

The Origin of the term Q Fever and *Coxiella burnetii*

Q Fever was first described in abattoir workers, people who butchered animals, in the 1920s by Edward Holbrook Derrick. Since the cause of the symptoms was unknown at the time, it was given the name Q Fever, where the “Q” stands for query. This name was chosen over the alternatives “abattoir fever” and “Queensland rickettsial fever” in order to avoid slandering the cattle industry or the area where it was discovered. Frank MacFarlane Burnet and Mavis Freeman discovered the actual pathogen in 1937 by isolating it from one of Derrick’s patients, and one year later H.R. Cox and Gordon Davis isolated it from ticks. It was originally thought to be part of the *Rickettsia* genus, which contains many tick and flea borne pathogens; two names were proposed by the different teams that isolated it. Cox and Davis favored *Rickettsia daporica*, which comes from the Greek word meaning able to pass through pores, the characteristic that made the organism so difficult to isolate. Burnet and Freeman proposed *Rickettsia burnetii* in reference to Burnet’s role in identifying the organism as part of the *Rickettsia* genus. Once it was determined that the species differed significantly from other organisms in *Rickettsia*, it was given its own genus named after Cox and became *Coxiella burnetii*, its current name.