AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter Number 6 – March 1993

-----------------------------

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 20 MAY 1993

Our next meeting will be held as part of the Annual Conference of the AVA at Junipers Hotel, Broadbeach, Queensland. It will be held at 2 pm Thursday 20 May.

The following four papers will be presented:

D. Mahoney – The history and the control of tick fevers in Australia.

H. Osborne, D. de Frederick and I. Freeman – The eradication of bovine tuberculosis from the Solomon Islands.

R. McKenzie – The Queensland Poison Plants Committee: its history and functions.


After the papers the Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held. This will be followed immediately by drinks and savouries prior to the AVA Conference Dinner.

RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP

A gentle reminder to those who have not yet paid their annual subscription for 1993. This is $15.00 and a coupon is enclosed. If you have already forwarded your subscription throw the coupon away.

HISTORICAL NOTES

EARLY MILITARY SERVICE IN VICTORIA – Jessica Taylor

Prior to Federation, each colony maintained its own military force with a few veterinary surgeons attached to mounted units. The earliest record relating to veterinarians and the military in Victoria is of R. Gibton who had been offered a commission in a cavalry regiment in England after his graduation.
from the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) in 1851, but who had decided to 
emigrate and seek appointment to a military unit in Victoria instead. He was 
apparently unsuccessful in his application; disillusioned, he became Clerk of 
Courts at Warrnambool, eventually taking up practice as a barrister, yet still 
becoming a member of the first Veterinary Association in 1880. However 
Henry Wragge and George Snowball were officially attached to the defence 
forces in 1872 as inspecting veterinary surgeons, as was Graham Mitchell in 
1874, all three serving on a voluntary basis.

L.C. Whitfield has reported that a Veterinary Department was formed in 1886 
under the aegis of the Colonial Defence Department, and the veterinary 
surgeons were granted honorary rank. In 1890 both veterinary and medical 
staff were required to wear the uniform of their unit, but remained unpaid. By 
1892 some form of remuneration was being paid for service, though no 
travelling expenses were reimbursed and the veterinarians always had to 
supply their own horse. William Snowball, a Major attached to the Victorian 
Mounted Rifles and a nephew of George Snowball, had also been engaged as 
an Inspecting Veterinary Surgeon. In a letter to the Assistant Adjutant General 
he pointed this out and argued as well that the salary that veterinary surgeons 
were offered was very inadequate for the work they did. Snowball also 
emphasised that the Veterinary Department was "numerically deficient" and 
that a "special and distinct department" should be formed for other veterinary 
surgeons who could then be called upon when necessary. It is apparent from 
an annotation to the letter(1) that it was received favourably.

The Boer War broke out in 1899 and during the course of hostilities 25 
Australian veterinarians volunteered for service. Of these, two graduates from 
the Melbourne Veterinary College, Ernest Kendall and H.S. Ruddock, were 
promoted to Veterinary-Captain with the 1st Victorian Mounted Infantry and 
the 2nd Mounted Rifles respectively. They were typical of the 16,000 
Australians who saw service in South Africa for, apart from some of those 
who embarked with the first contingents, the Australians were nearly all part-
time soldiers who, buoyed by the patriotic sense of duty to Queen and 
Empire, went off to the war ill-prepared and with no significant military 
instruction.

In England, acknowledgment of the value of the veterinary surgeon in the 
Army had been a long time in coming, and by the Boer War veterinarians 
were still not given the authority to control their own activities. In 1891 the 
Veterinary Service had been centralised and renamed the Army Veterinary 
Department, with the Principal Veterinary Surgeon (PVO) becoming a 
member of the War Office Staff and given the title of Director-General. A 
change in the War Establishments in 1898, however, was detrimental to the
veterinarians, for it made no provision at all for the care of sick animals in the field but instead enlarged the Remount Department, which had control over the supply and transport of animals to the army at the front; also, although the service of the PVO was retained, there were no administrative staff to carry out his orders. Hence at the outbreak of war, the British Army had no effective veterinary service at all.

