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ABDO's 25th Anniversary



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ABDO 25th Anniversary

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A time to celebrate in style

To mark the Association of British Dispensing Opticians' 25th Anniversary a silver jubilee luncheon will be held at the Plaisterers' Hall on 6 May. This magnificent hall, with its beautiful architecture and elegant decor, provides a perfect setting for us to celebrate this very special milestone in the Association's history. We will commemorate ABDO's achievements and acknowledge many of the individuals who have contributed to its success. We are also particularly honoured to welcome our special guest, HRH The Countess of Wessex, who is attending in her role as Global Ambassador for the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

ABDO was preceded by the Association of Dispensing Opticians, formed in 1925, but in 1986 it merged with the Faculty of Dispensing Opticians, a previous amalgamation of the British Optical Association and Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers dispensing faculties, to become our present Association, with its members becoming Foundation Fellows of the new body. In the early days there were around 3,500 dispensing optician members; today, ABDO represents approximately 5,600 qualified DOs in the UK and has become a powerful voice in optics.

Since the formation of ABDO, dispensing optics has gone from strength to strength. The FBDO qualification is recognised as the gold standard for dispensing opticians, both in the UK and overseas, and our honours qualifications in contact lenses and low vision are unrivalled. In 2001, ABDO set up its own college, which has greatly extended the courses and qualifications offered to our members, and with the recent introduction of the BSc(Hons) degrees, awarded in conjunction with Canterbury Christ Church University, we have also taken a great step forward towards a degree based profession.

This commemorative brochure has been produced to record some of the Association's highlights over the past quarter-century; it contains personal recollections from both John Baker and John Fried who were there at the beginning, as well comments and thoughts from most of our past Presidents. All of these people, together with members who have served on ABDO national and area committees, as well as ABDO staff have played a vital part in building the Association to become the successful organisation that it is today. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank them all for the legacy they have created, which I firmly believe has placed us in a good position to tackle the challenges that we face both now and in the future

For those of you for joining in our celebrations at Plaisterers' Hall, I should like to wish everyone who attends a most enjoyable afternoon, which, I am sure, will be remembered for many years to come.

Jennifer Brower FBDO (Hons) LVA Cert Ed
President

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THE ART
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HRH The Countess of Wessex

The Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) is delighted that HRH The Countess of Wessex will be guest of honour at the Association's silver jubilee luncheon and will attend in her role as Global Ambassador for the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness.

Her Royal Highness was born Sophie Rhys-Jones in 1965 in Oxford. After working in public relations for over a decade, in 1999 Miss Rhys-Jones married The Earl of Wessex in St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. As The Countess of Wessex, she acts in support of her husband in his roles, and undertakes public duties for a large number of her own charities. She is particularly involved with charities relating to children and others with disabilities and communication problems.

Both the Association of British Dispensing Opticians and The Worshipful Company Spectacle Makers are active contributing members of VISION 2020 UK, which is an umbrella organisation which facilitates greater collaboration and co-operation between organisations within the UK, which focus on vision impairment and operate on a regional, national or international basis.

VISION 2020 UKs objectives are:

- To prevent avoidable blindness
- To improve the quality of services to vision impaired people
- To improve the training available to professionals providing advice and services
- To improve communication between organisations within the VI Sector
- To improve the availability of information to vision impaired people
- To ensure that the voices of the vision impaired are heard when planning services and their opinions sought on key issues affecting their lives
- To raise public awareness of the issues and problems relating to sight loss

In addition to the above, VISION 2020 UK also seeks to provide a unified response on key issues affecting vision impaired people and to provide visual impairment sector representatives for consultation groups, working parties and project groups.

VISION 2020 UK is a supporting member of the VISION 2020 global initiative for the elimination of avoidable blindness, a joint programme of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) with an international membership of NGOs, professional associations, eye care institutions and corporations.

HRH The Countess of Wessex has visited Tanzania, Bangladesh, Canada and USA in support of VISION 2020 work and last year spoke at the World Sight Day event hosted by the World Health Organisation held in Geneva.

Members of ABDO, and its predecessor bodies dating back to 1925, have a proud record of serving the public by providing the best possible corrective eyewear and other optical appliances to enhance their patients' vision. The presence of HRH The Countess of Wessex at the Association's anniversary celebration event is therefore a wonderful tribute to the work of all who strive to make this profession so successful.

1986 - 2011



Some historical highlights,
facts and trivia

1986

- The foundation of the Association of British Dispensing Opticians takes place on 1 January; the first President is Tony Botten and first Vice President is Ros Kirk.
- The ABDO Educational Trust is set up with a generous grant from The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers.
- The Association of Dispensing Opticians (ADO) is officially wound up at an EGM on 11 May by the signing of a Declaration of Solvency by John Baker and Ros Kirk.
- On 1 July the NHS voucher scheme is introduced, as is a system of practise changes for all UK ABDO members.
- ABDO holds its first conference at the Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane, London – the event attracts over 1,500 delegates and exhibition visitors.

1987

- The Association holds its first Annual General Meeting on 26 April at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham.
- The College of Arms produce the illustrated and sealed Letter of Patent and Armorial Bearings for the Association, which is subsequently framed and displayed at ABDO's registered office in Nottingham Place, London.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Manchester.

1988

- VAT on spectacles and contact lenses is introduced on 1 September.
- ABDO members undertake a fundraising campaign for new Association office premises; ABDO regional areas and individuals start to arrange all manner of events, from five-a-side football tournaments to dances in aid of the building fund appeal.
- In November ABDO runs a retail business management seminar at Eynsham Hall near Oxford.
- ABDO receives GOC approval for its FBDO CL, Certificate in Contact Lens Fitting.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Torquay.

