

Ann Flashman BVSc

Ann Flora Flashman was, in 1930, the first woman to enrol in the Sydney University School of Veterinary Science. She became the fourth woman to qualify and enter the veterinary profession in Australia. Her enrolment encouraged other women to train as veterinarians.

A Sydney girl, Ann was educated at the Ascham School for Girls, matriculating in 1929. She had developed a passion for Girl Guiding and was the popular leader of the School's own company. She was also a keen sportswoman and had developed an interest in journalism.

She enrolled at Sydney University in 1930, having been influenced to the possibility of doing veterinary science by the mother of Pat Littlejohn, (the second woman to enrol at Sydney Veterinary Faculty). The School had close connections with the University and a headmistress who was a good educator and alive to the possibility of women pursuing professional careers. Ann proved a popular student at University where she received the full support of the Faculty staff and pursued her Guiding activities and played intervarsity hockey.

Her final year essay on duodenal ulcers in dogs was published in the *Australian Veterinary Journal*, and she was awarded the STD Symons prize for clinical subjects. Final year practical work was undertaken at the Berri Experimental Farm chaperoned by Pat Littlejohn and she graduated in 1936. Her graduation was preceded by those of Belle Reid from the Melbourne Veterinary College in 1906, Margaret Keats from the Melbourne University Veterinary Faculty in 1923 and Pat Littlejohn from the Sydney University Faculty in 1935.

On graduation Ann joined the staff of the Lost Dog's Home in North Melbourne as its first paid veterinarian, following the footsteps of Belle Reid who had worked there in an honorary capacity. She also worked for the Lort Smith Animal Hospital in North Melbourne until she set up her own practice in Victor Street, Kew. She married Arthur Rylah, who held a prominent position in the Victorian Government, and was his official partner and hostess. They had two children. In her own right she earned the respect of her colleagues and amassed a devoted following of animal lovers in Victoria through her tireless devotion to caring for animals and young people.

She wrote a column called *Pet Talk* in the Melbourne *Herald* under the pseudonym John Wotherspoon, addressing issues such as tail docking, suitable pet ownership and the psychology of dogs and owners. Of the veterinary career she wrote, "It is a curious anomaly that a veterinary surgeon devoting his life to the study and care of animals finds that one of his fascinations of his job is not the study of animals at all – but the clear light his work throws on the odd vagaries of human nature". These columns ran well in to the 1960s and were followed by two books: *The Australian Pet Book* (1962) and *The Australian Dog Book* (1971).

Ann was a keen member of and contributor to the Victorian Division of the Australian Veterinary Association and was its Vice President when she died from a cerebral haemorrhage on 15 March 1969. The many tributes paid to her included one by Reverend Gordon Brown who described Ann as "One of those people possessed of a driving force which would not let her rest. In her professional and private life she was a dynamo who would not

rest until she had accomplished what she set out to do."

If one considers that while running a veterinary practice, having a high profile social responsibility and bringing up a family she also devoted much time and care to fostering the Guiding Movement in Victoria, she accomplished a great deal. In Victoria she was captain of the 4th Yarra Company, Division Commissioner, North Eastern Suburbs, Captain of the First Melbourne Cadet Company and District Commissioner, Northcote. From 1962 to 1967 she was Senior Branch Adviser for Victoria in 1968 she held the post of Lieutenant of the 4th South Yarra Company and Training Adviser for Victoria. Her book on Guiding *Australian Adventure* was published in 1963.

In her professional life she had brought great credit to the profession, being a skilled diagnostician and small animal practitioner; one who amply met the expectations of Ian Clunies Ross when he had written that there is "no conceivable reason why they (women) may not achieve a distinction equal in all respects to that of their brother members".

References and Further Reading

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