

Joseph Lister (1827-1912)

Look in your bathroom. Do you have a bottle marked *Listerine*? Listerine is named after Joseph Lister who was born on 5th April. Lister was the first person to find out about antiseptics. Antiseptics are chemicals that stop cuts or wounds going bad. Lister was the first to use them.

Lister came from a scientific family. He wanted to study science himself. To study he would have to go to Oxford or Cambridge University. To go to these universities in those days you had to be in the Church of England. Lister was from a Christian family but they were not in the Church of England. So Lister went to a new college in London to study instead.

While he was studying Lister became very ill. He caught smallpox. Smallpox often killed people. Lister did not die. The illness left him feeling weak and sad. Lister put his trust in the Lord Jesus to save him from his sins. He became a Christian. We do not know when. Perhaps it was when he felt weak and sad after his illness.

Lister was always gentle and shy but he was firm too. He knew God had given him a special job to do. What was this job? In Lister's day people often died after hospital operations. They died because the place where they had had the operation went bad. Lister wanted to stop this happening.

Lister found out that dirt was the main reason why this happened. He went to work in a big hospital in Scotland. Where he worked he told everyone to keep things clean. The doctors had to wear clean clothes and wash the equipment they used. Because of this there were fewer deaths after operations. But some people still died. Lister thought that something was getting into the patients during the operations. This poisoned them so that they died. What was it?

Lister read something written by a French chemist called Louis Pasteur. This gave the answer. It was germs that were getting into the patients during the operations. Lister began to experiment to find something that would kill the germs. He found that carbolic acid killed the germs and did not harm the patients. Carbolic acid is an antiseptic.

Lister used carbolic acid to save many lives. He wrote about what he had found. It was a very long time before all doctor's believed him. At last all operations were carried out in clean conditions and antiseptics were regularly used. Lister had done the job he had been given!