1989

- Ros Kirk is elected President of the Association.
- 1 April was the infamous 'Sight Test Charging Day'. The NHS sight test is limited to specified groups only and a prescription is required to be given to a patient at the end of a sight test.
- 20 September 1989 sees the official opening of 6, Hurlingham Business Park, the Association's first freehold property.
- Also in September, the Association supports the new dispensing optics department at Cambridge College of Art and Technology, which is set up by dispensing optician Andrew Keirl.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Nottingham.

1990

- The Association establishes ABDO Publications Ltd.
- ABDO holds a PR presentation at the House of Commons on 24 November - the day Margaret Thatcher resigned (these two event were not directly related!).
- The ABDO Conference is held in Bournemouth.

1991

- ABDO launches a 'Training in practice management' correspondence course.
- The ABDO Conference is held at the Hilton National Hotel, Watford.

1992

- Richard Harsant is elected President of the Association
- ABDO has career development firmly on the agenda in July - two career enhancement questionnaires are included with the July/August issue of *Dispensing Optics*.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Brighton.

Pictured on the opposite page

1. 2011 - ABDO College academic staff, course tutors and ABDO examiners celebrate their attainment of a BSc(Hons) degree in Optical Dispensing Studies at a reception in Godmersham
2. 2001 - The ABDO Council
3. 2008 - John Fried at the graduation ceremony
4. 2000 - Jo Underwood and Rosemary Bailey
5. 2001 - ABDO College staff and the first group of students
6. 1997 - Mo Jalie at the conference in Chepstow
7. 1998 - The *Dispensing Optics* team Sheila Hope, Ann Johnson and Deanne Gary at the conference in Harrogate
8. 2000 - Stan Boorman, Bill MacDonald (left) and John Baker (right) celebrate 75 years of the profession
9. 2000 - Tony Botton and Huntly Taylor
10. 1989 - John Baker and Ros Kirk at the opening of the 'Hurlingham' head office
11. 2000 - Alan Parkhurst



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1993

- In January 1993 the optical publicity machine is well under way. Among many promotional initiatives, in response to demand from DOs, the Optical Information Council re-launches 'celebrity' posters publicising the importance of regular eye examinations.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Durham.

1994

- Duncan Counter is elected President of the Association.
- The Association makes a major contribution to the establishment of the Eyecare Information Service
- The ABDO Conference is held in Harrogate.

1995

- John Roskill retires and Malcolm Hunt is appointed general secretary of the Association.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Stratford-upon-Avon.

1996

- Colin Lee is elected President of the Association.
- The ABDO frame rule, originally designed by George Clayton, is revised and updated to comply with new European Standards.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Torquay.

1997

- On 1 January ABDO takes on the central secretaryship of the International Opticians Association (IOA).
- ABDO members vote on dropping the word 'Dispensing' from the Association's title - but the status quo is maintained.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Chepstow.
- The 1997 ABDO diploma presentations take place at Apothecaries Hall.

1998

- Eric Hall is elected President of the Association.
- In September a degree course in optometry, funded by FODO, commences at Anglia Polytechnic University. For the first time, a DO may train to be an optometrist whilst receiving accreditation for prior learning.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Harrogate.
- The 1998 ABDO diploma presentations take place at Apothecaries Hall.

1999

- Malcolm Hunt retires and Tony Garrett is appointed general secretary of the Association.
- On 1 April free eye examinations are reintroduced for the over sixties.
- 1999 the profession involved with the VCJD debate. Could the disease be transmitted through tear film? It was decided that trial contact lenses could no longer be used more than once.
- In December, ABDO appointed its first CET officer, Paula Stevens.

- The ABDO Conference is held at The Chateau Impney, Droitwich Spa.

- The 1999 ABDO diploma presentations take place at Apothecaries Hall.

2000

- Alan Parkhurst is elected President of the Association.
- The front cover of February 2000 issue of *Dispensing Optics* announces the launch of ABDO's new CET accreditation scheme.
- In September 2000 DOs register for the Association's first National CET Day in Harrogate.
- ABDO celebrates 75 years of the ophthalmic dispensing profession with a dinner held at the Park Lane Hilton in October.
- In December ABDO links with Brunel University and launches a BSc(Hons) degree in Business Administration.
- The ABDO Conference is held in Harrogate.
- The 2000 ABDO diploma presentations take place at the Royal College of Surgeons.

ABDO Presidents 1986 to 2011

Tony Botton FBDO
1986 - 1989

Ros Kirk FBDO
1989 - 1992

Richard Harsant FBDO
(Hons) CL (Hons) LVA
1992 - 1994

Duncan Counter FBDO
1994 - 1996

Colin Lee FBDO
1996 - 1998

Eric Hall FBDO
1998 - 2000

Alan Parkhurst FBDO
2000 - 2002

Chris Packford FBDO
2002 - 2003

James Russell FBDO
2003 - 2006

Kevin Milsom FBDO
2006 - 2008

Barry Duncan FBDO
2008 - 2010

Jennifer Brower FBDO
(Hons) LVA Cert Ed
2010 - Present



1992 • Ros Kirk bestows the new president Richard Harsant

Some historical highlights, facts and trivia



2001

- A 'members only area' is added to the ABDO website.
- ABDO sets up its own college in March at Godmersham in Kent, appointing Jo Underwood as principal.
- In May the Association moves from Hurlingham Business Park into temporary office premises at 113 Eastbourne Mews.
- The second ABDO National CET Day is held at The Palace Hotel, Buxton.
- The 2001 ABDO diploma presentations take place at the Royal College of Surgeons.

