

Foot and Mouth in Rolleston

I can remember when we had Foot & Mouth at Cross Farm, Rolleston in 1950. I was only 5 at the time, so some of this is what I was told later. There may be a few mistakes as it is a long time ago.

It started when my Dad (Phil Jennings) went to feed some young cattle that were in a loose box and noticed one of them frothing and dribbling from its mouth. He had a look in its mouth and saw ulcers on its tongue. He rang for the Vet and told him that he thought it was Foot and Mouth disease. The vet then called the Ministry of Ag and they sent one of their vets to see if it was F & M and it was. The farm and everyone there was quarantined, no one allowed in or out. I believe Mrs Dot Bentley was there and wasn't allowed to go home. I can remember I wasn't allowed to go to school, I thought that was really good at the time.

The ministry put a barricade across the drive up to the farm and there was a policeman stationed there 24 hours a day. He had a little pointed tent and a seat for when it was raining; I don't remember how often they changed shift. We were dairy farmers and had to keep milking the cows and tip the milk down the drain. My Mum used to put a cardboard box on the drive wall with a note of what she wanted and the money. Then Wally the co-op baker would come and leave the bread etc for her and any change. The box was disinfected on the outside each time. I think the same thing happened with groceries and meat or they may have rang the order through.

It took two weeks before anything happened and there was still only the one beast to show any signs of the disease. Still no one allowed in or out.

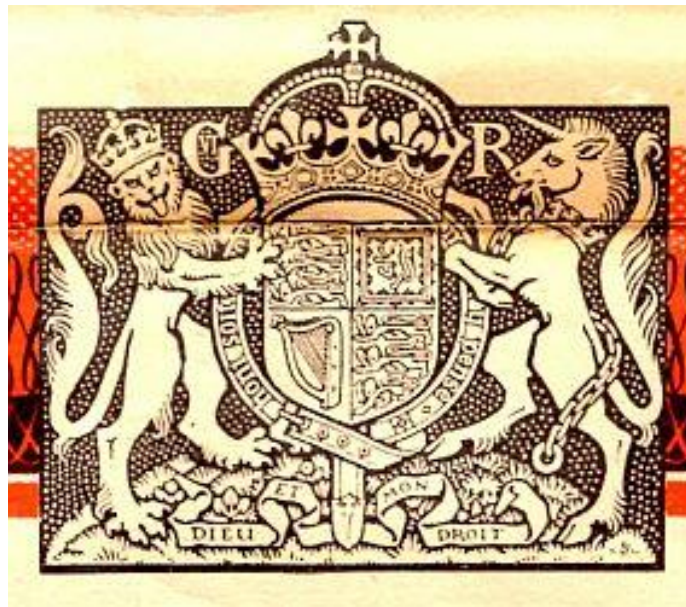
The first thing to happen was a big drag line excavator or two arrived and dug a big hole at the back of the buildings. Then a few days later some men arrived in a bus and started to scrub the concrete yard in front of the cow sheds. I remember someone saying they were displaced people. Whether that was people left in England after the War I don't know. Then they erected some big metal tripods on the yard, don't remember how many. I think they had block and tackle at the top and were quite high. The next day some men arrived and a big meat lorry, they were the slaughter men. They led the cows out onto the yard and shot them. I can still remember that! and my Mum crying. Then they pulled them up on the tripods and skinned and dressed them. They were inspected to see if any had T.B. if they did they were taken to the hole in the ground. The ones that didn't have TB or Foot and Mouth were put in the meat lorry. The one that had F and M was shot and taken to the hole along with the pigs we had. They also put all the feed we had in the hole except for the hay. All the offal and skins etc were also put in the hole. This went on for two days or so. Our old dog "Bob" was tied up at night so no foxes or other dogs would come near. I wonder if he thought it was his turn next. I remember they shot the neighbours cat for coming too close. What happened to the meat that was put in the lorry I don't know but there was nothing the matter with it.

After all that was finished some more men came and started to disinfect the farm. They disinfected inside all the sheds, the walls outside, the roofs, all the yards and drive. The machinery and car were also sprayed. I think they used Jayes fluid and also sprayed the outside of the hay stack with it. Everything in the hole was covered in lime and then it was covered over with soil, it was about 20 foot deep. I think we were allowed out about this time, about 4 weeks after F and M was found.

