

The history of the Association for the Study of Obesity

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Formation

In November 1966 a steering committee of scientists, doctors and health therapists who all shared an interest in obesity instructed a firm of solicitors to prepare the memorandum and articles of a new organization to be called the Obesity Association, which was duly launched on 16 January 1967 from 34 Weymouth Street, London W1. The objectives of the association were 'to provide an organization for the benefit and treatment of obesity and associated disorders, and to promote the study of the causes and treatment thereof'.

The press and radio acknowledged the event, and a sample of the coverage is shown in Figure 1. The initiator, prime mover and first Secretary of the new Obesity Association was Phillip Lebon (Figure 2), a Harley Street cosmetic surgeon who was motivated by a number of reasons. A close relative of his had a perpetual weight problem despite using innumerable diets. Many of his patients were obese and frequently sought a remedy in cosmetic surgery. He himself became interested in the Simeons treatment using a 500kcal diet and human chorionic gonadotrophin.¹ Lebon was a close friend of Professor Simeons of Rome, also a founder member of the new association, whose controversial treatment (now largely discontinued) was the forerunner of modern very low calorie diets.

Phillip Lebon is to be greatly congratulated and thanked for his foresight in starting this much needed association, since it was largely due to his efforts that the initial foundations were laid. To help him, founder members (Table 1) were drawn from distinguished members of the medical and scientific community interested in obesity, and several of them played a very active role.

Table 1 Founder members of the Association

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| I.M. Baird* | H.J. Shapiro* |
| J. Bjerer | J.T. Silverstone* |
| D. Cuthbertson | A.T.W. Simeons |
| L. Duncan | S. Szanto* |
| D.M. Kisser | A. Dickenson Weight |
| P. Lebon* | H.B. Wright |
| Z.A. Leitner* | |

* played an active role.

The association consisted of two branches: a medical and scientific section, which was asked to organize scientific meetings, to foster research and to provide an advisory board for advice to members of the public; and a lay branch which was concerned with fund raising and the education of the public in appropriate treatments for obesity (Table 2). The cost of membership was two guineas per annum. From its early days, the association was fortunate in having two distinguished medical researchers in office, namely Professor Butterfield, head of the Department of Medicine at Guy's Hospital, London, as President, and Dr McLean Baird, a consultant at the

Table 2 Early organization of the Association

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| President | Professor W.J.H. Butterfield |
| Chairman | Dr I. McLean Baird |
| Secretary | Mr P. Lebon |
| Research Committee | Mr D.S. Miller |
| Editorial Committee | Dr J.T. Silverstone |
| Symposium Chairman | Dr A.N. Howard |
| Lay Committee | Mr Z. Barrington |

West Middlesex Hospital, London, as Chairman. By giving his support, Professor John Butterfield (Figure 3) provided the association with integrity and a claim to be a serious organization. Dr Ian

McLean Baird (Figure 4) was very much a driving force in the early days and diplomatically attempted to bring widely divergent opinions to a consensus.



Tuesday
January 17th
1967

New hope for the fatties

By ARTHUR SMITH

Mirror Science Correspondant

OVERWEIGHT Britons will soon be able to join a new society aimed at fighting obesity.

The group, the British Obesity Association, is being formed by a com-

mittee of twenty-four medical specialists. One of them, Harley-street surgeon Mr Phillip Lebon said yesterday: "Few people realise that obesity is a sickness. Nor do they realise the harm it can do. "It can easily aggravate other conditons such as

cancer, heart trouble or arthritis." He added: "No one knows how many obese people there are in Britain but it is safe to say that one-third of the population is overweight.

"The new association will encourage and sponsor research into obesity and publish a journal.

Figure 1 One of the press notices on the launch of the Obesity Association.



Figure 2 Phillip Lebon FRCS (right), first Secretary 1967-1969, being congratulated by Alan Howard (left).



Figure 3 Professor John Butterfield, now Lord Butterfield, President 1967-1970.



Figure 4 Dr Ian 1967-1972.

The first symposium

The first major event was a symposium Medicine on 19 C was entitled 'Mech Obesity', and the Churchill Livingstone symposium speaker the most important the time, the stars provide an up-to-c

Table 3 Speakers at Obesity in 1968

| Chairman: |
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| I.M. Baird |
| T. Hanley |
| A.N. Howard |
| A. Kekwick |
| P. Lebon |
| J. Lloyd |

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Butterfield, now Lord
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Figure 4 Dr Ian McLean Baird, first Chairman 1967-1972.

