EDITORIAL

Reflection

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Editor-in-Chief

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If we go back to Greek mythology then reflection has something of a bad press. Gazing into a pool of water the young Narcissus fell in love with his own reflected image thereby giving his name to the less than alluring characteristic of narcissism. However, the activity of reflection as a contemplation of one's situation has gained rather more respect in current times. It was in this spirit that the BDA recently organised a small celebration of the fifty years since its headquarters at 64 Wimpole Street, London, W1 was opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 13 March 1967. The recent event included a further addition to the Museum's valuable 'John McLean Archive: a living history of dentistry' containing oral histories as a series of recordings, this time on dentistry in the 1960s as recalled by practitioners of the time.

Revealed was a fascinating mosaic of what, it has to be said, was an era that in many ways seems almost as lost in history as dear young Narcissus' watery retreat, since the changes in the half century have been immense. A short film has been commissioned to commemorate the Queen's visit (https://youtu.be/h7bP-AE_pzw) which includes black and white images of the unveiling as well as an historic audio recording of Her Majesty's address. This latter containing some rather witty observations about the nature of dentists, dentistry and the BDA building itself. In these far off images some things have either hardly changed at all such as the façade of the building, while some are still instantly recognisable despite intervening refurbishment such as the library and the lecture theatre. But while the substance of the physical surroundings may have stayed familiar the attitudes, practices and circumstances of the profession that the Association represents are in many ways almost unrecognisably different.

Despite the solid presence of a typically cream coloured dental unit from the 1960s, complete with crenelated bracket table and cord-driven handpiece, perhaps none of

the material available in the Museum from that era reflects the changes in dentistry's place in society more than a BDA guide to appearing on television. Written to advise potential interviewees on the possible pitfalls of the then quite young but vibrantly growing medium (the leaflet cites the two channels in existence, BBC and ITV) it couches the recommended behaviour in what is now all but a comedy perspective. For example, a section devoted to smoking advises that cigarette smoking is to be avoided as the smoke can distract viewers; unless the interviewee is a chain smoker in which case it is important to do so in order to calm nerves. However, pipe smoking is 'entirely acceptable'.

The handout was written with the exclusive assumption that the dentist will be male, since

'...what you say should be clearly understood by your postman, your grocer, or your wife's daily...'

at the time the overwhelming majority of the profession were men. However, other social norms are also unconsciously given emphasis. In the paragraph on dress code the advice is to stick to plain coloured suits, shirts and ties but that the producer (also a 'he') will advise. Make-up may be mandatory as 'television can do queer things to people's faces' and should not be regarded as 'cissy' since it can prevent one from looking like 'an unshaven desperado with anaemia'. While the advice to keep speech simple still holds today the way in which it is described speaks volumes for the period; 'what you say should be clearly understood by your postman, your grocer, your wife's daily, or a secretary unconnected with your work'. Truly a different world.

The recollections from the practitioners were also significant in their differences to today's dental practice. In a world dominated by a huge workload of caries, no fluoride toothpaste and little opportunity for, or awareness of, prevention the daily conveyor belt consisted of extractions, dentures and restorative dentistry, primarily amalgam fillings but increasingly anterior crowns as the new 'cosmetic' treatment gained notoriety. The advent of the high speed handpiece was universally hailed as the greatest innovation while plaque was yet to be identified as the cause of periodontal disease and there was no notion whatsoever of single-use needles for local anaesthetics.

At the celebration, in a neat and gracious loop, the current BDA President Peter Dyer read out a message from the Queen congratu-

lating the Association on the occasion and as such was one of only two people 'present' who witnessed the spring day five decades ago, the other being a former employee on the *BDJ* who we had the pleasure of inviting.

And so, forward to 2067. As unimaginable now as 2017 was in 1967. Today's graduates, who will be in their seventies, may be reminiscing on the further contract reform following the prolonged and disastrous reign of the Unit of Dental Activity as part of the defunct NHS dental service, the ineptitude of the discredited and disbanded GDC as an out of touch regulator, and a BDA building that didn't even have a charger for electric cars. Reflections in a pool yet to condense. ■

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