The Dentists of Llandysul
1900 - 2000
including a short history of Dentistry

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by
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INTRODUCTION – A SHORT HISTORY OF DENTISTRY

Dental disease, like all the other ills the flesh is heir to, is as old as mankind. The earliest people lived on coarse textured cereal and animal foods often contaminated with grit which wore teeth down exposing the sensitive pulp and causing gum disease and bone loss around the teeth.

With the growth of civilisation and the development of societies with ruling and subordinate classes there was a variation in the type of dental disease suffered by the wealthy and the poor. While the poor retained the coarse foods of previous generations the wealthy could afford the sweet and sticky foods that are the cause of dental caries even today.

In Britain by the 12th century sugar had become more widely available for the first time but being expensive was a luxury affordable only by the rich. A German visitor to the court of Queen Elizabeth described the queen as having “black teeth characteristic of the English for their love of sugar.”

As the consumption of sugar increased so too did the incidence of dental caries. Early theories as to the cause of caries in the absence of microscopes were hardly accurate though Leeuwenhoek had identified oral bacteria as early as 1683 using the newly discovered microscope without implicating them in oral disease. A worm in the tooth; pressure from other teeth and acid from food were some of the suggested causes but the results were self evident – decaying discoloured teeth, inflamed gums and jaw and PAIN!

There were other conditions too causing oral disease in the past and complicating an accurate diagnosis notably scurvy due to lack of vitamin C and medication with mercury which was used in a number of medicines especially in the treatment of syphilis.

In ancient civilisations it had been recognised that cleaning the teeth had some effect in preventing dental disease and twigs frayed at the end into a primitive brush were used – and still are in some places. The medieval Welsh historian Geraldus Cambrensis noted in the 12th century that “the Welsh paid great attention to their teeth rubbing them with either the leaves or the bark of the hazel and refraining from hot meats and drinks so that they were of dazzling whiteness”.

Tooth brushes as known today date from the mid 17th century and for the wealthy these were often quite ornate with gold or silver handles.

The toothpick was another device used in antiquity to remove fragments of food from between the teeth and these were usually carried on the person. In the
16th and 17th century the wealthier diners-out would wear gold or silver picks on chains around their necks. Later centuries were more discreet carrying their toothpicks in small decorated cases of gold, silver, ivory or wood.

Before the introduction in the late 19th century of toothpastes in today’s familiar soft collapsible tubes (previously only used for artists paints) tooth powders were commonly used. These again have a long history and contained various abrasive substances such as brick dust, soot, pumice stone etc together with flavouring and colouring often presented to the public by tooth drawers, chemists and quacks as their own infallible “secret formulae” to ensure oral hygiene.

It is not known how many people had the time and money to spend on these dental hygiene items but there is no doubt about the fact that toothache was a widely occurring problem with more remedies for toothache in the herbals and materia medica of the past than for almost any other ailment.

There was even a patron saint of toothache sufferers - St. Apollonia, who was martyred in 250AD having refused to give up her Christian faith in spite of having her teeth pulled out one by one before being burnt. She is said to have prayed that anyone who invoked her name would be relieved of toothache.

The prayers offered up to her were probably as ineffective as the protective amulets and other charms worn or carried. The medieval Welsh physicians of Myddfai prescribed “the inner bark of the ivy and the leaves of the honeysuckle bruising them well together in a mortar expressing them through a linen cloth into both nostrils the patient lying on his back” and “shepherds purse pounded into a mass and applied to the tooth”. A 17th century remedy recommended – “take a little cotton and dip into essence of cloves and place it into the hollow of your tooth” (oil of cloves is still used today.) Warm poultices and mouthwashes probably gave some relief and opium usually in the form of laudanum undoubtedly relieved the pain.

Other more drastic measures involved cauterising the nerve with a red hot iron (an operation undergone by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in c.1750 . This was followed by the ‘raw stumps being seared with a daily dose of caustic’ and had surprisingly excellent results) or lancing an abscess but the ultimate solution – extraction of the tooth was like all operations in pre anaesthetic days kept as a last resort.

The early medieval tooth drawers were like many of the early surgeons members of families who specialised in just one procedure and passed on their skills only to other members of the family. They travelled the country offering their
services and some were granted licenses to practise by the Company of Barber Surgeons.

Early instruments for extracting teeth such as the pelican and the key relied on leverage against the gum with a likelihood of extensive damage to the gum, neighbouring teeth, and the jawbone. Extractions were often carried out with the patient seated on the floor firmly held between the operator’s legs.

By the 18th century a new practitioner was emerging defined in a contemporary dictionary as “one skilled in drawing teeth and in making artificial ones”. They were at first called ‘operators for the teeth’ but in the late 1750s a new word was imported from France to describe them, which became the name for anyone dealing with matters dental – the name was dentist.

In 1783 John Hunter fresh from service in the Army with only a pension of 5/- a week to live on returned to London and went into partnership with a fashionable London dentist to earn enough to further his surgical career. In 1771 he published “The Natural History of the Human Teeth” which for the first time gave a scientific basis to dental anatomy.