The previous year, following Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897, Britain’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, had chaired a colonial conference at which defence plans had been a significant part of the agenda. Britain was keen to establish an imperial defence force reserve in an attempt to strengthen her own military capabilities, at the same time wishing to ensure direct control of such a force by the British Parliament. Certainly when war was declared, the British colonies responded promptly to the call to arms, but official response from the Australians were guarded. Their troops – initially senior officers were not required from Australia – formed one Australian Regiment, but "the deployment and control of Australian troops were handed over entirely to British authority". (2) The Australian veterinary volunteers were thus immediately affected by the lack of any organised British veterinary service.

With the onset of war, organisation of the British veterinary service, and provision for staff and treatment facilities, proved woefully inadequate. The loss of animal life was horrendous and in the main due not directly to war service, but to gross mismanagement resulting in appalling debilitation, disease and starvation. The enforcement of a ration scale at starvation level on mounts that were unfit, unconditioned and untrained, combined with a low standard of horsemastership in the British forces, led to enormous animal wastage in what has since been declared "a deliberate sacrifice of animal life and of public money". (3) To make matters worse the Remount Department, with inexperienced staff, was made responsible for the control of veterinary treatment; it was not till 1900 that a veterinary officer was put in charge of that Department.

Sick and debilitated animals were returned to the Remount Depots, to be mixed with new arrivals from shipboard. Instead of rehabilitating the trained troop horse, the British relied increasingly on importing horses, and Australian veterinarians often travelled to the Cape in charge of a ship's load of remounts. Ernest Kendall travelled with such a load and reported that they landed at Durban in splendid condition and it was generally remarked by the Embarking Officer what a great difference in class and condition
compared to a shipment of American horses from New Orleans which were landed at the same time. Our horses were greatly in advance of the others and admirably suited for the work of mounted infantry in South Africa. (4)

Smith reports, though, that Australasian horses required time to acclimatise to South African conditions -"all big leggy horses failed; but others did well if given time". (5)

Having arrived in South Africa, the Australian veterinarians were deployed on a regimental basis as were British officers, but there was no administrative organisation. Smith mentions that the exact number of serving colonial officers was unknown and remarks that the lack of documentation "is evidence of how completely their organisation was out of touch with the Veterinary Service of the Regular Forces". (6) That the British had not got this documented themselves was not altogether surprising taking into account the poor organisation of the British contingent, and its seems unfair to pass the blame on to the colonial forces. Indeed, very little is documented of the services given by Australian veterinarians in the Boer War. They had to enlist for a minimum period of one year and a majority continued to serve in the Commonwealth Military Forces on their return to Australia.

Through these years, it seemed that the War Office in London did its best to delay the implementation of an organised service under the control of veterinary officers. The Veterinary Service had been placed under the Remount Department with disastrous consequences and, despite strong and repeated representations from the Council of the RVC, any change had been strongly resisted. Even a proposed delegation to the Secretary of War was refused by the War Office. The Australian volunteers found themselves working in the same abysmal conditions, under constraints that were considered by the Council of the RVC as"degrading, and as lowering professional status". (7)

After peace was declared, in Great Britain there was a Royal Commission on the war, and a Court of Inquiry on the administration of the Army Remount Department. The latter court was an attempt to explain the high animal wastage, but the Remount Service was responsible for the purchase and transport of animals, and consequently the terms of reference of the inquiry did not cover the campaign after animals had reached South Africa. It therefore failed to examine the causes of the losses. As it was primarily an evaluation of the Remount Service, not one serving veterinary officer was called to give evidence. Major-General Sir Frederick Smith, who was appointed Director-General of the Army Veterinary Service in 1907,
attempted to make up for this deficiency in his account of the War, in the hope that it would stimulate interest and necessitate the reorganisation of the Veterinary Department.

Previously, the veterinarians on their own had not had enough influence to be recognised by the government and the military as a force to be consulted and reckoned with. But amidst public remonstrations in the press, in 1902 a committee called the Hardwicke Committee after its Chairman, the Earl of Hardwicke, was formed to inquire into the structure of the Army Veterinary Department. This proved a turning point, conferring non-compound rank on all Departmental serving officers and creating the Army Veterinary Corps from serving N.C.Os. and men. Eventually in 1913 the veterinary service was dissociated from the Remount Department and made responsible directly to the Army Quartermaster-General. By the outbreak of World War I in 1914 the British veterinarians were running an efficient military service. The organisation of the Australian veterinary forces was not brought into line with the reformed British service until 1916. (to be continued)

References


4. Letter from E.A. Kendall to Minister of Defence 16.4.1891, Australian Archives (Victoria) MP 84/2 Captain E. Kendall, Visit to England to study the British Army Veterinary Department 1901 Item 1901/2784 Horses used in South African War.


