A History of Veganism from 1806
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Veganism from 1806
May 25, 2011 (updated July 2011)

This is a brief summary of a talk I gave at the International Vegan Festival in Malaga, Spain, June 4-12, 2011, and will also be giving at the Midlands Vegan Festival, Wolverhampton UK, October 29, 2011

1806 – Dr. William Lambe FRCP, in London, England, changed his diet at the age of 40 – and gave us the first known unambiguous statement: “My reason for objecting to every species of matter to be used as food, except the direct produce of the earth, is founded on the broad ground that no other matter is suited to the organs of man. This applies then with the same force to eggs, milk, cheese, and fish, as to flesh meat.”

1811 – John Frank Newton, a patient of Dr. Lambe, in his book 'Return to Nature' expanded Lambe’s medical ideas to include ethical values towards all animals.

1813 – Percy Bysshe Shelley (right), poet, joined a ‘vegan commune’ which alternated between Newton family homes in London and Bracknell.

1830s – Sylvester Graham (left), in Boston USA, had been promoting the ‘vegetable diet’ – generally ‘with or without’ eggs/dairy. In 1837 he exchanged letters with Dr. Lambe, and his 1839 book clearly claimed that ‘without’ was more effective for health.

1830s – Dr John Snow (right), was ‘vegan’ since reading Newton’s book when he was 17. Moved to London in 1838 and eventually achieved fame for discovering the way in cholera was spread. In 2003 British doctors voted him the greatest physician of all time.

1838 – James Pierrepont Greaves opened ‘Alcott House Academy’, a school near London run entirely consistent with the ideas proposed by Lambe and Newton. It ran for the next ten years.

1842, April – the first confirmed use of the word ‘vegetarian’ in the Alcott House journal. All other early uses were by people close to Alcott House, and all using it for what we now call ‘vegan’.

1842 June – Bronson Alcott (left), from Boston USA, already veg*n thanks to Sylvester Graham, visited Alcott House, named in honor of him and his earlier school in Boston. In 1843, with new English friends, he ran the short-lived ‘Fruitlands’ near Harvard, MA – again run on totally ethical ‘vegan’ principles.
1845-6 – Henry David Thoreau (right) lived by Walden Pond, near Concord MA, living solely on plant foods plus some fishing – but wrote about how much he regretted the fish...

1846 – William Horsell (left) moved the hydrotherapy institute from Alcott House to Northwood Villa, in Ramsgate, Kent, England. This again followed Dr. Lambe’s principles of plant food plus purified water.

1847 – The Vegetarian Society was founded at a meeting in Ramsgate, launched jointly by Alcott House and the (ovo-lacto) Bible Christian Church from Salford near Manchester. The compromise was to set the objective as merely ‘abstaining from the flesh of animals’ – and the confusion over everything else has continued ever since.

1874 – Dr. Russell Trall (left) had been running a hydrotherapy institute in New York City since 1850. This changed to exclusively plant food plus water in 1862 – and in 1874 produced the first known ‘vegan’ cookbook.

1887 – John Harvey Kellogg (right) privately removed eggs/dairy from his diet, though his books and sanitarium, in Battle Creek, Michigan, continued to use them. 40 years later he returned to using yogurt – but then discovered soy milk...

1910 – Rupert Wheldon in England, published ‘No Animal Food’, the first British ‘vegan’ cookbook. This was reprinted by Dr. Elmer Lee in New York. A 1910 article about Lee in the NY Times included the first known use of the phrase ‘plant foods’.

1909-14 – The Vegetarian Messenger, journal of The Vegetarian Society, carried much discussion about the use of eggs/dairy. There seemed to be a possibility of significant change, but all momentum was destroyed by the First World War.

1931 – Mahatma Gandhi spoke at a meeting of the London Vegetarian Society (left), making it clear that he objected to the use of milk and milk products. Such high profile support must have emboldened the minority who called themselves ‘non-dairy vegetarians’.

1944 – Donald Watson and friends coined the word ‘vegan’ and founded The Vegan Society – the first issue of their journal was subtitled ‘the journal of the non-dairy vegetarians’ – and made it clear that they had not wanted to separate from The Vegetarian Society, they just wanted a distinct section within it. Most retained their memberships of both societies, as many do today.

1947 – Watson was a speaker at the IVU World Veg Congress (right) – The Vegan Society had joined IVU soon after being founded, and has been a member ever since.
1960 The American Vegan Society was founded, joining IVU from the outset. This included a smaller group started in California as far back as 1948.

1957 – The first Indian Vegan Society joined IVU. We don’t know how long it lasted, but the new society is also prominent member.

1960-90s – many new vegan organizations were formed, and the word gradually spread.

1995 – records of printed media show a significant increase in the use of the word ‘vegan’ – this appears to have come from the rapid expansion of vegan websites, leading to a market for vegan books, especially recipes.

1997 – The IVU website started a recipe collection – agreed to be entirely vegan from the outset. We now have over 3,000 in English with more in other languages.

1998 – IVU agreed that all food at IVU Congresses would in future be completely vegan.

21st Century – most veg organizations around the world now promote veganism as the ideal, regardless of whether they are called ‘vegetarian’ or ‘vegan’.

- by 2009 more books had ‘vegan’ in the title than ‘vegetarian’.
- 2009/10 surveys in the USA showed that 66% of vegetarians exclude eggs/dairy
- by 2011 there were as many Google searches for ‘vegan’ as for ‘vegetarian’
- 22 organizations with 'vegan' in their title are now members of IVU

Will all vegetarians eventually be vegan? We have no way of knowing, but the continuing trend seems inevitable.

Footnotes, added a couple of days after the blog was posted:

- it will be seen from above that there has been a significant change towards veganism within IVU over the last 15 years. This is mostly due to the work of The Vegan Society (the original one in the UK). Such changes inevitably take time, and TVS deserves credit and respect for the manner in which they have promoted their cause - and they won't give up...

- the day after the blog was posted, I went back to the 'Truth Tester' journals edited by William Horsell at the Ramsgate Hydrotherapy Institute. The winter 1846/47 issues contain a recipe for 'Sago Pudding' - normally made with some animal products - this one ended by proudly proclaiming what can be done 'without milk, eggs or butter'. So far this is the earliest deliberately vegan recipe that I've found, and in a vegan journal. There were plenty of earlier recipes that didn't happen to need animal products, but none I've seen that deliberately substituted them. (see below)

- the question of the lack of women above was raised. There must have been some, but the men of the time didn't bother to write about them, so we don't have any details. If anything comes to light another update will be posted.

- alongside the vegan Dr. Lambe above, the founder of the ovo-lacto Bible Christian Church in 1809 was the Rev. William Cowherd... honest! Hollywood couldn't have named them better :-)
Dr. William Lambe - father of vegan nutrition, and his vegan biographer
September 20, 2011

Our understanding of vegan nutrition has come a long way in the last 200 years, but it had to start somewhere, and William Lambe (1765-1848), Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, was the first to be specific about it way back in 1809.

In 1806, age 41, Lambe was concerned about his own state of health, and changed his diet to exclusively plant foods and distilled water. The word ‘vegetable’ in those days included all types of vegetation (as in ‘animal, vegetable or mineral’), so the ‘vegetable diet’ as it was commonly known, included fruits, grains, nuts, beans etc. Most people following this diet included cow’s milk, but Dr. Lambe did not – and he kept to his strictly vegetable/vegan diet for the rest of life, still looking good near the end 41 years later - the photo right was taken not long before he died.

Amongst his many writings, Lambe left us two books of particular interest: “Reports on the Effects of a Peculiar Regimen in Scirrhous Tumours, and Cancerous Ulcers” (1809), followed by his ‘Additional Reports’, more fully titled “Water and Vegetable Diet in Consumption, Scrofula, Cancer, Asthma, and Other Chronic Diseases” (1815) – both of these were primarily reports on his own condition and self-treatment, but included case studies from some patients.

In his now famous (since I found it last year) quote on p.89-90 of the 2nd book he said: “My reason for objecting to every species of matter to be used as food, except the direct produce of the earth – as maybe seen in my last publication - is founded on the broad ground that no other matter is suited to the organs of man. This applies then with the same force to eggs, milk, cheese, and fish, as to flesh meat.” [emphasis added]

On the IVU website we now have the full text of the only known biography of Dr. Lambe (see the link below). This was written in 1873 by Edward Hare (1812-1897), who was a former Director-General of Hospitals in Bengal, India. There is currently little further known about Mr. Hare, except that in 1881 he was living in the City of Bath, and by 1891 he had become a Vice-President of the Vegetarian Society. However, from expressions of his own views in the book, it becomes clear that he too shared Dr. Lambe’s view of what we now call a ‘vegan’ diet.

William Lambe was strongly promoting the use of distilled water as the only healthy drink for humans – partly due to the awful condition of the public water supply in early 19th century England. His biographer went to some lengths to support this idea, stating at one point: “Dr. Lambe also shows that the beneficial effects of drinking milk, and especially whey, acknowledged by all the old physicians, and called ‘The Whey Cure,’ were not due to the use of these animal fluids, but to the abstinence from impure water for which these drinks were substitutes.”

