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THE AGEING OF BRUISES
IN LAMBS

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment
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ABSTRACT

Bruising in lambs processed for human consumption is a significant economic problem. A reduction in the prevalence of bruises could be achieved relatively efficiently if their important places of occurrence could be identified by ageing these lesions with respect to the known times of occurrence of events of possible aetiological significance. To this end efforts were made to age experimental bruises in lambs by objectively assessing semi-quantitative histopathological data using a mathematical model based on Bayes' theorem of inverse probabilities, by enzyme histochemical and isoelectric focussing studies and by measurement of muscle pH.

The Bayesian method for objective histopathological ageing was developed and tested on data representing 178 bruises. It was successful in identifying bruises as either 1-20 hours or more than 24 hours old. The 'accuracy' with which a bruise of known age could be identified as such depended on the nature and number of tissue samples studied. The degree of 'confidence' with which an individual bruise of unknown age could be aged, however, depended both on the 'accuracy' of the method and on the relative number of bruises estimated to belong to each of the two age categories considered. In general a degree of 'confidence' of 80-90% can be expected in practice, and in this respect the performance of the Bayesian method is superior to that achieved by purely subjective means. A pilot survey involving 107 bruises collected from an export meat works established both the practical value of the objective ageing method and its superiority over alternative epidemiological approaches to the problem of utilising data pertaining to trucking times and holding times in meat works yards. Of the bruises studied, 50% were estimated to have been inflicted within the works, and 40% prior to arrival.

Enzyme studies on bruises aged 4-144 hours old revealed no detectable relationships between observed changes in either histochemical or isoenzyme activities and bruise ages. In light of contradictory published results pertaining to other types of wounds, this lack of success was thought to reflect the relatively mild nature of the tissue reaction in bruises.

Statistically significant relationships could not be demonstrated between absolute or relative muscle pH and the ages of bruises from 4-48 hours old.

A newly recognised condition of 'subcutaneous haemorrhagic speckling' in the carcase adipose tissue of young lambs processed for human consumption was investigated. From histopathological and epidemiological evidence, the primary cause of the lesions was shown to be electrical stunning. However, secondary aetiological factors were proposed as having influenced the prevalence and severity of lesions. Attempts to elucidate the pathogenesis of 'speckling' with the intention of formulating a rational approach to its prevention were unsuccessful.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>ABSTRACT</u>	ii
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	iv
<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>	v
<u>LIST OF TABLES</u>	xv
<u>LIST OF FIGURES</u>	xx
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER I: REVIEW - THE AGEING OF WOUNDS</u>	3
I. FACTORS AFFECTING THE TIME-COURSE OF THE TISSUE REACTION TO INJURY	3
1. The effect of type and severity of injury on the time-course of the ensuing tissue reaction	4
2. The effects of species of animal and type of tissue affected on the time-course of the tissue reaction to injury	4
3. The effects of subject age, multiple wounding and observer variation on the rate of the tissue reaction to injury	5
II. THE GROSS APPEARANCE OF BRUISES	6
III. BLOOD DEGRADATION PRODUCTS AND TISSUE CONDUCTIVITY IN BRUISES	7
IV. HISTAMINE AND SEROTONIN LEVELS IN WOUNDS	8
V. THE HISTOPATHOLOGY OF WOUNDS	8
A. <u>The histopathology of wounds involving skeletal muscle</u>	8
1. Degenerative changes in muscle fibres following injury	8
2. The leucocytic reaction following injury to muscle	9
3. Fibroplasia and vascular changes following injury to muscle	10
4. Regenerative changes in muscle fibres following injury	11
B. <u>The histopathology of wounds involving adipose tissue</u>	13
1. Degenerative changes in adipocytes following injury	13
2. The leucocytic reaction following injury to adipose tissue	14
3. Fibroplasia and vascular changes following injury to adipose tissue	15

