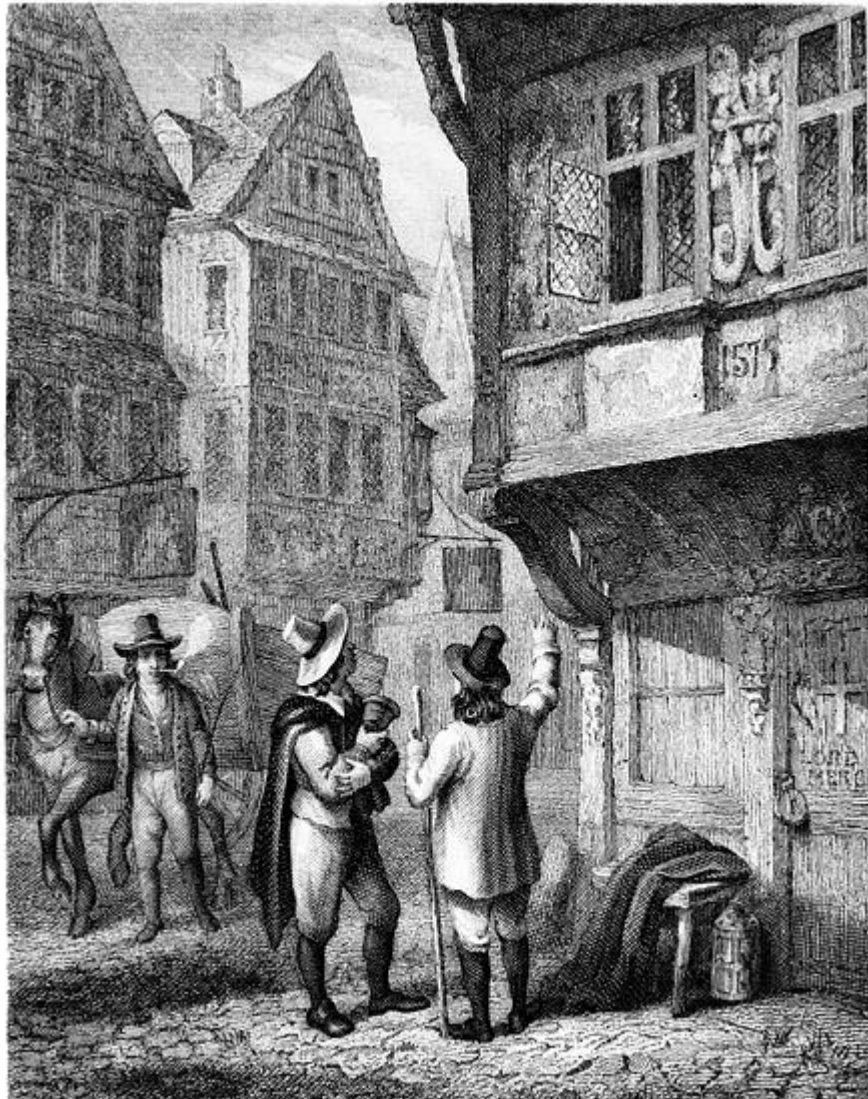


# The Black Death: The Effects on England 1348-1918.

by Garry Victor Hill



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*Frisky Press*

*Armidale Australia*

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## Dedication

To Doctor Thomas Fudge Lecturer UNE

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Written without prejudice.

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*A Note on the Text.*

Yes I know about the academic language of abbreviations. Ed. for editor, trans. for translator, ect. Abbreviations annoy and always changing. As this book began as a 32-page booklet for high school students, abbreviationese was unnecessary. If this work is used, students should check with their supervisor for which documentation system applies now.

## Revisions

During 2021 this book got another proofing. I added fifty pages of text and numerous new footnotes, more illustrations and appendices. I corrected much of the syntax, typos and grammar and added new information and sources. Most concerned lice, bacteria, viruses, and scratches. In 2023 and again in 2024 the text got another proofing for typos. Some sentences were restructured. Source notes were standardised to font 12 and Times New Roman fonts and standardised using the colour purple in the bibliography. With passive voice sentences I corrected most, but when it is unclear who did what, passive voice forms remain. Media articles are cited without correcting or standardising except for colourising. In 2024 newly used sources and new sentences were added or altered.

With computers finders indexes are obsolescent. Book users should refer to the computer version if an index is needed

## Plagiarism

Text source notes totalled well over 800 in less than half that number of pages. Frequently these source notes have multiple references. Four long appendices which are reproduced primary source documents and a bibliography of over twenty-five pages should be enough to stop any allegation. However, some facts do not have a source note because I used them in another of those 800 plus source notes. Others are in the realm of public knowledge and are therefore outside the rules applied to plagiarism.

## *Introduction*

Much has been written about the Black Death in England, so why write more? Most of these works focus on the great epidemic of 1347-1350;

writings like this one which cover all the outbreaks, going up to the last cases in England in 1918, are much rarer.

There are several other reasons; the most timely and obvious reason, Covid-19, is included. In the twenty-first century science has cleared up many mysteries and controversies concerning this topic, disproving much that has been considered, while verifying other theories. In 2022 a new explanation came into print as I was doing what seemed a final proofing. That has now been included. Archaeologists have excavated recently found plague pits and they reveal much. Publishers have printed in book form three new and valuable collections of primary source material; those edited by Hallam, Nardo and Furtado. Other primary source documents have gone into e-book form in the Wellcome and Gutenberg collections. Concepts in older histories can be reevaluated and reused when accurate and therefore hopefully brought to the attention of younger readers. Because of this new knowledge readers and researchers can now also discard mistakes, fallacies and dubious theories, all common with writings on the plague.

Each generation writes history not only because of new information, but by being influenced by its own concerns, so before the developments concerning climate change gained public attention in the 1980s, few wrote about climate's effects: now we can see these effects much more clearly.

The English experience of the Black Death has gone into culture and some basic histories: both carry many fallacies. Some are wrong because they are carried over from the continental experience and applied to England, although they never really happening there. Some base their writings on apparently exceptional events and then apply them universally. Several writers or commentators frequently exaggerate, or present the worst or the most bizarre as typical, while others ignore some evidence or do not know of it. Many of us make assumptions. This writer did so before begin research. I assumed that cholera existed in Medieval England; it arrived in the early nineteenth century. I also assumed that medieval English plague

pits contained jumbled bodies hurriedly buried without Catholic rites. Assessing the evidence proved me wrong, with only two exceptions. Throughout this work such fallacies and popular misconceptions are dealt with. When the plague hit, ignorant, foolish and passive responses were common, but it becomes simplistic to convey an impression that this was all that happened. Several people assessed the contagion's effects by observation or reports, ignored the fanciful and superstitious and realised they were fighting a contagion. From there they resisted being its victims by taking practical steps, or seemingly practical steps. Some efforts were correct, even if they did not quite know why.

While I refer to fallacies and errors, I usually deliberately withhold the modern sources for them. Litigation, academic bunfights and humiliating others writing on the topic are damaging their reputations, perhaps unjustly, are all best avoided.

No historian denies the Black Death's important effects. Nobody denies it was one of the most important events in European history. While rarely agreeing on nearly anything else connected with this great catastrophe, they do agree on that basic point.

Now once more we have a virus crossing species to infect humans. Once more ships carrying those infected spread the disease. Once more exhausted medical staff battle to save lives, while the numbers of dead and dying rapidly increase. Once more, the rich flee to their estates or hideaways while the poor stay in the city, once again suffering high casualty rates. Once more the infected become reliant on overworked medical carers who frequently die from the disease they fight. Once more nobody can confidently give reliable casualty figures. This time the rich are not luxuriating in castles or manor houses, but beachside apartments and luxurious homes.<sup>1</sup> The similarities end there though: 2019-2022 is not 1348-

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<sup>1</sup> ABC News (Australia) *News at Noon*. 22nd April 2020.

1350. Now we know the importance of vaccines, hygiene, distancing, separation and quarantines. By working extremely fast scientists have already developed vaccines and so have reduced the spread of panic and despair. Scientists and journalists have made knowledge much more advanced and more widely distributed and they distributed with more speed, accuracy and detail. We also know now that pandemics do not end the world. The third plague pandemic of the 1890s to the 1920s and the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-1921 show what knowledge, effort and science can do. They can combine to give us victory over an enemy worse than any human force.



### *The Origins and Spread of the Black Death*

Before focusing on the effects of plague in England, the English experience will be considered as part of a global response which includes how, when, why, where and with whom the epidemic originated, who or what may have spread it, how it spread and what it was – and what it was believed to be, for hundreds of years.

Until recently a leading point of dispute amongst scholars and scientists concerned with the topic has been what the great European epidemic of 1346-1353 and its subsequent reoccurring outbreaks actually was. The way it can live without a host for hundreds of years suggest it is a bacterium; viruses need hosts to survive, even for a few days. The way this contagion spreads by deathly contact and the 1890s tests of Yersin and his contemporaries revealed a virus. While bacteria are frequently beneficial, viruses are always harmful and usually are the carriers of highly contagious diseases. Is this some strange disease that can become a variant in both bacterial and virial forms? Looking through the source notes to this work reveals some scientists and historians describing the plague as a bacterium; others write about the bubonic virus. In his 2020 documentary *The Black Death* documentary commentator Dan Snow used tests to reaffirm that bacteria can be spread by air, particularly by coughed droplets. If both viruses and bacteria can carry plague this way, what is the difference? As Snow says and others affirm, plague carried by breath meant there was little chance of survival, but the bubonic variety, conveyed by touch, had a higher survival rate. What that survival rate was remains extremely difficult to calculate with so much vague and contradictory information,

but Dan Snow gives what must be the highest estimate as he puts the 1340s bubonic survival rate as high as 50%.<sup>2</sup>

Writers do agree that the pandemic that swept across much of Asia, North Africa and most of Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century was exceptionally virulent. They also agree on several dates for its arrival in different locales, the territory it infected and the dates for its passing. One major point they used to disagree about was on which disease actually devastated the fourteenth century world from China's coast to Iceland.

New evidence proves that the fourteenth century outbreak was not then a new disease as many believed at the time and others have suspected or stated since; the plague had hit much of Europe eight centuries earlier. Newly found and translated sources reveal that it made a little noticed small-scale comeback in parts of the Middle East, notably Iraq and Syria and possibly Egypt in the middle of the thirteenth century, almost a hundred years before emerging in China in the 1330s and the great European outbreak of the 1340s.<sup>3</sup>

It even existed in eastern Europe as a human borne infection over 5,000 years ago.<sup>4</sup> In 1875 the skeletal remains of two ancient individuals were found in Latvia and only recently tested for bacteria and signs of illness.

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<sup>2</sup> Dan Snow, (Presenter) *The Black Death*. 2 Episodes. Directors: Nick Dan. Gillam Smith and Al Edirisinghe. Channel 5 United Kingdom 46 minutes. Rated M. Shown SBS 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Monica H. Green, 'When the Black Death Arrived in Europe, it was Like Striking a Match in Tinder.' *BBC History Magazine*. Volume 26 Number 6 June 2022. p.58. Green is interviewed by Ellie Cawthorne and refers to recent discoveries; David M. Perry, 'Did the Black Death Rampage Across the World a Century Earlier than previously thought?' *Smithsonian* March 25 2021. [smithsonianmag.com/history/did-the-black-death-rampage-across-the-e=world](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/did-the-black-death-rampage-across-the-e=world)

<sup>4</sup> Green, p. 57.

One was found to have been infected with a much milder strain of *Yersinia Pestis*.<sup>5</sup> This pushes the earliest known plague cases back by two thousand years, as previously the earliest known of cases may even have been in ancient Egypt. An anonymous Egyptian account known as the Ebers Papyrus, dated from around 1500 B.C. describes a spreading plague leaving buboes which excreted pus on the victims.<sup>6</sup> Towards the end of the Pharaoh Akhenaten's reign, around 1337-1336 B.C., some form of contagion first hit what is now Cyprus and his northern provinces on the Levant and then hit his capital of Amarna.<sup>7</sup> Archaeologist Eva Panagiotakopulu found evidence there of the Nile rat species and cats, both are known carriers of parasitic, plague carrying fleas. Her mention of the black rat species which originated in ancient India and which trading ships apparently carried on to pharaonic Egypt interests: this species frequently gains mentions when apportioning blame for spreading plague. Panagiotakopulu also found evidence of floods, which usually brings humans and rodent carriers into close proximity.<sup>8</sup> Flooding frequently becomes a harbinger in several later accounts of pestilence outbreaks as it crowds people seeking safety together. This epidemic left no record of reaching Europe or eastern Asia, although

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<sup>5</sup> Helen Briggs, BBC Science Correspondent, '5,000-year old man was oldest plague victim.' *BBC News* 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/science-environment-57658859> accessed 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022; Ruth Schuster, *Haaretz*. June 29<sup>th</sup> 2021. [aaretz.com/archaeology/earliest-strain-of-plague-found-in-5-000-year-old-body-in-latvia-1.9952043](https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/earliest-strain-of-plague-found-in-5-000-year-old-body-in-latvia-1.9952043) accessed 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron Walker, 'Bubonic Plague Traced to Ancient Egypt.' *National Geographic News*. March 10<sup>th</sup> 2004. <https://newsnationalgeographic.com/new-bubonic-plague-traced-to-ancient-egypt> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Walker reproduces a quote from the Eber manuscript.

<sup>7</sup> Garry Victor Hill, *Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Atenism: Controversy and Evidence*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Armidale; 2020. pp.113-114.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, Panagiotakopulu, quoted.

the possibility of prehistoric European plague was made public in June 2021 with the Latvian discovery.

Slightly earlier but less conclusive results than those from Latvia and Egypt came from England. In February 2018 published results of recent examinations of 51 Neolithic skeletons there and another 104 from the later migrating ethnic group there known as the Beaker Folk, led to some tentative indications that bubonic plague may have reached England in prehistoric times.<sup>9</sup> Very large teams worked on skeletons from across much of the country, with both team groups having found remains in caves and tombs. They concluded that the Neolithic group were nearly 100% of Britain's population around 4000 BC, but by 2500 BC to 2000 BC they were down to around 10% of England's population<sup>10</sup> The Beaker Folk, coming from what is now the Netherlands, had become the dominant group. Why? No evidence for the obvious answers, genocide conquest or mass migration, emerges from the study, so the experts suspect plague.<sup>11</sup>

Other usual suspects for depopulation should include other diseases, conflicts, famine, floods, and extreme temperature changes. Until further research provides evidence, the possibility of a prehistoric Black Death in England remains only a possibility.

Other killing epidemics would occur in the ancient world and are loosely described as plague; the Bible alone mentions several, but descriptions that

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<sup>9</sup> David Keys, (Archaeology Correspondent) 'Britain's Prehistoric Catastrophe Revealed: How 90% of the Neolithic Population Vanished in Just 300 Years.' *Independent*. 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/stonehenge-neolithic-britain-history-ancestors-plague-archaeology-beaker-people-a8222341.html>, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,

aid in identifying these contagious diseases are rare. Eyewitness Thucydides records an exception in his *The Peloponnesian War*.<sup>12</sup> He describes the disease starting in overcrowded wartime Athens in 430 BC as killing by the thousand. Some modern commentators considered the cause to be bubonic plague or typhus. In 2006 scientific advances in new tests on fossilised dental pulp gave researchers proof of what others suspected; the Rufus, a physician thought to be working in Trajan's time, mentions glandular swellings that to us resemble plague and his description of animals dying first was typical of later plague epidemics.<sup>13</sup>

The confusion was understandable: typhoid, typhus and bubonic plague, especially if the latter is pneumonic, emerge in the same unsanitary conditions, are contagious and share many symptoms. Doctor W.H. Chun, an expert on diseases, while working in the early twentieth century commented how easy it was to mistake other diseases for the Black Death.<sup>14</sup> If there are no buboes or they are undescribed in detail the two can be confused.<sup>15</sup> Even trained medical staff in Glasgow in 1900 initially believed

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<sup>12</sup> Thucydides, Book II. 'The Plague.' pp. 47-55 in *The Peloponnesian War*. Introduction and Notes by M.I. Finley. Hammondsworth; 1972. pp. 151-156.

<sup>13</sup> Doctor A. Mitra, *The Bubonic Plague*. Calcutta; 1897. p. 1; George Deaux, *The Black Death: 1347*. London; 1969. p. 28, Deaux quotes Rufus for his description of buboes.

<sup>14</sup> Cohn, Samuel K. Jr. 'Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague.' *Medical History Supplement*. 2008; (27): pp. 74-100. *Cambridge Journal of Medical History*. PMID: [PMC2630035](#) PMID: [18575083](#). No computerised pagination available

<sup>15</sup> Mary Dobson, *Disease: The Extraordinary Story Behind History's Deadliest Killers*. London; 2007. pp. 54-61. Dobson describes the breeding grounds, causes and symptoms of typhoid; Appendix 3 Report of Doctor Lowry, p. 260. He compares the plague to typhus, noting their similarities.

plague victims were typhoid cases.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, at the same time in Liverpool, medical staff misdiagnosed different bubonic plague victims as having typhus, influenza or cerebral apoplexy.<sup>17</sup> In assessing plague cases in the United Kingdom's experience of the third pandemic Thomas Colvin listed twelve other diseases misdiagnosed because of their similarities to the Black Death.<sup>18</sup> In his 1897 work *The Bubonic Plague* Doctor Mitra explicitly warns doctors of misdiagnosing the plague, giving specific examples of similar symptoms from other diseases which are commonly not recognised as plague harbingers.<sup>19</sup>

If these experienced medical professionals in these three different locales, all with modern foreknowledge, texts and microscopes, continually misdiagnosed, what chance did those Medieval chroniclers have? They probably were at best, medically inexperienced with plague. Such situations as individual cases and regional outbreaks also showed another problem in assessing the Black Death, for even current experts and writers: the frequent similarity with symptoms and the subsequent difficulty on relying on only written sources, which are frequently medically untrained chroniclers.

Many experts in disease, forensic scientists, bloggers and historians have previously disputed that the epidemic now known as the Black Death was

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<sup>16</sup> Gillian Sharpe, 'Glasgow's Bubonic Plague Outbreak in 1900.' *BBC News*. Posted 31<sup>st</sup> August 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland23900394>, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>17</sup> James Boyle and E.W. Hope, 'England: Plague in Liverpool.' November 15<sup>th</sup> 1901. *Public Health Reports: 1896-1970*. Vol. 16. Number 46. 1901. pp. 2684-2685. *JSTOR*. [www.jstor.org/stable41469006](http://www.jstor.org/stable41469006), accessed December 26<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Colvin, 'Recent outbreaks of Plague in Liverpool and Glasgow.' *The British Medical Journal*. December 12<sup>th</sup> 1908. pp. 1782-1783. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmc2438061/>, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Mitra, pp. 21-22.

bubonic plague. Despite strong evidence from several detailed Medieval descriptions of victim's buboes turning black and the subcutaneous black splotches and spots (hence the adjective bubonic and the eventual descriptive title The Black Death) they pointed out that the extraordinarily virulent nature of the fourteenth century disease was much worse than for cases from the 1890s onwards into the twenty-first century.

They also remark that its rapid way of contagion did not match the modern cases that they had studied. The later cases also had a lower risk of contagion. Since the second half of the 1890s rats and their fleas have been generally accepted as the plague's main carrier, but from the 1960s onwards a minority have put this idea into dispute. The sceptics and the disputatious had some interesting points to make. Anyone who has had basic contact with rats knows that although they like our food and sometimes our homes, they avoid proximity to living humans and rarely attack, except when obviously threatened. This makes infection by close proximity or their bites rare. Diverse sceptics also considered the lack of references to dead rats in both primary source descriptions and their matching absence in archaeological sites as being at the least, suspicious. Another cause for suspicion was that unlike the rapidly spreading ubiquitous plague, rats were not wide or fast travellers. One 1907 study by an English plague research commission found it took one rat six weeks to travel six hundred feet.<sup>20</sup> The 1910 Suffolk study of a local bubonic plague outbreak also found that individual rats, while moving faster and farther than this, still did not go great distances.<sup>21</sup> Rats were also easily blocked in their travels as they dislike human contact and also dislike crossing any

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<sup>20</sup> S. Scott, C.J. Duncan and S.R. Duncan in their 'The Plague in Penrith, Cumbria, 1597/1598: Its Causes, Biology and Consequences.' *Annals of Human Biology*, 1996. Vol. 23 No.1. p. 18. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8815782>, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter Six for reports on the Suffolk outbreak.

body of water and wide open spaces.<sup>22</sup> In England they were unable to venture far from ports without finding any of these three alienating factors. These facts and conundrums seemingly go against the widespread idea that the rats' fleas carried and spread the pestilence in 1346-1353.<sup>23</sup> This was in contrast to what several nineteenth century observers saw dying rats do in Yunnan and southern China, in the 1894 Hong Kong outbreak.<sup>24</sup> Here the plague was obviously linked to rats as passers-by frequently saw rats staggering in the streets; very large numbers of rats were sometimes piled up in mounds in several of Hong Kong's public places.<sup>25</sup> Several primary sources link sick rats to this contagion; in different times and in several diverse locales. People often considered that frequent sight to be one of the plague's harbingers.

