Sydney William Garne, LDSRCS, FRGS (1875 - 1946), Founding President of the Ceylon Dental Association

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Abstract

This paper follows the life of Sydney William Garne: from qualifying as a Dentist in London, through a short visit to South Africa, to a lifetime of professional service in Ceylon. There, he was the first non-medically qualified dentist to enrol on the Dentists Register. He then became the Founder-President of the Ceylon Dental Association which he ensured was based on the British Association. The responsibilities of that post remained on his shoulders for ten years. All the time, he ran a thriving practice and had a happy family life, including a stepson of whom he was proud.

Introduction

I (the author) was encouraged to think about Sydney William Garne by Henry Carr Green, LDS Manch, DDPH, a much later member of the same family and a retired UK General Practitioner and Community Dentist. He had gathered some information about his relatives, especially on Sydney Garne and his adopted son Spencer. Although qualified in England, Sydney was immensely important in the world of Ceylonese dentistry. He asked me to take forward this research project.

When Green’s elderly aunt died in 1985 he was the executor of her will. Amongst her papers Green found a notebook written around 1870 by his great-great-grandfather William Louis Garne for his son Henry. It helped him to trace back a number of generations of his family. Green had retired in July 1984. After dealing with his aunt’s affairs, he decided to investigate the family’s history. As a fellow dentist he developed a special interest in Sydney William Garne.

Amongst Green’s contacts was Richard (Dick) Garne who had been researching on the family since World War II. He told Green that he had been sent a cutting from a 1902 South African newspaper publication with information on Sydney.

Sydney William Garne

Sydney William Garne was born on 24th December 1875 in ‘Berkshire, Surrey’. His parents were Henry Frederick Garne (birth: 1849 in Newbury; death: 1898) and Caroline S R Bowker (birth: 1846 in Stoneleigh, Egham). They married in Windsor in 1874. She was previously married to a Mr. Goodman by whom she had a daughter named Kate (who married Sydney James of Egham). In addition to this half-sister, Sydney had a sister, who died in infancy.

Sydney’s grandfather was Henry Jenner Garne (1811 – 1877), who in 1842 married Helen Smith of Newbury, Berks. Henry was a younger brother of Henry Green’s great, great, great, grandfather, William Louis Garne, author of the diary.
Looking for a reason as to why Sydney chose dentistry as a career, Green wondered if his father was a dentist, or perhaps a physician or surgeon. However, there was no record of H F Garne in relevant medical or dental directories or registers or the Royal College of Surgeons of England’s lists of members. That is not surprising. In fact, Frederick was the proprietor of a ‘fancy repository’ in Egham in 1882 and 1890. In 1895 he is listed as a private resident in Runneymede Street, Egham. He was no longer noted in the 1899 local Directory but is on the Electors list for 1899 as owner of 3 and 4 Tennyson Villas, Denham Road, Egham. Henry Frederick Garne died in 1898.

**Education and training**

Sydney William Garne was educated at Kent College, Canterbury and then the Coopers’ Company School in Egham. The latter was possibly the Strode’s School which was associated with the Worshipful Company of Coopers, a City of London livery company. Between January and December 1891 he attended the King’s College School in London’s Strand. At the time Sydney went there it occupied the same building as King’s London, for which it was largely a feeder school. Students of the school and college mixed together a great deal. In 1897 the school moved to Wimbledon. By then Sydney had left.

Having made up his mind to become a dentist, Sydney Garne obtained a formal education and training, rather than undergo an apprenticeship as was common at that time. The licence in Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England had been introduced in 1860 and the Dentists Register established in 1878, so the dental trade was becoming professionalized. Garne gained a place to study at the Dental Hospital of London which had been founded in 1858 at 32 Soho Square. In the following year, the London School of Dental Surgery was established in the same building to prepare students for the LDS, according to a prospectus issued in August 1858.

‘The Dental Hospital of London is founded for the purpose of affording to the poor, generally the means of obtaining gratuitous relief and advice, in such cases as are included in the special practice of Dental Surgery, and also for affording an opportunity of instruction to those who enter the Dental Profession.’

By 1874 both institutes moved to 40 Leicester Square, in ‘a disreputable area of London’, a ‘notorious hunting ground of the debased and profligate’. In 1901 the hospital and school moved to number 32. King Edward VII agreed to become patron, bestowing the title of ‘Royal’ Dental Hospital on 15th October. Garne would have studied at the second building. He also attended Charing Cross Hospital for medical aspects of the course necessary as the dental hospital was not part of a general hospital. In 1898 Garne passed the examinations for the LDSRCS. His son Spencer said Sydney wanted to study medicine and had possibly started the course when his own father died in that same year. So it didn’t happen.

