

London Marshals and other horsemen

Collated by Lady Isabell Winter

Information extracted from “The medieval horse and its equipment c.1150-c.1450” John Clark, 2004.

There were many more professions for people to work with horses in medieval times than what there is now. For example, coursers, hackneyemen, traventers, carters, porters, groom (garcio) and marshals, not to forget the bakers of horse-bread, hostellers and herbergeours.

Marahal, Mareschal, marescallus – otherwise known as a farrier, could also appraise the value of horses. The term marshal could be one of high dignity, as in the case of the Earl Marshal of England. The term marshal is originally Germanic and means “horse-servant”. The royal marshalsea, headed by a clerk, was primarily responsible for transporting the royal household on its continual peregrinations. Accounts from 1285-6 describe the activities as “horses having to be provisioned, equipped, cared for when sick, and replaced when not restored to strength and service. Carts and other conveyances had to be maintained, manned and guarded, and new ones purchased when old ones were worn beyond repair. A small army of grooms, carters, sumpter boys and menials of the stable had to be supervised and provided with the essentials of their offices.”

In a smaller household such overall duties would fall to a man with the title of marshal. In 1356, the London marshals (the ministry of mareschalcie) submitted ordinances to the mayor and the aldermen for approval, the ordinances define their function as 'horse-shoeing and the farriery of horses, which also included health care of sick or injured horses' and take pains to distinguish marshals from smiths. From this time till the establishment of veterinary schools in the 18th and 19th centuries, the treatment of sick horses by farriers was not challenged, from this time forth however except in an informal way the farrier was to be essentially a shoeing smith.

A scheme for the examination and registration of shoeing smiths introduced by the worshipful company of farriers in 1890 and the farriers (Registration) Acts of 1975 and 1977 gave statutory backing to this change. In latter english the term farrier, was to become the norm, and it was as the 'brotherhood of Farryers of London' that the London craft in 1674 appealed for and was granted a Royal Charter, and then in 1692 was recognised by the city authorities as a livery company. Farrier and the cognate French feroum or ferroum and Latin ferrarius presumably designate a man responsible for the ferrura (shoeing) of horses – though an ordinance of 1431 which explicitly defines 'ferrones' as 'marescallos equorum' would imply a responsibility for the wider aspects of marshalsea and horse care. We must also note the Latin word 'ferrum' formed part of the name for iron workers, which did cause some confusion at times.