

THE HISTORY OF THE VETERINARY HISTORY SOCIETY

Jean Mann

The idea began in **1954**: Sherwin Hall was fascinated by the history of the veterinary profession, and he believed that its history should be recorded. Dated from the time he qualified (London 1953) there are letters and copies of his enquiries in his first correspondence file, revealing how he searched for information on veterinary history topics; he wrote to veterinary schools, libraries, County Record Offices, newspapers, families and so on. One of his early papers was on the Great Cattle Plague of 1865, written in the late 1950s and submitted to the Medical History Society in **1962**: its publication initiated several congratulatory replies, with asides commenting on veterinary history. Encouraged, Sherwin Hall and Jack Barber-Lomax wrote to a large number of associates and also to *The Veterinary Record*, which published their letter (2 July 1962) asking for support in forming a veterinary history group. The greater majority supported the idea: only Professor Pugh at Cambridge wrote (14 November 1960) 'I am not happy that a club or society to promote veterinary history would be very successful.'

But by the end of September the two men had arranged the inaugural meeting, to be held at the **Wellcome Historical Medical Library on 31 October 1962** at 5.45 pm; an address was to be given by Dr F.N.L. Poynter, the Librarian. Sherwin Hall donated a Minute Book and an Attendance Register: 25 would-be members (and 1 visitor) signed, in the following order:

Jack W. BARBER-LOMAX— Wellcome Foundation Ltd
Sherwin A. HALL — VI Centre, Wolverhampton
Iain H. PATTISON — ARC Compton
Henry E. CARTER — Enfield
F.R. BELL — RVC
Tom K. EWER — Professor Animal Husbandry, Bristol
M.K. LLOYD — Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge
Ian HUGHES — Supp. Register RCVS, Coleshill
Christopher J. CHESNEY — Student, RVC
P.E. CURTIS — Chester
Sir John RITCHIE — Chief Veterinary Officer
Bruce V. JONES — Nicholas A&V Ltd, Slough
R. CATTON — Librarian RVC
W.S. GIMBER — W. Gimber & Sons, London SE15
Keith C. BARNETT — RVC
M. Beryl BAILEY — Assist. Librarian RVC
Benita HORDER — Librarian RCVS
N.R. TURNBULL — Basingstoke

D.M. REDFERN — RVC
O.V. GUNNING — Acle
W.G.R. OATES — Registrar RCVS
D.L. HUGHES — Professor Veterinary Pathology, Liverpool
E. GASKELL — Wellcome Historical Medical Library
Sue GOLDIE — Assist. Editor, Medical History
Earl W. HAYTER - Professor, North Illinois University (guest of B.V.J.)
Sam HIGNETT — Wellcome Foundation Ltd

A further 21 supporters sent apologies.

Dr Poynter's address was entitled 'The Purpose of the Study of Veterinary Medical History'. Elections were held: Chairman — Prof D.L. Hughes, Vice Chairman — J. Barbour-Lomax, Secretary — Sherwin Hall, Committee — Prof L.P. Pugh, and W.G.R. Oates.

The **aim** of the Society is the promotion of the history of veterinary science: to create an interest by communicating our experiences and our researches.

The first Committee Meeting was held on 3 March **1963** at the RCVS. The proposed name of the Society, its aims, membership, meetings, officers and finances had been commended by W.G.R. Oates, Registrar of the RCVS, and were confirmed. The official address of the Society was 32 Belgrave Square, London SW1. The Membership fee was 10/6 per annum. There was some association with the Worship Society of Apothecaries, for a few years only. A formal Constitution was discussed, but never materialised.

The first General (Ordinary) Meeting was held at Belgrave Square on 12 October **1963** at 10.30am. Mr Eric Gaskell, the Sub-Librarian of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, spoke on 'Bibliographical Technique'; after lunch Brig John Clabby presented a paper on 'The Modern History of the RAVC'; and finally Sherwin Hall spoke on 'John Gamgee and the New Edinburgh Veterinary College'. There were 26 members in attendance, and also 15 visitors including three of the Gamgee family.

The **Veterinary History Society** was launched. The first Annual General Meeting was held in April **1964**, and thereafter meetings of committee members were held periodically, primarily to discuss future programmes — possible speakers and topics for papers. Many meetings were held in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library for some years. The first Ordinary Meeting 'away from home' was at the Museum of Rural Life, University of Reading in **1965**, since when meetings have been held all over the country — including Swansea in 1977 and Edinburgh in 2013. So developed a flexible pattern for each year of one meeting anywhere in the country and one or two London meetings where the AGM was held. And occasionally the Society has held joint meetings.

By **1971** the committee had developed somewhat, as needs arose; the norm consisted of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary/Treasurer and six or seven other members. Later (1992) the treasurership was separated from secretarial duties and combined with membership. Finally in **1973** an Editor was added to the list of Officers, this composition serving until the present. The Chairman was tacitly expected to serve for 2-4 years, but the other posts had no time limit. Several individuals have served successfully in posts for many years, and so are responsible for the good health of the Society.