2002

- Chris Packford is elected President of the Association.
- The ABDO National CET Day is held at The Marriott Bristol City Centre.
- The 2002 ABDO graduation ceremony is held at The King's School, Canterbury.

2003

- James Russell is elected President of the Association.
- On 20 May ABDO head office moves to 199 Gloucester Terrace, sharing the freehold premises jointly with FODO and the FMO.
- The ABDO National CET Day is held at The Midland Hotel, Manchester.
- The 2003 ABDO graduation ceremony is held at The King's School, Canterbury.

2004

- The ABDO National CET Weekend is held at The Stratford Moat House, Stratford-upon-Avon.
- In October, Canterbury Cathedral becomes the venue for the annual ABDO Graduation and Prize Giving Ceremony.

Pictured above

1. 1989 - President Ros Kirk receives a donation from Brian Collison to the ABDO Building Fund
2. Chairman of the Benevolent Fund management committee Jennifer Brower with the Treasurer David Kirk
3. 1999 - John Baker
4. 2003 - The graduation ceremony at King's School, Canterbury
5. 1999 - Eric Hall
6. 2002 - The ABDO Council
7. 2000 - Tony Bottom



1



2



3



7



4



5



6



8

- In autumn 2004 ABDO members vote to change the way the Association is governed: a new board of directors is to be voted for and set in place for January 2005.
- The final meeting of the ABDO Council takes place at 199 Gloucester Terrace on Wednesday 10 November.

2005

- The newly elected ABDO Board meets for the first time on 12th January.
- In May the first President's Consultation Day is held at 199 Gloucester Terrace.
- Compulsory CET is introduced by the GOC to maintain registration.
- ABDO introduces online CET.
- The ABDO National CET Weekend is held at The Radisson SAS Hotel in Glasgow.

2006

- Kevin Milsom is elected President of the Association.
- In February ABDO launches its first interactive CET CD: *Frame and Facial Measurements*.
- ABDO establishes an Employers' Group for its members.
- ABDO becomes one of the founding members of the Eye Health Alliance.
- ABDO is recognised by the Regulatory Authorities in the UK as an Awarding Body. The Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) awards a level 6 grade for the ABDO main qualifications and level 7 for the Contact Lens Honours Diploma.
- The ABDO National CET Weekend is held at the Novotel London West Hotel Convention Centre, Hammersmith.

Pictured above

1. 1992 - The ABDO Council
2. 1997 - ABDO Golf Day
L to R: John Roskill, Sara Evans, Colin Lee, Brian Jay, Frank Clipson, Mike Stokes and Richard Patterson
3. 2010 - Kim Devlin receives Life Membership from Jennifer Brower
4. 2008 - The ABDO gala dinner at Manchester Town Hall
5. Chris Packford
6. 1992 - Bungee jumping at the Brighton conference
7. 1993 - Duncan Counter
8. 2000 - Alan Parkhurst

1986 - 2011

2007

- ABDO Northern Ireland area was formed at a meeting, at the Hilton Templepatrick near Belfast, on 13 March.
- The Association makes a number of new appointments; Elaine Grisdale joins as head of professional services, Michael Potter as head of marketing and communications and Alicia Thompson as director of professional examinations.
- The ABDO National CET Weekend is held at the Paramount Majestic Hotel, Harrogate.
- ABDO College adopts new branding and corporate identity guidelines.
- In July ABDO College launches a completely new website.
- Past President, Richard Harsant puts forward two resolutions regarding the Association's name change, which results in a majority of members' votes against the resolutions proposed.

2008

- Barry Duncan is elected President of the Association.
- The Association adopts new branding and corporate identity guidelines.
- ABDO CET department launches a re-registration pack to assist DOs returning after a break.
- The Association introduces a new range of corporate items.
- ABDO College, working with Canterbury Christ Church University, launches a Foundation Degree in Ophthalmic Dispensing course.
- The Association adopts a 'New Vision' for the 2008 ABDO Conference and Exhibition in Manchester.
- A new format for ABDO Advice & Guidelines is integrated into the ABDO website.

2009

- *Dispensing Optics* goes monthly rather than publishing nine issues a year.
- The Association launches the ABDO Locum Register.
- In January ABDO launches *association news*, the ABDO email newsletter.
- In March President Barry Duncan hosts an 'Open Forum' at Gloucester Terrace providing members with an opportunity to voice their opinions.

2010

- Jennifer Brower is elected President of the Association.
- Written by Board director Ted Moffatt, ABDO publishes *Safety and protective eyewear* which proves to be a useful reference guide for members.
- ABDO collaborates with the Elite School of Optometry in India.
- A new Information & Regulatory Matters section is added to the ABDO website.
- Together with ACLM, AOP, FMO and FODO, ABDO becomes a founding member of the Optical Confederation.
- ABDO College successfully secures validation from Canterbury Christ Church University and final approval from the General Optical Council for its BSc(Hons) course in Ophthalmic Dispensing.
- ABDO holds its most successful conference and exhibition for many years in Bristol.
- In November over 900 people attend the ABDO Graduation and Prize Giving Ceremony held at Canterbury Cathedral.



