

‘Oh Yes It Is’..... ‘Oh No It Isn’t’

It’s that time of year again when the local doctor dons red tights, high heels, false mammaries and eyelashes, all topped off by a ginger wig. He pretends to be hopelessly smitten by Jack the principal boy, real name Doreen, a fourteen year old he is incidentally treating for pustules and gum disease and the daughter of the chairman of the village hall committee. In order to maintain personal biosecurity she (the doctor) has a bad back and cannot bend to be kissed. This injury is the result of falling out of a tree, where she was hiding from the amorous advances of William the woodcutter. Jack and William have to climb steps in order to woo the dame and the running joke is that she walks away at the pivotal moment.

The brokers men, Foot and Mouth, are trying to evict the dame from her cottage because of her debt to the money lender. She took out a loan to buy fruit to make jam, which she sells in support of the princes truss. She has lost the right lens from her glasses and can only read the left end of words so she mistook truss for trust and is concerned about the abilities of her future potential husband.

The sub plot is that the wicked queen Margaret a’Becket, who lives in a caravan surrounded by thorns and thistles in the shadow of a once great castle, has also commissioned the brokers men to capture and kill the Dames dog. The dog is a mangy five year old, who lives near the church and answers to the name of Diddicombes as a dog and Henry as a boy. He, as part of the plot, chases the rabbits that would eat the thistles and thorns that stick in the queens shoes. If you haven’t booked your tickets yet it is not too late.

The radio programme involving the farmers’ representative and the government member had all the elements of rural pantomime. In effect, the farming man understood why it was important that the dog ran away into the wood so that William with his big chopper could rescue it and so win the heart of his true love, thus leaving the field unencumbered for Jack to marry the princess and the Dame to take tea with the Queen, so that everyone could live happily ever after. The government man thought it unrealistic that the Dame was sobbing her (his) heart out for a lost dog with all the cast rushing about the stage and looking up peoples skirts, when all the time he could see the dog (boy) sitting behind a cardboard tree not six feet from the action. In addition he felt that there were crocodile tears because every time she (he) took a tissue from her (his) handbag he (she) showered the first three rows with sweets. *(This is why the children always sit at the front – Ed).*

The programme developed into the realisation of the difficult task of explaining panto to an American and a German. The American listens, says he understands and considers it a drag act and the German listens, says he understands but doesn’t find it at all amusing and feels that the humour has something to do with the way the British bring up their children.

The point under debate was whether farmers continue to suffer hardship because of the imposition of D notices or whether the farmers are just making claims of hardship under false pretences. Depending on the point of view the restrictions were a short term interruption to

the farming calendar or a depressive experience which prevented proper management of the business with long term consequences.

In hard cash terms, when all the facts are known, a financial calculation involving lost service days for the cows, additional food costs for the sheep and a host of other detailed aspects can be accumulated. But the uncertainty of the length of existing restrictions and the concern over what further rules and regulations would be imposed, arguably, had a more serious and less calculable effect.

It is clear that there is no common understanding about the events of 2001. There are probably too many points of view now for the real impact of the disease to ever be fully recognised. At least, let us hope that intelligent input to the inquiries will help to develop some effective, progressive and acceptable action plans for handling local and national animal disease issues. Oh yes you do that and Oh no you don't do the other.

When the curtain falls the characters involved scrub off their make up and decamp to the pub. Unfortunately those recruited into Foot & Mouth Disease, albeit unwillingly, cannot simply call a halt and carry on as before. It's not so easy to overcome the anxieties of an anticipated disastrous performance. If only real life was more like a pantomime.

Richard can be contacted on 01363 866353 or rgard@agmed.freeseve.co.uk

Richard Gard
21st December 2001