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<sup>22</sup> Alan D. Dyer, 'Influence of Bubonic Plague in England 1500-1667.' *Medical History*. 1978. 22. Pages 308-336. Reproduced in *Semantic Scholar*. p. 308. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5e62/be97b8fd1e09b2d7def5d866e15ad5029e13.pdf>, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

\*This idea is examined in detail in Appendice Five.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Dobson, pp. 10-11 and boxed section 'What Was the Black Death?' p. 11; Jim Bolton, 'The Word Upside Down.' In *The Black Death in England*. Mark Ormrod and Phillip Lindley, (editors. Stanford, 1986. pp. 24-25; William Naphy and Andrew Spicer, *The Black Death: A History of Plagues 1345-1730*. Stroud; 2001. pp. 53-56; Bob.Yirka, 'New Study Suggests Human Fleas and Lice Were Behind Black Death Not Rodents. 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018 <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-human-fleas-lice-black-death.html#:~:text=30-.New%20study%20suggests%20human%20fleas%20and,behind%20Black%20Death%2C%20not%20rodents&text=A%20team%20of%20researchers%20with,the%20course%20of%20several%20centuries>. accessed 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022; Victoria Gill, 'Black Death 'spread by humans, not rats.' 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016. BBC News '<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-42690577> accessed 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

<sup>24</sup> These observations are noted and quoted with source noted in the chapter 'The Third Pandemic.'

<sup>25</sup> Edward Marriott, *The Plague Race: A Tale of Fear, Science and Heroism*. London, 2002. p. 80 p. 126 p. 149.

Those arguing against rats as plague spreaders believe they are attacking a fallacy. The latest explanation shifting blame is that human fleas and body lice were the carriers, explicitly at least in 1665 England, implicitly in other outbreaks. While there some slight evidence for this theory exists, several problems rapidly emerge upon examination. More doubts and problems with this theory emerge the more it is examined.\* Humans as the main infectors has more evidence.

Humans and anthrax, not rats, are frequently blamed in articles, books, university papers, documentaries and on blogger's websites. Others argue almost the opposite: that nothing can spread plague from human to human. Although Yersin and soon others working in the 1890s started disproving this idea with scientific evidence, it would be in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1903 that scientists and medical workers with their revealed evidence conclusively disproved this idea, finally to everyone's satisfaction. By then many different researchers working in different locales were all showing rodent fleas as the contagion's link. Then again in 1910 simultaneous, but unlinked scientific surveys of outbreaks in Manchuria and Suffolk came to the same conclusion, also based on scientifically researched evidence. The work of Americans in California from the late 1890s into the 1920s also verified these findings. They also all showed that assorted mammals could carry bubonic plague bearing fleas. All four of these Edwardian surveys showed the pattern of human-to-human contagion started with vermin and rodents.

Unfortunately, all four surveys seem to have been forgotten or unknown to the bubonic doubting, rat defending theorists of the 1960s and after. Their viewpoints become untenable when considering obvious evidence. Rats are indeed easily blocked migrants and not fast or great travellers *by themselves*. However, their way of hopping rides on ships, river barges, other watercraft, wagons, carts and trucks has always been notorious. This hitch hiking allows rats to spread themselves and their diseases fast. With their extremely high birth rate, ability to feed on nearly anything, tunnelling,

climbing skills and cunning, once they infest a site they have a tenacious grip on it, barring only the most catastrophic events. To this day England has not been able to rid itself of the pestilential rat or even greatly reduce its numbers. For several decades the Americans have found it easier to put a man on the moon and send rockets to probe the outer solar system than to rid New York City of its four-legged rats.

With the absence of rats in relevant archaeological sites, this can be explained by the Catholic belief that humans and animals are to be buried separately and not to do so is sinful. There may well have been fewer dead rats to observe compared to later visitations because Medieval ships had slower sailing speeds than those of later centuries. Therefore, more time existed for vermin to die on board and to infect crews. Crews almost certainly tossed rats overboard before infected ships landed. If they made it to ports rat corpses were surely burned or buried with rubbish. A problem with sources also emerges. Chroniclers were usually monks, courtiers or secretaries to the nobility or the gentry. How many of these people usually visited wharves, infected ships or seedy, filthy portside suburbs? How many went there during a deadly contagion after ports were infected? These are rhetorical questions: the chroniclers and the plague infected rats almost certainly rarely if ever crossed paths and, even if they ever did so, knew that they had. Who noticed the ways of rats or thought that they were important? The more obvious evidence for the medieval spreading of plague concerned humans, but the spreading was not the origin .

In Edward Marriott's detailed account, *The Plague Race: A Tale of Fear, Science and Heroism* (2002) he recounts a similar behaviour pattern in China five hundred years after the first great European epidemic. This suggests that this was a common response at the commoner's level but a lack of it amongst those who administered society or assessed health issues. Or was this just ignorance at higher levels? or rather a lack of it. During the third global pandemic, in Hong Kong and Karachi in the middle 1890s obvious signs of connections between rats and plague were usually ignored or the

significance of their being together was unknown. Two colonial officials, writing seven years apart, and both writing for the English Houses of Parliament in official reports on Hong Kong's reoccurring plagues, blamed filth, overcrowding and a lack of rainwater.<sup>26</sup> These were really contributing factors to plague's spread, not its cause.

Although one official went into detail about health measures and causes, rats and fleas remained unmentioned, even as a possibility. This was despite the obvious connection to rats in the 1894 outbreak there and the similar earlier official reports from Yunnan, Amoy and Pakhoi. Such official blindness was in a situation where colonial administrators and experts were not unknowing, uneducated Medieval people being hit by an unknown catastrophe. Large numbers of literate residents were in Hong Kong. These included a large well-equipped Japanese team investigating the plagues' causes and spreading patterns there, trained medical staff and resident officials who were regularly reporting on their efforts to control what they knew to, be a contagious disease.

A Scottish physician, James Lowson, who served as superintendent of the city's Government Civil Hospital, was sent to help fight the Hong Kong epidemic and he criticised both colonial and medical authorities. He detailed what are now standard practices: antiseptic cleaning practices for hospitals, abundant ventilation, eucalyptus oil as a disinfectant, carbolic acid for faeces and dressings and quick mass burials with quicklime for plague fatalities.<sup>27</sup> He writes of such things as if they were on the cutting

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<sup>26</sup> William Robinson, *Hong Kong: Bubonic Plague*. London; 1896. p. 7; Henry A. Blake, (governor) *Bubonic Plague: Memorandum on the treatment of Patients in their own homes and in Local Hospitals* London; 1903. pp. 14-17.

<sup>27</sup> James Lowson, 'The epidemic of Bubonic Plague in Hong Kong'. (1894) Published 1897. Furtado, introduces, reproduces and retitles 'Strict Hygiene.' by pp.184-186; in his *Plague, Pestilence and Pandemic: Voices from History*. London; 2021; Marriott mentions the burials. p. 97.

edge in Asia's medical care technology – as they were. It was the poor, illiterate, portside residents who could see beyond hygiene and so knew the connection between rats and plague. However apparently no one wrote or dictated an account that has reached the twenty-first century. The role of rats in the 1894 Hong Kong outbreak had only one detailed chronicler who received only a little help and much contempt from a dismissive colonial administration, including Lawson. This chronicler, bacteriologist and investigator was a Swiss-French expatriate, Doctor Yersin, who described his frequent sightings of dying,



*The Manchuria Outbreak 1910-1911. Staff are keeping the bodies for scientific study. Courtesy: Wikipedia*

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dazed rats crawling about and mounds of their dead piled up in the streets. The piled-up rats were so numerous that they gave off a stench that people smelt from miles away.<sup>28</sup> Being this obvious, it would be logical to think that somebody else did what Yeltsin alone did. Initially at least, he only tentatively made the obvious link between rats and plague: these would become certainties after tests. The obvious and vivid sights Yersin described should have been collaborated by others and obvious conclusions made, but were not made before his arrival, at least by experts. Chinese slum dwellers knew what sick rats adumbrated and behaved appropriately. Lawson, while disparaging or ignoring Yersin, encouraged and aided the famed Japanese virologist Shibasaburo Kitasato, to correctly identify the plague bacillus being in Hong Kong and to ensure that his claim was published in the respected medical journal *The Lancet*.<sup>29</sup> He wired this report to *The Lancet* only a day before Yersin's arrival in Hong Kong.<sup>30</sup> It may well have been premature, if on the right track. Yersin's version concerning the bacillus was probably only written up, but inchoate when he reached Hong Kong and went into print soon after. Marriott presents much primary source material to show that Yersin was the one linking the disease to rats and fleas ahead of Kitasato.

This seems another of those discoveries where competitors building on new scientific knowledge, sometimes make a breakthrough at the same time. Television and telephones both being registered as new inventions on the same days and Wallace and Darwin getting their theories of evolution published days apart are famous examples. The experts were solving the

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<sup>28</sup> David K. Randall, *Black Death at the Golden Gate: The Race to Save America from the Bubonic Plague*. New York; 2019. pp. 48-49.

<sup>29</sup> Furtado, Introduction to Lawson's report, pp. 184-185.

<sup>30</sup> Marriott, quoting Lawson in his conversation welcoming Yersin to Hong Kong. p. 90.

mystery of the plague's causes almost simultaneously. Despite Marriott's strong case for Yersin, who was first to identify the plague's bacillus remains disputed. During those turn of the century decades, others had key roles in identifying the virus, how it spread and how to fight it.

Amongst these heroes was Doctor Paul-Louis Simond. In Karachi in 1898 he fought the disease in a situation that almost duplicated Hong Kong in 1894. Others had come close to finding some aspect of the plague's cause. In 1884 A.C. Gordon, a British medical officer, noted how the Chinese believed that the plague originated in the ground, infecting vermin first.<sup>31</sup> The Chinese were essentially correct, but wrong on some details. In 1897 Doctor Mitra, one of Kashmir's leading medical officials, while acknowledging with detail that rats were a health menace, also described how the Chinese peculiarly (to him) believed that plague came from the ground and had an infection pattern of going for those with their mouths closest to the ground first, then going up a food chain.<sup>32</sup> Snakes being lowest to the ground, supposedly infected first, then in order came vermin, rats, poultry, pigs, cats, goats, dogs, cows and then humans.<sup>33</sup> What Gordon and Mitra unintentionally revealed was how close the Chinese were to the truth, and before the scientists knew. They were just missing it: snakes alone do not get plague, probably because their hard scales prevent carriers and their blood, by being cold, is unattractive to fleas. Yersin and other experts working soon after him proved the Chinese belief about the

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<sup>31</sup> A.C. Gordon, Furtado, p.184. See the next source note.

<sup>32</sup> Mitra, pp. 11-12;. A. C. Gordon, A British Officer in the employ of the Imperial Customs service. His report originally entitled 'Reports of the Medical Officers Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service.' (1884) is introduced, reproduced and retitled 'The Plague in China' by Furtado, pp.183-184. Gordon also separately mentioned this belief. Furtado, p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> Mitra, pp.11-12

earth being infected to be correct. Although Mitra and Gordon did not see beyond the one Chinese mistake to the essential truth, Mitra was amongst the first to acknowledge Yersin's then recent work. In his next sentence, while acknowledging Yersin's efforts, Mitra also noted that bacteriologists were subject to satire by those who did not understand the new science.<sup>34</sup> Indeed: in 1894 one such official, Doctor Ayres, wrote a discouraging, supposedly corrective, 'Important Statement' to the *China News* when they published two statements by Yersin that he had found the plague bacteria in the ground on infected sites.<sup>35</sup> At this time this idea that plague originated in the earth was still unproven and controversial. It would be 1908 before the American epidemiologist Rupert Blue was able to build on the work of Yersin and Simond, linking the plague spreading from fleas to rats to humans. He may not have known of the 1903 work of W.C. Liston, who also proved this; Liston only went into publication concerning this in 1911.<sup>36</sup> Blue would even differentiate about how different flea species carried and spread the virus, creating very different results. Unfortunately, his work and that of Liston, Simond and Yersin, did not get the widespread publicity necessary to reveal the true causes of bubonic development and contagion. That omission has led to a major fallacy concerning the Black Death and later bubonic outbreaks: 'Rats caused the Black Death.' This simplification remains widespread.

Without the writings of British and French consular officials in Yunnan and also Creighton, Gordon, Liston, Yersin, Simond and others we would not even have descriptions of the odd behaviour of the dying rats in China and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>35</sup> Doctor James A. Lawton, 'Plague bacillus Important Statement.' 18<sup>th</sup> August 1894. In the work of Ayres & Lawton, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> Liston's work is dealt with in detail in the last chapter.

in nearby lands. In Hong Kong in 1894 officials and the investigative team lived in an enclosed upper-class world. They had so cocooned themselves that they had rarely been in their own kitchens and were ignorant about the filth in their own houses.<sup>37</sup> With a widespread life support system of servants and underlings they did not need to visit their kitchens or investigate their levels of domestic cleanliness. They habitually avoided the horrible, filthy, stinking, overcrowded vermin infested portside slums - where rats and disease thrived. Was a similar situation existent in European ports during the second pandemic of 1346-1353? No records of English royalty or nobility visiting such places seem to exist and everything known about aristocratic ways suggests they would avoid such places..

Whatever the situation with carriers in the second pandemic, events during the third pandemic proved that rats were not sole carriers: humans, while not originators, also played a prominent part. The Manchurian outbreak of 1910-1911 showed evidence for and against viewpoints denying the rats' involvement.<sup>38</sup> Investigating Russian scientists proved that another mammal species acted as initial vectors and then the bacteria spread amongst humans without further contact from animals. This outbreak showed how bubonic plague spread and shows that it had lost none of its virulence since the 1340s, although some dispute this, despite the massive fatality figures.<sup>39</sup> This happened because unlike the local hunters, new Chinese migrants, eager to make a living by getting lucrative marmot furs, did not distinguish between skinning healthy animals and skinning the

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<sup>37</sup> Doctor Philip Burnard Cheenery Ayres and Doctor James A. Lawson, *Report on the Outbreak of Bubonic Plague in Hong Kong to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography at Budapest. 1894.* Hong Kong; 1894. p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Cohn ,Samuel K. Jr, "Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.,

sick. Those infected creatures soon infected their killers, who in turn at first spread the contagion locally, then they or people they had infected, by using trains, spread the disease to more densely populated areas, killing well into the thousands. Sixty thousand people were infected and perhaps died from the actions of a few.<sup>40</sup> Samuel K. Cohn gives statistics from the time to show that despite nearly perfect conditions for infection, such as crowded train carriages, thick layered clothing and overcrowded, unventilated underground huts measuring around twelve by fifteen feet, proportionally this outbreak had very low infection and death rates. Kohn notes that a second Manchurian outbreak in 1922 had similar results. Given the high death toll (which Cohn does not mention) this must mean that for the statistics to be correct for extremely low infection and death rates, the Manchurian outbreaks must have hit an extremely high population: this is likely.

Across the globe, the third pandemic of plague, which lasted from the 1870s into the 1930s, proved itself to be much less infectious and much less deadly than the earlier outbreaks – except in colonial India and China, where it raged with its earlier virulency, killing millions

This contagion would have been much worse were it not for the efforts of a government appointed fixer, Doctor Wu Lien-teh. As with two kings of England, James I and Charles I, the last Chinese emperor, Puyi, has a bad press. However, like them, he proved himself successful in the field of fighting disease. He approved Doctor Wu's ultimately successful if initially unpopular ideas of fighting plague through cremation, autopsies, house

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<sup>40</sup> William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*. Hammondsworth; 1985. p. 147; G. Stout, 'The 1888 Pneumonia in Middlesbrough.' *JRSM*. (Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine) Sept. 1980. Volume 73 (9) p. 666. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1438195>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019; Cohn, Samuel K. Jr, "Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague." McNeill mentions sixty thousand casualties, while Stout states that sixty thousand died. Laura Spinney and Jaime Breitnauer also separately refer to the death toll of sixty thousand. See the following source note.

searches and hygiene.<sup>41</sup> Wu's success marked the beginning of modern Chinese medicine.

The simultaneous, but much smaller 1910 English outbreak also connected plague to rats and other local furry creatures and also revealed the same virulence, albeit on a smaller scale. From ancient times onward borrowing rodents carried the disease.<sup>42</sup> Twentieth century American researchers also show that American rabbits and other mammals can be carriers, albeit without setting off pandemics. Ground squirrels, prairie dogs, the hirsute flea, and cats all bore the plague in America's west.<sup>43</sup> In the American epidemic during the Edwardian era squirrels came second to rats in terms of being common carriers.<sup>44</sup> Between 1902 and 1908 strong indications emerged that several individuals did die from contact with plague infected squirrels. Their large numbers over widespread rural areas and wilderness meant that they could be even more difficult to eradicate than rats. Rupert Blue, the health official who had already twice organised and led the teams which had eradicated the Black Death in San Francisco, used the same systematic methods to break contact between squirrels and humans.<sup>45</sup> His autopsies on squirrels found some were had yersina infections, but proportionally fewer than amongst California's rats. Squirrels were also

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<sup>41</sup> Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*. New York; 2017. pp. 154-156; Jaime Breitnauer, *The Spanish Flu Epidemic and its Influence on History: Stories from the 1918-1920 Global Flu Epidemic*. Philadelphia; 2019. pp. 6-8.

<sup>42</sup> McNeill, pp. 120-122.

<sup>43</sup> Bolton, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> Randall, p. 162 pp. 215-217.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218-221.

common in Europe, but were not subjected to such detailed scientific investigations as Blue carried out. With the exception of prairie dogs, all these previously mentioned American species existed in Medieval Europe.<sup>46</sup> England also had other potential warm-blooded furry carriers; who lived close to infected ground: or even under it, stoats, badgers, ferrets, moles, mice, otters and hares.

In Medieval England, little attention was paid to rats, fleas, rodents, small mammals and vermin. People were worried about themselves, their family and the mysterious catastrophe that was blamed on God, the devil, bad people or the stars, when it was to be blamed on anything.

As in Manchuria, rather than hordes of rats spreading the fleas and their bacteria, perhaps only a few creatures acted as initial vectors to humans. Ships provide an obvious example. Despite having large crews, few Medieval vessels were usually larger than a modern large yacht; crowded conditions meant regular contact. One infected rat need only infect one human for the disease to spread amongst a crew. One crew in one port could infect a city. This happened in Genoa when residents greeted and embraced refugees at the docks. These refugees had fled from the war in the Crimea. This was definitely so as the account of this happening comes from Gabriele de Mussis, one of the refugees. He states that their arrival in Genoa was as deadly as arrows.<sup>47</sup>

Roads leading out of ports were possible pathways to infect whole kingdoms. Several Medieval accounts mention ships full of the dying and infected arriving in Constantinople, Messina, Sicily, Venice, Genoa,

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<sup>46</sup> Bolton, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> Boucher, Charles E. *The Black Death in Bristol*. 12<sup>th</sup> July 1938. [Medievalists.net/2010/09/the\\_black\\_death\\_in\\_bristol](https://medievalists.net/2010/09/the_black_death_in_bristol), accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. p. 31. Boucher presented a long quote by de Mussis in the printed version of his talk.

Norway's southern coast and Marseilles. In the Mediterranean and the North Sea drifting ships without living crews became vectors.<sup>48</sup> Once living crews and the ship's rats disembarked in port cities, longish plague incubation periods, slow (if any) warning systems and no travel bans would have ensured the contagion's spread. At least the human carriers became obvious. Trade goods which infected humans had touched, held fleas or had carried other infected vermin would have looked harmless, but were deadly if touched by uninfected human victims.

In apportioning responsibility for spreading the contagion no need to find piles of skeletal rats in excavations emerges: rats were not even the original infected species, fleas were. Rats and to a lesser extent other mammals were the fleas literal carriers.

