



**You are warmly invited to attend
our May Talk at Millbank (and on Zoom),
1830hrs, Friday 29 May 2026**

Our guest speaker, Quentin Anderson, presents

Bite-size: Vignettes within an outline history of the Royal Army Dental Corps



Not one dentist accompanied the 90,000-strong British Expeditionary Force sent hurriedly to France in 1914. More priority was given to vets and blacksmiths. It was only when General Haig, commanding 1 Corps, was incapacitated with toothache during the Battle of the Aisne in September 1914, and a civilian dental surgeon had to be summoned from Paris to treat him, that it was recognised that the military needed dentists.

(More detail below)

Proceeds will support the Museum of Military Medicine

Prior registration required. Refreshments from 1730hrs; Supper at 2000hrs

Register [HERE](#) or via www.friendsofmillbank.org



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Some notes on Military Dentistry in the British Army

The exponential rise in the UK's consumption of sugar over the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in concomitant increases in the incidence and prevalence of dental caries amongst the population. By the early 19th century this was beginning to impact upon Army recruiting. 'Dental condition' as a reason for unsuitability for service (other than not having sufficient opposing teeth to bite open musket cartridges) was first recorded in 1821. Whilst in civilian life the science and practice of dentistry was growing and professionalising, the Army, although recording the problem, did little to address it. Thus, with no embedded professional dental support, the Second Boer War (1899-1902) saw the Army in South Africa admitting 6942 soldiers to hospital for dentally related conditions. Of these, 2451 were returned home for discharge as no longer being fit for service and many of the remainder could only be employed in rear areas with access to soft food as they couldn't eat and digest frontline rations. These figures do not include the many additional cases that, with no recourse to any other form of treatment, would have fallen victim to their RMO's forceps.

Whilst many medical officers appreciated the severity of the problem, the period 1902 – 1914 saw only minor attempts to address the issue. Consequently, the BEF deployed to France in 1914 with no dental support and in little better dental condition than in 1899. Within two months of General Haig's incapacitation by toothache during the battle of Aisne in September 1914, however, six dental officers had been commissioned and deployed to France. A further fourteen followed before the end of the year. The number of dental officers commissioned continued to grow so that by 1917 there were over 500 serving, mainly on the Western Front.

Whilst an improvement, the service remained, at best, ad hoc, and with qualified dentists still eligible for conscription into the Combat Arms, the drain on the nation's dental resources was becoming acute as services to the civilian population declined. This led to the forming of the Parliamentary Committee on Manpower and the Army Dental Service, the Pennefather Committee, to examine the issue. Reporting its findings to Parliament on 12 December 1917, it concluded that: 'the efficient man-power of our Army would be increased, and preventable sickness and suffering to our soldiers reduced:

1. By greater attention being paid to the teeth of soldiers while training in this country before being sent abroad, particularly in regard to conservative treatment i.e. calculated to prevent unnecessary extractions
2. By increasing the number of qualified dental surgeons at Base camps and casualty clearing stations, and also by the use of travelling dental lorries or ambulances
3. By detailing a larger number of specially skilled dental surgeons to cooperate with Army Medical Officers in the treatment of jaw wounds
4. By withdrawing from combatant and other non-dental services (other than medical and surgical services) all qualified dental surgeons, who are now in the Army or may come up for recruitment, detailing them to dental work in order to carry out the duties mentioned in the preceding paragraphs; and providing the necessary number of dental mechanics
5. By placing the organisation of the military dental service under the general direction of one or more experienced dental surgeons with special authority over Army dental officers of all ranks, and in an advisory position in regard to dental supplies and equipment, such dental director and officers to be under the orders of the Principal Medical Officer of the RAMC.'



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These recommendations were accepted and began to be implemented with establishment of a Dental Adviser to DGAMS supported by Inspecting Dental Officers in the Home Commands. The transfer of dental surgeons from the Combat Arms to the dental service immediately impacted on and improved the dental condition of recruits prior to deployment overseas. Plans for improvements in the Field Dental Service, however, were interrupted by the German 1918 Spring Offensive and subsequent Allied counter attacks so that they were never fully implemented before the Armistice.

