

“Little, if at all, Removed from the Illiterate Farrier or Cow-leech”: The English Veterinary Surgeon, c.1860–1885, and the Campaign for Veterinary Reform

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Introduction

Faced with changes to its composition and the society it serves, the British veterinary profession is currently engaged in the difficult task of assessing whether its structure, expertise and governance are still fit for purpose.¹ Its transition from a male to a female-dominated profession; the growing importance of pet medicine; and the decline of agriculture and state veterinary medicine, are forcing vets to reconsider their roles, identities, priorities and relationships. However, this is not the first time that vets have addressed such issues. Long desirous of improving their status and income, yet forced to compete for patients within a society whose valuation of animals has shifted over time, their history has been punctuated by recurrent episodes of self-evaluation and reform.²

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Sadly, Stephen Matthews, FRHS, died shortly after this paper was accepted. He was an enthusiastic, inspiring, and multi-faceted scholar, who will be sorely missed. This paper is dedicated to his memory.

This paper grew out of the authors' mutual interest in late-nineteenth-century contagious animal disease control. Versions were presented at the 2006 León conference of the World Association for Veterinary History; at the 2007 Manchester conference of the British Society for the History of Science; at the Cambridge Veterinary School Tea club in 2008; and at the 2009 meeting of the British Veterinary History Society. The authors would like to thank Mrs Jenny Dollar for sharing her insights and material relating to Thomas Dollar. We are also grateful for the comments and guidance of three anonymous referees.

¹ See R E W Halliwell, 'Is our divided profession a profession in decline?', *Veterinary Record*

(hereafter *VR*), 2008, **162** (25): 828, and subsequent correspondence.

² One twentieth-century episode is described in A Woods, 'The farm as clinic: veterinary expertise and the transformation of dairy farming, 1930–50', *Stud. Hist. Philos. Biol. Biomed. Sci.*, 2007, **38**: 462–87. Although in other countries, veterinary roles and relations with animal owners and the state differed in many respects from those in Britain, the profession was similarly preoccupied with its future. C Offringa, 'Ars veterinaria: ambacht, professie, beroep: sociologische theorie en historische praktijk', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 1983, **96**: 407–32; Franklin M Loew, 'Animals and people in revolutionary France: scientists, cavalry, farmers and vétérinaires', *Anthrozoos*, 1990, **4** (1): 7–13; Lise Wilkinson, *Animals and disease: an introduction to the history of comparative medicine*, Cambridge University Press, 1992; Ronald H Hubscher, *Les maîtres des bêtes: les vétérinaires dans la société française (XVIIIe–XXe siècle)*, Paris, Editions Odile Jacob, 1999; Susan D Jones, *Valuing animals: veterinarians and their patients in modern America*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2003; Peter Koolmees, 'Constructing a profession: a questionnaire on veterinary practice in the Netherlands in 1846', unpublished paper delivered to European Science Foundation Workshop, 'Veterinary knowledge: between human medicine and agriculture, 1870–1970', Paris, 2008.

This paper focuses on one late-nineteenth-century episode. The occupation of veterinary surgeon was then well established, its origins dating from the 1791 foundation of the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), London. A second school in Edinburgh had been opened by William Dick in 1828 with the support of the Highland and Agricultural Society (HAS), and a corporate body, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), established by Royal Charter in 1844.³ However, all was not well. During the 1860s and 1870s, leading vets complained repeatedly that their utility to agriculture and the nation was overlooked, and that their social status was unjustifiably lower than that of the “sister profession”, medicine. They were also extremely concerned by the increasing numbers of unqualified individuals who were assuming the title “veterinary surgeon”, and sought ways of managing this threat whilst simultaneously advancing their own prospects.

Their efforts form the subject of two historical accounts, which examine the RCVS’s failed attempts to gain a legal injunction against unqualified practice in 1866. Iain Pattison attributed this outcome to veterinary politics and personalities, blaming William Dick and his supporters, who selfishly refused to support any initiative emanating from the London-based RCVS. John Fisher emphasized a different factor: vets were “not quite a profession”. Their competence was not demonstrably greater than that of unqualified vets, and they did not possess the specialized knowledge that would have justified the award of a market monopoly. The reason for this state of affairs lay in the marketplace. In the absence of a public veterinary role, most vets worked in private practice. Their potential earnings did not warrant a substantial investment in formal education; therefore college courses were brief and superficial, so producing qualified vets of questionable competence.⁴

In subsequent years, these difficulties were tackled. In line with “trait based” sociological models of professionalization,⁵ authors emphasize improvements in education, which made vets more expert; advances in regulation, whereby rifts were healed and the RCVS became a single portal of entry to the profession; and the granting of legal monopolies to qualified vets via the 1878 Contagious Diseases of Animals Act—which required all local authorities to appoint at least one qualified veterinary inspector—and the 1881 Veterinary Surgeon’s Act, which granted qualified vets the exclusive right to the title “veterinary surgeon”. In accordance with

³ Iain Pattison, *The British veterinary profession 1791–1948*, London, J A Allen, 1984; L Pugh, *From farriery to veterinary medicine, 1785–1795*, Cambridge, Heffer, 1962; Ernest Cotchin, *The Royal Veterinary College London*, London, Barracuda Books, 1990; S A Hall, ‘The struggle for the charter of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, 1844’, *Vet. Hist.*, 1994, **8**: 2–21.

⁴ Pattison, *op. cit.*, note 3 above, pp. 62–86; J R Fisher, ‘Not quite a profession: the aspirations of veterinary surgeons in England in the mid-nineteenth century’, *Historical Research*, 1993, **66** (161): 284–302.

⁵ A M Carr-Saunders and P A Wilson, *The professions*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933; Harold

Perkin, *The rise of professional society. England since 1880*, London, Routledge, 1990. Other examples of its application include Ivan Waddington, *The medical profession in the industrial revolution*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1984; P Brassley, ‘The professionalisation of English agriculture?’, *Rural History*, 2005, **16** (2): 235–51. Traits assumed to characterize a profession included: a collective orientation; specialized knowledge; an approved and regulated course of training; exclusion of the unqualified; status and authority; altruism; independence of the market; a skilled service usually provided full-time for a fee.

their broader interpretative frameworks, Pattison attributed such developments to the actions of far-sighted individuals, while for Fisher it was the creation (during the 1865–7 cattle plague epidemic) and expansion of new market opportunities in the public control of contagious animal diseases that drove improvements in education, expertise and legal status.⁶

One problem with these accounts is their retrospective construction of late-nineteenth-century vets as a “profession in waiting” whose advancement depended on the healing of rifts (Pattison) or the realization of a potential market (Fisher). This approach is open to question in the light of a recent body of literature that has problematized the definition of a “profession”, challenged its presumed trajectory of development and reconceptualized the relationships between professionals and amateurs.⁷ In adopting a teleological perspective, authors have failed to examine alternative visions of veterinary progress, or veterinary commercial activities that have no present-day parallel. They consider unqualified veterinary practice not on its own terms, but as an impediment to be overcome. They have also tended to assume rather than analyse the impacts of educational, regulatory and legislative reforms.

Consequently, we believe it is time to take a fresh look at later nineteenth-century vets, starting with some fundamental questions: who were the vets and what did they do? What expertise and identities did they possess, and how did they relate to society and to each other?⁸ We do not claim to be the first to address such issues;⁹ nor do we provide a comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, by drawing on novel source material and adopting a symmetrical approach to qualified and unqualified vets we offer insights and perspectives that go well beyond the existing literature. Using evidence from veterinary journals, directories, registers, casebooks and bills, we reveal that vets were a disparate and expanding group of individuals. Operating within a highly competitive climate, and facing different challenges in urban and rural locations, they aimed to make at least a partial living from animal healing. Some were qualified and some not, but in terms of their education, expertise, employment and social status, there was considerable overlap between the two groups.¹⁰

⁶ Pattison, op. cit., note 3 above; Fisher, op. cit., note 4 above.

⁷ Key works include: Paolo Palladino, ‘Wizards and devotees: on the Mendelian theory of inheritance and the professionalization of agricultural science in Great Britain and the United States, 1880–1930’, *Hist. Sci.*, 1994, **32**: 409–44; John C Burnham, ‘How the concept of profession evolved in the work of historians of medicine’, *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1996, **70**: 1–24; Adrian Desmond, ‘Redefining the X axis: “professionals,” “amateurs” and the making of mid-Victorian biology: a progress report’, *J. Hist. Biol.*, 2001, **34**: 3–50; Ruth Barton, ‘“Men of science”: language, identity and professionalization in the mid-Victorian scientific community’, *Hist. Sci.*, 2003, **41**: 73–119.

⁸ Similar questions have been asked of the medical profession by Irvine Loudon, *Medical care*

and the general practitioner, 1750–1850, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, and Anne Digby, *Making a medical living: doctors and patients in the English market for medicine, 1720–1911*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁹ Fisher, op. cit., note 4 above; J Lane, ‘The English provincial veterinarian and his practice’, *Vet. Hist.*, 1975/6, **6**: 13–19; Philippa Moss, ‘Local vets and the Glasgow college’, no date, http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_60646_en.pdf (accessed 2 July 2009).

¹⁰ Roy Porter has also made this point in relation to medical practice, see *Health for sale: quackery in England, 1660–1850*, Manchester University Press, 1989.

Against this backdrop, we reconsider late-nineteenth-century attempts by leaders of the RCVS to enhance the status and competence of its members and to abolish unqualified veterinary practice. Rejecting the notion that they were deliberately trying to achieve a pre-defined set of professional characteristics, we ask, instead, what they thought they were doing. We argue that while all wished for social and economic advancement, and felt that distinguishing themselves from unqualified vets was essential in this regard, the actual means of achieving these goals were far from clear. In a rapidly changing society, veterinary surgery stood at a cross-roads. Should it seek to join medicine as a learned, scientific profession, bound by gentlemanly modes of conduct, or did advancement depend upon a more practical, businesslike orientation? Was self-improvement sufficient to convince society that qualified vets were superior to unqualified, or was a legal monopoly required? After briefly exploring these issues, we conclude that the process of veterinary reform was both contingent and contested, and that its outcomes fell far short of reformers' expectations.

Who were the Vets?

