

'...I have wanted to be an advocate for those people who are least likely to speak for themselves...'

Presidential address

Sue Greening was installed as the new President of the British Dental Association at the 2006 British Dental Conference and Exhibition held in Birmingham on May 18-20 2006. The following is her presidential address.

Good morning everyone!

It is an honour and a privilege to be standing here amongst so many of my family and friends to become President of this Association.

It is a particular pleasure to carry out my first duty as President in congratulating and thanking John Craig for the hard work he has done for us all during his term of office. John has always been someone for whom I have had great admiration, and to whom I have been able to turn for advice - as have others here today - so I am delighted to acknowledge his excellent contribution during the last year and prior to that, and to wish him and his wife Irene all the very best for the future.

I cannot tell you how humble I feel standing here as President of this Association, which I feel has done more for me than I have done for it! It has been a great pleasure to have been part of the BDA, at Branch and Section level, at Divisional and Council level in Wales, and at National level, and I have gained in knowledge and in the lifelong friendships that I have made over the 30 years or so of being part of that structure.

I am particularly delighted to be here as the first Welsh woman, and the first practising community dentist to be in this position. I feel that this is an honour that I share with all the dedicated salaried dentists who have been an inspiration to me over the years and I am extremely grateful to the Community Dental Services Group and the Welsh Council for their help and support.

I certainly would not be here if it was not for my colleagues in my 'day job', both at management level in Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust, who employ me, and those who work with me every day in the Community Dental Service in Gwent and particularly in Cwmbran. Without their patience and understanding I would not have carried out the work I have for the BDA and I thank them all for their support and tolerance.

My final thanks go to my ever-patient family, who I think have always thought I was a bit mad doing what I

have done, but have always accepted my commitment to the profession and my need to do all I can for the dentists and patients I have represented throughout my career.

John said in his Presidential Address last year how daunting it is to look at those Presidents who have gone before and what a responsibility it is to follow in such eminent footsteps. When I looked at the Roll of Past

Presidents it was quickly apparent that men have dominated this position and I am only the third woman to become President. The last woman President, in 1993, is in the audience today and many of you will know her. It is a great pleasure to be following in the footsteps of Dame Margaret Seward. She has been a mentor and a friend to me and to many dentists, particularly women, and has made a huge contribution to dentistry and to the Association. I did not, however, know much about the first Lady President - and she was also a very special lady it seems, so I thought it my duty to learn a little about someone who must have been a remarkable woman to

have become President in 1946, 60 years ago this year, in such a male dominated world as dentistry was then.

What I found was so interesting, and relevant to our Association today that I felt I must share some of it with you in this address.

Lilian Murray, as she was then, went to school in London where her head teacher advised her to become a teacher for 'deaf and dumb' children, but this strong minded young lady was insistent that she wanted to become a dentist, and following a three year apprenticeship she became registered as a dental student. Women were not accepted for dentistry in England at that time and so Lilian Murray became a student in Edinburgh. On her first day as a student she met Robert Lindsay who showed her round the dental school and later became her husband.

She qualified in 1895 - the first woman to become a dentist. It was not easy for her, as some of her friends' comments have informed us. Robert Lindsay himself apparently whilst showing her round on her first day as



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a student, asked her why she wanted to be a dentist. She said that she had to earn a living somehow and thought she could do it this way. He replied 'If that's your reason you had better go home and think again' – not too encouraging!

Similarly, it seems she had a hard time with some of the staff whilst she was a student and she herself relates to an occasion when one of her teachers told her 'I am afraid Madam, you are taking the bread out of some poor fellow's mouth!' He wouldn't be allowed to say that today – fortunately times have changed. Even when she apparently first joined the BDA she was told that she could join, but she would not be able to attend any meetings! She worked as a general dental practitioner with Robert Lindsay and they were married 10 years after qualifying, and when he became secretary (equivalent to our present Chief Executive) of the BDA they retired from practice and moved into the flat above the newly acquired home of the BDA in Russell Square.

For the first time there was enough space for a library and Lilian Lindsay became the Honorary Librarian following the establishment of the library committee in 1920. This became her main interest with special emphasis on the historical aspects of dentistry. She worked tirelessly with apparently little support from the Representative Body of the time! As part of her husband's duties he travelled widely in this country and abroad. Lilian Lindsay travelled with him and always had a mind open to new ideas for the Association, the library and the museum. In 1919 she donated several instruments to the Association which she had stored in a box under her bed. From this humble beginning the BDA museum now houses 20,000 objects representing all aspects of dentistry. How proud she would have been to have seen the newly refurbished museum, which has recently been opened and which I would strongly recommend to all our members.

She received honours too numerous to mention, including becoming President of the Metropolitan Branch in 1933 and National President in 1946. The accolades throughout the literature acknowledge a 'truly remarkable woman' – comments such as 'a gracious and loved lady', 'she is irreplaceable' and 'how could one small head carry all she knew'!

That was the lady herself – what about her views on dentistry? To discover that, I looked at her Presidential Address which, not surprisingly, had a historical bias. It was however a surprise to me to read her comments on the importance of the school dental service – the precursor of the CDS in which I work! In fact having read her address I almost scrapped my own and delivered hers

again – so much of relevance to today did it contain.

