

PROFILE

Hamlyn R Brier (1911–2001)
Queensland's optometrist for all seasons

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Hamlyn Royston Brier (Figure 1), known as 'Lyn', was born in Brisbane in 1911. He was the eldest of three children and only son of Clara Garland Abell (1882–1977) and Royston Carr Brier (1884–1960). He was born into a family of respected professional leaders and was seemingly destined for a distinguished career in optometry.

FAMILY INFLUENCES

Royston Brier, Hamlyn's father, was a prominent figure in Queensland optometry. He was the chief optician and director of Flavelle Brothers, the first firm of opticians established in Brisbane and was a founding member of the Institute of Ophthalmic Opticians of Queensland (IOOQ) in 1908. He was admitted to Fellowship of the Institute by examination in the following year.¹

The IOOQ was the original state professional association that evolved into the Institute of Optometrists (Queensland) (IOQ) in 1934, the Australian Optometrical Association (AOA) (Queensland Division) in 1952, Optometrists Association Australia (Queensland Northern Territory Division) in 1998 and Optometry Queensland Northern Territory in 2014. For 30 years, Royston Brier served the institute diligently as a member of Council (1908–1938), including Secretary (1908–12), Vice-



Figure 1. Hamlyn Royston Brier (1974)

President (1921 and 1927), President (1922 and 1928) and member of the examinations board (1922–23). He also acted as an independent auditor following retirement from council as he was also a qualified accountant. As a founding councillor he was closely linked with the efforts of the institute to secure an 'Opticians Act' (legislation that was passed in Queensland in 1917) and the establishment of the national professional body in 1918, including the drafting of the constitution.

Hamlyn's uncle, Percy Brier (1885–1970), was also a dedicated professional leader; a pianist and music teacher, who studied at the Brisbane Technical College and the Trinity College of Music in London.² He served as an examiner for the Australian Music Examinations Board for over 20 years and was a founding member and 12-time President of the Music Association of

Queensland between 1924 and 1951. Almost 50 years after his death, The University of Queensland School of Music continues to award an annual prize for music composition in his memory.³ Hamlyn was undoubtedly influenced by both his father and uncle and his career would follow a similar trajectory to theirs in many respects.

EDUCATION

Hamlyn attended Coorparoo State School in Brisbane and passed the Junior University Examination at the Brisbane Grammar School in 1926, studying English, French, Arithmetic, Algebra and English History.⁴ He followed in his father's footsteps and commenced a four-year apprenticeship in optometry in 1927, indentured to Major James Porter Fry.⁴ Fry had served in World War I during 1914 (3rd Battalion, Naval and Military Forces – Special Tropical Corps) and on his return to Brisbane studied optometry, graduating in 1918.⁵ Hamlyn was trained and mentored by this respected optometrist and public figure; Fry was not only the IOOQ President (1920–21) and AOA National President (1921) but was an elected member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly (seat of Kulripa 1918–1932). For Hamlyn, this was on-the-job training in both optometry and politics. Fry may also have influenced Hamlyn's decision to voluntarily enlist in the Australian Citizens Forces (militia) after universal military training in Australia for males over 18 years was suspended in 1929. Hamlyn had already served four months of compulsory training after his 18th birthday that year. He served for a further three years, including two years during his optometry studies.

³Presumably he was not indentured to his father RC Brier due to limitations imposed by the 1924 Apprenticeship Act, which restricted the number of apprentices at a particular workplace based on the number of employees.

After completing his apprenticeship and passing his final qualifying examinations in April of 1931, Hamlyn left for London in June to pursue further studies. One year later he obtained the Fellowship in optometry of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers (FSMC) and Fellowship of the British Optical Association (FBOA). Upon graduation, he received his diploma and was awarded the keys to the City of London. On reflection years later he confided that this was the proudest day of his life and he spent the remainder of the day following the graduation ceremony taking in London. In 1932 he completed the Certificate of the London Refraction Hospital and was appointed as a staff member (the institute specialised in orthoptics and contact lenses). The hospital provided free optical care for the underprivileged and training for optometry students; in fact, patients attending the hospital for treatment endured two complete eye examinations, one by a staff member and one by a student.⁶ In 1933, he obtained the Honours Diploma of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers (separate to the Fellowship examination⁷), the first Australian to do so⁸ and returned to Brisbane later that year by steamship. A short piece on Hamlyn's reflections of the noise and beauty of London was published in the newspaper *The Brisbane Courier*.⁹ He remained a lifelong anglophile following his time abroad.

