

J&S Davis Limited – a long history in the dental industry

Early History

J&S Davis was founded in 1908 by brothers Joel (Joe) and Solomon (Solly) Davis possibly because their brother Phillip was a dental surgeon. Their first export agencies included Lee S. Smith & Son Manufacturing Co. and Arnold Biber.

The company stopped trading at the start of World War 1. Solly had a distinguished military career as an army captain. He fought through the French, Belgian and Gallipoli campaigns and was awarded the Military Cross.

After the war, the Davis brothers worked in the United Kingdom Dental Ltd which they formed with W Linford Smith. The firm manufactured teeth. Within a year the company was purchased by the DeTrey group (now Dentsply). Joe and Solly then reestablished J&S Davis representing Universal Dental Company, Lee S. Smith & Son Manufacturing Company, J F Jelenko & Company, E J McCormick Rubber Company, King's Specialist Company and Dentinol and Pyrozide Company.

In 1922 Mark Schottlander left the De Trey group to join with Joe and Solly in forming Davis Schottlander and Davis (DSD). The business grew steadily in the inter-war years.

Solly's son John joined the business briefly in 1940 before enlisting in the RAF. He flew Spitfires until he was knocked over by a lorry in the desert. He was in hospital for several months with a fractured femur during which time most of his squadron were killed.

Joe and Solly remained with DSD until their deaths in 1946 and 1951 respectively. After Solly's death, John left and restarted J&S Davis.

Regenerated business

This dental business came back to life in November 1953 initially in a Hampstead flat, moving to a house/garage in Golders Green and gradually moving north through Hendon, Finchley, Potters Bar and now Stevenage.

During the next forty years John was responsible for bringing to the UK market many products and ideas now thought of as every day. In the seventies his youngest brother Victor was Finance Director.

Dental materials

Initially the company distributed products from Dentatus.

By 1955 Keur and Sneltsjes (now called Cavex) Impression material CA37 was added. Cavex is our longest partnership.

An important development was the introduction of Clearfil Bond System F from Kuraray. This was launched in 1978 at a Park Lane Hotel, by the Japanese Professor Fusayama. It was the world's first dentine bonding system and was subsequently followed by Panavia the first resin cement in 1983. To this day (and beyond) Kuraray have continued to lead the field in bonding (Clearfil SE Bond 2) and adhesion (Panavia F2). They have extended their expertise into composition with Clearfil Majesty and in 2013 launched Clearfil Majesty ES2.

In 1991 J&S Davis assumed responsibility for Micro-Mega with their reputable ranges of handpieces and endodontic instruments. Burs and eventually Implantology from Hager and Meisinger followed in 1992.

The theme of being innovative continued. Hygienists work was supported by the addition of LM Instruments in 1991. LM has led the way in changing and improving the ergonomics of instrumentation in use in UK and the rest of the world.

Micro-Mega One Shape launched September 2012 and marked a simpler approach to root canal work using Nickel Titanium instruments.

2014 Kuraray launched Teethmate which treats sensitive teeth with Hydroxyapatite. Cavex introduced ready-to-use whitening trays.

Solo Disposables Revolution

1964 saw the most significant decision for the company and dentistry; to set about converting the UK Profession to Disposables. The Solo needle was the first step; price and packaging had to be low enough to encourage the dentist to dispose of it after a single use. So a one million order was placed, with disbelieving laughter from the Trade. In the first year sales exceeded several million needles. Thus, Dental Disposables became an important part of the dental market. Solo Saliva Ejectors followed.

Then in 1969 Solo Impression Trays were conceived and born, the Solo range was 10 (6 dentate and 4 edentulous). The numbering system eventually became the universal Impression Tray numbering system for plastic trays in UK and much of Europe. In 2000 the range was updated with an extra large set. It also introduced a patented interlocking plastic handle.

Water purification was becoming important so in 1990 the Solo Water Deioniser was launched.

Dental Equipment

In 1958 one of the first turbine handpieces was launched at Alexander Palace Dental Exhibition – Sandri. Over the three days, over 1,000 were sold.

In 1965 W&H handpiece range was launched in the UK.

By 1966, sterilisation had begun to stimulate J&S Davis interest. Water boilers were the normal method, yet research papers showed that there were several spores that would live despite hours of boiling. What was the alternative? The autoclave looked too expensive and complex. Thus, dry heat was the selected method and the Swedish Electrolux the selected product. Price had to be below £100. First factory order for 1,000 was placed and again laughter from the trade. “You might sell 4 a year”. However, 13,000 were sold over the next 10 years until the market was ready to move on to the Melag autoclave.

L Porro Dental Company of London gave up the marketing of Ritter equipment and in 1984 Davis pitched in to take it on. The decision was to market their total equipment programme, so that a full surgery of equipment - including cabinetry, was sold as a single item, which had never been done before in the UK.

Recognising that sterilising dirty instruments did not sterilise, L&R Ultrasonic baths were added to the portfolio in 1987.

The likely growth of domiciliary work was anticipated when Dentronic’s Minident was added to the range in 1995 (since 2014 we sell the BPR Swiss domiciliary equipment). Developing the long connection with sterilisation and handpieces Nitram (now Sirona) DAC Universal was launched in 2002.

Ownership changes

In 1982 the company acquired Claudius Ash from Dentsply. That company operated from Moon Lane in Barnet with offices in Waltham Cross. Four years later both companies moved to Potters Bar to shared premises.

In 1991 when the business was acquired by Planmeca, John Davis retired and his son Daniel assumed responsibility for J&S Davis. (John passed away in October 2014 aged 92.) Before the end of the decade David Mason was appointed National Sales Manager.

2009 saw the business move again to Stevenage and in May 2012, Daniel bought the business back from the Planmeca group. By August 2013 the business had its own office and warehouse again.

Charitable work

Cordent Trust

As the company grew and prospered, it wanted to put back money and expertise into dentistry, so John Davis gathered a few enthusiastic dentists around him and the Cordent Trust charity was born in

1970 with John acting as Hon. Secretary for the first 27 years and Colin Davis, OBE, as first Chairman and John Forrest, the second. Since then they have organised nearly 250 projects, of all sorts of sizes and types. It is hard to select special ones since all are special in their individual way. Perhaps the most unusual was the Possum Project that equipped a mobile dental laboratory to use dental skills for the making of individual appliances to connect paralysed patients to a number of electronic aids. Many other challenging projects were initiated including the Phelophepa Health Train in South Africa. In 2008 Cordent trust finally closed its doors, passing on the mantle to Dentaid and Bridge2Aid.

British Dental Health Foundation

John was also one of the founding team of this well known charity in 1971. It was established to allow promotion of oral care to the public. It thus satisfied the needs of both the dental team and industry. The board comprised a cross section of dental professionals, academics and dental industry people. He was the first non Dentist chairman. His son Daniel joined the board in 2002 and was President 2010 to 2012. In 2014 he was honoured to join his father as one of the few Honorary Life Vice-Presidents.

J&S Davis will continue to source and supply products that add value to dental practice. It is justly proud of its 100+ year history of supplying not the largest quantity but the highest quality. It is a family business once more.

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