dentists. Whether they were there to

release Miller for his other interests or whether they were in attendance to learn from him and to gain supervised clinical experience, is not known.

### Conclusion

By the end of the century, the prospering Bexhill-on-Sea was served by three dentists who had moved into the town to set up practice, as well as one visiting practitioner. Three had come from Hastings: Meads, aged 42, the son of a labourer, taking in boarders as well as providing dental services in a rather plainer building on the Egerton Park estate; the long-standing local dentist, Dickinson, aged 53, with a hospital appointment and also maintaining a long-established practice in Hastings; and Mosely, London-registered but Hastings-based. The cosmopolitan Miller, aged 44, with the young wife and child, liveryman of the Cordwainers Company, and a mansion on the De La Warr estate, is clearly the exception. To characterise them from what we know, all of them were middle-aged and adventurous enough to settle in the new resort, but all very different in background and practice. Miller appears to be the gentleman dentist, perhaps with some private means. Meads, the entrepreneur and speculator. Dickinson, the committed professional dental surgeon, member of the Odontological Society of Great Britain and the British Dental Association. Mosely, a throwback to the earliest days of the town when dentists only visited, seems to have dipped his toe in the water and decided Bexhill was not for him on a permanent basis.

While we do not know what encouraged these pioneers to become dentists, it does

seem that they had a formative influence over the next generation. It does appear that an entrepreneurial spirit was a prerequisite for success. However, with the introduction of registration in 1879, it may be that dentistry as a career was becoming a more popular and respectable profession.

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