

THE ASSOCIATION OF OPHTHALMIC OPTICIANS
IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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VOLUME ONE - 1931 TO 1948

On January 29th 1931 a meeting was held at 100 High Street Bedford. Mr F T Gregg spoke on the need and purpose of a Local Optical Association affiliated to the Institute of Ophthalmic Opticians (IOO). Present were F Davis, P Hudswell, A Isherwood, M Pinnington, H Smith and Misses Dulson and Truscott.. Proposed by A Isherwood, seconded H Smith, the Proposal to launch the Association was carried unanimously.

The February 23rd meeting laid down the Rules. The group title would be "The Bedford & District Association of Ophthalmic Opticians", the object would be "To promote and arrange meetings for the technical instruction and discussion, to protect the interest of the Optical Profession locally and to generally further the aims of the Institute of Ophthalmic Opticians in so far as is incumbent upon a local Association affiliated to that body". Unanimously carried. Members limited to 12 mile radius of Bedford and must be Qualified Opticians. Ordinary Meetings to be in April September, October, November, January, February and March; AGM in April. Meetings to be two Lectures, two Demonstrations of apparatus, and three Discussions. Officers Sydney Smith Chairman, C Truscott to be Hon Sec and Hon Treasurer.

On March 9th the mechanism of government was set up. The above members were joined by Messrs Loat, Dollimore and Sydney Smith (who would become a major figure up to and beyond the NHS in 1948). Subscriptions to be 5/- to Members, Programme to be decided by Hon Sec.

At the Meeting on 13th April 1931 ten members were present at the Café, High Street Bedford when a speaker proposed co-operation among opticians in the field of advertising of an educational nature.

In July the Hon Sec was delegated to attend a meeting of the JCQO (Joint Council of Qualified Opticians - which seemed to be the forerunner of our AOP). The JCQO had circulated a recommended list of "minimum Charges to be agreed by the Members". Example - Spheres up to 8D 9/- pr; Torics up to 4D 4C 6/- pr; Cement Bifs 16/- pr extra; R, less 3/- extra; frames from 4/6 to 18/-. The recommended list was agreed upon. Mr Hudswell wanted a discussion on "the advisability of making a **"black list"**".

(From this point, where the foundation was laid, there are 150 pages in the Minute Book up to the inception of the National Health Service in 1948. Only significant events will now be recounted.)

The black list was subsequently discussed to be formed "for our own protection and this was agreed to and delinquent names were to be submitted to the Association". (delinquent opticians, patients, clients or customers ???)

On December 10th 1931 "Mr Challis demonstrated the new Bausch & Lomb Keratometer and Campimeter. The latter "showed how quickly and accurately the colour fields of the fundus could be mapped out, how muscle imbalances could be determined and exercises made by the instrument, and how stereopsis could be demonstrated". In February the Synoptophore was demonstrated. During 1931 an outsider joined the Members - Bruce Wilkinson (of Humphriss & Edwards, Biggleswade).

The AGM in April 1932 showed Annual Income £5 : 9 : 0; Expenses £2 : 3 : 0 ; Cash in hand £ 2 : 6 : 0 (for younger readers, the pound (£) contained 20 shillings. a shilling (s) contained 12 pence (d) - a penny harking back to the Roman silver denarius). (The local Association was flourishing !!) After much discussion the Officers remained unchanged.

A special Meeting took place at "The Mayfair Tea Rooms" (!!) August 29th 1932. The JCQO had proposed that 2.5% should be deducted from Members' Accounts "to finance the advertising to the public the advantages of the JCQO Service". Carried 4 votes to 2. The matter was to be dealt with at the forthcoming Conference at which it was also proposed that "the JCQO should supply leaflets to every approved Society " but the Secretary pointed out that Members had free choice and were not compelled to go where directed". Carried again 4 to 2.