Membership cards were mentioned in committee minutes in 1973, at the time when 'paid-up membership' was over 43 and the Bulletin was established. They feature in 1978 when quotations for new ones are asked for, but not again - possibly they were not thought necessary, or maybe they were included in 'Stationery' in the accounts for some time?

A publication, known at first as the **Bulletin** was prepared in the early '70s and the first issue appeared in July **1973**, being entitled *Veterinary History*. It was, and still is, issued twice yearly, and began as 30 sheets of A4 hand-typed roneocopied pages stapled together by hand; from the first there was an Editorial and several high-quality papers from prominent members of the profession. Such was its success, in **1979** the New Series began, when it became A5 in size, the cover being decorated with a copy (reversed) of Gervase Markham's horse from his *Masterpiece* (1610). The cover colour was changed at the end of each edition (two years) and has been improved over the years as the number of pages increased to more than 100 in each edition. And in 1999 the Bulletin became known as the **Journal**, coinciding with the its gloss cover and square back.

Dealing with the rising cost of printing and distributing the growing Bulletin became urgent in 1977/78, and the Society appealed to pharmaceutical companies for sponsorship. Roche supported its production from 1979 for 5 years; SmithKline in 1985 gave £500 for 5 issues, and Norden Laboratories in 1988 gave £100pa for the next five years. Until 1993 the Bulletins were sold separately from membership subscriptions, but as shown in the accounts for 1 June 1994 when sponsorship had ceased, a Bulletin was included in the subscription.

Subscriptions were affected by publication costs. The very low 50p in 1971 increased variably to £6.00 (£4.00 students and retired) in 1981, to £10.00 in 1991 and then a jump to £15 in 1994 to include the Bulletin. Whilst its printing costs rose with more pages and improvement in quality, the subscription remained until 2003 when it was increased to £25.00 as is still the case. Coloured illustrations are now the norm.

A life **membership** of £50, which was proposed in 1975 but not confirmed, would have been a good investment. Membership grew to nearly 100 by 1978

when the rate of increase in individual membership slowed as the number of libraries joining the Society increased; it is now about 120 individuals and nearly 50 libraries.

All Editors have played their part in the development of *Veterinary History* and have ensured the continuation of its high standard. The Journal now has a circulation internationally, and can compete with any other veterinary history publication in the world — it is the Society's main flag-ship.

Editors of *Veterinary History*

:

R.E. Walker 1973

Miss M. Brandenburg (co-opted from Wellcome) 1974

Miss Veronica Simmons 1977

An editorial subcommittee 1981

Norman Comben/Miss Peddar 1984

Tony Johnson 1985

Henry Carter 1992

Linda Warden 1996

No journal 1998

Evelyn Barbour-Hill/John Clewlow 1999

John Clewlow 2005-

Ordinary Meetings have usually been well-supported; membership is concentrated in the South-East, so the majority of Meetings have been in the London area. Others have been held in a wide variety of venues: veterinary schools, societies, gardens, villages, towns and cities throughout the UK. Papers have been presented on a vast range of veterinary history and related topics, and it has been a privilege to welcome many speakers from all levels of the profession as well as non-veterinarians, to speak at our Meetings.

The Silver Anniversary of the foundation of the VHS was marked by a celebratory luncheon in 1987, when forty members and guests gathered for the Meeting at the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine.

Certain Meetings have prompted the VHS to donate to appropriate causes promoting veterinary interests. In 1982 a contribution of £206, raised from individual members, was made towards the plaque marking William Moorcroft's practice premises in Oxford Street, London. The Staffordshire Historic Buildings Trust was given £250 in 1984 towards the restoration of Mayer House, previously occupied by the Thomas Mayers who promoted our Royal Charter of 1844. During a joint Meeting with the RVC Medical Association, the VHS Chairman presented a Minutes Book (£50) to the RVCMA. In 2002 after being shown the plans for the new Animals in War Memorial in London a donation of £250 was made to the Fund. In the same year the Society visited the Suffolk Punch stables at Hollesley Bay Stud Farm and

£100 was donated to the Trust. At the RVC, £50 was donated to the Dick Smith Memorial Fund 1989; in 2003 at the formation of the first veterinary museum, the Linda Warden Museum in the new Eclipse Building at Hawkshead, £5,000 was given towards the costs of display cabinets (this was on the understanding that VHS archives could be stored in the Museum — which has since been closed, the cabinets now being positioned around the building). Most recently £100 was donated to the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies towards the restoration of their WWI Memorial.

In 2001 the WAHVM had begun to compile an International Dictionary of Veterinary Biography and circulated the pattern for entries for inclusion. The Committee made a list of possible UK entries and asked members to offer to write the biographies. Very few were written, and the topic was dropped.

In an effort to increase membership in 2001, the Committee prepared an Essay Competition for veterinary students on any aspect of veterinary history; a prize was £50 (later increased to £100) plus a year's free subscription. Entries were few and although one prize was awarded, assessment of any entries proved too difficult; the idea was dropped in 2004. Another suggestion involved the RVC who expanded their Elective Programme for 4th year veterinary students to include a veterinary history topic, members of the VHS Committee being available to lecture and grade. Although expensive to run, this Elective was offered for three years: in 2007 (1 student) and 2008 (3 students) but in 2009 no student applied, and so the offer ceased.

