

Janet Dewdney

OBE, BVSc, MRCVS, Ph.D, FRCPath, FRSA 1934-2006



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Janet Dewdney was born in Sussex but lived for most of her working life in Kent. She read for a degree in veterinary science at Bristol University and joined the pharmaceutical firm Beecham in her 20s, where she worked as an immunologist, finally becoming director and vice president of biotechnology (Europe) for SmithKline Beecham.

She was awarded an OBE in 1995 for services to the pharmaceutical industry.

In the late 1950s Janet was asked by a friend to house temporarily various items of early oak furniture. The pieces fascinated her and inspired her to form her own collection, which quickly became such an obsession that in 1970 she opened an antique shop to dispose of surplus items. The shop, Farnborough (Kent) Antiques, which I ran, specialised in oak and country furniture and early woodcarving, exhibiting at the Guildford, Buxton, Chelsea, Café Royal and Olympia fairs.

Janet always retained a special affection for things relating to Sussex and formed an interesting collection of Sussex pottery, which she donated some years ago to the Bexhill-on-Sea Museum, where it is currently on display. She also made an extensive collection of early farriery books, which she donated to the Royal Veterinary College in London.

She spent much of her sadly curtailed retirement researching and recording her collections of woodcarving and pharmaceutical delft. She had previously prepared an inventory of her Sussex pottery and added four more volumes of illustrated inventories. She had just embarked upon a sixth volume documenting a collection of woodcuts and engravings when she died.

She enormously enjoyed discovering as much as she could about each individual item she had, valuing things for their intrinsic interest rather than on aesthetic grounds. She recognised a kindred spirit in the work of the Regional Furniture Society and hoped that her legacy would enable others to further their studies and derive the same pleasures she had found in her research both into medicine and antiques.

Celia Jennings