Rational animal healing did not begin with the 1791 creation of the Royal Veterinary College. Various techniques, therapies and services predated, and continued to operate after its foundation. Livestock owners, grooms, coachmen, shepherds and cowmen all had knowledge and experience of animal illness. Their resources included family receipt books, almanacs, and popular husbandry books,¹¹ together with remedies purchased from pharmacists, "quack" medicine vendors, and specialist "veterinary chemists" such as Day & Sons of Crewe. If cure seemed unlikely, they could cut their losses by butchering or selling the animal. Alternatively they could seek external aid. This was available from various sources. Prior to the nineteenth century, farriers headed the hierarchy. Represented by the Company of Farriers, they were usually literate, learned their craft through apprenticeship (as did surgeons), and earned a similar income to apothecaries. Further down the list came less educated horse-doctors—who might also call themselves farriers—blacksmiths, cow-leeches and castrators. In rural areas, landowners also offered free advice and remedies to tenants.¹²

The title "veterinary surgeon" was first adopted by the founders of the RVC to distinguish its new class of scientifically trained diploma holders from farriers. From 1828 it was also assumed by individuals trained at William Dick's school in Edinburgh, who qualified by passing the Highland and Agricultural Society's Certificate (HASC). Meanwhile, increasing numbers of unqualified individuals (who possessed neither the diploma nor the certificate) began to call themselves vets. The 1844 charter that founded the

¹¹ For example, Francis Clater, *Every man his own farrier*, London, Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, passed through thirty-one editions between 1783 and 1823. His *Every man his own cattle doctor* went through five editions between 1810 and 1870.

¹² R Perren, 'The manufacture and marketing of veterinary products from 1850–1914', *Vet. Hist.*, 1989/90, 6 (2): 43–61; J Lane, 'Farriers in Georgian England', in A R Michell (ed.), *The advancement of*

veterinary science: The bicentenary symposium series, volume 3: *History of the healing professions: parallels between veterinary and medical history*, Wallingford, CAB international, 1991, pp. 99–117; S Matthews, 'The cattle plague in Cheshire, 1865–66', *North. Hist.*, 2001, 38 (1): 107–19; Louise Hill Curth, 'Care of the brute beast: animals and the seventeenth-century medical market-place', *Soc. Hist. Med.*, 2002, 15: 375–92.

RCVS aimed to replace the two veterinary qualifications with a single membership of the RCVS (MRCVS). Its possession alone would entitle individuals to call themselves vets. However, while the RVC agreed to drop the diploma and allow the RCVS to examine its students (thereby enabling it to influence the curriculum), Dick refused on the grounds of London bias, and maintained the HASC. His actions caused some members of the RCVS to challenge HASC-holders' right to call themselves vets.¹³ Moreover, as the charter did not receive statutory enforcement, the title "veterinary surgeon" remained unprotected.¹⁴

An examination of census data for England and Wales,¹⁵ the trade directories of London, Cheshire and Warwickshire,¹⁶ and RVC and RCVS registers¹⁷ provides some insights into the numbers of vets during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and their educational status.¹⁸

Until 1891, the national census grouped vets with farriers, implying considerable overlap between their roles¹⁹ (similarly, directory lists of blacksmiths and farriers directed the reader to "see also veterinary surgeons"²⁰). Figure 1 reveals that the numbers in this category increased over the years 1841–81, reflecting the increased market opportunities provided by the substantial growth in the horse population as Britain industrialized²¹ (the market for shoes alone grew by 250 per cent between 1811 and 1901²²). The employment of veterinary practitioners was also favoured by the rising value of horses (which was particularly marked during the 1870s), and by commercial firms' efforts to increase the manufacture and marketing of animal medicines, some of which

¹³ G Poyser, 'Remarks on the veterinary medical associations', *Veterinarian* (hereafter *Vet.*), 1864, 37: 832; 'Veterinary jurisprudence', *Vet.*, 1871, 44: 692–5, describes a case of slander, brought by a HASC holder against a MRCVS who had described him as "only a cowleech". The judge found for the plaintiff.

¹⁴ Pugh, *op. cit.*, note 3 above; Hall, *op. cit.*, note 3 above.

¹⁵ Census of England and Wales 1841–1891, House of Commons *Parliamentary Papers*.

¹⁶ The following directories were used in this study. For Cheshire, the commercial directories of Pigot 1818/19, 1834; Bagshaw, 1850; Morris, 1861, 1864, 1874; and Kelly, 1894. For Warwickshire: Pigot, 1828/9, 1842; Kelly, 1863, 1872, 1884, 1896; White, 1850, 1874. For London: Post Office directory, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1885, 1900. Many are available at www.historicaldirectories.org. Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, also uses directory evidence, but does not cross-reference entries with RVC and RCVS registers.

¹⁷ Names of RVC diploma holders first appear in *RVC: rules and regulations, with a list of the subscribers and names of VS* (1831); The first *Annual register of members of the RCVS* appeared in 1858. The 1861 register included a separate list of HASC holders. The latter were not admitted to the full RCVS register until the HAS withdrew its certificate in favour of RCVS exams in 1878.

¹⁸ The limitations of this data must be acknowledged. Farriers and vets were not differentiated in censuses until 1891. Sometimes RVC and RCVS registers omitted names or provided incomplete details. Trade directories were inaccurate, incomplete, outdated by the time of publication, and provide little definite information on the reportedly large number of individuals who pursued animal healing on an informal, part-time basis. Jane Newman, "A want of better information?" Some early trade directories of southern England', *South. Hist.*, 1994, 16: 180–4; Gareth Shaw and Allison Tipper, *British directories: a bibliography and guide to directories published in England and Wales (1850–1950) and Scotland (1773–1950)*, 2nd ed., London, Mansell, 1996, pp. 7–22.

¹⁹ This point is also made by Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, pp. 287–8.

²⁰ Directory evidence, *op. cit.*, note 16 above.

²¹ There were an estimated 1,287,000 horses in Great Britain in 1811, rising to 2,112,000 by 1871 and 3,277,000 by 1901. The largest growth was in the category of commercial horses, used largely for transport, though private and farm horse numbers also expanded. F M L Thompson, 'Nineteenth-century horse sense', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 1976, n.s. 29: 60–81, p. 80.

²² Perren, *op. cit.*, note 12 above, p. 43.

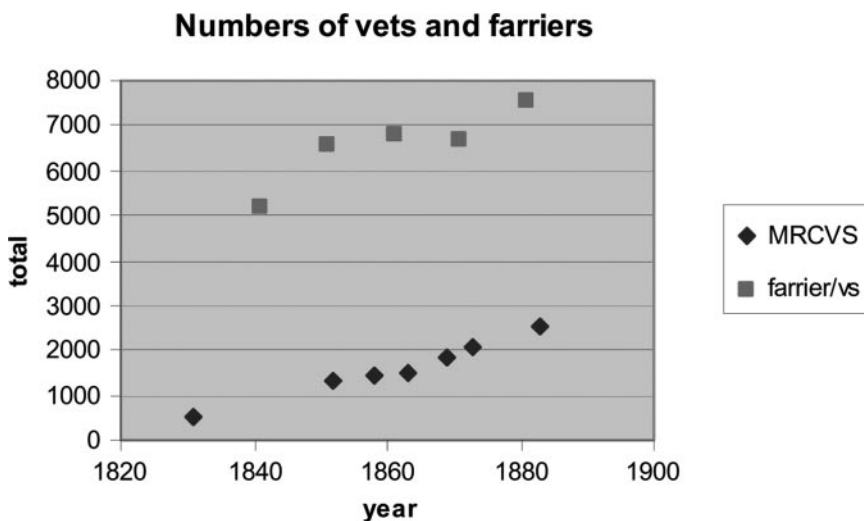


Figure 1: Census listings of vets and farriers compared to numbers of registered RCVS members. Sources: Farrier and veterinary surgeon numbers drawn from census data: 1841–1881; MRCVS numbers from *Royal Veterinary College: rules and regulations, with a list of the subscribers and names of veterinary surgeons*, 1831; *The veterinary directory, or, Annual register of the members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons*, 1858, 1861–83.

they sold via vets.²³ Cattle numbers doubled between 1830 and 1901, and their health deteriorated as the ports were opened to foreign livestock, allowing infectious diseases to invade and spread.²⁴ During the last third of the century, these developments generated some state employment for vets, as outlined below. However, they had relatively little impact on private veterinary practice. Farmers usually treated sick livestock themselves, and their willingness to pay veterinary bills presumably declined along with livestock values as the agricultural depression took hold during the late nineteenth century.²⁵

Within the expanding category of “vets and farriers”, the proportion of qualified vets (members of the RCVS) increased over time. The schools’ output outstripped the natural rate of wastage, as class sizes grew and new institutions were founded: John Gamgee’s

²³ Ralph Turvey, ‘Horse traction in Victorian London’, *J. Transport Hist.*, 2005, **26** (2): 38–59; Perren op. cit., note 12 above.

²⁴ Cotchin op. cit., note 3 above, p. 61, claims there were 1.5 million cattle in Britain in 1830, though he does not provide a source for this figure. The first livestock census was in 1871: cows then numbered 5,338,000, rising to 6,746,000 in 1901. Agricultural returns, cited in Perren, op. cit., note 12

above, p. 43. For a discussion of livestock health, see Abigail Woods, ‘The construction of an animal plague: foot and mouth disease in nineteenth-century Britain’, *Soc. Hist. Med.*, 2004, **17**: 23–39.

²⁵ Edith H Whetham, ‘Livestock prices in Britain, 1851–93’, *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, 1963, **11**: 27–35; Jonathan Brown, *Agriculture in England: a survey of farming, 1870–1947*, Manchester University Press, 1987, ch. 2.

school, which operated in Edinburgh and London, 1857–68; a Glasgow school, established in 1862; and the “New Edinburgh Veterinary College”, which split from the Dick in 1873.²⁶ Typically, men who sought a qualification were the sons of vets, farriers, shoeing smiths, horse-dealers or stable owners, who could afford the course (which cost £40 for two five-month terms stretching over a two-year period) and regarded it as a good investment in the family business.²⁷

However, many individuals who called themselves vets did not possess a formal qualification. An 1863 RCVS survey of members identified 1,244 such vets, compared with 1,018 qualified men.²⁸ It seems likely that they adopted the title “veterinary surgeon” in the belief that it conferred a market advantage (it is difficult to prove whether this was, in fact, the case). Many made the transition from smith or farrier, or used both titles. Others would, in earlier times, have been known as cow-leeches, horse-doctors or castrators, terms which fade from the directories as the century progresses. Some had formerly worked as chemists, farmers, cab drivers, or grooms.²⁹ A handful were women (who were barred from the schools), though by the 1870s they had virtually disappeared.³⁰

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the relative numbers and regional distribution of qualified and unqualified vets. Numbers of unqualified vets rose until the 1860s (in Cheshire and London) and 1870s (in Warwickshire). Unsurprisingly, given the magnitude and rapid growth of its horse population, London had more of both types than Cheshire or Warwickshire, and their numbers increased at a greater rate.³¹ In London and Warwickshire, qualified vets outnumbered the unqualified from at least the 1840s. In Cheshire, one of the main dairying counties, the picture was very different. Unqualified vets outnumbered qualified men until the 1870s, and there were far more of them than in Warwickshire, although the two counties possessed similar numbers of qualified vets. The particular difficulties facing the qualified rural practitioner are discussed more below. We will also suggest reasons why the numbers of unqualified vets began to decline over a decade before the 1881 Veterinary Surgeons Act gave qualified vets a monopoly over the title.

The boundaries between qualified and unqualified vets were extremely blurred. A formal veterinary education was rarely seen as an end in itself: most students also undertook periods of apprenticeship, or were trained within family practices. These avenues were also pursued by many unqualified vets. Some intended to progress to college but their

²⁶ Gamgee offered a more advanced, scientific education than the other schools, but he did not attract sufficient students to make his college financially viable. S Hall, ‘John Gamgee and the Edinburgh New Veterinary College’, *VR*, 1965, 77 (42): 1237–41. The new Edinburgh college was founded by William Williams, former principal of the Dick college. On being asked to resign by the Dick trustees, he decamped with most of the staff and students and set up a rival institution. C M Warwick and A A McDonald, ‘The New Veterinary

College, Edinburgh, 1873–94’, *VR*, 2003, 153 (13): 380–6.

²⁷ This point is made by Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, p. 291.

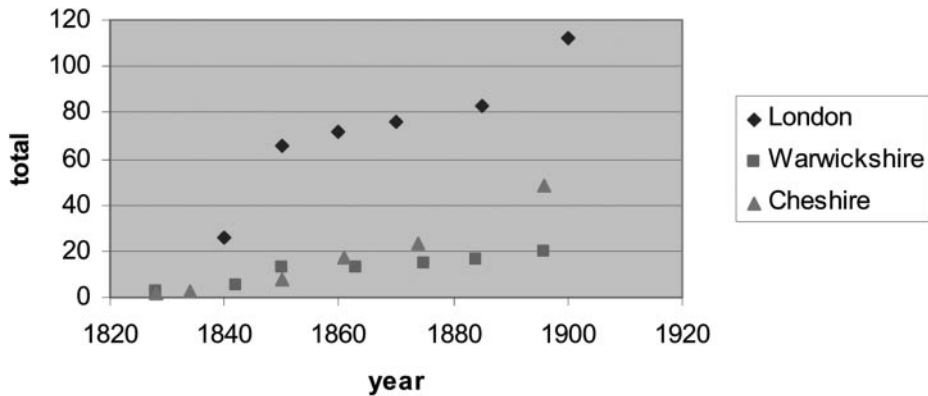
²⁸ RCVS, ‘Annual meeting’, *Vet.*, 1863, 36: 358–70. The survey also identified 1,189 “others” who performed elements of the veterinary surgeon’s job without assuming the title.

²⁹ National Archives, Kew (hereafter NA) PC 8/298, Veterinary Surgeons Act, appeals, 1883.

³⁰ Census records, *op. cit.*, note 15 above.

³¹ Turvey, *op. cit.*, note 23 above.

Numbers of qualified vets in 3 counties



Number of unqualified vets in 3 counties

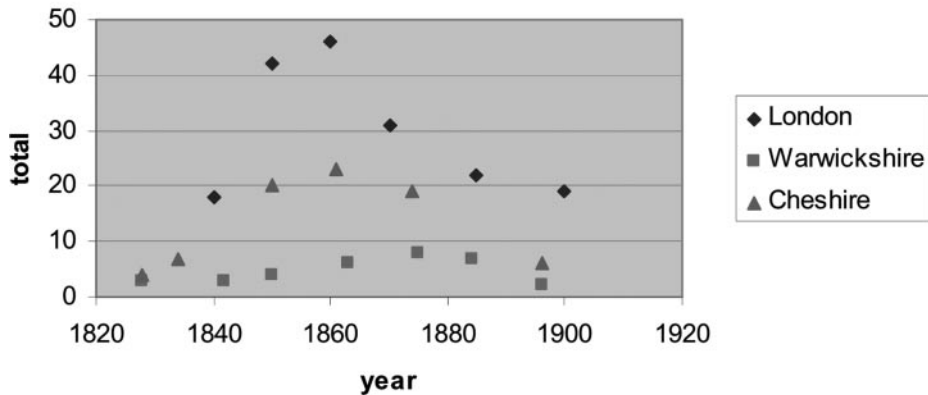


Figure 2: Relative numbers of unqualified and qualified vets in nineteenth-century London, Warwickshire and Cheshire.

Sources: London Post Office directory, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1885, 1900; Warwickshire directories: Pigot, 1828/9, 1842; White, 1850, 1874; Kelly, 1863, 1872, 1884, 1896; Cheshire directories: Pigot, 1818/19, 1834; Bagshaw, 1850; Morris, 1861, 1864, 1874; Kelly, 1894; *Royal Veterinary College: rules and regulations, with a list of the subscribers and names of veterinary surgeons*, 1831; *The veterinary directory, or, Annual register of the members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons*, 1858, 1861–1900, *passim*.

personal circumstances determined otherwise. Others did attend the schools but failed their exams.³² While formal lectures imparted a degree of theoretical knowledge unavailable to non-attendees, standards of education were reputedly low. Reliant on fees, the schools were more concerned with the size of intake than with the quality of education. Until 1864 the RVC had no preliminary exam and only an oral final exam. Consequently, it was possible for semi-literate individuals to qualify, such as the man who wrote to the *Veterinarian* in 1880, offering a series of papers on “Kweer Kases and ards hips gone thro, wilst labering for the Perfesshun” (*sic*).³³ Despite efforts to diversify the curriculum (for example, by appointing J B Simonds professor of cattle pathology in 1842), it remained largely horse-focused, and, until the 1870s, offered little hands-on training other than dissection. While large numbers of horses were admitted to the RVC infirmary (which treated, and examined for soundness the horses of subscribers to the College), operations were carried out by the professors, while grooms cast and secured the horses, administered medicines and applied bandages.³⁴

What did They do?

Apart from the few who won army commissions, virtually all vets who trained at the schools went into private veterinary practice. There, like their unqualified counterparts, they engaged in a variety of clinical work, mostly involving horses.³⁵ These ranged from horses kept for trade purposes (mostly traction) to gentlemen’s horses kept for riding or drawing carriages, to farm horses.³⁶ It was standard practice for purchasers of more valuable horses to request from vendors a veterinary certificate of soundness. Vets’ fees for these certificates were relatively large, reflecting the skill and diplomacy required, as well as the risk of litigation frequently pursued by disappointed purchasers. Qualified vets in 1870s London usually charged a guinea (approximately the same as a doctor charged for midwifery amongst the poor), though in the provinces half a guinea was more usual,³⁷ against horse prices of around £45 for cart horses, £72 for van horses and 100 guineas for thoroughbred yearlings.³⁸ Unqualified vets also carried out pre-purchase examinations, as revealed by occasional court cases in which purchasers of unsound horses demanded their money back on the grounds that the vet signing the certificate was not qualified. These cases were generally lost on the basis of *caveat emptor*.³⁹

Other clinical work involved horses with lameness, colic, wounds, tetanus, flu and strangles (a contagious disease that caused purulent nasal discharge and abscesses under

³² Hartest, ‘A reply to MRCVS’, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 469; WW, ‘Veterinary quackery’, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 541–3; ‘A voice from border land’, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 598–9, 671; Correspondence to *Vet.*, 1881, **54**: 316–772, *passim*.

³³ Trebble X, Correspondence, *Vet.*, 1880, **53**: 326–30.

³⁴ MRCVS, ‘A voice from the provinces’, *Vet.*, 1870, **43**: 302–8; J Steele, ‘On the prospects of veterinary students’, *Vet. J.*, 1880, **10**: 266–70, 392–7; Cotchin, *op. cit.*, note 3 above, pp. 70–80; Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, p. 291; Moss, *op. cit.*, note 9 above.

³⁵ Steele, *op. cit.*, note 34, above.

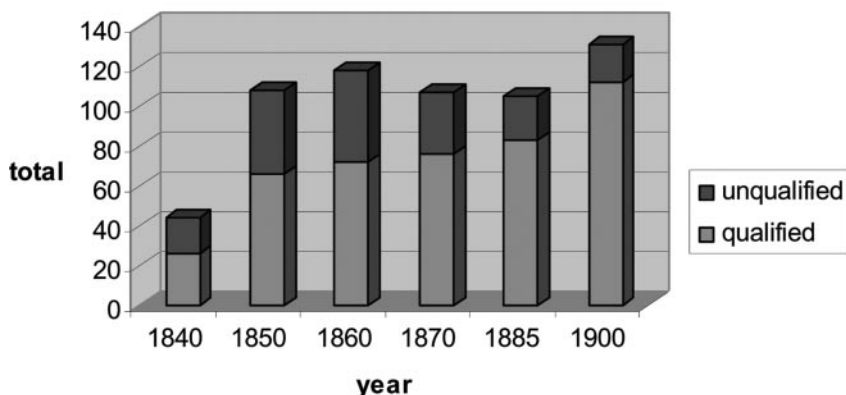
³⁶ Thompson, *op. cit.*, note 21 above.

³⁷ Collection of veterinary surgeons’ bills, MS 7562 and Certificates relating to the veterinary examination of animals, MS 7565, Archives and Manuscripts, Wellcome Library; Digby, *op. cit.*, note 8 above, pp. 254–6.

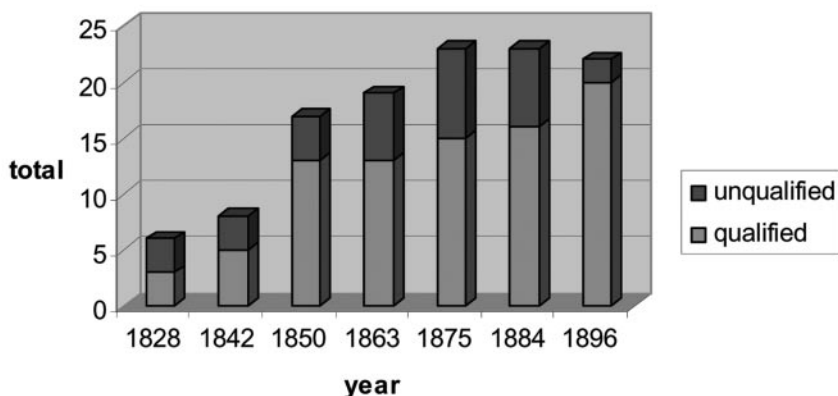
³⁸ Turvey, *op. cit.*, note 23 above, pp. 53–5.

³⁹ ‘Veterinary Jurisprudence’, *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 60–1.

Vets in London



Vets in Warwickshire



the jaw). Less frequently, vets visited sick livestock, usually dairy cows, found on farms and in the many urban dairies established to supply town dwellers with fresh milk.⁴⁰ Pets rarely feature in practice records, although it is possible that their importance has been underestimated.⁴¹ Visits and examinations usually cost between 1s 6d and 2s 6d, with

⁴⁰ Urban dairies housed freshly calved cows, brought from the country, which were milked for a single lactation then sold to the butcher. Reputedly, dairies were “hot beds” of disease. However, because owners had little long-term investment in cattle health they rarely sought veterinary care. The growth of the railway, refrigeration, and the cattle plague epidemic

of 1865–7 caused many dairies to close. Woods, *op. cit.*, note 24 above, p. 27.