I was born in 1910 and so was the Department of Veterinary Science in the University of Sydney. In 1913 it moved from the basement of the old Fisher Library with its 16 original students to its new home at the foot of and astride Science Road on the campus outskirts. In 1920 it attained the status of "Faculty". In 1923 the Stock Diseases Act, and the Veterinary Surgeons Act were proclaimed, milestones in the development of Veterinary science as a profession. In 1928 the second largest student intake, twelve in number of which I was one, was enrolled.

The "Great Depression" had already commenced and was to continue and worsen throughout our four undergraduate years and for a number of years after our graduation. In fact it did not finally terminate until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

At the University we were fortunately sheltered but not insulated from the poverty, despondency and lack of morale which permeated the community outside. Veterinary Science was one of the few faculties which managed to
place all graduates in some form of employment during these years; graduates in Arts, Science and Engineering found little or no employment and some, more economically fortunate, commenced other courses. Architecture graduates finishing up with a law degree for example, and there developed a race of "professional students".

I was the only son of a commercial chemist among whose products was a very well known veterinary remedy "Rows Embrocation". I suppose this turned my head, together with very convincing arguments from Professor James Douglas Stewart on interview, and I took the step I have never regretted.

In those days the horse was a very common and familiar sight on the city and suburban streets. Short haul transport was used by large firms such as C.S.R, the breweries, Penfolds the stationers, and big commercial stables were numerous. Watering troughs were present at strategic points, and "sparrow starvers" patrolled the main streets with little trolleys and brooms collecting and depositing manure in metal boxes set into the street gutters. In the suburbs horse drawn carts delivered milk, meat, bread, fresh butter and eggs, rabbits (very popular in the depression only – tuppence each), clothes props (no Hills Hoists then).

It was little wonder therefore that the veterinary course over these four years had a considerably large equine loading. The horse was dissected in great detail in anatomy. In first year osteology the horse was used as the type animal and bones were studied, described and examined upon in great detail. Thus training commenced in accuracy in observation, description and terminology – so basic for correct diagnosis.

We were taken frequently to commercial stables for instruction in feeds, feeding and grooming, to Randwick to visit training stables, early morning gallops etc. I still vividly remember a large chestnut over 17 hands called Phar Lap and (later on) whose heart together with fragments of trachea and lungs were given to me on its arrival from America to clean up and prepare before despatch to the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra for Sir Colin McKenzie's experts to mount for display; here it became a star attraction for many years.

We were given practical instruction in farriery and were required to remove and replace shoes after having prepared the foot. In Materia Medica and practical pharmacy we prepared horse remedies such as condition powders, aloe mass (from which we made physic balls), equine cough syrup (which was delicious and much in demand by the student body having syrup of
We were all members of the Citizen Military Forces in the Australian Army Veterinary Corps Mobile Veterinary Section as troopers and did annual camps with Light Horse Regiments. Living with army remounts for a week gave wonderful training in equitation, horse husbandry and was a great learning experience.

In surgery we were instructed in casting horses with hobbles, side lines and even the "Russian" method of casting single handed (only one of us was strong enough to accomplish this!). Inspection for soundness, and competency in administering physic balls by hand without mouth gag were examinable and many scars of honour decorated student's hands.

Operative surgery was performed on horses and dogs using ether and chloroform inhalation anaesthesia. Local anaesthetics were also used especially for nerve blocks in horses. Post-operative nursing and treatment for such conditions as fistulous withers and hoof grafting occupied much of our time. All this was under the instruction and strict discipline of R.M.C. Gunn who previously had lectured us in Anatomy in first and second years. Lectures in Medicine were given by Professor Stewart and well salted with personal anecdotes from his wide experience as Chief Veterinary Officer in the State Department of Agriculture prior to his appointment to the Chair in 1909.

