

**AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY HISTORY
RECORD**

Number 21 March 1998

Published by the Australian Veterinary History Society. Editor
Dr PJ Mylrea, 13 Sunset Avenue, Camden NSW 2570.

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting and History Session will be held
as part of the AVA Conference in the Entertainment Centre,
Sydney on Monday 18 May starting at 8.30 am.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

A few members have not yet renewed their subscription of
\$10.00 for the year 1998. The Treasurer would be happy to
receive them.

MEMBERS WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY

Since the last issue of the AVHS Record the Editor has heard
of the deaths of Professor T. Ewer and Bruce N King.

HISTORICAL ARTICLES

Veterinarians on the Honour Board, Customs House,
Brisbane: Bryan Woolcock 23 Lochiel Street, Kenmore Qld
4069

[A paper given at the Annual Historical Session, AGM,
Brisbane 1997.]

This is an account of six veterinarians named on a World War I Honour Board in the Customs House, Brisbane,

The Custom House and the Honour Board have had a chequered career. The building was constructed in 1889, gutted and 'renovated' between 1947 and 1950, and lay empty after Customs vacated the building in 1987. In 1992 it passed to the University of Queensland who raised some seven million from public subscription to restore the building. This was completed in 1994 and the building returned to its original magnificence.

It was during my first visit to the restored building that I noted the Department of Trade and Customs World War I Honour Board. It comprises three columns of persons who had served. Two columns of 25 names appear under the heading Customs and Excise. The third column of eight names is headed Meat Export. Six of those listed have veterinary qualifications shown. My interest was aroused because I could not recall seeing qualifications after the names of persons on any war memorial or honour board. I was also interested to seek out the history of the Board and of the six veterinarians named, and to ascertain why they were not listed amongst the other officers of the Department who served in that war.

One might assume that the Meat Export Section of the Department of Trade and Customs was considered to be an accessory group incidental to the core activities of the Department. Perhaps the qualifications were listed to distinguish the veterinarians from the lay inspectors or maybe to reflect the high regard held for the early veterinary officers in the meat export industry.

Despite careful research through the Australian Archives data bank, the history files held by Customs, and published histories of the service and contact with retired Customs and Meat Inspection Officers, I have been unable to establish the origin of this Board. It was present in the Customs House entrance in the early thirties, was removed temporarily at the time of the post 1939-45 war restorations, replaced, again removed to the new Customs Offices in 1987 and returned to the restored building in 1994. There is little doubt that the renovations and moves of Customs staff and records led to the loss of historical records which might of assisted in my research.

Another mystery remains unanswered. I have unearthed details of the six veterinarians but have been unable to locate any records of three of them being located with headquarters in Queensland. It was the normal practice for meat export staff to be sent temporarily to duty at northern centres during the killing season from their permanent southern headquarters. Records of such moves are long since lost.

Similar boards were established in Sydney and Melbourne. Neither board lists any of the six vets listed on the Queensland board. One might therefore assume that all six were stationed in Queensland either before, during or shortly after the first World War even if only for a short period. The history of the six veterinarians listed on the Board are outlined in the order listed.

ROSS GRANT BVSc graduated from the Melbourne Veterinary School in 1910 and soon after joined the Export Meat Inspection Service. He enlisted in the Australian Army Veterinary Corps (AAVC) soon after the outbreak of war and saw service overseas. He returned to the position of Veterinary

Inspector, Melbourne at the end of hostilities. During the twenties and thirties he served two periods as Veterinary Attache at Australia House, London.

Grant was for a long period Veterinary Officer in Charge, Victoria and Deputy to Chief Veterinary Officer RP Allen. On Allen's death in 1944, Grant held that position briefly before being succeeded by J.M. Davidson. Grant died in 1947. Grant is known to have visited Queensland's export meatworks in Allen's stead on several occasions before and during the 1939-45 war. Otherwise his connection with this State is uncertain.

BERTRAM CLAUDE VEECH BVSc was amongst the original 14 students who enrolled when the Veterinary School at the University of Sydney was opened in 1910 and one of eight to graduate four years later. He joined the AAVC and served in France as captain and was twice Mentioned in Dispatches.

