



# Veterinary History

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## EDITORIAL

### THE ROCKY ROAD FROM ODIHAM

The most defining characteristic of any profession, with a corpus of knowledge that embodies their particular art and science, is its ability to constantly improve, and most importantly to be able to transmit this knowledge to new entrants, in a word – education. In this respect veterinary medicine is no different from any other sector of knowledge transfer.

Veterinary medicine however has seemingly never found it easy to either map out or follow a clear educational path. The obvious comparison is with human medicine; while here there were innumerable difficulties (not least the disparate evolutionary routes of surgeons and physicians), but from their early days medical profession entrants were mainly directed through university systems.

Veterinary medicine sprang from stony ground, with a seemingly strange admixture of folk-lore, mumbo-jumbo, religion and ‘secret’ remedies *plus* some accurate observations combined with a sprinkling of developing medical knowledge. This led to a situation in the mid 1700s when there was a realization that the United Kingdom lagged behind, what appeared to be, the more enlightened countries on the Continent. First, Bourgelat had convinced the authorities in France to establish two veterinary schools, in Lyons in 1762 and in Alfort in 1766. These were followed by one in Turin in 1769 and then in the 1780s national schools were created in Copenhagen, Budapest, Dresden, Hanover and Vienna. It is said that the need to maintain cavalry horses and efforts to control epidemic cattle disease, plus more benevolent regimes on the Continent aided this earlier development, maybe so; however, this combination of factors did not exist in our off-shore islands.

At this time Britain was experiencing the rapid development of cattle and sheep breeds as well as efforts to improve horses for both work and pleasure: advances that were to put us in the forefront of animal breeding for many years. Interestingly, George III, while King of both Britain and Hanover signed the required decree to bring the Hanover School into being, but took no such action in Britain; if any advance was to be made it would have to be by private efforts and public subscription.

Needs were well recognized; in 1758 a circular was issued proposing a hospital for horses, and then in 1766 John Snape published a proposal to establish a 'Hippiatric Infirmary' for clinical and academic instruction. In 1788 this school was established in Knightsbridge, but closed very soon after opening.

The story of the Odiham Agricultural Society is well known, of how this group of men proposed in 1785 to try to put an end to the perceived animal cruelty caused by quackery and to provide young farriers with a scientific education. This was translated into the 'Plan'; Vial de Saint Bel was appointed the first Professor when the London College was established in 1791, but the early years were difficult following his death from glanders in 1793.

This bad start was exacerbated by the financial problems of the infant school, its passing into the hands of Edward Coleman (trained as a surgeon) in 1794 (after William Moorcroft resigned) and the drastic reduction in the course of tuition introduced by St Bel to a matter of months. This short-sighted latter move, to meet Prime Minister Pitt's need to appoint veterinarians to each regiment of cavalry, to help reduce the Army's losses in horses now being incurred in the war against Revolutionary France, resulted in a chronically under-funded institution. Adding to this situation was the dictatorial position of Coleman, who was also the Principal Army Veterinary Surgeon; two posts he held for some 45 years, thus exerting a stranglehold on the young profession.

All these perceived problems, together with the role of certain of the medically qualified College Governors in suppressing the aspirations of the veterinary graduates early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – chiefly by obstructing their approaches for a Royal Charter of Incorporation – allowed a great social and scientific gap to develop between the medical and veterinary professions. This gap remained for at least a century after the Royal Charter was eventually obtained in 1844.

The creation of the second veterinary school, in Edinburgh, by William Dick in 1823, whilst challenging Coleman's supremacy, in fact had little effect and the school developed into a separate Scottish power centre. Briefly they united in the Petition to obtain a Royal Charter, but then this broke down and led to a long period

of in-fighting, recriminations and general unpleasantness, during which time only slow progress was made in advancing the quality and breadth of veterinary student education.