Pictured above

1. 2008 - Barry Duncan celebrates his Presidency at the gala dinner in Manchester
2. 2000 - Alan Parkhurst and Chris Packford
3. John Thorpe Chairman of IPF and past chairman of FODO addresses the ABDO Council at the GOC offices
4. 1999 - Malcolm Hunt's retirement party
5. 1989 - Ros Kirk explains ABDO's Letters, Patent and Grant in Arms to Councilor Ian Gray and his wife
6. 2009 - Elaine Grisdale, Sheila Hope, Katie Docker and Deanne Gray at Optrafair
7. 2010 - T Pavanakumar and Barbara Doris at the ABDO gala dinner in Bristol
8. 1989 - ABDO Secretary John Roskill (far left) and President Ros Kirk (centre) receive a cheque for the ABDO Building fund from Bausch & Lomb
9. 2003 - Derek McLaren officially opens 199 Gloucester Terrace
10. 2008 - Tony Garrett receives Honorary Fellowship from Kevin Milsom

2011

- In January, working with Canterbury Christ Church University, ABDO College launches a BSc(Hons) in Optical Dispensing Studies course specifically designed for qualified DOs who are seeking to acquire a career related degree.
- In February ABDO College holds its first ever Foundation Degree presentations.
- A new Low Vision section is added to the ABDO website.
- ABDO holds a celebration reception for the first recipients of the BSc(Hons) in Optical Dispensing Studies (ODS) at Godmersham.
- ABDO celebrates its first quarter-century with a special silver jubilee luncheon at Plaisters' Hall.
- The Association announces that the 2012 ABDO Conference and Exhibition will be held 21 & 22 April at the Holiday Inn, Stratford-upon-Avon. ■

A mission with vision



Demonstrating inspired foresight, members of the Association of Dispensing Opticians and the Faculty of Dispensing Opticians agreed in November 1984 to join forces. The very first Council meeting of the new Association of British Dispensing Opticians was held on 15 January 1986 under the chair of its first President, Tony Botten.

The timing of the formation of the new Association was spot on as the years immediately following this union would continue to throw up all manner of challenges: the introduction of VAT on spectacles and contact lenses, the advent of sight test charging with the NHS sight test limited to specified groups, unregistered sellers and internet trading, to name but a few. In November 1990, when ABDO took its scrupulously planned PR presentation to the House of Commons, no-one suspected that this would be the very day Margaret Thatcher resigned!

John Baker, President of the former ADO and John Fried former chairman of the FDO, were among those working closely together at the beginning, helping the vision become a reality. When interviewed for *Dispensing Optics* in 2008, John Fried was asked, if he had one wish for dispensing opticians, what would this be? He replied: "To be even more involved in the 'Greater Optical Family' Due to the hard work of everyone at ABDO, including the general secretary, the President and many others, dispensing opticians are now being valued more, both by employers and through the contribution they make to 'UK Optics Plc'. Optics is a small profession, and the more closely we work together for the common good, the stronger we will become."

That same year, John Baker described in *Dispensing Optics* how, around the time of the merger, the profession had been experiencing a good deal of turbulence: "Out of all this turmoil, a new climate of unity within the dispensing profession prevailed. A member of the Faculty of Dispensing Opticians and vice versa attended ADO Council meetings. We found accord with our objectives and eventually a merger of the two bodies was proposed and accepted. If the Association's membership can continue to show the kind of unity and commitment demonstrated in those early years, then the future indeed looks bright."

The future has indeed become bright. Dispensing opticians have embraced the necessity and opportunity to learn a whole range of new business and professional skills, including CET, in order to survive economic climates. The opening of ABDO College in 2001 has made possible the development of exciting professional pathways. This year marks the College's tenth anniversary.

Although it is now satisfying to look back with pride on achievements, the successes of the past twenty five years arose from initial negotiations which took place against a very gloomy background. In the 1980s, the deregulation of the dispensing function to all but certain specific categories such as children meant the threat of survival of the dispensing profession was a very real one. John Baker believes that it was this single factor that firmly concentrated minds of all involved on what was in best joint interests.

He says: "Personally I would not have done anything differently; although, at the time, there were quite a few critics of the merger. Some thought the new body would not survive without the financial support of the employer organisation known as the Guild of Dispensing Opticians. They owned the premises from which the new body operated but donated £50,000 in the form of reduced rental over three years."



2010 • The graduates assemble on the steps of Canterbury Cathedral

Some critics were against the idea of one body representing both the protective/political and the academic aspirations of dispensing and preferred the optometric set up of separate AOP and College organisations. John explains: "Not only did we not have the luxury of their financial resources but the turn of events subsequently proved our judgement at the time to be sound. The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers donated £50,000 towards the setting up of an independent trust which remains in operation today and the eventual involvement of our own independent College at Godmersham fulfilled the wishes of those who desired separation."

Negotiations, however, were not without their sticky moments. John cites one of these: "A potential problem was overcome when we agreed that the Faculty tie was to be adopted for all male members (John Pugh and I still wear it on 'special occasions')".

John recalls an amusing moment at the special AGM held by the ADO to confirm the new title and organisation at the Hyde Park Hotel where the 60th anniversary of the ADO was also being celebrated: "This was when a certain young Jennifer Brower wished to know why we needed the B in ABDO. Couldn't we continue with the old name! The B for British was the compromise reached between the two organisations to avoid any suggestion of takeover."

were so crammed together, with over forty attending our first joint meeting held at Nottingham Place, we had little alternative but to get along with one another - cheek by jowl, so to speak."

Robust and enthusiastic support came from ADO Council members of the day working together in "rock-solid" unity. Many went on to become Presidents of ABDO. Ros Kirk is particularly valued for her work in public relations during the time of deregulation and for her subsequent efforts in raising funds for the new Hurlingham premises. John Baker adds: "In addition, with public transport over two miles away, members of committees and council could boast of being the fittest in optics."