In the earlier years lectures and practical classes in physiology, biochemistry, histology and pharmacology were taken at the Medical School with medical and science students and this gave us a wider circle of university friends and interests. Pathology and bacteriology were in the hands of Roy Carne just recently back from working in the Pasteur Institute in Paris.

Part-time teachers gave us the other important subjects: Frank Whitehouse in Zootechny (which included breeds and breeding, nutrition, reproduction, animal management, and horse shoeing) – now the subjects of a whole School of Animal Science(!); Jack Whittet, the State Agrostologist, gave Pastoral Botany; Joe Drabble from Homebush Abattoir gave Meat Inspection; Max Henry, Chief Veterinary Surgeon, gave jurisprudence; Ian Clunies Ross gave parasitology, and all these were delivered in the soporific post-prandial period of the day.

When I entered the Veterinary School it was a single stark building without its common room on one side and its dissection room and pathology laboratory on the other. Outside at the back was a paddock with a row of
weatherboard buildings along one boundary, and which consisted of dog kennels with attached kitchen, the Surgery with horse crush, instrument room, operating theatre with electrically controlled equine table and adjacent grassed throwing yard. Next was a couple of loose boxes, forge and closed sand yard.

Between the main building and the caretaker's lodge was the Observation Box known as the "Roundhouse" (which is still there). Between these two an Outpatients Building was erected during our last year. This was a two room cum verandah, weatherboard cast off club house from the University Tennis Club – a tank provided the water, but at least it was connected by a house phone to the Pharmacy up in the main building. The site now occupied by the McMaster laboratory had concrete foundations waiting for the future Veterinary Hospital which never eventuated. The McMaster Laboratory was built over these and was opened in 1931.

Nevertheless we managed plenty of extra curricular activities. At the University Union for Union Night, and daily meals of "steak pie" and peas, Commem time with song practices, theatre night in the Union Hall and street procession. We managed to hold our own in Faculty Sport, Rugby, cricket, rowing, boxing, conducted a Faculty Ball and the Vet Society Annual Dinner at which the Prof used to propose a toast to the "Graduands" who shall remain seated. This used to irritate the University authorities because it preceded the official announcement of the annual examination results.

To my knowledge only Douglas Stewart, Len Hart, and I are the only survivors of this 1928–1932 year – John Baker, Ken Bray, Arthur Clay, Noel Creswick–Jackson, Lyndon Furness, Colin Gorrie, Eden Love, Bill Marshall, Ray Mayer and Earle Page have completed their contributions to the profession and can no longer contribute their memories.

EARLY HISTORY OF BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS AND BRUCELLOSIS IN TASMANIA – PJ Mylrea

The bacterial causes of bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis did not occur in Australia before the arrival of white settlers. It can be assumed that they gained entry through the introduction of diseased cattle; when this occurred cannot be assessed from the extant records. However it is of interest to determine when the diseases were first recognised in the various parts of Australia and the steps taken to control them. This has been done for NSW (Mylrea AVJ, 1990, vol 67, 104; 1991, vol 68, 189.) The present article reviews the Tasmanian history.
There were numerous articles in the Agricultural Gazette in the 1890s which indicate that some sections of the farming community and officials were aware of bovine TB and of the tuberculin test. However these gave no information on the extent and importance of the disease in Tasmania.

Thereafter the disease was mentioned rarely until T. Philp LVS, Government Veterinary Surgeon, in 1915–16 advocated control of the disease especially in dairies supplying town milk. In 1917 the use of the tuberculin test was mentioned for the first time and Philp in 1919–20 gave the first specific opinion on the prevalence of TB:

Owing to the large number of outwardly diseased animals suffering from tuberculosis destroyed during the year under provisions of 'The Contagious Diseases (Cattle) Act' in and around one of the largest cities, considerable public interest has been aroused on this important subject. When it is realise that only a very small proportion of tuberculous animals are visibly diseased ... the question arises as to what extent the disease exists in the State, particularly in and around the larger towns. That it must exist to a serious degree is obvious from the number of affected animals discovered.