Mr. Hare also says that Dr. Lambe only used small quantities even of distilled water: “He said that man was not a drinking animal, his erect form showed it. In a state of nature man could not conveniently stoop to drink out of streams, etc. – and if we lived upon fruit and vegetables we should not have thirst.” This argument against the need for any
drink at all appears from time to time among 19th century vegetarians, and was used against milk drinking in particular (note the change to ‘fruit and vegetables’ as the meaning of ‘vegetable’ was changing in the late 19th century).

Lambe’s books were widely read on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1850 the second of his books mentioned above was published in New York, with ‘notes and additions’ by Joel Shew M.D., who was a Vice-President of the new American Vegetarian Society founded the same year. The file linked below includes a link to a complete copy of that edition on Google Books.

In 1883 Howard Williams wrote his ‘Ethics of Diet’ – the first book on the history of vegetarianism, which was hugely influential and which included substantial quotes from Mr. Hare’s biography of William Lambe. However, Williams, like all vegetarian historians, simply avoided any mention of the eggs/dairy issue. It is only now that we are beginning to re-discover the significant minority within the vegetarian movement who kept to the stricter version of the ‘vegetable diet’.

For the full text of ‘The Life of William Lambe M.D.’, by E.Hare, see: www.ivu.org/history/england19a/the_life_of_william_lambe.pdf (PDF 500k) - includes link to complete original volumes by Dr. Lambe and his patient John Frank Newton.

Dr. Lambe's Rural Roots
September 28, 2011

Dr. William Lambe did his groundbreaking work on the vegan diet 200 years ago, whilst living in London, but his roots were in the countryside, where he grew up and eventually retired.

The biography I put online last week mentioned that his family’s estate was near the village of Dilwyn in Herefordshire, and with some more research I found that the estate was Henwood, quite close to the village. That is only about an hour from where I live today, so last week Hazel and I took a ride down there to look around.

There is some confusion about where William was born, but we know his father was an attorney, and that his parents married in 1762 in St. Peter’s church in the nearby city of Hereford. Their first two children were also christened there. Right is St. Peter’s today:

William was their third child, born 26th of February, 1765. One record says he was also born in St. Peter’s parish, but another says he born in the town of Warwick, some distance away. The latter is quite plausible if his father was working there at the time, and we do have later connections with the town.

Either way, we know that by 1768, when William was three years old, the family had moved to the Henwood estate near Dilwyn, presumably on his father inheriting it. Soon after they moved there Mr. Lambe snr. rebuilt the house, probably on the same site as the earlier house which had been in the family for at least a hundred years. The photo on the right is the same house as it is today, little changed.
Below is a photo I took last week from the driveway, showing the setting of the house surrounded by extensive farmland:

As a child William would have been familiar with the nearby village of Dilwyn, at least from his weekly visits to the church. Below is my photo of the village green (there is still some green off-camera to the right of the modern tarmac), on a rather dull day, with a row of cottages and the Crown Inn at the end:
Below is the village school seen from the churchyard. The cottage would have been there in William’s time, but the schoolhouse was built by the church in mid-19th century. Before that the land-owners children, like William, would have been educated at home, and the others were not educated at all.

William moved on to the Hereford Grammar School, now known as the Cathedral School and dating back to the 13th century. From there, in 1782, age 17, he went to St. John’s College, Cambridge and stayed on a few years for further medical studies. In 1790 he moved to Warwick to take over a medical practice from a doctor who was retiring. This was almost certainly through family connections, and would be consistent with William having been born in Warwick.

Whilst in Warwick he became interested in the spring water from the nearby village of Leamington. His promotion of the medicinal qualities of this water led to a huge expansion of the village, and to it eventually being dubbed ‘Royal Leamington Spa’ by Queen Victoria. A few years later Dr. Lambe added his ideas about a pure plant-food diet to the pure water, and what we now call the vegan diet got its first write up in his books. (see last week’s blog, linked below, for more about that).

In 1828 Dr. Lambe inherited the Henwood estate on the death of his older brother. He continued to live and work in London, with his son’s family living on the estate. Around 1840 he retired from his medical work, at age 75, and returned to the countryside for his last few years, eventually passing away in 1847. He was buried in the family vault inside Dilwyn village church (photo right).
Below is the interior of the church, dating from the 12th or 13th centuries, which has many memorials to the Lambe family, including all of those in the photo. One of them reads:

The remains of WILLIAM LAMBE. M.D. born in ST PETER’S PARISH, HEREFORD. He died in this Parish at HENWOOD June II [2]. MDCCCXLVII [1847]. Aged LXXXII [82].

I took a couple more photos of the church interior – first towards to the altar, with the organ on the left:

Then looking back from the altar, across the choir stalls and along the nave:

For Dr. William Lambe’s work on the vegan diet 200 years ago see: www.vegsource.com/john-davis/dr-william-lambe--father-of-vegan-nutrition-and-his-vegan-biographer.html
Shelley - the first celebrity vegan
January 5, 2011

Percy Bysshe Shelley, known as Bysshe to his friends, was the rock star of his day - glamorous, controversial, fought over by teenage girls, loathed by their parents, and died dramatically before he was thirty.

At times he was also vegan, lived in a hippy-style commune, wrote about 'free love', had friends who were nudists, probably joining in that too, and was thrown out of Oxford University soon after he arrived.

All of that was 200 years ago, and during the last ten years of his short life he wrote what was arguably some of the finest poetry in the English language.

In 1811, when he was 19, Shelley married 16 year old Harriet Westbrook. They moved around for a while and were in Dublin in March 1812 when Harriet wrote to some friends that they had adopted the 'Pythagorean system'. Shelley was a classics scholar and had probably read the original texts in ancient Greek and Latin suggesting that Pythagoras had been lacto-vegetarian. Later that year they returned to London where Shelley met John Frank Newton, author of 'Return to Nature' and a patient of Dr. William Lambe, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and author of the 'Water and Vegetable Diet' - both of them advocating what we now call veganism, in ethics as well as in diet. Shelley soon joined them, as testified by his friend William Hogg in his later biography.

This was decades before any dairy or egg substitutes were commonly available, so it must have been hard for them to adapt, but the accounts show they were serious in their attempts. Shelley's first major poem 'Queen Mab' published 1813, included as a preface his essay on 'A Vindication of Natural Diet', and in the poem the lines:

. . . No longer now
He slays the lamb that looks him in the face,
And horribly devours his mangled flesh;

In 1814 Shelley left Harriet, now 19 and expecting their second child, and eloped with 16 year old Mary Godwin who later became the 2nd Mrs Shelley after Harriet committed suicide. Not surprisingly all this didn't go down too well in respectable society of the day and they had to spend most of their time living overseas.

During the summer of 1816 Shelley and Mary met up with fellow poet Lord Byron and a doctor friend on the shores of Lake Geneva, Switzerland. They shared a cottage for a while but the weather turned bad, and as there wasn't much on TV in 1816 they decided that each of the four should think of a story to tell the following night. With two of the four being Shelley and Byron, something special might have been expected - but it didn't come from them. It was Mary, a few days before her 19th birthday, who told a story a man who created life - and she called him Dr. Frankenstein.
In 1818 the full story was published as a novel, and the rest is history, with it being generally credited today as the first of a new genre - science fiction. But what is not so well known is that the nameless 'monster' (a gentle giant until provoked) that Dr. Frankenstein created was also vegan. At one point in the story he says: "My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment." The illustration of the monster, above, is from the 1831 edition of the book, rather different to the Hollywood version 100 years later.

Shelley and Mary ended up living in Italy, where he drowned at sea in 1822 - right is a later imagined painting of his funeral pyre lit by Byron on the beach, and far right a portrait of Mary in later life.

During the rest of the 19th century Shelley's reputation was somewhat whitewashed by the Victorians who liked some of his poetry but not his lifestyle. In 1886 George Bernard Shaw became secretary of the Shelley Society in London, and used his first meeting to announce: "I am, like Shelley, an atheist, a socialist, and a vegetarian." Shaw's close friend, Henry Salt, then wrote a series of articles on Shelley over the next few years, putting the record straight.

For full details of the Shelleys, with links to all original sources, see www.ivu.org/history/shelley
Taking the Waters - transatlantic pioneer plant-food doctors
April 5, 2011

Dr. William Lambe FRCP (1765-1847)

Back in 1815, in London, Dr William Lambe, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (FRCP), published his 'Water and Vegetable Diet' in which he stated: "My reason for objecting to every species of matter to be used as food, except the direct produce of the earth, is founded on the broad ground that no other matter is suited to the organs of man. This applies then with the same force to eggs, milk, cheese, and fish, as to flesh meat."

Nothing ambiguous about that! Lambe had adopted this diet himself in 1806 as a result of his own medical condition, when he was 41, and kept to it for the rest of his life. It must have worked as he lived to be 82 – a ripe old age by early 19th century standards.

He gained initial fame in 1797 by promoting the mineral waters that made a town in the English midlands into Royal Leamington Spa. He always insisted that water should be the only drink for humans.

In his later years he was able to visit the ‘vegan’ school at Alcott House, near London, and see his principles fully put into practice.

We know that by September 1837 Dr. Lambe was exchanging letters with Sylvester Graham in America.