The new dental practitioners dealt not only with extractions but also undertook the replacement of lost teeth with partial or full sets of artificial teeth; filling teeth with gold, lead, or tin; root canal treatments; minor oral surgery; and providing obturators to cover palatal deficiencies in cleft palate sufferers or more commonly for those whose palates had been eroded by syphilis.

They came from a variety of backgrounds - watchmakers, goldsmiths, even blacksmiths who after making the forceps and instruments for others would try their hands at using them. They were either self taught or underwent an apprenticeship with an established practitioner often a family member who had practised dentistry for many years and whose skills were passed on within the family.

Most were based in London where they advertised their services widely. Some sought patients further afield travelling through the country, advertising in the local press, taking rooms in an inn where they would treat patients or, for a slightly higher fee, carry out domiciliary visits, carrying all their equipment in one small bag.

The false teeth they made consisted of human teeth taken from corpses riveted onto an ivory plate. It was very difficult to carve ivory into an accurate profile of the mouth especially as there was no effective way of taking an impression so most sets of dentures were horseshoe shaped and used springs between the upper and lower plates to hold them apart and force them on to the
gums. They were difficult to clean and the human teeth and ivory plate decayed almost as quickly as natural teeth. Partial dentures to replace one or two teeth were smaller and neater.

Where only the crown had decayed leaving the root behind, crowns of human or animal teeth attached to a gold pin forced into the root canal were used. Gold shell crowns were made to cover badly worn teeth. As all these were not designed to be removed they were difficult to clean and frequently led to unpleasant mouth odours and halitosis.

Tooth grafting was sometimes attempted. Poor young men and women were paid to have their healthy teeth removed for immediate placement into the jaws of wealthy older patients who had just had their blackened stumps removed a procedure rarely successful. (The teeth for use in artificial dentures or grafting in this way were sometimes removed by grave robbers from the corpses they had dug up and sold to dentists before the rest of the body was delivered to hospital or private anatomy schools).

Because of the expense and inconvenience of artificial teeth (a set would cost over 20 guineas (equivalent to £500 today) even the wealthy were not always prepared to submit to dentistry. Women were able to hide their blackened teeth and unpleasant breath by the skilful use of a fan which became an essential fashion accessory for many society ladies.

Towards the end of the 18th century porcelain teeth began to be used which were better than human teeth as they did not decay though they were difficult to fire accurately and were rather brittle but they continued to be used in the 19th century when most of the other major advances in the practice of medicine and dentistry began to take place.

With a better knowledge of the anatomy of teeth forceps were designed with beaks anatomically shaped to fit the different shaped crowns of teeth. This reduced slippage and prevented damage to surrounding structures.

The discovery of anaesthetics in the 1840s saw more people prepared to undergo extractions rather than put up with rotten stumps. This in turn led to an increased demand for artificial teeth and the development of better materials for taking accurate impressions and making well fitting dentures. Wax and then plaster of paris, gutta percha or Stent compound were used to take detailed impressions of the patients mouth and easily worked vulcanite, a form of processed rubber invented by Charles Goodyear in 1851, was introduced as a base fitted with porcelain teeth. The upper plate which when made of ivory was usually horseshoe shaped and ill fitting could now be made to cover the palate.
completely. The increased suction holding the denture firmly in place without the need for springs.

Filling of teeth became a routine procedure and like all dental procedures was facilitated by the development of the reclining dental chair and the dental drill though the slow moving foot treadle mechanical dental drill invented in 1871 made it a lengthy and painful procedure. This was helped by the introduction of cocaine as a local anaesthetic in 1884, general anaesthesia only being suitable for short treatments such as extractions. Silicate cement, tooth coloured filling material was introduced about the same time and the principles laid down in the 1890s for preparing teeth for filling remained in use well into the 20th century.

In 1890 W.D. Miller in Philadelphia with the aid of advances in bacteriology and microscopy developed a 'chemico-parasitic' theory to explain the development of caries which is still accepted today. He believed that micro-organisms in the mouth caused fermentation of food particles trapped between the teeth producing a yellowish sticky substance he called 'plaque'. This in turn produced acids which demineralised the tooth’s enamel and dentine. Other bacteria in the mouth produce toxins from the trapped food particles causing inflammation of the gums and jawbone surrounding the teeth. This theory led to an ongoing interest in the prevention of dental disease rather than just its cure.

Specially designed operating chairs, dental engines for drilling, cases for instruments and sterilisers meant that dentists now required more than just a small bag of instruments but needed their own properly equipped dental surgeries.

During the 19th century the number of practising dentists increased mainly in London but also in the English provincial towns and cities. There were a few in Scotland and Ireland but Wales had almost no resident dentists. Those outside London tended to be situated in the larger cities like Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham where there were wealthy merchants rather in working class areas though there were some Dispensaries where the poor could obtain free treatment.

