

# History in the making

**Horbury Dental Care** has been run by five generations of the same family. **Mark Willings** describes the 130-year family history of his practice

In 1881 the British Dental Association held its first birthday, but we were still waiting for GV Black to consider the principles of cavity preparation. Born in 1881 in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, Mr Ernest Scruton started work as an apprentice dental mechanic (technician) in Harrogate at age 16.

GDC registration had started in the year 1876. However, this did not stop non-registered providers of dental services carrying out dental procedures, and as long as they did not actually call themselves 'a dentist', they were legitimately working within the rules. These providers trained through apprenticeships. The Dental Act of 1921 changed this situation when anybody undertaking dental treatment had to be registered with the Dental Board, now known as the General Dental Council.

However, a grandfathering clause meant that anybody who had been carrying out 'dental services' prior to 1921, could register with the Dental Board without undertaking additional training. Ernest Scruton registered with the Dental Board on 21 April 1922.

## Dorothie

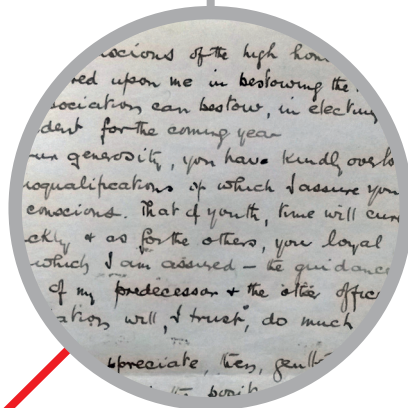
Ernest had nine children. The seventh in succession was Dorothie Scruton, who idolised her father – none of her

older siblings wanted to do dentistry, but Dorothie was determined that she would. Dorothie was born in 1920 and it would be very unusual at that time for a lady to go to university. Dorothie was one of only four girls in the whole dental school at that time (very different to today's mix of undergraduate students where predominantly over 50% are now female).

Unfortunately, Ernest Scruton died age 52 before Dorothie qualified and therefore



1936

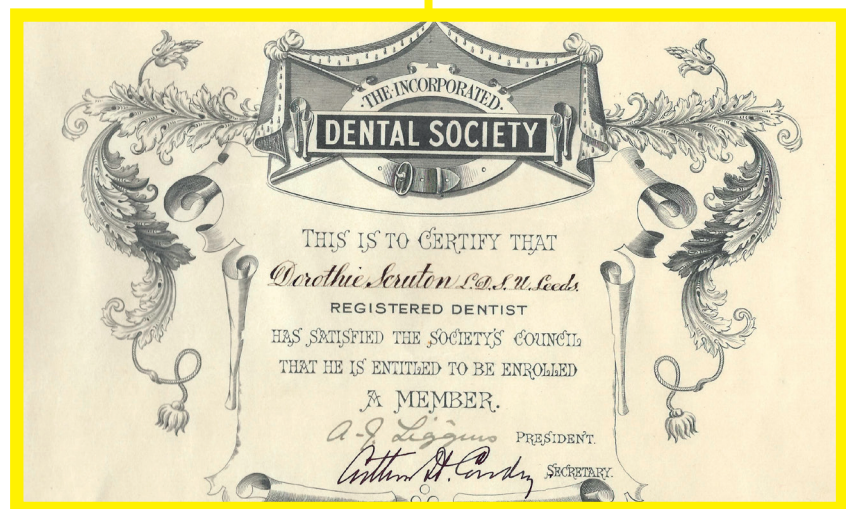
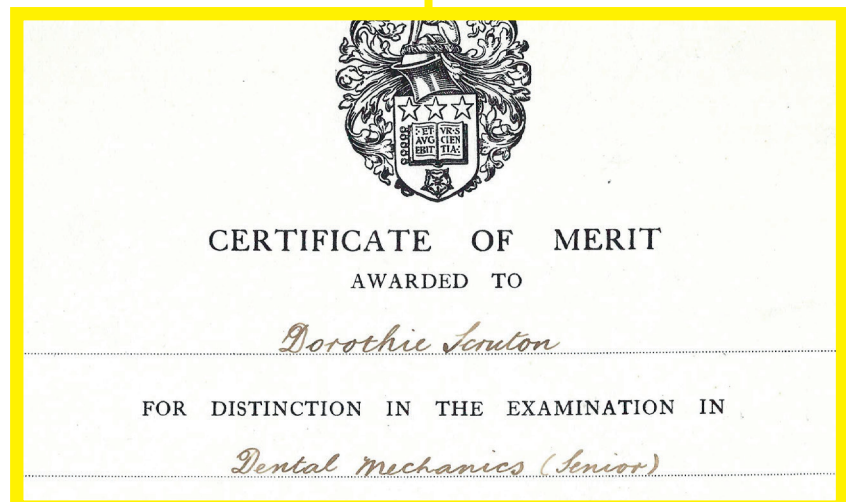