RESPECTED CLINICIAN

Upon returning to Brisbane, he commenced work as an optometrist for Charles Sankey Fraser alongside his father (Flavelle Brothers was now Flavelle, Roberts and Sankey). Fraser was another legendary figure in Queensland optometry: the founding President of the IOOQ.¹⁰ Hamlyn's position involved servicing regional and remote areas of Queensland as a visiting optometrist, including the small communities of Cloncurry, Morven, Richmond and St George with populations of only a few hundred or thousand in the late 1930s. After four years as an employee, in 1938 at age 27, he opened his own practice in the AMP Buildings in the Brisbane CBD. A notice in a local paper commented: 'Mr Brier, although still a young man, has had an extensive experience in his profession and we can recommend any of our readers, who are worried in any manner whatsoever

about their eyes to consult him with the greatest of confidence.'¹¹ Hamlyn was respected for his clinical acumen. A case report published in this journal describing a patient with 11.00 dioptres of astigmatism indicates the patient was referred to Hamlyn by another optometrist for refraction and his expert opinion.¹² He remained in private practice for 38 years until retirement in 1975.

PROFESSIONAL LEADER

The year after he opened his practice, Hamlyn was elected to the council of the IOQ and was heavily involved in advancing the profession at the state and national level for the next 14 years. Wright^{13,14} bluntly described Hamlyn's capacity to get things done: '...the AOA which in the 1920s had been almost frenetically active, in the 1930s went into a deep sleep which was to last until Hamlyn R Brier of Queensland (that most inadequately recognised man) blew a horn in its ear.'

In 1939, alongside WG Kett, he played a decisive role in ensuring optometry was admitted to the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) under Section A (Physics including the subject of Optometry), by convincing the AOA to simultaneously host a conference in Canberra and send representatives of optometry from each state to the ANZAAS congress.¹⁴ During 1938 in the lead-up to the congress, he wrote a letter to the editor,¹⁵ published in *The Australasian Journal of Optometry* (the predecessor to *Clinical and Experimental Optometry*), urging the AOA to host a meeting of state divisions coinciding with the ANZAAS congress, to promote optometry and also to consider the federation of state institutes. He then penned another letter to the editor¹⁶ criticising his original proposal under the pseudonym 'XYZ',¹⁷ followed by a final letter¹⁸ responding to the anonymous criticism! Presumably, this was to publicise an issue he felt strongly about and generate debate and discussion among readers of the journal.

He also convinced over a dozen leading academics and optometrists from around the world to submit scientific papers for the 1939 congress¹⁴ and also presented a paper himself to showcase optometry as a reputable profession underpinned by science.^{19,20} Optometry was later recognised as a standalone speciality in Section A of ANZAAS.

This series of events engineered by Hamlyn has been described as 'the moment of resuscitation of the AOA which had been sinking into a political coma all through the 1920s'.²¹ The recognition of optometry as a specialist discipline in ANZAAS was remarkable and an important milestone, as optometric research in Australia did not gain significant momentum until the second half of the 20th century. In Queensland during the 1930s, optometry was still a trade passed down from master to apprentice with night classes undertaken through the Central Technical College in Brisbane.

As an IOQ council member, Hamlyn was initially the chair of the 'Corresponding Counsellors' sub-committee and editor of the quarterly *Country Bulletin*. In short, he was responsible for engaging with and informing country members about the affairs of the institute and soliciting their opinion on matters. During World War II, he was also involved in negotiations with Army officials to improve the recognition (administration, conditions and rank) of serving optometrists.²² As his experience in council affairs grew, Hamlyn was appointed to increasingly senior roles, including Queensland representative on the National Optical Council (1942–45), IOQ Vice President (1945–47), IOQ President (1947–49) and member of the Queensland Board of Optical Registration (1946–49). Following his presidency, he remained on the IOQ council as Immediate Past-President from 1949 to 1952.

Between 1942 and 1949, he served as the AOA Vice-President, assuming the role of National President throughout 1949–50. The major federal issue during his tenure was the impending national insurance act. The government had announced a policy in 1942 to introduce a National Health Scheme and optometry was determined to be included. Hamlyn authored the AOA's three proposals submitted to government for consideration in a national scheme; the full-time salaried, part-time and fee-for-service schemes.²³ Despite years of lobbying by individuals, state divisions and the national association, optometry was not included in such a scheme until over 20 years later. He also stood for transparency in professional matters and openly objected to the secrecy and plenary power of the 'National Eye Service Committee' (established in 1948 by the AOA Secretary), to act without the knowledge and consent of the state divisions (and himself

as the then national president!).²³ During this extremely busy period of establishing his own practice and serving on numerous professional boards, including the Council of the Illuminating Engineering Society Queensland,²⁴ he married Myra Cunningham in November 1944 and raised a son and daughter. When he stepped down from the professional association at the end of 1952, this was the first time in the 44-year history of the IOQ that a Brier had not been a member of the council.

