

Veterinary history: why study it?

Robert Taylor, Peter Mylrea
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Manning Clark wrote: "I know you will be skeptical about this claim that a man can find out anything about life by a journey into the past. I am aware of the stern warning about historians by Leo Tolstoy, namely, that historians are like deaf people who go on answering questions that no one has asked them. All I have to say in reply to that is that all human beings have to find a way in which the world becomes intelligible and bearable to them. Human beings find their answers in all sorts of ways. Life is immense. I happen to be one of those who find answers to these deeper questions about life by knowing more about the past".*

This statement could be paraphrased to cover a profession; in our case the veterinary profession.

In the hurly-burly of daily life it is difficult for us to find the time to look backwards. Yet, when one does one finds a profession of which we can all be proud. The profession in Australia has a long history spread over 150 years. It started with the arrival of John Stewart in Sydney Town in May 1841 and his commencement of veterinary practice in Pitt Street. Others followed and there are records of nearly 100 members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons being in Australia in the nineteenth century.

Of these very few were Australian born. It was not until the founding of the Melbourne Veterinary College by Professor W.T. Kendall in 1888 and the Veterinary Schools at the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1900s that Australians began to predominate as the number of veterinarians increased.

The 150-year history of the profession should be remembered.

The list of achievements over this time is long and can only be sketched here with little detail.

Throughout the entire period veterinary practitioners although few in number have played their role and have adapted to changing conditions. In disease control it can be seen in the efforts to control bovine pleuropneumonia after its introduction in 1858, the eradication of exotic diseases from that of glanders in 1891 to fowl plague in Victoria in the 1980s and the final eradication on a national scale of bovine pleuropneumonia, tuberculosis and brucellosis in the latter half of the twentieth century. The profession can also claim many contributions to the knowledge of disease conditions which occur in Australia and their control through investigation and research. These achievements should be recorded in some detail.

There are many veterinarians to whom we owe a debt. It is through their enthusiasm and activities that we have arrived at the profession we know today.

Men like the Stewarts, Wragge, Mitchell, Kendall, Potties, Snowballs and Edward Stanley in the nineteenth century; Gilruth, Seddon, J.D. Stewart, Max Henry, Bull, Legg, Bennetts, Turner, Albiston, Gunn and Clunies Ross in the twentieth century.

In later years there are a number of prominent veterinarians. Their names and work should not be forgotten.

It is a belief in the value of our professional past that has led to the formation of the Australian Veterinary History Society as a Special Interest Group of the Australian Veterinary Association. In brief, its aims are "to foster all aspects of Australian veterinary history by research, recording and communicating".

To date we have achieved this through newsletters and annual meetings. The papers in this issue of the *Australian Veterinary Journal* are examples of the recording of the past.

* Manning, CMH (1976) *The Discovery of Australia (Boyer Lectures, 1976)*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney