

DIARY

MR DAVID BRIDGE began this diary at our special request on the day that foot-and-mouth disease struck his farm at Cockshutt, near Ellesmere, Shropshire. On that day, just over a week before Christmas, he could find some consolation in the fact that although his dairy herd and fattening pigs were gone, he could still look to his rearing farm at Llansantffraid, Montgomeryshire—where his replacement heifers and pig breeding herd were still safe—as a base from which to begin his recovery.

When this farm, too, was struck four days after Christmas, Mr Bridge found this second blow even harder to bear.

At Stanwardine Hall, Cockshutt, where he has farmed for 10 of his 20 years in farming, Mr Bridge had built up a dairy herd of over 100 Ayrshire cows, on which he had recently begun to use a Friesian bull. These were stocked at little more than an acre per cow on this 252-acre holding, leaving room for 130 acres of cereals—which Mr Bridge is now expanding by a further 35 acres.

No such opportunity presents itself on his 97-acre rearing farm—Pen y Bryn—which was carrying about 60 replacement heifers and a 35-sow pig breeding herd when foot-and-mouth struck. Here there is no possibility of arable cropping, and Mr Bridge can only await the necessary clearance to begin re-stocking.

DECEMBER

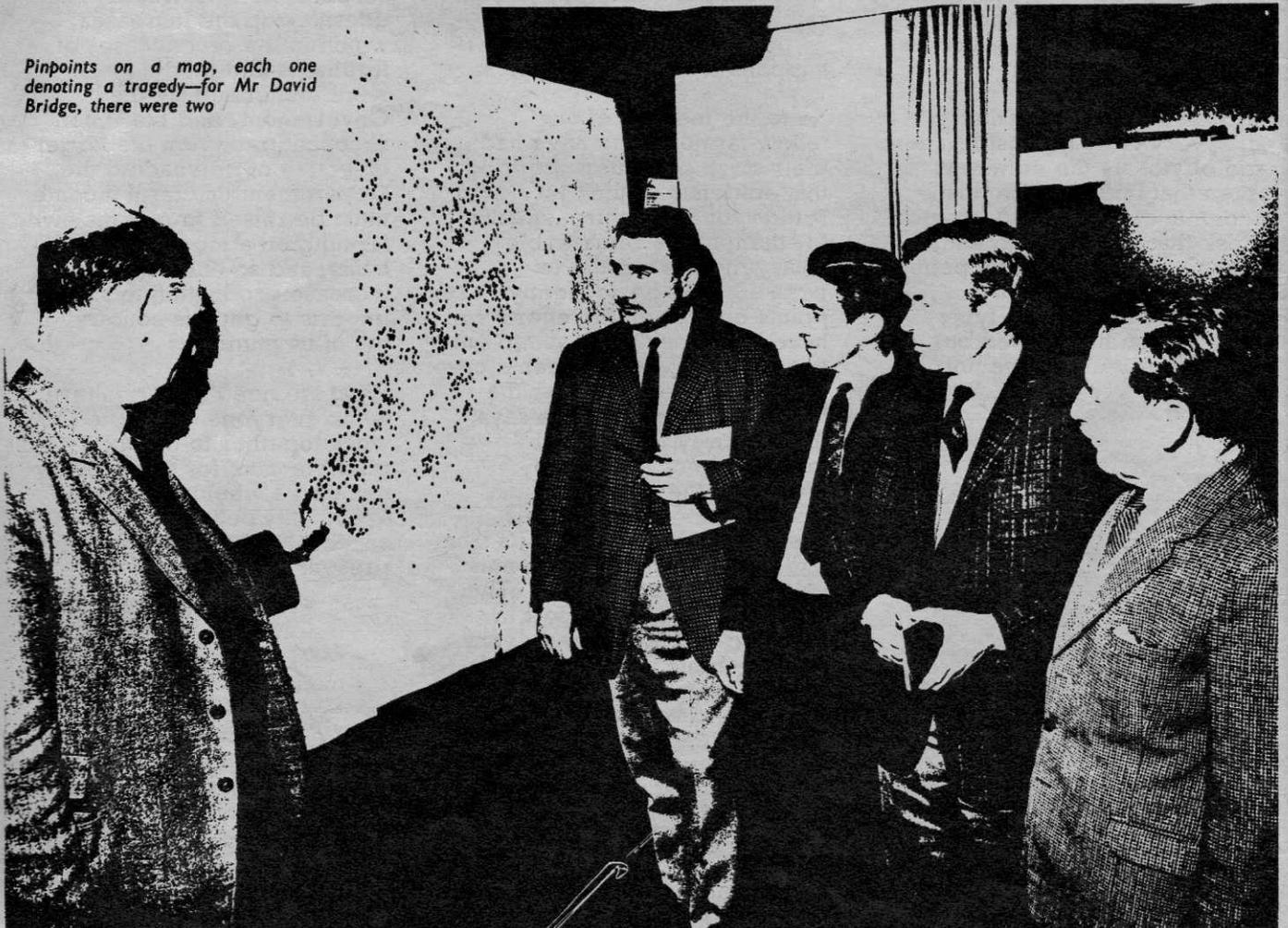
Saturday 16—Examined all the cows late last night—believed all to be well. Suspect cow was third in the rush through parlour door at milking time; she gave 52 lbs of milk last night and this morning, so must be well. Breakfast at 8.45 and confident we were clear.