A month later at the up-market venue the invited speaker was Mr Jack Hayes, an MP in the last govt, a late CID official and JCQO representative. The address was on the "intimate JCQO transactions which could not be reported except in this confidential way". The JCQO were concerned with itinerant optical quacks, representations being made to the Min of Health regarding unfair attempts to induce people who were insured under the NHI to go to unqualified DO's by Medical men. However far-reaching changes in the status of the Qualified Optician in the near future were anticipated. (The tea rooms proprietor requested 1/- extra when heating was required and meetings should finish by 10 pm.)

The December 1932 Meeting recorded thanks from the Bedford Guild of Help regarding the B&DAOO's offer of concessions on sight tests and glasses for poor people. Advertising was again raised. Most present agreed that the desired goal was an agreement between opticians to refrain from advertising, but some, although conceding

the principle, could not see how it could be done without some control being exercised over unqualified practitioners.

In January 1933 a well-known name, Mr A E Turville (later to be renowned for the remarkably versatile direct/ indirect ophthalmoscope / retinoscope with variable aperture and coloured filters and the first infinity balance subjective refraction system) gave a talk on "Instruments in practice".

The controversial matter of agreement on minimum charges was a regular chestnut. A letter from Mr H G Smith stated that he was averse to the Minimum Price List concept and the subject was deferred to a Special Meeting.

The other hot potatoes were advertising and the supply of spectacles to children. There had been discussions with the Borough Education Committee who had advocated a flat-rate for the latter item, but inevitably progress foundered on the practicalities of renewals, repairs and inconsistency with the JCQO standards.

The Special Meeting occurred on 27th February 1933 (they didn't hang about when matters were urgent and met very regularly.) Mr H G Smith stuck to his guns and "gave his reasons for not agreeing to a standard charge and as he refused to agree to sign any scale of prices no common agreement could be reached." The other Members present decided to adopt the Minimum Price List with the exception for higher power lenses above 8D when an extra 6/- should be charged.

The matter of collective advertising was raised at the autumn 1932 meetings and into 1933. Most agreed to the idea but one or two dissenters caused "the scheme to lie in abeyance for the present".

March 1933 revealed a name on the "black list" whose name had been spotted in a recent local publication, and Mr Isherwood was delegated to deal with it. An address by Mr F W Rossini FSMC followed on Psychology in Optical Practice describing the "influence of the unconscious mind and showed that all thought is due to what are called associations which link up each impression in sequence" (!!).

A heavy gathering In April was introduced by the **President** Mr S A Smith (who had been elevated from the Chairman's post at the previous AGM) who introduced Mr Jack Hayes "who spoke at considerable length upon the beginning of and formation of the OBJC especially in relation to the JCQO. The speaker had to confess that the JCQO had to all practical ends been superseded and was admitted to be "up in the air". However he appealed for loyalty to the JCQO on the grounds that though the NHI matters were still chaotic the JCQO were still the only body standing solidly for Qualified Opticians".

The 1934 AGM noted the resignation of the President in favour of Mr A Isherwood. The finances were still firm with a balance of £4- 3- 6d. Committee re-elected en bloc.

Deryck Humphriss (of Humphriss & Burgess) appears for the first time. Mr H G Smith had resigned sometime earlier. A proposal emerged to ask him to reconsider his resignation. Sydney Smith (retiring President) was against and Mr Hudswell seconded. Mr Humphriss proposed amendment that he be asked to rejoin, supported by Miss Dulson, and it was put to the vote. Three for, three against. The President cast in favour of the amendment ! (Momentous times).

Letters were read from Mr Humphriss (he is going to be trouble !?) in which he complained that the Association (presumably the BDAOO) had attempted to defame him in his application for Fellowship of the Institute of Opticians (FIO). The meeting refuted his claim as apparently the relevant document had been returned to the IOO by a given date but without comment as the Meeting at which the matter emerged had not had the necessary quorum. The following meeting records that Mr Humphriss had received a letter from the IOO Secretary who admitted he had blundered and apologised, which Mr Humphriss accepted. Matter closed (Phew !!).

The same gathering considered once again the importance of urgent collective advertising. The Berks Bucks and Oxon LA submitted a proposal for the forthcoming JCQO Conference urging all optical bodies to consider the formation of a "central controlling body with powers to act for and generally direct the activities of every optician in the event of an Opticians Registration Act". All in favour.

