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The Spatio-temporal Epidemiology of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Great Britain

A thesis presented
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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at Massey University

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CERTIFICATE OF REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

This is to certify that the research carried out in the Doctoral Thesis entitled

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- (a) is the original work of the candidate, except as indicated by appropriate attribution in the text and/or in the acknowledgements;
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- (c) all the ethical requirements applicable to this study have been complied with as required by Massey University.

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Abstract

Great Britain suffered two of the most globally notable animal disease epidemics of recent decades — the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) epidemic which began in November 1986, and the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) epidemic which lasted from February to September 2001. This thesis applies various analytical techniques to these two quite different epidemics: a rapidly spreading highly contagious disease for which urgent decisions are essential (FMD), and a feed-borne non-contagious disease with an exceptionally long incubation period (BSE). The BSE epidemic, in particular, presented major investigational challenges because its recent emergence meant that its epidemiological features were not yet fully clear.

The studies of BSE reported here showed that the control measures recommended as a consequence of the first epidemiological study of the new disease were remarkably effective. The July 1988 meat and bone meal ban resulted in a 60% reduction in BSE risk for cattle born in the first 12 months after its introduction. Descriptive spatial analyses, using kernel density and regression techniques showed a marked concentration of BSE risk in the south of Great Britain. Following the July 1988 meat and bone meal ban BSE risk shifted to the east of the country, an effect partly explained by cross contamination of cattle feed with high-protein concentrates destined for the pig and poultry industry.

Detailed investigation of the earliest BSE-exposed farm holdings identified the south of England as an area of excess exposure density. While interpretation of these findings is complicated by the fact that the disease must have been present for some years before it was first diagnosed, the evidence suggests initial amplification in the south provided risk material which progressively distributed the disease to the rest of the country.

In contrast to BSE, FMD presents different challenges, in that affected farms can be diagnosed rapidly, but it is difficult to accurately evaluate the relative importance of the different mechanisms of transmission, and hence determine how best to apply control efforts. Foci of FMD infection of matched size in the English counties of Cumbria and

Devon were compared to dissect out factors contributing to the two quite different epidemic patterns in these areas. This analysis showed evidence of strong spatio-temporal interaction of infection risk in Cumbria, due initially to cattle herds as the dominant influence, with a later growth in the role of sheep as a source of infection.

During the FMD epidemic a stochastic spatial simulation model was used extensively as an aid for decision making. After the epidemic was over the predictive accuracy of earlier real-time modelling was assessed for the whole of Britain and the most concentrated focus of disease in Cumbria. The model predicted the temporal epidemic curve closely at both levels, and predicted the national spatial pattern of infection with high specificities (over 99%) and useful sensitivities (37% to 71%). It was concluded that the model predicted FMD-infected locations within 0 to 14 days after simulation start date with sufficient accuracy to guide surveillance activities and to provide estimates of resources required for contingency planning. The spatial accuracy of predictions might be further improved through the use of a series of sub-regional models, better-capturing the characteristics of individual outbreak foci that typically emerge during extended large scale, multcentred epidemics.

The studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that the application of temporal, spatial and spatio-temporal analytical methods can enhance the understanding of the epidemiological features of diseases in animal populations. The value in applying these methods of analysis comes from the ability to identify high and low disease-risk time frames and locations, allowing more focussed allocation of investigative resources.

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Nomenclature

AR	Autoregressive (model)
BSE	Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
CAR	Conditional autoregressive (model)
CI	Confidence interval
CIGAR	Conditional intrinsic Gaussian autoregressive (model)
CPH	County-parish-holding (identifier)
FMD	Foot-and-mouth disease
ESDA	Exploratory spatial data analysis
GAM	Generalised additive model
GIS	Geographic Information System
HEPP	Heterogeneous Poisson process (model)
LISA	Local indicators of spatial association
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MPL	Maximum pseudolikelihood
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
SAR	Simultaneous autoregressive (model)
SERAD	Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department
SMD	Standardised mortality difference
SMR	Standardised mortality ratio
SOAEFD	Scottish Office, Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries
TIN	Triangular irregular network

List of Publications

Wilesmith, J., Ryan, J., Stevenson, M., Morris, R., Pfeiffer, D., Lin, D., Jackson, R., & Sanson, R. (2000). Temporal aspects of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy epidemic in Great Britain: holding-associated risk factors for disease. *Veterinary Record*, 147, 319 – 325.

