



Denture Recycling Parisian-Style

Len Schwarz*

In a letter sent to the late Henry Noble last year Len Schwarz LDS RFPS recalls a curious Parisian institution: -

“...noting your interest in the history of dentistry, I recall now a rather weird item, which you might consider incredible but believe me I have seen it!

While in Paris, (Len was there on special service in 1944/6.) I had read of a stall at the Clignancourt Market; the huge flea-market in North Paris. This particular stall was run by a family who had started the business in 1919. They sold “Appareils dentaires d’occasion”, that is, second-hand dentures.

Well, in 1952, on my honeymoon, I took my wife exploring and, being by then a dental student, we went in search of it and found it. It was really thriving then; several large tables of full upper and lower dentures and some ‘partials’. Jugs of water were placed strategically for rinsing, (hopefully with some kind of mouthwash). Several large bins of water stood nearby. A couple of these bins contained fresh water, which was conscientiously replaced (with ostentation) at frequent intervals.

Clients were given a courteous oral examination and a denture of approximate dimension was selected by “the staff”- all of whom were family members. Then some filing and a little grinding was done by foot engine followed by polishing using the same machine. Hand mirrors were supplied by the patients!

Almost all the dentures were vulcanite, although by 1952, some acrylic work was in stock.

Of course most of the dentures had come from “the deceased”. I guess in 1919 they were more plentiful.

Well, there you are – I’ve been there; I saw it!

I came across a description of the market in a book entitled, “The Little Street” by the American journalist, Elliot Paul who lived in Paris in the 1930s in the Rue de la Huchette (the “Little Street” referred to in the title of his book). Besides celebrating the Clignancourt Marche au Pouces and sundry neighbours from La Huchette, he also made famous the local brothel!

Anyway there’s a little dental history for you”.

* Len Schwartz LDS RFPSG, retired dental practitioner, Nottingham

