INTRODUCTION TO VISIT TO ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS’ WELLCOME LIBRARY ON SATURDAY 18 JULY 1992

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THE ROYAL COLLEGE
During your stay here, you have already visited a major documentation centre with international funding and input, you have seen a specialist institute in the history of rural life, and you have seen one of the British veterinary schools with a large resident group of users.

We have something in common with each of them: we have users all over the world, we have a specialist historical collection, we need to cater for the needs of examination candidates, but our type of organisation is probably unfamiliar to most of you. Many of you expect a college to be a teaching college, and I must disabuse you of the idea straightaway. The Royal College was established by Royal Charter in 1844, in which it is stated that the veterinary art was henceforth to “be recognised by law as a profession”. Thus established, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons became and remains the governing body of the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom.

For over a century the College conducted examinations at the veterinary schools in the British Isles, and admission to the Royal College could only be obtained by passing these examinations. Then the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1948 made possible the incorporation of the existing veterinary schools within the appropriate universities and led the way to the establishment of two additional veterinary schools in the UK. This same Act gave powers for the veterinary degrees awarded by universities with veterinary schools to be recognised as qualifications entitling the holders to registration as members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and thereupon to be known as Veterinary Surgeons. This position was confirmed by the Veterinary Surgeons Act of 1966.

The College is governed by a Council consisting of 24 elected Members, 12 members nominated by the universities of Great Britain which have a veterinary school (two per university) and four members nominated by the Privy Council.

The College is responsible:
1) for keeping the Register of Veterinary Surgeons and is empowered to charge and collect fees for registration and for retention on the register. If a member’s name is removed for nonpayment of fees, he ceases to be allowed to practise veterinary surgery in this country.

2) for the supervision of veterinary education. The College is required to visit from time to time the veterinary schools whose degrees are registrable by the College. The duty of these visitors is to report on the adequacy of the equipment, staffing and instruction provided, and the examinations conducted in these schools. The visitors’ reports are sent to the University concerned and ultimately to the Privy Council.

3) for examinations, fellowships, certificates and diplomas

4) for the maintenance of standards of professional conduct through:

A) The Preliminary Investigation and Advisory Committees.
The former makes investigations into complaints against members. The latter advises members on matters of professional conduct.

B) The Disciplinary Committee. This is a statutory tribunal and its constitution is regulated by law under the Veterinary Surgeons Act of 1966. It sits in public and is advised on matters of law and procedure by a legal assessor. It has the power to remove someone’s name from the register or suspend him.

5) The Council plays an active interest in Parliamentary affairs relating to such matters as animal welfare, the control of animal disease, the laws relating to such matters as drugs and toxic chemicals and any legislation which may be relevant to the work of and interests of the veterinary profession. The Registrar and Council are consulted by government departments and work in liaison with them on matters relating to veterinary services. The College also holds a watching brief on legislation which may affect the activities of the veterinary profession.
The College Trust Fund administers the Library and a number of scholarships.

I have gone into some detail about the College because I think that this example of a self-regulating profession is rare overseas. This power of self-government is greatly valued and jealously guarded. It is, I think, envied by many of your countries where, as I understand it, the veterinary profession is usually governed through government departments, generally the department of agriculture.

LIBRARY

Now that you know what the College has, as its main functions, you can see that the library has a very broad membership. Anyone who is a member of the College can use the library. He may be in practice, he may be in research, he may be teaching or he may be in overseas advisory work. All these people have an equal right to use our services. No veterinary surgeons work on the premises and so much of our work is done by telephone, letter or fax.

The three of the four invited speakers at this conference are regular users of this library, as well as the library in their own college or institution.

I will give first a very brief run-through of our history, then I will outline our stock and services, and then you will have an opportunity to circulate on this floor and the floor below to see what we are actually doing.

The Library came into existence almost immediately after the foundation of the College in 1844 and to some extent, the history of the Library runs in parallel with the history of the profession and with the history of scientific development in general. Many of the leading lights involved in the formation of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons pushed hard for a permanent home and one of the reasons most frequently put forward for having a permanent headquarters was the need for premises to contain a library. Otherwise they found that a local hotel provided quite adequate hospitality for their business meetings.

Many members offered their own collections to build up a library for the benefit of the whole profession. Throughout the nineteenth century, members continued to donate their libraries, and while most of the books now form part of the historical collection, we must remember that, at that time, they were donating not only treasures from previous centuries, but their current up-to-date working libraries.