⁴¹ Several specialist canine vets are known to have worked in London during the early nineteenth century. Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad dogs and Englishmen: rabies in Britain 1830–1900*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 20–1.

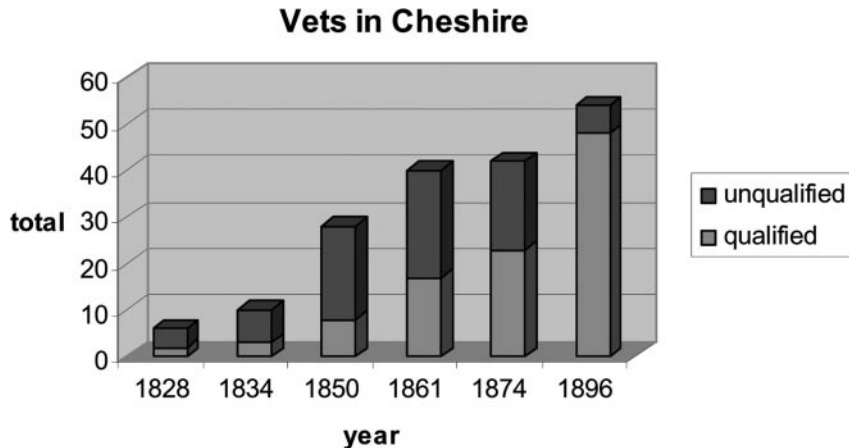


Figure 3: Numbers of qualified and unqualified vets in nineteenth-century London, Warwickshire and Cheshire.

Sources: London Post Office directory, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1885, 1900; Warwickshire directories: Pigot, 1828/9, 1842; White, 1850, 1874; Kelly, 1863, 1872, 1884, 1896; Cheshire directories: Pigot, 1818/19, 1834; Bagshaw, 1850; Morris, 1861, 1864, 1874; Kelly, 1894; *Royal Veterinary College: rules and regulations, with a list of the subscribers and names of veterinary surgeons*, 1831; *The veterinary directory, or, Annual register of the members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons*, 1858, 1861–1900, *passim*.

little evidence of inflation over the second half of the century. Surgical procedures (performed without anaesthetics)⁴² included bleeding, castration, assisting with births and the firing of lame horses (whereby tissue on a lame leg was cauterized in the belief that healing made the leg more stable). Although fees varied considerably, as a relatively skilled procedure, firing usually cost at least half a guinea; 5s was an average fee for colt castration, whereas bleeding, wart removal or teeth rasping cost around 3s. Vets also relied heavily upon the sale of medicines, usually costing between 1s 6d and 2s 6d. Most were home-made, but vets also sold patent medicines produced in increasing quantities by commercial firms, who advertised their wares in the veterinary press. In the days before hypodermic injections, medicines were administered as drenches, tonics or “horse

When the RVC opened a cheap practice in 1879, dogs made up the bulk of the patients. A Gardiner, ‘Courses for horses: British veterinary education and practice before 1950’, unpublished paper delivered to European Science Foundation Workshop, ‘Veterinary knowledge: between human medicine and agriculture, 1870–1970’, Paris, 2008.

⁴² Although anaesthetic use in human medicine began in 1846/7 (Stephanie J Snow, *Operations without pain: the practice and science of anaesthesia in Victorian Britain*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), it was slow to take off in veterinary practice. Few case reports appear in

veterinary journals (an exception, relating to its experimental use in the firing of horses, is Prof. Tuson, ‘Remarks on local anaesthesia applied to veterinary surgery’, *Vet.*, 1866, **39**: 779–81). By 1881, chloroform use was still not routinely taught at the RVC (RVC quarterly meeting, *Vet.*, 1881, **54**: 337–8). In his 1896 RCVS fellowship thesis on the castration of horses, W Pallin noted that while it could be of service, “the time, however, which I take is very short and the whole operation would be performed while the effects of the anaesthetics was in preparation”. RCVS fellowship theses: no 1. W Pallin, ‘Castration in horses’, 1896, RCVS library.

balls”, which required considerable skill. Lotions, linaments and ointments were also sold.⁴³

Few bills or daybooks issued by unqualified vets have survived, making it difficult to comment with any certainty on their activities and earnings. However the daybook of an unqualified vet, James Kite of Salisbury, 1842–5, provides some useful insights when compared with that of a qualified vet, James Rose of Leamington and Alcester, 1878–82. Although working in different times and places, they drew on a similar range of medical and surgical practices and charged similar fees. While their techniques and success rates are not known, both bled sick animals, assisted with births, “fired” lame horses, castrated colts and examined horses prior to purchase.⁴⁴ Both sold medicines, although these made up a greater proportion of Kite’s income, possibly lending weight to qualified vets’ allegations of excessive drug use amongst “empirics”.⁴⁵ Kite was patronized by the Marquis of Westminster, Rose by the Marquis of Hertford and Lord Kingley. Although there was a qualified vet in the same town, Kite ran a busy practice. His ledger contained 125 names to Rose’s 200, but the latter employed an unqualified coachman to do some of the less skilled work, such as administering medicines or following up cases.⁴⁶

In addition to attending individual sick animals, vets could be employed on a contract basis to serve large commercial stables. For example, in 1881, William Penhale of Barnstaple, Devon, agreed to provide veterinary attendance and medicines for the Great Western Railway’s horses at Barnstaple and Ilfracombe stations, at a fee of £1 per horse per year.⁴⁷ Contract systems offered reliable incomes, and the opportunity to visit sick animals early, when there was a greater chance of cure. However, clients could prove demanding and serving them left little time for more lucrative private practice.⁴⁸

Evidence suggests that vets rarely earned their entire income from practice. Like doctors, many held part-time public appointments. By the mid-1870s, around 370 qualified vets worked as Local Authority inspectors, examining animals in markets, stables and farms for signs of contagious disease. This activity was also performed by unqualified vets and policemen, who made up 19 per cent and 59 per cent of the inspectorate, respectively.⁴⁹ Additional opportunities existed at the ports, inspecting foreign animals for disease for a fee of 1 guinea per day. These diminished in the 1870s owing to the State

⁴³ Perren, *op. cit.*, note 22 above; Veterinary surgeons’ bills, *op. cit.*, note 37 above; Warwickshire Record Office, CR 1596/box 133, J Rose and Son, ledgers, 1876–92.

⁴⁴ A detailed consideration of the ways in which surgical techniques of unqualified and qualified vets differed, and whether such differences could be attributed to a formal education in veterinary anatomy and physiology is beyond the scope of this paper. However, analysis of the frequent case reports appearing in veterinary journals, some of which emanated from unqualified vets, would enable this question to be addressed.

⁴⁵ RCVS, ‘Annual meeting’, *Vet.*, 1864, 37: 413.

⁴⁶ Wiltshire & Swindon Record Office (hereafter WSRO), ref. 776/930, James Kite, account books; J

Rose and Son, *op. cit.*, note 43 above. For a history of Rose’s practice, see Lane, *op. cit.*, note 9 above.

⁴⁷ WSRO, ref. 2515 210 Box 37/7, Contract between William Penhale and the Great Western Railway, 1881.

⁴⁸ ‘North of England VMA’, *Vet.*, 1868, 41: 60–3; Steele, *op. cit.*, note 34 above, p. 393. VMA stands for Veterinary Medical Association.

⁴⁹ *Report of the Veterinary Department, 1873*, PP 1874 (c978), XXI, p. 659. Most of these posts were created under the 1866 Cattle Diseases Act (passed for the control of cattle plague) and the 1869 Contagious Diseases of Animals Act (which scheduled foot and mouth disease, pleuro-pneumonia and glanders). Anon, *Animal health, a centenary, 1865–1965*, London, HMSO, 1965.

Veterinary Department's preference for full-time positions, which it restricted to qualified men.⁵⁰

In the urban environment, other opportunities for veterinary income generation abounded, most notably the keeping of a "veterinary infirmary" in which sick horses were stabled, and a "veterinary forge" where healthy ones were shod. Out of a collection of twenty bills issued by qualified vets between 1846 and 1877, twelve refer, in the bill head, to farriery, forge or horse-shoeing.⁵¹ This activity was generally performed by farriers or smiths, who were employed by the veterinary owner of the establishment. In Manchester in 1864, horse owners typically paid 3s 6d per set of shoes, with 2s 1½d of that sum going to the smith.⁵² This fee was similar to that charged for veterinary attendance. The appeal of the forge was explained by the Wolverhampton practitioner, J Woodroffe Hill: "If Mr So and So brings his horse to be shod, he will bring it to be doctored; and therefore it is not what the forge pays, but the practice it brings which makes it answer."⁵³ The situation was slightly different for many of the unqualified vets who kept forges. Advertising themselves as "farrier & VS" or "blacksmith & VS", shoeing represented their main line of work, and they performed it themselves.⁵⁴

The forge business was the key to the success of the Scottish vet, Thomas Dollar, who studied at Dick's school before heading to London in the early 1850s. He found that as a HASC-holder, no RVC vet would employ him. After a short stint as a debt collector, he set up as a farrier and soon won a contract with a mail company in Finsbury to look after its 400 horses. As his finances improved, he began to acquire farriers' shops across London's West End, possessing around twelve by the early 1870s. Through good business sense and the timely purchase of a run-down veterinary practice in Knightsbridge, he was, by 1890, was one of the most prosperous vets in London. He served royalty and the aristocracy, and his newly rebuilt infirmary at 54 Bond Street was the best equipped practice in the city.⁵⁵

Vets often pursued other horse-related lines of work such as stabling, livery or horse hire. For example, in the 1858 *Post Office directory for Cumberland*, Thomas Brockbank, a qualified vet, advertised himself as "veterinary surgeon, livery stables, licensed to let post horses for hire, & contractor for the Carlisle cemetery".⁵⁶ Vets also formed connections with public houses on the basis that carters and coaches would stop there, even performing the dual function of publican and veterinarian (Figure 4). Other popular activities included horse and dog dealing, and the sale of horse insurance.⁵⁷

⁵⁰NA PC 8/182, Particulars of inspectors, 1872; *Report of the Veterinary Department, 1872*, PP 1872 (c619), XVIII, p. 629. The State Veterinary Department was created during the cattle plague epidemic, to collate local authority statistics and advise on disease control policy. It contained two full-time vets, J B Simonds and George Brown, who received £500 a year "on the understanding that they give up their whole time to the public". NA PC 8/160, Report, 1869; *Animal health*, op. cit., note 49 above.

⁵¹Veterinary surgeons' bills, op. cit., note 37 above.

⁵²T Greaves, 'Farriers strike, or a VMA on its trial', *Vet.*, 1864, 37: 578–82.

⁵³J Woodroffe Hill, Correspondence, *Vet. J.*, 1880, 11: 71.

⁵⁴RCVS, Annual meeting, *Vet.*, 1864, 37: 412–13.

