

The early development of the Australian veterinary profession: the first half of the twentieth century

The incorporation of the first Australian veterinary school into the University of Melbourne in 1908 was quickly followed by the foundation of a Department of Veterinary Science in the University of Sydney in 1910. It seemed that, at last, a sound basis had been established for veterinary science and the profession in Australia, but in some respects it was a false dawn. There was a flowering of veterinary science in the first half of the twentieth century but this was not matched by the fortunes of the profession in private practice in an era dominated by world wars and depression.

The staff of the new university departments immediately began significant research into Australian livestock disease problems, albeit in the face of poor funding and facilities. Figures such as 'Jock' Gilruth, JD Stewart, LB Bull and Max Henry established high reputations and their efforts were buttressed by the foundation of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in 1926. Veterinary research was accorded a degree of priority and, with Gilruth (followed by Bull) leading the CSIR Division of Animal Health, this was rewarded by a series of major advances. Perhaps the most spectacular of these was the identification of mineral deficiencies as the causes of 'coast disease', but important work was done in other areas, notably immunology.

The veterinarians in Sydney and Melbourne universities participated fully in CSIR research while research facilities were also further developed in Queensland and South Australia. However, the development of veterinary science was not matched in professional education. There was only one graduate, Ian Clunies Ross, from Sydney in 1914, while numbers at the Melbourne Veterinary Faculty fell to the point that it was closed in 1928. Although graduates found some employment in State livestock services, there was little or no demand for private practice until after World War II.

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March 2002