

## Veterinary education in South Africa: The Classes of 1928 and 1929

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### ABSTRACT

The available photographs of the Classes of 1928 and 1929 are confusing because they not only bear the same date (1929) but are also composed of individual shots of the graduates rather than the customary group photograph. An answer to the riddle was provided by the presence of J A Thorburn (a member of the Class of 1927) who was a 'super' and qualified in 1928, in the one photograph, together with M C Robinson who also graduated in 1928. The photograph dated 1929 on which 4 graduates and the Dean, Prof. Dr P J du Toit, appear is that of the Class of 1928. The other photograph dated 1929 in which the Dean is absent is therefore dated correctly. Concise descriptions are given of the life histories of the nine graduates. Their careers show considerable variation. Only one of them spent his entire career at the Onderstepoort Research Institute as a very eminent research scientist and professor, and two became well-known professors at the Onderstepoort Faculty. Two were in municipal service for most of their careers and a third ended up working for a municipal authority after spending some time in England and at the Onderstepoort Research Institute. Two spent virtually their entire careers in the field as state veterinarians and a third farmed for most of his career, although he also dabbled in private practice and managed one of the provincial game parks in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) for some time. Four served in the South African Veterinary Corps during World War II.

**Key words:** 1928 and 1929, graduates, Onderstepoort, municipal veterinarians, scientists, state veterinarians, veterinary education, World War II.

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The photographs of the classes of 1928 and 1929 present an enigma because they both bear the same date, *i.e.* 1929. How does one then determine which is which? In addition, both photographs are composed of individual shots of the graduates rather than the more customary, comprehensive class photographs, which means that mistakes in producing them could have slipped in, thereby causing further confusion.

However, a superficial examination of the photographs soon provided an answer to the riddle. J A (Jack) Thorburn also features in the photograph of the Class of 1927 and it has already been established that he was a 'super' who qualified in 1928, a year later than his classmates. We also already know that M C Robinson, who qualified in 1928, married Joan Morice, the first girl to study at the Onderstepoort faculty, who qualified in 1927.

From this reasoning it was deduced that the photograph dated 1929, on which four graduates and the Dean, Prof. Dr P J du Toit, appear, is that of the Class of 1928 (Fig. 1). The other photograph in which W O Neitz and C Jackson, who later

became well-known Faculty professors *inter alia*, appear in the absence of a Dean is dated correctly, *i.e.* 1929 (Fig. 2).

### THE CLASS OF 1928

Since the career of J A Thorburn was described in the previous article, only three of the four graduates who feature in the photograph of the Class of 1928 require further elucidation.

L C Blomefield was born on 26 March 1905 in Durban. He was the only member of the class who spent his entire pre-retirement career with the Division of Veterinary Field Services as field veterinarian. He was appointed on 14 January 1929 as government veterinary officer and was posted to Umtata in the Transkei where East Coast fever was rife. Transfers to Port St Johns, Flagstaff, Greytown and East London (in 1944) followed. While in East London he spent several years doing full-time research on the control of ticks by dipping. He was subsequently invited by the Rhodesian government to advise their veterinary authorities on dipping matters. He succeeded Cyril Flight as Assistant Director of the Cape East and Transkei region in 1955 on the latter's transfer to Cape Town. In 1960 Dr Blome-

field was transferred to Pietermaritzburg to take over the Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) region upon the retirement of Major L L Daly. He retired at the age of 60 in 1965 but continued to carry out meat inspection for several years at the whaling station in Durban, presumably for the municipal authority. He died in Pietermaritzburg on 25 July 1971 at the age of 66.

R C (Richard) Clark was born in Johannesburg on 13 February 1906 where he – and his three brothers, Marshall (later General Manager of the South African Railways), Bernard (later Secretary of Health) and David (later an architect) – attended the King Edward High School, matriculating in 1923. He then enrolled for the veterinary course and qualified at Onderstepoort in 1928. He joined the government service on 10 January 1929 and was stationed as government veterinary officer at various places such as Allerton Laboratory (1929), Nongoma (1930–1932), Ermelo, Bethlehem and Komatipoort. In 1938, however, he was transferred to the Veterinary Research Institute at Onderstepoort, first to the Pathology Department and in 1942 to the Physiology Department. In 1944 he was awarded a DVSc degree on the strength of his research on rumen physiology. When his senior, Prof. J I Quin, was promoted to the position of Director of Veterinary Services in 1941, Clark took over as part-time professor of physiology in the Onderstepoort Faculty and head of the Physiology Department.

