



Riverview Clinic

Osteopathic Information Service

History of Osteopathy

Osteopathy was founded in America in 1874 by Dr Andrew Taylor Still of Kirksville, Missouri. Dr Still was a doctor in a small frontier town in the mid-west. Life for a country doctor in those days was very different from what it is today. There were no pain-killing drugs, X-rays or other hospital tests. The local apothecary or chemist, if there was one, sold little more than remedies based on herbs and folklore, for modern pharmacology was as much in its infancy as medicine. The germ theory of disease put forward by Lister and Pasteur was still unheard of, so even if patients undergoing surgery survived the terrible ordeal of an operation without anaesthetic, they often died from an infection soon afterwards.



Medical training was in no better state. There were few medical schools and those that existed were very expensive, so there was little opportunity for anyone wishing to enter the medical profession. Dr Still was fortunate. As the son of a doctor, he went to medical school and received a formal training. After finishing this, he worked with his father. Doing the rounds of his rural practice he particularly noticed the way his patients' health was affected by the way they used their bodies.

As time went on he followed a different path from many of his peers avoiding alcohol and administering crude drugs which were at their disposal in heroic quantities. This drove him to seek new methods of treatment. The outcome of his research was application of physical treatment as a specialised form of treatment for which he coined the term 'Osteopathy'.

In 1892 Dr Still organised a school in Kirksville, Missouri, for the teaching of osteopathy and it was from these small beginnings that osteopathy was brought to the United Kingdom around the turn of the century. The first school of osteopathy was set up in London in 1917 and, over time, other schools and colleges followed.

