Architectural Association with Veterinary Education in Edinburgh

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(The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, (the Dick Vet), has been part of Edinburgh’s history for over 180 years (Rowland, 2003). However, it is not generally realised that the city has had a longer association with veterinary medicine, and that it was the birthplace of two other Veterinary Colleges. Moreover, just over two centuries ago, it might have become the site of the first college of veterinary education in Britain (Macdonald, Warwick and Johnston, 2005).

James Clark (1732–1808)
The veterinary profession evolved from the farriery trade. More than blacksmiths, farriers of the eighteenth century practised a basic, and somewhat rough and ready form of animal medicine and surgery. One very prominent member of the trade was James Clark who, in 1776, became Farrier in Scotland to King George III. His livery stable, labelled as Clark’s Repository, was situated in the South Bank, Canongate. It was replaced by St Mary’s Brewery, latterly owned by Scottish and Newcastle Breweries who sold it to Moray House in 1967. This property now belongs to the University and retains the name ‘St Mary’s Land’.

Being an enterprising businessman Clark offered what must have been the precursor of modern day-trips to Musselburgh and back for one shilling and six pence. In 1781 he fitted out a portion of the Chessel’s Building, on the south side of Chessel’s Court which was opened as Clark’s Hotel. Seven years later Chessel’s Building, as the Excise Office, was the scene of the notorious Deacon Brodie’s last robbery. Clark’s main contribution to the establishment of veterinary medicine in the city was the writing of three veterinary textbooks:

Observations upon the Shoeing of Horses: with an anatomical description of the bones in the foot of a horse in 1770;

A Treatise on the prevention of diseases incidental to horses from bad management in regard to stables, food, water, air, and exercise. To which are subjoined observations on some of the surgical and medical branches of farriery, in 1788; and

First Lines of Veterinary Physiology and Pathology, Vol.1, in 1806.

The titles of these books alone give us an indication of Clark’s range of knowledge and interests.

In the autumn of 1790 a group of English gentlemen established the Odiham Agricultural Society to improve and reform British farming. James Clark wrote to the Society with ‘a proposal for establishing a veterinarian School in Edinburgh’. However, his letter arrived shortly after an alternative and more
detailed proposal to create a veterinary college closer by, in London; the latter had by then been accepted and the London veterinary school was established in 1791. Although serious efforts were made in 1793 by the governors of the newly founded London Veterinary College to recruit James Clark as its Principal, he refused, anticipating that funding for a veterinary school in Edinburgh would soon be forthcoming. However, the wars on the continent blocked this aspiration. The contents of his last book were derived from the lectures he had planned to give to his veterinary students in Edinburgh.

James Clark lived at Comely Gardens and it is there that he died aged 76 on the 29th of July 1808. His writings, among those of others, were to influence a young Edinburgh scholar and farrier William Dick (1793–1866) who, armed with a veterinary diploma from London, would become the main influence on veterinary education in Scotland, and indeed through his students, the world.

**William Dick’s Veterinary College (1823–1866)**

From the North-east corner of St Andrew Square ran a narrow side-street in which tradesmen and artisans lived and worked. Clyde Street was where William’s father John Dick, also a farrier, had established a successful business. Being brought up at the forge and given a sound education, William was encouraged by his father to read veterinary authors such as James Clark and William Taplin. He attended lectures by John Barclay, the eminent anatomist in the Royal College of Surgeons of the City of Edinburgh, and was encouraged to follow a veterinary career. He trained at the London Veterinary College, returning with a diploma in 1818. Backed by the Highland Agricultural Society of Scotland, William Dick founded the first veterinary college in Scotland in 1823.

In 1831 John and William Dick purchased property on the South-west corner of the courtyard in Clyde Street from Alexander Munro (tertius), Professor of Anatomy in Edinburgh University. William Dick contracted local architects, Richard and Robert Dickson, to design a suitably imposing building which would house a lecture theatre, museum and living quarters for his parents, his sister Mary and himself. The Dickson brothers (Richard 1792–1857, Robert 1794–1865) had designed Gardener’s Crescent (1822) and Leith Town Hall and Police Station (1827–28), and structural similarities in these designs to Dick’s college can still be seen.

The classical façade consisted of three storeys each with three windows, those of the second storey being decorated with pediments. Two simple columns between two pilasters supported a frieze comprising four pairs of sculpted animal heads; the horse, dog, bull and ram, with a deer in the centre. These heads powerfully represent the breadth of animal material being taught by William Dick. The top storey was crowned by two sculpted scroll shapes bracketing a plinth on which sat a horse carved by A. Wallace and modelled on a smaller sculpture belonging to William Dick.

Links between the veterinary school and the medical establishment, including the University, were sustained during this period. Individual professors offered free access to their lectures in the Medical School and Royal College of Surgeons. This was a procedure initiated for William Dick’s students by John Barclay and continued in 1827 by his anatomical assistant and successor Dr Robert Knox (1791–1862). By session 1832–33 the medical men who were making their classes available to veterinary students included Professor Alexander Munro (tertius), Dr Robert Knox, Mr Robert Liston, Dr Thomas J. Aitken, and Mr William Ferguson.