Most practitioners by this time were ‘career dentists’, members of families who had practised for years, some medically qualified and a few chemists and druggists who also practised dentistry. These dedicated practitioners were aware of the opportunists who picked up some basic skills and set themselves up in what could be a very lucrative business – an established dentist could earn almost twice as much as a general medical practitioner. (£800 in London compared to £300 or 400 for a GP)

In 1852 the first Pharmacy Act had set up a register for chemists and the 1868 Pharmacy Act detailed the Schedule of Poisons which could only be
dispensed by a registered chemist. In 1858 the Medical Act brought into being the General Medical Council and the Medical Register. There was no corresponding legal or professional control over the practice of dentistry and so no way for the public to distinguish the trained practitioner from the quack. From the mid 19th century the London career dentists set about campaigning for similar recognition to establish their own claim to professional status.

They finally succeeded in 1858 in getting the Royal College of Surgeons to grant by examination a Licence in Dental Surgery (LDS) and by the time of the first examination in March 1860 the Odontological Society, one of the main groups agitating for reform had set up its own Dental Hospital in London together with the London School of Dental Surgery to train students.

In 1878 the first Dentists Act was passed by Parliament and the first Dentists Register administered by the GMC appeared in 1879. After this only those appearing on the register could legally call themselves dental surgeons though the Act allowed established practitioners who at the passing of the Act were engaged in the practice of dentistry either separately or in conjunction with the practice of medicine or pharmacy to go on the register without passing any additional exams. Of the names appearing in the first register only 500 could add the letters LDS and the others appeared in the register as ‘qualified under the Dentists Act.’

Soon after the Royal Colleges of Surgeons in Scotland and Ireland were empowered to grant their own licenses and dental schools were set up outside London.

It was 1895 before the first woman to qualify as a dentist entered the register when Lilian Lindsay (nee Murray) graduated from Edinburgh having previously been refused entry to the London schools on account of her sex.

In 1900 the first university to grant a degree in dental surgery was Birmingham quickly followed by the other universities.

The 20th century saw further great advances in the practice and administration of the dental profession. Rontgoen’s Xrays discovered in 1895 began to be applied in dentistry. In 1905 the local anaesthetic procaine was introduced as a safer alternative to cocaine and casting methods to produce gold inlays were demonstrated.

During the Second World War rubber for vulcanite became scarce and the acrylic resins first used in the 1930s became the material of choice for denture bases. Amalgam fillings which required extensive drilling of the tooth to prevent the filling coming out were replaced by composite fillings (acrylic resins to which fine silica powder has been added) which bonded directly to the tooth. High speed
turbine drills introduced in 1957 made filling of teeth a much quicker and less painful operation.

A further Dentists Act in 1921 amended the 1878 Act and set up the Dental Board as the governing body to maintain the register. It prohibited the practice of dentistry by unregistered persons but still allowed doctors and pharmacists registered with their own governing bodies to undertake emergency dental treatment and also allowed the registration of anyone “who was for any 5 of the preceding 7 years engaged in the practice of dentistry in the UK as his principal means of livelihood”. These appear in the register as ‘qualified under the Dentists Act of 1921.’

Since 1948 and the establishment of the National Health Service all dental schools have been part of the university establishments. The introduction of antibiotics after the war gave dentists an additional treatment for oral infections and dental abscesses making wholesale extractions unnecessary. This has led to an increase in conservative and preventive treatments and with the expansion of this sort of dentistry has come new specialties with diplomas in such fields as orthodontics and dental public health and the Royal College of Surgeons has instituted its own Fellowship in Dental Surgery.

A further amending Act in 1955 set up the General Dental Council and stipulated that only a licentiate or graduate in dentistry of one of the dental authorities shall be entitled to be registered in the dentists register. In 1962 the first dental auxiliaries qualified at New Cross General Hospital and in 1968 the first national dental survey of the adult population of England and Wales was carried out.

When the NHS came into being in 1948 free dental care was included in its provisions and the dreadful state of the nation’s teeth was revealed. The increased use of sugar from the mid 19th century had led to a huge rise in the level of dental caries in a working population who could not afford expensive dental treatment. There were a few free Dispensaries in London and some of the larger industrial cities but as early as 1885 the British Dental Association declared that “pain and sepsis in the lower social classes was a public disgrace.” Many of the men examined for service in the Boer War and the two subsequent World Wars were found to be unfit for service because of ‘loss or decay of many teeth’.

School dental services were set up under the 1907 Education Act and the 1911 National Insurance Act allowed Approved Societies to provide dental treatment ‘if funds allowed’ but uptake of the limited services available was low.
The demand for the free treatment available on the NHS was overwhelming and charges had to be introduced to control expenditure. Even so many dentists found the fees they could charge were insufficient to meet the ever increasing demands made on them and withdrew their services from the NHS preferring to treat patients privately.

In 1990 the Family Health Services Authority was created and a new dental contract was introduced but this has not solved the problem of providing dental care for all. In fact the end of the 20th and the start of the 21st century has seen embarrassing scenes of queues forming outside dental surgeries desperate to register with one of the few remaining NHS dentist.

This is not altogether surprising because the many improvements in dental services during the 20th century are now expected as standard treatment from the dental profession. Modern surgeries are equipped with expensive operating chairs; turbine drills driving the burr at many thousand revs per minute which by cutting through enamel and dentine quickly and painlessly make fillings less of an ordeal; improved local and general anaesthetics; improved X-ray apparatus for quick accurate diagnosis; new materials for taking impressions and making dentures and an emphasis on preventive dentistry and orthodontics. All this has brought with it a need for laboratory equipment, ancillary staff and computer record keeping never anticipated by older generations.