Researchers in 2011 proved that rats and perhaps other vermin were indeed an important link if not the initial cause in 1340s England. They proved this through tests from an excavated plague pit at East Smithfield near London. Later similar finds had the same or similar results. Carbon dated pottery shards in this East Smithfield site were from around 1350 and tests on human examples from there confirmed bubonic plague.<sup>49</sup> Scientists performed separate tests on the teeth of forty-six pit victims and fifty-three of their bones in two different facilities.<sup>50</sup> By using both tests scientists confirmed the results, linking these deaths to the bacteria *Yersinia Pestis*, a

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<sup>48</sup> I.F.C. Hecker, *The Black Death in the Fourteenth Century*. Translated by B.J. Babington. London; 1833. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/52413>. accessed July 11h 2021. Chapter IV 'Mortality'. As the page numbers are clearly erroneous, being applied to only a few lines, Chapter headings are cited. Chapter 1V

<sup>49</sup> Jack Trimmer, 'Scientists Sequence Black Death Bacteria DNA Admit they were Wrong.' (sic) *Ars Technica* 30/Aug/2011.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*,

known bubonic plague carrier. The Smithfield tests also showed that the virus was initially a bacteria held within soil.<sup>51</sup> Researchers confirmed these results in 2014 at Charterhouse after diggers for a rail tunnel found twenty-five skeletons there. Scientists soon tested them with the same results.<sup>52</sup> In early 2016 researchers working at another Black Death burial site at Saint Laurent de-la Caberisse in southern France also revealed the same virus after tests. At almost the same time a Sheffield University team publicised their results taken from the skeletons of 1349 epidemic victims. These came from the cemetery of a Medieval monastery hospital at Thornton Abbey, Lincolnshire. They revealed the same virus – and it matched the same strain of *y. Pestina* found in 1665 victims.<sup>53</sup> Similar results were publicised in 2016 when the tested remains of German victims in different locales (dying three hundred years apart) again revealed the same virus.<sup>54</sup> Of thirty skeletons tested, eight had *Yersina*.<sup>55</sup> Vermin almost certainly gave the initial infection for the first eight on this site and human contact from them

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<sup>51</sup> Trimmer; Ryan O’Hare, ‘The Great Plague in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century was spread by Black Death Bacteria that lay dormant across Europe for 300 years.’ (sic) *Daily Mail*. 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016. <http://www.daily mail.co.uk/The Great Plague-17<sup>th</sup>-century-spread-Black –Death-bacteria>, accessed December 30<sup>th</sup> 2018. German researcher Lisa Seifert mentions the test results proving *Yersina Pestina* on three bodies at Smithfield. It is unclear if they are part of the tests Trimmer refers to, or another test.

<sup>52</sup> James Morgan, ‘Black Death Skeletons Unearthed by Crossrail Project’ *BBC News*. 30<sup>th</sup> March 2014. [www.bbc.com/news/science\\_environment – 26770334](http://www.bbc.com/news/science_environment – 26770334), accessed 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Daily Mail Reporter, ‘Children of the Black Death are unearthed in a Lincolnshire Burial Pit. Huge Number of Bodies Where Entire Village Wiped Out.’ (sic) *Daily Mail Australia*. 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016. <https://www.dailymail.couk/children-Black-Death-unearthed-Lincolnshire-burial-pit/>, accessed December 30<sup>th</sup> 2018. Capitalisation standardised.

<sup>54</sup> O’Hare,

<sup>55</sup> O’Hare, Seifert quoted.

then killed the other twenty-two. While this one example can be taken too far and needs more collaborative evidence, it does plausibly suggest that in the great plague of 1347-1353 vermin were frequently only initial carriers, and human contact killed a much higher proportion of plague victims.

These continental European finds not only confirmed the English findings and disproved the rats' defenders: it proved that the virus did not necessarily mutate. The idea that the virus survived three hundred years unchanged and unmodified was ominous enough, but worse news became public. In 2013 essentially the same virus that existed in Smithfield's plague pit was found in a living form in Madagascar.<sup>56</sup> This gave the virus a known lifespan of almost seven hundred years and the ability to travel great distances. Both the German and Lincolnshire investigators concluded that due to the essentially unchanging nature of the virus, it had not been eradicated or changed its structure to survive, but had gone dormant, surviving by staying in some underground rodent homes in European locales.

Although they did not develop the idea, this means that the virus might emerge sometime in future - and be as virulent as ever, even if medical knowledge and vaccines limit the possibility of another epidemic resembling that of the 1340s. This has led to concerns over excavating burial sites from this era. Could doing so reactivate a dormant virus? While this sounds like a plot to a Hollywood thriller, obviously nobody should discount the possibility.

How long has this virus in this form existed? The Latvian case had no continuing link, but a recent German discovery suggests well over twelve hundred years. Nora J. Besansky revealed in the scientific journal *Plos* that

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<sup>56</sup> 'The Black Death.' *Wikipedia*. [https://Wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Black\\_Death/](https://Wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Death/), accessed December 30<sup>th</sup> 2018.

two separate DNA tests on Dark Age skeletons from a monastery in southern Germany both “confirmed unambiguously” the presence of *Y. Pestina*.<sup>57</sup> This confirmed what many had suspected, probably based on the symptoms described by the historian Procopius that the devastating ‘Plague of Justinian’ which began in the 540s and reoccurred in subsequent decades and centuries, was an earlier Black Death epidemic.<sup>58</sup> In the account of Procopius, he refers explicitly to bubonic plague symptoms, black skin spots, buboes on the groin, thighs, neck or armpits, fevers and delirium, the sudden onset of the disease and the usual death after a few days.<sup>59</sup>

Justinian’s plague came to Europe, the Middle East and North Africa in eighteen waves over two hundred years.<sup>60</sup> Writers now label this the first pandemic. Like that of 1346-1353 (which writers now sometimes refer to as the second pandemic) it spread from the Middle East as far as Ireland.

William Rosen In his detailed study *Justinian’s Flea* (2007) goes into detail, showing how this earlier epidemic devastated Christendom between its initial outbreak in North-Eastern Egypt in 540 A.D. until its fadeout in the middle of the eighth century. Rosen gives an estimate of at least twenty-five million dead for this first bubonic pandemic and while discounting estimates of a hundred million, states that a third of that figure remains plausible.<sup>61</sup> In 542 when the infection reached Byzantium that city may

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<sup>57</sup> Nora J. Besansky (editor.) ‘DNA from Skeletal Remains from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Reveals Insights into Justinian Plague.’ (sic) *Plos Pathogens*. 2 May 2013. 10.371 Journal V.9 (5) [journals.plos.org/plos-pathogens/article?id=10.1371/103349](https://journals.plos.org/plos-pathogens/article?id=10.1371/103349), accessed 2018.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>59</sup> Procopius, An excerpt from *A History of the Wars*. Volume II. Written in about 545 A.D. this excerpt has been reproduced, named and introduced by editor Peter Furtado. pp. 34-39.

<sup>60</sup> Cohn ,Samuel K. Jr, “Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague.”.

<sup>61</sup> Rosen, p. 3 p. 209.

have soon lost ten thousand a day.<sup>62</sup> So many died that the living could not bury the dead.<sup>63</sup> Despite the obvious likelihood that this was bubonic plague, this did not become a certainty until the twenty-first century. The DNA research described by the *Plos* team disproved the often-repeated belief that the plague which arrived in 1346 was the first bubonic plague epidemic to hit Western Europe. What was newly revealed by the 2013 investigation was that this earlier pestilence had gone beyond the Alps; it was previously thought that the sixth century outbreak was limited to the Middle East, southern Europe, the British Isles and North Africa. Besansky also suggested that the plague originated in Asia, but some similarities between bacteria provided the possibility that it linked to viruses in what is now Angola.

A plausible new theory recently put forward by the respected American medical historian Monica H. Green and her team of geneticists, scientists and historians is that an outbreak of bubonic plague started early in the first half of the thirteenth century, that is five hundred years after the ending of Justinian's Plague, but around a century or before the beginning of the fourteenth-century outbreak. She also gives a different first locale and initial carrier to those given in most accounts. Much of this theory concerns a thirteenth century primary source that remained little known and underused, not being published until 2009 and not translated into English until nine years later. In translation it is entitled *Mongol News*. These documents do contain news of this spreading plague. Modern science is another source focused on marmots, particularly those located in the Tian Shan mountains in what is now the Chinese-Kyrgyzstan

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<sup>62</sup> Deaux, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137; Procipus in Futardo, p.34-39.

borderlands. They are the initial carriers in the initial locale, which she sees as being infected around 1216.<sup>64</sup>

While marmots usually avoid people, people sought them. The Mongol tribes in the mountains were marmot hunters, after their flesh, furs and their skin, which they worked with to make supple for wear.<sup>65</sup> Modern investigators have found *Yersina* amongst marmots in these regions.<sup>66</sup> Such close human contact could have easily infected humans with the marmots' fleas and therefore the virus, as the observed 1910-1911 outbreak involving these creatures demonstrated. However Green also puts forward another explanation with evidence.

As the Mongols rapidly spread westwards, establishing their empire, rations for their armies relied heavily of wagon trains loaded with grains and millet, both loved by rodents. Did these Mongol wagon trains also carry marmots, or their fleas or humans carrying those fleas? Quite possibly. By 1258 when the Mongols were besieging Bagdad, plague raged in the city to the extent that the survivors could not bury the dead, instead they tossed them in the river. Green mentions that this plague spread where the Mongols went, into other parts of Iraq and Syria and possibly even Egypt.

Other evidence coming from long before Green's work while inconclusive, does support her theory of a thirteenth century outbreak. Charles Creighton mentions Marco Polo, resident in China in the 1270s to 1291,

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<sup>64</sup> Green; Perry.

<sup>64</sup> Perry,

<sup>64</sup> Green,

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*,

referred to a fever that left carbuncles on the victims, but Creighton states that this account is ambiguous.<sup>67</sup> Even so, apart from bubonic plague, what other fever gives carbuncles?

Early European travellers working in the Chinese Annals noted how between 1308 and 1352 China's empire sporadically suffered famines, floods, war, earthquakes, pestilence, malignant fevers and plague.<sup>68</sup> Which plague? Unfortunately, Doctor Hecker apparently correctly states that there "is no certain intelligence" about Chinese casualties and causes.<sup>69</sup> The plagues could refer to the bubonic, but typhoid, typhus, cholera, influenza or others are also likely. Doctor Hecker did make the connection in 1833, that this was the same pattern of disaster that would hit much of Medieval Europe.<sup>70</sup> In eastern Europe wars, unusually bad weather, famine and severe earthquakes in Greece and Italy would also hit. just before plague arrived.

Wherever and whenever it originated, the flea borne virus we know of as the Black Death did take several years to reach England from central Asia, taking at least seventeen years to spread from China in 1331, if not earlier. India was hit much quicker: infections were happening there at least by 1332.<sup>71</sup> Within a year after that, strange frightening reports were reaching

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<sup>67</sup> Charles Creighton *A History of Epidemics in Britain: From A.D. 664 to the Eradication of the Plague*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1891. n.p.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42686/42686-h/42686-h.htm> p.150. Polo's words are not given.

<sup>68</sup> Creighton, pp. 146-150; Hecker, Chapter III 'Causes-Spread.

<sup>69</sup> Hecker, Chapter III Causes-Spread.

<sup>70</sup> Hecker, Chapter II 'The Disease.'

<sup>71</sup> Doctor W.J. R. Simpson, *The Croonian Lectures on Plague*. London; 1907. p. 8.

Europe of violent floods and earthquakes and pestilence.<sup>72</sup> While like most news coming out of the East, this was confused and exaggerated, Pope Clement VI had the sense to get an eyewitness report from one of the handful of friars in the East, who told him that millions were dying.<sup>73</sup>

Although some early writers argue that the disease originated in the area between the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea, which was then known as Scythia, it had definitely reached that land by the spring of 1346. However, while he is right about the later spreading pattern, Geoffrey Le Baker, a 1340s eyewitness and chronicler to the effects in England, must be wrong about the origin. Scythia and the adjacent lands cannot have been its breeding ground: an earlier mention of second epidemic victims appeared in Chinese records in 1331.<sup>74</sup>

Despite objections by some historians that the Medieval humans did not carry plague from China to Europe because Moslem extremists banned the overland trade, traders almost certainly carried the disease westwards along the Silk Road. Apart from obvious realities and circumstantial evidence such as its pattern of spreading gradually westward in inland locations one clear and reliable piece of evidence backs this idea. The graves of a Nestorian community near Issyk Kul in central Asia show by tombstone inscriptions dated 1338 and 1339 that the plague killed them then.<sup>75</sup> Tests by Russian forensic scientists carried out on remains from that

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<sup>72</sup> Ziegler, pp.13-15. Ziegler quotes contemporary European sources and reproduces one.

<sup>73</sup> Deaux, pp. 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> McNeill, p. 152; Document 1: Gabriele de Mussis, 'The Black Death Reaches Europe.' A retitled excerpt of '*Historia De Morbo*', reproduced as an appendix by Don Nardo in *The Black Death*. San Diego; 1999. pp. 127-128.

<sup>75</sup> McNeill, p. 155.

site verify that these inscriptions describing plague as the cause of death are accurate.<sup>76</sup> When this travel ban started remains disputed. Was it sometimes enforced and at others ignored or rescinded? Charles Creighton states it shut trade in 1360, fourteen years after the plague reached Europe.<sup>77</sup> How effective it was must be uncertain, even apart from starting dates. The Moslem ban west of China in the lands controlled by the Golden Horde slowed the spread of trade and plague, but how can it be verified that absolutely all trade was successfully banned? No ban works perfectly: smugglers bribe. Even without smugglers, to survive on food the Moslem controllers of the Silk Road must have had their own traders or trading connections. Suppliers of some kind were necessary to survive in the barren desert lands of the Silk Road across what is now much of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq Syria Turkey and Italy.

Conterminous trading might have slowly spread the killer. It would take years to go by camel, horse or on foot from a manufacturing centre to a trading post, post to port, then port to port, port to roads going inland and lastly tracks veering off roads to villages, hamlets and manors would have completed the spread to the most remote parts of England. Unlike continental Europe, there would be no known safe havens in the British Isles. Conterminous trade either by road or sea ways remains the most likely explanation, but just possibly only one infected animal, person or product eventually spread the disease from Scythia to the Crimea, where groups are known to have deliberately spread it. It may have also travelled by sea in merchant ships, which travelled from China through South-East Asia to India and beyond.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>77</sup> Creighton, p. 148.

Another very likely carrier method during the second epidemic is that their fleas would have made homes in the clothes of traders, their trading furs, skins and blankets and their beasts of burden as they travelled along the Silk Road or other travel routes. Crews trading by river systems or oceans have also carried the pestilence; this must be the most likely way it reached India and then Ethiopia and Egypt. Either by sea or by the Silk Road trade routes would carry later outbreaks into Europe. In 2007 excavators of the Venetian lazaret (established as Europe's first officially authorised permanent quarantine station in 1485) contained skeletons showing that some late fifteenth century victims originally came from Africa and Asia.<sup>78</sup>

It is a fallacy to state that trade with the East ended with the end of the Silk Road in Venice. The Italians, not just the Venetians, were the main trading partners with the East.<sup>79</sup> Venetians, Catalans and Genoese merchant navies and their individual citizen's merchant fleets would reload goods from the Silk Road and the Levantine, to go on to their trading posts. These extended as far as England, Ireland and Scotland.<sup>80</sup> This route of lined ports and outposts was another way for the plague to spread; it took the pestilence as close to England as Normandy.<sup>81</sup> Regular trade with England flourished; yet amazingly infection did not cross the channel there first. While comparing situations a hundred years apart can be simplistic, the Edwardian Suffolk investigations do reveal that for three years before that

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<sup>78</sup> Maria Christina Valsecchi, 'Mass Graves Found on Venice 'Quarantine' Island.' Posted August 29<sup>th</sup> 2007. <https://www.quora.com/what-did-Venicedo-to-combat-the-plague>, accessed October 25th 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Deaux, pp. 44-46.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>81</sup> G.G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama*. Volume II. *The Horizons of Thought*. London & Glasgow; 1961 p. 129.

plague outbreak their ships from the recently plague infected ports of Valparaiso, Rosario, Alexandria and San Francisco had been in the river. They were only a mile or two from the infected farms and lodgings.

The reliability of the banned trade argument seems extremely unlikely for other reasons. Either by the Silk Road or by sea infected rats and fleas, both of which actually carried the virus in their blood, would have made homes in transported trading goods as they always do. Marmots, gerbils and other assorted rodent species were also frequently suspected as carriers as they also carry fleas. In 2015 a team working through an investigation into how plague was spread found that in Kazakhstan gerbils commonly carried plague and that as in earlier investigations European squirrels and marmots were still also carriers.<sup>82</sup>

Dogs, cats, mice, hares, otters, rabbits, moles, stoats, ferrets, weasels, oxen, buffalo, civets, meerkats, badgers, camels, dromedaries, cattle, monkeys, rabbits, coneys, beavers, donkeys, mules, asses, sheep, goats, marmots, squirrels and trained bears do not make the usual suspects list, although as all these mammals have fur or wool, body warmth and warm blood, they should. All those on this suspects' list apparently can attract and carry fleas. In a vague, inchoate, half-right way this reality was finally and officially realised in England by advisors to Charles I in a 1631 report on preventing the great mortality.<sup>83</sup> This doctor implicitly suggested that dogs, cats and vermin such as rats, mice and weasels were a danger to public health.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Boris V. Schmid and others, 'Climate-Driven Introduction of the Black Death and Successive Plague Reintroductions into Europe.' *PNAS*. Posted 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015. [www.pnas.org/content/112/10/302/tab-figure-data](http://www.pnas.org/content/112/10/302/tab-figure-data), accessed 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*,

Similarly in a 1585 Edinburgh outbreak, city councillors issued an ordinance for the extermination of dogs, cats and swine to prevent contagious contact.<sup>85</sup> Daniel Defoe stated that some Londoners believed the fur of dogs, cats, mice and rats carried the disease and so in the great epidemic of 1665 the lord mayor ordered the extermination of these creatures; his exterminators killed them in very great numbers.<sup>86</sup> In 1903 towards the end of the Hong Kong epidemic, colonial authorities scientifically investigated which creatures could carry the recently discovered deadly bacillus and found that spiders, bugs, flies, cockroaches, monkeys, geese, ducks, turkeys, hens, fowls, pigeons, quails and lastly mentioned, rats could all be carriers.<sup>87</sup>

How frequently many of these creatures could infect humans was a separate matter and one difficult to answer with any level of certainty. The reporting official could only say that some of the dead, both humans and creatures, were found together. Investigating the plague outbreak in the small 1910 Suffolk upsurge revealed to the scientists and medical people there that while rats were the most numerous of these infected and infectious creatures, others were rabbits, hares and one cat were scientifically proven to be carrying the virus and the infected were not in very close proximity.<sup>88</sup> This showed that rats and their fleas contaminate three other species – apart from humans.

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<sup>85</sup> S. Scott, C.J. Duncan and S.R. Duncan, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Hammondsworth; 1966. pp. 136-137.

<sup>87</sup> Blake, pp. 12-13.

<sup>88</sup> David Van Zwanenberg, 'The Last Epidemic of Plague in England? 1906-1918.' *Cambridge Journals Medical History*. January 1970. Volume 14. Number 1. PMC 1034015. [www.biomedsearch.com/attachments/00/04/90/47/.../medhist00136667pdf](http://www.biomedsearch.com/attachments/00/04/90/47/.../medhist00136667pdf), accessed 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. pp. 67-68.

By 1346 Tartar invaders in the Crimea were hurling the bodies of plague victims into a besieged Genoese trading fort.<sup>89</sup> In terms of their aim of killing off Christians the Tartars succeeded beyond their wildest dreams as Christians fled the Crimea in vessels to Byzantium and then went on to infect Italian ports. One much quoted account by Gabriele de Mussis, a notary of Piacenza and an important eyewitness and chronicler of the plague, confessed that by not knowing of incubation methods and periods, crews were unknowingly carrying the plague. However, while his vivid description of Moslems hurling bodies into Kaffa is much quoted and reproduced and supplies a quick explanation, there are other interpretations. His account, as reproduced by Charles Creighton, goes into details rarely quoted. He mentions that Italian merchants carrying Chinese trade goods, (including cloth and linen both of which can harbour fleas) were besieged by Tatars at Tana on the Don River, a trading post.<sup>90</sup> They fled to Kaffa and endured a siege lasting three years in an extremely crowded city while outside the Tartars endured plague. This crowding during sieges would be a common starting point for plagues in European cities and armies in the centuries to come. Creighton develops the idea that the refugees from Tana brought the plague into the city, probably in their goods such as linen, before the bizarre bombardment began.<sup>91</sup> Although he does not develop the idea, perhaps the besieging Tartars were not motivated by religious fanaticism, but by an apt form of revenge if they believed (correctly or incorrectly) that the Italian merchants had infected them. In this passage de Mussis also reveals that European merchants were

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<sup>89</sup> Gabriele de Mussis, 'Narrative of the Siege of Kaffa.' (c.1348/1349), Introduced, reproduced and retitled 'Mountains of Dead Were thrown into the City.' By Peter Furtado, p. 57.

<sup>90</sup> Creighton, pp.145-147.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.,

in contact with people and possessions from a land that had been heavily infected with the Black Death for well over a decade.

Whichever route the 1340s epidemic initially took, the fleeing of Kaffa meant that by late 1346 it was widely known across parts of Europe that a horrific and virulent contagion raged in the East.<sup>92</sup>

Even though news in and from the Middle Ages travelled extremely slowly, rumours of a deadly disease from the East were circulating in England long before it arrived.<sup>93</sup> There were more than rumours to go on. If the chronicler Baker, resident in an inland English monastery, knew several correct details long before the disease became common knowledge in England, surely England's elite must also have known this long before the disease itself finally reached England years later.

