

For The Poundstock Packet

Although having not lived in Poundstock for 60 years I still for some reason think of it as home and have always read The Packet when visiting my sister.

I have recently seen that agricultural articles were being sought by the editors and thought I may be able to contribute a slightly different angle by sharing some of my experiences selling to farmers for 50 years of my working life.

But let's start at the beginning.

I was born on March 10th 1938 at Treskinnick Farm (where Jen and Chris now live). I went to Poundstock County Primary School when Miss Barbara Mason was the infant teacher and Mr. R.H.Cory the headmaster.

I passed the 11 plus exam and went to Bude Grammar school in September 1948.

In 1954 I left grammar school and went to Bicton Agricultural College, leaving the following July with 3rd place in agriculture and my college certificate.

From Bicton I got my first employment on a large farming unit near Tiverton. My first jobs were to help the pigman with 100 sows and their progeny, I also had to help the farm foreman with milling and mixing all the feed used on the farm which also had sheep, beef cattle and 100,000 laying hens in battery cages and all the replacement growers plus 2000 turkeys for the Xmas trade.

After I had been there for some time the boss decided to start dairying and I somehow found myself as cowman milking about 100 cows in a brand new parlour set up.

After 5-6 years on the farm where I still helped with the mill and mixing as well as milking cows I was approached by the area manager of Vitamealo (a protein concentrate which we used in all the rations on the farm) enquiring if I would be interested in a trainee salesman's job. I said I would and after the usual interviews etc, I took the post at £600.00 per annum plus an A35 Austin company car.

I was still training with the representative in North Devon when a colleague in West Cornwall had a bad motoring accident and I got sent off at short notice to look after his area. He eventually came back but by this time the North Devon man had resigned so I walked straight back in to my own territory.

At about the same time Fulfords/Trumps a well known local merchanting company opened a new state of the art animal feed mill at Appledore and Vitamealo gained the business to supply all the protein concentrates for their Two Counties range of feeds. We as a company also formulated all their feeds and I had to pass a special National Corn and Agricultural Merchants exam to allow me to do this.

I stayed with Vitamealo for about 6 years. I was then head hunted by M.S.D. Agvet. An American company who were one of the world's leading human and animal drug companies.

I was introduced to their animal health regional manager by a mutual acquaintance. He told me they were looking for someone to develop the North Devon and West Somerset area with a new product called Thibenzole which was the first broad spectrum sheep anthelmintic to be introduced to this country.

After a great deal of thought I said I would like to be considered for the job and after the usual interviews etc. I was offered the post which I accepted.

Before I took up the post in North Devon I did several weeks parasitology training in Cambridge with 5 other newcomers to the job. Next I had two weeks with the rep in North Wales and then a week in Shropshire with the rep. there. These were both very experienced guys and I was really encouraged by their help.

It was now time to start in my own area with help in the first few days with the regional manager. I just couldn't believe how easy it was to sell this new product to sheep farmers especially on Exmoor where they had been waiting for such a product to be launched.

I spent a further 6 years with M.S.D. which I enjoyed very much. I was then approached by one of the better agents I had been working with to see if I was interested in joining them and selling direct to farmers in the same area. As I had a small family growing up I decided I would take up the offer as the M.S.D. job meant being away from home quite a bit. So started 21 years of working with South West Vet Supplies.

During these 21 years I had some very notable successes, especially when my old company now called Merial introduced a product called Ivomec which completely transformed the cattle worming scene. Merial ran a national competition for the most sales in the first 6 weeks of its introduction which I was fortunate to win, selling £76,000 in the period to win a fortnights holiday in a 5* hotel in Teneriffe. I had earlier won a 2 week holiday in a most marvellous hotel in the Lake District for the most sales of a product called Ranizole. This was where my knowledge of Exmoor and it's sheep farmers came into play as Ranizole was mainly used for the treatment of fluke and worm problems in sheep.

I stayed with South West Vet Supplies until the early 90's when the recession really hit and it was decided to wind up the company.

I had a sabbatical for a couple of weeks but then the phone started ringing with what was I going to do. Coincidentally I had calls from the 2 local co-ops on the same day and both offered me jobs over the phone. I chose to go to West Devon and North Cornwall Farmers as they offered me the opportunity to manage their Bideford branch which was relatively a new area for them and needed a lot of developing. The move turned out to be very rewarding as nearly all my previous customers in the area followed me

After 10 years or so the company changed its name to Country West Trading Ltd. with a new general manager. As I was now retirement age I decided to hand over the management of Bideford. The new general manager said I shouldn't finish altogether and offered me a new post in the company of heading up the animal health division. I stayed in this position until Country West Trading was taken over by Cornwall Farmers, who asked me to become their animal health specialist covering the

whole of their trading area. This I did until I finally reached my goal of 50 years dealing with farmers and retired.

I was completely overwhelmed when 50 or so farmers and their wives organised the most marvellous retirement send off in The Bradworthy Inn.

Some of the highlights my career brought me were being involved as chairman of Bideford Fatstock Show committee and being invited to be their president one year. Later I was invited to be president of Holsworthy Fatstock Show. I believe that Mr. Peter Kivell is the only other person to have been president of both shows.

My most memorable order was for £23,000 from a farmer about 20 miles north of Poundstock.

I obviously also had some bad times. The foot and mouth outbreak of 2001. Most evenings I would go to Keith Sanders of Kivells (my best friend) to try to console him after his days valuing animals for slaughter and having to see them killed. I am afraid the evening usually ended up with a glass of scotch (or two.)

More recently I sat with a farmer friend the day he had 93 pedigree Guernsey cows taken for slaughter with bTB. I just wish some of the do gooders of this country had been there that day. 56 years of breed lines gone in a couple of hours.

On a personal note I regret never scoring a century all the time I played cricket, 89 twice was the nearest I got.

Another regret and probably the most regretful to me was not having a mobile phone with me the day my Mum was taken to Derriford and passed away in the ambulance.

John Brewer.

a well known local merchanting company of the time opened a state of the art feed mill at Appledore and Vitamealo won the contract to supply all the concentrates for their feed and to formulate all the different rations which they produced.

To allow me to