The first symposium

The first major event of the Obesity Association was a symposium at the Royal Society of Medicine on 19 October 1968. The Symposium was entitled 'Medical and Scientific Aspects of Obesity', and the proceedings were published by Churchill Livingstone (Figure 5) in 1968. The symposium speakers (Table 3) were drawn from the most important medical scientific workers of the time, the stars of their day. Their brief was to provide an up-to-date account of the state-of-the-

Table 3 Speakers at the First National Symposium on Obesity in 1968

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| Chairman: W.J.H. Butterfield | |
| I.M. Baird | D.S. Miller |
| T. Hanley | G.L.S. Pawan |
| A.N. Howard | J.T. Silverstone |
| A. Kekwick | S. Szanto |
| P. Lebon | P. Turner |
| J. Lloyd | J. Yudkin |

art at that time. Thus it was not at all surprising when one of the reviewers commented that the Proceedings 'was a handy reference volume, but contained nothing new'.

The change of name

In early 1969 members of the Committee of Management had severe disagreements as to the role of the association in the community. Much of the discussion centred on whether members of the Committee should be involved in or associated with commercial ventures such as popular slimming magazines. To resolve these and other issues an important and decisive committee meeting was held on 11 July 1969 when the decision was made to discontinue the lay branch, which had been the source of most of the disagreements. Subsequently the association became a medical/scientific society, and held scientific meetings intended solely for a professional audience.

To demonstrate that there had been a change in policy, the name was changed to the Association for the Study of Obesity, and the lay members, about 50% of the total, had their subscriptions returned. A powerful influence in these decisions was Dr Trevor Silverstone (Figure 6) of St Bartholomew's Hospital, who later became Chairman from 1972 to 1975. He set the pattern for the Association as it exists today, having three meetings per annum being chiefly held at the Royal Society of Medicine, at one of which original work is presented. His secretary, Christine Hawkins (Figure 7), became Member-

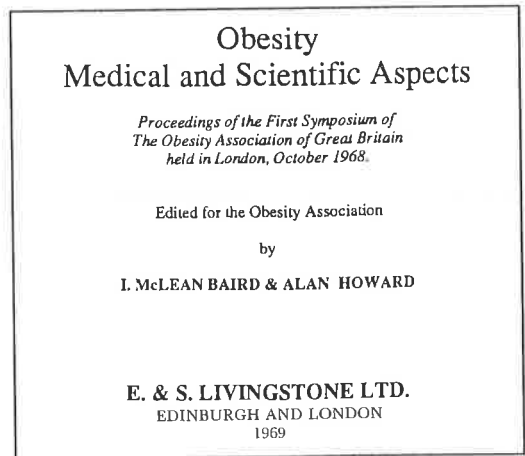


Figure 5 Publication of the Proceedings of the First Symposium on Obesity held in 1968.



Figure 6 Professor Trevor Silverstone, Chairman 1972-1975.

ship Secretary of the Association in 1972, and has held this office ever since. The Association owes a great debt to her devotion to the organization and its continuity.

The international congress and journal

Subsequent to discussions between myself and Dr George Bray of the University of California, Los Angeles, the committee decided to organize the first International Congress on Obesity, which was held at the Royal College of Physicians, in October 1974 under the chairmanship of Dr Trevor Silverstone (Table 4). About 500 scientists attended from 30 countries, and the proceedings were published by Newman Publishing Limited, London, and edited by myself (Figure 8). It was the first international meeting devoted to obesity and allowed contact between many scientists in the field. Among the new work presented were several papers on the subject of VLCDs, from which the modern nutritionally

Table 4 Organizing committee of the First International Congress on Obesity, 1974

| President: W.J.H. Butterfield | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Organizing Committee | |
| Chairman | Dr T. Silverstone |
| General Secretary | Dr V. Montegriffo |
| Treasurer | W.E. Arnould-Taylor |
| Administrative Secretary | Kim Solly |
| Scientific Secretary | Jill Fincham |
| Press Secretary | Pamela Vandyke Price |
| Dr I. McLean Baird | Dr A.N. Howard |
| Professor A.H. Crisp | Dr G.L.S. Pawan |
| Dr D.J. Galton | Dr J.P. Sedgwick |
| Dr J.S. Garrow | Professor P. Turner |

Table 5 International Congresses on Obesity held in various cities

| Year | Place | Chairman |
|------|---------------|------------------|
| 1974 | London | J.T. Silverstone |
| 1977 | Washington DC | G. Bray |
| 1980 | Rome | M. Cairella |
| 1983 | New York | J. Hirsch |
| 1986 | Jerusalem | S.H. Blondheim |
| 1990 | Kobe | Y. Oomura |
| 1994 | Toronto | A. Angel |



Figure 7 Christine Hawkins, Membership Secretary 1972 to present.

