

# The BDA First World War Memorial

F. S. S. Gray<sup>1</sup>

## Key points

Provides an introduction to the memorials of the First World War.

Provides information regarding the BDA First World War Memorial.

Provides biographical details of those commemorated on the BDA Memorial.

The First World War cost many lives and the dental profession was not exempt. Some were serving in their professional capacity within the forces, but many were not. The British Dental Association wished to commemorate those members who had sacrificed their lives by providing a Memorial plaque at the association's headquarters.

By the end of the war, approximately five and a half million men serving in the British Army were mobilised. British military casualties, including the Navy and RFC/RAF were 956,703; 704,803 being from the British Isles.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the large number of casualties incurred and the suffering of those remaining there was a desire to commemorate the men who had given their lives. This war had been different in that it was not just fought by a professional army but largely by volunteers and conscripts. Many communities were depleted of young men and villages on the battlefields were devastated. The need of bereaved families for remembrance led to a wave of commemoration both at home and overseas.

On the battlefields, makeshift graves were marked by wooden crosses and tin helmets on sticks. While a commander of a British Red Cross Ambulance Unit during the war, Fabian Ware (1869–1949), was saddened by the vast number of casualties and these makeshift burial sites. Determined that a soldier's resting place was not lost forever, he was instrumental in the founding of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) which was established by Royal Charter in May 1917; later it was known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). Following the Kenyon Report, War Graves: How the Cemeteries

Abroad will be Designed, in November 1918, work got underway to create memorials in the form of a cemetery or a monument in or near the place of death.<sup>2</sup>

The eminent architects of their day, Herbert Baker, Reginald Blomfield and Edwin Lutyens, were appointed as the Commission's initial principal architects. Rudyard Kipling was appointed literary advisor for the language used for memorial inscriptions.

The equality of the officers and other ranks was to be represented as the sacrifice had been common. No bodies were to be repatriated, all ranks were to be treated equally, all faiths to be respected and the graves to be marked with upright stone slabs and not crosses. This caused some considerable controversy. However, it enabled religious symbols and regimental badges to be engraved upon the headstones together with some brief text. Those of non-Christian faith were to have their graves treated according to their own religious beliefs and practices and their own symbol placed over them.

As a consequence of the weaponry used during the First World War, the remains of the casualties were often unrecognisable, destroyed or lost. Headstones of the 'unknown soldier', inscribed with 'A Soldier of the Great War' and 'Known unto God,' or memorial plaques arose to remember them on or near the battlefield sites.

Lutyens' Stone of Remembrance was erected in cemeteries and memorials of 1000 or more war dead. In respect of all faiths, it bears the inscription 'Their Name Liveth for Evermore'

and the stone's abstract shape was designed to avoid reference to any particular religion (Fig. 1). A symbol of self-sacrifice and of the Christian Empire was provided by Blomfield's Cross of Sacrifice. It is present in cemeteries of 40 or more dead. In some countries, the Cross of Sacrifice is absent, for example, Turkey, in consideration to the Muslim population.

The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London was originally built as a temporary, wooden structure by Lutyens for the London Victory Parade in 1919. Owing to its popularity, a permanent structure of Portland stone was constructed in 1920. The inscription of 'The Glorious Dead' differs from those memorials on the battlefields in its allusion to glory in battle and triumph.



**Fig. 1 Stone of Remembrance and Cross of Sacrifice at Tyne Cot Cemetery**

<sup>1</sup>Volunteer, BDA Dental Museum  
Correspondence to: Fiona Gray  
Email: museum@bda.org

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Fig. 2 'Dead Man's Penny', courtesy of the Museum of Military Medicine, Aldershot

Understandably, relatives wished to have remembrance of loved ones closer to home. A bronze memorial medallion, rather grimly nicknamed 'Deadman's Penny' (Fig. 2), was issued to the next-of-kin. This, together with a photograph of the deceased, was often found in homes as a 'shrine'. Memorial monuments or plaques can be found in villages and towns. Sometimes utilitarian memorials with a practical purpose, such as the provision of libraries, parks, or hospitals were built. Those on the BDA Memorial are also remembered or buried close to where they died. Those who lost their lives at sea are commemorated at Chatham Naval Memorial in Kent.

