

PROFILE

J Lloyd Hewett

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By any measure, Lloyd Hewett was a man of stature. He stood tall and straight with a commanding presence. He has been described as a visionary, a confirmed idealist, yet a man of action, courage and above all wisdom.¹ He was an archetypal scholar and gentleman² with incomparable style and élan.³

How did Lloyd Hewett earn such a reputation?

John Lloyd Hewett was born in Marrickville, NSW, in 1923. His father was an Anglican clergyman,⁴ an archdeacon in the diocese of Sydney and federal director of the Church Missionary Society.⁵

Lloyd⁵ once said that he *'was brought up to know God, King and Empire, but proved a great disappointment to his maternal grandfather because his cricketing career left a lot to be desired'*. There is little doubt that throughout his life he served these masters well and with considerable distinction.

On completing school at the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore) in 1940, Lloyd worked for an accountant for a few months before enlisting in the Australian Army. His leadership qualities were soon apparent and he was commissioned as a lieutenant by the age of 21.⁵ He served in a commando unit in Papua New Guinea and Borneo.⁶ Twice he was nearly killed by the Japanese and one month before the war ended he received a bullet wound to the right arm and was invalided home.⁷



J Lloyd Hewett
1923–1996

Following his discharge from the army in 1945, Lloyd entered the optometry course at the Sydney Technical College in 1946. A career in optometry had not been his original ambition. His aim was to study the classics and then possibly accountancy law. However, his destiny was to be elsewhere. On the advice of William Patterson, a Sydney optometrist, Lloyd decided to enrol in optometry. Patterson was to have considerable influence on Lloyd's life. After graduation, Lloyd joined Patterson in practice and married his daughter, Joan.

Lloyd was a good student with his share of credits and distinctions among his undergraduate courses.⁸ He was described by one of his fellow students as a *'tall handsome man with a neat black moustache and the arrogant bearing of a ex-Shore boy'*.⁷ Owen Ashley Williams, one of Lloyd's classmates, who

gained a considerable reputation in his own right, christened Lloyd with the complimentary title, Sir Stewart Duke-Hewett.⁷

Once he qualified as an optometrist, it was inevitable that Lloyd would become a leader of his profession and a teacher. In May 1950, only months after completing his undergraduate training in 1949, Lloyd presented a lecture entitled 'Sectional accommodation' to the Institute of Optometrists of New South Wales (a forerunner to Optometrists Association Australia, New South Wales Division).⁹ The diversity of his optometric interests at that time was demonstrated by his lecture on 'The ocular conditions in diabetes' to the Institute of Optometrists in April 1952.¹⁰

Once in practice, Lloyd had to contend not only with the problems of his patients but also with a major decision regarding his future role in optometry.

Perhaps as a result of his presentations to the institute, perhaps due to his clinical skills or perhaps because of the nature and calibre of the man, Josef Lederer (later Professor Lederer), Head of Optometry at the newly incorporated New South Wales University of Technology,¹¹ invited Lloyd to join the full-time teaching staff.⁴ Lloyd's son Peter explains that he rejected this and later attempts to persuade him to join academia, because he loved optometric practice and he loved people.¹²

In January 1963, Lloyd¹³ wrote *'It is of little value to boast of high university standards unless the fruit of those standards is available in the consulting room. Academic achievement is a barren plant of itself. It can only bear fruit in the soil of clinical application'*.

Peter Hewett¹² adds that even then, Lloyd believed that he could do more for his profession from outside the university system, working in his practice, solving the visual problems of his patients and sharing his experiences with his colleagues. *'Frequent brushing of mind against mind produces the bricks and mortar to build on the foundations of the undergraduate education and increases the practitioner's self-confidence and self-esteem'*.¹³

At such an early stage in his optometric development, he could not have envisaged the opportunities, including the journal editorship, which would become available to him to carry out these beliefs and the extent of his future influence on his profession.

Hewett the teacher

At the beginning of 1952, just two years after graduation, Lloyd accepted a position as part-time lecturer in optometry at the NSW University of Technology¹⁴ and he continued in that role for most of his professional life.

'His lucid teaching influenced a generation of optometrists, but his dedication, sincerity and natural gregariousness have been a beacon for all who have come under his tutelage'.² In fact, he not only taught them, he inspired them with his enthusiasm and love of optometry. One of his teaching maxims was *'Think clearly and remember to disbelieve'*.¹⁵

However, teaching was not the only way in which he contributed to the university.

Lloyd Hewett was an active member of the School of Optometry Visiting Committee of the UNSW from 1969 to 1993. He became a member of the Council of The University of New South Wales in 1984 and was disappointed to lose this appointment when the government of NSW reconstituted a smaller council in 1986.¹⁶

These contributions to The University of New South Wales, the profession of optometry and to the community were recognised in 1988 by the award of the degree of Master of Science, *honoris causa*,¹⁶ a rare honour for an optometrist.

Hewett the practitioner

Lloyd was the consummate and most professional of optometrists, who aimed to provide the best possible care for his patients.⁵

He loved his practice, which he conducted with an unswerving adherence to traditional ethical standards. He was always happiest in his consulting room,⁴ where his patients were his friends. He showed by example how to gain great enjoyment from optometric practice and how to treat patients and not just their eyes.¹⁵ For those practitioners who were critical of optometry and unhappy in their practices he believed that *'You get the practice that you deserve'*.¹⁵

He was emphatically in favour of regular continuing education for optometrists, support of the profession for research and graduate students, optometrists contributing publications on clinical topics to the journal, setting an example of professionalism to patients, occupational and industrial safety and eye care and many other areas. He strongly opposed advertising, commercialism and window displays for optometrists.

Regarding window displays, he wrote *'Substance not shadow, achievement not promises, research not out-dated techniques, public service not public exploitation are the major ingredients of professional advancement. Where these exist the media of mass communication are generous with their valuable space, because the sparks which fly from a profession hammering itself into better shape on the anvil of public service light many a news flash'*.¹⁷

However, it was as a contact lens practitioner and instructor that Lloyd was pre-eminent.¹⁷ He was among a handful of Australian optometrists in the 1950s who had the foresight and courage to develop an ongoing interest in contact lens practice.¹

He was a true pioneer and introduced many new techniques.¹⁶ His work in the development of hard contact lenses in 1950 and soft hydrophilic lenses with Bausch & Lomb in the early '70s was published for his colleagues and passed on to generations of optometry students at The University of New South Wales.¹⁵ His first publication on contact lenses was 'Contact lens fitting in general optometrical practice', which appeared in 1959.¹⁹

Lloyd derived great satisfaction in the exercise of his clinical skills, which were rarely matched by others in contact lens practice.⁵

A less publicised facet of Lloyd's contribution was his devotion to the visual rehabilitation of patients whose eyes had been damaged by trauma and disease.¹⁶ He had a special love for the manufacture and fitting of haptic lenses, which ensured that many 'hopeless cases' were given vision.¹⁵ This was one of his greatest achievements for it changed the lives of people whom no-one else could help.¹⁵ A special unit has been established in Sydney to provide ocular and facial prostheses for such people.¹⁶

In 1962, he organised and chaired the first Australian conference dedicated to contact lenses and played a crucial role in the development of the Contact Lens Society. He was a member of the Council of the Contact Lens Society of Australia from 1970 to 1982.

His Honorary Life Membership of Victorian College of Optometry symbolises the appreciation of his colleagues for his gentle leadership, wise council and scholarly influence.²

Hewett the editor

Lloyd's first exposure to *The Australian Journal of Optometry* would have been as an undergraduate student. His first publication²⁰ in the AJO was entitled 'Examination of the visual fields as a routine in optometric practice' and appeared in 1958. This was at a time when central and peripheral visual field measurements were not automated and were not commonly mapped. Although strongly encouraged, disease detection was a relatively minor component of optometric practice at that time.

His next paper²¹ was entitled 'Where's the drama in optometry' and clearly demonstrated how optometrists can influence patients' lives and their quality of life. One suicidal patient decided he wanted to live after receiving his first spectacles with a pair of 5.50 D cylinders.

In 1960, he was appointed subeditor of *The Australian Journal of Optometry*, assisting the Editor, Dr WG Kett.²² However, his apprenticeship in this position was short. On the death of Dr Kett in April, 1962, Lloyd was appointed editor and the first issue bearing his name in this position was in December 1962. He continued as editor for 17 years with his last issue dated July 1979.

Lloyd's contribution to the Journal and, as a consequence, to optometry in Australia has been described as immeasurable and his effort as Herculean.²³

Of particular note are the editorials produced monthly for 17 years. They are still a delight to read for their challenging comment and literary merit.¹ The eloquently written editorials demonstrated his understanding of human nature and of professional and public affairs.

Under Lloyd's editorship, the *AJO* became one of the most respected national optometry journals in the world.^{2,23}

Peter Hewett¹² reflects that Lloyd saw the journal not only as a scientific document but also as a medium of communication for the profession. In the days when optometrists saw each other as comrades not competitors, he extended a lifeline to independent practitioners who were working by themselves in isolated circumstances. He let them know that they were not alone and that they shared common experiences and problems. To facilitate this, he encouraged practitioners to contribute papers on clinical topics for publication in the journal.

