**Dictionary of National Biography Lindsay [*née* Murray], Lilian**

(1871–1960)

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* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/61067>
* **Published in print:**23 September 2004
* **Published online:**23 September 2004



**Lilian Lindsay (1871–1960)**

by unknown photographer

image courtesy of BDA Museum

**Lindsay [*née* Murray], Lilian** (1871–1960), dentist, was born on 24 July 1871 at 29 Hungerford Road, London, the third of the eleven surviving children of James Robertson Murray (*d*. 1885), professional organist, and his wife, Margaret Amelia Bennett (*b*. 1841). She attended Camden School for Girls and the North London Collegiate School (1887–9) and considered the headmistress, Miss Buss, to have deprived her of a scholarship in 1888 when she refused to envisage a career in teaching. On 3 August 1889 Murrayregistered as a dental student with the General Medical Council, having begun a three-year apprenticeship to a dentist. This choice of career owed much to a family friend, Olga von Oertzen (DDS Philadelphia, 1881), then in unregistered dental practice in London. On 1 October 1892, refused admission in London, Murray entered Edinburgh Dental School. She thoroughly enjoyed her student days, despite being charged double fees by Sophia Jex-Blake for lectures in surgery. Murray had committed the unforgivable sin of attending classes in anatomy and physiology at the rival Medical College for Women. Murray graduated licentiate of dental surgery, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh on 3 May 1895, thus becoming the first woman with a British qualification in dentistry.

Despite an attachment to a fellow dental student, Robert Lindsay (1864–1930), Murrayreturned to London in 1895 (both of them had to support dependent relatives). There she set up practice at 69 Hornsey Rise, Islington. Murray and Lindsay were finally married on 26 July 1905 in West Holloway and she joined her husband in practice at 2 Brandon Street, Edinburgh. Here they remained until Robert Lindsay became first dental secretary of the British Dental Association (BDA) in 1920 and they moved into a flat at headquarters in Russell Square, London. While her husband was immersed in the negotiations that surrounded the 1921 Dentists Act, Lilian Lindsay was charged by the BDA with building up a specialist library. This she did so effectively that the 361 books of 1921 had grown to 10,000 by 1951. She remained honorary librarian until 1946.

After the death of her husband in 1930, Lilian Lindsay involved herself even more in professional concerns, and with a success which brought her universal recognition. She became sub-editor of the *British Dental Journal* (1931–51), the first woman branch president (1933) and the first woman president of the association (in 1946, the year she was appointed CBE). She was elected a fellow in dental surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (1947), was awarded their Colyer gold medal (1959), and received the HDD and an honorary fellowship in dental surgery (1959) from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. The University of Durham conferred on her an MDS (1939), that of Edinburgh an honorary LLD (1946). She was president or honorary member of numerous prestigious professional societies, as well as becoming vice-president of the Johnson Society (1950). After her death, the BDA library bore her name for many years and the Lindsay Club (later the Lindsay Society for the History of Dentistry) was founded in her memory (1962).

In addition to more than sixty papers (twenty-eight of them on historical aspects of dentistry), Lindsay's publications included a *Short History of Dentistry* (1933), the introduction to the reprint of Charles Allen's *Curious Observations on the Teeth* of 1687 (1924), and the first translation into English of the second edition of Pierre Fauchard's*Le chirurgien dentiste* of 1746 (1946). Unpublished were translations, mainly from German, of two books and 112 scientific papers. Lindsay's historical writing reflects the priority she placed on original research based on primary sources and her unshakeable faith in dentistry as a learned profession, with the BDA (to which she had initially been admitted on condition that she did not attend meetings) firmly at its centre. She was the first to write seriously and at length on the development of dentistry in Britain.

During her lifetime Lindsay was highly esteemed for her intellect, wide-ranging achievements, and her 'goodness, graciousness and gentleness' (*British Dental Journal*, 205). She nevertheless possessed strong views (she was adamantly opposed to the admission of academically unqualified dentists to the BDA in 1921) and was possessed of shrewdness and great tenacity of purpose. This is amply borne out by pictures of this diminutive, bespectacled lady, her hair in an increasingly wispy bun, and a sweet but enigmatically determined smile on her lips. Towards the end of her life, she was universally seen as the matriarch of the association, a last link between the legendary figures of the early days and the changed world of the present. Subsequently she was remembered chiefly for her historical writing, and was occasionally cast in the role of heroic feminist pioneer, a perspective she would likely have scorned.

Lindsay lived the last years of her life in Orford, Suffolk. She died at 26 Wolverton Avenue, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, on 31 January 1960 and was cremated at Golders Green on 5 February. She bequeathed the residue of her estate to the BDA benevolent fund.

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