⁵⁵The infirmary comprised thirty horse boxes, a surgery, drug store, Turkish bath, coach-houses, farriers' shop, straw and hay loft, clerk and consulting office, operating space and table, dwelling house. J A W Dollar [son of Thomas Dollar], *Memoirs* (in the private possession of Mrs J Dollar).

⁵⁶*Post Office directory of Cumberland*, London, 1858, p. 133.

⁵⁷Directory evidence, op. cit., note 16 above; Veterinary surgeons' bills, op. cit., note 37 above;

ALBERT S. COX,
Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Edinburgh and London,
'George & Dragon' Hotel,
Manchester Road, Sandiway, Altrincham.

Loose Boxes for Sick and Lame Horses, and Infirmary
for Dogs. Horses Examined as to Soundness.
HORSE & CATTLE MEDICINES of every description.

Choice Wines & Spirits.

BOTTLED ALE AND PORTER. WELL-AIRED BEDS. EXCELLENT
STABLING.

Figure 4: Albert Cox, advertisement. (Morris & Co.'s *Directory & Gazetteer of Cheshire, Nottingham*, 1874, p. 194.)

The variety of sources of veterinary income (including many which have no present-day parallel) throws into question veterinary reminiscences from the 1940s, which stated that “money flowed easily into the pockets of those who comported themselves industriously and elegantly”, and “you could earn your living before breakfast in a gentle walk up the street”.⁵⁸ Whilst this may have been the case for London elites like Dollar, who won contracts with large stables and served the carriage and riding horses of the aristocracy, many vets clearly had to engage in supplementary business practices to earn a living. Moreover, within practice, competition for clients was often cut-throat. Vets advertised their services freely, even using sandwich board men at fairs. Some consulted by letter or in pubs; others entered into league with horse-dealers, issuing fraudulent certificates of warranty to facilitate the sale of unsound horses. It was also common practice to bribe grooms in order to win business; to steal cases that were under the care of other vets; and to under-cut or bad mouth the competition.⁵⁹

J Rowe, 'Professional advertising and "specialists"', *Vet. J.*, 1880, **10**: 60–1.

⁵⁸ J McCunn, 'The evolution of equine practice', *VR*, 1944, **56**: 159; Obituary, J A Dollar, *VR*, 1948, **60**: 137–8.

⁵⁹ Digamma, Correspondence, *Vet. J.*, 1876, **2**: 396; J Gerrard, 'Our fees', *Vet. J.*, 1879, **8**: 139–40;

Artemus Secundus, 'Spurious titles', *Vet. J.*, 1879, **8**: 151; Ubique, 'Our social status', *Vet. J.*, 1880, **10**: 376–8; J Woodroffe Hill, Correspondence, *Vet. J.*, 1880, **11**: 70–2; 'Fraudulent warranties', *Vet. J.*, 1880, **16**: 47–8.

The situation was particularly difficult for qualified vets in rural areas such as Cheshire. There were fewer horses and they were more spread out, requiring long journeys in the saddle, day and night. Farmers who sought veterinary aid for their horses rarely did so for their livestock.⁶⁰ This was partly for financial reasons. While the aristocratic members of improvement societies like the Royal Agricultural Society favoured veterinary aid for their pedigree cows (often valued at several hundred pounds),⁶¹ ordinary livestock were rarely worth the investment, even before their values fell as a result of the late-nineteenth-century agricultural depression.⁶² Consequently, owners often opted to butcher rather than to doctor them.

Another impediment to qualified veterinary employment was the prevalent farming belief that such individuals had little understanding of livestock disease. This was a fairly sound assumption given the horse-centred nature of the veterinary curriculum, which meant that “for some years, not an ox, a cow, or sheep has passed within the college walls of St Pancras”.⁶³ Consequently, many farmers preferred to treat their own livestock. Those educated at agricultural colleges such as the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, drew on veterinary knowledge learned there. Others relied on custom, tradition, and patent or home-made remedies. Often suspicious of outsiders, when they deemed external aid to be necessary, they consulted other farmers, their landlords, local healers and unqualified vets (who might be just as competent as the qualified man). The qualified vet was summoned only as a last resort. By then the animal was usually too ill to respond to treatment, and its death merely confirmed owners’ assumptions that college men were useless.⁶⁴

These circumstances meant that many qualified vets who tried to set up in rural areas eventually gave up and moved back to the towns. Others survived through sheer hard work. Regarding fees, they reportedly “took what they could get”,⁶⁵ for “farmers are very close for cheapness”.⁶⁶ The standard examination fee was around 2/6, with 6d per mile for travel; sitting up all night with a calving cow earned half a guinea.⁶⁷ Compared with the towns, there were far fewer opportunities to supplement this income, unless they farmed or acted as inspectors for local cattle insurance companies. The latter posts were poorly paid (vets received around 5s per post-mortem) and often awarded to unqualified men or farmers.⁶⁸ Consequently, practice income was rarely sufficient to support

⁶⁰ Editorial, ‘The contagious diseases act and the veterinary profession’, *Vet.*, 1871, **44**: 486–8.

⁶¹ The HAS was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the RVC, supplying funds for J B Simond’s lectureship in cattle pathology, and for investigations into livestock disease. J R Fisher, ‘Animal health and the Royal Agricultural Society in its early years’, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society*, 1981, **143**: 105–11; Pattison, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 48–54, 143–5.

⁶² A two-year-old stirk sold at Lincoln Beast Fair in 1882 fetched an average of £17 10s, while at its Sheep Fair, sheep sold for £3 2s 5d. *Final report of the Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression*, PP 1897 (c.8540), XV.1, pp. 47–8; Whetham, op. cit., note 25 above.

⁶³ Artemus Secundus, ‘Our present state’, *Vet. J.*, 1878, **7**: 216.

⁶⁴ Mr Dewar to North of Scotland VMA, *Vet.*, 1869, **42**: 219–25; Editorial, ‘The contract system’, *Vet.*, 1871, **44**: 809–11; T Mayer, ‘Review: A text book of veterinary obstetrics’, *Vet. J.*, 1876, **3**: 375; Fisher, op. cit., note 4 above, pp. 293–5.

⁶⁵ R Chrystal Irving, ‘In partnership with Wm Hunting’, *VR*, 1938, **50**: 923.

⁶⁶ Artemus Secundus, ‘Our fees’, *Vet. J.*, 1878, **7**: 289.

⁶⁷ Veterinary surgeons’ bills, op. cit., note 37 above.

⁶⁸ Directory evidence, op. cit., note 16 above; Stephen Matthews, ‘Cattle clubs, insurance and plague in the mid-nineteenth century’, *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, 2005, **53**: 192–211.

more than one vet, as shown by the fact that the qualified sons of Cheshire vets usually practised in different locations to their fathers, rather than joining them, as was usual in London.⁶⁹

Veterinary Status, Expertise, Identity and Relationships

Like leading physicians, elite London vets (though generally of modest backgrounds) assumed the airs and habits of gentlemen. They dressed in silk hats and tail coats, drove gigs, broughams or even carriages.⁷⁰ However, most vets—qualified and unqualified—were essentially tradesmen. They rubbed shoulders with local grooms, horse-dealers and smiths, and entered clients' homes via the servants' door.⁷¹ Unlike dentists and doctors, vets were not exempt from jury service on the grounds of their national importance, and there was some dispute over whether, like doctors, they were eligible for a reduction on their horse tax. When appearing as expert witnesses in court cases, vets were paid less than surgeons.⁷²

Levels of expertise varied considerably, although as the above description of veterinary training and activities reveals, there was considerable overlap between qualified and unqualified vets. Both groups contained respectable, hardworking and skilful individuals who kept in touch with new developments via the veterinary press.⁷³ Although some unqualified vets adhered to the stereotypes of ignorant, irrational, drunken empirics, who duped the public, inflicted cruelty on animals and brought vets into disrepute, such behaviour was not unknown amongst qualified vets. Respectable members of both groups looked down on the unrespectable.⁷⁴ Though usually scathing about their unqualified competitors, qualified vets also admitted their superiority over certain college men, who “could not perform the simplest surgical operation efficiently—far less write a sensible prescription”.⁷⁵

There is little evidence that society at large assumed qualified vets were more expert than their unqualified counterparts. Customers did not always ask if a vet was qualified: some were unaware that qualifications existed; others did not care, preferring to select on the basis of results, not education.⁷⁶ As already noted, livestock owners generally

⁶⁹ Directory evidence, *op. cit.*, note 16 above.

⁷⁰ G P Male, ‘The evolution of equine practice’, *VR*, 1944, **56**: 147.

⁷¹ R H Dyer, ‘Social position of the veterinary surgeon’, *Vet.*, 1865, **38**: 360–5.

⁷² Charles Moir, ‘Taxing riding horses used by veterinary surgeons’, *Vet.*, 1855, **28**: 247. The tax was abolished in 1874. Thompson, *op. cit.*, note 21 above, p. 68; ‘The service on juries by veterinary surgeons’, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 337–41; W Woods to Liverpool VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 204.

⁷³ F H Lascelles, ‘Horse warranty: on the purchase and sale of horses’, reviewed in *Vet. J.*, 1877, **5**: 374. The *Veterinarian*, edited by J B Simonds with the help of George Fleming, was the main journal until the latter established his own *Veterinary Journal* in 1875. Some qualified vets attributed their fellows’ unwillingness to write for these journals to the fear

that unqualified vets might benefit. T Greaves, ‘The state and prospects of the veterinary profession’, *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 392–5; T Broad, ‘Professional morals’, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 69–71.

⁷⁴ G Morgan to Lancashire VMA, *Vet.*, 1870, **43**: 408–11; J Fraser, ‘Our social position’, *Vet.*, 1870, **43**: 927–8; F Prentice, ‘A reply to MRCVS’, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 469; Old practitioner, Correspondence, *Vet.*, 1881, **54**: 316–7; Justicia, ‘The registration of existing practitioners’, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **16**: 149.

⁷⁵ A J MacCallum, ‘A scheme for raising the status of the veterinary profession’, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 68–9.

