

## Book Reviews

hand, argued puerperal insanity was best treated within the confines of the asylum.

*Dangerous motherhood* not only provides a vivid study of the specific Victorian conditions that led to the rise and fall in the fascination of puerperal insanity, but a powerful insight into the relationships between doctors, patients and their families in this period.

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**Abigail Woods,** *A manufactured plague? The history of foot and mouth disease in Britain*, London, Earthscan, 2004, pp. xvi, 208, illus., £19.99 (hardback 1-84407-080-8).

It has always seemed anomalous that the world's leading research laboratory into foot and mouth disease (FMD) for most of the twentieth century, the Pirbright Institute, was located in Britain. There was little of a tradition of veterinary research here, while, given the extreme infectiousness of FMD, such a centre seemed incompatible with a long-standing commitment to the prevention of the introduction of FMD into the country (and there were in fact outbreaks traceable to Pirbright).

An explanation for this conundrum (concerns over germ warfare in the 1930s led to ample funding from the Ministry of Defence) can be found in the work under review. And Abigail Woods provides cogent explanations for many of the other peculiar features of the struggle against FMD over the 150 years of its incidence in Britain. The most important of these, her central theme, was the manner in which what was for many years regarded as a relatively minor ailment, an occupational hazard of livestock production, became a "plague" from the late nineteenth century, to be "stamped out" whenever it appeared (as it did with frequency). This stress on "stamping out", on the slaughter of infected and contact stock, was not merely the necessary outcome of scientific or even economic logic, although these played their part. Rather, it was as much if not more the result of an alliance

between the official veterinary services, for whom "stamping out" became an article of faith, and a small group of politically influential livestock breeders. Over time, "stamping out" was adopted by the National Farmers' Union even more fervently than by official veterinarians, as was so graphically demonstrated in the epidemic of 2001, despite the costs it imposed on the mass of farmers directly affected by FMD outbreaks.

Dairy farmers in Cheshire, so often the epicentre of FMD epidemics, suffered especially, and came to regard FMD as a plague more because of the rigour of control policies than because of the nature of the disease. They occasionally rebelled, but while their protests had no effect, the obeisance paid to exclusion and "stamping out" by veterinary officials could be modified when other economic and political considerations were paramount for their political masters.

During the inter-war years, chilled meat from Argentina became identified as the chief source of continuing FMD outbreaks. However, this meat was so substantial a proportion of domestic consumption that its exclusion would have led to a politically unacceptable rise in prices. In these circumstances, as Woods demonstrates, veterinary officials colluded in obfuscating the evidence against Argentine meat in the interest of maintaining an essential source of supply.

As is evident from the examples above, this book is "a history of politics, society and knowledge" (p. vi) in relation to FMD. This makes for a dense text; there is an extraordinary amount of material packed into 151 pages. However, both the context and the results of the intense primary research that inform each episode or theme are presented concisely and with great clarity. Above all, Woods shows that history matters. The disasters of the 2001 FMD epidemic, the focus of the last two chapters, were due in part to inadequate resources and a slow response. As is amply demonstrated here, they were also due to a poor appreciation of the lessons of history, of the manner in which policy needs to be constantly adapted to changing circumstances.

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