The new and deadly diseases that appeared at the end of the 20th century, AIDS and MRSA, have also increased the risks of dental surgery like all other forms of surgery for both surgeon and patient leading to unprecedented ‘handling’ and sterilisation problems.

At the beginning of the 21st century people are more aware of the need for dental hygiene and the fluoridation of water and toothpastes appears to have reduced but by no means eliminated the incidence of caries but as Shakespeare put it “There was never yet a philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently” so the need for dentists shows no sign of diminishing.
While Llandysul was well served by doctors, chemists and nurses at the beginning of the 20th century dental provisions were more limited. Under the provisions of the 1878 Dentists Act, registered pharmacists and doctors could carry out dental treatments and Dr Tom Evans of Caeryglyn, Llandysul, included dental forceps as well as obstetric forceps and tonsil guillotines in his equipment and older residents remember Thomas Davies the pharmacist at Medical Hall in Lincoln Street extracting teeth in his back room when requested by local farmers in town on market days.

The registered dentists resident in Llandysul during the 20th Century were:-

- John James Thomas (1848–1942), Nesta James nee Lewis (1902 – 1958),
- Peredur Jones (1919 – 1974), John Michael Thomas (1928 – 2003),
- Lyndell David James Davies (1944 - ), Brian Armitage (1934 – 1999)

Apart from Mr Armitage all the dentists were from the Dyfed – Powys area and were Welsh speaking as were the ancillary staff employed in their surgeries. Another dentist based in Newcastle Emlyn also held surgeries in Llandysul on mart days in the front room of a house opposite the Cilgwyn Arms in Bridge Street. He was Albert Victor Hickey (1899 – 1973).
1. JOHN JAMES THOMAS (1848 – 1942)

J.J. Thomas was born, educated, lived and worked for the whole of his long life in Llandysul. There is no evidence that he went away to study dentistry and in his student days the only training schools for dentists were in London and he did not obtain the Licentiateship in Dental Surgery (LDS) of the Royal College of Surgeons instituted in the 1850s. His entry in the Dentists Register merely states “qualified under the Dentists Act” which allowed any one practicing dentistry as their main occupation for five of the seven years preceding the Act to be registered without passing any further examination.

It is known that in the 1870s when he was a young man he worked for some years with a local doctor, Dr T. Jones of Gellifaharen. At this time Wales was poorly served by dentists especially in the rural areas and most general practitioners also carried out dental operations as allowed by the first Dentists Act. It is likely that John Thomas acquired the necessary dental and medical skills at this time to set himself up as a practising dental surgeon in Llandysul. Existing documents show that he was well established in Blodfa, Lincoln Street by the beginning of the 1890. There is a family tradition passed on from his wife to their daughter and granddaughter that Dr Jones, a son of Gellifaharen, one of the large Cardiganshire mansions whose owners were the wealthy upper strata of local society, had been so impressed with his ability that he had offered to finance John through medical school. Unfortunately he died before this could be effected and the Gellifaharen family did not carry out his wishes. (Dr Jones’ elder brother was a solicitor in Llandysul who inherited the mansion in 1882 and lived there with his wife, twin children and their governess. While returning from an outing to New Quay one day in 1884 in the family carriage the horse bolted down Wesley Hill in Llandysul and failed to negotiate the bend at the bottom of the hill. The carriage overturned killing the father and the governess but the twins were rescued by the shocked residents of nearby Charles Street and the whole town was upset by this dreadful accident.) At the start of the 20th century J.J. Thomas was the only resident dentist in Llandysul.

In the early years of the century when many Welsh people were emigrating to America he arranged for his nephew Thomas John Thomas to go to Philadelphia to study dentistry at the Pennsylvania College of Dental Surgery from which he graduated in 1907. Thomas returned to Wales the following year and assisted his uncle for several years before leaving to set up his own practice in Lampeter. There is a strange document among J.J.T’s papers – a handwritten unwitnessed will dated September 14th 1908 made by Thomas naming his uncle as executor and leaving everything to him. It does not appear to have been
enforced as Thomas went on to marry and have a son to whom he passed on his Lampeter practice.

John Thomas’s practice must have provided him with a good income because at a sale of “The Full Moon Estate situate in the central part of the town of Llandysul” held by John Francis and Son at the Porth Hotel on 17th of January 1912 he purchased three cottages on the opposite side of Lincoln Street to his surgery in Blodfa drawing rents from these until his death by which time the cost of upkeep far outstripped the income from rents.

In the same year he married Hannah Jones of Rhydwen, Talgareg. He was 64 years old and she was 25 but in spite of the age difference it was a happy and loving marriage. Their only child was born in 1916. Christened Mary Elizabeth she was always known as Minnie and an affectionate letter from John to his wife who was staying at Rhydwen following the birth has survived in which he details his love for both wife and ‘Minnie Fach’ and explains how he is coping in his wife’s absence (about which she must have expressed concerns… “…We don’t find any trouble at all to manage the house and everything here so make yourself as happy as you can there. I get up at 7 or 7-30 every morning since you left and do all the housework by 8oclock. Mrs Evans comes in to wash the doorsteps and make the beds. Everything is finished by 9oclock when we start out on business. So you see that we have turned over a new leaf…."

