Animal Care and the Development of Veterinary Medicine

The archives and rare books held by Manuscripts and Special Collections contain a wealth of material relating to the care of animals over the centuries.

Britain’s first Veterinary College was established in London in 1791. This was followed by the creation of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 1844, a regulatory body created to protect the profession. Vets who had qualified at the London College, or one of the later colleges, could register as a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. The published membership lists allowed the public to distinguish between qualified and unqualified vets.

For many years the attention of both qualified and unqualified vets was focused on livestock rather than domestic animals. Animals were at the heart of British farming and agriculture and were a valuable commodity. Given the limited number of veterinary training colleges in Britain in the 19th century many farmers and others would have struggled to gain access to a qualified vet for their animals. Instead people relied on unqualified practitioners, their own remedies, quack medicines and information from ‘do-it-yourself’ manuals. There were many of these manuals available, offering advice on everything from anatomy to the diagnosis and treatment of disease.

It was not until the passing of the Veterinary Surgeons Act in 1948 that the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons was given power over the education of vets and the prevention of unqualified practice.

The School of Veterinary Science and Medicine opened at The University of Nottingham in 2006.

The University of Nottingham collects archival material relating to the history of the University its predecessor bodies, including the Midland Agricultural and Dairy College, the history of the East Midlands, and the research interests of the University. Over three million items are stored at Kings Meadow Campus. For more information on any of the items in the display or to arrange a visit to the Reading Room at Kings Meadow Campus please contact us.

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Letter from John Cossen, Wimpole, to Edward Harley, Lord Harley [later 2nd Earl of Oxford], Dover Street, London; 6 Sep. 1722

Reports the death 'of the staggers' of a carthorse called Serjeant; also reports that a sow at the Grange was bitten by a mad pig, and that he has employed a man reputed to be able to cure bites by mad animals to treat the other pigs.

(Ref: PI C 1/382)
Bill for veterinary treatment supplied for horses of Lord Frederick Bentinck; 17 Jan. 1817-22 Dec. 1826
(Ref: Pw F 9877)
Front cover of *The Pig: Its External and Internal Organisation* edited by Sir G.T. Brown and a fold-out diagram showing the skeleton and internal organs; [1900]

(Ref: Special Collection SF767.S95.B7)
The Henwife: Her Own Experience in Her Own Poultry-Yard by the Hon. Mrs Arbuthnot; 1871

This book is a typical example of a manual written by an enthusiastic amateur. In it the Honourable Mrs Arbuthnot provides descriptions of different breeds of poultry, gives advice on their general treatment and diet and provides remedies for common diseases.

(Ref: Special Collection SF487.A7)
Written by a man calling himself a ‘chemist and druggist’ of forty years’ experience this book promises to give a description of all the diseases suffered by ox, cows and sheep and to provide a remedy for each of them. The owner of the book has added in his own remedies.

(Ref: Special Collection SF753.C6)
Diagram of a 'clams' instrument used in castrating horses and an instrument used for cutting off a horse's tail. From *A Treatise On Veterinary Medicine, Vol. 4* by James White, Veterinary Surgeon of Exeter; 1818

(Ref: Special Collection SF753.W4)
A selection of photographs of animals belonging to the Midland Agricultural College; c. 1940s

(Ref: UAC 7/2)