**Practice in the United Kingdom**

At some stage he was a house officer at Charing Cross Hospital. Evething he qualified in 1898, Garne did not register his name on the list of dentists held by the Dental Board of the United Kingdom, a sub-committee of the General Medical Council, until 15th May 1901. Before 1921, when dentistry became a closed profession, it was not essential for practitioners to register with the Board. Thus he could have worked without doing so, but it probably would have been unusual if not rare, for qualified dentists not to register. So either he was not working or had gone abroad.

The 1902, 1903, 1904 and 1905 Dentists Registers show Garne was registered at 15 Clarence Street in Staines, but it does not necessarily mean he was working there. The 1901 Census indicates he was living in Staines in that year. The dental list in the Calendar of the Royal College of
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Surgeons of England shows that in 1904 Garne was living in Johannesburg, Transvaal. He had emigrated to Krugersdorp in South Africa and was certainly still there in 1905. The 1905 and 1906 calendars suggest Garne did not return the form in those years to update his personal information, so he was dropped in 1907 and 1908. He did not remain in Africa. By 1908 Garne was listed in the Dentists Register at ‘Clovelly’ in Egham, Surrey, but again, that does not confirm he had returned to England. By then he may have travelled to Ceylon.

The 1909 College Calendar lists Garne as at Clovelly and at the Bristol Hotel in Colombo, Ceylon. Before air travel, a journey by sea from Britain to Ceylon would have taken about a month, so he was unlikely to be practising in both countries. As often happened with ex-pats he no doubt used Clovelly as a UK point of contact.

Garne remained on the British register until he died in 1946. Until 1923 he was registered at Clovelly, from 1924 at the Grand Oriental Hotel, Colombo, and from 1933 at 45 Galle Face Court, also in Colombo.

According to his son, Sydney Garne was the first Dental Lecturer to ‘the Royal Naval Dental Corps at Portsmouth’. It has not been possible to trace any association. The Royal Naval Dental Service was not formed until April 1920. However, Harry Green learned that Naval Medical Officers were appointed to Haslar Hospital and the RN Barracks at Devonport in 1892 for ‘dental duties.’ He wondered if they couldn’t cope and called in specialist help to lecture the naval officers about teeth.

South African interlude
Sydney decided to go to South Africa. According to a South African publication, Garne migrated in 1893, but it is probably a printing error. His move came after ‘practising successfully at Queen’s Gate, London, and Staines, Middlesex’, so he could not have gone unless he practised dentistry before taking the LDS examination in 1901. The article suggests he chose Krugersdorp as it offered ‘considerable possibilities for the exercise of his science’, and the fact he ‘remained there proves he has succeeded to his and his clients’ satisfaction’. The publication said Garne was a foremost supporter of sport in the district, was a member of the West land and the Krugersdorp Clubs, and of the Pony and Galloway Club.

Spencer also said his father was a dental examiner in South Africa, but again there is no confirmatory evidence. Garne did not stay there. He returned to the UK for a while, then emigrated to Ceylon.

The marriage of Sydney William Garne
In 1910 Sydney married Agnes Bessie (known as Betty) Clapp. She was born on 7th June 1878 as Bessie Gould to a family living in Shanghai, China, where she married Harry Clapp. A son, Spencer, was born in Japan on 16th October 1899. The marriage broke down and Betty went to San Francisco, USA for a divorce. She then travelled to Singapore and married Sydney. It is not clear where they met. Sydney legally adopted her son Spencer but there were no children born to them both.

Practice in Ceylon
The British arrived on the island of Ceylon in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They introduced extensive crops of tea and coffee. By 1909 Garne had moved there, after a sea voyage of three to four weeks. He settled in Colombo in the South West of the country. Garne initially practised at the Bristol Hotel in Colombo, which was occupied by a succession of dentists until the late 1970s. Ceylon became Sri Lanka in 1974.

