

## **The early days of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy**



### **The First Students**

In 1944 the Government of the day set up a committee under the chairmanship of Thomas Loveday, the Vice-Chancellor of Bristol, to consider the future of veterinary education.

The Loveday Committee recommended that veterinary education should be expanded. Two new vet schools were to be founded, making six in all, one of which was to be at Bristol with an annual output of 30 graduates.

The University proposed that a site in Park Row, adjacent to the main university building, should be developed for some of the pre-clinical studies.

The University acquired the Langford Estates, 14 miles south west of Bristol, to be used as a field station. By May 1948 it was announced that the first group of students would be admitted in October 1949. Shortly afterwards Professor Frederick Blakemore was appointed Director of Veterinary Science.

The School was inaugurated by the then Minister of Agriculture, Tom Williams, on 10 December 1948, when a commemorative stone was laid for the building in Park Row. Almost a year later, in October 1949, a small number of students were admitted to courses carried out in the Medical School, the Park Row building having not yet been completed.

These students had matriculated from school and had to join a pre-veterinary year in order to gain more academic knowledge before joining the veterinary degree course. In October 1950 the first undergraduates with Higher School Certificates joined the course.

By now Park Row had been finished but even then a considerable amount of pre-clinical tuition was delivered in the Med School as Park Row became the focus for Anatomy teaching and there was little space for Physiology, Biochemistry, Pharmacology, Microbiology etc.

There were 24 in all in the first year of the vet course: 18 men and 6 women. A number of the men had served in the armed forces. One person dropped out of the first cohort and three failed their exams and dropped into the succeeding year. Out of the remaining 20, five became Professors in their own rights and one became the Assistant Chief Veterinary Officers!

The Langford Estate was also developed from 1948 and staff were engaged to prepare for the clinical teaching. The original third year students were taken out to Langford by coach

every Tuesday for their Animal Handling and Husbandry tuition. In their fourth (and final) year, they transferred to Langford for the entire year for their clinical and surgical instruction. However, the hall of residence was not completed for this first intake of students. The girls in the year were accommodated in Langford House itself but the male students were billeted out in digs in the surrounding villages. Some only had a bedroom and had to obtain all their meals and their studying at Langford House.

***“Memories of working in the Vet Anat Dept” by Mr Alan Coombs***

*“I was discharged from the R.A.F. on 11th March 1950.*

*I called into the Anatomy Department to return to work and had a chance to go to the new Veterinary Anatomy Department being built in Park Row. As they had employed an ex-serviceman in my place the prospects looked better in Park Row. I had an interview with Professor Ottaway and was offered the job and was to start work the following Monday. I did just 4 days and had Easter Holiday. I was working under Mr. Bert Hanks who also moved down, he was 60 years old so when he retired I was aiming to take over.*

*The builders were still working in parts of the inside so one had to work around them, unpacking about 50 large packing cases and storing contents, then phoning G.W.R., to get rid of the empty cases. The building had a large exercise yard to the rear gates onto Park Row and front doors for public access via a flight of steps. The teaching area consisted of a Lecture Theatre, Dissecting Room, Animal boxes that opened out onto the yard, a Museum, A Post Mortem Room, Offices and a Laboratory. We had to be ready for students to start in October, a class of 30 for a year then repeating the following October. Academic staff started to arrive at the end of July from London and Cambridge.*

*We had lots of deliveries including a load of skeletons including Ox, Sheep, Pigs, Dogs, Cats, Chicken and a Donkey. We had also started to embalm Cats and Dogs for dissection, also some Dartmoor Ponies and Bovines. The Museum display cabinets were empty so lots of bones were prepared by collecting them from Kennels at Yatton where they were cooked for Dogs. They were cooked up and cleaned and put in peroxide bleach then washed ready to put in drawers for student use, if we had a complete set in good condition I would join the bones together with wire and mount the skeleton on a wooden base with a metal support, for use in class teaching.*

*The first year teaching started by dissecting dogs, one on a table for two students, with a class of 30 we needed 15 dogs to start the class. It was usual to start with a lecture for one hour 9am-10am. Class work until 12 noon, Lunch 1-2pm, then 3 hours of class work. As time went on, and dissection was covering the Thorax and Abdomen areas, fresh organs were needed as picked organs had lost colour. So it was off to the local Vets or the abattoir, we had to book the University lorry to collect this in bins and clean the lorry after. This was often a problem so I often had to collect sheep or pig hearts and lungs in a haversack on my bicycle.*

*After a couple of years the department bought a van, and as I couldn't drive they paid for me to have lessons and passed my test. While all this was going on teaching Staff were also doing research and this meant that they needed things made so I suggested that an unused loosebox was changed into a workshop. This was done and we had a carpenter's bench put in plus an engineer's lathe and a selection of tools, I was now able to put my woodworking and metalworking skills to good use.*

*All the technicians had to be willing to turn their hand to anything from cleaning the dissection room floor and tables before and after classes to be ready to muck out the*

animals if the animal attendant was not in. I was helping to develop X-Ray film and photography was also needed but no one was skilled enough to do what was needed. During the summer vacation I was sent to the B.R.I. Photographic Department, for about six weeks. Quite an eye opener, Leica Cameras, telephoto lenses, Cassettes to load film in the dark room, developing in the dark, weighing chemicals to make the developer and fixer, then from the negatives create glass lantern slides for lectures – a clear glass cover slip was fixed to the side to protect the emulsion. Hundreds were needed on different subjects, I then had to use a 5 x 4 inch MPP camera and load sheet film in a holder. Both cameras were used to get the best quality prints for publication in scientific journals.”

Alan Coombs

### **“Update on the more memories of the early days” by Mr Alan Coombs**

“After a month of moving packaging we managed to organise the embalming of bodies. The overhead moving gantry was used to hold the container of liquid to embalm the carcasses. Small animals were stored in tanks and the horses and oxen were placed on special trollies with supports for the legs which were used in the dissection classes.

The museum at this time had only skeletons so staff were very busy placing specimens used for teaching and student studies into glass containers in preservative. Later we started making containers to use from Perspex sheet which was lighter to handle and could be made according to size, also these were used during exams.

To get more bones we used a macerating tank at Langford which was placed in an old stable building, I had to go down by bus. The animal bones had the meat removed and placed in water at a temperature to make cleaning possible. A week later they were all cleaned and removed.

The day following the two day dissection classes was clean-up day which included the post-mortem room. Just two of us used long handled scrubbing brushes and squeegees with a soap solution, this took place Wednesday a.m. and Saturday a.m. When animals were used for teaching the stables were used and animal attendant employed. We helped out when needed as they also had to be fed and checked at weekends.

When lectures took place it was often the case that lantern slides were required or films had to be projected. So we would take turns to do this. Photographic requirements have increased a lot, Staff who were publishing required first class photographs and some students who now have veterinary degrees and are doing research will require help before long.

In the 1960's what was left of the old building on the end of the site of the Veterinary School was converted. This building was part of what had been the George Parnall & Co., Coliseum Aircraft Works. The internal area was altered to provide a large research Laboratory with a treadmill for animals to work on, an updated workshop, a very large store room and an incinerator. While Upstairs were used for student meeting room and access to a covered bridge linking to the rest of the Veterinary School.

### **Spot Tests**

Spot tests were introduced in the 2nd year exam practicals. Small specimens were used and 15 were placed each side of the dissection room. Students were led in and sat one in front of each specimen and a question was placed in front of each. When told to start they had 1 minutes to answer the question before a bell went and they all moved to the right and answered the next question, this continued until all questions had been answered.

*They had practical exams, written exams and Animal Husbandry practical."*

*Alan Coombs*

