Sixty years of research at the Animal Virus Research Institute, Pirbright

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The papers contained in this issue of the OIE Review are based upon talks presented at a meeting held in October 1985 in celebration of the diamond jubilee of the commencement of scientific research at Pirbright in 1925. In 1924 the British Minister of Agriculture appointed a Foot-and-Mouth Disease Research Committee "to initiate, direct and conduct investigations into foot-and-mouth disease either in this country or elsewhere with a view to discovering means whereby the invasion of the new disease may be rendered less harmful to agriculture". A site at Pirbright, near Woking, Surrey, UK, was chosen for this purpose, and research work began in 1925 and continued under the auspices of this Committee until 1939. From 1939 to 1947 the full Committee ceased to meet, but a smaller sub-committee held meetings. In 1947 the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Committee of the Ministry was reappointed to function as an advisory body, the financial administration of the Institute being still the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. Ten years later, in 1957, the research programme was extended, and the organisation of the Institute was changed to that of a company limited by guarantee, without share capital. The Director is appointed and advised by a Governing Body which consists of a chairman (at present Lord Adrian of Cambridge) and eight members. The Institute is grant-aided by the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Although foot-and-mouth disease remains the major research interest of the Institute, which is designated the World Reference Laboratory by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, work is now carried out on several other virus diseases of economic importance which constitute a threat to the livestock industry in the UK. These include African swine fever, Aujeszky's disease, bluetongue, rinderpest, sheep and goat pox, swine vesicular disease, classical swine fever, and avian influenza (fowl plague). The emphasis of the research work is on improving methods of diagnosis and control, and understanding the molecular basis of virus pathogenesis. To this end, the scientific work of the Institute is organised into three discipline-based Divisions, of Molecular Biology, Epidemiology, and Immunology and Pathology. There are also two support Divisions, of Administration, and Laboratory and Animal Services.

The contributions which follow reflect both historical and current research interests. The scientific meeting upon which they are based was divided into sessions, each concerned with a different group of disease agents. Within each session, a historical overview was provided by a chairman — in most cases a former member of the Institute's staff — and the papers which followed were given by current staff members. They are not intended to provide a complete coverage of the Institute's

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activities, but rather to provide the flavour of present research and of the role which Pirbright has played over the past sixty years in combating the most serious animal diseases which exist.

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