From 1924 he was listed in the Dentists Registers at another address in Colombo; the Grand Oriental Hotel (known locally as GOH). Although later renamed as the Hotel Taprobane, by 1994 it reverted to the old name.
Garne’s long-standing practice was at 45 Galle Face Court, which he was in the process of selling at the time of death. Although, it was not his first home, for many years Garne lived and worked at apartment number 45. This interesting building with its shallow dome stands near the Galle Face Hotel, at the far end of Galle Face Green in Colombo. It was built in two phases: 1923, first section built as Galle Face Court 1, the first multi-storied block of flats in Ceylon; 1926, a large domed addition, Court 2, with an observatory in the dome for the residents and their guests. The flats were initially let out to Europeans. It later also housed the HQ of Macan Markar, the family of jewellers who built it.

Garne changed his address for registration with the GDC in 1923 and remained at Galle Face Court until his death.

This address saw a succession of dental practitioners. Following Garne came William Hugh Burndred. He was associated with Dr. Horace Norman Barnes, both of whom were attached to the British navy in the war. They were admitted as members of the dental association on 14th December 1946. Both left Ceylon in December 1950. Next came Dr. G.P.D. Rajasooriya (who died in harness) and then Dr. Pakstun for a very brief period. The practice probably closed in the mid – 1970s.

**Dentistry in Ceylon and origins of the dental association**

From 1915 the practice of dentistry was governed by the Dental Registration Ordinance. The first qualified dentist to register and work in Ceylon was Sperling Christoffelsz, LRCP,MRCS Eng, LDSEdin. Garne was the first dentist to register without a medical qualification, entering the dental list on 16th June 1916. Strangely, it suggested his LDS was from Edinburgh rather than the English College of Surgeons.

According to Hilarian (Hilary) Cooray, a Past President of the Sri Lankan Dental Association and a noted historian of dentistry in that country.

‘The name of William Garne is of great importance in the history of dentistry in this country [ie in Ceylon, later Sri Lanka]’. On 6th December, 1932 Garne and eleven colleagues formed the Ceylon Dental Association, with him as Founder President. By then 25 dentists worked in Government Hospitals and the Private Sector. According to a foreword written by Garne to the Constitution of the association, the original rules and regulations were based on those of the British Dental Association. The BDA was thanked by Garne and Gomes, the honorary Secretary, for much encouragement and support and for ‘readily accepting our application for affiliation to the Parent Institution’.

Garne remained President of the CDA for 10 years, after which he retired because of ill health. In wartime, the activities of the association were disrupted and election of its office bearers was delayed in 1942. On 12 November Garne said that with much regret, owing to ill health he was not willing to be re-elected President, ‘which office he filled just 10 years from the day of the founding of the Association’. Because of his ill health, a few meetings were held at his home. Garne was replaced by J S R Goonewardena (1942-45).

In 1943 a Dental School was established as the Department of Dental Surgery in the Faculty of Medicine of the University Ceylon, Colombo. As an acknowledgement of his outstanding contribution to dentistry in Ceylon Dr. W. Balendra proposed that an enlarged portrait of Garne should be hung at the meeting place of the CDA. A date was fixed for this on the 15th anniversary of the founding of the association. The CDA sought permission from the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, Dr. Briercliffe, to hang Garne’s portrait on the walls of the school. Permission was not granted as it was against policy to hang private portraits in Government buildings and Garne was not a Government employee. On 20th July 1946 the issue was taken up with the new Director of the
School, Balendra himself. He agreed to allow portraits of Garne and Gomes to be mounted in the hall where the association held its meetings.

**The Royal Geographical Society**

Garne was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society on 15th November 1909. On the form he described himself as a Medical Dental Officer of Colombo, so he certainly was in Ceylon at that time. His proposers were Sir Ernest E Shackleton and John Scot Keltie (Secretary of the Society). He had met the famous explorer when Shackleton visited Ceylon en route to one of his expeditions. On 9th April 1940 Garne wrote to the society about the expense of the annual subscriptions: “I trust you did not take any exception to my letter regarding the fees payable by foreign fellows, but of course, I know you appreciate the difficulties we are all going through at present.” He ceased membership in the following December.

**Death of Garne**

Sydney William Garne died aged 72 years at the Joseph Frazer Nursing Home, on 25th October 1946. The funeral was that same evening at the General Cemetery in Kanatte.

The Rev. Proctor held a short service in the chapel and at the graveside. The Times of Ceylon wrote, “Dr. Garne was one of the oldest and best known dental surgeons in the Island.” On 4th December the dental association passed a motion of condolence on his death.