On return he assisted in the practice of Roy Stewart. He was later appointed as Veterinary Officer to the Municipal Council of Launceston and was involved in the eradication of tuberculosis. He joined the New South Wales Department of Agriculture as a veterinary officer, serving at Kiama and Hawkesbury College. He was promoted to District Veterinary Officer, Grafton and was transferred to Cootamundra where he retired. He died in 1977 at Wellington NSW at age 90.

I have been unable to trace any employment with the Meat Inspection Service in Queensland or elsewhere in Australia.

ROBERT ANTHONY PATTEN BVSc was also one of the original Sydney students who graduated in 1914. He had been a pupil of AP Gribben MRCVS who practised in Phillip Street, Sydney and who later became a part-time staff member of the Sydney School.

Patten joined the Department of Trade and Customs as a veterinary inspector. He enlisted in the AIF sailing with the first convoy to the Middle East in charge of shipload of horses. He saw service in Egypt, Gallipoli and France rising to the rank of major in the AAVC. After the war he rejoined the Meat Inspection Service, but joined NSW Agriculture for a short time as Manager of the North Bangaroo horse stud farm. He rejoined the Meat Inspection Service but in 1936 was appointed as Superintendent of Taronga Park Zoo. He retired in 1954 as Curator. During the next four years before his death he built up a large private practice at Kellyville NSW. He was aged 68 when he died.

His obituary in the AVJ stated 'His passing ends a life rich in experiences in the field of veterinary science, animal husbandry, zoology, army and Commonwealth Public Service.'

I have not been able to trace any record of his having been located in Queensland.

JOHN MURRISON DAVIDSON BVSc graduated from the Melbourne School in 1913. He joined the Department of Trade and Customs as Veterinary Inspector with headquarters in Brisbane. He accompanied two shiploads of horses to Egypt as Veterinary Officer. He served in France as Captain in the AAVC and was awarded the Military Cross.

Returning to the Meat Inspection Branch he served briefly as Acting Veterinary Officer in Charge, Victoria before taking up this role in New South Wales in 1920. He was appointed Chief Veterinary Officer replacing RP Allen and Ross Grant. His obituary states that as CVO 'he earned the highest respect of his Veterinary Colleagues and of the leaders of the meat industry and other industries with which he was closely associated'.

Always active in AVA affairs, he was NSW Divisional President and in 1939-40, Federal President. He was an able administrator who was influential in the meat industry'. He died in 1956 at age 64.

ARTHUR ERNEST MASSEY MRCVS graduated from the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College in 1905 at 32 years of age. The Royal College Register reveals that he was located in Scotland for the next two, presumably in practice. He then had a Somerset address until he migrated to Australia in 1911. However his obituary records. records that he worked for some time in South Africa before migrating to Sydney.

He joined the Stock Branch of the Department of Agriculture, Sydney on arrival but resigned in 1915 to return to the United Kingdom to join the Army Veterinary Corps. He attained the rank of Captain but was invalided out of the Service, returned to Australia and joined the Meat Inspection Service in Brisbane. His address on the register was Albion Brisbane from 1917 until 1922. From 1928 to 1930 he serves as Chief Veterinary Inspector, Metropolitan Meat Industry Board Sydney. In 1930 he returned to live in the United Kingdom until his death in November 1939.

His obituary records that Massey was 'a kindly man, a pleasant colleague, and a keen philatelist, with a sensitive personality and with an unshakeable belief in the universal soundness and goodness of human nature'.

OSBORNE ANTHONY O'NEILL MRCVS was born in 1869 in England, graduated from Edinburgh in 1893 and practised in Ireland until he served with the British Veterinary Department at the Boer War and the Natal Rebellion. According to the Royal College registers he maintained a County Dublin address until he migrated to Sydney in 1911. He was employed as a Veterinary Inspector with the Department of Trade and Customs on arrival and the next year was at Aberdeen NSW and in 1914 was located in Brisbane.

At age 45 he applied on 11 December 1914 for a commission in the 1st Mobile Veterinary Section of the AAVC. He was appointed Captain and eight days later embarked at Sydney for the Middle East with a load of army horses. Captain O'Neill served at Gallipoli where he suffered from malaria and debility. In June 1916 he was transferred to France and soon after to the 1st Australian Division. Within a month he was invalided to England with psoriasis. In January 1917 he resigned his Commission under a cloud, electing to remain in Britain and forfeiting any further claim on the Australian Government.

