

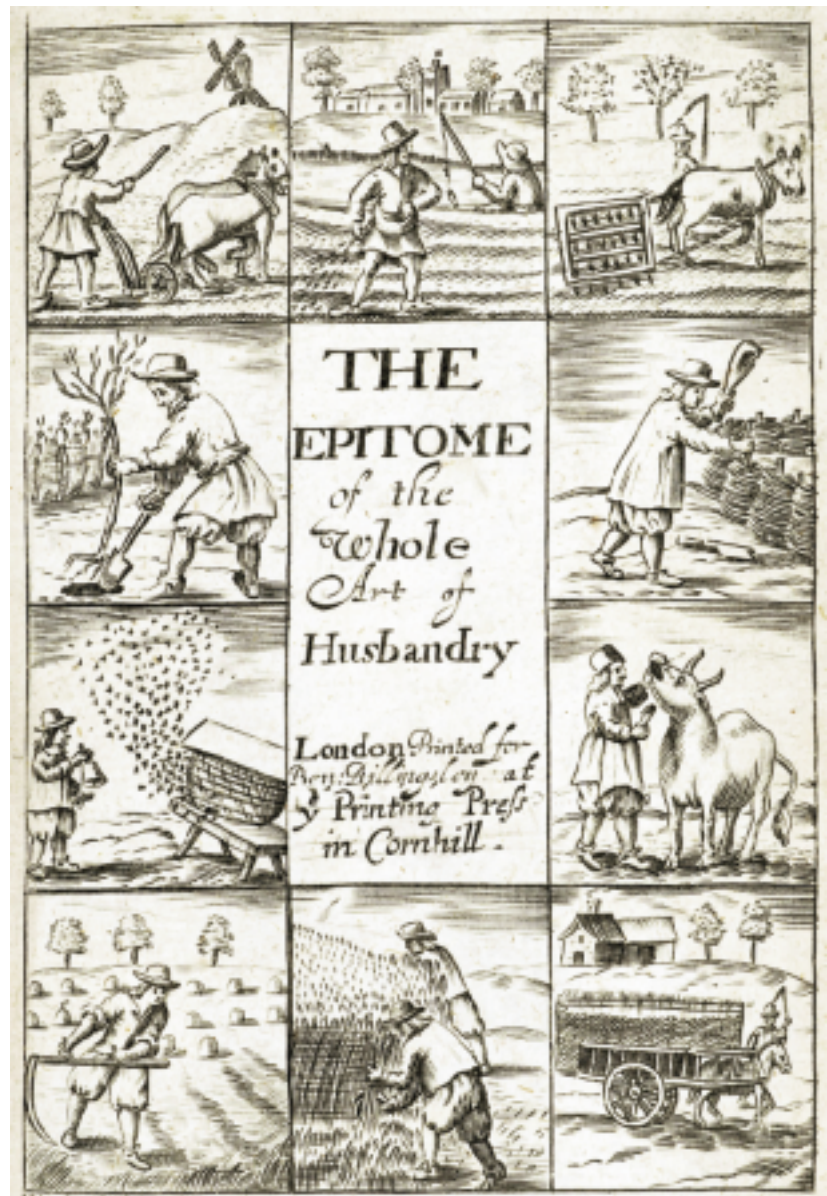
Erica Fudge and **Richard Thomas** explore relationships between people and their domestic animals in early modern England and how new types of archaeological evidence are shedding fresh light on one of the most important aspects of life in this period.

Visiting Your Troops of Cattle

In early modern England one relationship was vital to the economic and dietary wellbeing of most families: that between people and their animals. Indeed local and national economic stability was reliant on the presence of horses, cows, sheep, pigs and poultry. This dependence can be measured in terms of the need for a large amount of meat in the diet of those who worked the land; the demand for raw materials, such as hides, bones and fats, for craft and industry; the importance of animal manure to the fertility of the soil; and the necessary power of animals to move goods and support agriculture through the pulling of equipment, such as ploughs and harrows.

The period 1500-1700 also marks a watershed in the nature of farming in England. It witnessed a decline in the number of smallholdings, the emergence of large farms and a consequent growth in herd size, as well as increasing specialisation and commercialisation of husbandry. Arguably it is over this time that the system of intensive agriculture emerged that is familiar in much of the West today. For this reason the study of animal care has a particular resonance.