C. <u>The histopathology of wounds involving skin</u>	16
1. Degenerative changes in skin following injury	16
2. The leucocyte reaction following injury to skin	17
3. The histochemistry of acid glycosaminoglycans in skin wounds	18
4. Fibroplasia and vascular changes following injury to skin	19
VI. ENZYMIC ACTIVITY IN WOUNDS	20
A. <u>Technical considerations in measuring tissue enzyme activities</u>	20
B. <u>The nature of enzyme changes in wounds</u>	21
C. <u>The time course of enzyme changes in wounds</u>	22
D. <u>Observations on specific enzyme activities in wounds</u>	23
1. The glycolytic pathway	24
(a) Aldolase	24
(b) Glycogen phosphorylase	24
(c) Lactate dehydrogenase	25
2. The citric acid cycle	26
(a) Succinate dehydrogenase	26
3. The pentose phosphate pathway	27
(a) Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase	27
4. Hydrolases	28
(a) Acid phosphatase	28
(b) Alkaline phosphatase	29
(c) Non-specific esterase	30
(d) Leucine aminopeptidase	31
5. Miscellaneous enzymes	31
(a) Creatine phosphokinase	32
(b) Myosin adenosine triphosphatase	32
CONCLUSION	33

<u>CHAPTER II: AGEING BRUISES ACCORDING TO THEIR GROSS AND HISTOPATHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS</u>	34
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	34
<u>MATERIALS AND METHODS</u>	34
I. IMPACT BRUISES	34
1. Experimental animals	34
2. Production of bruises	35
3. Processing of bruised tissues	36
4. Examination and scoring of tissue sections	37
5. Analyses of data and methods used to estimate the ages of bruises	39
(a) The Bayesian probability model	40
(b) Linear regression analysis	42
II. WOOL PULL BRUISES	43
1. Production of bruises	43
2. Analysis of the histopathological data	43
<u>RESULTS</u>	44
I. GROSS AND MICROSCOPIC APPEARANCE OF IMPACT BRUISES	44
1. Gross appearance of bruises	44
2. The histopathology of bruises	44
II. SELECTION OF HISTOPATHOLOGICAL FEATURES SUITABLE FOR AGEING IMPACT BRUISES MATHEMATICALLY	50
1. Initial selection of histopathological features	50
2. Further selection of histopathological features according to results of chi-square analyses on data in contingency tables	51
3. Relationships between bruise ages and scores for histopathological features whilst controlling for the effects of haemorrhage	52
4. Histopathological features eventually chosen for use when estimating the ages of bruises	52

III. DEVELOPMENT OF A MATHEMATICAL MODEL FOR AGEING IMPACT BRUISES OBJECTIVELY	54
A. <u>Developing the Bayesian probability model</u>	54
1. The performance of the Bayesian probability model using data from muscle	58
2. The performance of the Bayesian probability model when used to place bruises into one of only two broad age categories	60
3. The performance of the Bayesian probability model using data from adipose tissue	61
4. The effects of re-scoring of tissue sections on bruise age estimates	61
B. <u>Developing the multiple regression model</u>	63
C. <u>Assessment of the performance of the Bayesian probability model when applied to data not previously used to develop the model</u>	64
1. Investigation into the advantages of considering more than one sample per bruise	67
(a) The effect of duplicate within-bruise sampling on the 'accuracy' of ageing bruises	67
(b) The 'accuracy' of ageing bruises when there was concordance between age estimates from muscle and adipose tissue	68
2. Comparisons between the 'accuracies' of interpretive and Bayesian methods of ageing bruises	69
IV. APPLICATION OF THE BAYESIAN PROBABILITY MODEL TO WOOL PULL BRUISES	70
1. Gross pathology	70
2. Histology	70
V. THE 'CONFIDENCE' OF AGEING BRUISES OF UNKNOWN AGES BY APPLICATION OF THE BAYESIAN PROBABILITY METHOD	70
(a) 'Accuracy' of the Bayesian probability model	71
(b) The 'confidence' of ageing individual bruises	71
1. Method of calculating the 'confidence' with which individual bruises have been aged	71
2. Method of calculating the 'confidence' with which single bruises have been aged	76