RECENT OBESITY

Proceedings of the
Congress on Obesity
8-11 October 1974
Held at the
Royal College of Physicians

Edited by
ALAN HOWARD
University of Cambridge

Organised by the
Association for the Study of Obesity

PUBLISHED BY

Figure 8 Publication of the First International Congress on Obesity, 1974

complete formula for commercial sale.² The first International Congress on Obesity was organized (Table 4) and now every year is held in Toronto.

As a result of the 1974 Congresses, Dr V. Montegriffo of California and I published the *Journal of Obesity*. One of the publishers was Pamela Vandyke Price of Libbey, who she had a company. Thus the *Journal of Obesity* has been published since. The journal and the current *Journal of Obesity* (Figure 10), then from 1987 to 1994 with the backing of the many of its members. Abstracts of original research are presented at the annual meeting. The *International Journal of Obesity* is very successful, and very wide appropriate that should be published as a journal.

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Journal

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Chairman

J.T. Silverstone
G. Bray
M. Cairrella
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RECENT ADVANCES IN OBESITY RESEARCH :1

Proceedings of the 1st International
Congress on Obesity
8-11 October 1974
Held at the
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Edited by
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Organised by the
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PUBLISHED BY NEWMAN PUBLISHING LTD.



Figure 8 Publication of the Proceedings of the 1st International Congress on Obesity.

complete formulations were developed for commercial sale.² The success of the first International Congress led to many more being organized (Table 5), initially every three years and now every four years. The next one will be held in Toronto, Canada, in August 1994.

As a result of the interest in the International Congresses, Dr George Bray of the University of California and I (Figure 9) decided to approach a publisher to launch the *International Journal of Obesity*. One of the partners of Newman who published the Congress Proceedings was John Libbey, who shortly thereafter formed his own company. Thus in January 1977 the *International Journal of Obesity* was launched with John Libbey as the publisher, and has continued ever since. The journal is now owned by Macmillan, and the current editor is Professor Michael Stock (Figure 10), the chairman of the Association from 1987 to 1990. The new journal had the backing of the committee of the Association and many of its members joined the editorial board. Abstracts of original communications presented at the annual meeting were published therein. The *International Journal of Obesity* has been very successful, and has achieved a substantial and very wide international readership. It is appropriate that the proceedings of this meeting should be published as a supplement to the journal.



Figure 9 Dr George Bray, University of California, Los Angeles (top) and Dr Alan Howard, University of Cambridge (bottom), Founding Editors of the *International Journal of Obesity* (photographs taken in the 1970s).



Figure 10 Professor Michael Stock, Chairman 1987–1990, present Editor of the *International Journal of Obesity*.

Table 6 Chairmen of the Association

| Year | Chairman | Hospital |
|------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1967 | Ian McLean Baird | West Middlesex |
| 1972 | Trevor Silverstone | St. Bartholomew's |
| 1975 | John Garrow | Northwick Park |
| 1978 | Gaston Pawan | Middlesex |
| 1981 | Tom Pilkington | St. George's |
| 1984 | Michael Cawthorne | (Beecham) |
| 1987 | Michael Stock | St. George's |
| 1990 | Peter Kopelman | Royal London |

Table 7 Secretaries of the Association

| Year | Secretary |
|------|--------------------|
| 1967 | Phillip Lebon |
| 1969 | Alan Howard |
| 1969 | Harold Shapiro |
| 1972 | Victor Montegriffo |
| 1975 | Gaston Pawan |
| 1978 | John Blundell |
| 1981 | Margaret Ashwell |
| 1984 | Christine Bowyer |
| 1989 | Michael Enser |



Figure 11 Dr Peter Kopelman, Chairman 1990 to present.



Figure 12 Dr Michael Enser, Secretary 1989 to present.



Figure 13 25th Ann officers of the Assoc Howard, N. Finer, T row—H. Shapiro, P



Figure 14 Speaker From left to right: t Jeanrenaud; front r

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West Middlesex
St. Bartholomew's
Northwick Park
Middlesex
St. George's
(Beecham)
St. George's
Royal London

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n Howard
old Shapiro
tor Montegriffo
ston Pawan
n Blundell
rgaret Ashwell
ristine Bowyer
ichael Enser



Figure 13 25th Anniversary meeting of the Association, Royal College of Physicians, London. Present and past officers of the Association attending. From left to right: back row—J. Garrow, P. Kopelman, T. Pilkington, A.N. Howard, N. Finer, T. Silverstone, M. Cawthorne, C. Bowyer, (H. Rose), M. Ashwell, M. Stock, M. Enser; front row—H. Shapiro, P. Lebon, C. Hawkins, I. McLean Baird.