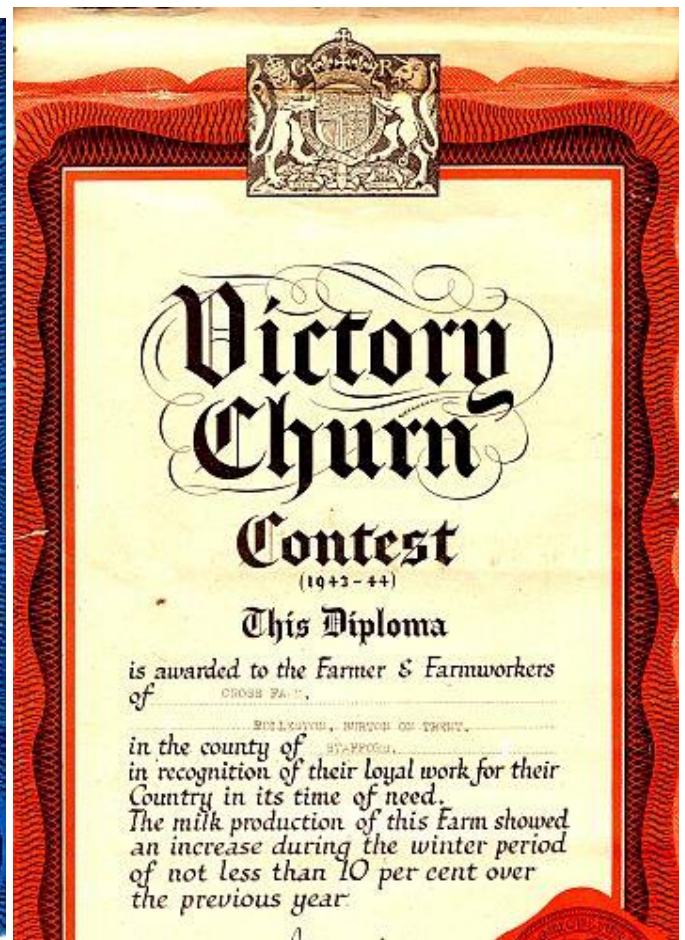
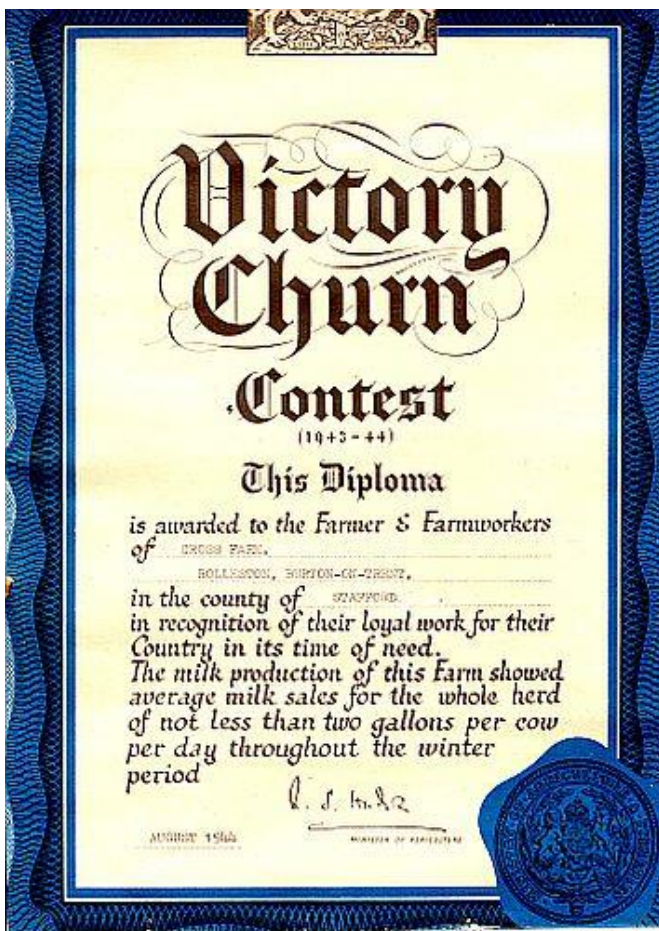
It turned out we were the only farm they knew of in England to have F and M at this time. They said it was probably brought over from Europe by Starlings. You would have thought the Starlings would have stopped somewhere else on the way to us! My Dad didn't think they were right. A cattle lorry had come in the week before and he remembered it was backed up by the loose box. He said he remembered tapping that same beast on the nose because it was licking the gate on the lorry.

Dad was eventually paid three quarters of the animals valuation in compensation by the government. He could not buy any more livestock for 6 months after. So for 6 months we had no income. When he could restock he went up to Scotland with a friend Ben Brooks in Ben's lorry. He brought a lorry load of cows back and we were milking again. It must have been very depressing for my Dad and Mum seeing all they had worked for end up like this. They had received two awards from the minister of agriculture during the war for increasing his milk production from these cows in times of need. I still have them, they are called "Victory Churn Diploma's" (see below).

Bryan Jennings - Queensland.



Coat of Arms found on Victory Churn Diploma certificates



The 2 gallons of milk a day may not seem much but cows that were not milking at that time were counted in that.

The Jennings certainly would have been worthy nominees for the Rollestonian of the year award as well.