However, while economic and agricultural historians have explored the general shifts in human-live-stock husbandry, the close connections between humans and animals have received almost no attention. One area where it is possible to gain an insight into such relationships is in the matter of animal healthcare and wellbeing. The moments when the relationship shifts from the normal to the fraught – such as when a healthy animal ceases to be able to fulfil its role in the domestic economy – provide particular insight into people's attitudes to their beasts. Yet in the period of early modern agriculture, when many of those working with animals did not, or could not, document their practices, the study of live-stock care requires an imaginative approach to research to build the fullest possible picture. As we shall see here different types of evidence – books, wills and bones – offer different clues about human/animal relationships. Husbandry manuals by their nature are addressed to a general readership and provide an idea of a wide-ranging, indirect engagement with animals; wills reveal people's direct relationships with specific



Frontispiece to *The Epitome of the Whole Art of Husbandry* by Joseph Blagrove, published in 1675, which offered comprehensive information on managing a farm, good agricultural practice and the care of oxen, horses, cattle, sheep and swine, identifying their diseases and supplying remedies.



John Fitzherbert's *Boke of Husbandry* was first published in 1523, reproducing on its titlepage a woodcut of a pair of oxen yoked to a plough.

animals; while bone remains unearthed during archaeological excavations are evidence of the animals themselves. These can reveal both general trends and insight into the lives of individual beasts.

If any sheep be scabbed

The historian Louise Hill Curth has shown how early modern animal healthcare regimes can be found in a range of texts: in almanacs, household manuals and specialist works. Many of the techniques outlined in these are likely to be products of an oral culture in which knowledge was passed on through practice, eventually finding its way into print. For example, John Crowshey, author of *The Countrymans Instructor* (1636), emphasises that 'it is not scholarship that brought me to the knowledge of what I profess', but 'my own experience' and the 'testimony of you my good friends'. Other ideas in the period were drawn from rediscovered classical scholarship on agriculture, including works by Columella and Virgil.

Hands-on experience plays a key role in these early printed texts, as evident in John Fitzherbert's 1523 *Book of Husbandry*, in which he offers a range of practical advice, including to the sheep farmer. He begins by outlining how to spot a problem: 'If any sheep be scabbed, the shepherd may perceive it by the biting, rubbing, or scratching with his horn, and most commonly the wool will rise, and be thin or bare in that place.' The remedy Fitzherbert offers for such scabs is 'tar', a substance made of oil and goose or capon grease, which should be rubbed onto the scab. An alternative, cheaper remedy is given to 'salve poor men's sheep'. This is made from a mixture of easily available plants – 'broom, crops, leaves, blossoms' – which should be chopped up, boiled in 20 gallons of water and then added to 2lbs of 'sheep suet molten ... a bottle of old piss, and as much brine made with salt'.

This should then be strained through a cloth. Fitzherbert adds: 'if your sheep be new clipped, make [the salve] luke-warm, and then wash your sheep therewith'. The mixture would also, apparently, rid the sheep of lice and cure temporary blindness.