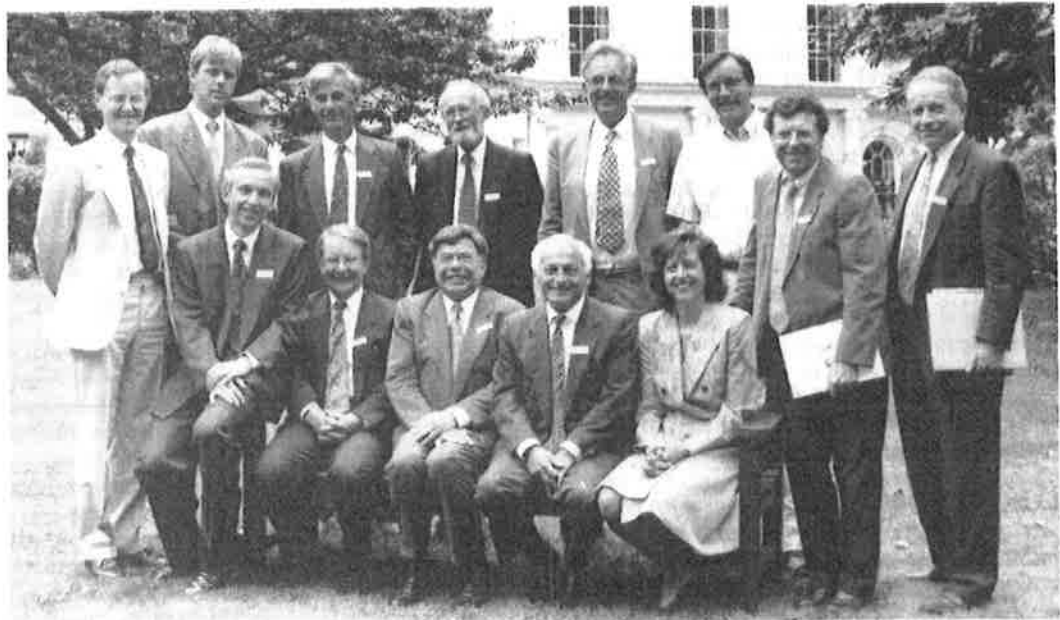


Figure 14 Speakers at the 25th Anniversary meeting of the Association, Royal College of Physicians, London. From left to right: back row—R. Turner, J. Seidell, J. Garrow, M. Stock, J. Munro, T. Sorensen, G. Ailhaud, B. Jeanrenaud; front row—P. Kopelman, P. James, A.N. Howard, T. Silverstone and C. Bowyer.



er, Secretary 1989 to

Achievements

Over the last 25 years many distinguished workers have been Chairmen and Secretaries of the Association (Tables 6 and 7), and its success has led many other countries to form similar associations for the study of obesity. These now include Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA.

Members of our Association can be justly proud of our many achievements which include:

- First National Association Meeting (1967)
- First International Symposium (1968)
- First International Congress (1974)
- *International Journal of Obesity* launched (1977)

In addition, we were a founder member of the International Association for the Study of Obesity and the European Society for Obesity.

When Phillip Lebon and his fellow scientists founded the Obesity Association 25 years ago, they had no idea of its future impact. Like Baden Powell founding the Boy Scouts or General Booth founding the Salvation Army, from a

small body of people has been created an international organization of enormous influence.

The 25th anniversary meeting

This 25th anniversary meeting was organized by the current committee headed by Dr Peter Kopelman (Figure 11) as Chairman and Dr Michael Enser (Figure 12) as Secretary, and was attended by many past and present officers of the Association (Figure 13). As in the first national symposium held in 1967, this anniversary meeting includes many scientists eminent in their field (Figure 14), who gave an up-to-date review of their subject.

Their presentations are a splendid tribute and memorial to the worthy endeavours of the Association over the last 25 years.

References

- 1 Simeons, A.T.W. (1954): The action of chorionic gonadotrophin in the obese. *Lancet* **ii**, 946-947.
- 2 Howard, A.N. (1989): The historical development of very low calorie diets. *Int J Obes* **13** (Suppl. 2), 1-9.

International Journal of

The import diabetes

B. Jeanrenaud
F. Assimacopoulos
O. Bchini H

*Laboratoires de
Switzerland*

It is well-known models, that typified by overwork, resistance, hypertension to carbohydrate towards long-term of this syndrome research. Our studied this syndrome the hope of establishing relationships. We clinical relevance with the help of with satisfactory

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