Peace brought about rapid demobilization and dismantling of much of the previous months' advances. With dental officers only on temporary commissions, with no career structure or permanent regimental 'home', the embryonic Army Dental Service was destined to disappear. Following repeated petition by the British Dental Association and with the support of a new DGAMS, Lt Gen Sir T H John C Goodwin, a proposal for a new Corps was agreed and submitted. The Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, in the Army estimates for 1920–1921 stated that a proposal for a Dental Corps had been made. The scheme was passed by the Treasury in April 1920. The Army Dental Corps was authorised by King George V in a Royal Warrant on 4 January 1921. The 'Royal' prefix was only awarded in 1946, in recognition of services rendered in the Second World War.

This talk will follow an outline of the Corps' 103-year history (until the formation of the Royal Army Medical Service on 15 November 2024) with a focus on a few specific areas along the way.



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Our Guest Speaker



Colonel (ret'd) Quentin Anderson L/RADC Former Colonel Commandant, RADC

Colonel (ret'd) Quentin Anderson is a Fellow of the College of General Dentistry and former Colonel Commandant of the Royal Army Dental Corps. He retired from active military service in 2013 after 38½ years of commissioned service. During his early career he saw service as a dental officer in the UK, Germany, and Hong Kong; on a two-year exchange with the Royal Navy; on a short exchange/advisory exercise with the Jamaican Defence Force and as a Squadron Commander with 1 Armoured Field Ambulance.¹

In 1990 he deployed to the Gulf as Senior Dental Officer with 33 General Surgical Hospital (in Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia)² and as Force Adviser in Dentistry to HQBF(ME). In 1995 he was appointed Commanding Officer of 4 Field Ambulance,³ the first Dental Officer to command a Regular Field Ambulance. He deployed to the Balkans with his unit as part of the UN Rapid Reaction Force.

¹ 1 Armoured Field Ambulance is a predecessor of 1 Armoured Medical Regiment, restructured as 1 Medical Regiment in 2023. See Previous Unit Histories (1 Armoured Medical Regiment) on the Friends of Millbank website, https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/downloads/1-Armoured_Med_%20Regt-20241001.pdf

² See Previous Unit Histories (33 Field Hospital), https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/downloads/33-Fd_Hosp-20241014-s.pdf

³ 4 Field Ambulance (1993-2000) is a predecessor of 4 Armoured Medical Regiment, re-designated as 2 Medical Regiment in 2023. See Previous Unit Histories, https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/downloads/4-Armoured_Med_Regt-2-241001.pdf.





Further postings included an MSc at the Eastman Dental Institute; Senior Dental Officer and Vocational Trainer; Head of Research at HQ Defence Dental Agency; Principal Dental Officer for Greater London and Kent; Regional Clinical Director for Home Counties Region APHCS; Director Primary Dental Services British Forces Germany and as Principal Dental Officer for London and the South East and Brunei Garrison.

He has been a member of various professional organisations and held appointments as President of the Section of Odontology of the Royal Society of Medicine, Armed Forces representative on the Council of the British Dental Health Foundation, Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Eastman Dental Institute, and Member of the Executive Committee of the International Dental Federation's Section of Defence Forces Dental Services. He has also been a Trustee of the Museum of Military Medicine, and Chairman and member of the Board of Trustees of the RADC Association.

In retirement his interests include family genealogy research, history in general and military dental history in particular. He is also a long-standing volunteer with a local heritage trust and as a steward at Berkhamsted Castle.

Some recommended reading

Ward, VH., Newell, MJ. *Ex Dentibus Ensis – A History of the Army Dental Service* (1997)

Anderson, Q. Military dentistry themed issue. *Br Dent J* **230**, 383 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-021-2843-0>

Anderson, Q. Dentistry and the British Army: 1661 to 1921. *Br Dent J* **230**, 407–416 (2021).