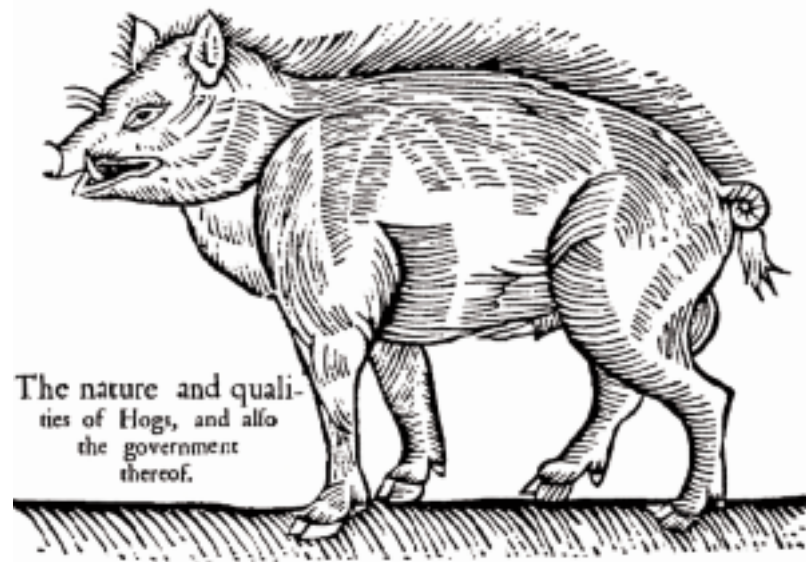
Fitzherbert also offers advice on plants that are poisonous, pastures that are bad for animal health and on 'hunger-rot ... the worst rot that can be'. The specificity and detail of his advice is clear, but this seems to get lost in some of the later animal manuals in which the reader is expected to recognise symptoms of disease and use a book simply to look up a cure. So in *The first Book of Cattell* (1596) Leonard Mascall lists a number of reasons for 'swelling' in cows: because of 'abundance of blood', the eating of a 'Tine-worm' and 'costiveness' (constipation). For each cause a different cure is recommended: the first begins with chasing the cow up and down and then pricking its tongue; the second involves feeding the animal urine mixed with salt; the last also suggests chasing the animal up and down, which if that fails to bring about a bowel movement should be followed by manual excavation of the dung. No explanation is given as to how to determine the cause of the swelling or to differentiate the symptoms in order to administer the right cure. It seems that this early advice is addressed to those with existing knowledge, information that is frequently left unstated.

These books represent the beginnings of a printed systematisation of animal healthcare. But who they were aimed at, when a majority of those who worked with beasts remained illiterate, is unclear: there was no recognised animal care profession until the late 18th century when the first veterinary colleges were established across Europe. John Crowshey's 'good friends' most probably passed on their knowledge verbally, but whether they could read their own words in print we cannot know.

My red pied bullock

If the issue of literacy is a problem in terms of the readership of the healthcare manuals it is less so when wills are considered, as such documents were often

This little pig ... illustration to the opening chapter of *The Countryman's Jewel or The Government of cattel*, a 17th-century edition of Leonard Mascall's three-volume guide to husbandry.





The 16th-century Bradford Table Carpet shows scenes of English rural life and the everyday interactions between man and animal.

written by a scribe on behalf of the testator. When mentioned in wills animals are present, of course, as valuable goods and are often represented in the simplest terms, merely revealing that they were owned by the testator: 'my two cows', 'my six sheep' etc. Sometimes a little more description is included. For example wills dating from the early 17th century in the Essex Record Office contain references to 'my bay nag', 'my red bullock', 'my black cow', 'one little hog', 'my red pied bullock with a star in the forehead'.

Occasionally more detail is given revealing a much stronger sense of the relationship between a testator and his animals. Thus the 1620 will of the yeoman Christopher Fuller from West Bergholt in Essex includes the following bequests:

Item I give unto Christopher Fuller my oldest son all my team of horses with my cart, wheels, plough and chains, horse harnesses both for cart and plough and cart ropes, Item I give more unto him my branded cow, my little black northern cow and my cow called Shaler, one heifer of a year old one weanell calf, my best sow with her pigs and two shots [young pigs] ... I give unto William Fuller my younger son my old great branded cow, 2 year old steers, one heifer of a year old, two weanell calves, a sow with pigs and two shots ... I give unto Alice my daughter my great black northern cow and one heifer that came of my little northern cow, one weanell cow calf

The clarity of the descriptions of more than 25 animals in Fuller's will reveals two things: his attentiveness to his livestock and his desire to ensure that specific animals are given to the right people. These animals are commodities but they are also individu-

alised. Both their economic value and the personal relationships between humans and animals would have encouraged owners to attend to their physical care. This is underscored, perhaps, in Leonard Mascall advice: 'Ye must often oversee and visit your troops of cattle, against any infirmity, that may daily hap.' The ability to spot a problem with an animal early on, such as a lame or a stoop, could be a matter of life or death. As William Poole noted in 1650 it was especially necessary 'for the poorer sort of people, who having but one beast, the loss thereof to them, is more than the loss of many to a rich man'.