Several Europeans must have known more details about how virulent and calamitous the great mortality was as India's population was almost wiped out, if chroniclers do not exaggerate. Even if exaggerated, the real toll must have been massive. Byzantium was also devastated as Genoese galleys returning from the East were full of the dead and the dying. More precisely, chroniclers in China and Egypt both give fatalities as being two thirds of those living when the pestilence hit, with China losing thirteen million and Cairo losing great numbers daily, perhaps ten thousand to fifteen thousand a day.<sup>94</sup> The Levantine port of Caesarea supposedly lost its total population, Cyprus almost all, while the report to the pope claimed

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<sup>92</sup> Zeigler, pp. 13-15.

<sup>93</sup> Boucher, p. 32.

<sup>94</sup> McNeill, p. 152 pp. 175-180; Gabriele de Mussis, pp. 128-129; Deaux, p. 2. Hecker gives both the thirteen million fatalities for China. And the 10,000 to 15,000 for Cairo. Chapter VI 'Mortality.'

twenty-four million died in the East, excluding China.<sup>95</sup> Such an estimate, to be reliable, must also surely include what is now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indo-China, Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, Tibet, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, and Malaysia. These lands were little known and where demographics existed they were basic at best. What did these chroniclers consider to be the East?

Medieval numbers, dates and descriptions are usually at best inexact, more frequently are exaggerations and their writers often meant to cover failure or convey urgency, mass disaster or grandiose achievement, rather than reveal a factual reality based on statistics.<sup>96</sup> However lying in a requested report to a Pope was (and is) sinful and unlikely. What may be more likely is that locals gave exaggerated figures, which others passed on.

Considering the plague's virulence and the lack of knowledge concerning preventative methods, these massive casualty rates amongst a large population means that high figures and references to whole societies dying cannot be discounted. Pope Clement VI's 1350s investigators concluded a then known global death toll that came to 42,836,486.<sup>97</sup> While this figure is suspiciously precise, and relies on Asian figures where the Pope rarely had formal contact and few priests to convey information, Gabriele de Mussis, listed "almost all the East" as being so badly affected that areas were deserted, being deprived of their people, and the dead numbers were infinite, while survivors were so traumatised that they believed that they

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<sup>95</sup> Deaux, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Deaux states this in relation to these Eastern figures, pp.2-3; Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century*. Hammondsworth, 1980. p. xviii; Phillip Ziegler, *The Black Death*. Stroud; 2003. p. 124; Lauro Martines, *Furies: War in Europe 1450-1700*. New York; 2013. pp. 175-176.

<sup>97</sup> Johannes Nohl, 'The Black Death's Grim Death Toll.' (1969). In Nardo, p. 48.

were in the time of God's last judgement.<sup>98</sup> An Islamic chronicler in Egypt, Ibn Kheldun and another contemporary, Englishman Henry Knighton, the canon of Leicester Abbey, and an associate of some in royal circles, also separately wrote of the disaster in the East in similarly dramatic terms.<sup>99</sup> The Pope's survey of European Christendom came to a loss of 23, 840,000 out of around seventy-five million people; 31% of Europe's Catholics died within six years.<sup>100</sup> In China plague may have killed 65% of that Kingdom's inhabitants between 1331 and 1353; even by 1393 the population was still 25% lower than it was before the plague hit.<sup>101</sup> While they disagree to what extent the plague was a catastrophe, the massive population drop, where there should have been a high rise, works as one broad point the demographers do agree on. Even with a century of natural increase the figures show a much lower figure a hundred years on.

The range of global population estimates indicate the epidemic's effects:

1300: a low estimate of 360 million a high estimate of 432 million

1400 a low estimate of 350 million a high estimate of 374 million.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> de Mussis, p. 128.

<sup>98</sup> Nardo, (Appendices) Document 5: Henry Knighton, 'The Black Death Spreads to England.' Nardo renames this account and reproduces it as an appendix, pp. 144-145. Document 7: Ibn Kheldun, 'The Islamic World Engulfed by Plague.' Nardo, p. 149

<sup>100</sup> Naphy & Spicer, p. 34.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

Influencing these figures was the great European famine of 1315-1322 which killed in the millions. In the last decades of the fourteenth century and the first few years of the fifteenth, Tamerlane's armies killed an estimated total of seventeen million across central Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.<sup>102</sup> Despite these other catastrophes and other diseases, contemporary chronicles and the pope's surveys make it clear that the Black Death must have been by far the globe's main killer in the fourteenth century.

What can only be remarkable is that even these devastating global guestimates include populations in areas where the plague is believed to have never hit: the Americas, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, Australasia, Siberia, much of Asia and even parts of continental Europe and perhaps central Russia east of Moscow. The focus in the infected areas can only have been even more numerically devastating than the overall tolls suggest. Such figures, like the archaeological results from some burials, as well as court, manor and tax rolls, show that the many accounts by eyewitnesses of almost apocalyptic devastation were frequently essentially accurate. This was despite reading like gross exaggerations or fervid nightmares.

Knighton's reference to Asian casualties shows knowledge of the disaster in the East was known of in England, but when was this knowledge known and what was known of the causes and preventative methods? Knighton was close to the household of Edward III's younger son, John Duke of Gaunt, so he was granted access to documents concerning important information.<sup>103</sup> What he personally witnessed (if anything) and when he gained information concerning the spread of the plague, are vexing

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<sup>102</sup> 'Timur.' *Wikipedia*. <https://Wikipedia.org/wiki/Timur>, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> October 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Barker, p. xi.

questions. He wrote his account up sometime after 1378, at least thirty years later. Did he use decades old documents from Gaunt's collection? Did he write from his old memories? If historians could prove that Gaunt's household knew of the plague long before it infected Europe this would be even stronger evidence than Baker's writings that the king was knowledgeable and therefore foolish and negligent about the Black Death. Knighton was not rumour-mongering: he was giving reliably known information that the pestilence was devastating long before it hit England.

Clement VI's church-organised census death toll for Christendom of just under twenty-four million, must be a probable figure for five reasons. First, priests were numerous and widespread over the Christian world. Even smaller villages would have a visiting priest, therefore making for grass roots contact to collect information for the Pope's survey. Secondly a third of Europe killed proportionally matches many local documents. Third it is very unlikely that priests would not have committed what they believed was a great sin by writing lies to the pope. Fourth, what widespread, shared, motive would so many clergy in different locales have had for telling lies on this matter? Fifth as some areas within Christendom had lost their priest and had no one literate to replace them, the toll must have been even higher than the figure that the pope proclaimed.

Those within Europe who were not Catholics, the Moslems in what are now southern Spanish and Portuguese lands and the pagans and heretics of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, would have been outside the pope's jurisdiction and therefore his survey. While it is known that Europe's Moslems suffered extremely badly during the epidemic, precise figures are unknown and evidence concerning pagans and heretics appears to be also thin. Adding guestimates from these groups and the areas where no priests were left to conduct the pope's survey makes an overall plague death toll of around thirty million Europeans between 1346 and 1353 likely, perhaps even a conservative estimate.

Basic knowledge of how the killer disease could spread was available. As viruses are more common causes of airborne disease than bacteria it may have also morphed into a virus. Some Europeans realised it was airborne and touch would also spread it, one Medieval medical expert, Ibn al Khatib, an Egyptian Moslem, realised that the Black Death was not caused by stars or magic and was a contagious disease: he was executed for saying this.<sup>104</sup> Khatib's execution may have kept other perceptive people quiet. Islam's true believers followed Mohammed's instructions about not fleeing disease, seeing it as fleeing from the will of God.<sup>105</sup>

In *Plagues and Peoples* William H. McNeill quotes three of Mohammed's explicit Koranic instructions on this. Reversing frequent contemporary Christian viewpoints, Moslems did not see a plague death as divine punishment. Instead, it was an act of martyrdom and therefore a blessing as martyrdom guaranteed paradise.<sup>106</sup> This is what writers said Moslems believed, but frequent Moslem purchases of protective charms and amulets suggest otherwise.<sup>107</sup>

Some Christians expressed similar ideas about God's will; the great pestilence comes from him, accept it.<sup>108</sup> *Stories of Abyssinian Christians*

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<sup>104</sup> Caroline Stone, 'Ibn Khaldun and the Rise and Fall of Empires.' *Muslim Heritage*. 2002-2018. [www.muslimheritage.com/article/ibn-khaldun-rise-and-fall-of-empires](http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/ibn-khaldun-rise-and-fall-of-empires), accessed 29<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Michael W. Dols, 'The Comparative Communal Responses to the Black Death in Moslem and Christian Societies.' Haywood, California, 1974. pp. 269-288. This is a computerised excerpt from the book of the same name. <https://web.stanford.edu/class/history13/Readings/MichaelDol.htm>, accessed 29<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 26; Dols.

<sup>107</sup> Dols,

<sup>108</sup> Deaux , pp. 41-42.

wrapping themselves in infected sheets to achieve martyrdom and not be sinful by avoiding suffering could be easily dismissed - except for two similar incidents. In plague-stricken London in 1602 poor people gathered at death pits to show they had no fear of the plague. In 1771 eyewitness account of Muscovites embracing the garments of the dead to show that they did not fear God's judgement.<sup>109</sup> Such acts by Christians and Moslems shows both having a vastly different attitude towards death - and what comes after than what is widely believed to be now.

Another Black Death fallacy has developed from the way many modern writers praise Arab scientists and doctors for their rational, scientific and effective approach to medicine and health. Sometimes with some individuals this contains considerable truth, especially in contrast to other writers and people in the rest of the world.

Despite this essential truth, commentators often overstate this idea, particularly concerning the Black Death and some contrast it too strongly when recounting much about the foolishness of Christians looking for the great mortality's causes in the stars: Arabs started astrology off.<sup>110</sup> A wise writer on health and medicine, the Arab ibn Khatib, had Catholic counterparts in Gentile De Foligno of Italy and Konrade of Megenberg. Foligno dismissed astrology and sensibly told people to forget about irrelevant heavens, focus on symptoms and cure the sick.<sup>111</sup> Konrade was fortunate not to share Khatib's fate as a heretic for sensibly saying plague was not God's punishing will because it hit both good and bad

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<sup>109</sup> Deaux mentions the Abyssinians. p. 42; The Muscovites are mentioned by eyewitness Doctor Charles Mertens, in his *An Account of the Plague Which Raged at Moscow in 1771*. London; 1799. pp. 21-23.

<sup>110</sup> Ziegler, p. 25.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.,

promiscuously.<sup>112</sup> He probably got away with saying this because the Pope issued a public communication saying the same thing.

Medieval Arabs being medically wise while all their contemporary Christians were superstitious barbarians in medical matters develops into another fallacy, at least concerning this medical catastrophe. Some Arab writers could also come up with explanations. One of the greatest Moslem historians explained the origin of smallpox as being caused by birds dropping rocks from their talons onto people. During one outbreak in Cairo residents also provided proof that other Arabic Moslems could be as superstitious and foolish in their responses to the plagues as any other religious believers. A similar example emerges when an Arab group suggested to the Sultan of Cairo that women (some without veils!) adorning themselves as they walked to the market day and night were spreading the plague, so the sultan banned women from the street and the market so that this policy would end the plague.<sup>113</sup> The Sultan enforced this, supposedly on penalty of death for defiance, but what happened was bad enough: enforcers hit disobedient women, sometimes driving them into insanity, imprisonment or suicide.<sup>114</sup>

During the great plague there was an extraordinary moment of shared wisdom between the world's three great monotheistic faiths. In July 1348 the whole population of Damascus including women and children, joined a Moslem ceremonial march; Jews and Christians also partook. Each of the faiths followed leaders bearing their sacred texts. All prayed that God

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>113</sup> Taqi Al-Din Al-Maqrizi, 'Account of the Plague in Egypt.' (1438) Introduced, reproduced and retitled 'Lock Down the Women' By Peter Furtado, pp. 70-71.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.71.

would protect them and their chronicler saw the subsequent extreme reducing of Damascus's fatalities especially in comparison to those in Cairo as a divine mercy.<sup>115</sup>

Some primary source documents reveal blame games developing in remarkably similar and erroneous ways: astrological alignments, eruptions, earthquakes releasing poisonous vapours and miasmas, winds that carried those fumes, clouds of flies, falling stars, great winds, changeable summer weather ethnic minorities, sinful youth, even washed-up whales and that perennial favourite, God's will.<sup>116</sup>

While all this sounds like quackery or paranoia now, experts considered such explanations science then. These claims resemble the report for King Phillip VI of France. In October 1348 he requested that the Paris Medical Faculty explain the disaster: they gave him zodiacs mixed in with miasmas and the other usual phantasmagorical suspects.<sup>117</sup> A detailed report from them found that people could avoid plague by preserving chastity and also by avoiding dew, rainwater in cooking, olive oil, bathing, beetroot and fat people sitting in sunshine.<sup>118</sup> Did they really believe their science was in this - or were they scared of dismissal or the king's wrath if they admitted that they did not know?

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<sup>115</sup> Ibn Battuta, 'Travels in Asia and Africa.' (1325-1354) Introduced, reproduced and titled 'A Multi-Faith Service Against the Plague.' By Peter Furtado, pp. 67-68.

<sup>116</sup> These include three documents reproduced by Nardo. Document 8 by Matteo Villani p. 150. Document 9 This has a modern title: 'A Report from the Paris Medical Faculty.' October 1348. pp. 150-151; Document 10 An anonymous undated report, probably from Germany. pp. 150-152; Deaux, p. 51 p. 54;. Wooding gives examples from a 1485 Flemish publication "*A Little Book Against the Plague*. pp.54-55.

<sup>117</sup> 'A Report from the Paris Medical Faculty,' pp. 150-151; Ziegler, p. 25.

<sup>118</sup> Hecker, Chapter VI Physicians.

Some commentators, physicians and scientists treated astrology as a false lead, but for many it worked as an explanation. This belief in the power of the stars, natural forces and God's will does reveal the power of the plague: they were matching its awesome, seemingly unstoppable power with some causes that they knew were equally awesome, seemingly unstoppable and powerful. This view, while understandable, blocked understanding that may have led to victory over the greatest pestilence that the world had ever known up to that time and for centuries after - until the arrival of the Spanish influenza plague of 1918. Yet who did dream that such a horror, which killed mighty royalty, left great cities as ghost towns and virtually wiped-out large kingdoms, originated with two of the most insignificant creatures on the planet, the rat and the flea?

While Medieval European medical experts apparently left no written accounts that clearly linked rodents, other vermin and small mammals as causing plague, others elsewhere and in later times were on the right track. As early as the tenth century, observers started recording the links, even if they did not fully understand how they interrelated. The Arabian physician Avicenna (980-1057) noted how this disease would begin with animals who lived in borrows coming to the surface and people would soon see stumbling rats.<sup>119</sup> Nathaniel Hodges in the London outbreak of 1665 made a similar observation, when the startled creatures were suddenly emerging from their burrows this "was a sure sign that the pestilence was at hand."<sup>120</sup> How could Hodges have known this was "a sure sign" unless he had witnessed, heard of or read of at least one such previous sight during an earlier outbreak? Did he have passed down English folklore from long past flare-ups or epidemics?

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<sup>119</sup> Marriott, p. 229.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 229. Hodges quoted.

In the 1630s the personal physician to Charles I bluntly informed the king that rats caused the plague.<sup>121</sup> In the 1792 Yunnan outbreak Hung Liang-Chi noted that rats died before people did and he described the rodents sudden appearance and ways of dying in exactly the same terms as both other earlier and later writers.<sup>122</sup> A hundred years later Yunnanese knew to flee their homes if a dead rat appeared there, while Taiwanese believed even the briefest contact with a dead rat may lead to plague.<sup>123</sup> Indians had a similar saying, warning people to leave houses if rats start falling.<sup>124</sup> Vermin Infected clothing also soon became correctly suspected.<sup>125</sup> Clearly the idea that *nobody* knew of the link between vermin and pestilence has to be another Black Death fallacy.

Explanatory ideas went into human misbehaviour, not the natural world. From Noah's flood onwards God's will was perceived as a punishment for a very sinful generation, but then biblical commentators and preachers in from Noah on comment on how remarkably sinful each generation has become. One wonders if God suffered more goading from the chronicler telling him what he thinks than from sinners. These supposed causes would serve as scientific explanations in subsequent centuries.

Henry Knighton, an apparently cranky and humourless chronicler judging by his plague comment, explained how women having mocking fun at an

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<sup>121</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*. New Haven and London.; 1992. p. 622.

<sup>122</sup> Marriott., p. 229.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

<sup>124</sup> Frances Aidan Gasquet, *The Black Death of 1348 and 1349*. London, 1908. p. viii.

<sup>125</sup> Wooding, p.154.

English celebration inflamed God's wrath and so goaded him to unleash the pestilence.<sup>126</sup> Knighton, like his God, communicates like one goaded. These women rode to tournaments on the type of horses reserved for the most elite knights and arrayed in male costumes with gold and silver studded belts and in bright and brief clothes. This reads as if they were pretending to be participants. They were apparently mocking the ways of the tournament and their showy possession of daggers particularly inflamed the chronicler, who passes over details of their unspecified foolishness and exhibitionistic wantonness, which leave them exhausted.

This description appears as a little too outraged, a little too detailed, as if a cranky old man cannot bear women having fun - or has an attraction been sublimated, because as a priest he must be celibate? Once again sexual attraction has been turned to a combination of punishment followed by obliteration - not of the one who desires, but of the ones desired. After all, self-interest, vanity and survival instincts are strong. Knighton's fervid and vivid account reads like that of an eyewitness.<sup>127</sup> In his last reproduced comment he talks of how God used a "wonderful" cure to punish the women. Knighton's/God's cure is written in as including the great rains of 1348, tempestuous winds and ultimately the Black Death.<sup>128</sup> Does he mean that God wiped out a third of Europe to punish a few flirtatious, cross-dressing young English women? Or what seems more likely, does this mean these women are only one example he uses to show from the sinful generation who must be punished harshly to be brought back to God? This is more in line with what other chroniclers say, several of them giving examples of sinful behaviour as a cause.

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<sup>126</sup> Ziegler, p. 23. Ziegler reproduces a long section from Knighton's chronicle.

<sup>127</sup> Deaux, p. 117.

<sup>128</sup> Coulton, pp. 128-129. Knighton quoted.

Not all of them were fringe cranks. Religion dominated thought and their science. Archbishop Zouche of York who had some sensible cautionary things to say about the pestilence from observation and report, ultimately limited his investigative, probably puzzled mind by blaming this disease on man's sinfulness.<sup>129</sup> In October 1348 Bishop Edynton took up the God's punishment theme and in that same year in a sermon the highest-ranking English Catholic explained plague as punishment in generalised terms.<sup>130</sup>

It can be tempting to see such beliefs as a reflection of either Christianity or the Medieval mind, yet these ideas are not just Medieval superstitions or even religious determinants; such explanations continued long after the Medieval world did not. In the 1590s and then again as late as the seventeenth century English outbreaks several writers and speakers used the God's punishment argument in assorted blame games.<sup>131</sup> Even in our lifetimes this attitude sometimes continues. By the early 1980s the AIDS epidemic quickly led to media denunciations of sinners and deviants who by indulging in sexual abominations, brought God's punishment, a sexually transmitted killer virus, on themselves. Such moralists failed to explain why God wanted to punish haemophiliacs, blood transfusion recipients, newly born babies and loyal husbands and wives unaware of their partners' secret sexual tastes.

Similarly, some cultures still convey depictions of women as humiliated, punished by society, disease, fate or even obliterated for being sexually active or being too entranced with pleasure, relaxation or sensuality. Even though the sexual revolution began in the early 1960s, it would be late in the twentieth century before people routinely provided cultural depictions of sexually and culturally liberated women going unpunished and being successful in life.

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<sup>129</sup> Deaux, x, p. 138.

<sup>130</sup> Document 14: The Metropolitan of Canterbury, 'Prayers to Save the Realm.' 1349; Nardo. p. 157; Deaux, p. 129.

<sup>131</sup> Wooding quoting the 1590s English Privy Council and others. pp.474-475; Kevin Sharpe, p. 620. He reproduces two sources from the 1620s who wrote on this idea.

From early in the second pandemic onwards noteworthy examples from observations overcame religious explanations for what caused the catastrophe. These observers were sometimes on the right track. Even so, their failure to find the ultimate cause meant that false causes served as scientific explanations for centuries. Modern writers can emphasise the superstitious and futile methods and beliefs used to combat the plague, but people had to deal with its three manifestations in some way.