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8033272/> (open access)

Ilott, R. *History Day 2022: Dental Surgical Collections from the First World War*. Royal College of Surgeons of England. <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/library-and-publications/library/blog/history-day-2022-dental-surgical-collections-from-the-first-world-war/>

Williams, M.D., The specialist cadre of the Royal Army Dental Corps. *Br Dent J*, **230**, 477-482 (2021). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33837348/> .



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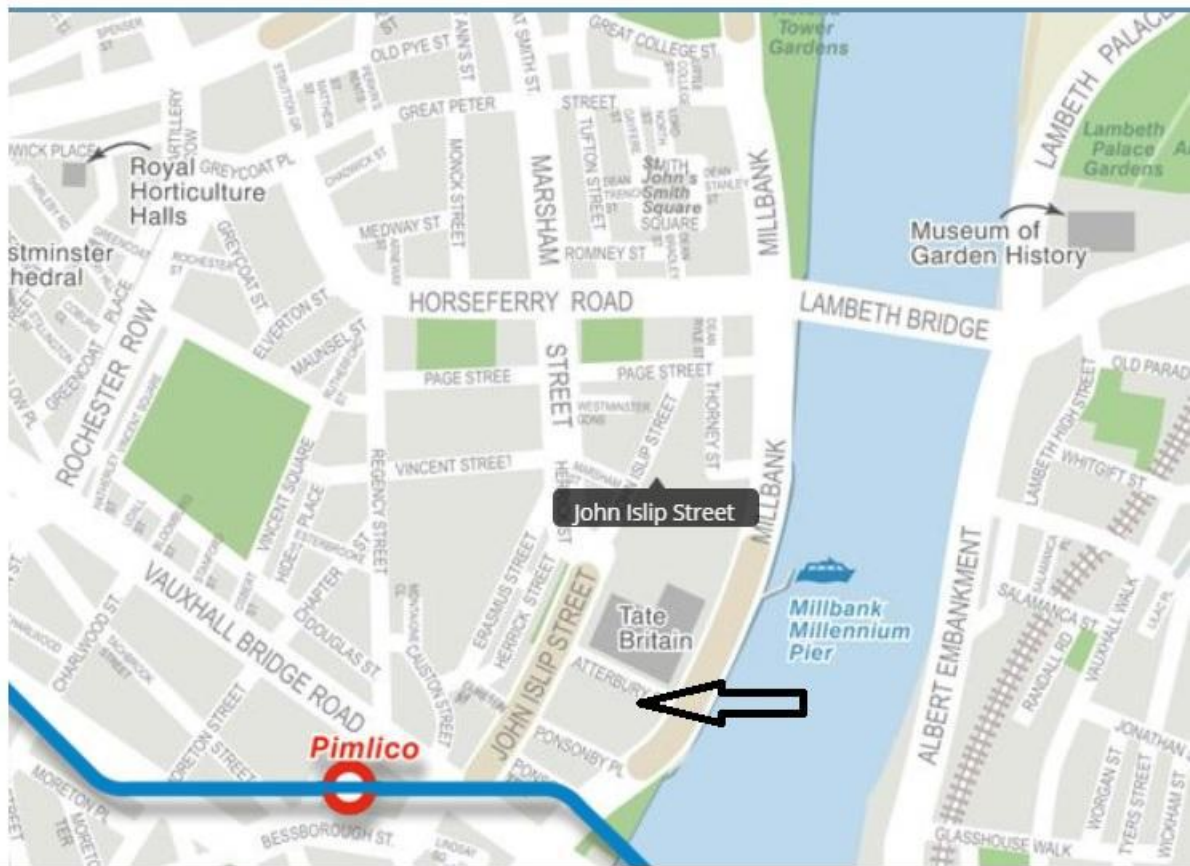
Directions for Millbank (Chelsea College of Arts, formerly the Royal Army Medical College)

The entrance to Reception is via Atterbury Street, opposite Tate Britain (arrowed on map below).

We meet for light refreshments at Reception from 1730hrs. The talk commences at 1830hrs.

Guests and non-members are always welcome. Everyone attending the talk, whether at Millbank or online via Zoom, is asked to register beforehand if possible. See www.friendsofmillbank.org

LondonTown.com - John Islip Street Location Map



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