The age of animals might indicate a long working life but also that they had been well cared for. Thus in 1632 when the widow Johan Ward of Earls Colne in Essex left her grandson Francis 'two young sheep and an old sheep with two lambs', she was also testifying to successful management of her animals. In this period sheep were valued for their wool rather than their meat and so could live for eight years or more. Death before this time was a result of lack of care. In this context the appearance of a cough would occasion a swift response.

The fear of losing an animal and the labour that might be taken to avoid it is hinted at in the 1625 will of Roger Hull of Great Maplestead. Hull bequeathed two named horses – Clubb and Jack – a bullock, 'my northern cow', 'my old cow' and, finally, 'my cow with the one eye'. Mascall cautioned that the 'eye of a beast is tender and is a principal member, and soon may be hurt diverse ways'. These might include by 'pinkeye', toxin poisoning, vitamin A deficiency or by accident. Whatever the cause it is certain that Roger Hull's one-eyed cow must have received careful attention

either throughout its life or in response to a particular injury. The animal's presence in the will marks its value to Hull and so is itself a record of its care.

Cover him well with earth

Animal bones are among the most common archaeological finds and their study can help explain many ways in which people and animals interacted in the past. Most excavated bones represent the rubbish left behind from butchery and food consumption (the bulk of the meat consumed in the early modern period came from cattle, sheep and to a lesser extent pigs and poultry). But careful analysis can also shed light on husbandry regimes, disease and injury.

However the study of pathology in dry bone specimens is not easy as many diseases and injuries only affect soft tissues so do not leave a trace. With the exception of acute trauma, such as bone breakage, it is usually only long-standing (chronic) diseases and injuries that affect the skeleton, because in cases where the animal's immune system overcomes the disease or the animal dies fairly rapidly the skeleton is unaffected. Additionally, animal bones found on archaeological sites are typically fragmentary (partly because they often represent butchered remains), making it almost impossible to determine whether bones come from the same animal. This is a problem for establishing facts about health because the diagnosis of disease relies not only upon the appearance of pathologies, but also upon their location in the body. Despite these difficulties certain diseases and injuries appear with some regularity in bones and these provide a direct insight into the ways in which people were managing their animals. For example – for many regions of England cattle provided the primary source of traction power. Because an ox did not evolve to pull agricultural equipment such activities would place stress on its skeleton, which would result in bone alterations visible to

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archaeologists. Analysis of cattle foot-bones at some sites shows a decline of stress indicators, which may reflect a decrease in their use for traction and the growing tendency to slaughter such animals at an earlier age for meat. Yet such remains could also indicate a simultaneous improvement in the healthcare of traction animals.