Only one cause, the pneumatic, the most common, was immediately obvious to many in those times. Obvious to us now, two other entwined causes made discerning transmission methods more difficult then. The transmission method for the pneumatic strain was and is spread by coughs, sneezing, and even speaking all of which was indeed windborne, easily befouling the air, making it deadly. While their belief that foul air itself caused plague, it actually was a carrier; the early chroniclers were close to the truth. How far these airborne germs could travel in the wind remains uncertain

They also quickly realised the second less obvious transmission method came from touching someone or something infected. The third transmission method and surely the least common, bites by fleas or mammals, escaped notice, at least in Medieval Europe and the Middle East, neighbouring pagan lands and Moslem caliphates and kingdoms.

Wherever they originated, both the Plague of Justinian and the Black Death spread slowly, at least in their initial stages. Justinian's Plague was as far as is known, much more limited in the territory it covered. Its domain spread westwards from modern day Iraq, across those countries bordering the Red Sea, the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Adriatic, the Mediterranean, over the Alps and then all the way to Ireland.<sup>132</sup> It reoccurred sporadically with

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 266-267.

localised outbreaks for around two centuries. Two epidemics devastated England, although total fatalities and most of the pestilence's effects are unknown. The first outbreak was in the 540s, the second reached the British Isles by 664 A.D. when the chronicler Bede records its devastating effects in England, Scotland and Ireland<sup>133</sup> This later epidemic left a rushed, shallow burial site at Cameron, Somersetshire, which contained 115 victims.

Another upsurge in 684-685 AD left few survivors in Northumbria and devastated Lindisfarne.<sup>134</sup> In Ireland one writer claimed that two thousand were killed in a week and were buried at Tallaght, so it was then named as "the burial place of the plague stricken."<sup>135</sup> In Ireland perhaps a third of the residents there were left alive.<sup>136</sup> The large number dying in so short a time strains credibility. However, given the virus's virulence, the lack of immunity and the Dark Age way of living crowded together, this could be true. Tallaght being a settlement, the nomenclature and the reference to one burial ground apparently being used in that populated area, also support this possibility. This plague hit Ireland at a time of great famine and so Saint Fechin (who was amongst the first plague victims) perceived it as an answer to prayer so that people would not die of famine; others prayed for increased food supplies.<sup>137</sup> This early example of reactions shows the plague could bring out the best and worst in people. Another example from this time similarly shows a loss of Christian faith. In England Bede

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<sup>133</sup> Rosen, pp. 267-268; Furtado reproduces an excerpt from Bede's *History of the English People*. (c.731) pp.46-47; Creighton, p. 5. He also quotes Bede.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>135</sup> Mitra, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Creighton, p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> Deaux, p. 39.

recorded that so many had died amongst the higher social levels that they renounced the church and returned to paganism.<sup>138</sup> Justinian's Plague adumbrated much that would happen centuries later. This first bubonic attack seems forgotten, even unknown by the time of the second epidemic eight hundred years later, which spread much more extensively. Apparently Medieval English chroniclers when writing about the later outbreak do not compare their situation to the earlier epidemic. They write in puzzlement and ignorance, as if hit by a new thing, not seeing their situation as a return to an old terror. Nobody apparently learned lessons from this earlier attack, but then perhaps the few surviving records of it were unknown almost seven hundred years later.



*Left An example of septicaemic plague infection. Right: The oriental rat flea. The dark mass is Yersinia Pestis. This makes the fleas a second carrier, not the originator as is often stated. Although the European fleas can be plague carriers, they rarely are: they do not have the digestive track problems of the Asian species. When this species of flea cannot digest Yersinia Pestis it becomes an aggressive biter and so spreads its vomit and the plague. Both illustrations courtesy of Wikipedia.*

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<sup>138</sup> Coulton, Volume II. p. 129. Bede quoted.

Before twentieth century scientists investigated, many other things that even experts could not explain happened. One of the first publicly published scientific opinions emphatically stating that the plague bacillus was in the ground went into print as late as 1897.<sup>139</sup> The change in temperatures caused by the Little Ice Age or earthquakes and eruptions, may have caused a temperature change in the soil. This then led to the virus starting. Is it coincidence that the last European plague outbreaks in the last third of the eighteenth century roughly correlate with the ending of the Little Ice Age there? It may be that fourteenth century fur trappers in central Asia were the first who caught and spread the disease. This possible scenario resembles the 1910-1911 Manchurian outbreak when sixty thousand were infected with plague originating in trappers' marmot skins.

Expert Boris V. Schmid gives a less dramatic and therefore less obvious starting point. He states in his article 'Climate Driven Introduction of the Black Death and Successive Plague Reintroductions into Europe' (2019) that warmer, wetter springs give more plant growth, which then sustains a growing, flea carrying population - for a time. When the weather changes the plants die and then rodent numbers crash and many die. When that happens the sometimes plague bearing surviving fleas seek a new living host. Sometimes marmots or rats became that new host, sometimes humans become their new supplier of food and warmth. By doing so, by making blood their food, the guests killed their host.

In 1908 researchers in San Francisco found rats carried two different types of fleas. The most common species then in San Francisco was the northern European species, *Ceratophyllids Fasciatus*. The Asian and Pacific variety was *Pulex Cheposis*. This species, not *Ceratophyllus Fasciatus* was then killing

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<sup>139</sup> Mitra, pp. 9-10. Mitra was one of the chief medical officers in Kashmir.

humans by the million in India and China. While much rarer in San Francisco, it did kill hundreds who died there in these years.<sup>140</sup>

This difference was despite San Francisco and the Indian and Chinese cities having very large populations and unhygienic slums. The crucial difference was the proportions of the different species of fleas. Rupert Blue's San Francisco based bacterial research team discovered why one flea was usually harmless and the other was usually deadly. *Pulex Cheposis* has barbs in its guts. Those barbs hold back some of the blood it feeds on and eventually that blood builds up into clots which block food reaching the stomach. This leading to starvation, which then leads to a hungry, aggressive biting of the host, leaving some of the infected vomited up blood in the bite. The host unknowingly worsens this by often scratching, which by opening the skin so that some blood emerges, drives the infection deeper.<sup>141</sup> While this could even go subcutaneously in the worst cases, light surface scratches might be enough to infect the arterial system. Once in or under the skin the bacterium goes into the blood stream, then circulation carries it around the body. In contrast, *Ceratophyllus Fasciatus* had no barbs and so digested blood more easily. This meant that it was a less hungry, less aggressive and a less common biter and therefore much less likely to infect. The bites of lice, and fleas already adapted to their human hosts, as well as insects and mammals, were also possible carriers, but possible is one consideration and how common these rare infectors are as either biters or breathers remains uncertain and speculative.

Although Rupert Blue apparently did not develop the idea, differences between the two flea species explains the difference between two large and

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<sup>140</sup> Randall, pp. 210-211.

<sup>141</sup> Randall. pp. 210-311.: Snow.

infected cities. San Francisco had 213 known cases in four years and Bombay (now Mumbai) lost hundreds of thousands of dead in the same era, but in much less time. This transmission difference would also plausibly explain why when plague epidemics hit the same area some places had only a few casualties, yet others nearby were devastated. Unfortunately, no earlier scientific investigations like Blue's happened.

Before the twentieth century other factors were also known from observation, if not by experiment. The ways that plague has spread usually worked against city dwellers and the poor was an obvious observation. This was known in Medieval times, as were two of the three ways of contagion, if not the details of their spreading methods. As mentioned, breath, coughing and sneezing obviously spread pneumatic plague. Eyewitnesses and writers quickly made this known at the time.<sup>142</sup>

All three forms had incubation periods. Timing between incubation and death varied from overnight to several days. Scientists studying modern cases put this as being between two and five days, after an incubation period of around a week. Once the skin was penetrated, the bacteria multiplied with phenomenal speed and magnitude, overwhelming the white blood cells which fight infection and then attacking the lymph glands, which led to their swelling with blood and turning black, as did the fingers and feet.<sup>143</sup> The bacteria's attacks lead to septicaemic shock, internal haemorrhaging and organ failure. The most common pattern was for victims to initially feel lethargic and feverish, but be unable to sleep due to suffering headaches, fever, chills, vomiting up froth and excruciating muscular pain. As the symptoms worsened, sufferers often seemed drunk,

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<sup>142</sup> McNeill, p. 156 p. 158.

<sup>143</sup> Randall gives a detailed description of the first American plague death, in 1899. pp. 1-4. Other symptoms are described pp. 50-51 p. 100.

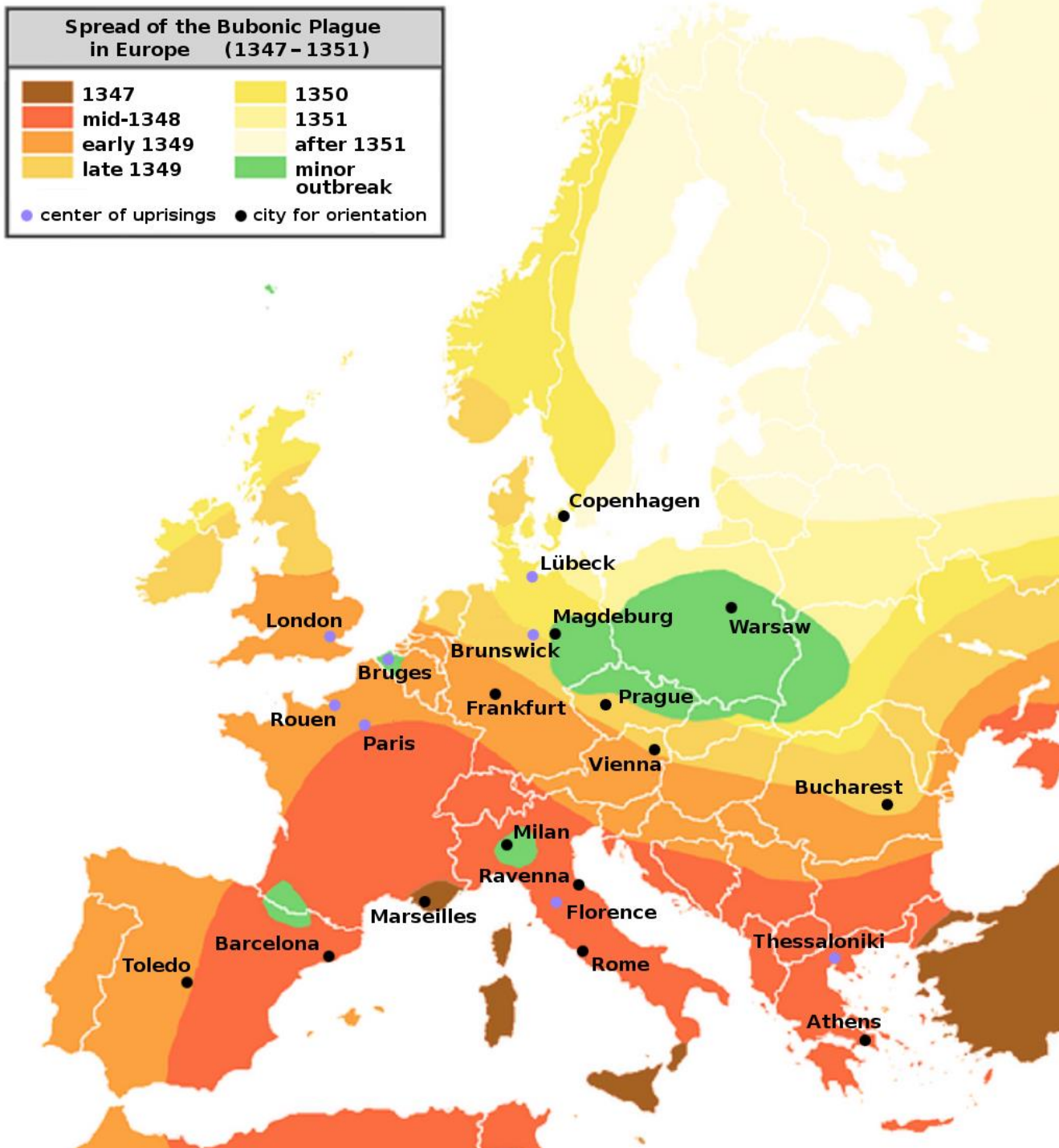
anaemic, mad or delirious.<sup>144</sup> Lymphatic glands swellings caused the pressure that formed buboes, usually in the groin, the armpits or the neck.



*The rushed and cramped, but orderly and respectful forms of burials are shown here in Tournai in 1349. Both archaeology and chronicler's descriptions reveal most English burials would have been similar. Modern people would perceive this depiction as being of three activities happening simultaneously, but Medieval artists were more concerned with presenting a narrative to a predominantly illiterate population. On the left bearers with the coffins arrive. In the centre and top right graves are being dug, while on the lower right men prepare a coffin for a burial service. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons*

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<sup>144</sup> Rebecca Rideal, *1666: Plague, War and Hellfire*. New York; 2016. pp. 26-27. p. 51; Randall pp. 1-4. p. 51. Also, Doctor Mertens in the next source note. Mitra noted similar systems, p. 16.



*The Spread of the Black Death in Europe 1346-1353.* Wikipedia and the Wikispaces site. The latter folded in January 2019.

Not long before death, small red or black spots would often appear. Doctor Hecker stated it could kill in as little as twelve hours or take as long as fourteen days.<sup>145</sup> In the 1771 Moscow outbreak four doctors working for the government separately wrote up detailed reports of the plague symptoms which match each other and more modern reports.<sup>146</sup> One of these doctors working in 1771 Charles Mertens, also added other symptoms which have not appeared in modern descriptions: a white or black dry tongue, foul breath, glossy skin, extreme paleness in corpses, diarrhoea which was impossible to check, turbid urine in some cases and watery eyes which had a sparkling fierceness. This does suggest some change, perhaps due to Russia's climate or a mutating virus. Doctor Mitra's essentially matching detailed book length report *The Bubonic Plague* (1897) also matches descriptions of causes, symptoms, the plague's passages, treatment and preventative measures. All these accounts are notable for being in line with those earlier descriptions, suggesting little change, if any in the disease. Doctor Simpson mentioned this similarity in 1907, while giving Croonian Lectures to the Royal College of Surgeons, he remarked on how plague symptoms had similar descriptions from earliest records to his day.<sup>147</sup>

Another continuing similarity concerned high fatality rates. In England's 1665 outbreak, an estimated 70% to 80% of victims were fatalities.<sup>148</sup> Even this revealed some improved immunity since England in 1348-1350. Hong Kong's 1894 epidemic also suggests this, as China had also been hit by plague from the fourteenth century onwards, so resistance must have been

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<sup>145</sup> Hecker, Chapter III Causes-Spread

<sup>146</sup> Mertens, pp. 2-3 p. 11 p. 21 pp. 42-46 pp. 66-83 passim,

<sup>147</sup> Simpson, p. 13.

<sup>148</sup> Merton., p. 27.

building. In the Hong Kong of 1894 differing ethnic groups had widely differing mortality levels.<sup>149</sup> Amongst Chinese residents, the fatality rate was between 90% to 93%, while in the 1896 reoccurrence it was 89%.<sup>150</sup>

Not all old explanations for the plague's origins can be dismissed. The wind, unusual weather, earthquakes and floods were not the disease's origin as many early chroniclers claimed, but in different ways. they all apparently had an early role in disseminating the killer's spread

Not only ignorance and unfamiliarity would aid the great pestilence in devastating England. Even the most enlightened, medically knowledgeable and stable society would have struggled to survive the plague without great problems - and Medieval England was definitely not such a society.

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<sup>149</sup> Ayres and Lawson, p. 22.

<sup>150</sup> Robinson, p. 6 p. 7.

## Chapter 2

### *Medieval England before the Plague*

No independent Medieval Kingdom of England existed at the time when the Black Death struck the British Isles. This is another historic fallacy. England was at that time part of an empire the Plantagenets ruled. Their empire stretched from eastern Ireland, across Wales and England and encompassed much of France. Where that French border was fluctuated, depending on where wartime conquerors stopped, or who gained by alliances and treaties. Lucy Wooding describes in her *Tudor England: A History* how even in the Tudor era the English borders were fragile, malleable and permeable.<sup>151</sup> This work does not focus on how the Black Death affected the Plantagenet Empire, but on how it affected England.

Modern historians dispute the long-term effects of the Black Death in England, often defending diametrically opposed conclusions. Six of the most influential among those historians writing about the plague in fourteenth century Europe, Barbara Tuchman, George Deaux, Francis Gasquet, J. M. W. Bean, G. G. Coulton and Phillip Ziegler, come to the same broad conclusion. They separately mention this tendency for writers on the topic to use selective evidence to prove points and come to opposing and

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<sup>151</sup> Lucy Wooding, *Tudor England: A History*. New Haven and London. 2023.p.3.



*English counties at the time the Domesday Book was finished in 1086. There would be few changes in their borders in the following centuries. Wikimedia/Commons*

often emphatic solutions based on scant, conflicting and usually localised evidence.<sup>152</sup> These six historians rightly permeate their works with cautious opinions and warnings. Due to the paucity of sources concerning the Black Death and the destruction of much of those sources that did once exist, there are many omissions and few certainties.<sup>153</sup> Other problems with surviving sources include a localised focus, tendencies to exaggeration, hearsay presented as fact, extreme bias, vagueness and supernatural or religious explanations. resources are almost always focused on the upper and middle classes, who made up less than 10% of the population.

Much of the evidence about this topic can only be tentative, speculative and even not really known. These problems with primary sources frequently lead those studying the Black Death into fallacies, stereotypes and controversies. One frequently repeated fallacy concerns the use of the term 'The Black Death' in Medieval English settings. Two rare points of agreement amongst historians of this epidemic is that people did not use this term to describe the plague in the Middle Ages and that common terms then were the pestilence, the plague or the great mortality.<sup>154</sup> In England the terms "botch" and "foul death" were in common usage to describe the plague from Medieval to Stuart dynasty times.<sup>155</sup> "The Black Death" was

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<sup>152</sup> Tuchman, pp. xv xix; Deaux, pp. 2-3 p. 143; Gasquet, pp. 85-86; J. M. W. Bean, 'The Black Death: The Social and Economic Consequences.' in *The Black Death: The Impact of the Fourteenth Century Plague.* Binghampton; 1982. p. 31; Coulton, Volume II p. 130; Ziegler, Chapter 17. 'The Effects on the Church and Man's Mind.' pp. 224-244.

<sup>153</sup> Mark Ormond, *Edward III.* New Haven and London Yale University Press, 2011. p.357.

<sup>154</sup> A precise tracing of this term's development is a graph showing the English language usage of the term The Black Death from 1500 until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. titled 'The Black Death' *Educalingo.* <https://educalingo.com/en/dic-en/the-black-death>, accessed 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018; Tuchman, p. 101; Ziegler, p. 5 p.7; Deaux, p. 5.

<sup>155</sup> Creighton, p. 219.

not in print before the second half of the eighteenth century and was not in common usage there for another eighty years after that first known use.<sup>156</sup>

The plague's effects on England's feudal structure were immense, but they were part of transformations that started long before it started devastating England. Despite Barbara Tuchman's bestselling and very influential 1978 history *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century* being a chronicle of jarring change which, shows the fallacy of Medieval Europe being a rigid, settled, ordered society remains, at least outside the world of scholarship it was not a world dominated by a few simple rules and expectations embedded in chivalric and religious codes. Rather than seeing this society as a feudal order before the Black Death came, feudal disorder would be a more accurate description. Within England this becomes obvious in all aspect of life, in politics, religion, agriculture, economics, health, warfare and climate.

In his *A History of Epidemics in Britain: From A.D. 664 to the Eradication of the Plague* (1891) Charles Creighton uses England's Medieval records to compile a list of famines and pestilences which hit England before the Great famine of 1315 struck. One problem frequently caused the other or hit at the same time. Nine such epidemics occurred in the eleventh century, fourteen in the twelfth and eleven in the thirteenth.<sup>157</sup>

Between 1256 and 1259, just at the start of dramatic climate change, one of the worst and most reliably recorded of these events adumbrated the English experiences of the Black Death ninety years later. Heavy and repeated rains in these years caused ruined crops, which lead to a famine. This combined with what a chronicler called "lethal fevers" which began just before the famine, both causing thousands of deaths. These "grievous

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<sup>156</sup> *Educalingo*.

