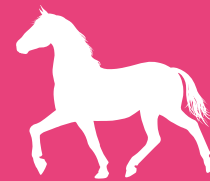


# ROLLING BACK THE YEARS

by Seadown Equine Vets



■ Peter carrying out his veterinary inspection of the New Forest ponies and foals at the sales

■ Photo: Seadown / Richard Dunwoody

ON the 100th anniversary of the Seadown veterinary hospital in Hythe, retired equine vet and Seadown director Peter Tunney reminisces and discusses how things have changed in equine veterinary medicine with Laura Trigg, Seadown's clinical director and equine vet.

**Please detail your career in a few words?**

**Peter:** I first qualified as a vet from Glasgow in 1981 and worked in Newbury and Winchester in mixed practice before joining Seadown in August 1985 to gain surgical experience, mainly with small animals.

I was with Seadown until January 1987 when I left to travel and do large animal locums in New Zealand. When I returned to Seadown in June 1988, it was mainly to do farm and equine work. I retired in August 2019.

**Laura:** I graduated from Bristol in 2006 where I entered a busy mixed practice in Herefordshire and worked as a farm and equine vet.

I joined Seadown as an equine assistant in 2009. At Seadown I enjoyed both equine and farm work but over time my role became predominantly equine based. I gained my certificate in advanced Equine Practice in 2013 and am an RCVS recognised advanced practitioner in this field.

I became a director of Seadown in 2018 and am now the equine clinical director having an interest in lameness and dentistry. I also enjoy my role as one of the honorary veterinary surgeons for the New Forest Pony and Cattle Breeding Society.

**What's was it like being a vet back then, and now?**

**Peter:** In the 1980s all Seadown vets were mixed practice vets and treated all species. Having said that I was farm-based, and mornings were generally spent doing routine visits to one of the large dairies.

**Peter Goodwin and Ralph Ellis** were the main horse vets. Back then the Catherston Stud were based in Brockenhurst and provided a lot of the work. As I was also doing small animal surgeries and operations most days, I might not even see a horse!

**Laura:** These days, vets tend to specialise much earlier in their careers. This is probably due to the advances in veterinary science and the huge in-depth knowledge that is required these days in each species.

Our vets at Seadown now either work on the small animal side of the hospital or work in our equine hospital or as part of our equine ambulatory team.

**What has been the biggest advances that you've seen in equine veterinary medicine?**

**Peter:** Without doubt, the biggest advances in equine medicine have been in diagnostic imaging. We had the benefit of Ralph Ellis having a certificate in radiography/ radiology, so it was a strength of the practice, but there were no CR/DR X-ray machines in those days.

All X-rays had to come back to the practice in their cassettes to be developed in a dark room where the nurse would remove them from the cassettes, attach them to holders so they could be dipped into developing tanks and then hung up to dry.

This does seem very archaic, when I think about it now!

**Laura:** Nowadays we have a wireless computerised X-ray system. It can also run off a battery which is amazing for imaging emergency cases in the field.

The quality of images we get within a few seconds is amazing. Even since I graduated, diagnostic imaging has moved on a great deal. One of my jobs as a vet student when I was seeing practice was to "develop the X-ray films".

We now also have video endoscopes at the practice for examining the stomach, airways and for more advanced dental procedures.

**Are there any new pieces of technology that you have been particularly impressed with?**

**Peter:** For the reasons already mentioned, I think the DR X-ray machines have revolutionised lameness diagnosis. At the press of a button, you have your X-ray there and then as quickly as a digital photograph on your phone!

**Laura:** The use of technology also enables vets to share cases with other vets and specialists. Images can be sent quickly via a phone for a second opinion.

There is even the technology available now to record a horse's heartbeat with a specialised stethoscope and then to send the recording to a cardiologist to check an abnormal heart rhythm for example.

**Are there any aspects that haven't changed at all?**

**Peter:** The Haussmann gag for dental examinations has been in use for as long as anyone can remember and is still an essential piece of kit that all equine veterinary surgeons will carry.

Nowadays, it is accepted that the device should always be used to allow a thorough examination of the horse's mouth at every dental consultation.

**Laura:** I completely agree

**What have the advances of the past 30-40 years meant to the wellbeing of horses and ponies?**

**Peter:** Equine medicine and surgery advances at a rapid rate. New diagnostics mean that a diagnosis can often be reached, whereas in the past a definitive diagnosis was more elusive.

This has led to more evidence-based medicine and more likelihood of a good response to treatment. Consequently, horses are living longer and have a better quality of life

**Laura:** Developments in care of the elderly equine have hugely helped our patients live a longer and happier life. Conditions such as Cushings (PPID) were not really known about previously. We now have drugs to treat this condition and they can be life-changing.

Modern dental techniques have also enabled better management of our older equines, as eating difficulties due to dental pathology can be life-threatening for any horse.

**Have the skills required to be an equine vet and the demands made on them changed over time?**

**Peter:** Yes, there was certainly more of a requirement to reach a diagnosis in the past using little more than clinical examination and this was helped with years of experience.

Vets are now required to be able to use modern diagnostic equipment, or for the more advanced investigations to know when referral is indicated. Students will be taught at college how to use this equipment; qualified vets need to do extensive CPD to keep abreast of new diagnostics and treatments.

**Laura:** Technology is still no substitute for a good thorough clinical examination! This is something we try and instil into vet students and the younger members of the profession who we mentor and train.

**When you look ahead over the next 30-40 years, what do you envisage the future changes in veterinary medicine might be?**

**Peter:** There have been massive changes in veterinary medicine since I graduated from *Glasgow University* in 1981, many of which we have already discussed.

Looking forward, corporate ownership will play a big part in future changes as around 50% of practices now come under that umbrella.

There seems to be a drive for vet schools to be more inclusive in their intake of students with perhaps a little less emphasis on academic ability.

I wonder whether in the future it may be possible to train as a vet just for horses, just for farm animals or just small animals? Medical advances will continue with new diagnostics and treatments.

**Laura:** A lot has changed in the profession but at Seadown we hope to retain the traditional values at the heart of our practice. Providing excellent standards of clinical care along with developing good and long-lasting relationships with the owners of our equines.

It is a team effort keeping a horse happy and healthy and we would like to think our vets play a key role in keeping the horses and ponies (and donkeys) of the New Forest as healthy as possible for the next 100 years.



■ Photo: Seadown

■ Laura undertaking the dentals of a horse, using the Haussmann gag