At this early stage, the function of the library was simply that of a collection of books. It was just a reference library which was free for all members to visit. This was useful, but it still left many unable to benefit. It was not until after the First World War that a library lending service was established. Then a retention fee was introduced for the first time, and funds became available for the upkeep of the Library. In the nineteen thirties, the first qualified librarian was appointed and the Aleen Cust Funds were used to equip a reading room. Aleen Cust was the first woman veterinary surgeon in this country and you will see her portrait still in the reading room below.

The appointment of a librarian signalled the end of the library simply being a collection of books. The emphasis changed to an exploitation of stock. The production of a printed catalogue helped to make its stock better known, and requests for straightforward loans were soon mingled with requests for information. Thus, the foundation of our current literature searches was laid. The Second World War brought evacuation of the collections, the librarian was called up and most services were suspended. Red Lion Square was hit by fire bombs and some material damaged. The money from the War Damage Commission was used to rebind much of the historical library, and that is why our leather bindings look so well today.

When I came to the College in the early sixties, I was very lucky that the RCVS Trust Fund was prepared to launch an appeal on behalf of the Library, and sufficient monies were raised to provide a modest income. This was supplemented by grants from the Wellcome Trust and others for furnishing and equipping the new headquarters here at Belgrave Square.

The library staff felt that too few members were using the library and we decided that, if the readers did not come to the library, then we would go to the readers. We have not missed mounting an exhibition at the BVA Annual Congress since 1961. Later we also came to exhibit at the BSAVA Congress, at final year student meetings and a selection of others.

This has helped to ensure that those who need to know about our services do know about them and demand has increased rapidly not only for books, but for information and for photocopies. The growth of specialist associations here and overseas has, as you all know, meant that the literature expanded in leaps and bounds, and with that expansion the veterinary surgeon has needed more help to keep up...
with the literature. The library has had to respond, and where possible has tried to anticipate future needs.

WHAT THE LIBRARY DOES NOW
The library exists primarily to serve the Members of the College, and it is one of the few veterinary libraries which exist solely for the benefit of the profession. There are many which serve veterinarians in universities, research institutes and so on, but we are there for anyone in the profession. Over the years, many others have come to use its services. We are the “special source library” in veterinary medicine for the British Library. Lending is reserved strictly to members and other libraries, as are literature searches, but photocopies, within the restraints of the Copyright legislation, can be supplied to anyone.

As a matter of good public relations we help many organisations and individuals with quick reference enquiries, or in the case of television companies with all sorts of background material. Some of our books have appeared on the set of “All Creatures Great and Small” and that of similar series - at a price of course! So far, we have not been written into the script, but we live in hopes! But we did have a charity premiere of one of the Herriot films in aid of the RCVS Trust Fund which administers the library.

Some radio and television quiz-show questions will have been checked by us. If any of you should have spent many a sleepless night wondering why a woodpecker does not get concussion, we have a full answer on file! Another poser was, “Does a horse have eyebrows?” Fiction writers have asked for help with factual information for their plots. It might be crucial when unmasking the villain to know precisely how long it takes the body of a drowned animal to rise to the surface of a lake.

Workers in the field of comparative medicine use the library for reference purposes as do students of the history of medicine. With these researchers I can frequently don one of my other hats - that of chairman of the Veterinary History Society and member of the editorial sub-committee for its journal Veterinary History to request permission to publish or to ask them to consider giving a paper to the Society.

We receive frequent requests for information about veterinary surgeons of former times. It sometimes appears that every single American, Australian and New Zealander is descended from a veterinary surgeon. Occasionally, very interesting information comes to light. One of our regular enquirers has been trying for many years to prove that Jack the Ripper was a veterinary surgeon. Another recent enquirer was delighted to find that his forebear had been in the Crimea and had not only been attended by Florence Nightingale, but had also brought back presents from her. Unfortunately, these have not survived.

Our requests for information stem from many situations. The veterinary surgeon in practice may wish to find out all about llamas, because the local farmer has just diversified. He may wish to read up on a particular surgical operation. He may have an unusual case which he wants to work up into a paper for the Veterinary Record. Sometimes a search enables him to put his own findings into context for a more substantial report than would otherwise be possible. Sometimes the number of references we retrieve persuades him that a further paper would serve no useful purpose.

Some of our most frequent seekers of information are those who are taking an RCVS certificate or diploma. Some of them ask for searches to back up all their case reports. Some ask for regular updating on their subject, for example many of the dermatology candidates are down to receive an update on dermatology every 6 months, as are the ophthalmology candidates.