VI. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE BAYESIAN AGEING METHOD: THE AGEING OF BRUISES IN A PILOT STUDY AT A MEAT WORKS	78
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	78
<u>MATERIALS AND METHODS</u>	78
<u>RESULTS</u>	79
1. Gross characteristics of bruises	79
2. Histopathological characteristics of bruises	79
3. Ageing of bruises using the Bayesian probability method	79
4. Bruise ages considered in relation to holding times in meat works yards	80
5. Epidemiological data	83
(a) Between-farm clustering of bruises	83
(b) Trucking distance	83
(c) Holding times in meat works yards	84
(d) Carcase position of bruises	84
<u>DISCUSSION</u>	87
I. EXPERIMENTAL ANIMALS	87
II. PRODUCTION OF BRUISES	87
III. GROSS APPEARANCE OF BRUISES	88
IV. HISTOPATHOLOGY OF BRUISES	88
1. Haemorrhage and fibrin	89
2. Histopathological changes in muscle fibres	90
3. Fat necrosis	91
4. The cellular exudates	91
5. Tissue repair	92
6. Haemosiderin	93
7. Mast cells and free histamine	93
8. Acid glycosaminoglycans	94

V. MATHEMATICAL METHODS AVAILABLE FOR PROCESSING HISTOPATHOLOGICAL DATA	94
1. Logical models	95
2. Statistical models	96
(a) Bayesian probability model	96
(b) Discriminant function analysis	97
(c) Data matching models	97
(d) Regression analysis	97
VI. ESTIMATING THE AGES OF BRUISES MATHEMATICALLY USING SCORES FROM SEVERAL HISTOPATHOLOGICAL PARAMETERS	99
1. Selection of histopathological features	100
2. Developing the Bayesian probability model	102
(a) Data base	103
(b) Selection of indicants used for age estimation	103
(c) Age classification and the potential performance of the model	104
3. Scoring variation	105
4. Developing the multiple linear regression model	105
5. Assessing the realistic 'accuracy' of the Bayesian probability model	106
6. Validation of the Bayesian probability model	108
7. The 'confidence' of ageing bruises of unknown ages by application of the Bayesian probability model	108
VII. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE BAYESIAN AGEING METHOD TO BRUISES IN A PILOT MEAT WORKS STUDY	110
VIII. WOOL PULL BRUISES	112
<u>CHAPTER III: ENZYMIC ACTIVITY IN BRUISED MUSCLE</u>	114
<u>MATERIALS AND METHODS</u>	114
1. Enzyme histochemistry	114
2. Isoenzyme studies	115
(a) Preparation of tissues	115

(b) Isoelectric focussing	116
<u>RESULTS</u>	117
I. ENZYMES OF THE GLYCOLYTIC PATHWAY	117
1. Aldolase	117
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	117
(b) Isoenzyme studies	118
2. Lactate dehydrogenase	118
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	118
(b) Isoenzyme studies	121
II. ENZYMES OF THE CITRIC ACID CYCLE	122
1. Succinate dehydrogenase	122
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	122
(b) Isoenzyme studies	122
III. ENZYMES OF THE PENTOSE PHOSPHATE PATHWAY	124
1. Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase	124
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	124
(b) Isoenzyme studies	124
IV. HYDROLYTIC ENZYMES	126
1. Acid phosphatase	126
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	126
(b) Isoenzyme studies	128
2. Alkaline phosphatase	128
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	128
(b) Isoenzyme studies	130
3. Leucine aminopeptidase	130
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	130
(b) Isoenzyme studies	132

