

Hurrah for Bishop Bronescombe

In 1461 the nave of the local church was consecrated by the Bishop of Exeter, having crossed the Raddon hills by horse. The history of the church and the parish, from the eleventh century to the current FMD era, is being prepared as a Son et Lumiere. This project has galvanised the local groupings as a post FMD activity and the sense of co-operation is extraordinary. Chapel is interacting with church and even the village hall committee is in agreement. The story is told with local people reading in the parts and a disc made incorporating their voices with the music and background noises. As local families sat around for the first reading, text written by the good Bishop refers to the impact of the Black Death on the parish and the bodies buried in the churchyard. This reminder, together with other distant events, rather distracted from the immediate current farm prosperity concerns.

The notion of bodies as carriers of disease has raised the question of the management and collection of fallen stock from outlying land. It has not been uncommon in the past to come across sheep carcasses and with the concerns about the reintroduction of the virus and the role of scavengers should this be a thing of the past? Feeders cannot be expected to wait for the virus to have died off before dining. Is burying the dead a reasonable requirement?

Further afield farmers are battling with the concept of coloured zones. To be in a blue zone is bad but to be in a red zone is better. The immediate thought is that red indicates danger and blue possibly safer but so long as bio-security is maintained the colour is irrelevant, if confusing. Safety for the clean up teams has been highlighted again because someone 'took their finger off' with a power hose. Someone else had a serious go at the end of their foot. Advice to power hose operatives has been issued. At least one farmer hopes that this advice does not reach the larragans who stole his pressure washer when they were halfway through a clean up operation and stopped for lunch.

One of the local benefits from FMD is an anticipated reduction in rural crime. Petty stuff may not be changed but the semi professional and professional theft of vehicles and machinery is expected to be less within the infected areas. Sheep and cattle rustling has been severely curtailed. These things all have an effect when budgets and staffing are allocated for future years. It may be that the time spent in FMD policing will have been greater than rural crook chasing.

It is interesting to note that the authorities are considering the impact on crime of greater access to the countryside. Considerations about relocation of footpaths, away from the farm buildings, is a likely bio-security essential. For the over nine thousand farms culled out to date it could be worth the time and cost for relocation of paths within their clean up and restocking budget. If an all time added bonus is less misappropriation of tools, equipment, machinery and vehicles there could be quite a benefit.

With increasing reference being made to the future role of herd and flock health schemes these will presumably include ongoing bio-security and attention to the role of people. Current advice is to 'direct visitors to safe areas' and advise visitors 'what you are doing to

protect your stock'. No mention is made of footpaths and although you could say that people and vehicles are not a veterinary responsibility, health schemes are.

Bio-security advice for farmers to leave a crop field without stock between themselves and their neighbour sounds reasonable on paper but can be difficult in practice. If this is to be an ongoing requirement and a condition of restocking, fences and hedges can be realigned. It will be much more onerous to 'keep an empty field, river or road between groups of livestock'. Is this a long or short term recommendation? What other disease controls might benefit from segregation by design? Is this the role for set aside?

The problem of roads through farmyards has been highlighted in the past. What is the risk from vehicles and people passing stock in sheds next to the road? One neighbour has always felt uncomfortable when a non-farming neighbour comes past because he is often complained to about dung on the road. Is the boot now on the other dung covered foot. Should the farmer ask the neighbour to take another route because of a threat to international trade?

Bio-security has a long history of becoming complicated in this area. The ancient records report that due to the death of vicars from The Plague, three in eight months in one parish, burials could be carried out in neighbouring parishes. A cart was sent to collect the bodies, but one fell off on the way and the following day a servant was paid one penny for finding the missing body and bringing it in.

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