COMPUTERIZATION
We looked at a wide range of library housekeeping packages of all sorts and sizes. We wanted to put our entire catalogues on computer, and to automate our lending procedures, our overdue reminders and recalls, our inter-library loans, our acquisitions, our serials and so on. We needed a system which responded swiftly, one on which we could work simultaneously, one which needed the minimum of duplicate entering of data, and one which did not need some vast mainframe for its operations and eventually we chose Sydney.

Sydney was developed in Canada originally but later extended into Europe. Now the British and European development has been taken over by Soutron Limited. There are approximately 120 users in this country including British Gas, the Pharmaceutical Society, Courtaulds, Fisons, ICI, Merck, Sharp & Dohme, Plessey, the National Physical Laboratory, Exeter University and many financial libraries and banks, including the Bank of England.

Our system, for the technically minded, is networked over five IBM PS/30s and compatibles via a Novell 3.11 network, using an IBM PS/80 fileserver. Once we have sufficient information on the database, we
shall add an online public access catalogue for readers in the reading-room and eventually we could make this available to members through a modem connection, possibly through Janet, the joint academic network. We use a tapstreamer and Sytos-plus for backup, and we have a Toshiba for demonstrating the system at congress. It can also be used for working from home. Incidentally, since I have mentioned congresses, there are examples of the College stand, the Continuing Professional Development stand and the Library stand which go to the major veterinary congresses in the UK, together with staff. This is one of the ways in which we are following Lord Soulsby’s counsel to interact more with our readers and public.

The Soutron system is very flexible and can deal with all kinds of material from drawings to archives to books to serials. The distributors’ helpline sees that all its queries are stored and tabulated on computer, so that the developers can identify problem areas. There is an active users’ group which ensures that its ideas for improvements are considered by the developers. The system is upgraded twice yearly and the developers and the users’ group organise a full day meeting to learn how to benefit from the enhancements, and this meeting is funded by the producers at no additional cost to users.

The task of setting up the system was no mean one. As the College had no computer expert we had to become our own systems managers. It has been quite an exciting period for all of us we had to learn fast.

PROGRESS
We started computerisation by first entering our basic structure of subject headings, which is based on the approved headings used by the Commonwealth Bureau of Animal Health for Index Veterinarius, supplemented by the CAB thesaurus and MESH headings, where appropriate. This system was already used by us as for our subject card catalogue.

Once this basic work was done we began to enter the journals, and now we have all our current journals and holdings on the computer. Next we started on cataloguing and retrospective conversion of the card catalogue. We employed a new graduate to work on this latter project. As it contains some 25,000 items, we anticipate that she will be busy for quite a while. We are about half-way through transfer of records. We introduced barcoding to speed up issue and discharge of loans, but we shall not be barcoding our rare books - these are not lent! The acquisitions module was brought into use very early on.

We then entered all our users, (some 3,000), on to the user database, and we commenced automated serial control in the January following installation.

The Inter-library loans module ran into production problems but is now expected to go on sale next month. We shall be very glad to see it as we handle nearly 3,000 requests, and this module is the end of form filling in this area.

Like most of you we use on-line searching and CD-ROMs for information work and there is nothing special to show you there. We do have the possibility of networking through Optinet, but we are not using it yet. This is mainly because of changes in administrative staff, which has slowed progress in linking the library with administrative departments. Readers can hire the equipment for an hour at a time and search on any subject within that time. Again, the certificate and diploma candidates were the first to make use of this facility. One of the databases on CD-ROM which some of you may not be familiar with is JUSTIS, which contains all the European legislation. Anything which appears in bold print in the Official journal of the European Communities is contained on Justis, together with forthcoming legislation. The same database brokers are now producing Statutory Instruments on disc.

We use a modem and Carboncopy Plus for interacting with our suppliers if software problems should arise, or so they can install updates or modifications at a distance. They are based in Nottingham, so this is a useful facility, saving on costs of time and travel.

The last item of computer technology to be adopted was document-imaging. We can scan onto WORM (Write-one-read-many) disc correspondence, minutes, archive material and so on and retrieve very quickly. We can also import files to disc from word-processing. This means we can achieve very compact housing of information. One disc, exactly the same size as a ordinary compact disc, holds 940 megabytes of information. We are still exploring the capabilities of this. Future developments might include optical character recognition, so that scanned material could be word-processed. It may also be possible to import the information at present held on microfiche, if this is converted first. This system is at present stand-alone, and we hoped to network it in the next stage. Unfortunately, the software manufacturers were a casualty of the current recession and we are having to pause, while we explore possibilities for transferring information on this system to another. At least we were wise enough to choose a system which
used standard hardware and have only lost the cost of the software programme. We can show you the possibilities of this technology, but we can only say, be careful about the soundness of your suppliers. All too many are very vulnerable in the current climate.