He immediately joined the Vestey organisation as a cattle buyer for beef supplies for the armies in France. He is recorded as residing in Majunga, Madagascar. In 1923 he was with the Civil Veterinary Department in Rangoon, Burma and from

1924-28 back in Madagascar. His register address from 1932 until 1951 was in Ireland.

The last Australian record of O'Neill related to a failed application for a war pension for his wife Daisy Gertrude who had moved to Sydney.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr Geoff Fewster, the Australian Archives, serving and retired Customs officers and officers of AQIS, and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

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Two Thousand Veterinary Graduates: H McL. Gordon, 4 Krui Street, Fairlight, NSW 2094

[Hughie Gordon graduated in 1930 and this article was written in 1981 - Editor]

'Here's to the School at the Foot of the Hill.' And the old Faculty song, which sadly we don't seem to hear these days, goes on - 'Here be our love through good or through ill'.

How fitting it was that on St Valentine's Day 1981 a great gathering of her sons and daughters came to celebrate the graduation of the 2000th graduate. What a gathering of the old and the young:

*Forty years on, growing older and older,
Shorter in wind, as in memory long,
Feeble of foot, and rheumatic of shoulder,
What will it help you that once you were strong?*

As it was truly 'memory holds the door', hand to hand-remember, remember. 'I wonder if so and so is here? Why there he is, hey Bill!' Who was the oldest graduate there - Grahame Edgar (1924) with Norman Larkin (1926) hot on his heels, then the 1931 drop, Lyall Rickard-Bell, Ian Beveridge, Hugh Gordon (75% of the graduation year, with only Sid Hebden missing through ill-health) and the youngest - a group of the day's graduates who continue to demonstrate the versatility of the veterinarians as barmen and serving maids! And the 2000th graduate, Sandy Kincaid, along with the 1,999th, Andrew Morgan, and the 2,001th, Amanda Nation.

The day began with the graduation ceremony in the Great Hall - memories, memories - and another memorable gathering. The Carillon called us in from the Quad, and the Academic Procession formed and progressed down the stairs from the Senate Room, out to the terrace overlooking the city, through the eastern door - slowly in pairs - 'Gaudy Profs in reds and yellows ...', into the hall with the new organ filling the hall with Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks - through the great crowd of friends, folk and graduands.

Conferring of degrees - the crown of academe- some higher degrees in Medicine, the 'Dento', our great rivals in interfaculty Rugby of years ago, and then the Vets., PhD for Judith Handlinger and Clive Jackson, MVSc for Leo Cummins and Elizabeth Laing, BVSc with first class honours and University medals for Richard Malik and Ann Crowley, 10 more first class honours, 14 second class honours, and forty more, and two BSc (Vet) Jeffrey McKee (Veterinary Anatomy), Charles Press (Veterinary Parasitology).

The Chancellor, Sir Herman Black, gave us a welcoming words, as always with praise and encouragement and deep sincerity and reminding us all of professional obligations. Somehow one imagined old Alma Mater smiling down on us, but with a finger raised in admonition! Sir Herman had a word for the 2,000th graduate and for the first woman graduate in Veterinary Science, Pat Littlejohn (Pat Abott now), who was with us.

The Occasional Address will be long remembered as marking a great occasion - Bede Morris (BVSc 1951), Professor and Head of the Department of Immunology, Australian National University, one of our Faculty's greats, was in true form, 'Bede at his best' was the common comment.

*Wearing all that weight
Of learning, light as a flower ...*

And then the exit to the Quad with Handel again, giving way to Carillon as we looked for friends, colleagues, graduands and tea! Soon down the hill, the Science Road all had trod so many times, so many years, to the old School, labels attached and into the hall to familiar things. There the bronzes to remind us of Sydney Dodd, long gone more than half a century, and James Douglas Stewart, first Professor and Dean, and not forgetting to look round the corner into what used to be the old museum for portraits. The 'Old Prof', still vigorous, half smiling; he expected much of us, and he left satisfied I think. And the others, Gunn, Clunies Ross, 'Freddie' Whitehouse, Carne (I dined with him in Cambridge in September). Look to the plaque that remembers Baker and Ridley and the others who served in war and came not home, who 'gave their tomorrow for our today'. Memories, memories - photographs,

notes, pictures as a great collection of memorabilia faithfully gathered by Jenny Edols. Copies of Centaur were there from Vol. 1 recording more than 40 years of Faculty doings and goings on. There were dozens of telegrams and messages from those who could not be with us.