4. Non-specific esterase	132
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	132
(b) Isoenzyme studies	132
V. MISCELLANEOUS ENZYMES	134
1. Creatine phosphokinase	134
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	134
(b) Isoenzyme studies	134
2. Myosine adenosine triphosphatase	136
(a) Enzyme histochemistry	136
(b) Isoenzyme studies	136
<u>DISCUSSION</u>	137
Enzyme histochemistry	137
Isoenzyme studies	139
<u>CHAPTER IV: pH CHANGES IN BRUISED MUSCLE</u>	142
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	142
<u>MATERIALS AND METHODS</u>	142
I. TECHNIQUE FOR MEASUREMENT OF MUSCLE pH	142
II. MEASUREMENT OF BRUISE AND CONTROL MUSCLE pH VALUES	143
1. Experimental animals	143
2. Bruising of animals	143
3. Slaughter of animals and processing of muscle samples	143
<u>RESULTS</u>	144
I. TECHNIQUE FOR MEASUREMENT OF MUSCLE pH	144
II. MEASUREMENT OF BRUISE AND CONTROL MUSCLE pH VALUES	144
1. Bruise pH values	144
2. Bruise pH values relative to those of appropriate controls	147
(a) Selection of appropriate control muscle samples	147
(b) Bruise pH values relative to those of within-muscle controls	148

DISCUSSION	150
<u>CHAPTER V: PETECHIAL HAEMORRHAGE IN THE CARCASE FAT OF SLAUGHTERED LAMBS</u>	153
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	153
<u>MATERIALS AND METHODS</u>	154
A. <u>Histology</u>	154
B. <u>Immunohistochemistry</u>	154
C. <u>Epidemiological studies</u>	155
1. Statistical analysis of population factors associated with petechiation in carcase fat	155
2. Split-line trial to determine whether lesions occurred at or prior to slaughter	156
3. Factors associated with the process of slaughter	156
D. <u>Pathogenesis of petechiation in adipose tissue</u>	157
1. Measurement of post-stunning systemic blood pressure	157
2. Attempts to produce petechial haemorrhages in inguinal fat	158
<u>RESULTS</u>	159
A. <u>Gross pathology</u>	159
B. <u>Histopathology</u>	159
C. <u>Immunohistochemistry</u>	160
D. <u>Epidemiological studies</u>	160
1. Statistical analysis of population factors associated with petechial haemorrhage	160
2. Split-line trial to determine whether lesions occurred at or prior to slaughter	162
3. Experiment to isolate factors associated with the process of slaughter	162
E. <u>The pathogenesis of petechiation in adipose tissue</u>	164
1. Measurement of post-stunning systemic blood pressure	164
2. Attempts to produce petechial haemorrhages in inguinal fat	165
<u>DISCUSSION</u>	165

1. The primary aetiology of 'speckling'	167
(a) Method of exsanguination	167
(b) The restraining conveyor	168
(c) Electrical stunning	168
2. Secondary factors in the aetiology of 'speckling'	169
3. The pathogenesis of 'speckling'	170
<u>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</u>	174
I. THE AGEING OF BRUISES	174
1. Histopathology	174
2. Enzyme studies	176
3. pH of bruised muscle	177
II. SUBCUTANEOUS HAEMORRHAGIC SPECKLING	178
<u>APPENDIX: MATERIALS AND METHODS USED IN THE ENZYME STUDIES ON BRUISED MUSCLE</u>	180
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	201

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

2.1	The ages, numbers and positions of impact bruises inflicted on experimental lambs.	36
2.2	Example of a contingency table used for chi-square analysis. In this case the relationship between bruise ages and scores for macrophage exudation is investigated.	40
2.3	A list of the special stains used on tissue sections from impact bruises, showing the numbers of bruises of each age stained.	45
2.4	Statistical significance of associations between scores from various histopathological features and bruise ages. The results are from chi-square analyses of the respective contingency tables.	51
2.5	Statistical significance of associations between scores for various histopathological features in muscle and bruise ages, whilst controlling for the effects of haemorrhage.	53
2.6	Statistical significance of associations between scores for various histopathological features in adipose tissue and bruise ages, whilst controlling for the effects of haemorrhage.	53
2.7	Probabilities of observing individual scores for selected histopathological features of bruised muscle, calculated for each of six age categories of bruises.	55
2.8	Probabilities of observing individual scores for selected histopathological features of bruised adipose tissue, calculated for each of six age categories of bruises.	56
2.9	The calculations required when using histopathological data to age bruises are shown for one bruise in muscle.	57
2.10	The estimated ages of experimental bruises, as determined by applying the Bayesian probability model to histopathological data for muscle, are compared with their known ages. Macrophages and neutrophils were scored separately rather than as ratios.	59