<sup>157</sup> Creighton, pp.16-17. he cites Medieval English records, mostly written by churchmen.

and widespread” fevers were so contagious that the living left the dead where they lay, fearing infection by touch. While this sounds like plague, annalists described no bubonic symptoms. It may have been plague brought from the Middle East, as Monica H. Green recently discovered documentary evidence of widespread bubonic plague there in the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>158</sup> As some outbreaks were even from the same years or just a little earlier, ships may have possibly carried from infected Egypt and the Levant and not infected continental Europe because they did not disembark before reaching England. Alternatively records of other European outbreaks may have been destroyed lost or are yet to be found. In England the high and rapid fatality rates also suggest plague. However, water borne typhoid, influenza and also pneumonia were frequently spread in rain and cold, so all contagions could have emerged due to the heavy rains. In London alone fifteen thousand died, even the Bishop of London died of pestilence. In Saint Albans, which was not a greatly populous city, Mathew Paris, a priest residing there, records that over two thousand fatalities were buried in their church cemetery. In London these fatalities were mainly amongst the poor: no money initially meant no food, but with extortionist prices, even some of the well off starved.<sup>159</sup>

In a situation going against the common image of the callous rich ignoring or exploiting the sufferings of the poor in Medieval times, King Henry III eventually forbade extortionist selling prices for food in this famine. Charity was an expected duty of royalty and nobility. Whatever their motives, either profit or charity, the Earl of Cornwall and “the King of

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<sup>158</sup> Green, Monica H. ‘When the Black Death Arrived in Europe, it was Like Striking a Match in Tinder.’ *BBC History Magazine*. Volume 26. Number 6 June 2022. Pages 55-59. Green is interviewed by Ellie Cawthorne and refers to recent discoveries. This information also appears in later chapters in this work.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

Germany” purchased from Germany and Holland enough wheat, barley and other grains to fill “fifty great ships” for distribution in London.<sup>160</sup> Like the fifteen thousand dead, this number of ships sounds like the usual Medieval hyperbole, but Mathew Paris, the chronicler here, was concerned with economics and simply recorded currency issues and price fluctuations. The way he describes the hunger and pestilence continuing even after the fifty ships arrived gives veracity to his account. What does strain credibility must be the “Fifty great ships” full of food. This would have at the least, greatly strained or even emptied any Earl’s financial reserves, especially in a time of little or no income due to a combination of agricultural failures and currency shortages. Those currency shortages were to some extent caused by the Earl cornering the currency supplies. Did he also attempt to corner the grain market? Perhaps not. Creighton does mention the role of nobles who had town criers going through the city, informing the deprived of where they could find bread distribution points. The nobility requested those they had helped to call out their benefactor’s name and give public thanks. This disaster provides only the first examples of generosity, even perhaps altruism, which goes against an over-reaching, too inclusive image of the callous well off in England’s plague epidemics. It also becomes one of many events to disprove the idea of a settled feudal order, which had other problems.

Ideally, politics was based in feudal obedience to the monarch, but this ideal was rarely matched in reality. From the death of Edward, the Confessor in 1066 until the reign of Charles II nearly six hundred years later, long after the Middle Ages faded, no English monarch ruled without at least one of the following occurring: foreign invasions, internal rebellions, crusading campaigns, dynastic coups both attempted and successful and even outright civil war. Battlefield deaths, murders and suspicious deaths and disappearances were frequent among England’s

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.,

royalty in this long period. Even Edward VI's eventual successor Mary I had an initial if brief military conflict over the succession, followed by widespread hostility to her rule. During her reign Elizabeth I would face rebellion in 1569 and a great foreign invasion attempt in 1588.

Princes and aristocrats were also a strong cause for this turbulence and disorder. At times siding with foreign enemies, they would more frequently initiate or partake in dynastic conflicts. It gives a strong indication of how violent late English Medieval society was, that of the male nobility born between 1351 and 1375, one in five would die by violence.<sup>161</sup> With the twenty English monarchs ruling between the battle of Hastings in 1066 and the battle of Bosworth in 1485 three would die in battle, (Harold I, Richard I and Richard III) and four (Edward II, Richard II Henry VI and Edward V) would be murdered after being deposed. Not one of these twenty monarchs had a peaceful reign. Two of them, Henry IV and his grandson Henry VI ruled a kingdom in almost perennial war. While such conflicts at times weakened the feudal structure, it did not transform it into something very different. Competitors for replacement positions always emerged and their continual intrigues made instability seem normal - as it indeed it was until England's 1688 revolution.

This instability at the top levels was part of a wider instability. Strong changes to the essential feudal structure began with Henry II restructured Medieval laws, giving a stronger, clearer sense of fairness and regularity, but at the cost of some royal and noble authority. This process was continued when his son, King John, granted the Magna Carta in 1215. That document did not outline the rights of the English people, as so many have fallaciously stated. Magna Carta initially concerned the rights of the English lords, who had fought for their rights in prolonged conflicts. These began in King John's last years and continued against King Henry III

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<sup>161</sup> Barker, Juliet. *1381: The Year of the Peasant's Revolt*. Cambridge; Mass., 2014. p. 26.

during most of his long reign, which ended in 1272. Even just before the Black Death hit England Edward III had troubles with the House of Commons. These disputes concerned finance approvals and general attitudes of subservience. Despite Edward III possessing many kingly virtues, absolutist authority was clearly weakening.

Simplistic ideas of feudalism's structure being based in unquestioned obedience to royalty, supported by a monolithic loyal nobility and obeyed by commoners, while the church acted as a successful mediator, was an ideal which rarely worked. Intrigues, conspiracies, battles, deals and rebellions, all for self-interest, were a more common pattern.

Modern writers working on the proportional demographics of England just before "the great mortality" arrived in 1348 are in broad agreement that the peasantry was the largest social grouping by far, some estimate that the peasantry were perhaps even ninety percent.<sup>162</sup> Nobody questions that London was obviously the largest city.

Disagreements start with estimates for the capitol's populace. A low estimate for just before the real pestilence arrived of around 45,000 residents contrasts with a higher one of 60,000.<sup>163</sup> If outlying villages and towns beyond the city walls are included Ziegler estimates 70,000 to 75,000 residents were in the Greater London area and Dan Snow gives London seventy thousand.<sup>164</sup> David Ross gives a similar estimate of 70,000, while

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<sup>162</sup> Gies, Frances and Joseph Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village*. New York; Harper/Perennial, 1990. Reprinted 2016. p.1 These writers give the 90% as definite; Creighton, p. 24. By focusing on 10% in the cities he essentially says the same as the Gries, but with a "perhaps."

<sup>163</sup> Tim Lambert, *A History of English Population*. 2019. [www.localhistories.org](http://www.localhistories.org), accessed June 2019; Doctor Mike Ibeji, 'Black Death.' 10/3/2011. *History BBC*. Website. [BBC History](http://BBC History). [www.bbbc.couUK/history/british/middle\\_ages/black\\_oihtml](http://www.bbbc.couUK/history/british/middle_ages/black_oihtml), accessed June 18th 2019. Lambert gives the estimate of 45,000. Russell's estimate came to 60,000, which Ziegler quotes, p. 124.

<sup>164</sup> Ziegler, p. 124; Snow.

Naphy and Spicer give a lower of 50,000.<sup>165</sup> The next largest cities are usually given as York, Norwich and Bristol. Some modern writers usually estimate that these three each had around ten to thirteen thousand residents.<sup>166</sup> Doctor Creighton gave Norwich an estimate of twenty thousand to perhaps a maximum of thirty thousand.<sup>167</sup>

Two other cities which usually go unmentioned as being of this size or near to it are Winchester, with not less than eight thousand residents and perhaps ten thousand and Yarmouth.<sup>168</sup> That port city's population has one estimate of around five to six thousand, but this must be an understatement, relying on regular residents.<sup>169</sup> Another estimate of over ten thousand residents must be closer.<sup>170</sup> An official record sent to King Henry VIII mentioning just over seven thousand plague dead there in 1348-1350 supports this larger estimate.<sup>171</sup> As this king was definitely not a man to lie to, this number is probably accurate. Other evidence supports the

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<sup>165</sup> David Ross, 'The Black Death in England 1348-1350.' *Britain Express: History of England*. <https://www.britainexpress.com/History/medieval/black-death.htm>, accessed July 20<sup>th</sup> 2019; Naphy and Spicer, p. 37.

<sup>166</sup> Ziegler, p. 97; Lambert, *A History of English Population*; Boucher, p. 43.

<sup>167</sup> Creighton, p. 130.

<sup>168</sup> Ziegler, p. 120.

<sup>169</sup> Norfolk Heritage Explorer. 'Great Yarmouth, Plague and Depression.' Posted 2007-2019. <https://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019.

<sup>170</sup> Erenow, *Sussex, Kent and East Anglia: The Black Death*. Posted 2019. <https://erenow.net/postclassical/the-black-death/10php>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019.

<sup>171</sup> Deaux, pp. 135-136.

idea of including Yarmouth as one of England's most populous Medieval cities. The port had a thriving, labor intensive herring export industry, not just for England, but also for continental Europe. On shore large numbers must have been involved in the curing of herring and its transportation. In the middle of the fourteenth century Yarmouth supplied more sailors for the King's war than London.<sup>172</sup> At the time the Black Death hit this city, the king's navy consisting of 220 ships was stationed there and a cathedral was being built.<sup>173</sup> Even if the conservative estimate of an average crew per ship in an era when large transport ships depended on rowers is twenty, that still gives at least four thousand four hundred sailors to be added to Yarmouth's permanent populace. The regular fishing fleet, the land-based herring processors, the navy or the cathedral workforce, each of these must have had a workforce well into the thousands. Added to this would be the self-employed and the households and families of those working in the larger industries.

After these cities, towns usually numbered between two and three thousand, with a town such as Beverley, which had five thousand, was large in comparison.<sup>174</sup> The towns usually had a granted charter of rights and permission to run fairs. Most were market towns. Larger towns usually had some unusual manufacturing on a fairly large scale or were transport hubs: Beverley had both, manufacturing tiles and bricks and being a river town able to be accessed by barges. It was also what we now call a medical centre with several hospitals and residences for the sick. Few towns resembled Beverley in being centred on mass manufacturing, but when they did wool, cloth, leather, clay, slate, jet, tin, stone, timber, coal, oysters,

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>174</sup> Tim Lambert, *'A Brief History of Beverley'* [www.localhistories.org/beverleyhtml](http://www.localhistories.org/beverleyhtml), accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2019.

fish and salt were usually their main raw materials. Towns rarely functioned with large supplies of more than one or two of such resources. Other largish towns had another industry: religion. Pilgrims served as a lucrative source of revenue. The great cathedrals at Wells, Durham, Salisbury, Canterbury, Lichfield, Saint Albans (technically an abbey until 1877) Lincoln, Ely, Peterborough, Cirencester, Chichester, Gloucester, Winchester and others give a false impression of the size of the cathedral towns and their importance outside the world of religion. They were also essentially market towns with only small-scale manufacturing, if that. There were some exceptions to this pattern, such as Yarmouth and Beverley. Oxford and Cambridge were also unusual in being the great centres of learning, while Bristol was a major fishing and fish processing port and a transport hub. In Cornwall some villages were centred on tin mining, while in Whitby selling jet was a major industry. In the north mining coal frequently occurred and coastal towns were often involved in making and trading salt. Even so, most of England was involved in some form of agriculture, with manufacturing, fishing, salting, mining, forestry and building following in importance.

Like those with no fixed abode, only a small proportion of the English lived in the towns and cities, perhaps less than one person in ten and this pattern would continue well into the Tudor era.<sup>175</sup> Because they sometimes travelled and were often involved in importing and exporting products, the itinerants and other travellers surely would have become important in spreading plague amongst the more settled overwhelming majority.

Despite agreement on them being an overwhelming majority experts disagree over the peasantry's precise proportion of England's population. They also dispute what were the lower classes chances for upwardly social mobility and what these generally illiterate working-class people felt and

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<sup>175</sup> Creighton, p. 24; *Tudor England.*, Oxford and New York; 1988; John Guy, *Tudor England.*, Oxford and New York; 1988. Guy, refers to the demographic pattern in Tudor times p. 34.

thought about their supposed betters. They do agree broadly on social mobility before the Black Death. In the earlier part of the feudal era the agriculturally based working class were almost always bound to the land and their village: apart from military service, few had ever been far from their place of birth. Conditions dictated this, but conditions were changing in the fourteenth century even before the Black Death hit. Farmers owning a few acres or less could not endlessly subdivide amongst a farmer's children. Despite the popular image of a static feudal order, the role of some in the under classes was not fixed in stone. It was possible, but uncommon, to earn cash wages with which to buy their freedom and then to buy land. Subsequently they would fit into the slowly growing numbers of freemen.

Despite differing ways of occupation, any type of farmland was limited in how many people it could support and natural increase meant that some had to leave. This meant a drift to the cities or to the armies and the navies, where people earned cash wages more commonly than payment in kind, which was how most peasants were paid. This drift to cash payments was becoming more common even before 1300.<sup>176</sup> Villeins selling crop surpluses for cash was a notable example of this tendency.<sup>177</sup> It would become increasingly common in the first half of the fourteenth century and the Black Death hastened this process. Those drifting away from the freehold farm and the manors met varying fates - from premature death, living by crime and imprisonment and beggary, to subsistence and sometimes to great success. Some of the successful could get money home, so their parents could buy the farm or workplace. Others could return to buy their parents out of villeinage or buy their own farm. How often did

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<sup>176</sup> G. G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama* Volume I. *Foreground: Society and Institutions* London & Glasgow; 1961. p. 92; Gies and Gies, p.18 p.46

<sup>177</sup> Gies and Gies, p. 46.

this happen? Long before the Black Death a steady trickle of such purchases occurred, weakening the villeinage system and strengthening the freeholders. This became a steadily increasing small stream as cash and freedmen became more common and both were needed by rurally based lords for crusades, other warfare and to cover crop failures, murrains, famine costs, labor costs and lost revenue. Outright slavery had withered away in England before 1190.<sup>178</sup> This would have exacerbated the problem of needing cash as everybody wanted some form of payment, which directly or indirectly cost money. Despite the fairly rapid death of Medieval English slavery, villeinage and serfdom died long deaths, continually dwindling away, but still lingering long into the Tudor era.

The crusades in the Levant, which effectively ended in 1291, then wars in Scotland and France gave opportunities for travel and advancement for those willing to leave and serve. Pay and plunder brought back could quickly purchase freedom. Cities and towns, notably Norwich, Hull, Yarmouth, Winchester, Bristol and Beverley expanded, therefore needing labour and so providing employment opportunities. One of the biggest providers of opportunity was the church, where ability and acumen meant that a former peasant could go very far. Oddly it was technically possible for the poorest, most oppressed man in Christendom to become its richest and most powerful individual – if he joined the church when young, worked his way up and became pope. This was more than a hypothetical: Famously Cardinal Wolsey, famed for his opulence and being the most powerful man in sixteenth century England after Henry VIII, had common origins. He was the son of an Ipswich butcher.<sup>179</sup>

The under classes were not an amorphous mass: they subdivided into very

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.68

<sup>179</sup> Guy, p.83.

differentiated segments with different rights, differing oppressive situations and wealth levels. Many were villeins. These men were essentially serfs who worked the land as tenants. While not slaves, they endured much typical of slavery. Lords and their field foremen (known as reeves), and sheriffs could and sometimes did forbid them to move or marry without their lord's permission. Unregistered marriages led to fines going into their lord's pocket.<sup>180</sup> Usually villeins had to pay a tax to the lord for the right of themselves or their children to marry. Women and girls marrying off the manor could only do so with their lord's permission and usually after paying what was called a merchet. The logic here was that her capacity to produce babies was going elsewhere, depriving his lordship of his future workers.<sup>181</sup> Widows could be compelled to remarry for the same reason and also because they had no man to stop the neglect of their farm or workshop; refusing grooms could be fined.<sup>182</sup> Sons of tenants who became clerics or university students also caused a fine, on the same logic that the manor lord was losing a worker.<sup>183</sup> Worsening the inevitable miseries of death and taxes that Voltaire famously lamented, even in death there were taxes. Called the heriot, this permitted the lord to claim the best beast from the dead man's herd. If the deceased had three beasts or less the lord could claim his best possession.<sup>184</sup> Migration was not allowed, at least without payment. Peasants and villeins regularly owed days of labor on

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<sup>180</sup> Barker, p. 57 p. 62.

<sup>181</sup> Coulton, *Volume I.* p. 93.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

their lord's estate, as they owed attendance at his court.<sup>185</sup> These regularly held manor courts, known as assizes, were concerned with local secular matters. Here they could be rewarded, allotted a tenancy, given tools or livestock, admonished, fined, taxed, had goods confiscated or convicted at his whim.<sup>186</sup> The judge and the lord of the manor were the same and these courts allowed no appeal. Frances and Joseph Gies state that the lords in the village and manor system have been stereotyped as tyrants and bullies, that in reality villages and manors had a great deal of autonomy which those having power over them were unwise to interfere with.<sup>187</sup> Even so, through much of the book *Life in a Medieval Village* (1991) the Gies give many examples showing the manor owners wide ranging legal, charitable military and financial power. While these powers may not have always or even regularly been used, when it was in his interest the manor lord could be a tyrant indeed - and so could their local controllers, usually bailiffs and reeves.

Other peasants were itinerant workers or vagabonds. Whatever their status most of the underclasses were overworked, overtaxed and continually reminded of their inferior status by church practices, secular law and custom. Despite Henry II's improvements in law and Magna Carta, there was no real equality before the law. The lords and the church governed commoners' lives. They did this not just through assizes and pursuing law enforcers, but through many complicated and petty rules that rarely solved social problems, they merely repressed them. Local people connected to a local power figure sometimes inflicted such punishments. This was not

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<sup>185</sup> Gies and Gies, pp 46-49.

<sup>186</sup> Barker, p. 56.

<sup>187</sup> Gies and Gies, pp 48-49.

necessarily always the task of the monarch's proto-police. These servile types included reeves, servants, foresters, bailiffs, soldiers and tradesmen. They often came from the peasantry or were their descendants. They were comparatively privileged, but dependent on their officers, church superiors or their lord's favour for their privileges. That favour came by carrying out their superiors' wishes – and therefore they were the people maintaining the hierarchy's direct, everyday power over the lower classes.

Some examples give an idea of how petty, pervasive and repressive the feudal order was. In church peasants, artisans and traders with their families stood at the back while their supposed betters sat at the front. While aristocrats and the wealthy wore multi-coloured finery; such garments were legally forbidden to lower orders. Legally they were limited to only wearing dull colours and inferior clothing. Even as late as 1363, when commoners were showing signs of getting above their station by wearing what they could afford with their newly found wealth, legislation was passed to codify dress and apparel, not by wealth, but by station.<sup>188</sup>

Control over food through restrictions and privilege was another repressive absurdity emphasising at the most basic level the privileges of the higher levels of society. Such extreme control must have caused suspicion and hostility towards those they repressed and exploited. Amazingly, given their demographic dominance and their exploitation, there was no great rebellion by the underclasses in England before 1381. Their lords frequently used their people by levees for military forces in acts of rebellion or suppression of aristocratic rebellions, but whichever side the lower orders served, such conflicts happened because the lordships led them for their lordship's benefit. Considering all these humiliating mercenary fees, fines, punishments, expected grovelling and regulations, it amazes that England was not in a permanent state of revolt.

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<sup>188</sup> Pollard, p. 186; Mark Ormrod, *Edward III*. New Haven and London Yale University Press, 2011. p.475.

This habitual subservience was not the situation in much of continental Europe. In Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (1957) he documents several messianic uprisings in France and the Holy Roman Empire. These were usually not sporadic small jacqueries, but sustained mass movements. Despite banditry, piracy and some isolated acts of group defiance, nothing like these revolts developed in England until decades after the Black Death of 1348 hit. When sporadic, frequent and isolated revolts did occur after the first great epidemic, the government or local authorities crushed them, but even after their failure, they did reflect a changed attitude.

The continual outbreaks of pestilence fuelled discontent and contempt for royal, religious and civic authority as they could do little to contain the plague or the changes it brought. The failures of Edward III and his grandson Richard II, the dynastic struggles against the usurper who became Henry IV, followed by the personal weakness of his grandson Henry VI, opened the way for prolonged conflicts that became the major focus of England's leaders.

Those upholding feudal structures had other challenges that would have weakened any system. From around the middle of the thirteenth century onwards English chroniclers frequently record abnormally high floods, severe, long frosts and long, cold winters such as were unknown before.<sup>189</sup> Later chroniclers also recall subsequent famines and epidemics, linking them to these new conditions. What we now know of as the Little Ice Age starting having an impact on England from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards, as harvests began to fail regularly. This was in a land heavily dependent on harvests and without the capacity for preserving

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<sup>189</sup> James A. Marusek, *A Chronological Listing of Early Weather Events*. Posted 2010. ([www.breadandbutter-science.com](http://www.breadandbutter-science.com)), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019. Marusek compiles primary sources from Late Roman times onwards.

large amounts of food for very long, so that any crop failure was a disaster.<sup>190</sup>

This was more catastrophe than disaster for the lower classes, whose regular diet consisted of beans, peas, leeks, turnips, oatmeal, barley, parsnips and pulses, with rough black rye bread and occasional pork.<sup>191</sup> While breeding pigs in London was a serious offence, in the country people could keep pigs and fed them from collected acorns, which were one of the few food sources peasants could legally use.<sup>192</sup> Even this system (called pannage) benefitted his lordship more than the peasant. In return for permission to keep a pig and feed it on his lordship's forest floor, his lordship got a pig.<sup>193</sup> How occasionally could peasants add to this food source - and with what? Pears, berries, cherries and apples were possible if they were pickers, as were fish and seafood for those on the coast or near some type of stream. While some fish species were permissible for villagers to catch, trout and salmon were the legal preserve of the ruling class.<sup>194</sup> Their lordships ensured that baking bread was allowed only in his lordship's ovens and the manufacture of beer was only with his permission.<sup>195</sup> In Medieval England almonds, almond milk and almond

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<sup>190</sup> Boucher. p. 31. In his talk Boucher presented a long quote by de Mussis; Tuchman, p. 24.