Two Ministry vets arrived 10 am to examine our suspect cow; a lengthy examination proved negative, but doubt remains. I am advised to mix stock as much as possible to get a definite result. Before vets depart we had another look round the stock and found a first-calf heifer nearing the end of her lactation to be dribbling more than usual. On examination her temperature was 105, blisters on her mouth just starting and sore footed; all doubt now removed. This was definitely the end of this particular road for us.

I am tremendously impressed by the calibre of our vets, and very thankful indeed that in the dreadful hours that lie ahead here were men in whom one had implicit faith that the appalling task would be carried out as expeditiously as humanly possible.

Disease confirmed here 11 am; preliminaries completed, Fran Ikin of Norman P Lloyd and Co here to value with a good assistant by 12.15 pm. With the help of my two men, Ken Dean and Jack Whitfield, we went carefully over every beast con-

Pinpoints on a map, each one denoting a tragedy—for Mr David Bridge, there were two



WRITTEN THIS MONTH BY A FARMER STRUCK TWICE BY FOOT-AND-MOUTH WITHIN A FORTNIGHT ON HIS FARMS IN SHROPSHIRE AND MONTGOMERYSHIRE

cerned, and arrived at what I believe to be a very fair figure; valuation completed by 3 pm.

Earth-moving tackle arrived at 2.30, and site chosen. Five local slaughtermen arrived and started work at 3 pm; by 5.45, 148 cattle and 205 pigs had been slaughtered, a really incredible effort. Drag line and excavator stopped work at 7 pm—now darkness and complete and utter silence enfold us. The night is fine with a promise of slight frost.

Sunday 17—Excavator drivers working by 8 am this Sunday morning. Weather conditions almost ideal for the job ahead. Ken Dean and Jack Whitfield prepared our three tractors to be used for the day; seven contractors' men arrived and from 9 am to 3 pm all worked very speedily conveying carcasses to the area surrounding the pit. By 5.30 pm a considerable layer of earth covered everything and we called it a day.

Through all this time one was receiving constant telephone messages of sympathy from friends and neighbours—very, very heartening indeed. My friend and very good neighbour Eric Williams, whose herd of 80 Ayrshires and 30-odd sows and whose buildings are contiguous to ours, continues to survive; we hope and pray that he may continue to do so.

During this cataclysm we still have 5,500 laying hens in Grossmith cages and 3,500 12-week-old pullets to farm. This task inevitably falls to my wife, a daughter of 12, and son of 11 who came home from school on Thursday; they worked like Trojans. In addition my wife had meals to prepare and do constant cups of tea. She had probably the busiest time of anyone, and as usual took the extra work in her stride and coped heroically.

One could not help but be extremely proud of one's family, who bore the tragic spectacle with such fortitude and forbearance. Living as we do in this grand old English country house, built 400 years ago in sterner times than we live in today, one can draw strength from the past, and know that finally all will be well.

Monday 18—The final covering of the pit with carefully preserved top soil was completed by mid-day; a very tidy job considering the area involved. However, the chosen site is in full view of the room we use most often, and the scars across the field will be a grim reminder for a long time to come.

So ends Phase I, the most poignant phase for ourselves, but now begins Phase II, the really long, hard haul to ensure that when we can re-stock, there can be no re-infection. On our premises and layout this is going to be a stupendous task, for the Ministry requirements are rightly most exacting, and we have a great deal of rough old buildings which are a nightmare to cleanse thoroughly.