The work of Dick’s Veterinary College flourished and the college gradually extended its occupancy of buildings around the courtyard. In 1840 Dick began to employ permanent members of staff in William Worthington and a brilliant young Quaker from Cheshire—John Barlow who taught Anatomy. Sadly Barlow died in 1856 at the age of 40. As a consequence, Dick contracted the bright and experienced London graduate, John Gamgee (1831–1894), to fill his place. Gamgee was one of three sons of Joseph Gamgee (1801–1895), a veterinary surgeon with an extensive knowledge of the workings of the equine foot. John’s father travelled between England and the continent importing and exporting horses for rich clients in Italy and as a consequence the family was multilingual and had had the best of an education. Nevertheless, a divergence of opinions developed between the young John Gamgee and the now 64 year old William Dick and as a result Gamgee’s one year teaching contract was not renewed.

**John Gamgee’s Edinburgh New Veterinary College, 1857–1865**

The confident young John Gamgee immediately decided to establish his own veterinary college in Edinburgh. He rented premises, only a few yards to the east of Edinburgh University, in a stable courtyard behind the south side of Drummond Street. This site, which used to be called Ross’s Stables, was immediately to the north of the Royal Academy for Teaching Exercises’ riding school building. By 1828 the latter had been purchased by the then Royal College of Surgeons of the City of Edinburgh and onto it, from 1829–1832, had been constructed Playfair’s Surgeons’ Hall. The outer rubble stone walls of the stable courtyard, which housed Gamgee’s veterinary school for five years from 1857–1862, remained in place until late in 2004 when they were demolished to make way for new teaching facilities for the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

James Law, a recent Clyde Street College graduate, was recruited to teach Veterinary Anatomy in John Gamgee’s New Veterinary College. Together with Gamgee in 1861 he published the popular student textbook *General and Descriptive Anatomy of the Domestic Animals*. Joseph Gamgee came up from London to assist his son by teaching in the Clinical Department, the practical work of which was housed in stables on Rose Street.

By 1862 John Gamgee had found more prestigious and spacious buildings for his veterinary college on the west side of Lothian Road opposite Castle Terrace. The building on Lothian Road had been erected in 1825 by the Scottish Naval and Military Academy and comprised two storeys, the upper storey having four pairs of pilasters which framed the outer windows while at ground level, six
short pillars framed the two entrances which were accessed by steps from the sloping Lothian Road. James Grant in his Old & New Edinburgh described it as 'a plain but rather elegant Grecian building'. Ironically, the building directly behind these premises, which was also used by Gamgee, had been constructed in 1828–1829 by the Royal Academy for Teaching Exercises as the new Royal Riding Academy.

John Gamgee continued teaching there until 1865 when his New Veterinary College was bought by a group of southern financiers, and was transferred to London, to become the short-lived Albert Veterinary College. It only survived for three years in London before financial difficulties and neglect by Gamgee resulted in its closure.

William Williams’s New Veterinary College (1873–1904)

William Williams (1832–1900) graduated from William Dick’s Clyde Street College in 1857. He gained the Highland Society’s Gold Medal for proficiency in Veterinary Science. After ten years building up a large practice in Yorkshire, Williams returned to Edinburgh in May 1867, as Principal of Dick’s Veterinary College. Williams was progressive and held the position until July 1873. However, during his tenure of the post there had been staffing and administration difficulties (after William Dick’s death in 1866 the college was administered by the Town Council of the City as Trustees) and he was asked to resign. Like Gamgee before him he founded a New Veterinary College, and took with him more than 40 of the Clyde Street students, most of the clinical material and the Edinburgh Veterinary Medical Society library which had been created in 1834.

In 1873, barely eight years after the demise of the first New Veterinary College, the second New Veterinary College began its existence in Gayfield House, which remained its home for the next ten years. Gayfield House had been built between 1761 and 1765 by Charles and William Butter as an isolated villa, before the New Town was planned.

In April 1882, Williams declared that his classes had increased to such a degree that larger and more suitable premises were required. Within eighteen months, veterinary teaching premises, designed by William Hamilton Beattie (1840–1898), the Architect of the Balmoral Hotel and Jenners Department store, had been built in Elm Row. These were officially opened on 24th October 1883, and declared to be ‘second to no other in the kingdom’.

Much of the Leith Walk premises still exist today. The four-storey façade is unchanged except that two pediments which once supported a group of animal sculptures have been removed. Inside the main entrance the ceiling and cornice are original. Most of the two-storey buildings that lined the north, east and south of the courtyard are extant, although the courtyard is now roofed over. The north and south buildings still have their original roofs and dormer windows. Three of the four south-facing, stained-glass windows of the west lecture theatre remain intact.

William Williams died in 1900 and was replaced as Principal by his son Owen. However, the local financial and political situation could no longer support two veterinary colleges in Edinburgh, and four years later he negotiated the college’s move to become part of the new University of Liverpool. The Leith Walk premises then became sequentially a theatre, a cinema, a television studio, and are currently the Drama Centre of the Queen Margaret University College (Warwick and Macdonald, 2003).