Rev. Sylvester Graham (1795-1851)

Sylvester Graham was promoting health foods in the Boston area in the 1830s, particularly brown whole-wheat bread. He is mostly known today for ‘Graham crackers’, though the modern version, made with white flour and sugar, is far removed from the healthy original he formulated in 1829.

The best known of his books is Lectures on the Science of Human Life (Boston, 1839). This had a series of numbered paragraphs, and #1291 says: "...though they do better on a milk and vegetable diet than one of flesh and vegetables, yet they do best when they confine themselves to a diet of pure vegetable food and pure water."

Through most of this, and his other books, he accepts the use of eggs and dairy products, merely insisting on good quality. This was a pragmatic approach as he knew he would sell very few books otherwise.

In 1849 his 'Science' was published in London by William Horsell, where it attracted a lot of interest from the larger number of British vegetarians.
William Horsell (1807-1863) and Northwood Villa

The modern Hydrotherapy revival began in Germany in the early 19th century, with the first British establishment being within Alcott House in 1842, the school near London based on Dr. Lambe’s dietary principles.

William Horsell moved that to Northwood Villa, Ramsgate, Kent at the end of 1846 – and this was the venue of the meeting which founded the world’s first Vegetarian Society on September 30, 1847.

Meanwhile Horsell published ‘Hydropathy for the People’ in 1845 – that and the hydrotherapy institute both followed Dr. Lambe’s principles, and were both what we now call vegan.

In 1850 Horsell’s book was published in the USA by Russell Trall.

Northwood Villa, Ramsgate.
Russell Trall M.D. (1812-1877)

In 1850 Sylvester Graham helped start the American Vegetarian Society, which lasted about 10 years. One of his co-founders, and a Vice-President was Russell Thatcher Trall, a naturopathic physician who ran a hydrotherapy establishment in New York.

His book of 1854 contained a lot of recipes using eggs and dairy products, but this changed in 1862. His 1874 book: ‘The hygeian home cook-book; or, Healthful and palatable food without condiments’ - stated that ‘for a dozen years’ they had left these out of the diet.

This is, so far, our first known ‘vegan’ cookbook - long before that word was invented of course.

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943)

Kellogg took a much more pragmatic approach on behalf of the Seventh Day Adventist Church – all his 50 books included the use of eggs and dairy products. The famous Battle Creek Sanitarium, also making much use of hydrotherapy, used milk products as well, especially yogurt in the later years.

But privately Kellogg had abandoned them, spending about 40 years as a ‘dietary vegan’. However his main biographer says that by 1917 he had gradually gone back to using milk products, again yogurt in particular. Then we are told he discovered soy milk.

Kellogg was in his 70s by then but made good use it, probably replacing cow’s milk to an increasing extent. Had he known about soy 50 years earlier our vegetarian history might have been different as Kellogg was undoubtedly a major influence – cornflakes with soy milk could have been the norm from the outset...
**Rupert Wheldon**

In 1910 we have the first British ‘vegan’ cookbook: “No Animal Food and Nutrition and Diet with Vegetable Recipes”, by Rupert Wheldon. The introduction included both medical and ethical reasons for the diet.

**Elmer Lee M.D.**

Wheldon’s book was soon re-published in New York by the Health Culture organization which inserted a few quotes, including: "Plant diet with butter, cream, milk, cheese, eggs, lard, fat, suet, or tallow added to it, is not vegetarian; it is mixed diet; the same in effect as if meat were used. --Elmer Lee, M.D., Editor, Health Culture Magazine."

Around the same time, November 6, 1910, the New York Times printed a report headlined: ‘**Dr. Lee pleads for better foods**’ which went into greater detail about his plant diet quoted above.

As well as ‘plant diet’ as above, that NYT report also contains our currently first known use of the phrase ‘**Plant-Foods**’ – this appears to be an American view of replacing the negative British ‘no animal food’ with a more positive view of the diet.

**Notes:**

There must have been some of this happening in Germany as well – if any German speaking historians can fill in the gaps it would be most welcome.

Russell Trall’s 1874 vegan cookbook: [www.archive.org/details/hygeianhomecookb00tral](http://www.archive.org/details/hygeianhomecookb00tral)

Vegetarian equals vegan!
July 7, 2010

The first people who called themselves 'vegetarian' were in fact vegan. This has now been established conclusively with resources not previously available.

We have now shown that until 1847 *all* uses the word 'vegetarian' came from people associated with Alcott House School, on Ham Common, south west of London. And they used it to mean a 100% plant food diet - a 'vegetarian' was simply someone who lived on vegetation. There were, of course, many other people following variations of the 'vegetable diet', most of them adding eggs/dairy products. But we can find no indication of any of them using the word 'vegetarian' before 1847.

So what was Alcott House?

The Alcott House School was opened in July 1838 by James Pierrepont Greaves, a radical educator who had discovered that Bronson Alcott had already had a similar school in Boston, USA. Greaves was sufficiently impressed to open a correspondence with Alcott and to name his school for him. Greaves had adopted the 'vegetable diet' in 1817, and Alcott in 1835, so the school used it from the outset.

In 1841 the school was re-invented as 'A Concordium, or Industry Harmony College', still in Alcott House. The earliest confirmed use of 'vegetarian' was in the April 1842 issue of their new journal, and used in a way which showed that it was already familiar, at least to readers of that journal.

In July 1842, Bronson Alcott arrived from America to stay for four months, and when he left at the end of September he took two members of the Concordium with him to found a short-lived community near Harvard - Fruitlands. He was joined there by his family, including his 10-year-old daughter, Louisa May Alcott, and they continued to follow a wholly plant-food diet. [right: Alcott House and garden - they were largely self-sufficient in fruit and veg]

So why was this research never done before?

The difference now is simply down to being able to search more than 10 million online books in a matter of seconds. In the past it required a visit to one of the great libraries, then searching thru every book to find any mention of the V word anywhere in the text, and it was rarely in the indexes. It's difficult to imagine a smaller needle in a bigger haystack.

We can now easily see who was using the word, and exactly what they meant by it, and we have found *every* use of the word up to 1847.
So why did the meaning of the word appear to change?

We know there were plenty of other people by the early 19th century who were following a - mostly - plant food diet. But we can now clearly show that NONE of them used the word 'vegetarian', in any surviving printed works, before 1847.

Foremost amongst these others was the Bible Christian Church (BCC), founded in Salford in the north of England in 1809. In 1817 some members migrated to Philadelphia, USA, and opened another branch - and were all very clearly using eggs/dairy in significant quantities.

In 1847 Alcott House promoted the idea of a Vegetarian Society, but they were struggling by then and closed in 1848. Its members continued in the positions of Secretary and Treasurer in the new society, and ran it from London for the first two or three years. Meanwhile the Salford BCC had considerable political and financial influence, and one of their members was elected as the first President of the new Society. Without them the Vegetarian Society would almost certainly have folded by 1850. They soon took over completely and moved the Society to the Manchester area, where it is still going strong today.

But they imposed their own definition of the new society: "The objects of the Society are, to induce habits of abstinence from the flesh of animals as food." - which left a lot of things that were not 'flesh', such as eggs/dairy. They didn't specifically re-define the word 'vegetarian', but the name of the society combined with that objective, and soon followed by some strongly ovo-lacto cookbooks, caused endless confusion.

Just 3 years after the Vegetarian Society was founded, in 1850, a serious London medical journal did a 22 page analysis of a typical meat diet vs the heavily eggs/dairy recipes in the new VegSoc cookbook - and concluded "...we find that the so called vegetarian positively consumes, according to his own diet-scale, as much animal food as the avowed flesh eater. ... it is not true Vegetarianism, being nothing else than the substitution of one form of Animal food for another."

The Vegetarian Society debated changing its name for the rest of the 19th century - at times considering names such as 'VEM Society' - vegetables, eggs and milk - and 'Food Reform Society', but none of these were adopted.

In the late 19th century there was still much confusion. Anna Kingsford MD, writing in the Preface to her 'Dreams and Dreams Stories' of 1886, stated: "For the past fifteen years I have been an abstainer from flesh-meats. Not a vegetarian, because during the whole of that period I have used such animal produce as butter, cheese, eggs, and milk."

Maybe we are beginning to see a return to the original, and obvious meaning of 'vegetarian' - as one who lives on vegetation. When I flew with Emirates Airlines last year there were a lot of food options, of which the three most relevant were:
1 - ovo-lacto-vegetarian
2 - lacto vegetarian
3 - vegetarian
- so if the last one is not 'ovo' or 'lacto' then what is it? It duly arrived with a sticker saying 'vegan'.

For the much longer and more detailed version of everything above, with links to all original sources, see: www.ivu.org/history/vegetarian.html
Update (Feb 2011): in the above blog I failed to mention that the Alcott House community also adopted all the same ethical values as modern day vegans. They clearly wrote that they objected to the use of animals for any purpose, not just food - one reason the Fruitlands community failed was because they refused to use horses for the hard farm work. They were totally ethical vegetarians.

Google Books appears to show some uses of the word 'vegetarian' before 1842 - however checking the original texts, instead of just looking at the scans, shows that *all* of these are scanning errors.