Prof. Clark became editor of the *Journal of the South African Veterinary Medical Association* in 1942, a position which he initially held for 4 years. Reappointments lasting for shorter periods of time followed in 1953 and 1968. He retired from Onderstepoort in 1968 at the age of 62 years and died on 16 July 1977 at the age of 71.

M C (Mike) Robinson was born on 14 May 1903 in Johannesburg and, like Clark, attended King Edward High School and qualified as a veterinarian at the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1928. He also joined the government service as a government veterinary officer and saw service in Umtata and Nongoma. In 1930 he married Joan Morice, as mentioned above, and joined her in private practice in Johannesburg. However, their practice

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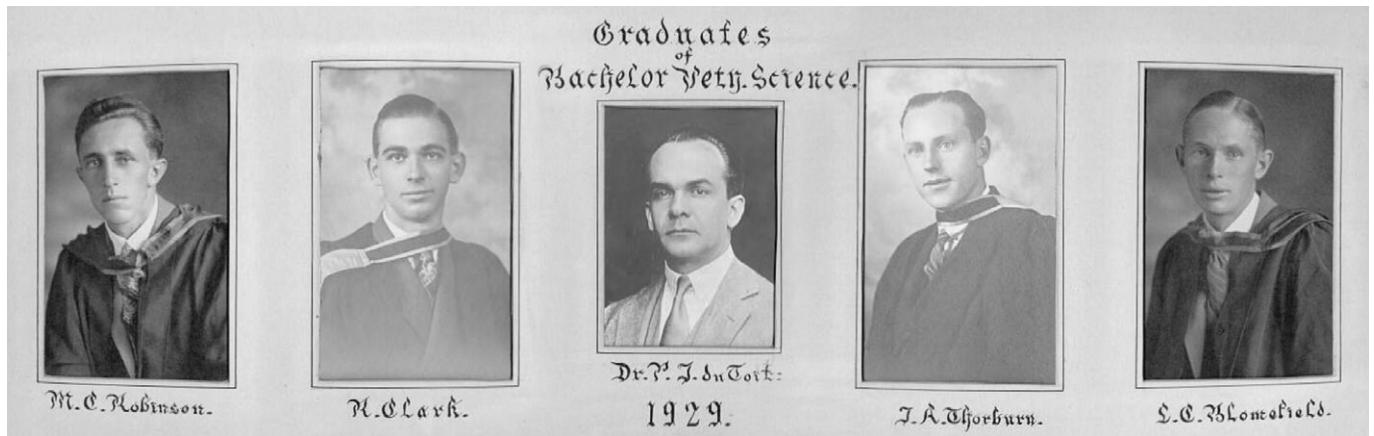


Fig. 1: The Class of 1928.

was short-lived because they closed it in 1935 when Mike joined the Municipal Service in Johannesburg. He served as a Captain in the South African Veterinary Corps in World War II. It is of interest to record that he was due to sail on the mule ship *SS Nirpura* to India, but the night before it departed he was replaced by Major A M Howie MRCVS. The ship was torpedoed on 3 March 1943 and Howie was one of many casualties. Dr Robinson's wife Joan (a member of the Class of 1927) died on 24 November 1944. He retired from the Johannesburg Municipal Service in 1960 and settled in Umkomaas, Natal, where he died on 23 March 1978 at the age of almost 75.