⁷⁶ M Hedley to North of England VMA, *Vet.*, 1869, **42**: 292–6; J Barker, ‘The veterinary profession and education’, *Vet.*, 1869, **42**: 573–5; C Stephenson, ‘Veterinary topics of the day’, *Vet. J.*, 1881, **12**: 50–1.

selected unqualified vets (or indeed cow-leeches, or cattle doctors) on the basis that they knew more about livestock. Judges and juries were similarly unimpressed by a veterinary qualification. In lawsuits brought against unqualified vets on the grounds of their alleged incompetence, the lack of qualification was rarely grounds for conviction.⁷⁷ The frequently conflicting opinions offered by qualified vets employed (often in great number) to give evidence in “veterinary misconduct” or animal cruelty cases, did little to enhance their reputation.⁷⁸ Nor were local authorities convinced of the merits of formal veterinary training. As shown above, when choosing veterinary inspectors they often preferred policemen, who were cheaper than vets and, in the eyes of the public, probably had more authority to carry out unpopular tasks like livestock inspection and the enforcement of restrictions on livestock movements.⁷⁹

For some “college men”, possession of a veterinary qualification was very important to their identities, especially in rural areas where it could create a prejudice against them. The long list of names supplied by qualified Cheshire vets for publication in the 1861 RCVS register under the title “veterinary practitioners reported as having no recognised diploma” suggests a degree of separation and indeed hostility between the two groups. (The fact that no London names appeared in the list implies a less fraught relationship.)⁸⁰ However, although veterinary journals and meetings abounded with complaints of unqualified practice, it is important to note that some qualified vets could and did work happily alongside unqualified men. Some joined the practices of their unqualified fathers or worked as assistants for unqualified vets. In larger practices, like that of Rose, it was not unusual for qualified vets to employ unqualified coachmen or “running doctors” to follow up cases.⁸¹

The fact that the title “MRCVS” was used in just five out of a collection of twenty bills issued by qualified vets over the period 1846–77 suggests that most did not value—either socially or economically—their association with the RCVS.⁸² James Gerrard probably spoke for many when he complained, “What has RCVS ever done for the profession that it is entitled to our loyalty . . . taken our money and given us a pretended right to a title that it is unable to protect.”⁸³ The time and money required to travel to London disbarred most provincial practitioners from standing or even voting (since this was done in person) for the RCVS council.⁸⁴ As a result, this body was dominated by London practitioners, RVC professors, State Veterinary Department vets and army vets. As the next section reveals, these men had little understanding of life in provincial practice.

⁷⁷ ‘Veterinary jurisprudence’, *Vet.*, 1853, **26**: 322–4; Nemo, ‘Qualified and unqualified practice’, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 88.

⁷⁸ ‘Veterinary jurisprudence’, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 519–25; ‘Horse case: difference of opinion’, *Vet. J.*, 1878, **7**: 431.

⁷⁹ *Report of the Veterinary Department, 1873*, op. cit., note 49 above.

⁸⁰ *Register of the members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons*, Edinburgh, T C Jock, 1861.

⁸¹ Directory evidence, op. cit., note 16 above; Hartest, ‘A reply to MRCVS’, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 469;

J Watson, ‘Quackery’, *Vet. J.*, 1878, **6**: 145–6; J Walker, ‘Quackery’, *Vet. J.*, 1878, **6**: 224–6; For complaints about running doctors, see Correspondence in *Vet. J.*, 1880, **10**, *passim*.

⁸² One bill employing the title MRCVS was issued by J R Cox of London, a council member and future RCVS president. Collection of veterinary bills, op. cit., note 37 above.

⁸³ J Gerrard, Correspondence, *Vet. J.*, 1878, **6**: 69.

⁸⁴ Editorial, ‘The annual meeting of the members of the veterinary profession’, *Vet.*, 1871, **44**: 423.

On account of divisions between the RVC and Edinburgh schools, which developed following the latter's refusal to accept the RCVS as its examining body, qualified vets identified strongly with their place of education. As Dollar discovered, RVC vets could close ranks in the face of a Dick-educated rival. However, attendance at the same school was no bar to hostilities. On account of the fierce competition for cases, relationships, especially between neighbouring practitioners, could be poor. Regional veterinary medical associations (VMAs) founded during the 1860s and 1870s aimed to address this problem. Though meetings were sparsely attended and did not necessarily exclude unqualified men, they were nevertheless important in constructing a sense of community.⁸⁵ Topical issues were discussed and meeting reports appeared in veterinary journals, keeping vets across the country in touch with events (although it is important to note that many qualified vets did not read journals, and some unqualified vets did).⁸⁶ Association brought other benefits, as illustrated by the 1864 Manchester shoeing smiths' strike, which crippled veterinary forges used to shoeing forty or fifty horses a week. Members of the recently formed Lancashire Veterinary Medical Association banded together to share stocks of shoes, scoured the country for replacement employees, and eventually broke the strike.⁸⁷

The Movement for Reform

In an 1872 address, an army vet and RCVS council member, George Fleming⁸⁸ voiced his considerable dissatisfaction with the state of qualified veterinary affairs:

Veterinary science . . . is not understood in Britain, and is but little valued. Veterinary surgeons are only too often, in some respects, looked down upon as little, if at all, removed from the illiterate farrier or cow-leech, and their sphere of utility is generally supposed to be limited to administering a drench to a cow, a dose of physic to a horse, or some such trifling operation as castration, or firing the limb of a broken-down animal; and not unfrequently they are confounded with horse-copers, general jobbers, frequenters of race courses and the associates of betting men and bookmakers on racing events; in fact, anything but educated scientific men, who respect themselves and their profession.⁸⁹

Such complaints were nothing new. Ever since the RVC had opened, a vocal minority of qualified vets had criticized the state and status of veterinary surgery, campaigned to improve veterinary education and prospects, and debated how to manage the unqualified competition. Partly motivated by self-interest, they also saw themselves as guardians of the "veterinary art", with a duty to ensure its continuing advancement

⁸⁵ C Hunting to North of England VMA, *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 117–23; R Reynolds to Liverpool VMA, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 291.

⁸⁶ West of England VMA meeting, *Vet.*, 1870, **43**: 75–83; T Greaves, 'The state and prospects of the veterinary profession', *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 392–5; T Broad, 'Professional morals', *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 69–71.

⁸⁷ T Greaves, 'Farriers' strike, or a VMA on trial', *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 578–82.

⁸⁸ Fleming was the son of a shoeing smith. He attended Dick's school but also took the RCVS exams which enabled him to enter the army. He served in the Crimea, India and the Middle East. In 1879 he was appointed inspecting veterinary surgeon at the War Office and in 1883, principal vet to the army. He was RCVS president 1880–3. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>; printed version, vol. 20, pp. 52–3.

⁸⁹ G Fleming to Central VMA, *Vet.*, 1872, **45**: 65.

for the ultimate benefit of animals, their owners and the nation.⁹⁰ With the mid-century rise in numbers of unqualified vets and the failure of the 1844 charter to contain the problem, these concerns and ambitions were taken up by RCVS council members and leaders of the provincial VMAs. Such individuals viewed unqualified vets as a dual threat: the worst brought vets in general into disrepute, while the best competed successfully with qualified men. They argued that the solution lay in elevating the qualified vet to such an extent that he could no longer be confused with his unqualified counterpart.

Similar sentiments and ambitions are evident within nineteenth-century dentistry, pharmacy and medicine.⁹¹ This was possibly because like vets, they operated within a competitive marketplace, in which their claims to expertise were challenged by unqualified practitioners. It is also possible that the medical profession's campaign for advancement acted as a model for the other groups, as well as providing a lens through which historians have viewed them. Without further study, it is difficult to identify factors specific to the veterinary campaign for improvement. What is clear, however, is that while some veterinary reformers aspired to the status of doctors, and co-opted medical strategies of advancement, others did not. While all agreed upon the need to advance their occupation, there was no consensus over the characteristics of the ideal veterinary surgeon, or of the market within which he should operate.

These divisions came to the fore following the failure of the 1866 Veterinary Surgeons Bill. Drawn up by the RCVS council, the bill aimed to prevent unqualified men (except those practising prior to 1844, the date of the RCVS charter) from calling themselves veterinary surgeons, thereby granting a semi-market monopoly to qualified vets.⁹² It was modelled on the 1858 Medical Act, which created a medical register and reserved the title "doctor" for qualified individuals.⁹³ The bill ran into difficulties in Parliament as Scottish MPs interpreted it as restricting Scottish HASC-holders' right to practise as veterinary surgeons. In addition, doubts were expressed over whether qualified vets were sufficiently expert to merit a market monopoly.⁹⁴

The bill's failure forced reformers to refocus their efforts on self-improvement. Over the next fifteen years, RCVS council and VMA meetings and the veterinary press were dominated by discussions of how to enhance veterinary competence, income and social standing. It is difficult to ascertain what unqualified vets made of these aspirations, or whether they were shared by most qualified vets, who were too busy earning a living to dabble in veterinary politics. However the logic of reformers was clear: if qualified vets were

⁹⁰ Pattison, *op. cit.*, note 3 above, pp. 11–62; Hall, *op. cit.*, note 3 above; Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, pp. 287–9.

⁹¹ Waddington, *op. cit.*, note 5, above; Elma P Douglas, 'Licensed to practice', *Newsletter, History of Dentistry research group*, 2003, 12, <http://www.rcpsg.ac.uk/hdrg/2003April4.htm> (accessed 6 July 2009); S W F Holloway, *Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain 1841–1991*, London, Pharmaceutical Press, 1991, chs 3–5.

⁹² 'The Veterinary Medical Bill of 1863–4–5–6–7', *Vet. J.* 1882, 14: 112–18.

⁹³ Waddington, *op. cit.*, note 5 above; Loudon, *op. cit.*, note 8 above. It is important to note that the 1858

Medical Act did not live up to doctors' expectations, as it failed to legislate against quackery or to limit competition from chemists and druggists. Digby, *op. cit.*, note 8 above, ch. 2. A government enquiry revealed that in 1910, unqualified dentists, chemists, herbalists, bone-setters, faith healers, and abortionists continued to practise in large numbers. *Report as to the practice of medicine and surgery by unqualified persons in the United Kingdom*, PP 1910, (Cd 5422), XLIII, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Pattison, *op. cit.*, note 3 above, pp. 64–5; Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, p. 284.

more expert there would no longer be a demand for the services of the unqualified man. Educational standards and the veterinary curriculum should therefore be improved.

But what did “improvement” mean? This term was interpreted very differently by RVC professors and army vets like Fleming, who were more concerned with social and cultural elevation, and provincial practitioners like Charles Hunting of Durham and Thomas Greaves of Manchester, who wanted to advance the utility of the profession.⁹⁵ Fleming and his supporters—who had little direct experience of life in veterinary practice—believed that vets required a more classical and scientific training, which would sharpen the mind and produce the refined tastes and cultural outlook required for vets to converse on equal terms with doctors. Once society recognized that vets possessed such attainments, a better class of men would seek veterinary education.⁹⁶

Drawing on their many years of experience in veterinary practice, Hunting and Greaves rejected this argument. They contended that its poor pay, dirty work and long hours would not suit refined individuals,⁹⁷ whose elevated minds would prove incapable of taking simple, practical decisions and “commit such egregious blunders as to bring down upon the profession both ridicule and contempt”.⁹⁸ Instead, they located the solution to veterinary difficulties in a more practical form of training. They argued that customers would turn to qualified vets only if their competence, common sense and business habits were demonstrably superior to those of the unqualified. Veterinary education should aim to inculcate these qualities, and if the schools proved incapable (and reportedly, some students left without having performed an operation or even administered therapy⁹⁹), apprenticeship should be made compulsory.¹⁰⁰ As apprenticeship was the hallmark of a trade and had been largely abandoned by the medical profession,¹⁰¹ this suggestion was not favoured by more socially aspiring vets, who regarded it as “against the spirit of the age”.¹⁰² Nor did they support a focus on practical ability “which the empiric claims as well as ourselves”.¹⁰³ In Fleming’s eyes, “The days of the so-called ‘practical man’ have gone by . . . the veterinarian must now be an educated scientific man.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ Hunting qualified in 1850 and established a practice serving the horses of colliery owners. He also managed several farms. His son, William Hunting, worked as assistant to Greaves in the 1860s and, in 1888, founded the *Veterinary Record*. J Francis, ‘William Hunting’, *VR*, 1943, **54**: 349–52. Greaves qualified at the RVC in 1841, then joined his father in a Manchester practice. By 1876 he owned several branch practices and had taken on a partner, Faulkner, which allowed him to divert his energies towards educational reform.

