COPY

I thought you might like to have a copy of this article I wrote for a Petworth paper recently (Maybe to show the Grandchildren one day?!)

Joan

VETERINARY PRACTICE AND PETWORTH VETERINARY SURGEONS

In the 1920s' and 1930s' a Mr Spurgeon had a Veterinary Practice, which he ran from Fairfield House in the High Street (now an Antique Shop). Mr Spurgeon was it seems a Vet of the "Old School" Who much enjoyed hunting and hunted regularly with the Leconfield Hunt and also knew the "Lordy" of the day quite well. Incidentally His Lordship in those days could hunt on his own land all the way to Brighton. I understand that during the later years that he had the practice Mr Spurgeon was severely crippled with Arthritis and had difficulty in getting about. At that time he employed a Groom/Assistant called John Murray. John Murray apparently did most of the work under the direct supervision of Mr Spurgeon. The practice in those days would have consisted mainly of Horse work, some Farm work and very little "Small Animal work" (treating Dogs and Cats etc).

In 1947,or thereabouts, Mr Spurgeon sold the house, the practice goodwill and the veterinary equipment etc. to Richard Cooke. Richard Cooke qualified in 1939 but immediately joined the Fleet Air Arm, where he served in Coastal Command until the end of the war. When he arrived in Petworth he had no idea that there would be competition in the town, inevitably taking part of the practice he had purchased.

John Murray had a wealth of experience gained from assisting Mr Spurgeon and he was a likeable Irishman, who had a way with horses and also people. He set up his plate on the other side of the town at Preyste House in North Street. Mr Murray was not a Veterinary Surgeon and had no formal training or the Diploma MRCVS. At that time anybody could set up a business treating animals. In 1947 a new Veterinary Surgeons Act came into force and anybody, like Mr Murray who could prove they had been treating animals for more than seven years could apply to join a supplementary register(SVR) and become a Veterinary "Practitioner". John Murray joined the SVR and practised in Peworth until 1960.

In that year, I Francis Hunter, purchased Preyste House and the Goodwill of John Murray's Practice for £7000.00 (£4000.00 - with a Mortgage - for the Property and £3000.00 for the Goodwill - with a Loan at 6% fixed interest - for a term of 20 years). Of course I knew nothing about what had happened at the time Richard (Dick) Cooke had bought his Practice until I made a courtesy call soon after my arrival in Petworth in February 1960.

I ran the Practice happily single-handed for 13 months, during which time I got to know Dick Cooke and we got on together very well. Dick was a real Gentleman, quiet and unassuming with a relaxed attitude towards practice and a passion for sailing. He started to cover for me occasionally, if I had to be away for a day, and I did the same for him covering his Practice for a few days while he took a short holiday. We soon realised it was rather pointless for us both to be on duty at the same time during the evenings and week-ends, so we began to discuss the idea of forming a Partnership. At about the same time a friend and colleague from College days Richard Williams (Dick) happened to call to see me, having heard that I was now in the area. He was working as an Assistant in Cranleigh and was beginning to think about a move. There was plenty of work for two or three Vets and the practice was expanding, so the three of us met and decided to form a three person equal partnership. The new Practice was run from Preyste House.

In March 1961 the partnership "Cooke, Hunter and William"s was born, comprising "the two Dicks" as they were always referred to from that time and myself. This article could easily be filled with "Herriot type" anecdotes, but I will restrict it to two. Some clients asked us to look after a much loved parrot while they were on holiday. During its stay with us we taught it to say "Cooke, Hunter and Williams Good Vets!" which it soon learned. The parrot returned the following year and to my dismay it had abbreviated the phrase to just "Cooke and Williams - Good Vets!"

At that time the practice looked after almost 150 Dairy herds varying in size from a very few cows to as many as 100 or more. In 2006 the remaining 9 dairy herds in the Practice were taken over by a single group of vets, the only Practice now covering Farm work in West Sussex, Surrey most of Hampshire and some of East Sussex and even into Kent. Such have been the changes to farming in this part of the Country during the last 50 years. Another example of these changes is that the Practice in Arundel that specialises in treating only horses used to be run by three Vets in the sixties and seventies. There are now thirteen!

In the mid-sixties it became apparent that if the practice was to continue to expand that we should concentrate on building up the "small animal" side and that we should expand Eastwards, where there were more people living and hence more dogs and cats etc. We rented an old cottage in Lower Street, Pulborough from the West Sussex County Council, decorated it and opened a branch surgery. In 1997 we had the opportunity to take over a single handed Farm Practice in Storrington and a small branch surgery that went with it. (the rent was £10.00 a week and remained so until the site was re-developed in the early nineties - a kind Landlord indeed!).We then owned a third of a new building comprising three downstairs units, with a small flat above each.

At about that time some changes took place in the Practice. We were joined by a new partner Michael Howe (Mike) from Colchester. Mike decided to move from Essex because his practice was already changing from large to small animal work. Dick Williams left the partnership in 1967 to run his own Practice in Dulwich. Dick Cooke retired in 1970 and emigrated to Australia with his family. Mike and I then ran the Practice with two Assistants.

In September 1972 The Practice moved from Petworth to a new purpose built premises in Pulborough (built for us by Lucking Brothers of Petworth) and became The Arun Veterinary Group. We sold Preyste House in Petworth to part pay for it! We rented a building from the Leconfield Estate and opened a branch surgery, which finally closed in the early nineties. The property was in the small lane opposite the old Post Office. It was named the Audit Room and was where the farmers used to come many years ago to pay their rent each Quarter. The entrance into the back room was protected by a huge "Safe" type door. This brings me to the second extraordinary anecdote which occurred in the Audit /now Consulting Room. One afternoon a lady brought her dog in for treatment and after the examination I moved to a side table, where we recorded the history of the case and the fees etc. Out of the corner of my eye I could see her climbing onto the "examination table" - something unheard of! I jumped to my feet and she was looking terrible and told me she felt faint and was going to be sick. I rushed to the cupboard for a bucket but I was too late and when I turned round the poor lady was vomiting quantities of pure blood all over the floor. I flew round to the Doctor's Surgery for help to be told that she was not one of their patients and as there was an ambulance strike on there was nothing they could do. They advised me to take her home to Tillington in my car and call her own Doctor from Midhurst.Hence it was that a few days later Alastair Ford the Dentist reported to my wife that he had seen me in the car looking ashen faced with a "dead Woman" beside me! It transpired that the lady had recently been discharged from Hospital having received treatment for a Gastric Ulcer which had ruptured. Sadly she died a little while later, or I would not be relating this story.

Footnote: The Practice continues today in both Pulborough and Storrington, but only treats Pet animals.