TABLE

2.11	The estimated ages of experimental bruises, as determined by applying the Bayesian probability model to histopathological data for muscle, are compared with their known ages. This time macrophages and neutrophils are scored as ratios.	59
2.12	The percentage 'accuracies' of the Bayesian probability model in ageing bruises using histopathological data from muscle or adipose tissue are shown for the 120 bruises used to develop the model.	60
2.13	The percentage 'accuracies' of the Bayesian probability model in ageing bruises indirectly or directly into two broad age categories are calculated using histopathological data from the 120 bruises used to develop the model.	61
2.14	The estimated ages of experimental bruises, as determined by applying the Bayesian probability model to histopathological data for adipose tissue, are compared with their known ages.	62
2.15	The percentages of scores duplicated after re-scoring the 120 bruises used when developing the Bayesian probability model.	62
2.16	Comparisons between the 'accuracies' of the Bayesian probability model in ageing bruises using the original and new scores for the 120 muscle sections used to develop the model.	63
2.17	The estimated ages of experimental bruises, as determined by applying the multiple regression model to histopathological data for muscle, are compared with their known ages.	65
2.18	The percentage 'accuracy' of the multiple linear regression model is compared with that of the Bayesian probability model, using the same data for muscle.	65
2.19	Comparisons between estimated and actual ages of experimental bruises. Age estimates were made by applying the Bayesian probability model to histopathological data from muscle sections not previously used for developing the model.	66
2.20	Comparisons between estimated and actual ages of experimental bruises. Age estimates were made by applying the Bayesian probability model to histopathological data from adipose tissue sections not previously used for developing the model.	66

TABLE

2.21	The 'accuracy' of the Bayesian probability model when applied to data previously used for its development is compared with that achieved with new data.	67
2.22	The 'accuracy' of the Bayesian probability model in ageing bruises when there was concordance between paired within-bruise samples.	68
2.23	The 'accuracy' of the Bayesian probability model in ageing bruises with concordance between estimates made from muscle and adipose tissue.	69
2.24	The 'accuracy' of the Bayesian probability model in ageing bruises is compared to that of interpretive ageing.	69
2.25	The effect variation in the relative numbers of bruises actually aged 1-20 hours or 24-72 hours old has on the 'confidence' of ageing individual bruises. The 'accuracy' of the model is assumed constant at 0.85 and 0.81 for 1-20 hour and 24-72 hour old bruises respectively.	75
2.26	The 'confidence' with which single or small numbers of bruises can be aged by the Bayesian probability model, using 'accuracy' figures from Tables 2.21, 2.22 and 2.23.	76
2.27	'Confidence' levels of ageing individual bruises calculated after applying the Bayesian probability method to data from muscle, adipose tissue or both.	80
2.28	Bruises aged as 1-20 hours or 24+ hours old are classified according to the known holding times of lambs in meat works yards prior to slaughter.	81
2.29	Results of Student's paired 't' test assessing the significance of differences between mob-specific and appropriate daily average bruising prevalences.	83
2.30	The carcase positions of bruises are compared with their estimated places of occurrence, either before or after arrival at the meat works.	84