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Also founded at a Committee Meeting in **2006** was the Society's Newsletter, to contain an assemblage of items of past and future interest, to be sent to members twice yearly, preferably between the editions of the Journal. The aim of the Newsletter was to keep in touch with members, maintaining interest, and to generate comments from members.

In **2007** a complete **Index** was produced covering all the previous issues of *Veterinary History* and a copy sent to all members. Since then the Index has been up-dated electronically at the publication of each new issue.

Overseas Meetings were discussed in 2007, and in **2008** a small group visited the Copenhagen Veterinary School, a successful three-day event. However the next, planned for Utrecht in 2010 was cancelled due to lack of support.

At about this time an experimental **website** was set up by Sherwin Hall, and

was recognised to be a necessity. A professional webmaster was employed in 2008: news, aims, membership, future programmes and so on are displayed. Many members use the site, and now receive communications electronically.

A **publishing** project was begun in 2007 by Bruce V. Jones (the then Chairman), who launched the Granville Penn Press with an investment of up to £10,000. A diary of a Victorian veterinary student at the London College had been recently identified; it was then edited and annotated by Dick Lane, and proved to be a valuable chronicle of the student's day-to-day routine in 1863 and of the teaching staff and their methods at that time. In 2009 a grant of £2,000 towards the publication of the Diary was made by the RVCAA, and *A Victorian Veterinary Student's Diary* was published **2010**. Meanwhile Bruce V. Jones was writing biographies of 119 British veterinarians of the last century, several of whom had been suggested by Society members: in **2012** *Twentieth-Century Veterinary Lives* was published. Two further titles are in preparation.

The Society has always included members who have an interest in early veterinary books, some of whom are experts and have built up large collections. Norman Comben who died in 2011, studied early veterinary literature and became a leading bibliographer and dealer. He made many contributions to the Society both during Meetings and with articles written for the Journal. And now too, the Society's present Chairman has created the most extensive horseracing collection in Britain, The Cox Library, a reference library opened in 2004, on the history of horse racing and thoroughbred breeding.

In 2008 the Society showed concern for the preservation of veterinary **archives** scattered around the country. All the veterinary schools were approached, and the RCVS and the Scottish schools responded. The Society became involved with the RCVS archives (other than books) which are held at Belgravia House. A group of Society members met and examined the collection, which ranges from the prominently displayed portraits and prints to the many photographs, medals and other artefacts collected over many years and through several moves. Eventually after several meetings every item was identified and dated and a complete catalogue produced, from which the RCVS Charitable Trust printed, with many illustrations, *The RCVS Collection* in **2012**.

The **Oral History** Project, running at Newcastle University's School of Agriculture and Rural Economy, was outlined at a Meeting in 2010 by Sue Bradley, whereby verbal reminiscences of the working conditions of an individual's life, such as a veterinary practitioner, are recorded and preserved. One of our oldest veterinarians, Mary Brancker, had recently spoken at a Meeting of her life in the profession, and in 2011 became the first veterinary surgeon to have her memories recorded and stored in the British Library.

On 31 October **2013**, exactly 50 years after the first meeting of the Society, a two-day **50th Anniversary Meeting** was held in London. We were again

welcomed on both days by Wellcome, and dined at the Farmers Club, where the Society has met many times in the past.

Plans for holding the 41st Congress of the World Association for the History of Veterinary Medicine in **2014** in London were discussed during committee meetings from 2011 onwards. An organising committee was set up, and assurances made concerning the financial commitment. The dates of 10-13 September are now confirmed, sponsorship advanced, programmes for each day beginning to form, accommodation booked, speakers approached. Although a few of our members have regularly attended these international Congresses before, and have written their reports in the Journal, this is the first time our Society has acted as host.

The Veterinary History Society has of course had its ups and down throughout its first 50 years, as does any small society; it was particularly vulnerable in the late 1990s, when dissolution was discussed. However, with new ideas all was well; its continuing existence is due to the energy and enthusiasm of the few and the many who have contributed in so many ways. The support for the 50th anniversary Meeting and the promise of hosting the WAHVM Congress in 2014, for which we wish the organising committee every success, show the Society to be in good heart.

CHAIRMEN

Prof D.L. Hughes 1962
Henry Carter 1969
Sherwin Hall 1974
J.S. Steward 1978
Henry Carter 1982
John Clewlow 1988
Benita Horder 1992
Gary Clayton Jones 1997
John Broberg 2000
Tim Cox 2009-
N.R. Turnbull 1964
Norman Comben 1972
Joan Lane 1976
kin Pattison 1980
Gary Clayton Jones 1986
David Locke 1990
Prof Lance Lanyon 1994
Roger Ewbank 1998
Bruce V. Jones 2004

SECRETARIES

Sherwin Hall 1962
Benita Horder 1966
Sherwin Hall 1969
M.K. Lloyd 1974
Sherwin Hall 1976
David North 1994
Tom Roper 1998
Jean Mann 2000
Clare Boulton 2013-

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