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Stevenson, M., Wilesmith, J., Ryan, J., Morris, R., Lawson, A., Pfeiffer, D., & Lin, D. (2000). Descriptive spatial analysis of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy epidemic in Great Britain to June 1997. *Veterinary Record*, 147, 379 – 384.

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Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Nomenclature	vii
List of Publications	ix
1 Introduction	1
2 Literature Review	3
2.1 Introduction	3
2.2 Spatial data types	4
2.3 Point data	7
2.3.1 Visualising point data	7
2.3.2 Exploration of point data	8
2.3.3 Modelling point data	18
2.4 Lattice data	20
2.4.1 Visualising lattice data	20
2.4.2 Exploring lattice data	22
2.4.3 Modelling lattice data	28
2.5 Continuous spatial data	36
2.5.1 Visualising continuous spatial data	37
2.5.2 Exploration of continuous spatial data	37
2.5.3 Modelling continuous spatial data	41
2.6 Dynamic spatial models	46
2.7 Spatial clusters	47

2.7.1	Traditional methods	49
2.7.2	Adjacency methods	50
2.7.3	Moving window and related methods	51
2.7.4	Risk surface estimation	54
2.8	Space-time interaction	56
2.8.1	Descriptive techniques	57
2.8.2	Spatio-temporal clustering	57
2.8.3	Spatio-temporal modelling	60
2.9	Conclusion	62
3	Holding-associated risk factors for BSE in Great Britain	65
3.1	Introduction	65
3.2	Materials and methods	66
3.3	Results	68
3.4	Discussion	79
4	Individual animal risk factors for BSE in Great Britain	85
4.1	Introduction	85
4.2	Materials and methods	86
4.3	Results	89
4.4	Discussion	100
5	A descriptive spatial analysis of the BSE epidemic in Great Britain	103
5.1	Introduction	103
5.2	Materials and methods	104
5.3	Results	107
5.4	Discussion	114
6	Area-level risks for BSE in Great Britain	117
6.1	Introduction	117
6.2	Materials and Methods	118
6.3	Results	123
6.4	Discussion	136
6.5	Conclusion	139

7	The early evolution of the BSE epidemic in Great Britain	141
7.1	Introduction	141
7.2	Materials and methods	142
7.2.1	Estimation of incubation period	142
7.2.2	Estimation of the time and place of index exposure	144
7.2.3	Spatial and temporal patterns of exposure	145
7.3	Results	147
7.4	Discussion	161
8	Spatio-temporal epidemiology of FMD in two areas of Great Britain in 2001	165
8.1	Introduction	165
8.2	Materials and methods	166
8.3	Results	169
8.4	Discussion	181
8.5	Conclusion	183
9	The predictive accuracy of a stochastic spatial model of FMD	185
9.1	Introduction	185
9.2	Materials and methods	186
9.3	Results	189
9.4	Discussion	202
10	General discussion	205
10.1	Surveillance for endemic disease	207
10.2	Case data	208
10.3	Population data	210
10.4	Conclusion	211
	Bibliography	213

List of Figures

2.1	Data types typically used in spatial epidemiological analyses: point, continuous and lattice data.	6
2.2	Image plot of kernel density estimates for the laryngeal cancer data set.	9
2.3	Image plots of kernel density estimates for the laryngeal cancer data set, showing the effect of different smoothing parameters.	15
2.4	Contour plot showing the variability of the kernel density estimates for laryngeal cancer cases.	16
2.5	Image plot showing the density of laryngeal cancer risk constructed using the location of lung cancer diagnoses as controls.	16
2.6	K -function plot based on the location of laryngeal cancer diagnoses in the laryngeal cancer data set.	17
2.7	K -function difference plot and upper and lower bounds of 99 simulation envelopes based on the location of laryngeal cancer diagnoses (cases) and the location of lung cancer diagnoses (controls).	17
2.8	Choropleth maps of SMRs and standard errors of SMRs for lip cancer in Scotland from 1975 to 1980.	23
2.9	Choropleth maps of SMRs and empirically Bayes-smoothed SMRs for lip cancer in Scotland from 1975 to 1980.	25
2.10	Explanation of empirical Bayes smoothing.	26
2.11	Moran's I statistic (and 95% confidence interval) computed on the basis of the SMRs for lip cancer diagnoses in Scotland from 1975 to 1980. . .	28
2.12	Moran scatter plot of the SMRs for lip cancer diagnoses in Scotland from 1975 to 1980, based on a first order adjacency matrix.	29
2.13	Structured and unstructured heterogeneity terms from a mixed-effects model of the risk of lip cancer in Scotland from 1975 to 1980.	35
2.14	Bubble plot constructed using the aquifer data set.	37

