Ernest Jackson Lawson Soulsby, better known as Baron Soulsby of Swaffham Prior, led an extraordinarily varied life. He was brought up on a farm in Westmoreland (which is still farmed by the family) and then trained as a veterinarian at Royal (Dick) Veterinary College, Edinburgh, Scotland. From the beginning his interest focused on parasitology with his first publication appearing in 1954.¹ His first research base was Bristol, then Cambridge followed by Pennsylvania, from where he travelled widely earning the irreverent title of ‘the Pan Am Professor of Parasitology’!²

He returned to Cambridge in 1978 as Professor of Animal Pathology, writing extensively on parasitology, and later became Dean of Wolfson College. He was created a Conservative life peer in 1990 (at the time of the announcement he was working in the Malaysian jungle), the first veterinarian to enter the House of Lords. In 1998, he became the first non-medical president of the Royal Society of Medicine. Never afraid of controversy he was a member of the Labour Government’s Burns Inquiry regarding fox hunting, with interests in the Jockey Club, the Field Sports Society and fell walking in his native Cumbria. He was clearly a man of the countryside.

He proved an excellent choice for the Chair of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Antimicrobial Resistance Inquiry (1997–98). Indeed, one of his last scientific articles on antimicrobial resistance declared that ‘The magic bullets have lost some of their magic’, but also that ‘Overusing antibiotics is not the only cause and reducing use is not the only solution’.²

He brought charm and determination, which certainly kept Harold Lambert and myself, as his external advisors, on our toes. It was the first such broad-ranging report² since the Swann Committee some four decades earlier.² The breadth and scope of the report is a testament to his leadership and many firmly believe that Lord Soulsby was the catalyst for so much of the international activities of the past two decades, which finds us inching painfully slowly along the track that he defined.

The BSAC invited him to be the Garrod Lecturer in 2008 on ‘Antimicrobial resistance—animals and the environment’⁵ and he was made an honorary life member.

Soon after the House of Lords report was published he lost a leg to a vascular accident—yet this did not diminish his activities, zipping around the Palace of Westminster on his scooter and going to the West Indies to teach at a veterinary college there. A man who lived life to the full and led a very full life!

Richard Wise
Breinton, Hereford
E-mail: rjwise2@aol.com

References