**THE CLASS OF 1929**

The first thing that strikes one about the current photograph of the Class of 1929 (Fig. 2) is the obvious youthfulness of one of the graduates, B M Horwitz. His position on the original photograph was indicated by a neatly tied scroll, which means that

it was not possible to obtain a suitable photograph of him at the time that the compound picture (obviously composed of shots taken individually of the six graduates) was prepared. However, a school photograph of Dr Horwitz was recently obtained from his son through the initiative of Prof. Peter Belonje, which enabled Prof. Ken Pettey to complete the original picture. In fact, it is very likely that the latter was composed almost as an afterthought because most of the photographs were clearly taken several years after the graduation ceremony when the graduates were considerably older. Only one of them (W O Neitz) appears in graduation regalia.

B M (Bertie) Horwitz was born in East London on 17 October 1907 and matriculated at Selborne College in 1924 where he played for its first rugby team, as indicated by the only photograph of him which could be traced (Fig. 2). Like most of his predecessors, he also joined the government service shortly after qualify-

ing in 1929 and was stationed at Allerton Laboratory as government veterinary officer until July 1931. He then tried his hand in practice in Port Elizabeth while also doing duty as a part-time municipal veterinarian. From 1937 to 1940 he was employed by the municipality on a full-time basis. He then served in the South African Veterinary Corps in World War II. From 1944 to 1953 he was municipal veterinary officer in control of milk supply in Cape Town and was promoted to Director of the Municipal Abattoir in 1953 in which capacity he officiated until his retirement in 1968. Dr Horwitz then rejoined the government service and was *inter alia* involved with the drafting of the Animal Slaughter, Meat and Animal Products Act. In April 1973 he took up employment with the Department of Medical Microbiology at Tygerberg Hospital as infection control officer and died in office at Tygerberg Hospital on 1 April 1982 aged 74.

C (Cecil) Jackson was born in London



Fig. 2: The Class of 1929.

on 10 May 1905. He initially studied veterinary anatomy and physiology at the Johannesburg University College, the predecessor of the University of the Witwatersrand, and obtained a BSc degree in 1924. After working as registrar to the Hon. Mr Justice RA Tindall, he enrolled at the Onderstepoort Faculty to qualify as a veterinarian at the end of 1929. Jackson started his veterinary career as a research officer at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Laboratory and part-time lecturer in Anatomy in 1930. In 1936, at the age of 31, he was not only awarded a DVSc degree for his classic thesis entitled 'The incidence and pathology of tumours of domesticated animals in South Africa' but was also appointed part-time professor of Anatomy in the faculty. [In those days all faculty posts were part-time positions.] He also took on the responsibility of an editor of the *Journal of the South African Veterinary Medical Association* at the end of the year, a position that he held for one year, but he was a member of the editorial committee from 1931 to 1948. He was a great lover of classical music and regularly gave small orchestral performances at his home to which interested students were invited.

Prof. Jackson remained professor of Anatomy at the Onderstepoort Faculty until he resigned in September 1955 at the age of 50. Thereafter he was variously employed, first at the Medical School of the University of Witwatersrand and then as senior fellow of the National Cancer Association of South Africa. He left South Africa for the United Kingdom in 1957 but returned to Africa the next year to head the pre-clinical veterinary school at Makerere College in Kampala, Uganda, where he also served as professor of Anatomy. In 1961 he accepted a post as principal research officer at the Biological Research Institute at Achimota in Ghana and became acting director the following year. He died in Ghana on 5 January 1965 at the age of 60.

W O (Willi, or Willem – his first name was Wilhelm) Neitz was one of the greatest research scientists ever produced by Onderstepoort. Born in Potgietersrus (now Makopane) on 17 November 1906, he was the youngest child of a German missionary from the Berlin Mission, which was situated in a semi-rural environment in the bushveld. As a child he often had to look on helplessly when livestock owned by his parents and local farmers died from especially tick-borne diseases. To quote from his own *curriculum vitae*, written in the third person, 'These scenes, and the ruination of many a hopeful farmer in the bushveld, created a lasting impression and caused him to study