He had acquired a motor car in 1914, one of the first in Llandysul to own one (the only others were Channing Thomas the grocer and Dr Tom Evans) and in the letter he mentions an enjoyable drive out in the car but regrets that he will not be able to visit his wife and daughter as his driver has just been called up to the Army. (It is unlikely that he ever drove the car himself. The motor insurance taken out with the Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance company in June 1914 names J.J.T of Blodfa, Llandysul, as the owner of a 5 seater Studebaker registration number EJ188 valued at £245 but the premium of £10-15-0 includes an additional £1-0-0 to cover ‘the chauffeur employed by him’ and a driving licence of c. the same date is made out to Thomas John Thomas).

He continued to practice after the war ended though by now in his 70s. His wife and later his daughter acted as his receptionist cum nurse. In the last decade of his life he took on an assistant and was virtually retired. When he died in 1942 the practice closed but his granddaughter, Eira, remembers visiting her grandmother in Blodfa until she died in 1952 and in the room in which she slept the dental chair remained as a reminder of the grandfather she had never known.

His obituary in the Cardigan and Teifside Advertiser of 30th January 1942 pays a deserved tribute to his long service.
2. NESTA GEM LEWIS (1903 – 1958)

Nesta Gem Lewis was born on 19th December 1902 the third daughter of the headmaster of Llandysul Grammar School. Her father was an MA (Cantab) and married Anna Ada Amphlett at Llandysul Parish Church in 1898. They had four children, three girls and a boy all of whom went on to professional careers - Gwen the eldest a doctor; Sybil an academic with an MA Cantab like her father; Nesta a dentist; and Benjamin James, the youngest of the family and usually known as Rory, a solicitor. For some reason the second and fourth children took their mother’s maiden surname in addition to their given names becoming Amphlett Lewis while Gwen and Nesta remained just Lewis. Nesta Lewis was educated at primary and secondary level in Llandysul. She left for dental training in London and obtained the LDS (RCS England) in 1925. At school and university she was a keen hockey player.

Soon after qualifying she returned to Llandysul to set up in practice in the upper rooms of Llwynderw, Bridge Street and practiced there until 1934. At that time her younger brother Rory, (Benjamin James Amphlett Lewis), now qualified as a solicitor had also returned to Llandysul and was looking for suitable premises to set up his own law practice. Brother and sister decided to share accommodation and in 1934 bought numbers 4 and 5 Bridge Street and converted these with an impressive ‘classical’ frontage to make a modern solicitors office on the ground floor for him and a modern dental surgery and waiting room on the first floor for her where they both practiced successfully for many years.

John Thomas of Blodfa was by now a very old man and Nesta Lewis’ practice flourished and she took on as receptionist, a friend and neighbour, Enid Thomas, who lived next door to the surgery in Brithdir, Bridge Street. In 1948 the town was pleasantly surprised when at the age of 45 this apparently confirmed spinster got married. She married another well respected Llandysul man of about her own age, William Lloyd James, the head master of the Local primary school and a master fisherman who was famed in the area for having caught the largest trout ever taken from Llandysul’s River Teifi and this ‘monster’ fish stuffed and mounted in a glass case can still be seen displayed at the Porth Hotel. The practice continued to expand and in 1951 she took on an assistant - another John Thomas but not related to the old dentist.

The NHS was now in existence and the practice followed the latest trend of employing not only a receptionist but also a practice nurse employing local girls, firstly Elizabeth Enoch daughter of Dr Enoch, and then Elizabeth Maher. In 1954 a branch surgery in Cardigan mainly run by Mr Thomas was opened and it was here that all the dental laboratory work was done.
Happily married, with a successful practice, a congenial partner and efficient ancillary staff all seemed to be going well for Nesta but in 1958 at the relatively young age of 55 she died and is buried in Llandysul Churchyard.
3. **PEREDUR JONES (1919 - 1979)**

In 1944 another dentist, Peredur Jones, came to Llandysul, not a native Llandysulian but a Welsh speaking Welshman from a little further north. He was born in Cemaes, north of Machynlleth where his father was headmaster of the local school and where he was educated. He went to London to study dentistry before the Second World War broke out and qualified LDS (RCS England) in 1942. He then joined the Army as a dental officer but while in the services he contracted poliomyelitis which left him with residual weakness in his right side and he was invalided out in 1944. In the same year he married Esme Davies who had been brought up at the Porth Hotel, Landysul during the war by her grandparents while her parents braved the blitz in London.

The married couple settled in Llandysul and Peredur opened a dental surgery at the Poplars in High Street. The polio had left him with a slight limp but did not affect his ability to carry out the majority of dental work. They acquired Dolgrogws Farm in partnership with Esme’s aunt where Peredur enjoyed the role of gentleman farmer as well as dentist but they lived most of their married life in the Porth Hotel. In 1947 their only child was born - a daughter christened Andrea and as a little girl she had her own pony bought for her by her father and stabled at Dolgrogws.