Ernest Scruton becomes president of Leeds Dental Society  
Ernest reads his speech

1924



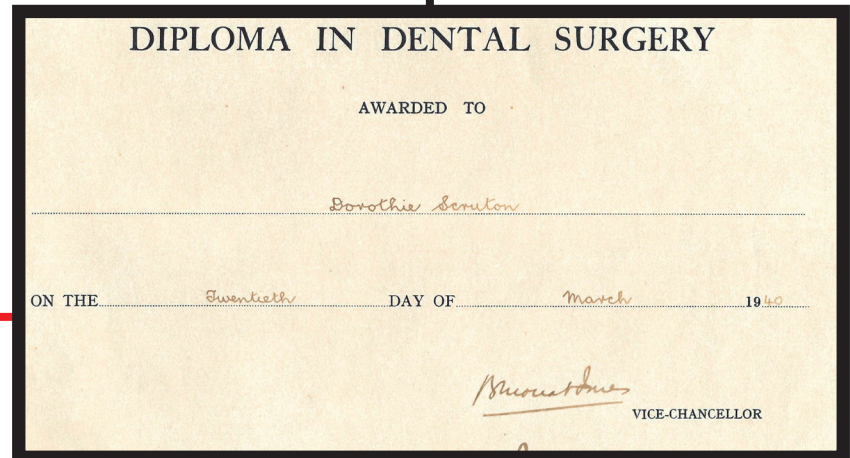
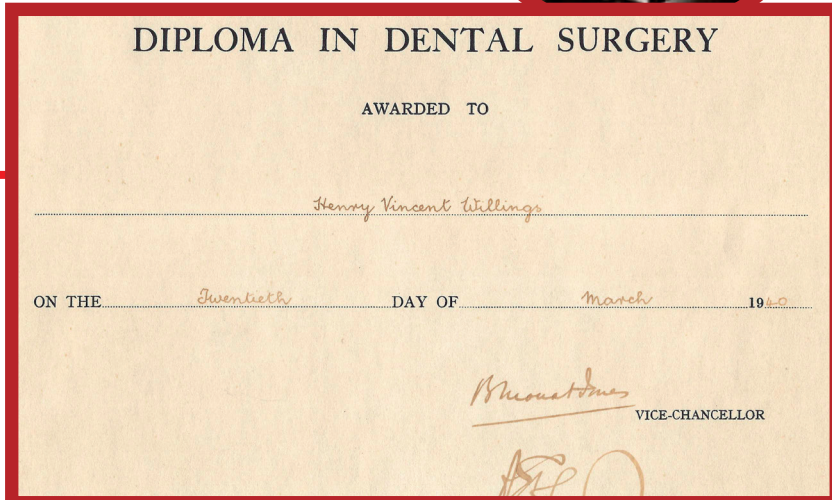
**Mr Ernest Scruton born**  
General Dental Council is five years old  
BDA enjoys first anniversary



**Class of 1936 University of Leeds Dental School - Dorothie Scruton**  
Dorothie Scruton graduation (her registration certificate is worded for males only)  
Dorothie won a merit for dental mechanics

1943

**Dorothie married Henry Vincent Willings who she met at university. Henry graduated with an LDS from the Royal College of Surgeons**  
Henry started as a house officer at Leeds Dental School. Then Henry agreed to help out at a surgery in Wakefield, West Yorkshire



**Al (Bert) Scruton took over the family practice on Dewsbury Road**  
Bert married another dentist, Anne, whom he met at university

and appreciated by the community. The practice was owned by Holbrook and Stanley and was split over two sites in Horbury (on Twitch Hill) and nearer Wakefield town centre at George-a-Green Road (later changed to Horbury Road).

