



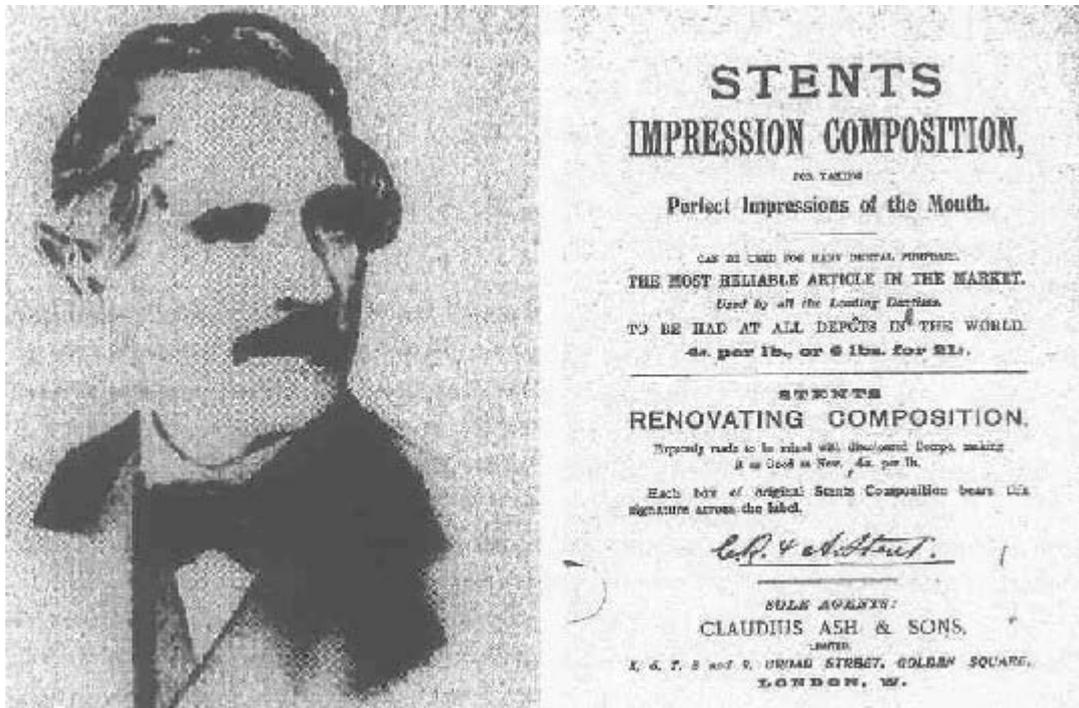
A composition on 'stents'

Edna Robertson, Henry Noble and David McGowan

Is Charles R. Stent in danger of being forgotten? The word stent is differently defined in dental and medical dictionaries (one of the latter describes it broadly as "any material that is used to hold tissue in place") but in both it is spelled with a lower case "s". Dr Malvin E. Ring mentioned this in our October 2002 issue when referring to "Charles Stent, the English dentist who developed the impression compound which was later used by plastic surgeons for support in their moulding of tissues." Surgeons, he added, began saying they were "Stenting" something, but later the capital letter was dropped. This has prompted Dr Michael Tynan to write to say that as a retired paediatric cardiologist he thinks it is important "that doctors using stents in the cardiovascular system should be aware who is responsible." He regards the capital "S" as having been "forgotten".

Dropping the initial capital seems standard procedure as proper names become part of the language - hence wellington boots, half-nelson, victoria sponge. Perhaps the trouble with stent is that it has a totally technical ring which conceals the fact that it is a man's name - a bit like hoover, which is almost onomatopoeic.

Dr Tynan, who sent us these pictures, wonders where he can find a photograph of Charles Stent. Can anyone help?



Charles R. Stent might be highly pleased to know that, as a result of his original insistence in linking his family name and signature to the thermoplastic mixture of gums and resins which he developed and sold towards the end of the 19th century, his name with a small "s" is now to be found in most dental and medical dictionaries.

A stent in dentistry is an impression of a surface which may be used in the making of a model of the jaws, or a splint to control haemorrhage from a socket or wound by the application of even pressure to that surface. The material was later adopted by plastic surgeons to support skin grafts, and this is probably an example of the technology transfer from the dental laboratory which tended to occur in maxillo-facial units.

A stent in medicine has now come to mean a small tube carrying an inflatable balloon which can be introduced and passed along an artery to the point where, by expansion of the balloon, a narrowing of the lumen of the artery may be expanded to permit a more healthy flow of blood. The origin of this use may be entirely different. "The Shorter Oxford Dictionary" defines a stenting as a mining term meaning 'a passage between two winning headways' - 'a *headway*' in turn being a gallery in a mine. The analogy with opening of a partially blocked vessel is obvious. "Chambers Dictionary" has yet another meaning and refers to a stent as a Scots word for a valuation or tax, also used as a verb. Could one of these have been the origin of the surname in the first place?