The Poplars dental surgery was situated on the ground floor and consisted of a well equipped surgery and laboratory and a waiting room. The dentist was assisted by a dental technician called Ryland Davies, a Llandysul man born in 1926 one of the large Mona House family. He had served in the RAMC during the second world war in India and Tokyo as a nursing orderly. When he was demobbed and came back to Llandysul he was offered a job with Peredur. He had had no dental training before but under the guidance of the dentist Ryland quickly became skilled at all aspects of dental mechanics which he carried out in the laboratory on the premises. It was a happy association and Ryland and his wife Maisie lived in the upper storey of the house which had been converted for them into a flat only leaving in 1957 when their first child, Andrew, was born and they needed more space. (Peredur’s mother lived in a similar converted flat in the basement of the Poplars.) Ryland could turn his hand to most things and willingly helped Peredur out on the farm when needed.

In his younger days Peredur had been a good amateur footballer and though polio put an end to his playing days, he continued to take a keen interest in Llandysul's own football team. Over the next few years progressive ill health began to take its toll of the dentist. He took an early retirement which he did not live long to enjoy, dying in (?)1979.
Ryland in spite of having acquired considerable skill as a dental mechanic which he could have continued in another practice decided to leave dentistry when the surgery closed and went to work at the Post Office and he was a Post Office employee during the very hot summer of 1976 when he became ill and died.
4. **JOHN MICHAEL THOMAS (1928 – 2003)**

John Michael Thomas was born in Aberdovey in 1928 (and in spite of the similarity of name was no relation to the earlier John Thomas, Dentist of Blodfa Llandysul). He lost his parents as a young boy and was brought up by relatives in Neath. He was educated at Ardwyn School, Aberystwyth and then Taunton School before going to Edinburgh to train in dentistry qualifying LDS (RCS Edinburgh) in 1950.

He had originally intended to specialise in hospital based dentistry in Bermuda and only came to Llandysul in 1951 as a short term locum to Nesta Lewis. He enjoyed the work and being Welsh speaking was welcomed enthusiastically into the area and stayed on first as an assistant then as a full partner. When Nesta died in 1958 John carried on the practice in Bridge Street, Llandysul which she had founded and also the branch practice in Cardigan he had initiated in 1954. He married in 1958, shortly after Nesta’s death, Nina Lewis a daughter of the old established Gomerian Press family and they lived for a time in Cardigan commuting between the two practices until John took on a partner to run the Cardigan practice and to help in Llandysul. This was John Albert Lazzaro Capanini, Aberystwyth born, and qualified BDS (Birmingham) in 1957.

They shared the work in Cardigan and Llandysul and where previously local doctors had had to be called in to give dental anaesthetics now with the two dentists in the practice one could give the anaesthetic (usually JT) while the other operated (usually JC). With the coming of the NHS doctors and dentists were increasingly in need of receptionists to see to the non-clinical aspects of practice and Enid Thomas and Rae Evans both of whom lived close to the surgery served in this capacity. A dental nurse was also employed for the first time to assist at the chair side, another local girl, Mair Phillips from Pentrecwrt.

John and Nina came back to live in Llandysul in 1966 buying Caeronen, a large house on the Gilfacwen road opposite the Grammar School and here John could take part in all the country pursuits he so enjoyed — riding, fishing and shooting. He rode with the local hunt and kept his own horse at Caeronen which had fields and stables attached. In 1975 he gave up NHS dentistry and went into school dentistry for a time before returning to private dentistry working from home in a room converted to a surgery at Caeronen. His dental nurse from Bridge Street, Mair Phillips, accompanied him on both these ventures. When John Thomas left the Bridge Street Surgery in 1975 the practice ceased though Mr Capanini continued to run the Cardigan practice. What had been the surgery there was made into a comfortable flat for Nesta’s brother Amphlett and his wife Valmai.
In the early 1990s John developed polymyalgia and arthritis and had to take an early retirement from dentistry. He became progressively disabled and as his health deteriorated he was found to be suffering in addition from lung cancer. He died in July 2003 aged 75 years not long after he and Nina had celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary.

His widow lives on in Caeronen and he is still remembered with affection by many in Llandysul.
5. **LYNDELL DAVIES (1944-still alive and well in 2004)**

Lyndell David James Davies was born in Neath in March 1944 but came to Llandysul when only three months old where he was brought up and educated. He attended Llandysul Grammar School (now Ysgol DyffrynTeifi) before going on to Edinburgh to train as a dentist. He graduated BDS(Edinburgh) in 1967 and went on to gain experience working in Birmingham and then in Carmarthen where he joined the practice of an old established Carmarthen dentist, Bertram Rees. He returned to Llandysul in 1974 to set up his own practice in the Poplars, High Street, where Peredur Jones had previously had a surgery.

The only other dentist in Llandysul at the time was John Thomas carrying on Nesta Lewis’s original practice in Bridge Street. John Thomas was also an Edinburgh graduate and knew Lyndell from his student days when he had allowed the then dental student to observe dental surgery being carried out at the Bridge Street surgery so there was no rivalry and in fact John Thomas was even then contemplating giving up his NHS work and did so the following year.