Lloyd produced the journal at home, mostly sitting on his verandah and in his own time. Only love of the work and a sincere belief of the value of the journal could have motivated his labours²³ and only Lloyd, Joan and his family could have known the sacrifices made to produce the journal.²

On his retirement as editor of the *Australian Journal of Optometry*, a tribute to Lloyd stated that '*one cannot fail to be impressed by the force of his personality demonstrated in the clarity of his editorials and papers. His strong hand and masterful command of language reflect a classical upbringing, one which would be the envy of many a journal editor.*'⁵

As a tribute to Lloyd, the National Executive Council of the Australian Optometrical Association established in 1980 an award for authors of original scientific or clinical papers published in the *Australian Journal of Optometry* and to be known as the J Lloyd Hewett Award.⁵ It was intended to foster and encourage the work of young research workers or clinicians not yet established as authors or full-time academic optometrists.⁵

Again Peter Hewett¹² recalls that as time moved on, the academics demanded a more scientific journal. Lloyd felt that the practical support that the journal brought to everyday practice would be lost to the profession. Hopefully, Lloyd would approve of the current format of our journal, a blend of research communications, reviews of topics of interest and clinical reports.

Hewett the politician

Lloyd was involved in opto-politics as a commentator and as a participant.

In May 1950, just months after registration, the President of the Institute of Optometrists of New South Wales (the forerunner to the Australian Optometric Association New South Wales Division), Pen Thomas, and Lloyd Hewett were elected to attend a meeting with the board of registration to place before it the institute's views regarding advertising.⁹ Later, he was a member of the AOA Council in New South Wales from 1955 to 1969.

As a strong advocate for the status of optometry, in 1961 he answered the claims that contact lens fitting was properly a function of the practice of medicine, by stating that '*Optometry's positive contribution to contact lens fitting must be maintained and increased through more emphasis on wider and deeper practitioner education, fundamental research activity into the question of the effects of long-term wearing and unremitting accent on the necessity for watchful aftercare of the wearers.*'²⁴ This is as true today as it was in 1961.

When an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* argued for the relegation of optometry to the status of an auxiliary of medicine,²⁴ he wrote in 1962 '*... the progress it (optometry) has made and the talents it has developed have come out of its own efforts as an independent profession. As an independent profession of long and honoured lineage, it cannot be accused of practising medicine when it detects and refers to medicine, those who need the services that profession alone can provide.*' Regarding this conflict with medicine, he also stated '*The gap between the two professions can be bridged but when bridges are built it is usual engineering practice for the structure to grow from both sides of the gap.*'²⁴

His contribution to the deliberations of

the National Executive Council of the Australian Optometric Association during the 17 years of his editorship of the journal was outstanding and he contributed in large measure to the entry of optometry into Medicare.⁴

Hewett and community service

Lloyd maintained that the viability of a profession is linked to the willingness of its members to conduct research, which will improve its performance and enable it to better serve the community. He was a life member of the Optometric Vision Research Foundation and a member of the Board of Management of the National Vision Research Institute of Australia from 1972 to 1992.

Lloyd was a director and chairman of the Board of the Mosman and District Community Hospital from 1967 to 1972¹⁶ and was instrumental in achieving a major program of building and modernisation. He was a member and treasurer of the Judge Rainbow Memorial Fund for prisoner rehabilitation and was an active member of Sydney Rotary Club.¹⁶

At the Royal Ryde and Twilight Homes in Sydney, Lloyd provided free eye examinations and free spectacles for many years before these services were provided by the national health insurance system.²⁵

Lloyd Hewett the man

Lloyd was an honest and erudite man who loved the classics, poetry and Shakespeare and could translate Latin and Greek. On many occasions, we discussed the merits of maintaining the classical languages on the school curriculum to aid the understanding of the English language. However, Lloyd loved Greek, while I favoured Latin. Both also have immense value to optometrists in the understanding of medical terminology. He was an avid reader, an excellent conversationalist and an attentive listener.⁷

After his beloved family, Lloyd's passions were optometry, his practice, his car and finally his yacht, the *Bottom Line*.⁷

For most of his professional life, he was a part-time clinical teacher and for this his reward was to be well-loved by generations of students who profited greatly from his interest, especially in contact lenses.⁴

In 1989, Lloyd was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to optometry. This honour was well deserved. Lloyd was a role model who set the standards for how the truly professional optometrist cares for his patients and his profession.²⁶ He has left a great legacy and a goal for us to pursue.²⁶

In 1993, the Optometric Vision Research Foundation instituted the J Lloyd Hewett Award for Excellence in Optometry.²⁵ The first recipient was John Lloyd Hewett at a testimonial dinner.

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