Royal (Dick)’s Veterinary College (1873–present)

In order to bring the Clyde Street premises up-to-date and in line with the New Edinburgh Veterinary College, building work was initiated at the north end of the courtyard in the spring of 1886 and completed the following year. The by now named Royal (Dick)’s Veterinary College occupied the whole building block with the courtyard roofed over with glass. Despite this huge improvement, the premises were soon considered too cramped, and in December 1908 it was decided to buy the larger site of Summerhall Brewery. David McArthry (c1854–1926), who in 1906 had re-modelled the Canonghills school attended by Robert Louis Stevenson, and six years later had designed the classical Dean Bank House in Canaan Lane, was asked to produce a design for the veterinary college his ‘masterpiece’. The construction was started in 1913, and the veterinary students were transferred from Clyde Street to Summerhall in 1916, even though the buildings were incomplete. Due to the financial consequences of the First World War the finishing work continued for about eight more years.

The long Edwardian Baroque façade consists of two-storeys of classical columns and pediments with a central three-storey pavilion over the main entrance. The originally planned carved embellishments were not included, probably because of wartime restrictions, but the balustraded parapet was retained. The front foyer is oak panelled with two prominent oak pillars. Three stained glass windows, the centre one featuring a portrait of William Dick, dominate the top of the main staircase.

By April 1940 the Summerhall premises had been extended to the North (architects: Lorimer & Matthew), behind the United Presbyterian church on the corner of Causewayside and Hope Park Terrace, and angled along the line of the front of Summerhall House (demolished in 1937). The Church in turn was taken down in 1948. In 1951 the Royal Dick Veterinary College became the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies when it was incorporated into Edinburgh University.

In 1970–72, to accommodate expanding research and teaching commitments, an eight storey tower block was constructed on the north-west corner site vacated by the United Presbyterian church and a four storey clinic and research extension building was put up on the south-east corner of the Summerhall Veterinary School site (architects: Alan Reay, Eric Hall and partners). In 1982/3, as the intake of undergraduate student numbers increased, the interior of the Congregational Church in Hope Park Terrace was remodelled to accommodate three floors of research labs, tutorial rooms and a student refectory. However, even by this time
staff and students were already making use of veterinary facilities on a new site, this time out in the countryside to the south of Edinburgh.

Easter Bush Veterinary Centre
Since May 1947 the Veterinary School had had a commercial farm (Home Farm) at Easter Bush which it used for teaching purposes. In 1962 a Veterinary Field Station and Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine opened on the land to the south-west of this farm. First the teaching of large animal veterinary surgery moved out of the city to Easter Bush, and early in 1999 the teaching of small animal followed to the new state-of-the-art small animal hospital, designed by Forum Architects. Reconstruction of the equine hospital and the large ruminant hospital facilities were completed in 2003. Currently, plans are being progressed to consolidate the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies on the Easter Bush site before the end of this decade.

References

Reflections of a Rector
by Tam Dalyell MP

It has been a privilege to be Rector of the University of Edinburgh for the last three years. I have received nothing but kindness from staff and students.

My first reflection, to meet the Journal’s request for a ‘reflective piece’ is to express an element of surprise. Only one ‘complaint’ has reached me in three years, and only a very, very few have been brought to the Rector’s Assessor, Jim Stretton, formerly of Standard Life; he has made a huge contribution to the University Committees, Audit and Finance and General Purposes, and was instrumental as a former Member of the Court of the Bank of England, in procuring Threadneedle Street as a venue for the University Fund-Raising venture in London, which proved to be most successful.

The absence of complaint, I interpret, is that the mechanisms to deal with any grievance from individuals are well-oiled. In some cases of ‘Doubt’ rather than ‘Complaint’, as Rector, I just phoned the professor concerned. The saddest cases seem to me to concern the Faculty of Mathematics. A phone call to the caring and distinguished Professor, Alastair Gillespie, would evoke a response that the kindest solution was to candid with a student, that he or she could not, in fact, cope with this difficult and most demanding of courses. It was confirmed to me by Michael Banner, that as a tutor, it was very difficult to anticipate who could, and who could not, face the challenge of Mathematics!

My second reflection is that the most important task accruing to the Rector, is to Chair the Court! My aim was to be brisk, but to ensure that no Member of Court was gratuitously truncated in their contribution. I can honestly say that having chaired every meeting of the six times a year Court, on a Monday afternoon, other than one, no Member, but none, has said anything either silly, or long-winded! (The one occasion was when I went to London to vote against the Government on a crucial Prevention of Terrorism vote. With a twinkle in his eye, Professor David Finnegan of Biological Sciences told me that he felt so strongly about the issue, that he would have moved a vote of censure against me, had I remained in Edinburgh, rather than going to London!)

Perhaps part of the reason for the smooth running of the Court, and this is my third reflection, is the high quality of the papers which are prepared for Court, by the office of the University Secretary, Melvin Cornish, and in particular by the responsible minute-taker, Dr Katherine Novosel. From the time 1962–66 that I was a Member of the Public Accounts Committee under the Chairmanship,