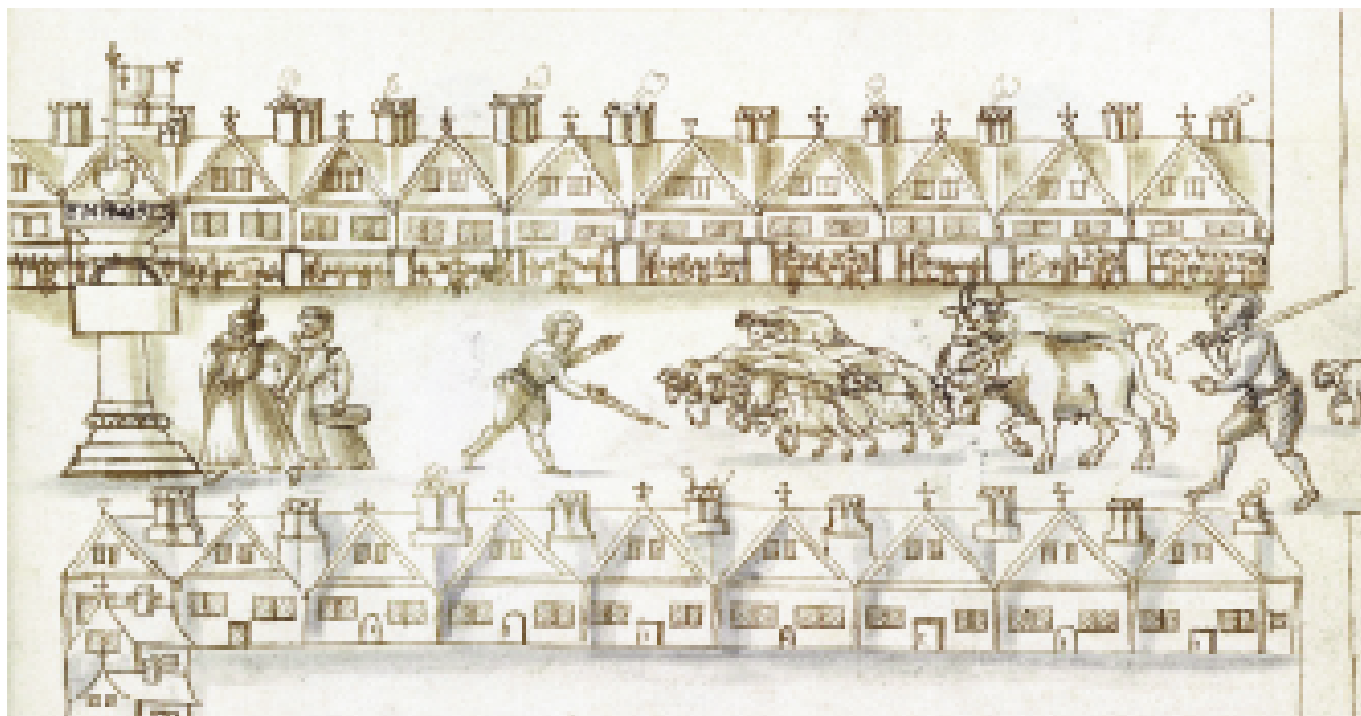
Occasionally we find the remains of skeletons of animals with clear evidence of systemic bone infection. An example is provided by a partial lamb skeleton from a site in Cambridgeshire, buried in a discrete pit. Such a practice echoes the advice of early modern writers like Mascall, who urged the rapid disposal of infected animals to prevent the spread of contagion to healthy beasts:

The remedies are, ye shall flay the beast that is so dead, and bury him in a deep pit, and cover him well with earth, that no dogs can come to the carrion. For so many beasts as do smell thereof, are like to be infected with the same disease.

But the absence of particular pathologies is sometimes as revealing as those that are present. Healed long-bone fractures in domestic livestock are incredibly rare. This may reflect the low chance of survival for such animals. Yet knowledge about fracture repair existed, as Mascall reveals:

To help any bone of a beast that is broken, ye must cast and bind his legs, and then feel softly how the bones do lie, then shall ye cause that limb to be holden out straight, and with your two hands, ye shall stroke softly up and down, and then softly put each bone into his right place again. Then in holding the limb straight, feel if all the said bones be well bolstered round about, and then splinted thereon and well lapped, and let it so remain for the space of nine days.