The union also owed a great deal to the scribes and secretariat of the day: John Roskill and Colin Eldridge who drew up the Aims, Memorandum and Articles and agreed the various insignia; Past Masters of the SMC Richard Thorpe, who initiated merger discussions, and Sir Richard Meyjes, who sat as an appointee on the new Council and, of course, Tony Botten, Deputy Chairman of the Faculty, who became the first President of ABDO.

Then there are those who have carried the baton forward in more recent years: Jennifer Brower with the Low Vision Diploma and Benevolent Fund; Barry

Says John: "There are many more unnamed but Malcolm Hunt and now our current general secretary Sir Anthony Garrett have contributed immensely to our continued wellbeing. It wasn't so long ago that our qualification certificates of were just sent out in a cardboard container without any form of ceremony. Now we have an annual graduation and prize giving event at Canterbury Cathedral, complete with gowns and mortar boards, for successful diplomats and their peers to celebrate success.

"Such pomp and ceremony were scarcely envisaged when those 'early pioneers' set out their stall but today they

"It wasn't so long ago that our qualification certificates of were just sent out in a cardboard container without any form of ceremony. Now we have an annual graduation and prize giving event at Canterbury Cathedral, complete with gowns and mortar boards, for successful diplomats and their peers to celebrate success." John Baker



2006 • President Kevin Milsom at the graduation ceremony

Both John Baker and John Fried want to pay tribute to the unified support of many people from different organisations. John Baker says, "I cannot speak highly enough of the committee members of the Faculty of Dispensing Opticians ably led initially by Mo Jalie and then by one of the men who I can say that I admired most - John Fried. Many of those same committee members devoted their lives to the profession and some remain active in dispensing circles today. We

Duncan with his regular news item in *Dispensing Optics*; Jo Underwood and her work in creating ABDO College and the new degree courses for DOs, ably supported by husband Jim Russell; Rosemary Bailey for her development of the Contact Lens Curriculum over many years. These people are among the many staff and volunteers who continue to ensure the on-going success of the vision held those many years ago.

are justly proud of their achievements and that, with its increasingly enhanced reputation globally, the future of the dispensing profession has many more opportunities to come." ■



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A community for sustainable success

Past Presidents share memories of their time 'at the helm' and their hopes for the future.

For over 25 years ABDO has not only survived, it has thrived. In an age of ever-expanding multi nationals, some of which have spectacularly failed, the Association has remained compact and sustainable - and nimble enough to quickly react to changing circumstances, weathering all manner of storms. It has also retained its sense of community - a great strength in what is sometimes a very anonymous working world.

Since the establishment of ABDO in 1986, members have steadily developed a culture of 'giving back' to the Association and the wider community through initiatives such as fund-raising for good causes from their practices or volunteering for sight-giving projects overseas. Added to this, much of the Association's infrastructure is upheld through the tireless, voluntary commitment of individuals from committee work at Area level to positions at national level. One of the most taxing of these roles is that of the ABDO President.



A community for sustainable success



1994 • Richard Harsant passes the duties of President on to Duncan Counter



2000 • Eric Hall passes the duties of President on to Alan Parkhurst



2002 • Alan Parkhurst passes the duties of President on to Chris Packford



2006 • James Russell and Kevin Milsom



2008 • Kevin Milsom passes the duties of President on to Barry Duncan

Ros Kirk 1989 - 1992

"It is hard to believe that twenty six years have passed since several of us first met in hired hotel rooms (neutral ground) protective of our respective Associations, unsure of each other, yet positive in the conviction that the occupation of dispensing optics had evolved into a fiercely strong entity and needed future direction. The matter under discussion was the plausibility of unification of the interests presented to

enable the profession to move forward. So many topics were talked over: economics, membership, educational aspirations and a future 'home'. The list was long and varied but at the end of months of debate all those involved were unanimously enthusiastic that we could take this by now much wanted embryo to full gestation – and look at how it has grown!

Twenty five years from foundation ABDO has not only kept up with new technology, educational courses and systems, but has led the way strongly for our own members and, dare I say it, even our optometric colleagues.

The greatest asset to the Association during this quarter century has been the membership. It is our unsung heroes, the DOs who have worked tirelessly in the background as instructors, volunteers, examiners, councillors and Area secretaries, who have brought us into the 21st century with aplomb. This is reflected back to dispensing opticians at grass roots level who daily see patients with self-assurance in their knowledge and qualification.

As I took over the Presidency in 1989 I was, of course, proud to be the first woman in the role and saw my prime task as getting around all the Areas, keeping members informed of what their new Association was doing and how it was settling into its new home at Hurlingham Business Park. This was had managed to buy after a fund-raising campaign that I had headed. It was our super members, along with industry supporters, who had come up trumps to enable us to make that purchase. How well I remember kicking off those five-a-side football matches, the quizzes, dances and all the fun.

Shortly after I took over at the ABDO helm, the GOC and the Government dropped a few bombshells on the profession that I hadn't been reckoning on and which caused my team and me many a late night. However, in the long term, those threats and changes made members even more unified. My thanks go here to all the Association's staff, past and present, for their guidance through the years.

'The greatest asset to the Association during this quarter century has been the membership.' Ros Kirk

I love keeping involved and admire immensely the wonderful young people entering the profession. The enthusiasm emanating from them at recent graduation ceremonies is infectious and inspirational.

As for the future, looking at the composition of the current membership I wish I could see more ambitious career woman aiming for the top. I am delighted Jennifer is now standing up for us; I just wish it hadn't taken so long for another lady to 'strut her stuff'. Also ladies, why aren't more of you setting up your own practices? You know how good you are.

