

# BACO: The Master's role

BY IAN MACKAY

**Ian Mackay** is this year's BACO Master, with Valerie Lund taking over for the next meeting. As the senior overseer of the conference, the role of Master is a crucial one, and Ian tells us how he has gone about it.

When I was invited to write a few lines on the role of the Master, I readily accepted the challenge, not least because it is reasonably straightforward. One's first priority is to find a department prepared to undertake the local organisation and ensure they can provide a suitable venue, have the necessary enthusiasm and experience, can provide a conference centre with the requisite number of lecture theatres, the facilities for surgical demonstrations, electronic poster sessions, student 'helpers', space for the trade exhibition, venues for the social programme – the list goes on for ever. ENT departments throughout the UK are invited to tender for the privilege and the final decision is taken by the Trustees of ENT-UK.

The next priority is to find someone with the necessary experience who is prepared to organise the academic component of this academic conference, someone who can coordinate the representatives of all the subspecialties within otorhinolaryngology to ensure that each and every special interest is catered for. There needs to be a balance between speakers from abroad and the UK, ENT surgeons and allied specialties, well-known faces as well as exciting new-comers, and then to arrange the programme so that none of these speakers will be required to give two presentations in two different theatres at the same time, that the size of the lecture theatres corresponds to the number of delegates expected to attend, that the speakers have

been invited and agreed to attend etc. Providing these tasks have been successfully accomplished, the rest should be plain sailing.

At the time of the conference, the Master is expected to give a short welcome address on the first morning, attend the Master's Reception and say a few words at the Conference Dinner and chair a few sessions. In recent years it has become a tradition to give a short presentation in the History of ENT section. Finally, the Master gives a closing address at the end of the last day, handing over to the next Master, on this occasion to Professor Valerie Lund CBE.

That pretty much describes the role of the Master but one may well ask, how is the Master elected in the first place? Candidates are proposed by their peers and the Master-elect is chosen by the trustees of ENT-UK. At present the trustees comprise the President and President-elect of ENT-UK, the two Secretaries and Treasurers and the current Master of BACO. In the future it is likely to include at least one lay member. The Master-elect serves for three years followed by a further three as the Master and is thus elected six years before the actual meeting takes place, during which they will serve as a trustee, attend BACO executive committee meetings, academic committee meetings, site meetings and should ensure that preparations are going to plan.

When Ronald Macbeth suggested a British Academic Conference in Otolaryngology in 1961, the British Association of Otolaryngology, who were

at the time relatively impecunious, appear to have been somewhat underwhelmed by the idea, but despite this agreed to loan a sum in the region of half its total funds. On the 17th June 1963, the first five-day conference took place with Ian Simson Hall as the master.

My first involvement with BACO dates back some 40 years, to the meeting in London, when I was pleased to be invited to be a 'monitor' for one of the instructional sessions. At that time BACO and the BAO were quite separate organisations but as time went by, many felt that it would be sensible for the two to amalgamate. David Wright, a past Master of BACO and President of the BAO together with John Evans, past Treasurer and Master, in addition to many others, spent years trying to effect this, but it was not until 2009 that the BAO, by then the British Association of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery and BACO were eventually merged as ENT-UK.

Until that time BACO had its own Trustees, Executive Committee, General Committee, Academic Committee and Local Organising Committee to name but a few and with the merger there has been an inevitable period of readjustment while the two organisations adapt to working as one.

BACO '15, held in 2015, is also the 15th conference and a great deal has changed since that first meeting in 1963. Initially occurring every four years, now every three; taking place over five days, now reduced to three days. The opening ceremony included a procession of all those who had sat on any of the

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numerous committees dressed in full academic regalia, after which the gowns were stored until Wednesday afternoon when everyone was encouraged to don these again for the garden party. 'The Dinner' has replaced 'The Banquet' although the Masters' Reception has been retained and whereas all delegates would have remained for the full five days, three is now the maximum and many find that they can only stay for one or two.

It is almost 25 years since I was appointed treasurer of BACO and could witness first-hand the way in which the more senior members of the committees were, somewhat to my surprise, prepared to listen to what the delegates wanted and move with the times. If delegates felt they were wasting their time and money attending a garden party, the garden party must go. If most delegates find it difficult to attend for five days, let's reduce it to three. If four years is too long to wait, increase it to every three. One can only wonder what the original organisers would think if they could attend BACO '15. Undoubtedly they would approve of the truly first class international and multidisciplinary academic presentations and would marvel at the clinical skills centre, the video-linked dissection demonstrations, the electronic poster sessions and the huge trade exhibition, but might possibly look back on those sunny days when one could wander round some botanic garden wearing an academic gown and there was ample time to chat to all one's friends.

Returning to the present and the role of the Master, the success or failure of BACO depends to a very large extent on

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those first two decisions. I was delighted when Prof Shakeel Saeed agreed to chair the academic committee. From the start he insisted that the academic component should "take precedence over all other considerations". Andrew Swift, as a past treasurer of ENT-UK and with the benefit of his experience organising BACO in Liverpool six years ago has insisted on us having the finest venues for both the convention and the social programme and has been amazingly hands-on, not only personally checking whether the cadaver heads were fit for purpose, the catering was up to the mark, the fellowship applications were judged fairly and just about every other fine detail one can imagine but that this should "take precedence over all other considerations". Needless to say, as Master I agree with both.

Shak and Andrew are not alone and one should not underestimate the time and effort put in by those responsible for so many other aspects of this meeting, unfortunately too many to name here but to all of them, to our speakers, to all the delegates and to our sponsors and trade exhibitors, perhaps one of the most important roles of the Master is to say "thank you".



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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian Mackay was, prior to retirement, a consultant at Charing Cross and the Royal Brompton Hospitals London with a special interest in rhinology. A former President of ENT UK, the Laryngology and Rhinology Section of the Royal Society of Medicine and Treasurer of BACO.

### Declaration of Competing Interests

None declared