Tuesday 19—The task of removing two months' muck from the sheds starts in earnest. This has all to be placed in a heap, along with the infected silage, and allowed to heat up before spreading commences at some future date. It is also finally sprayed with strong disinfectant.

I have been stripping the milking parlour of all moveable equipment, and soaking it before it is cleaned. Goodness knows when, or under what circumstances, it will be used again. Much thought must be given to this problem. There are so many permutations of what we might do. I acknowledge

we are very lucky in this respect. We can certainly plough out some grass for spring wheat—Cappelle, I think, for early February.

Wednesday 20—It is a great comfort in the early morning to hear the milking machine pump going next door for my neighbour; somehow one feels that while he can keep going all is not lost here. Four to six days seems the critical incubation period for the virus round here—but of course it can be 14 days or in some cases even more.

We have just heard the sad news that David Hockenhill of Shade Oak has gone down with this voracious disease. His stock have been fully housed for a very long time and every possible precaution taken. This is indeed a bitter blow, and I am very despondent indeed about the other brave farmers in this locality who are battling on very courageously.

Looking back, I almost think it was worse being poised on the knife-edge before we had the outbreak here. It is exactly like waiting for a bomb to explode—you hear it ticking and wonder 'when'. Believe me, it is a most nerve-racking experience carrying on and just waiting.

Thursday 21—All through the night they have been burning the cattle at Shade Oak. It is certainly an awe-inspiring sight, and unfortunately one which we have seen many times round here.

As I write this I can see a Ministry vet who has been inspecting Eric's stock next door get into his car and drive away, so they are still clear there; but a long, long way to go yet.

Friday 22—At 9 o'clock last night Eric Williams rang up to say he had had foot-and-mouth confirmed there that evening at Nil Green where he lives; another bitter blow to the community round here.

There are four of us, all neighbours who play billiards here in the winter every Monday evening—and now only Stanley Hulme of Kenwick Lodge remains unscathed. He is certainly in a very hot seat, but miracles do happen. This disease is absolutely raging round here, though the national figures show a steep decline.

Saturday 23—This foot-and-mouth is keeping us all very much on edge; two more outbreaks this week at Llansantffraid, Montgomeryshire, where our other farm Pen y Bryn is still going. Poor Emrys Arthur, who is there with no help at all, has been in the firing line for eight weeks—I am told his hair is long enough to make a Beatnik jealous!

He has over 200 pigs, 63 cattle and 118 ewes to tend each day, week-ends, and for this coming Christmas. Add to this the fact that his ewes have started to lamb and you have a situation which would be enough to make most men throw in the sponge; but his guts and determination to do all he can for his stock typify the spirit of farmers battling on against this plague unleashed on them by our cheap imported meat policy. It would be salutary for the advocates of this policy to have to step into Emrys' shoes this Christmas!

Ken Dean, after thoroughly disinfecting himself and his tractor, set off to plough 13 acres of stubble lying in a wet part of the farm, before starting on the grassland. The rest of us have been tackling the clearing of the muck from the yards—now all hard work. And so approaches the quietest Christmas

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I can remember. My family and I cannot go to Church—but we shall be there in spirit.

Wednesday 27—It seems to have been a long time since Saturday evening. I hope we shall not have another Christmas with so few stock to tend.

Bob Sutton, my poultryman, came in Sunday morning to feed the growing pullets enough till Wednesday morning, otherwise the family have coped with the hens and eggs. Ken Dean worked on Sunday in an effort to finish turning over the wettest part of the field, but was prevented by a twisted shackle controlling the lifting device of the reversible plough, and there is no prospect of parts till Thursday!

Foot-and-mouth has been raging again round Llansantffraid over Christmas—one on Christmas morning and three yesterday. It is incredible how this wretched virus continues to break back to devour the remaining farms in an area. There seems to be no hope at all for those who have fought through, and we are all very dejected today.

Thursday 28—Gilbert Brown of Bromley, who lost his lovely herd of pedigree Friesians some four weeks ago, kindly sent two of his men to help us clean our buildings. They, with our own chaps, have worked like blazes and by tonight we can see the beginning of the end in our cow accommodation. It is a hard slogging and back-breaking work—how much easier it would be off concrete!

Friday 29—This morning we had 20 men from an army camp to scrape and clean the walls in the cows' bedded area. They arrived complete with all the necessary equipment and did a very efficient job.