As a profession we must look around this ever-shrinking world, and collaborate with our colleagues to establish worldwide standards and practices. We meet at the International Opticians Association only every two years. It is a great sadness to me that, through this organisation in particular, we don't join forces more. I know a possible name change for colleagues and our Association is a hot topic at the moment and I feel our role would be more understood globally if we adopted the name 'optician' and would also enable us to open up more career pathways.

Finally, as I look around the UK, I decry some of the open commercialism that has crept into optics and urge members to practise all the best of what they have learned and will continue to learn. The most important people in your working lives are the patients – look after them well, for happy patients bring you rewards.

Older, greyer (and most likely not wiser) I thank a profession and it's Association that has rewarded me so well in all respects. I raise my glass, wish it well and say - Cheers!"

Duncan Counter 1994 - 1996

"It scarcely seems possible that my term as President began back in autumn 94. It was the time of the final part of the work of the Ophthalmic Services Audit Committee. This occupied a large amount of my period of office and found us having to make a strong case to this influential GOC committee for the continued participation of dispensing opticians in UK Optics.

During this time we also saw the retirement of our long-serving general secretary John Roskill, and the recruitment process which resulted in Major General Malcolm Hunt joining us in John's place. Although John and his great experience were missed, Malcolm soon settled in and proved a formidable representative for DOs in the intra-professional arena, then in the embryonic form of what we see today with the various

'FBDO - the gold standard for anybody dispensing spectacles in the UK, and probably worldwide.'

Duncan Counter

professional bodies regularly collaborating on projects of mutual interest. From the word go there was much discussion and unity between ABDO and the other organisations in a whole range of areas.

I have been involved in the educational side of dispensing optics for many years - usually within a 'company' framework, helping and organising revision courses for students about to sit their exams. I still work in education but these days on a more ad hoc basis. As a trustee of ABDO College my student links are maintained, with the ABDO graduation ceremony in London being one of the highlights of my year. Student DOs are the lifeblood of our profession and Association; they will bring forward our future Presidents, teachers, examiners and Area representatives, and any investment in them and their progress is paramount.

This brings us to one of the big challenges for the future. ABDO has laboured over the years to raise the bar in terms of both scopes of practise and professional standards for dispensing opticians. This must be maintained and not be diluted by the addition of different dispensing-based qualifications which serve as anything other than steps on a ladder to the final aspiration of FBDO. It is important that ABDO makes it possible for qualified optical technicians, optical assistants and so forth to easily and naturally progress from their existing qualification to a course leading to the ultimate goal of qualification as FBDO - the gold standard for anybody dispensing spectacles in the UK, and probably worldwide.

The success of our Association over the years is squarely down to our members who never fail to produce quality dispensing for the UK public. They also never fail to go the extra yard and get involved in their Association for the sake of the profession as a whole. It is they who supply us with the distance learning tutors and examiners, the Board members and Presidents, the Area and National Committee members, and all who make our Association tick. Happy Anniversary to them, and to all of you."

Colin Lee 1996 - 1998

"Those of you who have met me will know I am a rather tall chap, actually measuring six feet four inches and, when Duncan Counter placed the President's chain of office around my neck, he couldn't quite reach. A box had to be found for him to stand on!" I succeeded Duncan as President and during my term as Vice President I appreciated how fully Duncan had involved me - providing a valuable introduction to the job.

Issues concerning ABDO at the time were wide and intense. They included the threat of total deregulation through the GOC's OSAC committee who were looking deeply into the whole ophthalmic service. There was also extremely low morale in the profession and this was my greatest challenge. We were battered and bruised following partial deregulation in 1988, following which, many large corporate multiples had made numerous dispensing opticians redundant. They had also stopped recruiting trainee DOs, resulting in our correspondence courses struggling to be filled. I made 'lifting our spirits' a priority, aiming to show the optical world our value and trying to instil into all our members their worth, both in the optical community and within practices.

The recognition and stature of dispensing optics within the optical profession as a whole has remained an area of special interest. I shall always strive to help ensure this situation is rectified. Dispensing opticians are still underrated in many areas and are not appreciated for their contribution to the success of optical practices. This is the biggest challenge facing the profession today and changing the way DOs are perceived and appreciated is largely in our own hands.

After partial deregulation, the doubters among us thought this was our death knell and that we would fade away. Today, many DOs continue to bemoan the fact we are not given the credit we deserve - and yet do nothing about it. They don't try to influence their optometric colleagues, when it is often from that quarter that there

'...changing the way DOs are perceived and appreciated is largely in our own hands'

Colin Lee

is a lack of appreciation or recognition.

However, in spite of some negative attitudes we have moved forward and increased in both our numbers and our presence within the world of optics. Our profession has grown and thrived in the way it has because of the inherent worth of our contribution to the optical community.

It is through improved training and education that we can help ensure the continuity of our fantastic profession. The ABDO College degree programme will enable those within our ranks and those outside who doubted our worth, to appreciate just what goes into attaining our qualification. I remember Mo Jalie telling everyone on the first block release I attended (which was the first block release in our history) that our qualification was the equivalent of a degree. It has taken some while to confirm this but he has been proved right!"



1997 • Colin Lee at the conference in Chipstow

A community for sustainable success

'The transition to GP Consortia is a challenge to all involved and it is up to ABDO and the membership to identify which skills can be offered to Consortia.'