I was invited to expand this into a double page article for the winter 2010/11 issue of The Vegan magazine, published by The Vegan Society based in the UK. This is a PDF of the resulting article (623k): www.vegansociety.com/feature-articles/prototype%20vegans.pdf

I've also been giving an even more detailed version of this as a powerpoint lecture - available to anyone who wants to pay my expenses... :-)
Amos Bronson Alcott was an abolitionist vegan in a way that few today are emulating – in the 1830s he was taking a stand against human slavery in the USA. In some parts of the world human slavery is still very much with us of course, and I’d hope that modern day ‘abolitionist vegans’ are just as active in campaigning against that too.

Bronson also argued for women’s rights even, for a while at least, helping them in the kitchen. We know he had stopped eating meat by 1836, but it appears to have been during his visit to England in the summer of 1842 (age 42) that he became an ‘ethical vegan’ and expanded his anti-slavery views to include all non-human animals.

Soon after his return to the US, with two new English friends, he started the Fruitlands community on a 90 acre site near Harvard. No animals of course, and even refusing to use horses for slave-labor – but with tractors not yet invented, that was part of the reason it didn’t last long.

Bronson was no gradualist, he wasn’t going to wait for human equality before demanding it for the animals as well. He wanted it all and he wanted it now. He didn’t get of course, idealists never do, but that doesn’t mean the ideals are wrong. He lived long enough to see the end of slavery in the USA, though nowhere near long enough for Civil Rights, or for the women’s movement to make some progress in western countries. The animals are still waiting.

But Bronson was so far ahead of time in his attitude to non-human animals that we have to fast-forward at least a hundred years before we can clearly identify other Americans with the same views. That doesn’t necessarily mean they weren’t there, just that we don’t know about them because in such a big country it was all too easy to simply ignore the ‘extremists’.

The main reason we know so much about Bronson is because his daughter, Louisa May Alcott, age ten at Fruitlands, later wrote a book called *Little Women*. Naturally everyone wanted to know about her childhood and she obliged by writing about that too – some of it distorted by later biographers into accusations of child-abuse by her father for not feeding her meat.

We know there were many others in 19th century America who abstained from eating flesh, the first American Vegetarian Society was formed in New York in 1850. But they were dominated by medical men with only a secondary interest in animal concerns and, as far as we know, they were all strongly ovo-lacto-vegetarian.
Dr. William Alcott (Bronson’s 2nd cousin) was elected the first President of AVS. Unfortunately two recent veg historians have hopelessly muddled the two of them, one rolling William and Bronson into one person, and the other citing Bronson as AVS president. These mistakes seem to be copied by other writers and spread around the internet. Bronson had no direct involvement with the American Vegetarian Society, partly because they had adopted the form of ovo-lacto-vegetarianism promoted by the Bible Christian Church, through their branch in Philadelphia – looking forward to the ‘promised land flowing with milk and honey’ (and eggs). Not at all how Bronson saw things.

Some vegans today argue that armed with modern nutritional knowledge and faced with the horrors of factory farming and climate change - if those ovo-lacto-vegetarian pioneers could come back today they would be vegan. Maybe so, we’ll never know of course, but by the late 19th century in both England and America we do have people clearly writing that the acceptance eggs/dairy was merely a ‘first step’ in dietary reform, but it’s never easy to clearly identify any who actually took the next step.

I have seen claims that there were some American cookbooks in the late 19th and early 20th century that were entirely plant food. On the IVU website we have links to more than a dozen American ovo-lacto-vegetarian cookbooks from that period – but we haven’t yet found any that are plant-food-only [later - we have now see below].

There probably were Americans eating only plants, and going further with ethical values towards animals. But most of the vegetarian histories were written by ovo-lacto-vegetarians who just ignored that minority, at times even deliberately writing them out of history. Later vegans have just assumed this wasn’t their history so they didn’t investigate it – but scratch below the surface and it is just possible to find some.

But be warned – most of the early ‘vegans’ that are claimed on the internet turn out to be not any sort of vegetarian after all – but always worth investigating as they must have been around, we just need clear evidence.

I’ve avoided giving much of a biography of Bronson Alcott as we already have an excellent summary on the IVU website, from Karen Iacobbo in 1999, as part of the preparation for the equally excellent ‘Vegetarian America, a history’ (2004). The page below has a link to that book, and several older books by and about Bronson. Less than 1,000 words and well worth reading: www.ivu.org/history/usa19/bronson-alcott.html
Henry David Thoreau and the Roots of Plantism
March 30, 2011

Oh no, not another –ism...

Well, everyone else is inventing words... by plantism I mean eating only plants – and ideally wearing plants, growing your own plants for food and conserving plant habitats for other species – vegan self-sufficient environmentalism if you like.

And plantists do have roots – in the historical sense that is.

There have probably always been some people doing all this, but the first to give us a really eloquent account of why he was trying to do at least some of it was Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). He was a close friend of Bronson Alcott and visited the ‘vegan’ Fruitlands commune (see above). Thoreau’s version was to go solo, living alone for a couple of years, 1845/6, in a small wooden hut by a lake in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts. He left us his remarkable account as ‘Walden- or, Life in the Woods’.

Thoreau lamented the felling of so many trees around his pond for the ever expanding railway lines – “How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down?” He also mourned the reduction of many species due to the growing number of humans using guns for ‘sport’. In the mid 19th century few other people ever thought about such things.

He told us about his food too: “Like many of my contemporaries, I had rarely for many years used animal food . . . The repugnance to animal food is not the effect of experience, but is an instinct.”

And he went further about his time at Walden: “I did not use tea, nor coffee, nor butter, nor milk, nor flesh meat”. He grew beans and vegetables near his hut, and gathered wild berries and nuts, but his one weakness was fishing in Walden pond: “I did not pity the fishes nor the worms. This was habit.”

But even here he was re-thinking his habits: “I have found repeatedly, of late years, that I cannot fish without falling a little in self-respect. I have tried it again and again. I have skill at it . . . which revives from time to time, but always when I have done I feel that it would have been better if I had not fished.”

His conclusions were dramatic for a mid 19th century writer: “Whatever my own practice may be, I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals.”

Throughout this time Thoreau followed Bronson Alcott’s example of refusing to pay taxes to a government that was condoning human slavery. And like Alcott had been a few years earlier, he was arrested and spent a night in jail before his tax was paid by a well-meaning but misguided friend. Neither man wanted to be released - they wanted to stay in jail to make their point whilst continuing to refuse to pay their taxes. Thoreau later wrote his views on all this in an essay: ‘On the Duty of Civil Disobedience’.
We have suggestions that Thoreau was influenced in this by Percy Bysshe Shelley's political poem The Mask of Anarchy (1819). In 1813 Shelley had also spent some time as part of a 'vegan' community. Whilst Thoreau never directly mentions Shelley, we do know that he was very well read in English poetry so could have seen this and there do appear to be some similarities.

In 1890 another remarkable man, Henry S. Salt (1851-1939), over in England, wrote a biography of Thoreau, introducing him to people in Britain.

Not the least of those was a young law student in London – Mohandas K. Gandhi, who also then read Thoreau’s essay on non-violent protest – and told a reporter: “[Thoreau’s] ideas influenced me greatly. I adopted some of them and recommended the study of Thoreau to all of my friends who were helping me in the cause of Indian Independence. Why I actually took the name of my movement from Thoreau’s essay ‘On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,’ written about 80 years ago.” (photo 1931, Henry Salt with Gandhi).

Henry Salt had begun a promising career as a master at Eton College, the most prestigious school in England, but in 1884 he followed Thoreau’s example and ‘dropped out’. For eight years he and his wife Kate lived in a country cottage where they grew their own plant food and he began writing on a wide range of humanitarian issues, including the first book on Animals’ Rights. Salt’s total of forty books included several on Shelley, also comparing him to Thoreau.

One of his early articles, A Plea for Vegetarianism, had been picked up by the young Gandhi in 1890, convincing him to become a vegetarian for its own sake, instead of just from religious doctrine. It also led him to get to know more about Salt, Thoreau and Shelley, and their ideas about simple living in tune with nature, which in Gandhi’s case included spinning his own cotton for his clothes, and of course spending time in jail for peaceful civil disobedience.

Sketch by Henry Salt of his cottage at Tilford, where he lived with his wife Kate after resigning his post at Eton
Stephen Wisten, Salt and his Circle.
Footnote: there are claims that Thoreau was pro-hunting, but he was working through his ideas on this like everything else - and his ideas were a long way ahead for 1840s North America where shooting anything that moved was considered normal. This is from Walden: "As for fowling, during the last years that I carried a gun my excuse was that I was studying ornithology, and sought only new or rare birds. But I confess I am now inclined to think that there is a finer way of studying ornithology than this." (that sounds like the 'science research' whaling today) Thoreau was no saintly perfectionist, as can be seen from everything above, he re-thought about a lot of things, sometimes going backwards, but always thinking instead of just following the crowd.

Compare with his friend Bronson Alcott, who was a rigid perfectionist and achieved very little - without his daughter's fame, and her diaries, he would have been largely forgotten. Thoreau said he was expecting "gradual improvement", and he has been celebrated in his own right by a wide range of people with very diverse views - though the things he wanted improved got a lot worse over a long time before many others even recognised the problems... He certainly does not belong on those simplistic lists of 'famous vegetarians', but he should be celebrated by vegetarians for the direction he was trying to take, and for his broad vision of seeing the environment in a way that few of the more consistent vegetarians did at that time.