By 1917, approximately 25% of BDA members were serving with the forces. This was over 500 members out of a membership of about 2000 at the time. Among the UK registered dentists, approximately 1,300 joined the forces; 60 were killed or died in service.<sup>3</sup>

In order to commemorate those members who gave their lives and to help their dependants, a War Memorial Committee was set up in 1919, as a sub-committee of the Representative

Board of the BDA. A commemorative tablet of bronze, with a carved wood surround, was decided upon, designed by architects Messrs. Sheppard and Harris. Funding was supplied by BDA members to cover the cost of £150. The design was initially exhibited at the BDA offices in Russell Square on 23 and 24 January 1920 for approval. The unveiling was carried out by the BDA President, Arthur Ball on Saturday 30 October 1920<sup>4</sup>(Fig. 3a). Currently, the memorial without the wooden surround, together with that of the Second World War, is opposite the lecture theatre in Wimpole Street (Fig. 3b).

On the First World War Memorial is the list of 25 BDA members who died while serving during the war. Of those dentists commemorated only eight served in a dental or medical capacity. The remaining dentists served in other regiments, all but three as officers.

The twenty-sixth name, Henry Thomas Massey, had been chief clerk to the BDA for 12 years. He served with the London Regiment (Queen Victoria's Rifles) in France and was killed in action on 16 August 1916.

Dentistry was not a reserved occupation in spite of a shortage of dentists at home. There were 5,254 registered dentists in 1914, serving a population 46 million including Ireland.<sup>5,6</sup>

*'In October 1915, Lord Derby had stated that he could not accept that dentists should be exempt from military service and advised that they should enrol in the Army Reserve B for call-up. Dentists already employed by the Services in a civilian capacity would normally be exempt but dental mechanics would have to follow the same procedure as dental surgeons. Despite their pleas, the Board of Trade, in January 1916, decided that neither dentists nor their mechanics should be excused from military service.'*<sup>7</sup>

In 1916, instructions from Lord Derby enabled dental students with finals to postpone conscription to a later date.<sup>8</sup>

By 1917 there were 5,453 registered dentists in the UK. Of these, 1,400 or so were not qualified but had been in practice before the Dentists Act of 1878 and thus would have been over the age of enlistment (19–40 years). Of the 4,000 or so qualified dentists, 2000 were of military age and over half of these were serving in the forces. Only 454 were commissioned as dentists.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty and length of time to enrol in a professional capacity in the forces may have contributed to dentists serving in combatant roles.

*'During 1915, published obituaries revealed just how many dental practitioners had served as combatants and thereby lost their lives. No doubt some would have preferred to have served in a professional capacity but delay in their acceptance had caused many to enlist in a combatant unit.'*<sup>7</sup>

Private Robert Harold Heath was such an example. Following qualification at the Royal Dental Hospital he underwent further training at the University of Pennsylvania gaining a DDS in 1910. He joined Mr Warwick James in Portland Place, London, as an associate and then partner. At the outbreak of hostilities, Heath volunteered and in his obituary Mr James explained:

*'He sort [sic.] a commission as a dental surgeon, but was told there was a very long waiting list. He had rendered voluntary assistance at the Royal Dental Hospital, but when his services could no longer be utilised to assist the Army in any capacity while remaining a civilian, he decided to enlist as a private.'*<sup>10</sup>

He was killed in action on 22 October 1916 at the age of 38.

The following were the only dentists on the memorial serving in a professional capacity:

- Captain L. C. Crockett LDS RCS Eng, DDS Penna. Special List attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC)

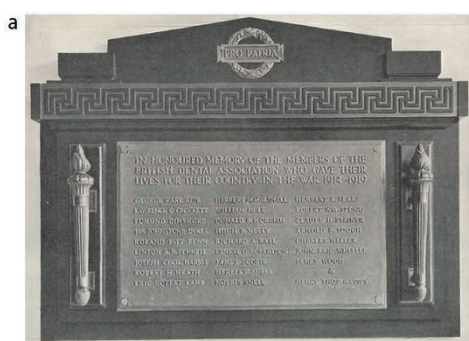


Fig. 3 War Memorial at Russell Square (a) and at Wimpole Street (b)

- Captain M. E. Dinsmore LDS RCS Eng. Special List attached to the RAMC (home service)
- Captain J. C. Harris LDS RCS Eng, MRCS LRCP Lond. Field Ambulance RAMC
- Lieutenant/Commandant H. M. Marshall LDS RCS Eng. Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
- Captain E. G. Robertson LDS RCS Eng. RAMC
- Lieutenant R. W. Spong LDS RCS Eng. RAF
- Captain C. Weller LDS RCS Eng, MRCS LRCP RAMC
- Captain J. Wood LDS RCS Edin. RAMC.