Alan Parkhurst

Alan Parkhurst 2000 - 2002

"I became the 7th ABDO President on the 7th October 2000. If nothing else, the date should have warned me of interesting times ahead! ABDO was evolving from what had been a 'gentee' Association into one which would rightly take its place as a leading force in the optical world alongside the other optical organisations. The ABDO Board had recently appointed Tony Garrett as general secretary. Tony was a new boy on the optical scene but was extremely astute and a fast learner and he and I worked well together. Both ABDO and myself were, and are, lucky to have him at our helm.

As incoming President I had to identify any changes ABDO needed to make in order to prepare for immediate challenges. To begin with, the Association was growing out of its Hurlingham headquarters and new premises had to be found. We eventually settled in Gloucester Terrace, sharing with FODO and FMO.

Since ABDO was both a training and examining organisation the Council recognised it could not carry on with these functions under one roof. Thus our College was born, separated from the ABDO membership and is now run by a Board of Trustees. With Jo Underwood as Principal, has become a leader in the field.

The third major issue I identified was the structure of the ABDO Board. As organisations grow they have to constantly monitor their framework in order to keep up with modern and best practice to operate efficiently and cost effectively. We were probably not in the best shape to handle changes and prepare for the challenges of the new century. The Board was facing major changes and yet our Council and Committee structures had not been assessed for many years. The result of the proposed changes led to the current Board structure.

Not long into my Presidential term, supported by the Government of the day, Customs and Excise decided to mount a challenge to the optical VAT position. This led to many hours of discussion with colleagues, other bodies, VAT and legal advisers. It was a lengthy and difficult time for us all and I am grateful to my colleagues for their support during that period.

But life as ABDO President does have its lighter sides. I recall once instance, when Tony and I were checking into

a Hotel in Malaysia in preparation for presenting Diplomas to our Malaysia graduates. It was about 5pm and the reception area was very busy, about four deep at the desk in a large foyer. One of the clerks looked at us, confirmed we had a booking and asked for our credit cards. We passed them across over the crowds. The clerk looked at them, his eyes popped open, his jaw dropped - then he turned and ran into the back office. Not twenty seconds later he emerged and shouted at the top of his voice: 'President and Sir Anthony please follow me!' The whole foyer stopped to stare at these important guests. We toasted ourselves at dinner that night.

ABDO has come a long way in 25 years but we still face many issues. The transition to GP Consortia is a challenge to all involved and it is up to ABDO and the membership to identify which skills can be offered to Consortia. GP practitioners are as confused as us about what the future holds and I see this as an opportunity for ABDO to identify members within the Areas who can talk to their local Consortia and demonstrate how their skills can be used. After all, the Consortia will be looking for best value and our members can provide that within their own specialities."

Chris Packford 2002 - 2003

"One of my most challenging tasks in 02 was that of moving CET forward, as many members saw compulsory CET as a threat. Also challenging the government of the time who wanted VAT to be charged on the whole retail cost of spectacles, failing to recognise the professional element of dispensing. Our biggest challenge today involves the GOC. We must continue to fight for 'fair play' when it comes to retention fees. Reducing the DO fees by £10 does little to appease, when in real terms we are still paying the same as the optometrist, without the benefit of subsidised CET. My areas of special interest remain largely in education, both pre and post-registration. We must

continue to produce 'well-rounded' dispensing opticians who give a quality service to the public; continuing professional development is essential in order to keep abreast of changes within the profession. I still have two independent practices, and am particularly involved in paediatric dispensing. I continue to support five children's community clinics and three special needs schools as well as the eye treatment centre at my local District General Hospital. In 2005 I



2002 • The ABDO Council



2009 • The ABDO Board

‘Good vision is an essential ingredient to enjoying this time, and those who play a part in delivering this life-enhancing service to the public are blessed indeed.’

James Russell

James Russell
2003 - 2006

“The day the results of my election as President came through my dear friend Elvin Montlake telephoned me with the result. “I have...” he declared “...bad news and good news. The good news is you have won the election and the bad news is you have won the election!”

I understood what he meant. Just looking at the list of all the wonderful and capable Presidents before me, I realised I was in trouble. The

only way I could ever be effective in the role was to be totally reliant on our general secretary (the amazingly talented Tony Garrett) the officers of the Association, its staff and Board - and my many friends in the profession. Help was given constantly, consistently and often quietly unsung from those who were then, as they are now, passionate about our profession and its future.

It was no easy task engaging with the Government’s political policies and personalities of the day, making sure the Association’s governance, staff and organisation were delivering efficient and effective outcomes, supporting members and students in the workplace, ensuring educational pathways were relevant to a changing market place and were of the highest standard, managing finances and properties, encouraging the governing Board of the College, ensuring overseas activities were healthy and fit for purpose and engaging and fostering relationships with all the other optical bodies.

For the last 25 years ABDO, like the ADO before, has played a pivotal and significant role in the delivery of great optical care in the primary sector. It has set the highest standards of education, clinical excellence and commercial awareness and its members, along with our colleagues in the profession, continue to deliver superb service and optical care on every High Street in the country. No wonder I am proud to have been President for nearly three years.

We are all living longer and this is an absolute joy to those who, like me, are rapidly approaching late middle-age. Good vision is an essential ingredient to enjoying this time, and those who play a part in delivering this life-enhancing service to the public are blessed indeed. Our members are out on the High Street providing fantastic service combined with commercial skill and clinical care to the great British Public day after day. They are the reason this Association is strong and will go on getting stronger and they are the reason I am still enjoying so many different and exciting roles in our profession. Congratulations to my Association for the last 25 years and here’s to the next 25!”

was appointed to an honorary position at Great Ormond Street Hospital (for Children). I cover the maxo-cranial facial clinic which affords many challenges. My son Simon (FBDO) ably supports me in this and we both get incredible satisfaction from the specialist dispensing required.