By 1900 there were five proprietary schools: 2 in Edinburgh, 1 in Glasgow, 1 in Dublin and the Royal Veterinary College in London. This was a difficult time for all the schools, in particular the second establishment in Edinburgh – the New Veterinary College. As a result when Principal William Owen Williams was invited to transfer to Liverpool (the new university wanted a veterinary faculty to enable them to cover the full spread of the medical sciences) he accepted and transferred both school and students, together with the Royal Warrant of Affiliation. This move was vehemently opposed by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and Sir John McFadyean in particular because the Williams' school was now integrated into a civic university.

The situation was not helped when in 1920, John George Adami FRS (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool) sent shock-waves through the profession when he made very positive criticisms of both British veterinary education and the RCVS – on the basis of the 'segregated' colleges and the controlling power of the RCVS over entry to the profession. Adami was right; university integration was essential for the enhancement of both tuition and research.

W.R. Wooldridge saw this and through his efforts with the Loveday Reports both the existing colleges and the new ones at Bristol and Cambridge were all brought into the University system. As a result the post-war years were exciting times for veterinary education as the new structures, and funding, enabled a scientifically based profession to develop.

Behind this very tortuous evolution have been many powerful veterinary figures – Edward Coleman, William Dick, John Share Jones and John McFadyean, as well as William Williams, J.B. Simonds, John Gamgee and F. Fitzwygram – all with strong views and, unfortunately, very frequently in opposition to their colleagues.

Following in this tradition (but without so much controversy) it was William Weipers who regenerated the Glasgow Veterinary School and showed a new clarity in veterinary education. He was able to not only open doors but also windows, coming as he did from a background in clinical practice rather than the previous somewhat hide-bound academic environment. His influence followed perfectly from Wooldridge's vision and is still felt.

In retrospect all these men had to fight their way, invariably with opposition and continually under-funded, but always sure they were right. Those that won through

are responsible for the profession today and for finding its place alongside the other medical sciences. It has been not just a rocky road, it's been a very tortuous one also and almost certainly the end is still to be reached. Not just Britain, but all English speaking veterinary faculties owe a debt to those who sat down at the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1785 in the George Inn at Odiham, Hampshire to discuss the promotion of 'the study of scientific farriery'. From this grew the veterinary schools, veterinary research and the veterinary profession.

*BVJ*

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**FROM *The Veterinarian* 1846 p. 655**

*At the City Sale Rooms*  
*'The Great Horse'*

**Will be set up for sale on the 9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1846, at noon**

A strong, staunch, steady, sound, stout, safe, snug, serviceable, strapping, supple, swift, smart, sightly, sprightly, spirited, sturdy, shining, surefooted, sleek, smooth, spanky, well-skinned, sized and shaped, leather-coloured horse, called 'Tappin'; with small star, and swift, square bodied, slender-shouldered, sharp-sighted, and steps stately; free from strain, sprain, spasms, spavin, stringhalt, staggers, strangles, seeling, sallenders, surfeit, seams, strumous swellings, sorances, scratches, splint, squint, scarf, sores, shuffling, shambling gait, or symptoms of sickness of any sort. He is neither stiff-mouthed, shabby-coated, sinew-shrunk, spurgalled, saddle-backed, shell-toothed, slim-gutted, surbated, skin-scabbed, short-winded, splay-footed, or shoulder-slipped; and is sound in the sword point and stifle joint. Has neither sick-spleen, sleeping-evil, sitfasts, snaggle-tooth, sandcrack, subcutaneous sores, or shattered hoofs; nor is sour, sulky, stubborn, surly, or sullen in temper; neither shy nor skittish, slow, sluggish, nor stupid; he never slips, trips, strays, stalks, starts, stops, shakes, snivels, snuffles, snorts, stumbles, and seldom sweats; has a showy, stylish switch-tail, and a safe set of shoes on: can feed on stubs, straw, seage, corn, or Scotch grass; can carry TEN STONE with great speed and long strokes. – Upset price low.

S.G. JACOBS, *Auctioneer*, Aug. 25<sup>th</sup> 1846.