Lyndell equipped the Poplars with the latest equipment – Xrays, high speed drills and the latest acrylics which had taken over from the old vulcanite and gutta percha. Like nearly all the other dentists in the area he held branch surgeries, in his case in Lampeter. This involved extra work and in 1976 he took on an assistant, Patricia Young who took over much of the Lampeter side though she also worked two and a half days in Llandysul.

In 1988 Lyndell gave up the Llandysul practice. (by then the town had another dentist who had extended his existing Newcastle Emlyn practice to Llandysul in 1979). He continued to practice in Lampeter until 2002 and since then has done only part time locum and domiciliary dentistry. He also has a second home in Southern Ireland and now in his sixties he commutes between Wales and Ireland enjoying the facilities of both countries – especially the golf.

Apart from dentistry he has always had a passion for sport. In his younger days he played football for Llandysul Town, Edinburgh University and a minor Scottish League team. Later he enjoyed squash but now finds golf satisfies his sporting instincts.

Born in Barnsley in 1934 he was brought up and educated in Pencoed near Bridgend, attending Bridgend Grammar School. He was a good athlete and a bright scholar and began to apply for admission to university dental departments when he was only sixteen. He was accepted by Guy’s Hospital dental school where he not only succeeded academically but represented the hospital at rugby and athletics. He qualified BDS when he was 21 years old and married a year later – a ‘childhood sweetheart’ from Bridgend where they had both attended the same school and Methodist Chapel but had been separated while he was a dental student and she was training as a nurse.

National Service was still in force at the time and Brian went in to the Dental Corps as an officer. He rose to the rank of major and ended his service in charge of Western Command Dental Services stationed at Malvern. Back in civilian life after the two years mandatory service he and his wife settled initially in Sheffield where their two children, a son and a daughter were born and where the son John later qualified as a dentist.

The family came to Wales again in 1979 setting up practices in Newcastle Emlyn and Cardigan before establishing the one in Llandysul. His first surgery was in Bradford House, King Street but the building was in danger of being condemned so he bought Compton House further up the town in High Street and this remained the Llandysul surgery until he retired. Brian Armitage was not actually resident in Llandysul but lived at first at Plas Cerdin Ffostrassol a large nine-bedroomed house with twenty acres of land later moving to a larger 100 acre farm, Troedyrhiwfenydd, where he was able to indulge his love of farming particularly the breeding of old strains of sheep. He specialised in raising Llanwenog and Border Leicestershire breeds and carried off prizes for these classes at the Royal Welsh and other agricultural Shows but his dental commitments meant that his wife and family had to do a lot of the day to day farm work as well as answering the telephone.

He took a keen interest in the advances in dental surgery made during the 20th century and introduced the latest high speed drills, and Xray equipment into all his practices. He was not Welsh speaking but employed local Welsh receptionists and a local born dental technician, Islwyn Evans, who worked at the laboratory in Newcastle Emlyn.

Islwyn’s story is of particular interest. Born at Groesffordd, Llandysul in 1927 and educated locally he joined the Royal Navy in World War II and was assigned to the medical branch serving as a dental assistant. When he left the Navy in 1947 he was given a grant to continue training as a dental technician – worth £3-13-9
which included the bus fare to Cardigan at that time 13/9 for a weekly return ticket. He completed a 6-year apprenticeship with the Matthias brothers who were both qualified doctors and dentists but practiced as full time dental surgeons.

After completing his training he worked for the Llandysul dentists, Lewis, Thomas and Capanini in their well equipped dental laboratory in Cardigan. The other Llandysul dentist, Lyndell Davies did not have a branch surgery in Cardigan and had his own dental mechanic in his Lampeter surgery so did not use Islwyn professionally but knew him and was in fact related to him (Lyndell’s father and Islwyn’s mother were brother and sister.)

Islwyn retired from dentistry in the mid 1970s to run a pub, The Fox and Hounds in Cwmcych and this seemed to be the end of his career in dentistry. However, when Brian Armitage came to the area in 1979 the dental mechanic working for him decided to leave in 1980 leaving the post open. When Islwyn, attending the Armitage surgery for dental treatment, learned that the practice had lost its mechanic he offered his services which Brian gratefully accepted. Although he had been out of dentistry for some years he found little had changed – many of the materials used had improved but the basic techniques were the same.

In 1995 Brian Armitage decided to take an early retirement to devote his time to farming and the other leisure pursuits that he loved – fishing, painting and golf. The Llandysul practice closed and the town has had no resident or visiting dentist since. His son John who had qualified BDS in Sheffield in 1984 had joined his father in practice the following year, sharing the work in Emlyn and Llandysul but after 1995 did not come to Llandysul only keeping the main surgery in Newcastle Emlyn.

Brian did not live long to enjoy his retirement dying in 1999. When he left the practice Islwyn Evans retired again but after a few months was persuaded by John Armitage to return to work on a part time basis and at the present time (November 2004) he is still working there. Brian Armitage’s wife survived him but she too died at the beginning of 2004.
7. **ALBERT VICTOR HICKEY (1899 – 1973)**

Although Mr Hickey was never resident in Llandysul he was a regular visitor on Tuesdays - mart day, for many years before, during and after World War II. Born in Stirling Scotland in 1899 he became a registered dentist in 1922 and settled in Wales not long after. His entry in the Dentists Register of 1926 shows him as “registered under the Dentists Act 1921” and gives his address as Melrose, Newcastle Emlyn.