<sup>191</sup> C.N. Trueman, 'Food and Drink in Medieval England.' *The History Learning Site*. 5<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Revised 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019. [Historylearningsite](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk), accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019; Barker, p.23.

<sup>192</sup> Trueman,; Barker, p. 87; Gies and Gies, p.148.

<sup>193</sup> Barker, caption 14.

<sup>194</sup> Trueman,

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.,

sauce, chestnuts, hazelnuts (known as filberts) walnuts, pistachios, pine nuts and roasted acorns were affordable and available for all<sup>196</sup> People usually grew them in cottage gardens, the lords' estates or the commons, which was land owned by commoners and shared for crops or grazing. In the forests they were collected, scavenged or filched. The clergy allowed that good Catholics could eat beef, mutton, pork, geese, ducks, venison and chicken on feast days or at autumn slaughtering time, as nobody kept meadows for retired livestock.

All of these more nutritious foods being eaten by the lower orders were dependent not only on erratic availability, but on either gaining their local superior's permission or largesse or if that failed, on breaking the law. This change after several fourteenth-century epidemics. Such control was always under threat and must have worsened with a worsening climate. Starvation and poverty are powerful motivators. A starving person will still steal sheep and hunt the king's forest deer, even if the penalty for those caught is having their nose or hands cut off.

Demographic estimates show increasing numbers pressing on these food supplies. The Medieval English population peaked from around 1290 to 1300. Assorted estimates for this period go from a low of around 3.7 million to a high of just over double that.<sup>197</sup> While human pressures increased the need for food productivity, climate change was reducing the amount of arable land in a kingdom where developments in agricultural tools, transport and agronomy were primitive, slow to change and therefore

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<sup>196</sup> James L Matterer, 'How to Cook Medieval.' *Nuts Gode Cookery*. [www.godecookery.com>how to 10](http://www.godecookery.com>how to 10), accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019.

<sup>197</sup> Ormond, *Edward III*. p.357 Ormrod gives a low of four million and a high of six million. Several different writers give estimates for England's fourteenth century population totals in Chapter 3.

could not meet the unfolding, worsening crisis.<sup>198</sup> Not only the increase in population but its spread across England could easily be a problem. About three quarters of the population lived in the fertile south-east, in the land bordered by the Humber and the Severn.<sup>199</sup> The other quarter lived in the less fertile north and the south-west and even in these two areas there were wide differences in prosperity fertility and demographics. Of those towns and cities in these regions only York was a large and important city. High concentrations of these populations were in the towns of Exeter Beverley, Durham, Nottingham and Carlyle, and none were great centres for processing abundant food. These differences between regions would mean that famines and epidemics would not hit evenly, making for a complex overall view of England in disastrous times, which across Europe were developing in the second half of the thirteenth century and be egregious .

Across western Europe extraordinary floods, crop failures and increasing cold led to extremely severe famines between 1315 and 1322.<sup>200</sup> As another sign of how feudal disorder could interfere with God given absolutist royal powers, when in 1315 Edward II issued price control statutes to fix most forms of meat and also eggs, he had to revoke his own unworkable statute the next year.<sup>201</sup>

Although the years of mass fatalities from starvation in England eased round 1318-1322, there was no return to what had once been. As

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<sup>198</sup> Tuchman, p. 24; A.J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509*. Harlow, 2000. p. 178.

<sup>199</sup> Wooding, p.14; Guy p.34.

<sup>200</sup> Boucher, pp. 31-33; Jordan's *The Great Famine* focuses on these events.

<sup>201</sup> Creighton, pp.47.

temperatures dropped crops were on a reduced growing season.<sup>202</sup> This made their quality, quantity and even their success or failure much more unpredictable. Effects could be extreme. In the later 1290s wine was so rare across the country that priests could not find sufficient wine for Holy Communion.<sup>203</sup> This meant that there was not enough for a sip once a month for each English adult. Grapes, once grown in several parts of southern England, virtually vanished and would not be a substantial English crop again until 1977, when vintners made concerted and widespread efforts to revitalise what had become a tiny, almost non-existent industry.<sup>204</sup> Was climate change hot enough in 1977 to give that one extra degree southern England needed to sustain vines? Probably, as since 1977 England's wine industry greatly expanded and prospered.<sup>205</sup>

Other climatic and weather effects included cattle developing murrains, crop losses and fruit and vegetable failures. A description from 1316 contains the phrase about "a general failure of the fruits of the earth."<sup>206</sup> This would refer to orchards and vines, both susceptible to severe frosts, long winters and floods. Even grains, usually hardier, suffered as in that same year grain crops had failed to the extent that the king forbade making

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<sup>202</sup> Tuchman, p. 24.

<sup>203</sup> Marusek, p. 96. Two original sources for this give different dates, 1296 and 1298. Is this confusion or the same thing happening twice two years apart?

<sup>204</sup> Gavin @12 July2006, 'Medieval Warmth and English Wine' in *Real Climate: Climate Science from climate scientists 12<sup>TH</sup> July 2006*.  
<https://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/07/medieval-warmth-and-english-wine/>  
 accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>206</sup> Marusek, p. 100

beer.<sup>207</sup> To modern readers the full significance of this may be missed, beer was not only the most popular drink, it was a staple within the kingdom. Our modern variety of beverages simply did not exist in the Middle Ages; distillation only began in the later fifteenth century and was rare then. Wine was usually for the well-off: cider and beer were for the others.

To modern readers grapes, cider and beer as important for nutritional survival sounds odd. To Medieval people such products were vital. Before the fifteenth century Columbian exchange, when trade with Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania began to bring in potatoes, citrus fruit, tropical foods, sugar, tomatoes, maize and more varieties of beans and nuts, such things were rare medieval luxuries, if known of at all.<sup>208</sup> These sources of nutrition would become more common in England in the later years of Tudor era. This process also occurred in the east and in the same era. After Elizabeth I greatly expanded trade with the Moroccan Sultanate and the Ottoman Empire sugar, nutmeg, dates, turmeric, aniseed, currants, dates, and pistachios were regularly consumed in England and imported almonds made consuming this nut more common.<sup>209</sup> While sugar is now considered unhealthy, it did supply energy and wakefulness, was used as a preservative and made unpalatable foods palatable. Nutmeg while rare

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.,

\* Cholera, sometimes stated to infect Medieval England, did not do this, yet. It was accidentally imported from the Ganges Delta in the early nineteenth century; by 1830 it flourished across much of the world. It would be in London in 1854 before Queen Victoria's doctor, John Snow, confirmed that fouled water caused cholera.<sup>208</sup> Even that discovery was only a start to stopping cholera in England.

<sup>208</sup> Alfred W. Crosby Jr, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. Westport; 1972. This work examines this development and its effects in detail, but is a fascinating sidebar..

<sup>209</sup> Brotton, sugar is referred to several times.p.2 p.5 p.8 p.61 p.55. The others are mentioned on p.210.

and expensive, was abhorred by flees and therefore its consumption would have reduced the spread of plague, albeit in a small way. Before the trade with the New World and the east was established, how many other English food sources gave necessary amounts of vitamin C and A, zinc, iron, protein and fibre? Does any evidence exist that any English peasant resident in their village ever ate an orange, a lime or a lemon before the sixteenth century? Even amongst the rich, nutmeg, turmeric and citrus foods were a rarity, if that. Common diet-based diseases starvation, malnutrition, scurvy and rickets would be great allies for lowering resistance any epidemic disease, including bubonic plague.

Apart from nutritious food quality, quantity became a problem; food shortages were common throughout much of feudal English life.<sup>210</sup> It is significant that the French ship bringing the first plague into England imported a cargo including grain and wine, once both abundant in England.<sup>211</sup> With grain harvests frequently failing or being much reduced and wine having to be imported, consumption of the two most common drinks in England must have been reduced and replaced by water. Today every dietician considers drinking water rather than alcohol as a way to good health, but in feudal England the reverse was usually true. The alcohol within alcoholic drinks, notably beer, killed dangerous germs within water.<sup>212</sup> While some parts of England provided pristine drinking

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<sup>210</sup> Boucher, p. 31; Marusek, pp. 91-112; Creighton's Table of Famine Pestilences. pp.16-17.

<sup>211</sup> Amanda Moore, 'The Black Death in Hampshire.' *Hampshire History*. Posted July 4, 2012. [www.hampshire-history.com/the-black-death-in-hampshire/](http://www.hampshire-history.com/the-black-death-in-hampshire/); Archaeological Finds, Archaeology, Hampshire Overall, Plantagenets 1154-1399 Period, Titchfield, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019.

<sup>212</sup> Jamie Simpson, (Director) *Tutankhamun: Life Death and Legacy*. Episode One. BBC Studios, 2019. 7:30 p.m. 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Presenter Dan Snow. The observation about alcohol killing germs in impure water was made about ancient Egyptian society, but must also be a valid observation about Medieval England.

water, streams frequently flowed through towns and villages where residents dumped offal, garbage and human waste into the water. In such conditions deadly water borne diseases, particularly dysentery and typhoid flourished.\* In this era little was done to prevent or cure these killing diseases: causes were often unknown. How many died over the centuries from these water-borne diseases remains unknown, but with more people increasingly drinking polluted water rather than the processed drinks of ale, cider, wine and beer, the infection rate and therefore the death rate can have only increased. This seems an unmentioned factor in considering why the English population either declined between 1300 and 1348 or did not recover in expected numbers after the great famine waned between 1318 and 1322. These water-borne diseases left survivors weak and depressed, easy targets for the plague, famine or another contagion to finish off. This factor may contribute to the extremely high bubonic plague Medieval death rates which were not matched in late twentieth century outbreaks.

To add to the problems with both diet and water consumption lowering resistance to diseases, there was the problem of overwork. In nearly every excavated fishing village in England, France and Wales examining skeletons reveal that those people lived by crushingly hard work: osteoarthritis was extremely common.<sup>213</sup> In many documentaries where commentators or experts discuss the condition of skeletons of ordinary English people from these times (and much later) the experts frequently make similar revelations. In a generally overworked, malnourished population like this, which was pressing hard on its resources, any prolonged food failure or epidemic would lead to disaster.

The winters of 1310 to 1330 were extraordinarily cold, being amongst the worst in Europe's Middle Ages.<sup>214</sup> In England the heavy rains spoiled hay

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<sup>213</sup> Jordan, p. 192 n.

<sup>214</sup> Jordan quoting climatologist Pierre Alexandre, p. 16.

and made harvesting and storing corn nearly impossible and seed grain rotted.<sup>215</sup> The latter was more disastrous as without seed farmers could not sow next year's crop. A pestilence also affected sheep at this time and soon a murrain affected oxen and cattle.<sup>216</sup> With little or no normal supplies of meat and foods from grain, the alternatives were unhealthy: horses, dogs and other "unclean creatures" were eaten and rumours of cannibalism, even of people eating their own children, were chronicled.<sup>217</sup> Starvation made working people susceptible to diseases and dysentery hit, almost certainly from three causes; eating horsemeat, overcrowding and hygiene.

The image of neat, clean English villages and towns in this era beloved by film makers, artists and novelists, rarely applies. Boucher comments on how even smaller towns were overcrowded, with streets little better than open sewers.<sup>218</sup> Boucher uses this phrase and implicitly applies it to Bristol, while Tim Lambert also applies a similar comment to Hull.<sup>219</sup> Both writers give an impression that this was typical of English towns in the Middle Ages. This is the other extreme to images of clean white villages. Such a lack of hygienic measures would have led to recurrent contagions. Whatever the causes "a severe pestilence of which many thousands died in

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<sup>215</sup> Elizabeth Hallam, (general editor) *Chronicles of the Age of Chivalry*. London; 1995. An excerpt for the Year 1315 from 'The Life of Edward II.' p. 193.

<sup>216</sup> Hallam, previous citation for the sheep; the effect on oxen and cattle is mentioned by S. Scott, C.J. Duncan and S.R. Duncan, p. 19.

<sup>217</sup> Hallam, 'The Life of Edward II.' p. 193; Creighton, pp.47-48; Boucher mentions the animals and the cannibalism which Edward's biographer omits; Marusek, pp. 96-98.

<sup>218</sup> Boucher, p. 31.

<sup>219</sup> Tim Lambert, *A Brief History of Kingston Upon Hull. England*. Revised 2019. [www.localhistories.org/hull.html](http://www.localhistories.org/hull.html), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

different places” hit in 1316.<sup>220</sup> In this period England’s population is calculated to have dropped by 10% to 15%.<sup>221</sup> This was not necessarily all from adult or child deaths; disease and famine caused abortions, miscarriages and stillbirths. Couples would have delayed having children in such insecure and dangerous conditions, lowering the population by a weak or non-existent natural increase.

Further evidence for instability at this time emerges in a blatant contempt for the king revealed in several contemporary documents and in the famine’s aftermath.<sup>222</sup> One such, written about 1320 was even entitled ‘The Evil Times of Edward II.’<sup>223</sup> Such comments about a ruling English monarch were extremely rare before these troubled times. This was another example showing that he was held in such contempt that no one rallied to him and he was easily overthrown without the usual great decisive battle. This disastrous situation emerges as in other aspects essentially similar to the Black Death of thirty years later, while not yet so extreme. Widespread devastation and death, contempt for royalty and severe agricultural disruption logically should have led to dramatic economic, cultural, demographic, social and religious changes – and yet these changes did not happen, to any great extent.

Within a few years of the great famine England was recovering. This was not yet a strong recovery, but in the three decades before the plague hit, English conditions were picking up remarkably, despite climate change.

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<sup>220</sup> Hallam, ‘The Life of Edward II.’ a 1316 excerpt. p. 193; Marusek, p. 100.

<sup>221</sup> Jordan, p. 118.

<sup>222</sup> Hallam, Part III. ‘Edward II 1307-1327.’ pp. 167-225. Hallam produces several excerpts written during his reign or soon after and adds modern comments and assessments.

<sup>223</sup> Jordan, pp. 182-183.

Cruel as this sounds, the demographic reduction of the large underclass would have relieved both pressures on food supplies and the need for ubiquitous charities, which must have drained away the savings, energy and time of many. Subdividing scant, arable land was easier with fewer competitors. The economic pickup was strongly influenced by an increasing, then even burgeoning continental European demand for English wool, which England eventually met.

There were also dramatic and beneficial changes in leadership; one of England's most inept, unpopular and disastrous rulers was replaced by one who for his first two decades, was one of its best. When Edward III came to the throne in 1327 the monarchy was in disrepute after his father's disastrous reign. England had experienced deadly famine, defeats by Scotland and France, attacks by his nobles, extravagance towards his father's favourites and contempt from nearly all due to his behaviour. The latter involved egalitarian habits, a disastrous marriage, incorrect, even foolish policies and his unaccepted bisexuality. Finally forces led by his wife, her lover and disaffected nobles overthrew him. Young Edward quickly overthrew this alliance, bringing stability, astuteness and respect for royalty back.

One way that he achieved these welcome characteristics was to establish the Justices of the Peace in 1328. Landed gentry had held some legal powers since Edward I, but his grandson extended and clarified their powers and formalised their structure. There would be at least four or six in each shire and their most important task was to maintain the law at a grass roots level by arresting and conducting trials for minor offences and then sentencing.<sup>224</sup> Sentences could include jail, but pillorying people, investigating felonies and then reporting to higher authorities were also in

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<sup>224</sup> Ian Mortimer, *The Perfect King: The Life of Edward III Father of the English Nation*. London; 2007. p.245.

their powers.<sup>225</sup> During the Black Death their other duties included supervising local markets, regulating weights and measures, fixing prices dealing with hoarders in times of famine and generally dealing with the effects of great mortality. Their numbers in shires would be expanded in later decades as more needs became obvious. The Justices were more than respected locals: although the first appointees were such. Initially they had to be resident in their county and eventually own land worth at least twenty pounds, which meant they could only come from the landed gentry

King Edward's dignified bearing, economic, military and naval successes, habitual munificence and frequent magnanimity and mercy to lawbreakers all soon gave him respect and popularity. While his father had led the English army to disaster in the war against the Scots and ended up facing a powerful and hostile Scottish kingdom, Edward III curbed his neighbouring kingdom's power after defeating the Scottish army at the battle of Halidon Hill in 1333. He reclaimed much of Plantagenet France and in 1346 decisively defeated the French navy at Sluys and their army at Crecy.

Prosperity soon followed victory by the king's gaining much wealth for himself and England from the ransoms of the captured French nobility, especially their French king and the wartime plundering of the French countryside. His capture of the port of Calais, so vital for English-French trade, was not only lucrative, but strategically important: it would be much easier to invade France from a held port on the European mainland than to launch seaborne invasions from England. This was more than plunder: he was gaining new lands and people to tax as well as more resources. From 1340 onwards on the home front his sergeant at arms force won local victories by smashing despised local corruption. When in October 1347 he returned from these conquests to England he was greeted with "the greatest enthusiasm" and the chronicler Walsingham, who mentions this,

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<sup>225</sup> Guy, pp.170-173.

goes on to describe Edward III as a new sun arising over the English people, giving them peace, prosperity and glory.<sup>226</sup>

Good as the military situation was, war had also bolstered England's financial reserves. This extra wealth from plunder ransoms and conquered lands to tax, not only flowed down from the nobility, but also came directly for ordinary soldiers, who would have added more purchasing power and so to some extent ameliorated the economic effects from both the earlier famine and climate change. Walsingham quipped that there was scarcely a woman in England who did not have some apparel plundered from France.<sup>227</sup> Obviously hyperbole, it still suggests widespread prosperity by plunder. Even the future superficially looked stable. Edward's heir apparent, the Black Prince, was a people's hero and obviously very suitable to rule as he had also shown his considerable military, diplomatic and political abilities, so Edward had not only stabilised England's monarchical rule, but seemingly guaranteed its future.

This seemingly rosy picture had considerable truth in it, although it was not the full story. Seemingly was the keyword and superficial also should apply. This king also inflicted high rates on old taxes and established new ones, causing resentment and querulous opposition as much of the taxes financed his wars, his extravagant way of life and munificence.<sup>228</sup> Much of England's economy depended on plundering the Scots and the French. A plunder economy has a strong immediate advantage; in the short-term: big money comes in easily. It also has two bigger if not immediately obvious disadvantages, in the long-term supplies to be plundered will run out and all that exists then is a desperate enemy to be fought. That costly process

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<sup>226</sup> Deaux, p. 117; Gasquet, p. xix. Walsingham was the quoted chronicler for both writers.

<sup>218</sup> Previous source note.

<sup>228</sup> Mortimer, p. 257.

ultimately gives no long-term benefit except possibly glory. It creates armies habituated to easily gained wealth which suddenly stops. Armed groups living by violence who are suddenly deprived of those material expectations are dangerous, to their leaders, their society and ultimately to themselves. Edward's pensive critics sensed much of this. In parliament an increasing demand for more of a say in economic planning came from the expanding, sometimes sullen, sometimes friendly middle class. How this situation would have played out without the chaos and devastation of the Black Death can only remain uncertain. These tensions emerged before England was infected: Commentators and historians usually and rightly entwine the Black Death with other causes for feudalism fading. However, the importance of these other causes, how they entwine with each other and by who, when, why, where and what their effects were in England, becomes a disputed morass.

Several major factors were evident in the weakening feudal structure before 1348. These include the crusades and the subsequent development of trade with the East, the upward social mobility of an increasing proportion of the population, the declining popularity of royalty, developments in Norman French architectural styles, cultural expressions, disillusionment with the established church and a widespread loss of certainty concerning God.

Not all developments were part of this entwining process. Military technology, English language dominance over Latin and French and the more common use of woodblocks and paper over vellum, all had immense effects on feudal England. However, they had no direct links to the plague and would have had their effects without it.

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### Chapter 3

#### *The Plague Comes to England 1348 -1350*

The question of how many people lived in England when plague first hit and how many were left after that first plague outbreak faded are crucial factors in working out its effects there. Unfortunately, the demographic primary sources are meagre, usually localised, frequently vague and even when seemingly precise are very open to very different interpretations. While England had Christendom's best records, few now survive.<sup>229</sup> English sources come from church writers, manor records, wills, councils or royal edicts and correspondence. Rebels deliberately targeted a large, but unknown number of original documents from these categories for destruction in the 1381 turmoil. While we can deduce information from statistics and evaluate the opinion of churchmen and brief localised comments, until the early seventeenth century we apparently do not have a single narrative voice from a secular commoner giving a long, detailed account of how anywhere in England coped with the initial catastrophe or subsequent outbreaks. Even in Tudor times the closest writings to this concerned plague avoidance booklets. Before 1400 very few collections of family letters were written and fewer were complete.<sup>230</sup> One of the largest, that of the Pastons, starts decades after 1400, yet it does not have a detailed account of a single plague outbreak, although England endured several over the long timespan these fifteenth century letters cover. Without even a

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<sup>229</sup> Gies and Gies, p.1 p.5.