⁹⁶ Editorial, ‘The sciences in connection with veterinary medicine’, *Vet.*, 1863, **36**: 287–90; Prof. Tuson, ‘Address at opening of the RVC session’, *Vet.*, 1870, **43**: 788–98; J Lambert, Correspondence, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **5**: 387–89.

⁹⁷ T Greaves, ‘The state and prospects of the veterinary profession’, *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 392–5; C Hunting to North of England VMA, *Vet.*, 1868, **41**:

200–5; T Greaves, ‘The question of the day’, *Vet.*, 1868, **41**: 412–16.

⁹⁸ A working practitioner, ‘Practical veterinary science’, *Vet.*, 1869, **42**: 723.

⁹⁹ M Hedley to North of England VMA, *Vet.*, 1869, **42**: 292–6.

¹⁰⁰ T Greaves to Midland counties, *Vet.*, 1875, **48**: 611–26; T Greaves, ‘The elevation of the veterinary profession’, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 219–224; G Morgan to Liverpool VMA, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 255–62.

¹⁰¹ I Loudon, ‘Medical education and medical reform’, in Vivian Nutton and Roy Porter (eds), *The history of medical education in Britain*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1995, pp. 229–30.

¹⁰² Editorial, ‘Veterinary education’, *Vet.*, 1868, **41**: 440.

¹⁰³ Editorial comments, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 228.

¹⁰⁴ Editorial, ‘The practical training of veterinary students’, *Vet. J.*, 1880, **11**: 22.

Reforms instituted at the RVC during the 1870s by the new principal, J B Simonds (a former practitioner, head of the State Veterinary Department and editor of the *Veterinarian*), attempted to answer both sets of criticisms. In 1872, he supplemented the two five-month lecture-based winter sessions with a new summer session devoted to histology and botany, shoeing and surgery (on dead animals). He also introduced hospital visits, clinical demonstrations and practical pharmacy classes (writing prescriptions and dispensing medicines). Students were appointed dressers and clerks and instructed to attend to animal patients. By 1876, the course was three years long, just one year less than a doctor's training. Three years later, Simonds established a "cheap practice" at the college for the animals of the poor, to be carried out by students under the direction of their professors. He also introduced a final practical exam as well as a matriculation exam, to cover reading, dictation, maths, and English grammar.¹⁰⁵

The exact impact of these reforms on veterinary competency is difficult to discern. It seems logical to assume that veterinarians subsequently qualifying from the schools were more educated and practically skilled than their forebears. However, to a certain extent reforms simply exchanged one type of practical education for another as students with limited time and resources increasingly opted for a college education in place of, rather than in addition to, apprenticeship. Meanwhile, complaints that education was outdated, lacking in resources, and not clinically oriented, continued, ensuring the perpetuation of RCVS council discussions over the merits of apprenticeship.¹⁰⁶ Another problem was that under the new entry requirements, admissions fell to a record low, threatening the RVC's financial viability. Matriculation standards had to be dropped, but only temporarily as by 1883 the exam had been extended to include French and Latin, with English history and the geography of Europe and the British Isles added the following year.¹⁰⁷

The broader impacts of the educational reforms must also be considered. The matriculation exam and the three-year course effectively barred the poor and illiterate in favour of men who possessed a degree of wealth, education and ambition.¹⁰⁸ In this way, they answered Fleming's call to put social distance between qualified and unqualified vets and to raise the standing of the former. It is possible—though difficult to prove—that educational reforms halted the mid-century rise in numbers of unqualified vets, as men who had practised successfully without a formal training sought a higher social status for their sons. Certainly, numbers of unqualified vets were falling before the 1881 act prevented them assuming the title, and there are countless examples in trade directories of qualified sons joining their unqualified fathers in veterinary practice.¹⁰⁹

In another attempt to advance veterinary social standing, reformers like Fleming called on qualified vets to improve their conduct. Using the medical profession as a model, they

¹⁰⁵ Editorial, 'The RVC', *Vet.*, 1872, **45**: 186–8; 'The new curriculum', *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 856–8; *Bye-laws and regulations of the Royal Veterinary College*, London, Thos Scott, 1876, pp. 7–8; Cotchin, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 94.

¹⁰⁶ Compulsory apprenticeship was considered but prevented by disputes over its value, and doubts over the RCVS's powers to dictate to the schools. Correspondence and RCVS meeting reports, *Vet. J.*, 1880–85, *passim*.

¹⁰⁷ A provincial practitioner, 'Veterinary teachers and students', *Vet. J.*, 1878, **7**: 65–6; RVC annual report, *Vet.*, 1881, **54**: 650–1; *Bye-laws and regulations of the Royal Veterinary College*, London, Thos Scott, 1883, p. 6; The RCVS did not set written exams until 1892. Cotchin, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 120.

¹⁰⁸ T Greaves, 'The penal clause', *Vet. J.*, 1881, **13**: 123–4.

¹⁰⁹ Directory evidence, op. cit., note 16 above.

urged vets to behave in a more respectable manner, to adopt gentlemanly habits, improve their standards of dress and cease consorting with grooms. They should stop advertising, abandon disreputable sideline activities such as horse dealing, and close their forges, for in the eyes of the public there was little difference between “the shoeing-smith who doctors horses and the doctor who shoes them”.¹¹⁰ They should charge properly for services rather than relying on drug sales, and appear in court as expert witnesses only in cases of gross injustice. Vets should also behave in a more considerate fashion to their qualified brethren, while standing aloof from the unqualified competition.¹¹¹

These suggestions, like Fleming’s vision for veterinary education, were largely divorced from the economic realities of life in practice.¹¹² For the leading Newcastle farmer, veterinary practitioner and port inspector Clement Stephenson, the call to abandon the forge was all “sham and false ambition”,¹¹³ while, as members of the Scottish Metropolitan society pointed out:

So long as one man would work almost for nothing, in order to get a big practice; another of high standing go 20 miles, perform an operation, and charge a guinea and his railway fare; another keep a barrel of beer in his shop for the special benefit of whom it may concern; another go canvassing his neighbours’ customers, &c., so long must others just do their work as well as they can, and get the highest remuneration in their power.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, preliminary evidence suggests that vets did begin to abandon their forges towards the end of the century: only five out of twenty bills dated between 1878 and 1890 reveal this feature, compared with twelve out of twenty for the period 1846–77.¹¹⁵

Fleming argued that instead of engaging in the mere “doctoring” of animals, an activity which any quack could emulate, vets should apply their learning to disease prevention, a far nobler pursuit.¹¹⁶ In veterinary practice there were few opportunities to apply this approach except under a contract system. However, Fleming and another active veterinary reformer of the 1860s, John Gamgee, saw great potential for its application by the state, which they thought should employ vets both to prevent contagious animal disease and to promote the public’s health through the inspection of meat and milk.¹¹⁷

Initially, their hopes were not fulfilled. Vets failed to gain a foothold in meat and dairy inspection, which fell under the control of the Medical Officer of Health. Reliant on Local Authority veterinary inspectors to execute its policies, the central State Veterinary

¹¹⁰ Harold Leeney, ‘Tipping’, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **16**: 385.

¹¹¹ W Taylor to Lancashire VMA, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 219; AEGR, ‘Veterinary quackery’, *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 468–71; HD, ‘Professional bêtes-noires’, *Vet. J.*, 1876, **2**: 395–6; Parlan Walker to Yorkshire VMA, *Vet.*, 1878, **51**: 47–9; Lancashire VMA discussion, *Vet. J.*, 1880, **10**: 110–13; Ubique, ‘Our social status’, *Vet. J.*, 1880, **10**: 376–8.

¹¹² East Anglia, ‘Professional humbug’, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **16**: 466–7; E Stanley, ‘Veterinary medical ethics’, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **17**: 363–6, 418–21.

¹¹³ C Stephenson, ‘Veterinary topics of the day’, *Vet. J.*, 1881, **12**: 130.

¹¹⁴ Scottish metropolitan division meeting, *VR*, 1873, **46**: 586. See also W G Litt, ‘Professional propriety’, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 150.

¹¹⁵ Veterinary surgeons’ bills, op. cit., note 37 above.

¹¹⁶ Annual meeting of the RCVS, *Vet.*, 1864, **37**: 408–15.

¹¹⁷ G Fleming, *A manual of veterinary sanitary science and police*, 2 vols, London, Chapman & Hall, 1875; A Hardy, ‘Pioneers in the Victorian provinces: veterinarians, public health and the urban animal economy’, *Urban Hist.*, 2002, **29**: 372–87; Woods, op. cit., note 24 above, p. 29.

Service employed only a handful of vets.¹¹⁸ As noted above, Local Authorities often filled their veterinary inspectors' posts with unqualified vets and policemen, undermining reformers' claims that disease prevention was a specifically veterinary domain. However, in 1878, George Brown, head of the State Veterinary Department and an RCVS council member, engineered a clause in the new Contagious Diseases of Animals Act that required Local Authorities to appoint at least one qualified veterinary inspector. Almost immediately, the number of qualified veterinary appointments doubled.¹¹⁹ Over the subsequent two decades, some provincial cities established new posts for qualified vets, who were to manage the large stables of horses used to draw council-owned omnibuses and trams.¹²⁰

As Fisher noted, these developments enhanced the market value of a veterinary qualification.¹²¹ It is significant that far more qualified vets advertised their status on their bill heads after 1878 than did so before: fifteen out of twenty surviving bills from the period 1878–90 contain the title MRCVS, compared with five out of twenty from 1846–77.¹²² Along with the educational reforms noted above, and the 1881 Veterinary Surgeons Act discussed below, they probably contributed to the decline of the unqualified vet. However, it is important not to overstate their contribution to veterinary advancement.¹²³ Qualified vets' legal monopoly over public appointments was challenged by some Local Authorities, who resisted central government orders and continued to employ unqualified men.¹²⁴ Inspectors received low pay (appointed to the Stratford-upon-Avon post, J R Rose earned just 2/6 per inspection and 1/6 for writing reports¹²⁵), while acting as an agent of the state "got them into bad odour very often among their clients".¹²⁶

Despite the failure of the 1866 bill, many reformers continued to hanker after legislative protection for qualified vets. Proponents argued that it would prevent the public from being duped into thinking that their vet was qualified. Consequently, their animals would be protected from the cruelty inflicted by ignorant quacks, and qualified vets would be relieved from the stigma of association with such men.¹²⁷ Adhering to a "free market" model of veterinary services, critics argued that legislation was not necessary, for the best practitioners already had the confidence of their customers. Where qualified vets were not used it was because they were not as competent as their unqualified competitors. Their employment could not be enforced by act of Parliament, which would only arouse sympathy for the "quack".¹²⁸ An unqualified vet also warned that as with

¹¹⁸ In 1876, the SVS comprised two veterinarians and nineteen full- and part-time port veterinary inspectors. By 1901, it had appointed another twelve veterinary inspectors, with port staff reduced to nine full-time inspectors. *Annual reports of proceedings under the Diseases of Animals Acts, 1901*, PP 1902 (Cmd 1041), XX, p. 33; NA MAF 39/8, A Anstruther, Memo, 12 Nov. 1917.