Then out the back door - 'temporary' fibro path lab still there, McMaster with its Ian McMaster Wing (who did break those windows with a bottle long ago?), and the old Round House, still serving its purpose and dispensing useful medicaments! The backup was the Evelyn Williams Building - clinic, laboratories forming a fine facility. (Possible benefactors please note!).

And who was there already, colleagues from so many years - Scotty Rogers, Hal Ware, Pat Nicholas (remember the goal he kicked that day at North Sydney!), Grahame Edgar, Norman Larkin, Ian Beveridge, Lyall Bell, Rod Ramsay, Rick Lowe, Katie Walker (Farr), Joyce Steel, 'Midnight' Arnott, Dick Webb, Douglas Stewart, Alf Humble, Chak Nam Cho (our first Singapore graduate), and there were a couple of parent - off spring groups: Trevor McClure and Sue who graduated last year, Rex Butterfield and Peter who graduated that very day. The years press on - I lectured to all four of them! And there were more and more - Jenny Edols has a list but it seems close to 25% of all Sydney graduates were there. There were not only graduates and wives, but many who served us so well as true servants of the University - 'Sarge' Rames and young Chris (alas Sarge is no longer with us - he passed away in May). the Whitlock brothers, Len and Harold, Alf Audet, lots more. Look right. look left and there were familiar faces, alas, sometimes the names half gone, with wives, friends, a goodly company, a fine reunion.

A few words from the Dean (John Egerton), presentations to Sandy Kincaid (2,000th), Andrew Morgan (1,999th) and Amanda Nation (2,001st), sleeping pigs of Huon Pine mounted on Silky Oak, well wrought by someone with profound anatomical knowledge!

Then the fine luncheon spelling out the great organisation of the day, and more meetings, handshakes. What a day - blessings to Jenny Edols and all who had a hand in the planning and the performance. A prospect for the future was there, with nostalgia for the 'good old days'. Farewell adieu ...

*They ride into the sunset,
The years they used to know ...*

Oh to be around when number 3.000 comes up!

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Mad Cow Disease in Britain: a new disease but a familiar story. John Fisher, Department of Economics, University of Newcastle, Callaghan NSW 2308

On the 26th March 1996, the then British Minister of Health read a short statement to the House of Commons. He reported the advice he had recently received from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Council (SEAC), a body established in the wake of the discovery of Spongiform Encephalopathy (SE) in British cattle. A new variant of Creutzfeldt Jakob disease (CJD) now existed in the United Kingdom, SEAC had been informed, as eight young people had died from an SE after exhibiting clinical symptoms which

differed from those characteristic of CJD. This led SEAC to conclude that, although there was no direct evidence, 'the most likely explanation, in the absence of any credible alternative, was that the cases were linked to exposure to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy' (BSE) – popularly known as mad cow disease.

The response to the ministerial statement will be part of a story familiar to medical and veterinary historians. In the first place, a public sense of unease which had been simmering - and flaring regularly - for several years now erupted in hysteria. : 'MAD COWS CAN KILL YOU' and 'We've already eaten 1,000,000 mad cows' (*Daily Mirror* 20.3.96) made marvellous headlines in the tabloids. Estimates of the deaths of millions of people were entertained in the serious newspapers. Beef sales fell precipitously and cattle production and marketing were thrown into a chaos from which they have hardly recovered two years later. For the first time for 130 years, since the cattle plague epizootic of 1865-67 in fact, a livestock disease became the prime focus of public concern in Britain.

Modern communication meant that hysteria – and the economic losses to cattle producers - spread faster and more widely than the disease itself. Mad Cow Disease has led herdsmen near Samarkand to express sympathy with British tourists over their likely fate; New Zealand butchers display notices emphasising the disease-free status of their supplies. When Adelaide won the AFL Grand Final in 1997, the *Sun Herald* described the supporters' response as 'Mad Crows' Disease' – no further explanation was required. The impact, however, was greatest in Western Europe, leading to a total ban on the export of British cattle and beef and putting the already delicate relationship between Britain and its partners in the European Union under further strain.