TABLE

3.1	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated aldolase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	119
3.2	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated lactate dehydrogenase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	120
3.3	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated succinate dehydrogenase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	123
3.4	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	125
3.5	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated acid phosphatase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	127
3.6	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated alkaline phosphatase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	129
3.7	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated leucine aminopeptidase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	131
3.8	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated non-specific esterase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	133
3.9	Summary of the visually assessed degrees of activity of histochemically demonstrated creatine phosphokinase in various tissue components of bruised muscle.	135
4.1	Results of Student's paired t tests examining levels of significance of pH differences between contra-lateral (C1-C2) and also between within-muscle (C2-C3) controls.	148
4.2	Average muscle pH of bruises and controls, along with results of Student's t tests on pH differences between bruise/control sample pairs.	150

TABLE

5.1	Outline of procedures applied during attempts to produce petechial haemorrhages by the direct electrical stimulation of nerves innervating inguinal fat.	158
5.2	The prevalences of petechiation in the carcase fat of two groups of lambs formed from a single mob. The lambs in Group B were killed 20 hours after those in Group A.	162
5.3	Experiment to isolate factors associated with the process of slaughter.	163

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
2.1	The weight, and plastic tube, along with the hand vice used to inflict impact and wool pull bruises respectively. The wooden ruler is 40cm long.	35
2.2	An example of the score sheets used when studying histopathological changes in bruises.	Page 38
2.3	The number of neutrophils in the infiltrate exceeds that of macrophages, as was generally the case in bruises up to 20 hours old. This bruise was 16 hours old. (Paraffin section, H+E x 260)	48
2.4	The number of macrophages in the infiltrate exceeds that of neutrophils, as was generally the case in bruises 24 hours and older. This bruise was 60 hours old. (Paraffin section, H+E x 260)	48
2.5	Myoblast-like cells indicative of early regenerative change. This bruise was 36 hours old. (Paraffin section, H+E x 500)	48
2.6	Endothelial hypertrophy in a 60 hour old bruise. (Paraffin section, H+E x 260)	48
2.7	Hypertrophy of fibroblasts in a 60 hour old bruise. (Paraffin section, H+E x 500)	49
2.8	Haemosiderin positive macrophages in a 72 hour old bruise. (Paraffin section, Perl's stain, x 160)	49
2.9	A diagrammatic and figurative representation of the performance of the Bayesian probability model in ageing a population of bruises of ages n_x actually 1-20 hours old and n_y actually 24-72 hours old.	Page 72
2.10	Percentages of the total number of bruised mobs plotted against differences between mob-specific and appropriate daily average bruising prevalences. This shows the tendency for bruises to cluster within certain mobs of lambs rather than to occur with even distribution in all mobs slaughtered.	Page 85

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
2.11	Percentage bruising in lambs surveyed plotted against trucking distance to the meat works.	Page 85
2.12	Percentage bruising in lambs surveyed plotted against holding time in meat works yards.	Page 86
2.13	Areas into which carcasses were divided when classifying bruises according to carcass position.	Page 86
3.1	Bruise 4 hours old. Variation in aldolase staining according to fibre type in apparently normal muscle. x 320	118
3.2	Bruise 48 hours old. Decreased and increased aldolase staining in necrotic muscle fibres. x 320	118
3.3	Bruise 144 hours old. Moderately positive aldolase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 320	119
3.4	Bruise 144 hours old. Enhanced aldolase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 320	119
3.5	Aldolase zymogram of bruised muscle, leucocytes, plasma and erythrocytes after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	119
3.6	Bruise 4 hours old. Variation in lactate dehydrogenase staining according to fibre type in apparently normal muscle. x 320	119
3.7	Bruise 24 hours old. Decreased lactate dehydrogenase staining in necrotic muscle fibres. x 320	120
3.8	Bruise 24 hours old. Variably positive lactate dehydrogenase staining in the leucocyte exudate. x 320	120
3.9	Bruise 24 hours old. Increased lactate dehydrogenase staining of intramuscular leucocytes. x 320	121