November 1934 a notable authority delivered a lecture on "Drugs used in Practice". Mr DWA Mitchell of the London Refraction Hospital provided "A description of the anatomy of the eye and the muscles, ligaments and end-plates" which was followed by an "explanation of the various drugs such as atropine, homatropine, eserine, pilocarpine, etc". (This was the first occasion when the actual content of the address was recorded).

A special meeting in November discussed "how to meet the propaganda of the Dispensing Opticians who were advertising that none but medical men should be entrusted with refraction work". It was agreed that the LA should adopt collective advertising and that "this be of the nature for the present of positive affirmation of the value of the Service the Qualified Optician is rendering to the Health Insurance Members and that this advertising be continued to the end of the year and then reconsidered". Agreed, the ad to be 6" double column size. The Members would share the cost with the suggestion "each should withdraw their private adverts". Another meeting was held concerning the advert and unanimous agreement was reached.

Mr LFD Tranter (of Northampton ?) spoke at the November 1935 gathering. He represented the "New Deal Party" which, although not antagonistic to the established bodies, felt that more could be done to create unity, vital to the interest of all opticians in their dealings with the Ministry of Health. The meeting pledged their support.

An issue which was to become an increasing bone of contention arose in December. North Herts and S Beds Hospitals were requiring patients who needed spectacles to be directed to a branch of a well-known multiple firm of Dispensing Opticians. The matter had been bitterly fought by the Hertfordshire LOC, was ongoing and the IOO were to be brought in to the battle. Our meeting firmly supported the principle of free choice - that the dispensing of Hospital Rx's should be offered to all ophthalmic and dispensing opticians.

January 1936 was visited by one of the giants (if not the giant) of the subsequent history of optometry, Mr George Giles (later to become the Secretary of both the British Optical Association and the AOP, becoming a Barrister-at-Law, the major negotiator in guiding the Opticians' Act through Parliament, and the award of an OBE). Being the author of several books on Refraction and Orthoptics he had designed a Colour Vision Lantern which was extensively used by various Services concerned with colour vision in aviation and navigation. His subject was "Colour Vision Testing" with special reference to the Giles-Archer Lantern Test which had the facility of presenting very small colour stimuli which simulated navigation lamps at two miles distance.

The next two meetings were academic and again names to become better-known later were featured. Mr Harry Freeman spoke with illustration on "The Living Cell", and in March, David Mitchell of LRH fame returned to speak on "Ocular Signs of General Diseases".

A tricky situation occurred in May 1936. Mr Deryck Humphriss (I told you so !) had published an article in the Bedford Press newspaper entitled "New Hope for Squinters", in which very wild and extravagant claims were made for curing squints "at his London Hospital" where "he is now in charge of a special "squint" department". The article is about five inches, one column long and ends that he "has proved that the treatment is applicable to all ages, his youngest being 6 years old, and his oldest 74". The predictable meeting was convened which provided the following resolution "that the article published in the local press on May 7th and 8th is in the opinion of this Association unethical, and this meeting desires to register its disapproval and instructs the Hon Sec to convey to the SMC, the JCQO, the IOO and to Mr Humphriss himself its considerable opinion. Deryck Humphriss gave his apologies for absence from this meeting, but counter-attacked in the same letter. He made objection to the words "Advice Free" on the shop front of Messrs Charnley, Opticians in Bedford.

Charnley's manager Mr Pinnington, a member of the Association "admitted that these words had been included in an incised sign from the beginning of the business at 21 High Street but he volunteered to remove them since they gave offence to some". (Deuce).

February 1937 witnessed a serious debate on "Ethics". No conclusion was reached. But "in the meantime enquiry should be made as to the attitude of the BOA and SMC in the case of an optician who in loyalty to his Associations adhered to their code of ethics and lost his situation thereby". Extraordinary GM was held in April at which the required quorum was reduced from five to four.

(It is evident that the Association was held together by Sydney Smith who was President almost throughout, Mr Truscott as Hon Secretary and Hon Treasurer and Albert Isherwood. The other Members were very irregular in attendance and with a quorum now of just four it is remarkable that the movement survived.)

