

The Wylie Centenary Flyer

November 2008



Inbred Or Well Bred?!

You might have thought that the problem of hereditary defects was a modern one. We have schemes today helping to breed out conditions such as 'Hip Dysplasia', 'Elbow Dysplasia' and 'Collie Eye Anomaly'. Yet even in 1908 there was concern over inherited conditions.



A Shire stallion 'Timekeeper', was rejected from the 1907 London Cart Horse Show, as he was 'unsound due to 'ringbone', a bony enlargement of a hind pastern. He was exported to Australia where he was then rejected for use at stud due to 'hereditary unsoundness'. This decision was controversial, as only one joint was affected and could have been caused by trauma. However 'Australia possesses a law, Britain would be pleased to have at home – a law which prohibits the use of stallions suffering from hereditary unsoundness'. Genetic research was limited in those days. The 1908 Veterinary Record told the tale of a cart mare with colic. The driver already knew the diagnosis. 'He had been employed on the estate for over 30 years', and 'the dam and grand-dam of this mare had shown almost identical symptoms and had died. In each case the knacker had reported the cause of death to be a twist'. 'This mare died also, and again the knacker reported a twist. One does not often have an opportunity of tracing a family weakness so far back'.

Veterinary science was advancing all the time. Sterilisation of skin pre-operatively with tincture of iodine was advised, and the intra-dermal tuberculin test was introduced in 1908 to test cows for TB. There was concern, as now, over students gaining practical experience. Although 'a practical man without theory is like a ship without a rudder', it was also true that 'there are no special forceps that will do what lack of skill fails to accomplish'.

The profession was changing; 'the advent of the motor vehicle has, without doubt swept off our public streets a great number of horses' but 'they have not yet invented a motor cow'. Also the importance of communication was acknowledged. 'Consider the lady clients. With few exceptions, they brighten the routine of daily work and exert a civilising influence on the practitioner. Here good manners and tact prove invaluable and essential! Oh, how true!

Editor: **Kathy Beasley**

Ps. Winter's coming! Ask our nurses about special deals on arthritis treatments.

100 Years Of 'Lost And Found' . . .

Momentous scientific events have occurred in the last hundred years. Okapi, (close relatives of giraffes), were only recognised as a species six years before Arthur Wylie opened his surgery, and it was another 10 years before they were seen in Europe. Okapi are now commonly seen in zoos, but they are shy creatures, and for nearly 50 years they had not been seen in the wild. Happily a wild okapi was photographed earlier this year in the Democratic Republic of Congo by staff from London Zoo!

Other creatures have not been so lucky over the last century and are now lost for ever, while many more are on the brink of extinction. This year a £60,000 appeal is about to be launched to save the bird that inspired Charles Darwin to formulate his theory of evolution. The Floreana Mockingbird had evolved on one of the Galapagos Islands and differed from mockingbirds on other islands. In May 2008 it was upgraded from 'endangered' to 'critically endangered', and it is now one of the rarest birds in the world, with only 137 left. It had already disappeared from its island of origin by 1906 but survives on two other islands. The plan is to repopulate Floreana Island.

Another sad story from the Galapagos Islands is that of the Pinta Giant Tortoise, otherwise known as 'Lonesome George'. No tortoises had been seen on Pinta since 1906 when 3 males had been collected by scientists. It was presumed the rest had been killed for meat or had perished after the introduction of goats destroyed their vegetation. (Goats were eradicated from Pinta in 2001). Then Lonesome George was found in 1971. He was taken to the Charles Darwin Research Station, on Santa Cruz Island, and has since been housed with 2 female tortoises from Isabela Island, as they were thought to be of a similar species. It was hoped that he would breed with them - but no young have been produced. Unfortunately he had probably lived on his own for too long.

Spoilt Dogs And Exotic Vets!

The majority of Arthur Wylie's patients, in common with most vets at that time, were horses and farm animals. The idea of small animal vets was a new one in 1908 and the majority of people with dogs would not have considered taking them to a vet. It was known that dogs had been domesticated for thousands of years, but it had always been presumed that the people of ancient times kept dogs purely for work. It was a surprise therefore when, in 1908, a report from an archaeological survey in Nubia told of finds suggesting that the ancient Egyptians had kept pet dogs. They had found the bodies of 'dogs with ivory bracelets around legs, twisted leather collars' and 'long leather leads attached'. 'The teeth in many instances were in very bad condition, being worn and much decayed, thus affording evidence that they had been domesticated and greatly pampered'!

If few vets treated dogs and cats 100 years ago, certainly none held certificates in 'Exotic Veterinary Medicine', as our own William Lewis does today. This did not stop them applying their knowledge to new species when necessary, and they found they had an advantage over medics should they both be asked for help. A story in the 1908 Veterinary Record recalled a problem with a rhinoceros at London Zoo. When showing signs of intestinal obstruction 'a very eminent physician was asked to prescribe for it. He ordered 10 drops of croton oil on a bun'. Nothing happened. A veterinary surgeon then 'prescribed an enema, 'of soapy water 4 gallons, of croton oil a drachm, of castor oil a pint and 'a bottle of whiskey'! 'The result was magical', 'colossal,' and the rhinoceros 'still flourished' 15 years later!