2.15	Dirichlet tessellation plot constructed using the aquifer data.	39
2.16	Delaunay triangulation network constructed using the aquifer data. . . .	40
2.17	Triangular irregular network contours constructed using the aquifer data.	41
2.18	Image plot of kernel regression estimates computed using the aquifer data.	42
2.19	Empirical variogram plot computed using the aquifer data.	43
2.20	Variogram cloud plot computed using the aquifer data.	44
2.21	Contour plot showing variation in piezometric-head measurements through- out the Wolfcamp aquifer, computed using trend surface techniques. . .	45
2.22	Contour plot showing variation in piezometric-head measurements through- out the Wolfcamp aquifer, computed using kriging.	46
2.23	Contour plot showing the location of the most likely cluster of laryngeal cancer cases, computed using the spatial scan statistic.	53
2.24	Contour plot showing areas of excess laryngeal cancer risk, defined as locations where the standardised kernel density difference of cases and non-cases exceeds two in absolute value.	55
3.1	Map showing the seven regions of Great Britain described in a study of holding-associated risk factors for BSE.	73
3.2	Kaplan-Meier survival curve showing the cumulative proportion of hold- ings that had not experienced a BSE index case by 30 June 1997.	74
3.3	Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of hold- ings that had not experienced a BSE index case to 30 June 1997, stratified by region.	75
3.4	Adjusted Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative propor- tion of holdings that had not experienced a BSE index case to 30 June 1997, stratified by region.	76
3.5	Adjusted Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative propor- tion of holdings that had not experienced a BSE index case to 30 June 1997, stratified by holding size.	77
3.6	Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of hold- ings that had not experienced a BSE index case to 30 June 1997, stratified by holding type.	78

4.1	Map showing the seven regions of Great Britain described in a study of individual animal risk factors for BSE.	93
4.2	Kaplan-Meier survival curve showing the cumulative proportion of cattle that were BSE free as a function of age.	94
4.3	Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of cattle that were BSE free as a function of age, stratified by region of the natal holding.	95
4.4	Adjusted Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of cattle that were BSE free as a function of age, stratified by region of the natal holding.	96
4.5	Adjusted Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of cattle that were BSE free as a function of age for the 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 birth cohorts.	97
4.6	Adjusted Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of cattle that were BSE free as a function of age for the 1988, 1989, 1990, and 1991 birth cohorts.	98
4.7	Line plot showing the monthly hazard of showing clinical signs of BSE, by birth cohort.	99
5.1	Prevalence of BSE-positive holdings throughout Great Britain to 30 June 1997 (expressed as the number of BSE-positive holdings per 100 holdings per square kilometre).	111
5.2	Location of the most likely, second most likely and third most likely high incidence clusters of BSE-positive holdings throughout Great Britain to 30 June 1997.	112
5.3	Incidence of BSE throughout Great Britain (expressed as confirmed BSE cases per 100 adult cattle per square kilometre) for selected 12 month periods from 1 July 1986 to 30 June 1997.	113
6.1	Map showing the 178 districts of Great Britain described in a study of area-level risk factors for BSE.	125
6.2	Directed acyclic graph showing the parameters in a mixed-effects model of area-level BSE risk.	126