A fresh problem arose in October 1937 related to a form issued by the JCQO and OBAC (?). The upshot was a letter from Mr Claud Dupont of Leicester LA expressing "profound dissatisfaction" with Clause 1 which forbade the use of drugs for refraction work which it appeared had been accepted by the SMC. The meeting endorsed the views of Mr Dupont. But on November 15th another letter from Yorkshire Optical Society urging us again to protest on the same issue, was followed by yet another meeting on November 24th at which our view was vehemently endorsed. This issue rattled on for several meetings, Mr Dupont requesting all FSMC members to write to that body (which it seems were unaware of the significance of this threat to our professional entitlement).

March 1938 recorded a minor triumph - the Hertfordshire Hospital had amended their procedure to allow patients free choice of spectacles dispensing! The meeting decided to approach Bedford Hospital for a similar agreement.

January 1939 recorded an IOO letter informing that a National Register for Emergency Opticians would have a reservation age of 30 - opticians over this age could only be recruited in their professional capacity. The movement towards unity and co-ordination among optical bodies was growing, but the SMC Charter prevented that body from delegating powers to representatives. The problem was settled by a Resolution "That we note with pleasure that the Court of the Worshipful Company of Spectaclemakers has nominated Sir William Champness to act as observer on the Exploratory Committee".

An "Indian Eye Specialist" had applied to the Beds Times requesting advertising space for his planned periodical visits to the town. The meeting threatened to withdraw all

advertising by Association members if the newspaper agreed to the request. The Times subsequently refused the offending Indian interloper.

In March 1939 Albert Isherwood led a discussion on "Contact Lenses" which was well received but with the conclusion that "this form of correction was not a very practical proposition and was unlikely to be of general use". The following month saw Deryck Humphriss talking on "The Treatment of Myopia" dwelling chiefly on the pathology of progressive myopia and suggesting "ways in which Opticians and Doctors should co-operate."

The AGM on 2nd October 1939 (just a month after the start of WWII) noted that due to the difficulty in arranging lectures during the war the annual sub be kept to five shillings. Owing to the wartime Regulations concerning the "Blackout" closing hours for the present would be 6pm.

In March the black list (not blackout!) reared its head again. Members had failed to report cases of bad debts. Names of people who had victimised them should be reported to the Secretary "for the protection of other members of the Association" and further "persons named should not be allowed to have goods without previous payment"

The death of the Hon Sec, Mr Truscott was reported in May 1942 when Mr Isherwood stepped into the breach. An important telephone message from Mr George Giles, Registrar of the JCQO had been received. The Royal Ordnance Factory at Elstow would be included in the JCQO Factory Scheme whereby local opticians would give services to employees engaged in essential war work by visiting the factory on a rota basis. The idea was supported and several members volunteered. Provision of equipment for the project would be met by subscription (£4 per head) from all Members.

Meetings were somewhat irregular at this period and a Minute noted in November 1940 affirmed "that Officers then in office shall continue in office for the duration of the war".

Mr FAJ Turner was welcomed in September 1942 (who with Mr Wilkinson also from Biggleswade were the only two non-Bedford Members).

The January 1943 meeting introduced two North London LA Members who spoke on the setting up of Regions and the significance of the Carr-Saunders Report which aimed "To establish our profession with dignity in the Health Services of the Nation".

The next meeting in March 1944 discussed the Beveridge Report (which prepared the way for the NHS Act of 1948 ?). Our LA was to be in Region No 5 (North London).

At the next meeting in February 1946 the AOP was first mentioned following our request to advise on the (thorny) matter of collective advertising. It was hoped that all Members would join the AOP. In April a special meeting "considered Amendments to the National Health Bill" (the first mention of the 1948 Act). It was a lengthy gathering where support for the JEC (Joint Emergency Committee) position was given "and stressing the fact that in our opinion, optical participation in the Health Centres would depend on recognition by the Minister of our professional claims".