This was the start of Henry's long career and two years later, in December 1944, Henry purchased the buildings and practice from Mr William Holbrook. He was now a self-employed practice owner in very tough times during the war years and before the inception of the NHS. Henry worked very long hours, working 12-hour days and on Saturday mornings.

Dorothie and Henry Willings' children, Carol and Eric, were born during the war.

### Eric Vincent Willings

Eric Vincent Willings graduated from Leeds Dental School in December 1967 and started work at a practice in Leeds. By 1969, Eric had moved to join his father at the practices in Wakefield: HV and EV Willings and Associates.

This was still very much a time when general anaesthetics and complete dentures were the norm and between Eric and Henry, they undertook routine weekly 'gas sessions', as they were known. The practice was very heavily based on general anaesthesia to carry out full clearances and had an on-site laboratory with in-house technicians making dentures.

### Mark Vincent Willings

Dorothie Scruton returned to work as a school dentist at the West Riding Clinic in the centre of Wakefield where she worked part time to fit in with her young family.

She retired from dentistry later, with increasing problems with carpal tunnel syndrome.

Eric had three sons, the eldest, Mark Vincent Willings, was born 4 July 1969 and as long as he can remember, always wanted to be a dentist.

Carol, Eric's elder sister, had three sons. The middle son, Matthew Emmott, born in March 1968 also qualified as a dentist. ▶

1941

never saw her complete her dental studies.

Even Dorothie's registration certificate was pre-worded for males only. However she could hold her own and won a merit for dental mechanics.

She used to tell stories of being in clinic where they would have a bet to see who could remove the most teeth, in one go, whilst the patient was very primitively anaesthetised using ether/chloroform. This only gave a very short working time and the winner would be the person who could remove the most teeth – Dorothie often won this arrangement, proving her worth and demonstrating she was equally as capable as most of the male students.

On graduating from Leeds University, Dorothie went to work at the family practice on Dewsbury Road in Leeds. Ernest had died the year previously.

Dorothie had to provide the income for the younger siblings and to support her mother; there was no NHS and no widow's pension benefits at that time.

### Bert

Dorothie had a younger brother, Bert, who subsequently decided he would become a dentist and when he qualified, he took over the family practice on Dewsbury Road in 1943. Interestingly, Bert married Anne – also a dentist he met at university.

### Henry Vincent Willings

In December 1941, Dorothie married Henry Vincent Willings, who she met at university.

Henry Vincent Willings was the son of a school teacher from Scarborough and he studied dentistry at Leeds University in the same year as Dorothie.

Henry graduated in 1941, at a time when university education was extremely

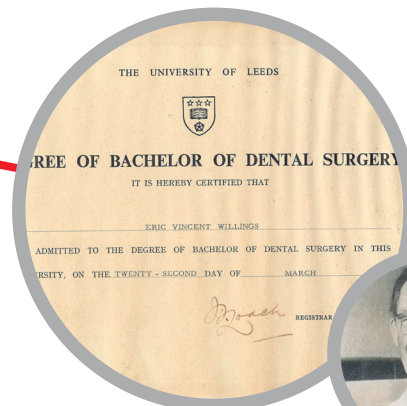
1944



**Henry purchased the buildings and practice**

**The dental surgery at Lupset, Wakefield where Henry worked (note the primitive general anaesthesia machine, an integral part of general practice at the time)**

**Eric Vincent Willings graduated from Leeds Dental School**  
**By 1969 Henry retired age 60 and finished dentistry completely age 70**



1967

**Mark Vincent Willings  
was born**

**Mark, Matthew, Eric, Henry, and  
Dorothie, taken in December 1991**



**1969**

graduating from Leeds in December 1991. Mark graduated in December 1991 from Guy's Hospital, then known as United Medical & Dental Schools of Guy's & St Thomas' Hospital.