6.3	Choropleth maps of district-level standardised mortality ratios for BSE in British cattle 1986 – 1997.	127
6.4	Choropleth maps of district-level dairy:non-dairy ratio, pig:cattle ratio, and mutton: beef ratio for the pre-control and post-control cohorts. . . .	129
6.5	Scatterplots of log-transformed district-level standardised mortality ratios for BSE versus dairy to non-dairy cattle ratio, pig to cattle ratio, mutton to beef ratio and northing coordinate of each district's centroid.	130
6.6	Box and whisker plots showing the 95% credible interval of the relative risk estimates for the mixed-effects models shown in Table 6.4	133
6.7	Estimates of district-level relative risk of BSE attributable to the structured heterogeneity terms from the mixed-effects models shown in Table 6.4.	134
6.8	Influence support plots for two mixed-effects models of area-level risk factors for BSE.	135
7.1	Diagrammatic representation of the sequence of analyses conducted in a study of the early evolution of the BSE epidemic in Great Britain. . . .	149
7.2	Map showing 178 arbitrarily-defined districts of Great Britain described in a study of the early evolution of the BSE epidemic.	150
7.3	Box and whisker plot of age-at-onset of clinical signs of BSE for confirmed cases where the onset of clinical signs was before 1 July 1997, stratified by birth cohort.	152
7.4	Box and whisker plot of age-at-onset of clinical signs of BSE for confirmed cases where the onset of clinical signs was before 1 July 1997, stratified by birth cohort and conditioned by region of natal holding. . .	153
7.5	Line plot of incidence density of BSE (expressed as cases of BSE per 1000 cow-years at risk) for the 1987 birth cohort at assumed incubation periods ranging from 24 to 144 months.	155
7.6	Results of analyses conducted to assess the performance of multiple imputation.	156
7.7	Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing the cumulative proportion of holdings that had not experienced a BSE exposure by 1 July 1983, stratified by region.	157

7.8	Image plots showing the kernel density of holdings estimated to have been exposed to BSE by 1 July 1983 and the cumulative incidence of BSE-exposed holdings by 1 July 1983.	158
7.9	Estimates of district-level odds of BSE exposure attributable to the structured heterogeneity terms from the mixed-effects model shown in Table 7.5.	160
8.1	Map of Great Britain showing the location of the Cumbria and Devon study areas described in a study of the spatio-temporal epidemiology of FMD.	172
8.2	Weekly hazard of FMD for cattle and 'other' holding types.	174
8.3	Contour plots showing locations in the Cumbria study area where > 10% and > 20% of holdings were diagnosed with FMD during four time periods in 2001.	175
8.4	Contour plots showing locations in the Devon study area where > 10% of holdings were diagnosed with FMD during two time periods in 2001.	176
8.5	Spatio-temporal interaction of FMD risk among infected premises in the Cumbria study area during four time periods in 2001.	177
8.6	Spatio-temporal interaction of FMD risk among infected premises in the Devon study area during two time periods in 2001.	178
8.7	Frequency distribution of the interval (in days) between FMD infection date and confirmation date in the Cumbria study area during four time periods in 2001.	179
8.8	Frequency distribution of the interval (in days) between FMD confirmation date and slaughter date in the Cumbria study area during four time periods in 2001.	180
9.1	Map of Great Britain showing the spatial distribution of foot-and-mouth disease infected premises across Great Britain in the 14 day period after a 10 June 2001 simulation start date.	190
9.2	Selected epidemiological parameter settings used by InterSpread for simulations starting on 7 April 2001, 10 June 2001 and 3 September 2001.	193

9.3	Map of Great Britain showing the location of the Cumbria study area described in a study assessing the predictive accuracy of a stochastic spatial model of FMD.	194
9.4	Explanation of the method used to assess the accuracy of InterSpread's predictions.	195
9.5	Frequency histograms showing the distribution of the predicted number of foot-and-mouth disease infected premises across Great Britain in the 28 days after simulations starting on 7 April 2001, 10 June 2001 and 3 September 2001.	197
9.6	Frequency histograms showing the distribution of the predicted number of foot-and-mouth disease infected premises across Cumbria in the 28 days after simulations starting on 7 April 2001, 10 June 2001 and 3 September 2001.	198
9.7	Positive and negative predictive value of InterSpread predictions at 0 - 14 days after simulation start as a function of inferential grid cell size . . .	200
9.8	Positive and negative predictive value of InterSpread predictions at 14 - 28 days after simulation start as a function of inferential grid cell size .	201
10.1	Schematic diagram showing how on-farm data, veterinary practice records, laboratory data, slaughterhouse processing records, details of residue assessments and animal movements might be integrated within an active surveillance data network.	210

