

FARRIERY PUT INTO SHARP FOCUS

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RONALD S JONES and DAVID GOODALL reveal the important history of this trade and look at the education and continued training of today and tomorrow's generation of farriers

ACCORDING to Professor Coleman, one of the first principals and professors of the English College: "A proper method of shoeing horses was of more importance than the treatment of any, or perhaps all diseases incidental to the horse."

The history of farriery and the veterinary profession are inseparable over many hundreds of years. In classical times, Xenophon, Virgil and Pliny the Elder alluded to the treatment of animals and the Roman essayist, Martial, composed the tag "venienti occurite morbo", which, after a loose translation, conveys the meaning that it is better to go out and prevent disease than to treat the established condition.

It was as early as 1356 that the farriers of the City of London were called together by the mayor of the city and formed the "Fellowship by the name of the farriers of the City of London". This formed the basis of the Worshipfull Company of Farriers (WCF), which celebrated the 650th anniversary of its foundation in 2006.

The term farrier was derived from the old French word "ferrier" and the Latin "ferrarius", which was formed from ferrum, meaning horse shoe. Records from the early years are sparse, as most of the records were destroyed in the great fire of London in 1666.

In 1674, a charter book was purchased and a charter was granted to the farriers in that year. The farriers company was given "the power to impose fines, pains, penalties and forfeiture on breach of

rule and government of the company”.

In those early years, a farrier was not restricted to the shoeing of horses, but he or she also became involved in the treatment of general horse ailments and, therefore, other animals.

In the early 19th century, the farrier was superseded by the veterinary surgeon, especially in military circles. The farrier reverted to the more restrictive activity of a shoeing smith. The veterinary surgeon evolved into an equine physician and later took up preventive medicine when controlling the plagues that attacked agricultural animals. It is only relatively recently that the veterinary surgeon has assumed the role of a physician attending to all domestic animals.

In 1732, Burdon wrote: “A farrier is as useful a trade as any other in His Majesty’s Dominion; we commonly call him Doctor because he professes Physick [sic] and surgery among horses; and some are good and sensible men but people who are able to give their sons learning seldom bind them to that trade so farriers are obliged to take such Apprentices as they can without regard to their education.”

The RVC was formed in 1791 by a group of landowners, horse owners and agriculturalists. It arose out of the activities of the Odiham (Hampshire) Agricultural Society. However, it is interesting to note that the world’s first veterinary school had opened in Lyon in 1763 but that the first professor at the RVC was a Frenchman, Vial de St Bel. The RCVS received its first charter in 1844, and this advocated that all animals should be treated by veterinary surgeons. The WCF once again adopted its craft role towards the end of the 19th century. An examination scheme for shoeing smiths was introduced. This was done by a group representing the WCF, the RCVS and the Royal Agricultural Society and it was resolved that “it was desirable to establish an organisation under the auspices of the company for the promotion of skilled farriery and the registration of duly qualified farriers in London and throughout the country”.

In 1969, representatives of the WCF and the RCVS met to discuss the formal regulation farrier training and statutory registration. In 1971, there was a further meeting of the livery sub-committee to consider the statutory control of farriers. In 1972, the concept of a Farriers Registration Bill was agreed. It became law in 1975.

In good company

The WCF was formed in 1356 and is 55th in the list of more than 100 livery companies in the City of London. It is a fellowship of men and women who are free of the company and the city and, by definition, citizens of the City of London. The company’s membership consists of craft farriers, veterinary surgeons and a variety of others who are committed to the welfare of the horse, the continuing craft and contributing to the success of the City of London. The total number of liverymen is limited to 375, of which 10 per cent are craftsmen farriers, a further 10 per cent are veterinary surgeons and the remainder are from all walks of life. The governing body of the

company is the court. It consists of the master, three wardens, a treasurer, past masters and assistants. It is served by the clerk, craft secretary and registrar, chaplain and beadle.

The WCF is one of the few city livery companies that still controls its craft. This is done through the craft committee, which is made up of representatives of the company, including the master and the upper warden (ex-officio), practising farriers and veterinary surgeons.

Examinations and qualifications

The WCF is the examining body for farriery – the professional examinations are administered by an examinations board, which is an independent body within the craft and is responsible only to the company. There are three levels of qualifications on offer.

- **Diploma (DipWCF)**

This used to have the title of registered shoe-smith. This examination is taken by students at the end of their apprenticeship and comprises a live horse shoeing test, a written paper and an oral examination to establish that the candidate has the knowledge and practical skills to shoe horses to a safe and acceptable standard.

- **Associateship (AWCF)**

This previously had the title of “Associate of the Farriers Company of London”. This is a further qualification for diploma holders and concentrates on therapeutic and remedial farriery, as required by the practising equine veterinary surgeon and requires a high standard of technical competence.

Candidates are required to undertake a written test, fit a therapeutic shoe and carry out advanced farriery procedures – as required when working with a veterinary surgeon.

- **Fellowship (FWCF)**

The fellowship recognises the highest level of ability. Candidates who already hold the associateship are required to submit a thesis, prepare and present a lecture and undertake a practical shoeing test.

In addition, the company has recently instituted CPD for farriers. Continuing high standards of farriery are encouraged through the medium of best-shod horses classes at agricultural shows and the awarding of medals at horse shoeing competitions.

Registration

The Farriers Registration Council (FRC) was established by the Farriers Registration Act 1975, as

amended in 1977, to register persons engaged in farriery and the shoeing of horses and to prohibit the shoeing of horses by unqualified people. It is a criminal offence for any person to shoe a horse (including their own) or otherwise engage in farriery while not on the register of farriers. To do so may render that person liable to prosecution. The council is responsible for the annual registration of all farriers and copies of the register are available from www.farriers-reg.gov.uk or the council's offices. The council also has the statutory duty to consider possible cases of professional misconduct, which is a two-stage process involving investigating and disciplinary committees.

The disciplinary committee has the power of the ultimate sanction to suspend or remove a person's name from the register of farriers. The council also considers the registration of farriers from overseas.

Training

The Farriers Training Agency (FTA) is a management agency established by the FRC to oversee the training of apprentices in Great Britain. It is responsible for their terms and conditions of training as set by the FRC.

All apprentices must complete a four-year apprenticeship, with an approved training farrier. During this time, they must successfully complete a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level three in farriery and pass the diploma examination.

It has other responsibilities, including the induction and approval of candidates for apprenticeship, obtaining funding for apprenticeships and discharging the responsibilities set by the funding agencies. It also arranges for an adequate level of supervision of apprenticeship training, liaises with the WCF on examinations and acts as the arbiter on training matters.

Future in mind

The National Association of Farriers, Blacksmiths and Agricultural Engineers (NAFBAE) was formed in 1905 to ensure the future of the craft. The association encourages CPD with a variety of activities and brings together interested parties to provide information and a wider understanding of the craft. It also holds competitions at a number of venues and publishes a bimonthly magazine called *Forge*. NAFBAE, alongside the WCF, is also responsible for arranging exchange visits for farriers with other countries.

Further reading

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- Prince L B (1980). *The Farrier And His Craft – The History Of The Worshipful Company Of Farriers*, J A Allen.
- Stephenson R M (2007). Working with farriers, *UK Vet* **12**(1).
- Worshipful Company of Farriers website: www.wcf.org.uk



Placing a hot shoe.



Grinding a shoe to fit the hoof.



Trimming a hoof. It is a criminal offence to shoe a horse, even your own, if you are not on the register of farriers.