The Dentists Act of 1921 was an amendment to the earlier Dentists Act and prohibited the practice of dentistry by unregistered persons. The qualifications for registration were:

1) to hold a licentiateship in dental surgery of any authorised body (ie LDS or BDS)

2) to be engaged in the practice of dentistry in the UK as the principal means of livelihood for 5 of the 7 years preceding the Act or to have been a member of the incorporated Dental Society not less than a year before the commencement of the Act.

The 1921 Act also allowed application to be put on the register from “a person of good character, who had attained the age of 23 years and who had for 5 of the 7 years preceding the Act been engaged in the occupation of dental mechanic.”

As the register does not specifically state his qualifications as LDS or BDS it is likely that Mr Hickey (like John James Thomas of Blodfa before him) qualified under one or other of the provisions outlined above.

His surgery in Llandysul was in Fronheulog, Bridge Street (just opposite the Cilgwyn Arms) where he rented a room from the widowed owner, Mrs Evans and her son Jim for his once-weekly surgery. They prepared the room for him by bringing the dental equipment (chair, drill, spittoon etc) up from the cellar where they were stored for the rest of the week. When Mrs Evans died in 1947 the routine was continued by Jim and his new wife Ray until Mr Hickey gave up his Llandysul work in 1956 though he continued to work in Newcastle Emlyn.

Patients who remember him recall a tall, well dressed, distinguished looking man with a marked Scottish accent. His wife too was Scottish; a trained nurse she acted as his nurse/receptionist in Newcastle Emlyn assisting him when he gave gas, but she did not accompany him to Llandysul where he relied on the Evanses. His abilities as a dentist have not left any unpleasant scars on the memories of those he treated in Llandysul but he is remembered for a histrionic streak for he
appeared at local concerts singing and reciting Stanley Holloway type monologues and he was an active member of Newcastle Emlyn’s amateur dramatic group, the Attic Players, taking part in their stage productions. He had sporting interests too, especially boxing, encouraging and training local boys in the sport. His Scottish origins were acknowledged by his enthusiastic attendances at local Burns Night celebrations and although nothing is recorded of any World War I service by him or his family he and his wife were lifelong supporters of the British Legion. His surgery in Newcastle Emlyn had a well equipped dental laboratory where he did most of the dental mechanic work required by the practice himself but in 1949 he employed and trained a Llandysul man, David Harding Jones (usually known as Harding) as his dental mechanic.

Harding’s family were a well known Llandysul family who had owned the Cilgwyn Hotel in Pontwelly for generations. He was born in 1928 not in Llandysul but in his grandmother’s home in Llanelli where his mother had gone (as was usual at the time) for her confinement. His primary education was at Bridge Shop School in Llandysul run by Miss Jenkins but he went on to St.Michaels School, Llanelli, living with an aunt there in term time. National Service was still in force and in 1947 Harding went in to the Army serving in the RAOC (unlike the other Llandysul dental mechanics Islwyn Evans and Ryland Davies who had both been in medical posts during their time in the services). He came out in 1949, returning home to the Cilgwyn Hotel with no work in prospect but with an ambition to be a farmer not a hotelier.

Mr Hickey would often call into the Cilgwyn Hotel after his Tuesday surgery for a relaxing drink before his journey home. The hotel was just opposite Llandysul railway station and the dentist’s home/ surgery was next door to Newcastle Emlyn’s railway station. The Hickeys called their home Melrose but originally it was the Railway Temperance Hotel, a matter seen by some of his patients as amusing because the dentist was certainly no teetotaller. He was sociable and approachable and would even carry out an extraction in the hotel bathroom for a suffering fellow drinker if requested.

Talking to the out of work Harding Mr Hickey suggested that he came to train as a dental mechanic with him. Harding agreed and for a year he was instructed by the dentist in all the necessary dental repair and construction techniques becoming quite adept. But his heart wasn’t in it. He still wanted to be a farmer and eventually his parents agreed to finance the purchase of a farm in Ponshaen where he stayed for the next 52 years finally retiring in 2003 – to a house in Pontwelly only a stones throw from his old home.

Mr Hickey continued in practice until c.1970 and he died in 1973.
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Acknowledgements:
Mrs Eira Pitt – documents and photos of J.J.Thomas
Mr Alan Lewis – documents and photos of Nesta James (nee Lewis)
Mrs Nina Thomas – memories, documents and photos J.M.Thomas
Mr.Lyndell Davies – personal memories.
Mrs Armitage – memories and photos of Brian Armitage.
Mr.Islwyn Evans – memories of dentistry past and present.
Mrs Maisie Davies – memories and photos of Ryland Davies.
Mrs Rae Evans – memories and photos of receptionists/nurses/Hickey.
Austin Davies – memories and photos of Thomas Davies
Mr D.Harding Jones – memories of Mr Hickey
Ken Jones and Hanes Emlyn – memories of Mr Hickey.