List of Tables

2.1	Classification of data types commonly used in spatial epidemiological analyses.	5
2.2	Summary of spatial epidemiology studies in the veterinary literature, classified by the primary analytical technique used.	61
3.1	Counts of the total number of holdings present in Great Britain between 30 June 1986 and 30 June 1997, estimates of the area of the seven regions of Great Britain, and holding density (expressed as the number of holdings per 100 hectares).	70
3.2	Counts of the total number of cattle holdings recorded on MAFF and SOAEFD censuses between 30 June 1986 and 30 June 1996, stratified by BSE status and region.	70
3.3	Descriptive statistics of holding size, stratified by BSE status and region.	71
3.4	Counts of BSE-positive and BSE-negative holdings stratified by holding type and region.	71
3.5	Cox proportional hazards model showing the effect of region, holding size and holding type on the monthly hazard of experiencing a BSE index case.	72
4.1	Counts of confirmed BSE cases to 30 June 1997, stratified by origin of case and region.	91
4.2	Counts of confirmed BSE cases to 30 June 1997, stratified by holding type and region.	91
4.3	Cumulative incidence of BSE from 1 July 1986 to 30 June 1997, stratified by region.	91
4.4	Cox proportional hazards model showing the effect of region, holding size, holding type and birth cohort on the monthly hazard of experiencing BSE.	92

5.1	Descriptive statistics of British parish areas, stratified by region.	109
5.2	Descriptive statistics of the numbers of cattle holdings per parish, stratified by region.	109
5.3	Descriptive statistics of adult cattle numbers per parish, stratified by region.	110
6.1	Descriptive statistics of district-level counts of adult dairy cattle, adult non-dairy cattle, adult pigs, and number of cattle and sheep slaughtered, stratified by period (1987 to 1988 and 1989 to 1997)	128
6.2	Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients for log-transformed district-level standardised mortality ratios for BSE and district-level estimates of dairy:non-dairy ratio, pig:cattle ratio, mutton:beef ratio and northing of district coordinate of each district's centroid.	131
6.3	Posterior means and posterior standard deviations of the regression coefficients in the fixed-effects models of factors influencing district-level relative risk of BSE.	131
6.4	Posterior means and posterior standard deviations of the regression coefficients in the mixed-effects models of factors influencing district-level relative risk of BSE.	132
7.1	Descriptive statistics of age (in months) at onset of clinical signs of BSE where the date of onset of clinical signs was before 1 July 1997, stratified by birth cohort.	151
7.2	Counts of holdings estimated to have been exposed to BSE by 1 July 1983, stratified by region and certainty of birth date of the index exposure case.	154
7.3	Counts of holdings estimated to have been exposed to BSE by 1 July 1983, stratified by region and certainty of natal holding of index exposure case.	154
7.4	Counts of holdings estimated to have been exposed to BSE by 1 July 1983, estimates of the area of the seven regions of Great Britain, and density of BSE-exposed holdings.	159

7.5	Posterior means and standard deviations of the regression coefficients in the mixed-effects model of factors influencing district-level relative risk of BSE exposure to 30 June 1983.	159
8.1	Counts of holdings present in the Cumbria study area on 24 February 2001 stratified by holding type classification and FMD status.	173
8.2	Counts of holdings present in the Devon study area on 24 February 2001 stratified by holding type classification and FMD status.	173
9.1	Epidemiological parameters used by InterSpread for simulations starting on 7 April 2001, 10 June 2001 and 3 September 2001.	191
9.2	Control strategy procedural definitions and settings used by InterSpread for simulations starting on 7 April 2001, 10 June 2001 and 3 September 2001.	192
9.3	Counts of premises predicted to become infected and counts of premises diagnosed with foot-and-mouth disease in the 28 days after InterSpread simulations starting on 7 April 2001, 10 June 2001 and 3 September 2001.	196
9.4	Means (95% confidence intervals) of sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value and negative predictive value of spatial predictions of FMD infection made by InterSpread in April, June and September of the 2001 British epidemic. Predictions have been made for the intervals 0 to 14 and 14 to 28 days after simulation start date.	199