She talks about perhaps the first dental epidemiologist who examined the mouths of 1000 children and tabulated the results as to the average stage of eruption of teeth in various age groups. He revealed dental disease in children was widespread. She comments:

'It was customary at the time (mid 19th century) for the private practitioner to devote the early hours of his morning to gratuitous treatment of the teeth of the poor in his surgery and it was obvious that with the rapidly increasing population a more extensive service was necessary if the poor were not to be left prey to the quacks.'

Well I hope we don't have too many quacks, but that sounds like an access problem to me!

She goes on to talk about the founding of the first school dental clinic in Cambridge, developed with what she called a 'munificent' gift of money from a layman, and the London County Council started the first funded school dental clinic on a part time basis.

Her comments on the school dental service of the time were strong and will no doubt amuse some of the salaried dentists in the audience.

'School clinics have been disgracefully equipped and as disgracefully housed in barns and outhouses, in vestries with concrete floors, no natural light and often no

heat and no water. Men and women entering the service with high enthusiasm have lost this precious attribute as well as their health!'

Perhaps at that point we should return to today, where we don't quite have these problems but I do recognise in those words the struggle we have had in the salaried service over the years to get the funding and recognition for the valuable services that I feel we provide. Many of us here will have fought and are still fighting hard to keep the services we provide for the vulnerable in our society and presently the pressures on that service are as real as ever. I have always been passionate about the need to ensure provision of care for people least able to seek out care for themselves and that is in essence why I am here today – because I have wanted to be an advocate for those people who are least likely to speak for themselves, particularly children, disabled people and the frail older person and those providing their dental care. I am therefore delighted at the recent agreement to establish a specialist list in Special Care Dentistry and look forward to the reality of that. Those of us who have worked hard for this believe that this will ensure ongoing services of high quality, for some of those vulnerable groups, whatever changes happen within our provider services. We are however



Lillian Lindsay

going to have to keep fighting to ensure that our salaried services are not subsumed within the need for access for all and particularly those who shout loudest!

We do not yet know how the new ways of working will affect NHS care in England and Wales, and there are great uncertainties in the other parts of the UK at present. There is no better time for us all to be supportive of each other in whichever branch of dentistry we work to ensure that we continue to live rewarding professional lives. We can only do this if we are doing the best for our patients.

'It's been a difficult year for our members in whichever setting they work...'

Valedictory Address

Dr John Craig was installed as the President of the British Dental Association at last year's 2005 National Annual Conference held in Glasgow. At this year's British Dental Conference and Exhibition in Birmingham he gave his valedictory address.

In my Presidential Address last year, I summoned up the ghost of our first President Sir John Tomes and then, after seeking his opinion on modern dentistry and the BDA, I made him disappear back into his portrait.

My main task today, metaphorically speaking at any rate, is to make myself disappear and leave the stage to our incoming President Sue Greening. Before I do that, however, may I say a few words about my year as your President.

I have visited Branches, Sections and Groups; I have attended Young Dentists and Student Conferences; I have been all over the UK, from Poole to Dundee, from Norwich to Belfast and from Newcastle to Swansea. I have presented lectures, given toasts, made speeches and eaten a lot of chicken dinners; I have even 'Addressed the Haggis' at a Burns Ceilidh in, of all places, Stockton on Tees. I have visited members in every country of the UK and everywhere, without exception, the welcome and hospitality has been warm and unstinting.

It's been a difficult year for our members in whichever setting they work, whether it be General Practice, Hospital, Community or Academia; but dentists are nothing if not resilient and, if you don't know it already, take it from me, they certainly know how to enjoy themselves.

So to all the colleagues and their friends and families, who looked after Irene and me so well and so generously, my sincere thanks and appreciation. You have all made me very proud to be the President of an association which has

I am proud to be a dentist, proud of our profession and above all today, proud to be President of this Association. I thank you all and all who have gone before me for making this a very special day.

**Sue Greening – BDS Wales DCDP Kings
Associate Clinical Director
Specialist in Paediatric Dentistry
Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust
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as members such kind, friendly and sociable people.

My thanks also to the BDA staff who have helped and 'managed' the President in the last year and in particular to Kerry Dalton. Kerry's organisational skills are awesome and she does it all with such great good humour. Kerry, thank you very much indeed.

And last, but of course not least, thanks to Irene, whose forbearance at hearing me give yet another speech has surely been above and beyond the call of any wife's duty.

Our incoming President, Sue Greening, is only the third woman ever to be President of the BDA. She joins the select and very illustrious duo of Lillian Lindsay and Dame Margaret Seward and, if I may be so ungallant as to comment on a lady's age, she will I believe be the youngest ever President of the Association.

I would like to wish Sue all the best for her Presidential year. I am sure she will have a memorable and enjoyable

time as President. I am also sure that she will make a marvellous ambassador for the Association.

Finally, my thanks to the members of the BDA for giving me the immense honour of being President of the Association. It has been hard work but it has been a delight from start to finish. May our Association and its members grow and prosper, and through them, may the Art, Science and Ethics of dentistry continue to flourish.



John Craig

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