Mark worked in Gravesend, Kent and then at Carshalton Beeches in Surrey before returning home to work alongside his father in the family practice in Wakefield. His eldest daughter, Harriet Elizabeth Willings, was born on 9 September 1994.

### Horbury Dental Care

Mark initially worked for Eric as an associate and subsequently became a partner in May 1998, when the practice relocated to a purpose-built building in the centre of Horbury.

This was an extremely exciting time and in 1998 Horbury Dental Care was conceived. This was a cutting-edge clinic with six surgeries sharing central sterilisation facilities – something completely normal now but at the time was not commonplace at all. This was before the days of standards and CQC inspections and much of the development put into the purpose built premises was quite ahead of its day.

The premises were opened May 1998 by David Hinchcliffe, MP for Wakefield

**1991**

**Mark Willings graduates in  
dentistry from Guy's  
Harriet Elizabeth Willings was  
born in 1994**

and then chairman of the Select Committee on Health.

Mark and Eric worked in partnership EV and MV Willings and Associates until 2004, when Eric retired from NHS practice. However, like his own father he continued to work alongside Mark, now as an associate, until he was diagnosed with lung cancer aged 67 in November 2011.

The new practice on Queen Street, – Horbury Dental Care – has continued to grow since 1998 and photos show the initial extension carried out in 2007, which added further surgery space and then again in 2013, when running out of space to move outwards, it was decided to take the roof off the entire building and build a third storey above.

Horbury Dental Care is now a very modern facility with 10 dental surgeries and a mixed provision of dental care

**1998**



**The premises were opened by David  
Hinchcliffe, MP for Wakefield and then  
chairman of the Select Committee on  
Health**

including a large NHS contract for General Dental Services, and Specialist Oral Surgery Services, and a separate private wing focusing on dental implant treatment and periodontology.

Mark is also a partner at the multi-award-winning practice, Dental Excellence Harewood. He lectures locally and nationally, and has been a key opinion leader for Astra-Tech Dental Implants as well as Bredent Dental Implant Systems.

In December 2016, Mark was extremely proud that Horbury Dental Care won the Best Team award at The Dentistry Awards.

### Harriet Willings

In June 2017, Mark's daughter, Harriet, graduated from Newcastle University Dental School with distinction in academic dentistry. Harriet took her foundation training post in Sunderland in September. Note the differences in numbers of graduates for the year group and the number of females to that of Dorothie's day in 1942.

Harriet is the fifth generation in a family with a long history of connections to the dental industry, a profession that has seen a change from an apprenticeship starting at age 16 as a plaster boy. Nowadays there is a complicated academic education required along with development of highly refined clinical skills. A profession that has been focused on removing teeth under general anaesthesia and provision of dentures, to a profession that is now focused very much on prevention of disease and adopting a much more conservative approach with extractions being a last resort.

Whether Harriet comes back to Wakefield to work in the family practice to be the fourth generation working from the same location remains to be seen and there is certainly no pressure for her to do this, but equally it is fascinating to think where Horbury Dental Care may be in another five generations.

### Changes in clinical dentistry

With the reduction of dental disease and improvements in health, will there be need for any dentistry, or will there simply be drop-in centres for fluoride applications and dental hygiene carried out by a few trained therapists?

With improvements in technology and science, will robots take over from technicians?

And will new technology be the future for dentistry? We are already on the verge of never having to take impression again because of advancements in digital scanning and 3D printing.

With patients becoming much more appearance focused, how will this shape our thinking and treatment provision?

I think it is a very exciting time to be involved in dentistry and for Harriet without doubt, this could be the start of a very exciting career. Dentistry will no doubt continue to change and develop at a fast pace.

What will the profession look like in another five generations? **D**

**2007**



**The new practice on Queen Street, Horbury, was extended in  
2007 and 2013**

**2016**



**Horbury Dental Care won The Dentistry  
Awards Best Team award**



**Team at Horbury Dental care**

**2017**



**Harriet graduates from Newcastle University Dental School**