

EDITORIAL

Time, tide and industry

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Time ... and tide wait for no man ... is a great healer ... represents the longest distance between two places ... we each have our own chequered relationships with this mercurial metric. What is not at issue is that it provides a universal comparison of achievement and with great pride the British Dental Industry Association (BDIA) has measured its time against the calendar and reaches its 100th anniversary this year.

Being mindful of this celebration, I recalled writing an editorial entitled 'Trade and industry' but on checking was amazed that it was as long ago as 2013.¹ Time eludes us indeed. The starting point for that piece was the announcement that the BDIA was amending its name from the British Dental Trade Association, swapping Trade for Industry, to better represent the broadening activities and services of its members in a changing world. As the Chief Executive at the time Tony Reed predicted at the press conference announcement, it would take many years before we got used to using the new acronym, especially when referring to what would become the annual BDIA Showcase exhibition. In that he was correct as now, this decade on, we use BDIA without a second thought, illustrating how adaptable we are to shifting circumstances. What also intrigued me re-reading the editorial was one of the analogies I used in describing change. I pondered on how garages had shifted their business model from a basis of selling petrol and diesel to becoming shops and mini-supermarkets. What I didn't write, because it certainly wasn't on my horizon in 2013, was that their future was going to be substantially skewed by a change to electric vehicles. In a further decade, will we have continued the continuity from garages to petrol stations to electricity charging points? Or will they, as has been the trend with internet-facilitated finances, like high street banks be variously converted to restaurants, retail premises or

residential accommodation? What seems fanciful today becomes fact tomorrow.

The BDIA is holding a glittering celebratory dinner later this month on the *Cutty Sark* in South London. This caused me to dip into some research about the ship. What took me unawares but which is entirely in keeping with the theme of shifting fortunes and opportunities is the history of the vessel. It is now grandly displayed in dry dock and a prominent part of Greenwich on the Thames peninsula. As such, its past as the fastest tea-clipper makes one assume that it had that status for its whole life before being retired to well-deserved admiration and glory. It transpires that that is not the case at all. It too has had to duck and weave its way through changing commercial fortunes.



'What seems fanciful today becomes fact tomorrow.'

Built in Dumbarton, Scotland in 1869 on its maiden voyage, the ship departed London on 15 February 1870, bound for Shanghai. On this outward voyage, it carried a general cargo, including wine, spirits and manufactured goods and reached China on 31 May. Then loaded with 1,305,812 lbs of tea it sped back to London, arriving on 13 October the same year.

All seemed set fair until technology stepped in with the advent of the steam engine. Now, far from recognised as the fastest seagoing entity to bring tea to the thirsty British consumer, it lagged behind and was demoted to transporting wool from Australia. Later still in its life, demoted from being the golden galleon of its youth, it was sold off to a company in Portugal where it languished for many years before being bought back

to the UK and reincarnated as a national treasure. Its changes of fortune were caused by developments outwith its own influence and in many ways it provides an interesting comparison to the vagaries of our current situations. Like steam ships, who could have envisaged direct to consumer aligners, digital dentistry, imaging and now AI?

What has not changed, and I cannot see changing, is the mutual reliance between our erstwhile profession and the supporting dental industry. It is and will remain an essential partnership in our mission to improve oral health by seeking to prevent and treat diseases and conditions. The conundrum of health and business inevitably raises its head. Yes, the members of the BDIA are out to make a livelihood and a

profit but then so are we as practitioners and business owners. By acknowledging the essential reliance on one another, we allow for a far greater understanding and positive collaborative approach which benefits all involved. Negotiation of course, such is the nature of human interaction, but also respect and understanding for fellow travellers towards the same shared goals.

So, our congratulations, and thanks, go to the BDIA and its members with the sincere hope that we will still be appreciative and co-operative partners for a further century at least whatever time and tide throw our ways. ■

References

1. Hancocks S. Trade and industry. *Br Dent J* 2013; **215**: 487. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-023-5978-3>