



# Food Poisoning, Policy and Politics: Corned Beef and Typhoid in Britain in the 1960s

*David F. Smith, H. Lesley Diack, T. Hugh Pennington*

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The problem of food poisoning and food-borne infections is currently one of vigorous debate, highlighted since the 1980s by numerous outbreaks and scares involving salmonella in lettuce and eggs, listeria in cheese, the links between vCJD and BSE, E.Coli 0157 in cooked meats, and foot and mouth disease. Yet, as this book shows, the various issues involved were important as early as 1963/4, when there were serious typhoid outbreaks in Harlow, South Shields, Bedford, and Aberdeen, traced to contaminated corned beef imported from Argentina. Based upon extensive research, using archives which have only recently become available, private papers, and interviews as well as secondary literature, the book analyses the course of the outbreak and looks at the responses of politicians, officials, health professionals, business interests, the media and the public. It also considers the difficult issue of the weighing of food safety against international trade and other business and economic interests; conflicts between government departments; rivalry between professionals such as doctors and veterinarians; the effects upon and influence of victims and local communities; and the conduct of and responses to an official enquiry. Overall, it draws out generic lessons for how such epidemics should be handled, adding an historical perspective to contemporary debates.

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