

# Chawton House Surgery – A History.



Only a few patients will remember pre 1914 when Dr Pithie lived at 1 High Street, Lymington. There was a small surgery and dispensary approached by a passage from Captains Row.

In 1914 Dr Pithie and Dr Kay moved the practice to 48 High Street (now Moore Blatch). The surgery was in the coach house. Dr Kay was a larger than life character, a friend of John Howlett, an experienced and dynamic engineer and founder of Wellworthy's, a local engineering works. He used to send him a bill every month, whether he had seen him or not! Dr Kay was a cricketer and had a renowned capacity for port. He went to Vienna and married an opera singer, but unfortunately she killed herself by jumping from the roof of number 48 onto the terrace.

The two grandest houses in the town (Dr Kay at 48 High Street and Dr Maturin at Monmouth House) were the two doctor's houses. There was great rivalry between the practices; wives were expected to call on notable new arrivals in the area to enlist them as patients. In general, Wistaria practice (Dr Maturin) had the congregation and what was eventually to become Chawton House had the pubs!

Both practices required a surgeon. George Pitt had served in the 1914 -18 war, then trained at Guy's (where his father was a consultant known as 'Bottomless Pitt'). He joined the practice in about 1928 and lived at Pilgrim opposite the Church. He was a passionate gardener and gradually acquired neighbouring land to create three great gardens extending down Church Lane. Together with Geoffrey Hallett of Wistaria, they did all the surgery and casualty at Lymington Hospital, and still managed to play tennis in the afternoons.

A G (Sam) Johnson, also from Guy's, joined the practice after war service in 1939 – 43. He lodged in the Old Bank House, as did the solicitor 'Purple' Blatch. Without warning, Dr Kay put the entire house of 48 on the market. 'Purple' bought it immediately and Sam and George bought the coach-house from him and continued to practice from it as 48a High Street.

At the start of the NHS, part time surgeon/GPs were forced to choose one or the other path. Geoffrey Hallett became a full-time surgeon at Southampton and Lymington. George Pitt became a full-time GP.

Geoffrey Clinton-Jones joined the partnership from Guy's Hospital in 1961, taking over George's list in anticipation of his retirement. The list was growing however, and when George retired in 1963 Ivor Johnston joined the practice from the RAF.

Sam Johnson had introduced an appointments system, revolutionary then for General practice, but this required a part time receptionist. This formidable lady used to stand in the waiting room shouting patients' names in turn.

Jonathan Rogers, also from Guy's, took over from Geoffrey Clinton-Jones in 1968 when he moved to the Hythe practice. Jonathan was a notable sailor, and with his boat-builder brother – Jeremy, won the quarter-ton cup.

In 1978 Tom McEwen, a Bart's man, joined Ivor and Jonathan. In those days doctors were on call 24/7, having only Thursday afternoons and one in three weekends off. Space was very restricted at 48a. Tom's consulting room was so small that the examination couch could not be fully made flat; anyone taller than 5 foot had to be examined sitting up! However in 1982 Mr Runeckles' house and dental practice at Chawton House were for sale.

Chawton House provided a much better accommodation, and a beautiful garden. Donald and Yvonne Mackenzie rented the first floor and took on Mr Runeckles' dental patients. Gradually both medical and dental practices needed more space, and the Mackenzies moved out in 1988. Ivor's daughter-in-law, Sally Johnston (Guy's again) joined as a part-time partner.

Ivor retired in June 1999 and Jonathan in December 1999. Tom became senior partner and Sally moved to full time and welcomed Ed Reeves (Guy's & St Thomas's) and Annabel Arnold (University College Hospital).

Chawton House was in need of modernisation as there was no lift or disabled access. These seemed impossible to install in the old listed building, however, none of the doctors had noticed that the Lymington Tavern next door had been empty for months! The Brewery was approached and an offer made and

accepted. Building work to link the two premises commenced and was completed in 2002 and the extension formally opened on 4th September 2002. There are still features from the Tavern in the surgery, such as an old stained glass window bearing the brewery logo which was rescued from a skip. It now has pride of place in the reception waiting room.



In 2006 Dr Tom McEwen retired, being replaced by Dr Ben Vines (University Hospital Southampton) and in 2016 Dr Wyn Roberts was taken on as a salaried GP after completing his training at the Surgery. He became a partner in April 2018.

In March 2023, Dr Annabel Arnold retired, being replaced by Dr Joanna McEwen (Cambridge University).

We have a few pictures of the current premises throughout the years:

## 1902



1924



1958



**Present Day**