Following his LDS at the Royal Dental Hospital, Laurence Charles Crockett went to America to gain a DDS before returning to England and establishing a practice in Eastbourne. At the outbreak of war he served as a dental surgeon attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). After a few months in Aldershot he was posted to Malta in December 1915. Owing to his strenuous workload in the military hospital resulting in ill-health, Crockett relinquished his commission in the summer of 1918. His death, aged 37, from pleurisy and tuberculosis followed on 17 October 1918 at the Mundesley Hospital in Norfolk.<sup>11</sup> This hospital was the first designed in the UK to incorporate fresh air in the treatment of TB and opened in 1899.

Edmund Dinsmore was commissioned as an Army Dental Surgeon in 1916 serving in the home service at the Curragh Camp, County Kildare.<sup>12</sup> He died from pneumonia in Londonderry on 12 November 1918, aged 29; tragically the day after the signing of the Armistice.

Qualified in both dentistry and medicine, Joseph Cecil Harris practised dentistry in Wolverhampton. He sought a commission with the third (North Midland) Field Ambulance, RAMC, and served in France from 1 April 1915. He was killed on 16 August 1917, aged 37, following the bombing of a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS).<sup>13</sup>

The youngest on the memorial is 23-year-old Herbert Myers Marshall. He served as a dental surgeon as a Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on HMHS 'China'. He was accidentally killed while serving at Scapa Flow, Orkney Islands on 10 August 1918.

*'10/8/18. Wire from HM Ship China – Miss Chamberlain together with 3 officers of the ship, blown up by a mine in above date on Cantick minefield, and killed in the ship's whaler while*

*out fishing. Next of kin informed by 'China.'* Noted in *The National Archives ADM 104/162.*<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of the war there were no dental services for the troops, with the exception of extractions carried out by medical surgeons. The first dentists to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France were given temporary commissions attached to the RAMC. An alumnus of Guy's Hospital, Ernest Guy Robertson, was one of the first to be commissioned to the RAMC. In December 1914, he served at Salisbury Plains before disembarking in France during the summer of 1915 where he spent two years at a CCS. Returning to England to treat facial injuries at Cambridge Hospital, Aldershot, he was transferred to Queen's Hospital, Sidcup, Kent in August 1917.<sup>15</sup> While there, Captain Robertson died of pneumonia following influenza, on 28 October 1918 aged 33.

Queen's Hospital was opened in 1917, under the auspices of the British Red Cross to treat maxillofacial injuries.<sup>16</sup> It was housed in Froggnal House, a Jacobean mansion.

Robert William Spong also died following influenza, at Shorncliffe Military Hospital, Folkestone on 30 October 1918, aged 29. His dental studies were interrupted at the start of the war having enlisted as a Private in the Middlesex Yeomanry. He obtained a commission and served in Dublin during the Irish troubles before serving in France for a couple of years. Returning to England to resume his studies he obtained his LDS RCS in 1917. Demobilised following an illness, he later served with the RAF in a dental capacity until his death.<sup>17,18</sup>

Charles Weller was another of the first to be commissioned for dental duties in France, in

November 1914. He was both medically and dentally qualified from Guy's Hospital. He served at a CCS at the Western Front. Then he was attached to a field ambulance, in connection with the 1st Cavalry Division, and later served at a base hospital. At the time of his death on 16 August 1917, aged 35, he was a medical officer to the London Regiment and was on his way to render assistance to officers buried inside a shelled building.<sup>19</sup>

James Wood qualified at Edinburgh in 1914. He served during the war as a dental surgeon with the RAMC. While with No.28 CCS in Greece, he died of accidental injuries on 14 September 1918, aged 28.

On the memorial there are five members who were among the 420,000 or so British casualties of the Battle of the Somme (1 July-18 November 1916):

- 2nd Lieutenant D. B. Morrish
- Captain N. Snell
- 2nd Lieutenant C. H. Stainer
- Captain A. B. Tough
- Captain J. E. Wheeler.

Donald Bernard Morrish (Fig.4) practised in Cambridge, following his studies at Guy's Hospital. He served in France as a trench mortar officer and was killed in action on 18 August 1916, aged 25.<sup>20,21</sup>

Norris Snell (Fig. 5) had a successful dental practice in Ipswich. Before the war he held a commission in the Royal Garrison Artillery and at the start of hostilities he volunteered. Refused by his regiment, perhaps owing to his age, he was gazetted to the 8th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment and served in France and Flanders.