‘We must continue to produce ‘well-rounded’ dispensing opticians who give a quality service to the public; continuing professional development is essential in order to keep abreast of changes within the profession.’ Chris Packford

The maxo-cranial facial clinic is a specialist combined out-patient clinic comprising surgeons, nurses, optometrists, orthoptists and dispensing opticians. It is held one day each week

for children referred from, not only the UK, but from all over the world. The age group is mainly under-fives but includes children from just a few weeks old to adolescents. These children require or have had surgery to eyes, head, ears, jaw, face and neck for a variety of disorders such as congenital/genetic abnormalities, cancers and trauma.

Sometimes the parents of children have been issued with a prescription on a day they are not in clinic and have therefore taken it to a local optician only to be told ‘You cannot dispense a child of this age.’ Of course our answer for these DOs is: ‘Yes you can!’ - if you are motivated enough to gain the expertise, or to ring and ask for help.”

Chris recently gave a lecture on paediatric dispensing to the team at GOSH. He cited case histories from the clinic which proved very helpful to all as often, when professionals only do their ‘bit’ - i.e. the surgeon, they may not be aware of the full outcome for the patient and family further down the line.

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‘The profession has a bright future but we have to keep forging forward to create new pathways for our members to follow.’

Kevin Milsom

Kevin Milsom 2006 - 2008

“The challenges I faced included the Foster review which dealt with all health professions after the Shipman Case. We were more or less allowed to be involved but the Government decided how they would proceed and we are still dealing with some of the fall out

now, often with outcomes such as the vetting and barring, being reversed. Within ABDO I helped organise the strong team within the examinations department that has taken the Association’s examination structure to a new level. It was during my Presidency that the ABDO College degree course was discussed and applied for with those in the first year beginning their education just before I handed over to Barry Duncan.

The two-year term as President can be a sobering time. One thing that stood out for me was the support some parents showed for their children. I have attended Canterbury Cathedral for the Association’s Graduation and Prize Giving Ceremony many times and I have always been impressed to see how parents show their support for the graduands. Both during my Presidency and since I have been involved in graduations in Malaysia and the way parents of the students over there support their children is second to none. Every graduand receives some form of token presented by their parents - often a huge bouquet of flowers with a teddy bear in cap and gown in the middle. Memories like this are the ones I have carried with me as these were among the times when I felt the profession was getting things right.

I am involved with Optometry Wales as an Observer now, although I was previously ABDO’s representative. Within Wales I now represent ABDO on a committee called the Welsh Optometric Committee which advises the Minister for Health in Wales with discussions relevant to the day-to-day jobs of those involved in optics. I was also invited to be a member of a committee which is associated with Cardiff University Optometry Department, which discusses post graduate courses and the possibility of masters courses at Cardiff.

In addition, I am currently Vice Chairman of the Joint Committee of the European Union, which forms the British contingent of the European Committee of Optometry and Optics. During 2012 I will take over the role of Chairman of this committee.

The profession has a bright future but we have to keep forging forward to create new pathways for our members to follow. I urge our members to take part in any future developments that interest them. As time goes on there will be options that will be of great interest to many. Changes that arise may not suit everyone but we need to make sure we embrace these. People who wish to be part of proposed developments have the opportunity to improve their skills and embrace the evolving optical arena with the customary vigour shown by dispensing opticians.”

Barry Duncan 2008 - 2010

“I fondly recall the day when I was elected Vice President. Each year we have our family holiday in the last week of June; therefore, in a departure from protocol, I was unable to attend the meeting where the voting took place. I was sitting by a swimming pool in Cyprus when my proposer Mike Cody communicated the result. Mike was excited as he explained the position, making it perfectly clear that there would be no airs or graces just because I was going to be President! If ever good news was to be followed by a sudden sense of reality, it was then.

through. No need to mention names as I have thanked them personally and they know how grateful I am.

In terms of time commitment to ABDO, it seemed as though I was on a plane every week, phone constantly at my ear (particularly Friday afternoons on my way to Crieff), answering emails, writing documents, attending meetings, as well as running half marathons and trying to hold down a full-time job. Yes, it was tough and by the end I was on my knees. That said, fatigue is temporary, and the pride for giving everything to the role of ABDO President will be with me forever.

Regarding the future for ABDO and its members, I believe we must start to



2011 • The BSc(Hons) in Optical Dispensing Studies graduates

‘Achieving FBDO is merely the beginning of a journey of great satisfaction and rewards from a career in optics.’

Barry Duncan

On the 9 September 2008, at 33 years of age I became the youngest President of ABDO. My life changed dramatically, so much so that it is difficult to explain in words how, in the space of ten minutes you become the figurehead of ABDO with the weight of expectation firmly placed on your shoulders. Speaking in front of 400 people at a gala dinner is the best form of laxative an individual with no previous experience in that field could ever wish to have!

You cannot do the job on your own as the amount of activity we are involved in these days has spiraled, something many will not appreciate. However, I was fortunate to have terrific people around to help me

operate with a much firmer belief in what we are and what we can do. Members need to recognise that they are highly skilled people who are custodians of eye care in all sorts of fields and who can make a significant difference to peoples’ sight and lives. Achieving FBDO is merely the beginning of a journey of great satisfaction and rewards from a career in optics.” ■



**Association of British
Dispensing Opticians**

1986 - 2011 • 25th Anniversary

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