Footnote 2: eight lines from Shelley's long 'The Masque of Anarchy' (1819):

'Ye who suffer woes untold,
Or to feel, or to behold
Your lost country bought and sold
With a price of blood and gold -
'Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free -

Another section of the same poem was read by Gandhi to a gathering in India. Full text and details at: www.ivu.org/history/shelley/masque.html
Dr. John Snow - a vegan of genius
April 20, 2011

In a poll of British doctors in 2003 John Snow was voted as the greatest physician of all time. Though probably few of them would have known he was what we now call vegan.

He grew up in the North-East of England, always a tough area of the country, and still not the easiest place to be vegan today. But Snow was born almost 200 years ago, and at the age of 17, in 1830, with no apparent support from anyone else beyond a book he read, he changed his diet to plant foods and pure water (preferably distilled water, though probably more often just boiled). He kept close to that diet, and teetotalism, for the rest of his life.

His refusal to prescribe alcohol to his patients, considered routine at the time, brought even more ridicule from fellow doctors than his strange diet.

The book he found was ‘Return to Nature’, by John Frank Newton, first published in 1811. Newton was a patient of Dr. William Lambe FRCP, who had adopted a pure plant-food and water diet back in the second week of February 1806 (Lambe was very precise about these things!). In 1828 Lambe published a pamphlet which argued that the drinking water taken from the River Thames was causing illness to the people of London. He was ridiculed then ignored. We have no record that Snow ever met Newton or Lambe, but their influence was considerable.

Requirements for ‘genius’:
1 – dare to be different – argue your case even when ‘conventional wisdom’ else says the opposite.
2 – stick to it whilst being ridiculed or ignored by all the ‘experts’.
3 – eventually be proved right. This last part being rather crucial to the process!

John Snow certainly did all of those.

He moved to London in 1837 to continue his medical studies, and became particularly interested in anaesthetics. He started experimenting on himself, promoting new ideas that others dismissed, eventually succeeding to the extent of administering pain-reduction to Queen Victoria during the births of two of her children. His book on the subject became required reading. Not bad for a boy from a humble working family, but that was just the beginning.

During the 19th century the world was being rocked by cholera epidemics, starting in India but spreading across Europe and over to North America. All the top medical brains were desperately trying to find the cause, but they were getting nowhere because of their pre-conceived ideas about disease being spread by ‘vapours’ in the air.

Dr. Snow did his own research and in 1849 wrote a pamphlet showing how cholera was spread by infected drinking water (just as Dr. Lambe had predicted 21 years earlier). Some other doctors ridiculed him, most just ignored him.

During the next London cholera epidemic in the 1850s he carried out large scale research into which houses were supplied by the two main water companies – virtually inventing the science of epidemiology in the process. The companies refused to help
because of their commercial interests, so he walked around all the affected areas, knocking on doors to find out which houses were supplied by which company. He then wrote an expanded version of his pamphlet showing that all the houses affected by cholera were being supplied by the same water company.

He also focused on a particular outbreak in Soho, London, and narrowed the source down to one street-pump. With some difficulty he persuaded the local authorities to remove the handle.

The medical establishment still ignored him, still being convinced that it was something in the air. A couple of friends corroborated his research from their own investigations, but they were ignored too. In 1868, 10 years after Snow died, another cholera epidemic hit London – this time his friends were finally able to prove that he (and Lambe) had been right all along.

Unfortunately Snow's self-experimentation on anaesthetics damaged his health, resulting in kidney failure and an early death in 1858. The other doctors around at the time didn’t understand renal failure either, and naturally blamed all his ill-health on both his strange diet – and even his refusal to drink alcohol! There are some anecdotes that towards the end he gave in to the demands of other doctors and was persuaded to take some wine, and even a little meat. The real cause of his death was only understood later.
The Truth Tester was first published in England in 1845, as a temperance (anti-alcohol) journal.

In August 1846 a new editor, William Horsell, based near London, took over and incorporated 'The Healthian', first published in 1842 by the strictly vegan Alcott House Academy.

In his first introduction to the combined journal the new editor stated it would advocate "...entire abandonment of alcoholic drinks, animal-food, tea and coffee, drugs, tobacco and snuff, and condiments".

Following are some extracts and comments from the next two years:

September 1846 - RECIPE FOR A PLAIN BIRD’S NEST SAGO PUDDING (the earliest known deliberately vegan recipe)

Soak half-a-pint of sago in three pints of water, stirring it occasionally until it is uniformly swelled. Pare and core ten or twelve apples, fill the holes in the centre with sugar, and put them, without piling them one over the other, in a nappy or pudding dish, of such size that the sago will just cover them. The sago, which may be seasoned with spice or sugar to suit the palate, may then be poured on, and the pudding baked until the apples are quite soft. It may be made thicker or thinner at pleasure, by using more or less sago. We sometimes boil the sago before baking, and pour it while hot upon the apples. We think the pudding no better, except that it may be baked much quicker. It must be set in a cold pure air when done, and may be eaten cold or hot.

Who ever heard of a pudding without butter, eggs, or milk? Try it – try it; and may you like it as well, and eat less of it than does A VEGETABLE EPICURE.

May 1847 - A letter from a reader in Hampshire suggested: "... has seemed to me desirable ... namely the occasional or periodical meeting together of vegetarians - or the formation of societies for mutual instruction and encouragement."

This was the first time anyone had proposed forming a Vegetarian Society, and it was quickly followed up by William Oldham, the business manager of Alcott House Academy (at this time the word ‘vegetarian’ meant what we now call ‘vegan’). In the June 1847 issue the lead article was a letter from Mr. Oldham announcing a 'Physiological Conference' at Alcott House on Thursday the 8th of July. We were told later that about 50 people attended.

By 1847 Alcott House was struggling financially, and eventually closed the following year. Meanwhile they had made contact with the Bible Christian Church in Salford, near Manchester, which included some very wealthy and influential people and banned the eating of animal flesh. All very useful to Alcott House at that point – but with the problem that the Bible Christians did not ban the use of eggs and dairy products, making things awkward for the cash-strapped, but strictly vegan, Alcott House.

August 1847 - THE VEGETARIAN TABLE

This was an article, apparently by Hannah Bond, the matron of Alcott House, giving full details of the food served at the ‘Physiological Conference’. She included a ‘Herb Pie’ made with eggs and milk, stating that it: "... participates to some degree of the animal
secretions, though not of their substance, it is well qualified to become a popular dish in helping passengers over the stream from the carnivorous to the herbivorous region.”

We can almost hear Hannah gritting her teeth as she accommodated the preference of their wealthy new friends. But it didn’t work, the Bible Christians never did get more than half-way across the stream to veganism.

A second meeting was held on September 30, 1847, at the Hydropathic Hospital in Ramsgate, Kent, which was managed by William Horsell. During this the world’s first Vegetarian Society was formally launched, with its objective being merely to ‘abstain from the flesh of animals’.

The Truth Tester included occasional viewpoints from eggs/dairy users and even meat-eaters, but the editorial emphasis was clear, as can be seen in a letter from a British reader in India, in the November 1847 issue:

“Sir, - I am a subscriber to the Truth-Tester, and a vegetarian. I address you from this distant part of the world, to enquire whether you know of any such work as a treatise on domestic cookery, for the use of those who confine themselves strictly to a vegetable regimen? . . . I have seen a book on ‘Vegetable Cookery, by a Lady,’ and suppose it to have been published under the patronage or countenance of the Society of Bible Christians. But it recommends the use of eggs, milk, butter, and all manner of injurious spices, all of which are known by pure vegetable-eaters to be hurtful to human health and happiness. What I wish to know is, whether there be any work on the subject for the use of exclusive vegetarians in the strictest sense? . . . If there be no such work, I think there should be, and a fitter person than the editor of the Tester could not be found, perhaps to cause one to be written. . . Calcutta, June 23, 1847.”

The lady who wrote the cookbook was Martha Brotherton, wife of Joseph Brotherton who was the Member of Parliament for Salford, a very prominent Bible Christian, and chairman of the meeting that founded the Vegetarian Society.

No reply to the letter was printed. By the time it was published, the editor, William Horsell, still in the London area, was also the Secretary of the new Vegetarian Society – and James Simpson, the wealthiest of the Bible Christians, was the first President.

Within a couple of years the cracks in this uneasy alliance split completely. Simpson moved all operations of the Vegetarian Society to the Manchester area, where it has been based ever since.
The Curious Affair of The Vegetarian Advocate (1848-50)

In September 1848 the pro-vegan journal previously known as The Truth Tester was renamed as The Vegetarian Advocate. The editor and publisher, William Horsell in London, was also the first Secretary of the one-year-old Vegetarian Society, but this was a privately published journal which reflected some uneasy compromises within the new society.

In 1849 the society’s President started publishing The Vegetarian Messenger from Manchester, and for the next year the two journals were effectively in competition. The Advocate ceased in August 1850, and Mr. Horsell stepped down as Secretary.