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
3.10	Bruise 24 hours old. Moderately positive lactate dehydrogenase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 500	121
3.11	Bruise 48 hours old. Strongly positive lactate dehydrogenase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 320	121
3.12	Lactate dehydrogenase zymogram of bruised muscle, leucocytes, plasma and erythrocytes after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	121
3.13	A representative densitometer scan of electro-focussed lactate dehydrogenase isoenzymes obtained from bruised muscle, showing the 25 bands common to each sample of bruised muscle. This particular bruise was 4 hours old. The gel had ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5.	121
3.14	Bruise 4 hours old. Variation in succinate dehydrogenase staining according to fibre type in apparently normal muscle. x 320	121
3.15	Bruise 48 hours old. Decreased succinate dehydrogenase activity in necrotic muscle fibres. x 320	123
3.16	Bruise 144 hours old. Enhanced succinate dehydrogenase staining in degenerative muscle fibre. x 320	123
3.17	Succinate dehydrogenase zymogram of bruised muscle, leucocytes, plasma and erythrocytes after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	123
3.18	Bruise 4 hours old. Absence of glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase activity in apparently normal muscle fibres. x 320	123

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
3.19	Bruise 24 hours old. Punctate glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase activity in degenerative muscle fibre. Intramuscular leucocytes show a moderately positive reaction. x 320	125
3.20	Bruise 48 hours old. Faintly positive glucose-5-phosphate dehydrogenase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 500	125
3.21	Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase zymogram of bruised muscle, leucocytes, plasma and erythrocytes after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	125
3.22	Bruise 4 hours old. Absence of acid phosphatase activity in apparently normal and degenerative muscle fibres. x 125	125
3.23	Bruise 48 hours old. Absence of acid phosphatase activity in necrotic muscle fibres. Intramuscular macrophages show a positive reaction. x 320	127
3.24	Bruise 24 hours old. Apparently positive acid phosphatase staining of a necrotic muscle fibre, actually due to infiltrating macrophages. x 320	127
3.25	Bruise 144 hours old. Absence of acid phosphatase staining in interstitial polymorphs, and a variably positive reaction in macrophages. x 320	127
3.26	Bruise 48 hours old. Acid phosphatase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 320	127
3.27	Acid phosphatase zymogram of bruised muscle, liver and erythrocytes after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	128

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
3.28	A representative densitometer scan of electro-focussed acid phosphatase isoenzymes obtained from homogenates of bruised muscle, showing the four isoenzyme bands represented in all the muscle samples. This particular bruise was 144 hours old. The unmarked peaks represent haemoglobin or unidentified protein.	128
3.29	Bruise 24 hours old. Apparently positive alkaline phosphatase staining of a necrotic muscle fibre, actually due to infiltrating macrophages. x 500	129
3.30	Bruise 24 hours old. Strongly positive alkaline phosphatase staining of capillary endothelium. Neutrophils are also strongly positive. x 125	129
3.31	Bruise 24 hours old. Variable alkaline phosphatase staining of infiltrating macrophages. x 500	129
3.32	Alkaline phosphatase zymogram of bruised muscle, small intestine and liver after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	129
3.33	Bruise 144 hours old. Apparently positive leucine aminopeptidase staining of a necrotic muscle fibre, actually due to infiltrating macrophages. x 320	131
3.34	Bruise 4 hours old. Positive leucine aminopeptidase staining in the absence of infiltrating macrophages. x 320	131
3.35	Bruise 144 hours old. Moderate leucine aminopeptidase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 500	131
3.36	Leucine aminopeptidase zymogram of bruised muscle homogenates after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 30 minutes at 37°C.	131