In the second place, the search already in place for culprits, for those to blame for the disaster, was reinvigorated and widened. There were plenty of suspects, including capitalism, intensive farming, consumerism and modern science. But the most popular villains by far came from a triumvirate containing the Conservative government in Britain, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), and the State Veterinary Service (SVS), the agency responsible for animal health.

As early as 1990, it was contended that these three were conspiring to downplay the scale of the BSE epizootic, and the possibility of transmission to humans, in order to protect the interest of cattle producers. After the March panic such accusations hit a crescendo. The hapless Chief Veterinary Officer, Keith Meldrum, was treated as a buffoon in a Panorama programme - "The Great British Beef Fiasco" (shown on ABC 29.7.96). The SVS was accused of complacency, of interpreting research selectively, and of acting as a faithful poodle to its political and bureaucratic masters. Two British historians argued that scares like BSE would 'continue until the administrative ethos of the Ministry of Agriculture, which frankly seems to have changed very little over the last 100 years, can be fundamentally readjusted to be more responsive to consumer needs.' The present Labour government has recently announced plans to establish a new agency to monitor food standards; this will takeover the traditional role of the MAFF in many areas.

There was a basis of truth to such accusations - governments and their agencies have an evident and natural interest in minimising alarm in the face of threats to public or animal health.. The record of the MAFF and the SVS in enforcing regulations designed to prevent the spread of disease, both among cattle and across to humans, was also bad (although

they could claim that their efforts had been hampered by budgetary cuts). Nevertheless, the initial investigation of BSE had been highly successful while the MAFF's principal containment strategy was working. Although the transmission of SEs had not previously been linked to feed, the identification of meat and bonemeal concentrate (MBM) as the cause of infection provided the basis for a control policy which saw BSE cases fall steeply from 1993 onwards. Why then did the MAFF and the SVS have to endure such a level of calumny?

The answer comes from yet another feature of the familiar story. The central problem of mad cow disease lies in its mystery, a problem which remains after a decade of increasingly intensive research. This applies to virtually all aspects of the disease and to SEs generally. Uncertainty and therefore controversy still attends the question of the origin of BSE, its transmission within and between cattle herds, in and outside of Britain, and between cattle and other species. Its incidence is variable as its incubation. Stanley Prusiner may have won a Nobel Prize for his work on prions but it remains unclear as yet whether these are cause or effect. And while the probability that BSE is a zoonosis has all but been confirmed, the likely extent of the resulting epidemic in Britain (and elsewhere) remains a fertile field for speculation.

In this respect, the story of mad cow disease provides ample confirmation that the social response to mystery and uncertainty remains the same as ever. Panic, hysteria and the search for scapegoats have been constant features of the history of disease among either humans or animals, most famously in the cases of bubonic plague and rinderpest. There are analogies even for what appears a novel feature of the modern story.

While the MAFF and the SVS have provided the chief concrete villains, their culpitude has been set in the context of an attack on or at least a questioning of science and science-based technology. Mad cow disease is not just frightening and mysterious but possibly a symptom of a deeper malaise. It is one of a range of new diseases, including Aids, the Eboli virus and others, which are suspected to be a result of the impact of modern material 'progress' on the natural world. This progress is ultimately based on science; in the modern world 'people turn to science for what religion can no longer supply - a sense of certainty.' But this certainty 'is, of course, an illusion', as BSE has so amply demonstrated. Mad cow disease is just one example of the 'vast unsupervised experiments, whose risks we can know, if at all, only retrospectively'.

The moral of course is 'to resist the scientific onslaught on nature'. Just as the Catholic church lost prestige (and worse) during the Black Death, so modern science has met the something of the same fate. However, the animus against science and science-based technology evident during the BSE saga is ultimately sterile. A return to a pre-scientific society is unrealistic while the mysteries and uncertainties of mad cow disease can ultimately only be resolved by scientific investigation and research. It remains only to hope that historians, by emphasising its familiar nature, can help to bring about a more objective appreciation of the story of mad cow disease than has generally been current.

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The present paper is based on two journal articles I have recently published: 'Of plagues and veterinarians: BSE in historical perspective', *Argos*, 16 (1997), 225-32 and 'Cattle plagues past and present: the mystery of mad cow disease', *Journal of Contemporary History*, April, 1998.

Much of the information and opinions (of which there is an incredible diversity) are taken from the Internet. The most important references used are given below.

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