The compromise was the usual one – the idea for the Vegetarian Society had come from the ‘vegans’ at Alcott House and Mr. Horsell’s Hydropathic Hospital, both near London; but the only way it could survive was with the considerable support of the strongly ‘ovo-lacto’ Bible Christian Church in Salford, near Manchester. William Horsell accepted the compromise on becoming secretary, and the first issue of the Advocate dutifully reported the banquet at the first AGM – including full details of the omelets and cheesecakes. But he couldn’t resist slipping in the alternatives.

October 1848 Advocate, p.39, included an article on diet and cookery (probably by his wife, Elizabeth), stating:

“. . . Pound cakes and tea-cakes are also extremely good made with oil (instead of butter and eggs), and cheese-cakes are well imitated by means of mashed potatoes mixed with oil and sugar put into a crust . . . a very good and nutritious diet may be obtained from them [vegetables] without animal substance of any kind, or of eggs, milk and butter.”

We have no record of the response from the President, but nothing like this appeared again in the Advocate for almost a year. However, when the Messenger started appearing from Manchester, Mr. Horsell seems to have decided to more actively promote his own views, and his other publications, in his own journal.

May 1850 Advocate, p.110:

“On Tuesday evening, the 2nd of April, a Vegetarian entertainment was given by Mr. Horsell . . . The treat was one in its nature purely Vegetarian. The repast consisted of barley, sago and apple, and carrot puddings, made according to the recipes in the Penny Domestic Assistant, Nos. 54, 55, and 37, without animal products. “

The ‘Domestic Assistant’ was edited by Mrs. Elizabeth Horsell, who was also active in the movement in her own right. But they made a small concession to some of their guests: “This was followed by barley pudding made with milk.” (the italics were his).

July 1850, Advocate, p. 140, a letter from a reader:

“Sir.- Several of your correspondents appear to be anxious to adopt ... a strict vegetarian diet; and, unfortunately for themselves find that their principle of not destroying animal life for the use of man, is ever and anon being assailed by the shoemaker, the harness-maker, the bookbinder, the furrier, the bed-maker, the brush-maker, the oilman, the chandler, the druggist, the bone-worker, the bug-killer, the rat-catcher, and fiddler, besides hundreds of others working and using an immense quantity of animal substances that have depended on animal life for their growth. I would ask you whether the vegetarians do not render themselves ridiculous by asserting a principle as a rule of action, which they can only maintain by a diet of purely vegetable matter; and not that which embraces the eggs of fowls largely, in omelets, cakes, and puddings...” [bold added - continued at some length referring with equal concern to butter, cheese and milk.]

At this point we get an intervention from another London journal, snappily titled: “The British and foreign medico-chirurgical review or quarterly journal of practical medicine and surgery”. The July 1850 issue carried a 22 page review of the new cookbook published by the Vegetarian Society – all very heavily laden with eggs and dairy produce. They concluded:

“...we find that the so called vegetarian positively consumes, according to his own diet-scale, as much animal food as the avowed flesh eater . . . it is not true Vegetarianism, being nothing else than the substitution of one form of Animal food for another.”

William Horsell had a background in the medical industry, and was now a publisher, all in the London area. It is tempting to wonder how much contact he had with the publishers of this particular London medical journal. They certainly expressed his own views very clearly . . .

The next issue of The Vegetarian Advocate, August 1850, was a mere four pages, and was the last available to us. The editorial said it would change to fortnightly, and
appealed for more advertisers. There is a record of some ‘supplements’ over the next few months, but we do not have copies of them.

But Horsell went out with a flourish, printing a rather long and convoluted article by the American, Sylvester Graham, entitled ‘Butter and Cheese’. Not surprisingly arguing against the use of these products.

The last issue also included a brief report from the Vegetarian Society for 1849-50, signed by the officers including William Horsell, secretary, still running the Society from his office in London up to July 1850. It appears that he was no longer secretary after that, and the Society’s office was moved to the Manchester area, where it has remained ever since.

We know that William Horsell continued publishing books on veg-related topics up to 1859, some written by his wife, Elizabeth. In 1856 he was apparently at the RSPCA AGM in London, arguing that the society should embrace vegetarianism, 150 years later they still have not. Mr. Horsell died in 1863 and his widow apparently went on to open a vegetarian girls’ boarding school. Further research on exactly what she fed them would be of interest...
London Vegetarian Association, 1850s – the world’s first ‘vegan society’

There are always two main problems in researching vegan history in the 19th century – the word ‘vegan’ did not exist, and most of the records were published by ovo-lacto-vegetarians who avoided the contentious issue of eggs/dairy. So we have to do a lot of careful reading, especially between the lines...

The first secretary of the Vegetarian Society in 1847 was William Horsell who was a prominent ‘vegan’ running the Society from his London office. He came into inevitable conflict with the strongly ‘ovo-lacto’ president, James Simpson in Manchester.

In September 1849 Simpson began publishing the Vegetarian Messenger, in direct competition with Horsell’s Vegetarian Advocate, and in the summer of 1850 Simpson won. Horsell stepped down as secretary and his journal ceased.

But wasn’t the end of Mr. Horsell… the new Society had been encouraging members in towns and cities across the UK to form local committees, and London duly responded. The extract below is from Fifty Years of Food Reform, by Charles Forward in 1897, p.32:

“On November 6th, 1849, a meeting of London Vegetarians was convened at Aldine Chambers . . . . The meeting was adjourned to November 12th, at Aurora Villa, Hampstead, when Mr. Turley occupied the chair, and it was resolved that a local committee should be formed in the Metropolis, consisting of Messrs. Viettinghoff, Wiles, Hodgson, G. Dornbusch, Turley, Edwards, Uempleby, King, Evans, Pratt, Reed, Viessieux, and James Salsbury; Mr. Horsell being treasurer, and Mr. J. Shirley Hibberd, secretary.

“...Mr. Dornbusch had adopted Vegetarianism about 1843, and was an abstainer from tea, coffee, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs of every kind. Mr. Dornbusch’s daughter was married to Mr. W. L. Beurle, an active Vegetarian, and one of the prominent workers in the movement against compulsory vaccination.”

Getting precise details is never easy, but we do know that several of the committee, and other leading members, had been connected with the Alcott House Academy which ran from 1838 to 1848 close to London, and which had been responsible for all known uses of the word ‘vegetarian’ before 1847. And in Alcott House ‘vegetarian’ was in all respects what we now call ‘vegan’. The above references to abstention from tea and coffee were typical of Alcott House (anti-vaccination was partly because of the egg whites used in the vaccine).

With the local committees underway the national Vegetarian Society began encouraging local groups to use the term ‘Association’ to avoid confusion. So in 1852 the London group announced
that they were now the ‘London Vegetarian Association’. But these were branches of the national society, not independent groups.

The Vegetarian Messenger (VM) began printing extensive reports from these Associations, usually running to many pages of speeches, and often mentioning the meals. At the end of 1854 we have some contrasting accounts, all from VM, Volume 5:

p.81: “The monthly meeting of the [London] Association was held on Thursday, September 7th, at the Vegetarian Depot, 492, New Oxford Street. A crowded assembly of ladies and gentlemen enjoyed a repast of the fruits of the season, consisting of pears, apples, grapes, etc., and a supply of wheat-meal bread, oat-cakes, and buns.” [The Vegetarian Depot was run by William Horsell and his partner as a book, journal and pamphlet publishing and distribution base.]

p.84: [a further comment about the same meeting] “Indeed the fruits of the earth have something so pleasant in them that they must be acceptable, and if they were used more, the beauty of the Vegetarian diet would sooner be appreciated.” [this was a thinly veiled sideswipe at the egg/dairy eaters – if the comment had been too obvious it would never have been printed in the VM]

p.113 [the meeting of October 5th]: “…almond, currant, and lemon syrups in iced water, formed very agreeable beverages.” [they never used tea or coffee]

All these reports from London are in stark contrast with the Associations in the cities of the north of England. This one from the Leeds Vegetarian Association meeting of October 17 is typical:

p.116: “…a delightful repast consisting of tea, milk, brown and white bread, biscuits, plum-cake, moulded rice, with preserves, barley, pudding, apples and pears.” [the limited ‘fruits of the earth’ seemingly something of an afterthought]

The activities of the London Vegetarian Association were not going down at all well with the President in Manchester. It has to be taken into account that the majority of the Vegetarian Society members were in the north of England, and most of the leaders were closely connected with the Bible Christian Church. They did not merely accept the use of eggs/dairy/honey, they actively promoted it as God’s given food – as in ‘the promised land flowing with milk and honey’ (Exodus 3:8). We still see something similar today from some Hindus in India who regard cow’s milk as sacred, and therefore see vegans as ‘heretics’, treating them with some hostility.

The differences came to a head in early 1856, when William Horsell was elected secretary of LVA. James Simpson responded by replacing Horsell with a ‘local secretary’ of his own choice, more loyal to the Manchester viewpoint.

In a letter dated 5th May 1856, Simpson expressed his concerns that Horsell would bring the vegetarian movement: “…under the imputations and objections which ought carefully to be
avoided.” Referring to his action of replacing Horsell: “... any steps taken by the association at all unfavourable to the general interest of the movement being thus somewhat modified, as far as our control of the public influence of Vegetarianism in London will permit.” [quoted from ‘Of Victorians and Vegetarians’ by James Gregory, 2007, p.48]

Exactly what happened after that does not appear to have been recorded by anyone, but the London Vegetarian (i.e. vegan) Association seems to have soon fizzled out in disarray. A few years later a new London group opted out completely, but that’s another story...