A few basic statistics now. We lend approximately 10,000 items a year, supply over 80,000 pages of photocopy, borrow nearly 3,000 items from other libraries, and undertake about 800 literature searches. We receive over 2,000 visits from veterinary surgeons and numerous telephone calls. We have over 30,000 volumes, and take around 250-300 current journals and the same number of annual reports. Obviously, this is quite a small number and is explained by the fact that we are in London and depend heavily on other libraries for non-veterinary material. If we were located anywhere else we should have to take many more medical and agricultural journals. We also have no resident readers, unlike most of you. Over 90% of our work is done by post or fax or telephone. If we have more than 10 visitors in a day we think that is a lot.

So this visit from you is more than our normal week’s ration!

Because there is no resident nucleus with a particular research area we tend not to buy a wide range of research journals. If demand grows, then we respond. For example, the growth in specialisation has meant that there has been a greatly increased demand from veterinary dermatologists for research journals on human dermatology.

I think that gives some idea of what we do and how we do it, but I should be very happy to answer any questions which anyone might have. We are very cramped for space, and you will be seeing only part of our collection. We do have stacks with rolling shelving for compact storage elsewhere in the building.

PREMISES
Before you go round the building, you may like to know a little about its history. This building together with all those around the Square form part of a development of the area between 1828 and 1840. The architect was George Basevi, a pupil of Sir John Soane and you can see his name inscribed on the side of the portico next door. Number 32 was in the hands of the same family the Clanwilliams, until the 1930s. We moved here in 1962, and tried to install modern facilities with as little disturbance to the fabric of the building as possible.

Because of space limitations we shall now split into two groups. May I ask the people sitting in the last five rows to stay seated for a moment while those in the front go downstairs and visit the exhibits available there. In room 1, there will be the opportunity to access our catalogues or watch staff demonstrating the catalogue, serial or circulation modules, or take a look at the Justis CD ROM if you like.

All the booklets and the registers on your seats are complimentary and you are welcome to take additional copies from the table here. All the publications on display in room 2 are on sale. There is also a video and there are greetings cards from a collection of drawings in our collection.

In room 3 there is a small selection of some items from the Historical collection. May I ask you not to touch or turn the pages. This humid weather is not good for them and the cream tea will do them even less good.

If you want to see what we have begun to do with document imaging please ask me, or preferably come back next week to see it. My room is very small and numbers for that would be limited.

The staff are all wearing orange labels - can they stand up please so that you can recognise them. Only one is missing - that is Vivien’s dog, the basenji, Tatu, who is on a slimming diet and therefore could not take part in today’s cream tea. You have been exposed to quite a lot of institutional food over the last few days. Jean’s cream teas are institutional food with a difference. I hope that you enjoy it.

Will those in the back five rows stay here for tea and can I ask you all to help by pushing the chairs back to the wall so that you can circulate a little more freely.

Those who are going downstairs first, do not worry, there will still be something left for you, when we change over.

One of the leaflets on your chair gives details of what is happening in each room.
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I have found that choosing an after dinner speaker is not all that easy a task as three of us sat down to decide what kind of speaker we wanted. What did we want - did we want a well known personality or on the other hand did we want a scientist? Did we want a practicing veterinarian? Did we want an end user of information provision, perhaps an author or an innovator? Everybody had their supporters and then suddenly we had a flash of inspiration that all diplomats long for - why not invite all of them? All we had to do was to invite David Taylor and persuade him to accept and that’s how we came to invite you, David.

Your pioneering work with rare exotic animals all around the world, you are one of those jet setting exotic animal vets, you are a fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and also with over 40 books to his credit. (So, he is doing his bit keeping librarians at work cataloging all that lot.) He is a regular radio and television presenter and his own autobiographies have been dramatized in several peak time television series. He is one of those library users who keeps us all on our top toes. You all know the one - rings in from the airport, on the way to some Mediterranean sun spot, wanting an enquiry on some out of the way creature and would like it on his desk when he gets back tomorrow. I shouldn’t have said that. I will probably be rung up about gorillas on Monday. On top of that he is someone mad enough to get involved in the company of Ian Botham and an elephant on a charity walk in Hannibal’s footsteps and well, need I say more. David Taylor, we are honored and delighted you are able to accept and we are looking forward to your speech tonight. Thank you very much.