¹¹⁹ *Annual report of the Veterinary Department, 1878*, PP 1878–9 (c2263), XXI, p. 479.

¹²⁰ Hardy, op. cit., note 117 above, p. 381.

¹²¹ Fisher, op. cit., note 4 above, pp. 300–1.

¹²² Veterinary surgeons' bills, op. cit., note 37 above.

¹²³ Fisher, op. cit., note 4 above, p. 300.

¹²⁴ RCVS meeting, *Vet. J.*, 1879, **8**: 107; Editorial, 'The animals order', *Vet.*, 1880, **53**: 181–3.

¹²⁵ J Rose and Son, op. cit., note 43 above.

¹²⁶ Southern counties VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **16**: 115–16.

¹²⁷ M Hedley to North of England VMA, *Vet.*, 1869, **42**: 292–6; MRCVSL, 'Veterinary quackery', *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 327–8; Editorial, 'The protection of the veterinary profession and the public', *Vet. J.*, 1876, **3**: 448–50; RCVS meeting, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 804; Bones, 'Unqualified practitioners', *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 467.

¹²⁸ J Fraser, 'Veterinary quackery', *Vet.*, 1873, **46**: 397; C Stephenson, 'Veterinary topics of the day', *Vet. J.*, 1881, **12**: 49–56, 127–30; T Greaves to RCVS

the 1866 bill, MPs would not pass legislation that threatened to take away men's livelihoods: "Let the best man win, say I . . . I am perfectly capable of holding my own if matters remain as they are . . . as a rule, the public will find out the most competent man."¹²⁹

Momentum for a new Veterinary Surgeons Act gathered pace after 1878, when the long-standing rift between the Edinburgh school and the RCVS was healed by the RCVS president, Sir Frederick Fitzwygram. A public school educated army officer, who had attended lectures at the Edinburgh school out of interest, taken the HASC and then the RCVS exams, Fitzwygram was well placed to persuade the Dick trustees to abandon the HASC in favour of the RCVS's exams. This move not only awarded the RCVS control over the curriculum and educational standards; it also allowed it to claim that it spoke and acted on behalf of all qualified vets.¹³⁰

Fleming, an army colleague of Fitzwygram, took the lead in pushing for a new act, using his new *Veterinary Journal* and his position as RCVS president (1880–83) to celebrate its merits and suppress dissent.¹³¹ As drafted by the RCVS council, the Veterinary Surgeons Bill initially aimed to penalize all who "wilfully and falsely pretend to be or take or use the title of veterinary surgeon, or any name, title, addition, or description implying that he is a professional or practitioner of the said Veterinary Art, or that he is registered as a MRCVS".¹³² Following legal advice that qualified vets had no exclusive, retrospective right to the title, the published bill took a very different shape. Unqualified individuals who called themselves veterinary surgeons would be fined £20. However, this ruling would not apply to individuals who had earned their main living from veterinary surgery for at least ten years, providing they applied for admission to a new RCVS register of "existing practitioners". Following the representations of unqualified vets, a parliamentary committee reduced this period to five years.¹³³

In 1881, the bill passed Parliament and became law. Though celebrated by existing historiography, this event cannot be regarded as a definitive acknowledgement by MPs and society that qualified vets were superior to unqualified. The act placed no constraints on who could practise animal healing; it simply imposed a prospective restriction on the use of the title "veterinary surgeon", allowing the public to make a more informed choice about who to employ. In this, it followed the medical (1858), pharmacists (1868) and dentists (1878) acts.¹³⁴ These precedents facilitated its passage, as did Fitzwygram's use of political connections to win parliamentary support. Luck also played a role: the

meeting, *Vet.*, 1876, **49**: 435; F Fitzwygram to Yorkshire VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1877, **4**: 281–4.

¹²⁹ MRCVS, 'Gross injustice', *Vet.*, 1881, **54**: 536.

¹³⁰ Editorial, 'Professional unity', *Vet. J.*, 1878, **7**: 386–7; Pattison, *op. cit.*, note 3 above, pp. 77–86.

¹³¹ Editorial, 'The charter of the RVC', *Vet. J.*, 1875, **1**: 34–41.

¹³² 'Veterinary medical bill', *Vet. J.*, 1881, **12**: 112.

¹³³ *Bill, intituled, Act to amend law relating to veterinary surgeons*, PP 1881, VI, p. 519; Editorial,

'The veterinary surgeons' bill', *Vet. J.*, 1881, **13**: 33–6.

¹³⁴ The pharmacy act of 1868 restricted the sale and dispensing of poisons to qualified men and created a register. 'The pharmacy act of 1868', *Vet.*, 1868, **41**: 850–3. The Dentists Act of 1878 created a register and required dentists to take a licence in order to practice. 'The birth of the BDA', <http://www.bda-advance.org/museum/story.cfm?ContentID=366> (accessed 6 July 2009).

parliamentary vote took place late at night at the end of the summer session in a half-empty house, eluding the attention of several leading agricultural opponents.¹³⁵

Far from advancing veterinary surgery, many qualified vets were extremely disappointed with the act. A common complaint was that by permitting over 1,500 unqualified vets to apply, at a cost of 3 guineas, to be placed on the RCVS register of “existing practitioners”, it simply legalized quackery.¹³⁶ At the same time, however, the act helped to advance Fleming’s vision of veterinary surgery as a full-time occupation pursued by respectable men. Unqualified vets applying for registration were required to demonstrate that they had earned their main living as such for at least five years, and to provide evidence of good character. The RCVS council circulated their names to qualified neighbours, who were not slow to brand them mere shoeing smiths, chemists or farmer’s men, known for their intemperance, ignorance, illiteracy, or cruelty to animals. Outraged at this manner of proceeding, over forty rejected applicants launched largely successful appeals to the Privy Council.¹³⁷ The final RCVS list of “registered practitioners” numbered 882, around one-third the number of qualified vets.¹³⁸

Although barred from joining provincial Veterinary Medical Associations, registered practitioners could continue to use the title “veterinary surgeon” and became eligible for Local Authority appointments, to the outrage of qualified vets.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, it remained legal for non-registered individuals to run “veterinary infirmaries”, “veterinary forges”, “horse hospitals” and “dog clinics”.¹⁴⁰ Illegally, a few individuals still called themselves veterinary surgeons. It soon transpired that the RCVS had no funds to prosecute them. Consequently, and to the intense disappointment of its members, the act could not be enforced.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

In exposing the variability of veterinary roles, the overlapping expertise and status of qualified and unqualified vets, and the weak sense of professional identity possessed by many of the former, this paper has put into context veterinary reformers’ efforts to abolish “veterinary quackery” and improve the state and status of their art. It has also revealed veterinary reform to be a more contentious process than previously depicted. Reformers wrangled over whether vets should be practical businessmen capable of holding their own in a free market, or learned, socially elevated individuals akin to doctors,

¹³⁵ ‘Nottinghamshire Chamber of Agriculture’, *Vet. J.*, 1882, **14**: 223–5.

¹³⁶ R Reynolds, ‘Correspondence’, *Vet. J.*, 1882, **14**: 64–6; T Greaves, ‘The Lancashire VMA and “enemies in our midst”’, *Vet. J.*, 1882, **14**: 148; C Stephenson to North of England VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **16**: 368–70; Many RCVS council members wanted to fix the fee at 10 guineas. They eventually agreed on 6 guineas but Privy Council pressure reduced it to 3 guineas. Southern Counties VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1882, **14**: 349–53.

¹³⁷ Justicia, ‘The registration of existing practitioners’, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **16**: 149; NA PC 8/298, Veterinary Surgeons Act: appeals, 1883.

¹³⁸ *Register of the members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons*. London, RCVS, 1884.

¹³⁹ Alpha, ‘Existing practitioners’, *Vet. J.*, 1882, **14**: 388; Southern Counties VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1883, **17**: 115–16; Royal Counties VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1885, **21**: 205–6.

¹⁴⁰ C Stephenson, ‘Letter to Daily Chronicle’, *Vet.*, 1881, **54**: 109–11; J D Gregory to Devon County VMA, *Vet. J.*, 1885, **18**: 352–8.

¹⁴¹ ‘A Surrey veterinary surgeon’, Correspondence to *Vet. J.*, 1885, **21**: 70–1; Kelly’s Directory for Cheshire, 1894, op. cit., note 16 above.

who merited state recognition and protection. The failure to reach agreement over these issues hampered their efforts to improve veterinary incomes, status and competence to a level at which animal owners and the state would recognize their clear superiority over unqualified healers.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, subtle changes did result from the reformers' 25-year campaign. These mainly reflected Fleming's preference for a medical model of veterinary advancement rather than that favoured by provincial practitioners. Educational reforms (which caused a degree of social elevation, if not greater practical competency), the 1878 act (which granted privileged, if not exclusive access to veterinary inspectors' posts), and the 1881 act all made qualification a more attractive option for aspiring vets. In the demands it made of registered practitioners, the 1881 act also helped to make veterinary medicine a full-time occupation, while in granting privileges—however partial—to RCVS members, both pieces of legislation encouraged vets to value their association with that body and to see themselves in newly corporate terms, as a breed apart from unqualified non-members. Moreover, by extending to vets the same privileges already awarded to doctors, dentists and pharmacists, the 1881 act helped to distance them from farriers and blacksmiths, culminating in their redesignation as "professional class" in the 1891 census.¹⁴³ However the battle against unqualified animal healing was far from over. Along with veterinary education, recruitment and skills, it is still a focus of veterinary debate today.

¹⁴² Fisher notes that problems over veterinary education and professional competence continued well into the twentieth century. Fisher, *op. cit.*, note 4 above, p. 301.

¹⁴³ *Census of England and Wales*, PP 1893–94, IV, p. 133.