

CSAR



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"The Eternal Triangle (Science, propaganda and disease control)"

The facts behind the 2001 foot-and-mouth epidemic

Dr Mike Thrusfield, Veterinary Clinical sciences
Royal School of Veterinary Studies
University of Edinburgh

7.30 p.m., Monday 5th March, 2007
The Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Churchill College, Storey's Way, Cambridge

Dr Thrusfield writes:

Science and Propaganda

Foot-and-mouth disease, first described in Italy in the early 16th Century, is a globally widespread virus disease of cloven-hoofed animals, suited to temperate climates. It occurred regularly on the mainland of the UK until 1968, and was accompanied by tried-and-tested control procedures, including slaughter of affected animals, movement restrictions, slaughter of in-contact animals, and compensation. However, the long inter-epidemic period between the 1967-'68 epidemic and the one that devastated the country in 2001 resulted in a collective loss of memory about a well-understood disease, and was associated with changes in the UK farming system and reduction in the number of veterinarians employed by the government's State Veterinary Service.

Consequently, when the epidemic struck, close to a planned General Election, there was unprecedented media coverage of the event. The initial widespread dissemination of affected animals before the disease was identified resulted in premature conclusions that the disease was not being effectively controlled by the established procedures; and novel pre-emptive

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slaughter strategies, targeted at healthy animals, were instigated.

The most contentious of these – automatic slaughter of animals on premises adjacent to affected farms – was posited by computer predictions.



The resulting death toll (over 6.5 million animals, compared with less than half a million in 1967-'68) had a profound effect on rural livelihoods and attitudes, made all the more keen by empirical evidence attesting to the effectiveness of established control techniques, and indicating that the novel methods were wastefully unnecessary.

About the Speaker:

Michael Thrusfield graduated in veterinary medicine from the University of Glasgow in 1970. He worked in the East Indies, and then gained postgraduate qualifications in tropical veterinary medicine at the University of Edinburgh, and in virology at the Medical School of the University of Birmingham. After a period of time in general practice, he returned in 1976 to the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Edinburgh, where he was appointed epidemiologist. He has published the only general textbook on veterinary epidemiology (now in its third edition and 22nd year), and over 140 papers, articles, reviews and book chapters.

His research interests include diseases of small animals (infectious tracheobronchitis, pyometra and urinary incontinence), the development of computerised disease recording systems, clinical trials, the control of tropical diseases, and, most recently, animal abuse and foot-and-mouth disease. He has travelled extensively in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, North and South America, Europe, the Far East and the Pacific, advising government veterinary authorities on the development of disease control programmes, and lecturing and giving training courses at veterinary schools and research institutes.

He was elected a Fellow of the Institute of Biology in 1996 for his contribution to veterinary epidemiology, was the first *Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons* recognised specialist in epidemiology, and is a foundation Diplomate of the *European College of Veterinary Public Health*.

The Organising Secretary adds:

Mike Thrusfield was suggested to me as a speaker by one of our CSAR members. Some of you will remember that we had Sir David King, the government chief scientist, explain to us how they dealt with the 2001 outbreak? Well, this is a vet's view of the crisis.

Best Regards

Richard Freeman, CSAR Organising Secretary

Coffee available, as usual, in the foyer outside the lecture theatre from ~7.00 p.m.