veterinary science'. He received his schooling in Potgietersrus and matriculated in 1924. He then proceeded to study veterinary science and qualified at Onderstepoort in 1929. He was appointed research officer at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Laboratory under Prof. P J du Toit early in 1930. He never married and research became 'his passion'. He was awarded a DVSc degree in 1945 for the research work in which he demonstrated the multiplicity of immunogenically distinct bluetongue strains and the absolute necessity of producing a polyvalent vaccine. His scientific productivity is legendary. It spanned several veterinary disciplines, Neitz *inter alia* publishing 133 scientific articles up to 1971 of which several were monographs consisting of more than 100 pages. He shunned the European custom of adding his name to publications of his subordinates, as was done by some of his predecessors and earlier contemporaries at Onderstepoort. He held the positions of part-time professor of Protozoology and Virology from 1948–1957 at the Onderstepoort Faculty, part-time professor of Protozoology at same faculty from 1958–1968 and visiting professor at the Universidade Federale do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 1972–1979. Prof. Neitz died in his 73rd year in Pretoria on 18 August 1979 while on leave from Brazil.

Prof. Neitz served on many national and international scientific bodies such as the Expert Panel on Tick-borne Diseases of the FAO/OIE. He received several awards and other accolades, including the Senior Captain Scott Medal of the South African Biological Society in 1954; the 'Havenga-prys vir Geneeskunde' of the 'Suid Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns' in 1957; the South Africa Medal for 1970 of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science; the Gold Medal of the South African Veterinary Association in 1971; and the degree DrMedVet *honoris causa* awarded by the Tierärztliche Hochschule, Hannover, Germany in 1963.

E J Pullinger was born on 14 February 1906 in Johannesburg and completed his schooling at Oundle School in England in 1924. He graduated as veterinarian at the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1929 and then proceeded to England to register with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons as MRCVS. He was awarded the Clement Stephenson Research Scholarship in 1931 which enabled him to take a postgraduate Diploma in Bacteriology (Dip Bac), awarded in 1933, at the London University. Dr Pullinger spent the next 4 years of his career at the Royal Veterinary College as lecturer in Bacteriology and as a research assistant. On his return to

South Africa he worked at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Laboratory as research officer until 1939 when he joined the Johannesburg Municipal Service. From 1940–1946 he saw active service as a major in the South African Veterinary Corps during World War II, when the photograph appearing in the compound picture of the class was obviously taken. After the war he was appointed Assistant Director of the Johannesburg Municipal Abattoir. He died on 10 November 1959 in Johannesburg aged 53. One of his sons, 'Pat', was to follow in his father's footsteps by qualifying as a veterinarian in 1963.

F B (Bob) Wright. After qualifying in 1929, Felix Wright worked briefly as a government veterinary surgeon in Estcourt and later as a private practitioner based on a farm south of Estcourt. A serious accident, which left his arms badly burnt, made him give up practice and he accepted a job with the Natal Parks Board, managing the Kamberg Nature Reserve and its visitors' rest camp. He also managed a small pack of hounds with which he hunted jackals on behalf of the Kamberg and Underberg farmers' associations. A fine horseman, his hunt was for some years the most successful killer of jackals in the whole of South Africa. There is no information as to how he acquired the nickname 'Bob', but he was known by this name throughout the Natal Midlands, even by the Zulus of the area who called him 'Ubobrite'. Several classes of students may recall him as a meticulous but fair examiner in Animal Management for the Faculty, a chore which he looked upon as a privilege. He retired to a farm near Nottingham Road where he lived with his wife 'Winnie' until his death. The dates of his birth and death could not be traced.

J J (Swarie) Zwarenstein was born in Lydenburg on 20 January 1905 and graduated as veterinarian from the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1929. He then joined the state service as government veterinary officer and was stationed at the Allerton Laboratory, Onderstepoort, Nongoma and Eshowe during his career, most of which was spent in the Division of Veterinary Field Services in which he rose to the rank of Sub Director, later known as Assistant Director. He served as an officer in the South African Veterinary Corps during World War II. Dr Zwarenstein retired in 1965 at the age of 60, but was immediately reappointed as poultry pathologist at the Allerton Laboratory. In 1972 he was invited to join Rainbow Chicken Farms with which he was associated until the time of his death in Johannesburg on 2 February 1974, after a short illness, at the age of 69.



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