Further notes from VM: In its first five volumes, the Vegetarian Messenger only twice commented directly on the eggs/dairy issue. The works of the American Sylvester Graham (right) were being published in England by William Horsell from his Vegetarian Depôt in London.

In the very first article of the first issue of VM (Vol.1, p.2, Sept. 1849) there was a mention of Sylvester Graham with an oblique reference to his ‘simple’ diet. The two-page article went on to make it clear the VM saw eggs/dairy as an integral part of vegetarianism. The following summer saw the final issue of Horsell’s Vegetarian Advocate, which included a two page article by Graham, arguing against butter and cheese.

VM made no further comment until late 1854 - Vol.V., p.4:

“Mr. Graham, in his Science of Human Life, has been the leading advocate of the adoption of the Vegetarian system in dependence upon fruits, farinaceous [starchy] substances, and vegetable products alone, without the addition of animal substances, such as milk, butter, eggs, or cheese ...” [they don’t seem to have been aware that Graham was heavily influenced in this by Dr. William Lambe from London, in his book of 1815.]

The VM claimed the Vegetarian Society took no view either way, leaving it for individuals to decide, ‘however...’ and they followed with a two page article by John Smith from Yorkshire (northern England), author of the most popular vegetarian diet book of the day. He warned against eliminating all animal products on various health grounds, ultimately seeing it as a risk of “... Vegetarian principles brought into disrepute.”

On page 76 of the same volume (later in 1854) the VM printed an article on ‘The Designation of the Society’. This acknowledged the confusion around the word ‘vegetarian’, without being very specific, and threw out the idea of replacing the word with ‘Dietetic Reform’, so potentially becoming the ‘Dietetic Reform Society’. This appears to have received no response at the time, but 20 years later it was London that took up that idea. But that is also part of the next story....
The Vegetus Myth

June 1, 2011

You’ve all read it somewhere: "The word vegetarian has nothing to do with vegetables, it was derived from the Latin 'vegetus' meaning whole, fresh, lively, vigorous” etc...

Whilst all the dictionaries simply suggest the derivation as 'vegetable+arian'. Most of us never really believed the 'vegetus' myth, but it was impossible to disprove it – until last year.

The issue arose because by the late 19th century the origins of the V word had already been lost, even though we now know it was first used by people closely associated with Alcott House, near London, around 1840 (see the footnote for full details of last year’s research) – and the originators did indeed see themselves as just vegetable eaters. In the early 19th century the word 'vegetable' simply meant any type of plant food, including fruits, grains etc.. Over the last 150 years the meaning has reduced to just certain types of plants.

But the origins of 'vegetarian' had been lost, and in his 1906 book 'The Logic of Vegetarianism', Henry Salt wrote:

No-one has a better right to speak on this matter than Professor J.E.B. Mayor, the great Latin scholar, and he stated that, looking at the word etymologically, "vegetarian” cannot mean “an eater of vegetables.” It is derived from vegetus, “vigorous,” and means, strictly interpreted, “one who aims at vigour.” Mind I am not saying that the originators of the term "vegetarian” had this meaning in view . . .

Mayor was a Professor of Latin at Cambridge and, from the mid 1880s, the President of the Vegetarian Society. He didn’t invent the 'vegetus’ idea, but in his dual positions he was naturally taken seriously and it caught on. This was a convenient solution to the problem of eggs/dairy not being vegetables (plant foods), but it is fairly obvious that even Salt, himself a later Vice-President, was dubious about it.

Vegetarian can equally be seen as derived from the late Latin 'vegetabile’ – meaning plant – as in Regnum Vegetabile /Plant Kingdom. Hence vegetable, vegetation – and vegetarian. But it’s very unlikely that the originators went through all that either – they really did just join ‘vegetable+arian’, as the dictionaries have said all along.

Of course words change over time, and dictionaries do not decide the meanings of words, they merely reflect common usage.

The classic example of change is the word ‘gay’ – which some younger people today might not even know used to mean just ‘happy’. Back in the 1970s I did a lot of sailing with a friend who had restored a 1930s boat, and he refused to change the name from its original ‘The Gay Lady’ – which brought a few comments from other passing sailors...

So 'vegetarian' today means whatever most people use it to mean – and in the west it has become synonymous with ‘vegetable-egg-and-milk eater’ (at one time called the VEM diet – vemetarian??), or in India just vegetable-and-milk.
Changing common usage is extremely difficult. And as much as some of us today would like to change this one back we are now up against all the supermarket products labelled a 'suitable for vegetarians' when many (but not all of course) contain eggs and dairy products. Maybe we'll get back to the original meaning one day, but it certainly won't be easy.

Meanwhile, whatever it now means, it definitely had nothing to do with 'vegetus' – that was just a myth, and if you see anyone claiming it, send them this blog!

Footnote: for full details of the research into the origins of 'vegetarian' see: www.ivu.org/history/vegetarian.html
Gandhi - and the launching of veganism
March 16, 2011

Gandhi is not the first name that vegans might think of as helping to launch the movement, and yet he did, on November 20, 1931, in London to be precise. He didn’t call it ‘vegan’ of course, but it wasn’t long before others came up with the word to describe what he was talking about.

We need to go back a bit – in 1888 the London Vegetarian Society split from the original UK society, based in Manchester, to form a second national group. In 1891 Gandhi was a law student in London and joined their committee for a while, later describing this in some detail in his autobiography.

On leaving India the young Gandhi had made a religious vow to his mother not to eat meat while he was in London, and he kept to it with great difficulty. One day he found a vegetarian restaurant and on the way in picked up a booklet by Henry Salt entitled A Plea for Vegetarianism (1885) which persuaded Gandhi that being vegetarian was important in its own right – and in which Salt wrote: "...even dairy produce is quite unnecessary".

Salt’s next book, in 1892: Animals’ Rights, Considered in Relation to Social Progress is generally recognised today as groundbreaking.

In 1931 Gandhi, now world-famous for his non-violent resistance in India, went to London to meet the government, and while he was there agreed to give a talk for the London Vegetarian Society, with the title of ‘The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism’.

The photo on the right is Gandhi at that meeting, next his old friend Henry Salt who had founded the Humanitarian League and written 40 books to promote his ethical ideals. By 1931 Gandhi wanted something different, after some opening remarks he said:

"Forty years ago I used to mix freely with vegetarians. . . . . . I notice also that it is those persons who became vegetarians because they are suffering from some disease or other - that is from purely the health point of view - it is those persons who largely fall back. I discovered that for remaining staunch to vegetarianism a man requires a moral basis.”

Whether Gandhi was statistically correct in this claim is still the subject of much debate today. But he wanted to go further:

"I would give up milk if I could, but I cannot. I have made that experiment times without number. I could not, after a serious illness, regain my strength unless I went back to milk. That has been the tragedy of my life. But the basis of my vegetarianism is not physical, but moral. If any said that I should die if I did not take beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice, I would prefer death. That is the basis of my vegetarianism.”

Milk drinking a ‘tragedy’ - and this to an audience of mostly ovo-lacto-vegetarians. In his autobiography Gandhi says he gave up milk in 1912 (in South Africa) but six years later contracted dysentery (back in India) and was reluctantly persuaded to take goat’s milk, which he then did on and off for life, but he never returned to cow’s milk (a significant distinction in India) - soy milk was still largely unknown outside of East Asia at that time.
He also wrote elsewhere: "**Milk is an animal product and cannot by any means be included in a strictly vegetarian diet** . . . I am convinced that in the vast vegetable kingdom there must be some kind, which while supplying those necessary substances that we derive from milk and meat is free from their drawbacks, ethical and other." (source below).

But Gandhi had been just warming up in this talk to the London Vegetarian Society, finally making his point:

". . . the only basis for having a vegetarian society and proclaiming a vegetarian principle is, and must be a moral one."

But only a few years earlier in his 1925 autobiography Gandhi described an issue that arose back in 1891, while he was on the LVS committee. He objected to action against a particular member because: " . . . it had nothing to do with the declared object of the Society, which was simply the promotion of vegetarianism and not of any system of morality."

He knew very well that all Vegetarian Societies kept the diet itself as their core function, and would not discriminate against any members just because they had different reasons for adopting the diet.

And yet he clearly wanted something which would bring together those who were motivated by morality, and who shared his objection to dairy products (and eggs of course). His talk was published in full in the various vegetarian journals where it was widely read by the minority of members who had always kept to their ethically-based plant-only diet. Gandhi certainly didn’t invent that concept, but such outspoken support from a major world figure, with Henry Salt by his side, must have boosted their confidence enormously.

Within a few years they were arguing for a distinct ethics/morality based ‘non-dairy’ section within the Vegetarian Society, but with slow communications, and the 2nd World War intervening, it took until 1944 for that proposal to be rejected. They responded by creating a new society, on exactly the lines that Gandhi had proposed - inventing the word ‘vegan’ to name it.