Fig. 4 D. B. Morrish



Fig. 5 Norris Snell from the UK, De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, 1914-1918



Fig. 6 C. H. Stainer

In a letter home in May 1915, he wrote:

*'Your gingerbread arrived with the gilt on it and it was very acceptable and doesn't show the dirt when you carry it in your pocket. We are all pretty cheery living in a wood or almost under it in a dug out; plenty of strife all round but I am having quite a peaceful time [...] I am hoping to move again to a quiet place for a few days with all the comforts, a bath included, and almost of reach of the guns – I picked quite a bunch of bluebells yesterday going my rounds to outlying posts – only a canvas screen between me and the Hun's bullets – it's a queer mixture of peace and war here – Cheer-oh!'*<sup>22</sup>

Severely wounded during the Battle of Loos in September 1915, he spent time in hospital at home. After a spell with a Reserve battalion in Yorkshire he eventually re-joined his regiment in February 1916, returning to France in March. While leading his men at Longueval he was killed in action on 14 July 1916, aged 41.<sup>23</sup>

After qualifying at Guy's Hospital, Claude Hamilton Stainer (Fig. 6) practised in South Africa. He returned to England to volunteer when war broke out and served in France. Aged 31, he was killed in action on 15 November 1916 while attacking a German trench.<sup>24</sup>

Arnold Bannatyne Tough was commissioned in September 1914 into the 11th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, also known as the 'Accrington Pals'. After a short spell serving in Egypt, Captain Tough was transferred to France. During the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, he led the first wave of the attack on Serre and was killed in action, aged 26. 'The History of the East Lancashire Regiment



Fig. 7 J. J. Dykes

in the Great War' records that out of some 720 Accrington Pals who took part in the attack, 584 were killed, wounded or missing.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence of the large number of casualties and the devastating effect on communities, later battalions were no longer comprised of recruits from the same area.<sup>25</sup>

John Eric Wheeler had been in practice and on the staff of Brighton and District Public Health Service. Early in the war he served in France with a Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was killed in action on 10 November 1916, aged 29.<sup>26</sup>

The following were mentioned in dispatches for gallantry in action:

- Captain J. J. Dykes
- 2nd Lieutenant W. Mole
- Private H. R. Sears.

James Johnston Dykes (Fig. 7) qualified in dentistry at Edinburgh and in medicine at both Edinburgh and Glasgow. He held the appointment of dental surgeon to the Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary and was also in practice with his father. While serving in The King's Own Scottish Borderers Regiment, he was killed in action at the Dardanelles on 12 July 1915. It was his twenty-ninth birthday.<sup>27</sup>

William Mole also qualified at Edinburgh. He served with the Durham Light Infantry in France and died of wounds received in battle, on 28 August 1917 aged 28.<sup>28</sup>

Herbert Rayson Sears had been commissioned as an Army Dental Surgeon in 1915. Shortly afterwards he relinquished this and joined the Royal Fusiliers (Sportsman's Battalion) as



Fig. 8 The Military Medal awarded to non-commissioned ranks of the British Forces for bravery. Established on 25 March 1916. The Military Cross has been awarded to all ranks since 1993 when the MM was discontinued. Courtesy of the Museum of Military Medicine



Fig. 9 H. R. Sears's gravestone at Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, France

a Private. A month after his marriage, he was wounded in October 1916 during the Battle of the Somme. He was mentioned in dispatches and was awarded a Military Medal (MM) (Fig. 8) on 21 October 1916.<sup>29</sup> Following his recovery, he returned to the front and was killed in action in France on 17 February 1917, aged 36.<sup>30</sup> (Fig. 9).



Fig. 10 R. P. Fenn

Captain Roland Pitt Fenn (Figs 10 a and b) was the son of a dentist and practised in Croydon. During the war he served in both Egypt and France with the Royal Flying Corps. In a letter home he wrote:

*'Have not been doing a great deal of flying the weather seldom good enough for long at a time to really do a job. One gets up in the air about half an hour before dawn so as to be over the German lines at dawn, if it is too cloudy or there is ground mist so that you cannot see what is going on you come home again – turn in once more to bed. If not you reconnoitre down the line to see what they are up to.'*

In another letter he notes:

*'We have been having an exceptionally busy time the last fortnight. Today and one other being the only days we have not flown and being short of pilots what with new ones, some on a course in England and others on leave have had to do two shows on some days, having a flight to look after also makes one much busier than one would otherwise be. Had great excitement yesterday the Hun got funny and started shelling us with a 15 in naval gun at about 20 miles range [...] getting three on the aerodrome and three others less than 100 yards from our mess, but although the shell weighs nearly a ton and chucks up several tons of earth and stones no one was hurt.'*<sup>21</sup>

He was missing in action, presumed killed on 25 March 1918, aged 35.<sup>32</sup> He was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palm (Fig. 11).<sup>33</sup> His citation from family papers, in translation, states he 'showed the utmost courage and remarkable coolness in the course of daylight bombing raids and photographic reconnaissance flights.'

The remaining members on the Memorial:

- Lieutenant G. C. Adie
- Private L. A. R. Fennell
- Lieutenant E. R. Lamb
- 2nd Lieutenant H. B. Neely
- Lieutenant R. A. Rail
- 2nd Lieutenant J. Scobie
- Lieutenant H. Snell

Following his studies at Newcastle Dental Hospital and University of Durham, George Carl Adie was commissioned at the beginning of 1917 and in April disembarked in France. A few months later he was killed in action on 22 August 1917, aged 25.<sup>34</sup>

Linton Albert Ramsey Fennell, a dental surgeon in Cambourne, was a platoon Commander of the Cambourne Volunteer Corps. He joined the London Regiment (Artists' Rifles) and died of sickness on 14 April 1917 in Romford Hospital, aged 37.<sup>35</sup>

Eric Robert Lamb qualified at Manchester University and entered general practice with his brother in Wigan. Commissioned to the Manchester Regiment, he served in France from February 1917. Following pneumonia he died at a CCS in France on 2 November 1918, aged 29.<sup>36</sup>

Hugh Bertram Neely (Fig. 12) practised in Southampton and had been a member of the London Regiment (Artists' Rifles) until 1912. He re-joined at the commencement of hostilities and was gazetted to the Suffolk Regiment. Following service in France and Flanders he died of wounds following the second Battle of Ypres on 25 April 1915, aged 27.<sup>37</sup>

Richard Angwin Rail was born in Sydney, Australia. His family moved to Cape Town, South Africa where he was educated. Following



Fig. 11 Croix de Guerre 1914-1918 with Palm. The Croix de Guerre 1914-1918 was awarded by France to members of the French military or their allies displaying valour in battle during WW1. The palm represents the citation of gallantry at army level. Courtesy of the Museum of Military Medicine

his qualification at the Royal Dental Hospital in London he returned to Cape Town to practise. He came to England and was commissioned in the Coldstream Guards and was sent to the Front in July 1916. He was killed in action on 9 October 1917, aged 29.<sup>38</sup>

James Scobie qualified from Edinburgh Dental School and practised in Hampstead, London. He disembarked in France with the Gordon Highlanders in October 1916.<sup>39</sup> He died of wounds on 3 August 1917, aged 36.<sup>40</sup>

Herbert Snell (Fig. 13) also served but unlike his brother, Norris, he survived combat until 1917. Following in his older brother's footsteps he qualified at Guy's Hospital. In order to fund his studies, he took a post in Portugal for some years. He returned to complete his qualification but with his health weakened



Fig. 12 H. B. Neely

from recurrent bouts of malaria. He was in practice in Woking, Surrey until he joined the Inns of Court Volunteers in January 1916. He was gazetted to the 24th London Regiment (the Queen's) the following year and went to France attached to the Lancashire Fusiliers in February 1917. In a letter to his younger brother, Arthur, he wrote:

*'I am writing this from the front line as you know best, but expect to be resting before you get this – they are a decent lot of men and we are getting to know and like one another. It is rather cold here at nights, frost and ice, the same as you have had, I suppose, but the life is interesting and we keep smiling, so you need not worry about things, and I think of us in the depths of misery [...] I think quick wisdom and always cheerful courage are what we need.'*<sup>41</sup>

After six weeks deployment in France, Lieutenant Snell was killed following patrol operations on 7 April 1917, aged 36. He had



Fig. 13 Herbert Snell

volunteered to take a patrol party across no man's land into German trenches for a reconnaissance. The mission was accomplished but he was shot on return to his own trench. His last words were to his men: *'leave me, look after yourselves'*.<sup>42</sup>

Having read about these lives, one realises the sacrifices these men made for the nation, together with many others.

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