**Sydney William Garne’s Will**

Garne appointed his wife, Agnes Bessie (Betty), and a friend, Arthur Neshitt Strong MA, Barrister-at-Law as Executors for his Will. In it he asked Betty to give some friends a few personal belongings. The rest of the estate was left to her. In the event of her death before him or at the same time, the estate was to be divided among.

The Will signed in Colombo on 25th October 1944 left nothing to Spencer: perhaps Sydney felt he had enough of his own money. At some time Sydney had given Spencer a ring which he possibly felt was enough as a memento. Spencer said earlier that Sydney had a ring of which he was very proud. It had a crest with a French motif – possibly an ‘N’ – which Spencer thought was a family crest. May be this was the ring given to Spencer.

Garne’s Will lists the companies in which he held shares. On 26th November 1946 an agreement was signed between Betty and William Hugh Burndred, a dental surgeon, who was in the process of purchasing the practice. Garne had agreed before death to sell the practice (“exclusive of the safe and the contents thereof”) for £3,000, 1,500 of which had already been paid. The sale was completed on 11th November 1946, with the balance to be paid in 20 months. Everything including goodwill was to be included. Letters were to be sent to the patients that the practice had been sold to Burndred.

After Sydney’s death Betty and her two sisters settled in a house in Oxfordshire. She made contact with her first husband, Harry Clapp, and visited him in the Norfolk Islands, perhaps en route to Australia to see Spencer. Her brother John had lived out his years in Canada. Betty died on 4th October 1966 in Sunningdale.

**Postscript: Spencer Harry John Garne**

Spencer Garne was born in Kobe, Japan on 16th October 1899, to Bessie (Betty) Clapp.\(^{(a)}\) Spencer spent his early years in Singapore but his main education was “Berkhamsted [sic], Hertfordshire”. He was adopted by Sydney when the latter married his mother.

In World War I Spencer joined the Royal Flying Corps, on 5th December 1917. At first he was an RFC cadet at Blackswon camp, then he trained as an observer in Hastings, Reading, Uxbridge, Hythe, New Romsey and Winchester. Spencer was then posted to France. His movements were: 21st July 1918, No. 8 HQ Squadron; 8 August,
with tank brigade on the Somme; and 21st August, Arras front. Spencer was wounded on 23rd August 1918 and demobbed on 23rd June 1919.

April 1936 saw the marriage of Spencer to Marion Haynes Padbury (Born 26th May 1903) in Colombo. In World War II Spencer served in the Royal Air Force. He joined up in Ceylon and held a staff appointment in Colombo throughout the war, perhaps engaged in some cipher work. His rank is unknown.

After the war Spencer became a tea planter on the very large and well known Gikiyanakande Estate in Neboda, Western Ceylon. He still retained an English address: c/o Mrs. Atkinson, High Kelton, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. It is unclear who owned the estate when Spencer worked there. However the Sunday Times reported in 1988 the former Finance Minister, Ronnie de Mel, has said he owned 50 acres of land to which he was entitled under the Land Reform Law. Under this law his family surrendered 5,000 acres of the highest yielding tea and rubber lands in the country and also some coconut and paddy lands. They included the Gikiyanakande estate. Under this law he applied to keep 50 acres for which he was eligible from his own Glendon estate at Neboda. However, in 1975 the Commission allocated 50 acres from Puttalam Plantations which also belonged to him.

Upon leaving Ceylon in 1959 Spencer and Marion spent some time in the UK then emigrated to Western Australia. Their last address was 86 Tyrell Street, Nedlands in Perth. Spencer and his wife both died in Perth in 1980; Marion (Born on 26th May 1903) on 13th March, Spencer on 14th September.

His Will dated 16th August 1974 named Marion as the main beneficiary, but she pre-deceased him. Having no children his estate of 50,000 Australian dollars was left to Marion’s niece, Helene Elizabeth Niquet Wilson, of Sevenoaks, Kent. She was Marion’s niece and had also lived in Ceylon for a number of years.

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Support, encouragement and information came from Hilary Cooray, the eminent Sri Lankan dental historian.

The original members of the Ceylon Dental Association, 6th December 1932

Sydney Willam Garne (President)
H Eric Swan (Vice President)
A Annesley Gomes (Honorary Secretary)
M A B Brito Muttunayagam (Treasurer)
J S R Goonawardena
Sperling Christoffelsz
S L Cramer
W Balendra
V Sinnatamby
C A R Goowardena
E P N Abeyesundara
A E Daviot