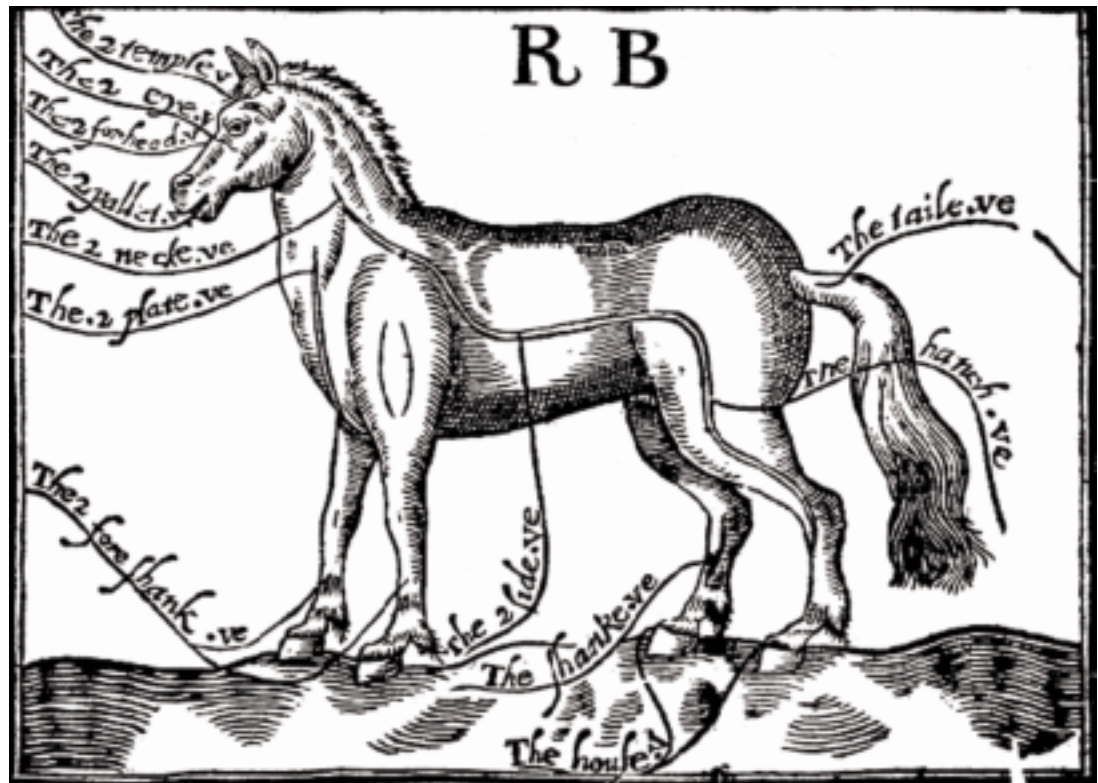
Driving animals to London's Eastcheap Market past carcasses for sale, from *A Caveatt for the Citty of London*, 1598.





Above: a horse metacarpal showing two draining sinuses, where pus gathered following an infection, and new bone formation.

Right: the frontispiece to John Crowshey's *The Countryman's Instructor* identifies parts of a horse's body and the diseases likely to afflict it.



The absence of healed injuries in the archaeological remains strongly suggests that such animals were slaughtered before healing could take place. As in the case of the buried lamb, economic pragmatism and animal care may have been closely entangled.

But the archaeological record also shows that animals were not always well cared for. Defleshing marks on the bones of some 15 horses dumped in a derelict cellar at Dudley Castle in the West Midlands sometime around 1700 indicate they had been knackered for their skins and their flesh recycled for dog food. Many of these horse bones also displayed pathology. Advanced joint disease was common and was included in bones of the hock (mid-leg) joint which had become so arthritic that they had fused together (a condition known as spavin), which would have rendered the animal lame. In one horse infection had set in within one of the lower leg bones, most probably following a traumatic injury to the overlying skin. This infection had developed to such an extent that the pressure of the pus had built up in the centre of the bone until it eventually erupted leading to an open drain of infectious fluid through the leg.

Of course, it is not always possible to tell from bones whether efforts were made to heal problems. But bone spavin is one condition for which attempts to cure might potentially be visible on bone remains and advice on cures appear frequently in early farrier texts. These usually involve the application of caustic blisters (a corrosive substance) or mechanical means to remove excessive bone growth. For example, in 1687, G.L. recommended:

Take a penknife and lay open the skin about the bony excrescence; and having a chisel or knife for that purpose, strike off or pare away the bone till you come as

near as may be to the quick; then having ready a plaster of bees-wax and verdigris well mixed by melting, bind it on, but so that it may not afflict the vein, and renew it every other day for the space of a week.

However, no such evidence exists on the horse bones at Dudley Castle and the general impression gained from these remains is of a group of horses that had been worked exceptionally hard in life and then exploited in death before being unceremoniously dumped in an abandoned building.

The picture emerging from this collaborative approach to understanding early modern human-animal relations is itself apparently contradictory. Animals were clearly individualised and they were also economically valuable assets. Yet these assets could have names or be worked with little consideration for the health consequences resulting from their labour when those consequences did not interfere with productivity.

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Further Reading

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Louise Hill Curth, *The Care of Brute Beasts: A Social and Cultural History of Veterinary Medicine in Early Modern England* (Brill, 2010).

Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Terry O'Connor, *The Archaeology of Animal Bones* (Sutton Publishing, 2000).

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