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
3.37	Bruise 4 hours old. Negative or slightly positive non-specific esterase staining of apparently normal muscle fibres. x 320	133
3.38	Bruise 24 hours old. Unchanged and increased non-specific esterase staining in necrotic muscle fibres. x 320	133
3.39	Bruise 48 hours old. Strongly positive non-specific esterase staining in interstitial fibroblasts. x 320	133
3.40	Esterase zymogram of bruised muscle after isoelectric focussing at 25 watts constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 15 minutes at 25°C.	133
3.41	Esterase zymogram of bruised muscle after isoelectric focussing at 25 watts constant power for 2.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 4.5-6.5. The gel was incubated in aqueous substrate medium for 15 minutes at 25°C.	134
3.42	A representative densitometer scan of electro-focussed non-specific esterase isoenzymes obtained from bruised muscle, showing the 17 peaks represented in all the muscle samples. This particular bruise was 24 hours old. The gel had an ampholine buffer range of pH 4.5-6.5	134
3.43	Bruise 144 hours old. Moderate diffuse and strong punctate creatine phosphokinase staining in apparently normal muscle fibres. x 500	135
3.44	Bruise 24 hours old. Unchanged creatine phosphokinase staining in severely necrotic muscle fibres. x 320	135
3.45	Bruise 48 hours old. Decreased creatine phosphokinase staining in necrotic muscle fibres. x 320	135
3.46	Bruise 144 hours old. Strongly positive creatine phosphokinase activity in the leucocytic exudate. The necrotic fibres show decreased activity. x 320	135

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
3.47	Bruise 48 hours old. Strongly positive creatine phosphokinase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 320	135
3.48	Creatine phosphokinase zymogram of bruised muscle, leucocytes, plasma and erythrocytes after isoelectric focussing at 25 watt constant power for 1.5 hours in PAG with ampholine buffer range pH 3.5-9.5. The substrate was incorporated in a 2% agarose gel which was applied to the electro-focussed gel for 30 minutes at 37°C.	135
3.49	Creatine phosphokinase zymogram of bruised muscle, leucocytes and erythrocytes after electrophoresis at 250 volts for 90 minutes in cellulose acetate plates. The substrate was applied to a second cellulose acetate plate as a 0.5% noble agar gel. This plate was firmly applied to the first and the pair incubated for 20 minutes at 37°C.	136
3.50	Bruise 48 hours old. Variation in adenosine triphosphatase staining in normal muscle fibres according to fibre type in apparently normal muscle. x 50	136
3.51	Bruise 24 hours old. Variation of adenosine triphosphatase staining according to fibre type is maintained in areas of muscle necrosis. x 125	136
3.52	Bruise 24 hours old. Very mild and therefore equivocal adenosine triphosphatase staining of fibroblasts in connective tissue septum. x 500	136
4.1	Sequential pH measurements of normal muscle sampled 1 hour <i>post mortem</i> and homogenised in 5mM sodium iodoacetate.	Page 145
4.2	Sequential pH measurements of normal muscle sampled 24 hours <i>post mortem</i> and homogenised in 5mM sodium iodoacetate.	Page 145
4.3	Ranges of fore and hind limb pH values in 3 hour <i>post mortem</i> samples of bruises of different ages. Hind limb values are offset to the right for clarity.	Page 146

<u>FIGURE</u>		Following page
4.4	Ranges of fore and hind limb pH values in 24 hour <i>post mortem</i> samples of bruises of different ages. Hind limb values are offset to the right for clarity.	Page 146
4.5	Ranges of bruise/control pH differences for 3 hour <i>post mortem</i> fore and hind limb muscle samples of bruises of different ages. Hind limb values are offset to the right for clarity.	Page 149
4.6	Ranges of bruise/control pH differences for 24 hour <i>post mortem</i> fore and hind limb muscle samples of bruises of different ages. Hind limb values are offset to the right for clarity.	Page 146
5.1	Petechial haemorrhages occurring in adipose tissue but not in muscle.	159
5.2	Discrete haemorrhage in adipose tissue and its associated fascia. (Paraffin section, H+E x 65)	
5.3	A capillary thrombus with closely associated leucocytes. (Paraffin section, picro-Mallory x 1250)	159
5.4	The weekly incidence of petechiation in carcase adipose tissue in comparison with that of conventional bruising.	Page 161
5.5	Changes in arterial pressure following electrical stunning using a 'Thornton Mk II' head-to-back current applicator.	164
5.6	Changes in arterial pressure following electrical stunning using a 'Paralec' head-only current applicator.	164