Just as I was passing the house at 4.30 I heard the telephone ring. I rushed to answer it to find Emrys on the other end—foot-and-mouth confirmed in a yearling heifer lying out at Pen y Bryn. So we start the wretched business all over again—at the moment words fail me.

Saturday 30—Arrived at Llansantffraid by 8.30 to meet the valuers and the Ministry vet in charge of Pen y Bryn. The farm is approached by a mile of rough and steep road, and I hardly slept last night worrying about the problem of getting lorries with fuel up there for the fire; in fact the old road stood up to the traffic marvellously.

The big headache was conveying material off the hard yard on to the site of the fire. Once on the field even the crawler was spinning in the driving rain and mud we had there—quite definitely a day best forgotten as a bad dream.

Livestock involved were 63 cattle—including 23 lovely Friesian bulling heifers I had hoped would escape—238 pigs (including our breeding herd of sows) and 118 ewes. These latter were most grievous to Emrys and myself, for they were close to lambing and Emrys had in fact 14 lambs on 6 ewes, with triplets that morning. A really heartbreaking job to all concerned, and one of my neighbours very unfortunately had about 60 sheep slaughtered as contacts.

For some reason I feel far more heavy-hearted at losing Pen y Bryn than here. My sympathy goes out to Emrys and Mrs Arthur who struggled from the start of the epidemic to keep the farm free. To go down after all this time is very distressing indeed.

JANUARY

Monday 1—Let us hope 1968 deals more fairly with us than the latter part of 1967. Until October, when the plague hit us in this part of the country, I

thought 1967 to be one of the best farming years we have had.

All the staff here are engaged on mucking out calf boxes and young stock buildings. There is the most enormous stack of muck growing in the infected heap, and it is starting to heat nicely, but we still have days and days of scrubbing ahead of us after the mucking out.

Tuesday 2—I went to see how Colin Thomas and Malcolm Stockton were progressing locating and repairing stopped drains on our 50 acres of winter wheat. They are having a difficult job in the appallingly wet conditions—we have had very heavy rain the last day or two.

Wednesday 3—Walking across 17 acres of old turf, I noticed several wet patches indicating further stopped drains. I intend to plough this for wheat, so these must be put right quickly.

Ted Farmer of Maesbrook is our draining contractor and knows more or less where the trouble will be; unfortunately for us he has stock of his own so I don't think he will be allowed on our fields, even though we have had no stock out for two months. I shall have to clear this point with the foot-and-mouth centre at Ellesmere.

Emrys tells me all burning is finished at Pen y Bryn last night—a strong wind helped the job.

Thursday 4—The ploughing of 12 acres of tetraploid ryegrass for the £10 subsidy is going well, in spite of the wet ground conditions. The 30 acres of grass I intend to plough out has been sprayed periodically with our organic irrigation system over the last four years, and I am puzzled by what, if any, fertilizer the spring wheat should have: I rather feel 8-10 cwts of K slag might fill the bill, and leave the nitrogen until later on.

Everyone else is engaged on cleaning down and scrubbing. I hear reports from people who had foot-and-mouth long before us still at it, so I am afraid we are in for a dreary spell of work yet.

Friday 5—Really heavy rain all last night and all day today has put any field work out of the question, so we have continued with the cleaning of the buildings and made a start on one range of piggeries.

Monday 8—Finished ploughing one field of grass ready for wheat, and started to finish off the wet ground we were forced to leave last week, but this afternoon it was deluging again, so had to leave it. After much searching we discovered one blocked 3-in drain in the next grass field we propose to plough; but this is a large area of wet ground, so I fear there is more trouble than this.

Emrys tells me on the phone that his buildings have been passed at Pen y Bryn. He has had a good army gang there all week and they have certainly got cracking.

Tuesday 9—During the night we experienced a blizzard, and woke to find the snow drifted to an incredible depth in many places about the road and farmyard. By daylight the snow had stopped, but the wind at full gale force was whipping it off the fields into the roads.

None of our men live nearer than a mile, some a good 2½-3 miles away, nevertheless they all turned up having had an exhausting walk. One cannot praise too highly the tenacity of purpose shown by such faithfulness in these arduous conditions.

Wednesday 10—By morning the gale force wind had dropped, and instead we had a very severe frost. A major undertaking today was to load up 65 boxes of eggs from the fumigating store and take them 1½ miles through snowdrifts to the main road to be picked up by the lorry from the packing station.

