



Robert Stordy in Abyssinia

by Bruce Vivash Jones and Clare Boulton

This new book presents for the first time the story of both an extraordinary veterinary surgeon, Robert Stordy, and also his remarkable journey in 1911 from Nairobi through the deserts of northern Kenya and across Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) to Addis Ababa and on to the Red Sea.

Stordy and his companion Lord Cranworth, with a mixed team of porters and staff plus assorted animal transport, made the journey of close to 1,500 miles mostly on foot. The motor transport they started with soon had to be discarded, but near the end of their trek they were able to use a newly constructed railway for the last few miles to Djibouti. Crossing the Red Sea to Aden, Stordy and Cranworth caught the next P&O liner back to Britain, or the “dear old country” as he called it!

The journey was planned by Stordy, then the Chief Veterinary Officer for the East African Protectorate (as Kenya was then called) to enable him to study the cattle that were traditionally moved south from Ethiopia to Kenya: he was concerned both with the possible impact of disease problems as well as investigating the trade to see if it could be structured and improved.

The story of this unique journey is presented in Stordy's own words: he left a comprehensive journal which both detailed their progress, adventures, mishaps and pleasures and also included his observations. The meetings with Dejaz Balcha, the Governor of Southern Abyssinia, and with the Council of Ministers in Addis Ababa, including the clothes, customs and food are all well described. Stordy not only recorded but photographed and collected: when he arrived back in England he passed the collection of plants, grasses and insects to the recognised authorities for examination. He was a keen naturalist who also noted the terrain and countryside, the peoples and their livestock. His narrative provides a valuable and singular record of both the flora and fauna observed along their route. The journal was written in the hey-day of European colonialism and has to be read within this context; Stordy had the confident superiority of the time, reflected in much of his commentary.

The journey from Nairobi to the Red Sea made valuable additions to knowledge and also provided a picture of a society in the middle of change. Abyssinia was the one part of Africa that had resisted occupation by colonising powers, yet was having to come to terms with the European world.

This book is of particular interest as it provides a good picture of the evolving colonial world in East Africa, which in fact only had a relatively short existence. It also highlights a man - Robert Stordy - who almost single-handedly created the effective veterinary service in Kenya and Uganda and also laid the groundwork for the Colonial Veterinary Service as a research based organization. This later made a major contribution to animal disease control in a large part of Africa - with a structure and effect that is still felt today.

Also in the book is a short biography of Robert Stordy. His time in East Africa was his first experience overseas: when the 1914-18 war started he was active in fighting the Germans in what is now Tanzania and later in France. In 1920 he was recruited to develop model farms in Peru until a 1930 revolution ended the contract. In 1936 he was again in Africa in Ethiopia during the Italian invasion, to provide veterinary relief, and was also organizing the refugee camp in the British legation gardens in Addis Ababa. Back in Britain again in 1939, when war started, he became Chief Executive of the National Air Raid Precautions Animals Committee recruiting a national veterinary volunteer force.

The main body of the book is the journal written by Stordy and is illustrated by some of the many photographs he took at the time. The original typescript is preserved in the archives of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. It is a remarkable record of a journey through a region that was little known to the Western World at that time and of contact with peoples to whom Europeans were an interesting curiosity.

Authors

Bruce Vivash Jones MRCVS graduated from the Royal Veterinary College in 1951 and then had a diverse career both in the UK and overseas. Currently his main interest is the history of the veterinary profession and veterinary medicine. He is a regular contributor by articles and papers on many topics of veterinary history, as well as speaking at meetings, including the opening presentation to the History sessions of the World Veterinary Congress in 2011 (World Veterinary Year). He is Senior Vice-Chairman of the Veterinary History Society.

Clare Boulton has been head of the Library and Information Service at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) since 2009. Following the award of a Diploma in Library and Information Studies from Manchester Polytechnic she spent 16 years working in arts libraries. This provided a particularly valuable background for her additional role managing the archive and historical book Collection at the College. Her particular interest in history can be seen in her regular contributions to the RCVS Knowledge website, as well as being the current Secretary of the Veterinary History Society.

Publishers

The Granville Penn Press by its name commemorates the memory of Granville Penn FSA (1761-1844), the grandson of the Quaker leader William Penn of Pennsylvania. Granville Penn was a member of the Odiham Agricultural Society, who in 1785 discussed a proposal that young farriers be given a "scientific education". It was Penn who took the idea, translated it to an ideal and drew up a plan for the creation of a veterinary profession. As a result the Veterinary College (now the Royal Veterinary College) was established in Camden Town, London, in 1791. Granville Penn had "a self-confessed commission to campaign for enlightenment causes": he justifies being called the Founding Father of the British veterinary profession.

The Granville Penn Press in association with the Veterinary History Society seeks to promote interest in the history of veterinary medicine and surgery.

Robert Stordy in Abyssinia: An Extraordinary Veterinary Surgeon (softback, 200 pages, 10 illustrations and maps) £10.50 ISBN 978-0-9566200-2-6 is a book that tells the story of a unique journey made across a little explored country and by an adventurous but enquiring man. His journal provides an insight into the culture at that time as well as giving a picture of the flora and fauna. Robert Stordy led a most valuable life, and made an essential contribution to the development of veterinary services and research in Africa.