More specific information is given in 1922–23 when one herd of 122 head of mixed origins had 14 % reactors and in 1923–24 when testing of 175 dairy herds gave 5 % of reactors; 'This percentage is fairly close to that found in previous years.' These figures would overstate the prevalence as much of the testing was done on suspect herds.

The first organised scheme to control TB was that applied to dairies supplying milk to Launceston. This started in ..... and by 1931–32 over 90% of cows were tuberculin tested. A similar scheme started in Hobart and in some other municipalities in the latter half of the 1930s. Elsewhere in the 30s testing continued as previously, i.e., on suspect herds. The proportion of reactors found annually ranged from 0.5 to 7 %. The records do not indicate when compensation first was paid for condemned animals but it was paid in the 1930s.

The general pattern set in the 1930s was to continue until TB was eradicated from Tasmania. There was never an Accreditation Scheme for TB similar to that for brucellosis nor was there a formal eradication campaign as adopted
11
years later on the mainland. The reasons for this were the generally low levels of TB and the gradual improvement achieved under the established policy. Testing of city and municipal dairies continued and other testing was confined mainly to herds suspected of being infected or as the result of the detection of tuberculous animals at slaughter.

During the 1940s the annual proportion of reactors was mostly less than 1%. In the 50s the volume of testing declined except in the Smithton district and on King Island and in 1958–59 it was recorded:

The very low percentage of reactors to those tests conducted [2 reactors, 5199 tests, 158 herds], together with the very small number of tuberculosis cases reported from abattoirs, is a good indication that the incidence of tuberculosis in Tasmanian cattle is extremely low.

A similar picture emerged in the 60s; very few herds were infected and in many years no reactors to the tuberculin test were detected.

The 1970s saw the eradication of bovine tuberculosis from Tasmania. The last two cases of infection with Mycobacterium bovis were detected in 1972–73 and in 1976–77 the State was accepted as being free of the disease.

Over the years the main diagnostic tool was the tuberculin test. The method employed in the early years was not recorded but, judged by usage in other states, it was probably the subcutaneous test. Then in 1938–39 the single intradermal test using synthetic tuberculin was investigated and, while not stated, this probably became the standard procedure. In the 1950s the short thermal test was used sometimes as a supplementary procedure while in the late 60s and the 70s tests with avian tuberculin were also carried out. In the closing phases of eradication and during monitoring samples from reactors and suspect animals were subjected to detailed laboratory examination.

BRUCELLOSIS

The earliest mention of brucellosis, or contagious abortion as it was then known, was an article in the Agricultural Gazette in 1905 by R. Willmot MRCVS, Government Veterinary Surgeon, and in the same journal in 1913 it was recorded that 'throughout Tasmania there were considerable losses owing to the trouble [contagious abortion].'

The infection was mentioned only occasionally in the following years until T.
Philp LVS, wrote in 1920:

[the disease] is undoubtedly spreading, largely owing to there being no power to compel notification or to restrict the movement of infected animals.

And in 1924 C. G Dickinson BVSc made two comments. First he wrote 'Contagious Abortion – This continues to be a serious trouble with which the dairyman has to contend especially along the North-west Coast.' This comment was significant as it was the north-west which was later found to be the most heavily infected and the most difficult area from which to eradicate the disease. Second, he stated that some money had been obtained to allow serum agglutination tests to be carried out on selected herds. This was the first mention of the use of laboratory tests for the diagnosis of brucellosis.

By 1931 a veterinary laboratory had been established and was undertaking agglutination tests. In 1931-32 it carried out tests on 682 blood sample from 31 herds with reactions in 14 herds. It was concluded that the condition was widespread.

The availability of laboratory support lead to the start of an Accreditation Scheme in 1934. The aim was to create brucellosis–free herds by a voluntary system of test and slaughter. The subsequent history was given by GK Meldrum (AVJ 1953 v 29 p 295; 1963 v 39 p 348; 1970 v 46 p 210). In 1975 the last reactors were removed from 2 herds and in 1976 the State was declared a free.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank F.B. (Barry) Ryan for his assistance while I was in Hobart.

References

Much of the information given in this article came from the annual reports of the Tasmanian Department of Agriculture for the years indicated.