

### **OBITUARY: DR DAVID LACEY**

Dr David Lacey, who died recently, was a much-loved member of the local community. We are reprinting his biography, written by Pat Fenn and published in the February 2009 issue of *Bosham Life*, with later additions by his son, Graham.

### **THE VILLAGE AND HOSPICE DOCTOR**



*David and Vivien Lacey in 2007, when they handled the distribution of Bosham Life*

Chance played an important part in David Lacey's life. His education was eclectic, to say the least. Prep school and Rugby in England, India to be with his parents, South Africa to live with a schoolteacher uncle, University of Cape Town for preliminary medical exams, Cambridge for a degree in Natural Sciences, and three years at St Thomas's, London, before qualifying as a doctor. For two years he worked at St Thomas's as a junior doctor, studying to become a Member of the prestigious Royal College of Physicians. It was then that he met his nurse wife-to-be, Vivien, whom he married in May 1953. In the same year he was called up to do National Service as a doctor with the RAF.

It did not take him long to realise that his vocation lay more in the direction of a GP than as a Service doctor, but where? It so happened that a member of the Bosham practice had left abruptly and a replacement had to be recruited immediately. He and the pregnant Vivien had no previous connection with the village, but liked what they saw at a preliminary interview and when the phone call came, announcing that the practice was struggling to cope with a flu epidemic and needed him at once, they did not hesitate. For £4 a week they rented a one-bedroom flat in Manor Barn, erstwhile stables to the Manor House. So began David and Vivien's 62 years' association with the village. They bought a house in Chequer Lane, where they brought up their four children, before

spending their final years together in Moreton Road.

David soon established a reputation as a superb general practitioner. Never wishing to develop a medical expertise in a particular area, he recognised the importance of adopting an holistic approach to his patients. Indeed, he insisted to the end of his working life that the basic principles of history taking, listening and clinical examination, such as he had been taught at St Thomas's, should never be replaced by sophisticated investigations. Technology should support, not replace, the intellectual procedure that leads to a diagnosis. And the relationship with the patient should be at the heart of a doctor's work.

Towards the end of his career David identified a gap in the provision for the terminally ill, which drew him towards the hospice movement. He was approached by Peggy Lee, who had been a ward sister at St Thomas's and was then deputy matron at the Royal West Sussex Hospital. She had worked with Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement, and been greatly influenced by her. Even those with no first-hand knowledge of these admirable establishments will have heard of the loving care that terminally ill patients receive in hospices. Patients can be sure that their pain will be controlled and that they are well prepared for a peaceful death.

David was impressed by the work and success of hospices around the country and determined that one should be founded in Chichester. In 1980 a small committee was formed and launched an appeal in 1983, asking for £500,000 to build St Wilfrid's. The site was bought for £20,000 and the Duchess of Norfolk, who was co-chairman of Help the Hospices, agreed to become Patron of St Wilfrid's. David was appointed Medical Director and the first patient arrived in January 1987. The first nine beds were later supplemented by another six, financed by the Dunhill Trust. Cancer was always the main disease to be treated by palliative care, but St Wilfrid's was one of the first hospices to include those suffering from motor neurone disease. The vast majority of the hospice's costs are met from voluntary contributions, investments and legacies.

David rated this time as the most rewarding in his medical career. In four years he saw over 1,000 patients benefit from the hospice's treatment and care. His philosophical approach to hospice care was always strongly influenced by a deep moral, indeed Christian, conviction of the importance of caring for the dying to ensure they passed away in dignity and peace.

David retired from his hospice work in 1990 and settled down to enjoy bridge and golf, and visiting four children and ten grandchildren. He was also a member of the village's 'Eclectics' discussion group. He and Vivien continued to love Bosham, living in the village until Vivien's death in August 2015 when David moved to Tunbridge Wells to be closer to his family. Shortly before he died, he published '*While I'm here, doctor*', under the pseudonym 'Doctor Charles'. It consists chiefly of amusing anecdotes, drawn from David's time as a GP. It is available from Amazon, among other outlets. He remained very fit for the vast majority of his 91 years, and lived life to the full almost up to his death on 30th March 2017.

So many achievements in such a fascinating and varied life. David will be greatly missed by his loving family, and by all those who had contact with him professionally, as well as socially, in Bosham and further afield.

*Pat Fenn and Graham Lacey*