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Thursday 11—Very little snow has disappeared although the weather is slightly warmer this morning. We still hear the number of foot-and-mouth outbreaks to be around eight or nine all the time, chiefly in Staffs; although this is a big reduction nationally, it is small comfort to those chaps sitting in the areas concerned, and it must be a double headache for all concerned dealing with it in the severe weather.

To me it seems quite extraordinary that after all this time and with all the resources at our disposal and everyone being on top of the job, the slaughter policy does not stamp it out thoroughly. It has in the past, why not now?

Scrubbing and pressure washing the buildings continues in this weather, but a very unpleasant job it is for all concerned.

Friday 12—Ken Dean has spent some time with the fore-end loader clearing snow drifts so that some communications can be restored. The bulk milk tanker has managed to visit my neighbour next door, and the egg lorry can reach us, so one additional job is removed, though our egg boxes still have to be fumigated before they leave us.

Today for the first time these holidays the family and I had an expedition to Shrewsbury. How much more pleasurable the simple things are in life when

you have been denied them for a time—we thoroughly appreciated our lunch in a restaurant and a film matinee afterwards.

Saturday 13—The snow is going at last, and pretty fast too. Fear there will be some flooding down-country—there is a great deal of water lying about on our low ground.

My son Peter rode his pony for the first time these holidays round our fields; the way they went both he and the pony might have been out every day. Looking back over the school holidays there just seems to have been a complete blank—nothing to fill the picture that one would wish to remember.

Often in the past we have been lucky enough to enjoy some excellent foxhunting and all its attendant functions; there must be scores and scores of people in the same situation as ourselves. I really cannot think our friends in the towns can possibly conceive the appalling blight this plague has cast on our countryside; there are so many facets of country life it would be almost impossible to begin to understand.

Monday 15—Last night's unprecedented gales caused much damage in the district. We lost large areas of slates on some of the old buildings and many trees were blown down. The worst thing was the fuse 'blowing' on the phase supplying the poultry houses; the layers had no light or ventilation until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We could well do without the check in egg production this will cause.

I heard tonight of someone with a Friesian herd of 80 milkers or so thinking of giving up because of labour difficulties. This idea of taking over an entire herd is one which greatly appeals, for one is assured that at least some of the stock must be good. I do not like the thought of buying cattle piece-meal—it is so easy to buy a little trouble from everyone, with disastrous results.

Tuesday 16—One month today since we had foot-and-mouth here. It seems ages and ages ago. Looking round the buildings it is hard to imagine stock was ever kept in them, they seem so dead and lifeless. I don't expect great problems in getting the sow herd going again and pig production started once more, but a good sound, breeding herd of dairy cows is quite another matter; there are so many imponderables.

I gladly pay tribute to the part played by our county chairman, John Whittingham, during this epidemic—from the early days he has not spared himself in his ceaseless efforts to fight for better terms and conditions for farmers. Few realise the debt of gratitude we owe to him.

What of the future? Never again must we have a catastrophe such as this. In spite of the herculean efforts to stamp it out, it is a classic example of shutting the door after the horse has gone. The only way is to stop importing the wretched virus from endemic countries.

Looking back on war-time experiences, anyone who had seen an oil tanker in convoy torpedoed, would not have used a gallon extra of petrol at home; anyone who had heard men's cries in the sea at night when you could not stop to pick them up, would never grumble at rationing of food. Likewise those of us living in the stricken areas would say—let us see to it that foot-and-mouth cannot start again.

NEXT MONTH'S DIARIST IS MR ALAN MASON, OF CODMORE FIELD NURSERY, PULBOROUGH, SUSSEX



SNAPSHOTS FROM A STRICKEN FARM

Above: THE CATTLE THAT ARE GONE. . . . Mr Bridge had built up a dairy herd of more than 100 Ayrshires at Stanwardine Hall, stocked at little more than an acre per cow. Below left: THE SCHOOLBOY WHO HELPED. . . . Mr Bridge's son Peter, home from school for his Christmas holidays, joined with his father and the farm staff, including Jack Whitfield (left) in the wearying task of disinfecting the farm to make it safe for restocking. Below right: THE SURVIVOR Peter's pony looks out over the deserted farmyard. Mr Bridge lost altogether 148 cattle and 205 pigs at Stanwardine Hall, plus 63 cattle, 238 pigs and 118 ewes on his Montgomeryshire farm

