

Foreword

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The Humane Slaughter Association was very pleased to welcome 254 delegates from 25 countries to this open international symposium: the first, as far as we are aware, of its kind. The symposium was one of several special events organised in 2011 to mark the HSA's centenary year. The charity can trace its roots to a meeting held in London on 17th January 1911 at which the Duchess of Portland was elected as the first President.

One hundred years ago, attempts to stun animals prior to slaughter were often, literally, a matter of hit or miss. However, thanks to the very impressive scientific and technical advances that have been made since then, humane slaughter methods are now available for a wide range of farmed animals.

Many people are content to not know how the animals that provide eggs, milk, wool, leather and other products are killed — preferring not to think about that aspect of food production. However, it is of course a very important matter and it is essential that others are prepared to address the details of the subject carefully and thoroughly.

Developments in humane slaughter depend on knowledge — about how unconsciousness can be induced and confirmed — which has been gained through research into brain structure and function. However, it is one thing to know the theory of inducing

unconsciousness, and another to design and build equipment that can be used to stun and/or kill humanely with very high levels of reliability. The great advances of the last 100 years are due to the work of many scientists, engineers and operators who have worked in these fields.

The handling of animals and the ways in which equipment is used are of course crucial. The slaughterman performs a very special task on behalf of society but, perhaps particularly in modern times, rather rarely receives wide thanks and recognition for this. Advances in livestock welfare at slaughter depend partly on the technology but greatly also on the knowledge, expertise, professionalism and care of the people operating it and on the pride they take in performing their job as humanely as possible.

The HSA is very grateful to all those who have encouraged and contributed to advances in this field. As the papers in these proceedings illustrate, a great deal has been achieved but much still remains to be done. There are further refinements to be made to modern methods and there is a lack of evidence-based guidance for the humane slaughter of some species, particularly fish. There is also a need to roll out more widely around the world, understanding of the principles and practice of humane slaughter and the importance of pre-slaughter stunning in protecting animal welfare.