May 1946 meeting was notable. The Association was to become "**The Bedford and District Branch of the Association of Optical Practitioners**" Branch 5/1 commencing at the AGM of 25th September 1946. Mr Deryck Humphriss then addressed the meeting on "Orthoptics" with "special reference to the points needed to commence a local clinic by the Association". The new annual subscription was increased from 5/- to 10/6d (!) and the AGM would now be in February each year. The President and Hon Secretary were re-elected with Mr Pinnington as Treasurer, and all the Members would form the Executive Committee.

Attached to the AGM Minutes is a note of the equipment held for use at the Royal Ordnance Factory at Elstow - Jerrome (Bjerrum?) screen and targets, near point measure, distance chart, Giles-Archer colour lantern, trial case, Light-adaption test (Wright), Maddox wing near muscle balance test, all stored at 70a Tavistock Street.

The following month noted an address by Deryck Humphriss listing the requirements for those members taking his forthcoming course in Orthoptics, the study circle to take place monthly until concluded.

(Much time was taken up over the years with two issues - collective advertising and the type of frames which could be provided by people obtaining financial help from insurance schemes. It would be tedious to record these matters and, in the end, they seem never to be satisfactorily resolved.)

In June 1947 Deryck Humphriss announced his departure for South Africa, allowing just one more practical demonstration of orthoptics to his study group and informing that Mr Burgess would be carrying on both the business (Humphriss & Burgess) and the orthoptic course.

Two minor triumphs occurred in September 1947. Congratulations were extended to Mr Burgess and J E Smith for their success in the orthoptics examination (from which examining body?). And a Resolution "That this Branch ceases individual advertising in favour of an ethical form of collective display in the local papers without names. The only exception to be made in the case of new members opening practices in the Branch's district in which case an official announcement by the AOP Branch of such

members names, address, phone numbers and hours to be allowed for a limited period".

With the advent of the much heralded NHS and the concern for the likely involvement of OO's, the December 1947 gathering was significant.

(It should be recalled that the service of OO's in the NHS was planned to be temporary and only until such time as clinics staffed by ophthalmologists and Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners (OMP's) were widely available. Hence the title of all documents were headed SOS - Supplementary Ophthalmic Service. The OO was to be phased out and relegated to the dispensing function.)

The December minutes record a Resolution to be submitted to the AOP:

1. OO's who decide to remain in private practice to have the right to dispense prescriptions from State Clinics.
2. That there be no State direction with regard to dispensing, and that the individuals have complete freedom of choice.
3. Newcomers to the profession to enjoy the same rights and privileges, otherwise private practice will eventually cease to exist and OO's become merely State servants.

The March 1948 AGM welcomed Mr JO Brough to Membership. With ending of WWII the ROF Elstow enterprise was finished and the relevant equipment was surplus, but its disposal was deferred to a later meeting. The following May Meeting was to be of special significance as representatives for the first Local Ophthalmic Committee to serve the Bedford Hospital Area was required. The following names were proposed:

Messrs S Smith, A Isherwood, FAJ Turner, Davis, Pilgrim, S White (Luton), plus four more names to be included from the Luton area. The Committee of ten would "deal with matters arising in the working of the Supplementary Ophthalmic Scheme and would advise the three further Members (to be appointed) who would serve on the Ophthalmic Services Committee".

(The ten pages of this summary have been condensed from 157 pages in the leather-bound Minute Book. Much of the original material is concerned with inconsequential matters of little relevance or interest. Mercifully the hand-writing of the two Hon Secretaries is exemplary and easily understood, but they were meticulous in recording the names of every speaker and the proposer and seconder of every motion - hence the length of the records.)

For seventeen years from 1931 to 1948 the Local Association provided the ophthalmic opticians of Bedford and District with a forum for debate and discussion; and helped to maintain business practices within the bounds of professional behaviour and honest service to the community.

The Association was (and is) indebted to the three Founding Fathers :

Mr Sydney A Smith Chairman / President 1931 to 1933 1936 to 1948

Mr Albert Isherwood President 1934 and 1935

Hon Secretary & Treasurer 1941 to 1948

Mr Truscott Hon Secretary & Treasurer 1931 to 1941

MJT February 2012