- See also: ‘The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism’ – a compilation of articles by Gandhi, including the full text of the talk above, some others originally in Hindi, translated and published in 1959 - with the first section very specific about milk and eggs (PDF 144k): www.ivu.org/history/gandhi/the_moral_basis_of_vegetarianism.pdf
- Much more about Gandhi and vegetarianism at: www.ivu.org/history/gandhi
- More about Henry Salt at: www.ivu.org/history/salt
- Salt in turn was influenced by, and wrote several books about, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, see above.

The photo below shows the 1931 meeting coming together, just before Gandhi spoke (no chairs...) The December 1931 issue of Vegetarian News (London) printed the full text of Gandhi’s talk, along with a descriptive article which stated that about 500 were present and that Henry Salt also spoke:
The Invention of the Vegans
March 31, 2010

The word 'vegan' was invented in November 1944 by Donald Watson in England. But the origins are not how many vegans today might imagine.

We know there were definitely groups of people in both Britain and America, as far back as 1806, which avoided the use of any animal products for food, clothing or labor. There may have been some earlier but precise details are rarely recorded as they had no specific word to describe themselves.

By the mid-20th century there were a number of members of the Vegetarian Society in the UK who wanted to form a distinct section, within the Society, of 'non-dairy vegetarians'. This was rejected by the Society as being too divisive, but in the end it was even more divisive as those promoting the idea were left with little choice but to form a separate society. Watson simply took the beginning and end of 'vegetarian' - and the world's first Vegan Society was born, initially with just 25 members.

Their journal was called 'The Vegan News (Quarterly Magazine of the Non-Dairy Vegetarians)' - and the very first edition, November 1944, is on the IVU website at: www.ivu.org/history/europe20b/vegan_news_1.pdf

In it, Watson proposes the word 'Vegan' and says "Should we adopt this, our diet will soon become known as a VEGAN diet."

The idea spread further and sooner than they might have thought - by 1948 we have a record that Dr. Catherine Nimmo and Rubin Abramowitz formed a Vegan Society in California which ran until 1960. Unfortunately we have no further details, so if anyone reading this can tell us more, please do so!

Meanwhile the British group had joined IVU (International Vegetarian Union, of which I'm now the manager), and Donald Watson spoke on 'Veganism' at the 1947 IVU World Vegetarian Congress.

Over those first few years there was much discussion about the definition of the new word. Initially it was formally just about diet, but new rules were adopted by the Vegan Society in 1951. This went much further than mere 'non-dairy':

"The object of the Society shall be to end the exploitation of animals by man;" and "The word veganism shall mean the doctrine that man should live without exploiting animals."

They continued: "The Society pledges itself in pursuance of its object to seek to end the use of animals by man for food, commodities, work, hunting, vivisection and all other uses involving exploitation of animal life by man."

But . . . it is not clear whether the group in California agreed to all this, or were even initially aware of it. It is possibly a result of this that there has always been a significant group of 'dietary vegans' in the USA, whilst others regard themselves as 'ethical vegans'. The British Vegan Society, and many Americans, do not accept the distinction, insisting that ethics are an integral part of the definition. But it is always difficult to argue against common usage of any words.

The next major development was the founding of the American Vegan Society in 1960, and that is still very active today at: www.americanvegan.org (hosted by VegSource.com). From the outset this group followed the same definition as the British Vegan Society, and has also been a member of IVU since it started.
1981 saw the first International Vegan Festival, held in Denmark. These have continued roughly every two years in many European countries as well as California, Australia, India and Brazil. For full details see: www.ivu.org/veganfest/history

The use of the word Vegan has expanded dramatically in the last 30 years, and there are now Vegan Societies in most parts of the world. To find these and other Vegan resources just use the database at www.ivu.org

Donald Watson, the man who invented the word, was vegetarian from 1924, then 'non-dairy' from 1940 (inventing 'vegan' in November 1944). He died in 2005 at the grand age of 95. The photo shows him in later life reading his first issue of 'Vegan News' (Picture by Joe Connolly - Veg News)

World Vegan Day is celebrated on November 1 each year in recognition of his invention.

More details of the origins of The Vegan Society (the British group has never added 'UK' to its name) and its membership of IVU can be found at: www.ivu.org/history/societies/vegansoc.html

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**Vegans are Vegetarians too**

March 2, 2011

The man who invented the word ‘vegan’ in 1944 was very clear that this was a part of the vegetarian movement, and Donald Watson remained clear about that up to his death in 2005, at the grand age of 95.

In recent years some vegans have tried to claim that veganism is completely different to vegetarianism, sometimes with considerable hostility to other vegetarians – Watson would certainly be turning in his grave at that. Some extracts:

**Vegan News** – subtitled: Quarterly Magazine of the Non-dairy Vegetarians - issue 1, November 1944, written by Donald Watson:

"... we shall, of course, say strongly why we condemn the use of dairy produce and eggs... there need be no animosity between ourselves and the 'lactos'. We all accept that lacto-vegetarianism has a well appointed place in dietary evolution... though our friends the lacto-vegetarians may reject our ideas if they wish, we hope they will not reject us for stating them."
THE VEGAN WAY OF LIFE – by Fay K. Henderson, Secretary of The Vegan Society, in The Vegetarian (an independent journal) – issue 1, Spring 1947:

"The word Vegan has been brought into use since the formation of The Vegan Society in November, 1944, and it denotes a person who abstains from using animal products as food. Veganism is actually vegetarianism carried logically to a further stage."

The International Vegetarian Union was re-convened in 1946 after the war years, and The Vegan Society promptly joined.

VEGANISM – a talk given at the 11th IVU World Vegetarian Congress, July 1947:
"Mr. DONALD WATSON (Leicester), said that the vegan believed that if they were to be true emancipators of animals they must renounce absolutely their traditional and conceited attitude that they had the right to use them to serve their needs." [beyond just food...]

Photo right: Watson front row middle. His co-founder Elsie Shrigley was in another part of the big group photo at the 1947 vegetarian congress. Immediately behind Watson is the President of the UK Vegetarian Society.

VEGAN VALUES by Fay K. Henderson, VeganSoc Secretary, in The Vegetarian, issue 4, Winter 1947:

"There has been much conjecture as to the origin of the word VEGAN and its meaning. . . in the first instance it was an attempt to get beyond the rather negative phrase "non-dairy vegetarian" . . . being both the beginning and the end yet implying hopefully that what starts as vegetarian may finish as vegan."

[Ms. Henderson then explained how the group originally wanted to remain within the Vegetarian Society, as a non-dairy section, but this was not agreed so a separate society was reluctantly formed.]

". . . The Society has grown steadily in three years to a membership of about five hundred individuals . . . and has recently joined the International Vegetarian Union."

". . . It is a matter of some concern and regret that the modern tendency among reform groups is to break away from main societies and work independently for some slightly varying ideal. . . . This condition must be remedied if Vegetarianism is to develop the full force of its revolutionary powers. The closest co-operation and unity is therefore essential."

SHOULD THE VEGETARIAN MOVEMENT BE REFORMED? by Donald Watson in The Vegetarian, Spring 1948:

"The movement should grant to the individual the right to judge how best to meet each personal problem as it arises, and there should be no inferior section reserved for those who cannot live consistently according to the movement's definition. Loyalty cannot be measured merely by the standard of consistent practice attained, nor can a person's value to the cause be assessed in this way. Difficulties are greater for some than for others."
"... The time has come to revise the definition of vegetarianism ... Vegetarianism, should mean the practice of living without food from animals." 

In 1951 The Vegan Society changed its rules to clarify that veganism was about more than just food, specifically excluding any use of animals in any way at all. In practice this just codified their existing ethical values and the vegans remained firmly within the vegetarian movement.

*Photos: top- leaders of The Vegan Society of India at the IVU World Vegetarian Congress in India, 1957.

In 1975 the first IVU World Vegetarian Congress to be held in North America, and the biggest outside of India, was masterminded by Jay Dinshah, founder and president of the American Vegan Society.

*Photos bottom- Serena Coles, President of The Vegan Society, flanked by the Presidents of the International Vegetarian Union and the Vegetarian Society UK – IVU Congress, 1977. In the background is Brian Gunn-King, General Secretary of IVU and a member of the Vegan Society.

In 1997 the International Vegetarian Union started putting recipes on its website – now over 3,000 in English and many more in other languages. These have always been completely vegan, as is everything else on the website.

In 1998 it was agreed that in future all food at all IVU Congresses must be completely vegan. Donald Watson lived long enough to witness that, and naturally approved of it.

In 2010 we finally proved the real origins of the word ‘vegetarian’ – and that the first people to call themselves that were in fact vegan, in ethics as well as diet. Sadly Watson had passed away by then, but he would certainly have liked that one.

IVU currently has about 120 full voting member organisations, including 22 with the word ‘vegan’ in their title – and many more vegetarian groups now only promoting food derived from plants. Another 114 calling themselves ‘vegan’ have requested the free listing in the IVU public database, along with hundreds more only promoting plant foods.

Donald Watson never wanted to leave the Vegetarian Society, and never did. He never wanted to invent a new word, or create a new society. Initially he just wanted vegetarians to stop using animal foods – and the course of history is clearly going his way.