CONTACT LENS PIONEER

In addition to his numerous roles in optometric political bodies, Hamlyn was a founding member of the Contact Lens Society of Australia (known as the Cornea and Contact Lens Society of Australia since 2008); an apolitical, not-for-profit organisation, established to improve the standard of the prescribing and fitting of contact lenses through education and the facilitation of scientific research. In May 1947, Hamlyn was one of seven optometrists, who attended the first course on the prescribing and fitting of contact lenses conducted in Australia²⁵ (Figure 2). He learned from Penrhyn Thomas, one of Australia's first contact lens practitioners²⁶ and was known to practise taking moulds of the eyes on his wife using plaster of Paris. Following 10 days of training, the attendees agreed to form the Contact Lens Society of Australia and New Zealand, with Hamlyn appointed treasurer; however, the society floundered due to the extremely specialised nature of contact lens practice at the time; glass and polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA) scleral lenses were the only lens types available, until corneal contact lenses became commonplace. There was also resistance to the formation of a society not under the control of the AOA.²⁵ Over a decade later in 1961, a group of motivated contact lens practitioners in Brisbane appointed Hamlyn as chairman of an organising committee to resurrect the contact lens society. This was realised in 1962 and Hamlyn was the first honorary secretary and treasurer,²⁷ retiring from this position in 1966. A detailed history of the early years of this society has been previously published.²⁵ Hamlyn was awarded the first honorary life membership in 1974 for his distinguished service to the society.²⁸

LEGACY

Hamlyn passed on his knowledge of and passion for contact lenses to the next generation of optometrists through his involvement in teaching rigid contact lens theory at the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT) from 1966 until his retirement in 1975. It is highly likely that he was also involved in the clinical and didactic teaching of the optometry course provided through the Central Technical College and the Queensland College of Optometry (facilitated through the professional association) throughout the 1950s to prepare students for the examinations set by the Optical Registration Board. Hamlyn remained involved in contact lens practical tuition and clinical supervision at QIT until 1979 and since his retirement, contact lens theory in Queensland has been taught by Professors Peter Swann, Leon Garner, Ken Bowman and Michael Collins.

John Mountford, one of his students, eventually took over his well-established specialised contact lens practice in 1975. When informed he would take over upon Hamlyn's retirement, John was presented with copies of a number of seminal texts, including Orbig's *Contact Lenses*, Bier's *Contact Lens Routine and Practice*, Fletcher's *Theory and Practice of Contact Lenses* and *Conoid Contact Lenses* by Penrhyn Thomas. Hamlyn also passed on hundreds of old contact lens journals. These were all mandatory reading, if John was to properly look after his patients.



Figure 2. Hamlyn Brier practises taking a mould of the anterior eye on Penrhyn Thomas at the first contact lens course held in Sydney in 1947

When sorting through the practice archives years later, John discovered a raft of correspondence between Hamlyn and the optical engineers at Bausch & Lomb concerning the accuracy of the formulas used to calibrate their keratometer. Hamlyn patiently and repeatedly pointed out an error he had identified (and provided his own formulae), which were met with as many replies insisting that the manufacturer calculations were correct, except for the final letter; an apology from Bausch & Lomb, after they had finally taken the time to work through his equations and conceded he was indeed correct.

In 1994, the awards committee of the Australian Optometrical Association (Queensland Division), chaired by Colin Waldron,²⁹ established the Hamlyn R Brier Clinical Optometry Award to recognise excellence in clinical optometric practice. Hamlyn was the inaugural recipient for his longstanding clinical leadership and contributions to mentoring, peer education and advocacy for the profession. Awardees since have included respected Queensland clinicians: Leo Hartley (1995), John Mountford (1996), Julie Albietz (1997), Lesley Vedelago (1998), Peter Montgomery (2001), Beverly Roberts (2003), Henry Heron (2005), Jan Lovie-Kitchin (2009), Jennifer Vieritz (2012), Ann Webber (2014), Ian Kent (2015) and Andrew Carkeet (2016).

As Hamlyn wrote in his unpublished history of Queensland optometry,¹⁷ 'It behoves us to remember that we are standing on the shoulders of great men'. Hamlyn R Brier was a great man, the consummate clinician, a professional leader and advocate and a peer mentor and educator. Australian optometry stands taller today due to his leadership and tireless efforts to promote and uphold the ideals of our profession.

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