<sup>230</sup> Richard Barber, Introduction to *The Pastons: A Family in the Wars of the Roses*. London 1981. p. 5.

compilation of basic nationwide demographic statistics between William the Conqueror's late eleventh century *The Domesday Book*, and Edward III's 1377 surveys and poll tax records, speculation based on assorted English specialised sources or comparisons between localised records often form two starting points. Comparing the demographics between those two points reveals the startling loss of life, especially considering when natural increase as a factor *The Domesday Book* did not list every known person, just heads of households: they totalled 275,000.<sup>231</sup> The 1377 poll tax exempted beggars and those under the age of fourteen and by taxing every other known English and Welsh person gave a population of 2,350,000.<sup>232</sup> Some historians give what they see as a truer picture by tentatively adding to this, usually going up to rounded numbers of two and a half million or three million people in England in 1377.<sup>233</sup> They are right both to add numbers and to be tentative about doing so, for the later re-occurrent outbreaks, between 1361 and 1401 hit children particularly badly, to the extent that the 1361-1362 outbreak was recorded by chroniclers as the plague of children.<sup>234</sup> We can only guesstimate what proportion of the people did fit into this baby to youthful category, but it must have been much lower than usual, pushing up the proportion of those over fourteen to unusually high levels. How many others evaded the tax? How many could not pay it and how many had no fixed abode? A nationwide population of around three million goes beyond plausible and seems likely. This figure also reveals a great loss of life. Ormrod and Lindley note that

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<sup>231</sup> Gies and Gies, p.30.

<sup>232</sup> Chance; Gasquet, p. 225. Deaux also uses this figure, p. 143.

<sup>233</sup> Ormrod, p. 357; 'Demography of England.'; Ormrod and Lindley, p. 27; Guy gives the figure of two and a half million..

<sup>234</sup> Creighton, p.124.

the 1377 figure almost halves that of the high population of 1290-1300.<sup>235</sup> This drop was despite what should have been nearly eighty years of natural increase. This strange demographic resulted from several factors, not just those coming directly from the great pestilence. Dislocation, depression, poverty or fear of these factors would surely have affected the decision to have children. The plague must have disrupted marriages and therefore the birth rate. People would rarely gather for any celebratory event, assuming that somehow they ignored (or could ignore) the horror of the Black Death to celebrate a joyous and romantic occasion. Deaux notes that when the plague ended marriage rates hit high numbers.<sup>236</sup> This must obviously be due to people coming out of rudimentary quarantines and once more attending gatherings, particularly delayed weddings. This tendency would have led to erratic lows and highs in the birth rate and in natural increase, even after the epidemics ended.

Other factors affecting 1377 demographic records include climate change from the last half of the thirteenth century onwards, the famine and epidemics of 1256-1259 and 1315-1322, nearly perennial war casualties from the Hundred Years War which started in 1340 and the reoccurring Black Death epidemics of 1361-1362, 1368-1369, 1371 and 1375.

While they disagree on precise figures, what historians do essentially agree on in broad terms is the plague's most obvious effect: the massive loss of life. Even here disagreements arise on the death toll, and its proportion of casualties. Researchers usually base estimates on assessing assorted types of residence and household taxes; immediately widely divergent estimated numbers emerge for an average household. Some writers state family sizes in line with modern nuclear family sizes. Others go for the much larger European extended family size, which includes everyone from

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<sup>235</sup> Ormrod and Lindley, p. 27.

<sup>236</sup> Deaux, p. 213.

grandparents to toddlers, with perhaps aunts, uncles, cousins, orphans and servants living together. Another problem with these estimates which has not gained much attention is that when historians and demographers

discuss the total population of England, they use evidence that applies to the stationary population: what of others? Assorted groups had no fixed address. Entertainers, hawkers, pedlars, gypsies and traders followed the fairs and festivals. Merchant seamen, pilgrims, mendicants, tinkers, mercenaries and locums also travelled without a set abode. Foreign traders, visitors, foreign pilgrims, imported specialist employees and Jews lived outside records. There were also those outside society; jailbirds, lepers, beggars, assorted outcasts, declared outlaws, pirates, escaped serfs and brigands.

All of these groups, legal and illegal, remained unlisted in parish records or tax documents. It could be easily argued that even if all these little groups were put into one total they would not make up a change of one per cent to England's Medieval demographics. Perhaps, but the next such groupings counted together certainly would. These would be the itinerant workers, the homeless, the large numbers of clergy and nuns, the navy, garrison forces, the armies and their camp followers. The latter term has become a virtual synonym for prostitute, but should also include all those servants, tradesmen, armourers, cooks, kitchen hands, foragers, ostlers, hawkers and civilians who travelled with the armies.. Putting all of these larger mobile groups onto the estimated totals for around 1348 would obviously substantially increase the estimates, but by how much? Somewhere between one or two hundred thousand seems plausible. Apparently without including figures or estimates for these more unsettled groups McNeill gives one of the lower estimates at 2,200,000 in 1377 with the population being reduced somewhere between 20% and 45% in the initial

plague outbreak.<sup>237</sup> Writers still frequently use this figure for the 1377 estimate, but trouble with this estimate emerges. Ziegler discusses this question in detail, starting with an 1865 dispute between two professors, one of whom gives around five million while the other stated that England could not have supported so many and gives a maximum of half that.<sup>238</sup> Then in 1948 Professor J.C. Russell's extremely detailed study on this question was published and his conclusion was that in England 1348, the population was 3.7 million. As Ziegler rightly points out, this leaves out many people. Russell's conclusion must rest on incomplete government documentation for demographics and Russell's presumption that his estimate of the average dealing with household contained only two parents and either one or two children: Ziegler suggests that to add one more child on average to a household would push the estimates of the English population to well over four million.<sup>239</sup> Russell's low household estimate could be initially justified as one person households existed and life expectancy was decades less than in modern times. These factors would have affected the average household size. Another factor lowering the numbers in households was that child deaths were common, especially in the outbreaks after 1350. However, looking at the evidence more closely, Russell's estimate must be unlikely as Medieval households often included servants, grandparents, other relatives and serfs. Add these and those previously mentioned as being without a fixed address and around five million people in England in 1348 or a total approaching it then seems likely. Several writers working on this question give such a figure or approximations close to it. Tim Lambert estimates five to six million

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<sup>237</sup> McNeill, p. 136 p. 158.

<sup>238</sup> Ziegler, p. 192; Gasquet, pp. 226-227.

<sup>239</sup> Ziegler,, pp. 192-193.

around 1300 while for that year Ormrod's estimate nearly matches, giving 4,500,000 to six million.<sup>240</sup> Jim Bolton gives the same range as Lambert's 1300 estimate and for 1348.<sup>241</sup> John Guy estimates that before the famine of 1315-1317 the population was four to five million with a possible high of five to six million.<sup>242</sup> William Chester Jordan, after assessing demographics by others, also gives five million by 1300 and for the time just before the plague hit gives six estimates, from the same as Russell's and McNeill's lows up to a high of 7,100,000 with most estimates ranging between just 4,100,000 and 5,250,000.<sup>243</sup> Ziegler tentatively gives 4,200,000 as plausible, with 4,600,000 as a higher estimate.<sup>244</sup> Niall Ferguson, gives seven million in 1300, but notes the demographic decline began soon after that.<sup>245</sup> Juliet Barker applies the total of five million to the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>246</sup>

Ziegler gives his opinion that the basis is shaky for such estimates and how basing conclusions from them can be hazardous.<sup>247</sup> He also quotes two

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<sup>240</sup> Lambert, *A History of the English Population*; Ormrod, *Edward 111*. p. 357

<sup>241</sup> Bolton, p. 26.

<sup>242</sup> Guy, p.32.

<sup>243</sup> J William Chester Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century*. Princeton, N.J. p. 26 p. 191;

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid* ., p. 191;

<sup>245</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Doom: The Politics of Catastrophe*. Sydney; Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2021. p.131. He gives a lecture by Mark Bailey as his source.

<sup>246</sup> Barker, p. 25.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*., p. 191.

other writers on the topic. One condemns such attempts as useless; the other describes a seeming exactitude of conclusions based on sophisticated mathematical methods and general laws built up on scant resources as being like sinking in quicksand while thinking you are on solid earth.<sup>248</sup>

This second comment Ziegler quotes is indeed so. One seemingly reliable method is to count the numbers in those groups who left the most traceable written records. The totals in a group such as monks in a monastery, councillors, tax payers or leaseholders, are added up before the plague and then after. The number of survivors is then deducted from the pre-plague original and the remainder is supposedly the number of fatalities. The survivors become a proportion for their group, which then becomes a proportion for all of England: 48% of England's clergy died, so around 48% of England's people died. Simplistic as that method initially sounds, it becomes more so and then rapidly untenable when considering that the casualty records are incomplete, vary from area to area, may include clergy still alive who were travelling elsewhere in the Plantagenet empire and frequently do not distinguish between those who have died and those who fled. There are also the casualties from other diseases and age, as well as retirements and transfers. Others vanished. Fear of the plague made many hole up. Others with that same fear did the opposite by fleeing, either doing so before quarantines were set up or evading them. The effect of both reactions was the same, to reduce the numbers in these recorded groups being listed as plague fatalities. The clergy, more than any other group are used for these dubious demographic projections. What are the totals for clergy in the plague years? G.G. Coulton estimates the number at twenty thousand; Cardinal Gasquet at fifty thousand.<sup>249</sup> Such differences mean that what proportion of the English people were clergy becomes equally

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<sup>248</sup> Ziegler, quoting Doctor Levitt for the first comment (p. 196) and Professor Elton for the second. p. 193.

<sup>249</sup> Coulton, Volume I. p. 146.

uncertain. Obviously, this method would fail on any of these factors, let alone when they all must be combined in such estimates. Applying these figures to all of England hits another snag: did the great mass of English people live like the clergy? Obviously not. Many would have shared sleeping quarters and close domestic proximity, both very different to solitary monks sleeping in cells and who frequently worked alone. The wildly varying estimates of Gasquet and Coulton show that even the essential base for such a method, a known number of total clergy resident in England, remains unknown and disputed. Although several local Church records seem reliable, nobody can say with exact certainty how many clergy were in England or how many died, fled or survived, therefore this method should not be used for demographics.

Another incomplete and uncertain method involves recent discoveries. Some archaeologists recently claimed a fatality rate of around 45% for England in the first outbreak. Supposedly the way that across England pottery shards in archaeological sites suddenly declined by 45% in the plague years and after indicates this figure. While the percentage is at the least plausible, (and gives exactly the same percentage for fatalities that Ziegler came to by other methods in 1969, over forty years earlier) the used shard method rapidly emerges as dubious. Using reproduction rates for pottery shards for a conclusion assumes that survivors gathered in groups to produce pottery at a time when they were usually avoiding close proximity or even frequently fleeing from each other. This assumption refers to the ones who stayed near production centres: as the only ones surviving death. Large numbers of others either fleeing villages or migrating to seek better employment would also have reduced numbers.

Another problem was England's weather in 1348, particularly from the early summer onwards. Across much of continental Europe and England extremely high and prolonged rains, followed by crop failure, lasted until

around Christmas 1348. This must have led to abnormal levels of wetness to the extent that grain, so vital to avoid famine, lay rotting in the fields.<sup>250</sup> English efforts would have focused on saving the grain, not making pottery. If by itself this was not enough to explain the sudden productive drop, rain sodden and therefore temporarily useless clay would. In Italy the four months of rain in 1348 ruined harvests and therefore caused

Famine deaths; babies died in their mothers' arms.<sup>251</sup> Starvation and grief would have combined to make people easy targets for the plague. While dismal English conditions were apparently not as bad as in Italy, the same pattern must have emerged. In continental Europe even this was exacerbated on January 30<sup>th</sup> 1348 by an earthquake hitting Greece, Italy and neighbouring lands. The quake itself and its aftershocks were so powerful that they toppled castles and churches and were felt as far away as Basle.<sup>252</sup> Up to 1360 other earthquakes hit Germany, France, Silesia, Poland and Denmark. This shaking of the ground and collapsing structures would have forced rats to move, coming into close proximity to humans and so infecting them. Homeless, in shock, probably grief-stricken, starving and sodden, large numbers of continental Europeans were left in the worst possible condition to deal with the catastrophic epidemic. Such conditions outside are contributing factors that explain the high death rates that many modern commentators believe to be unlikely.

These unusual rains also suggest another interpretative problem. In England did they have one clear effect on the plague, in either reducing or increasing its effects? Where there diverse, even opposing effects across England? Did the heavy and prolonged rain force people to stay indoors,

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<sup>250</sup> Ross; Marusek, p. 106; Deaux, p. 4.

<sup>251</sup> Hecker, Chapter III Causes-the Spread.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.,

avoid travel, and contact between groups and by doing so, reduce the contagious effects?

Alternatively, did these factors eventually have the opposite effect? By being couped up were people coming into increasing and prolonged contact with pestilence bearing vermin which also were overcrowded by sheltering from floods? After being couped up by rain for weeks or months, and being unable to travel on roads turned to mire and flooded fords, did people put their pent-up energy into delayed travel that became extensive and therefore prolonging outside activities? Did the numbers travelling and being outdoors dramatically increase just as the plague was spreading - and by happening just then, did the change in weather spread the plague? Colds and influenza caused by rainy weather certainly would have been widespread at a time when the pneumatic form of plague came into England. We do not have any scientific data from Medieval England on how far wind could spread airborne germs. These diseases, combining with plague, would have obviously aided in the spread of windborne viruses. Less obviously, weakened flu and cold victims, like the malnourished and those sick with waterborne diseases, would have had less physical or mental resistance and so became easy victims for the plague. They may also have been indirect victims, dying from starvation, neglect and despair because their carers fled to avoid the plague and because food was scarce. Defoe refers to this situation being a widespread cause for fatalities in 1665.

These rains also caused flooding in the north as the Humber burst its banks in December 1348, the worst possible time. Flooding makes rats and people move, bringing both into proximity on dry ground or in dry habitations, just as the plague was spreading.

A separate problem must be assessing human behaviour when under threat. So many writers (including sometimes this one!) rely on logic based in plausibility, probability and sensible behaviour - all of which they apply with speculative arguments in assessing the plague's effects. Applying such characteristics frequently emerges as a mistake. Do people act reasonably

when panicking? Or when they are desperately trying to survive? Do the habits of centuries, many of them tied to economic survival, vanish on rumours of an approaching calamity? Media coverage of Covid -19 reveals myriad examples that show logic, plausibility, sense and probability are ignored. A salient mistake involving believing in reason emerges when examining how the second pandemic arrived in England in 1348.

Surely strictly enforced quarantines for ships travelling from outside Europe, banning the embarkation of foreign goods and travellers, cracking down on smugglers, checkpoints on the roads to ban internal travel and burning infected property were all obvious safeguards, seen in 1348. When quickly applied they were effective in reducing and sometimes stopping the plague. Parts of northern Italy, of the Pyrenees, and areas in Bohemia, Poland and Prussia were untouched.<sup>253</sup> Many people across Europe at the time must have known of these success stories. As these blockages affected exports and imports across the empire of Edward III including much of France, including areas in the Pyrenees near both his own French acquisitions and those of his allies, must surely he must have been amongst those knowing what was happening and what could be a successful barrier.

Incredibly, against all probability, plausibility and sensibility, England's government and people apparently did nothing to stop the second pandemic getting into England. This was despite the way the English definitely had at least several months, apparently even several years, to prepare and prevent plague transmission from overseas. Did those in authority initially think that the stories coming out of the East were the usual hyped up Medieval exaggerations? Even if they did what was happening in Western Europe in 1347 was undeniable. In his chronicle for

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<sup>253</sup> Ziegler, p..87 p.118. and Doctor Carpenter's map reproduced on pages 106 and 107; The map from *Wikipedia* on page 41 shows a very similar depiction.

1347 Geoffrey le Baker relates how in that year when war was happening with France, two French cardinals brokered a truce with Edward III due to the plague.<sup>254</sup> Well-intentioned Pope Clement VI was behind this, but the truce did not quite survive the plague's sojourn in England.<sup>255</sup> In that same chronicle, he relates how the pestilence "had gradually spread from the east." in his 1349 entry he states that it had arisen among the Turks and Indians, "infecting the air men breathe" and then spread amongst the Saracens and Greeks. Remorselessly, it then spread over the Alps until "finally seven years after the pestilence had arisen, it came to England."<sup>256</sup> Seven years? The king knew it was in those parts of his realm in southern France. Nearby the French royal family, the Valois, ruled Marseilles, which the plague first hit between November 1347 and January 1348. The death toll there and in surrounding areas came to 57,000.<sup>257</sup> This outbreak rapidly spread northwards from the Valois kingdom into the Plantagenet realm.

Even allowing for Medieval exaggeration and imprecise figures, this toll of 57,000 must indicate a catastrophe which everyone would rapidly know. As Edward III was in Calais during the plague's early stages, the king must have quickly known, as the news spread throughout Christendom, faster than the plague. In October 1347 infected Genoese sailors were known to have carried the plague ashore with them in Sicily.<sup>258</sup> This was also a clear

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<sup>254</sup> Hallam, p. 254. The source here is the reproduced segment of Geoffrey le Baker's writings for 1347 and 1349.

<sup>255</sup> Hecker, Chapter IV.

<sup>256</sup> Hallam, p. 254.

<sup>257</sup> Deaux, p. 48.

<sup>258</sup> Deaux, p. 40; Michellee de Piazza in Nado, p. 43.

transmission method from other southern European ports and from port to port and the transmission method was obvious. On returning to England in that same month he could have started preventative steps. Instead of combating an obviously approaching catastrophe he spent that valuable time (about a year) making war, then negotiating the captured French King's ransom and celebrating his conquest. Amazingly, he apparently took no preventive measures before the pestilence hit either his French possessions or those in Great Britain. As Geoffrey le Baker apparently did not have access to secret information and was obviously compiling his account from different known sources, this chronicler knew with fair accuracy where the virus originated, its virulence and traced its westward path. If a monk far from centres of information knew such details royal ignorance was impossible and so cannot work as an excuse.

Baker's mostly accurate account is generally borne out by evidence now known. Even allowing for this slow development in both medical knowledge and some preventative methods, news of the plague and how it spread travelled fast. Contemporary accounts by Gui de Chauliac, the papal court physician (and himself a rare plague survivor), de Mussis, and Michele Da Piazza also make it clear that as early as 1347 many Europeans knew of how plague was conveyed on ships and spread by person to person. They quickly learned how it spread by contact with possessions or breath. Boccaccio's description in *The Decameron* and the quarantine measures taken in Milan also makes this clear. English eyewitness chroniclers Geoffrey le Baker and the Archbishop of York both separately wrote of how breath infected and how the disease was in the air.<sup>259</sup> Like their statements, preventative measures taken by England's common people and some authorities show that the image of a people being hit by a

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<sup>259</sup> Cowie, Leonard W.. *The Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt*. Wayland Publishers, 1972. p. 42 p. 56; Deaux mentions Chauliac's survival.

disaster for which they only had ridiculous or at best erroneous explanations and combative methods must be a simplistic fallacy.

Although they did not really know precisely why the plague existed or how it originated and while some of their supposed cures were bizarre, the previously referred to statements show that several writers and others in Europe's populace correctly knew some of the ways by which the plague was conveyed. Equipped with this knowledge, others developed several correct avoidance tactics. Some of their explanations for the origins of the plague remain as serious if inchoate possibilities. *Something* caused the infected rodents to come into contact with humans. Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods and storms, linked by Medieval chroniclers to the outbreak of the great mortality, may have caused rodents, vermin and mammals to move from their accustomed area into areas humans habituated. These observers and chroniclers, while mistaking contributing factors with fundamental causes, were on the right track, but without knowing it, but without the knowledge of why their observations correctly if vaguely linked to causes,. Even so, they were not as foolish or as wrong as some patronising modern commentators declare. One modern scientific investigation does take this beyond speculation into accepted evidence. A research team proved that the 1907 San Francisco plague cases linked to the great April 1906 earthquake there. Piles of rubbish, excrement and rotting food were ubiquitous and out in the open near displaced, overcrowded people and displaced overcrowded rats. Both species mingled: bubonic cases emerged.<sup>260</sup> Such disasters cause rodents to move distances and into human habitations. Alternatively Medieval human refugees from those

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\* Now in the midst of the Corona pandemic, my bookseller arrived with a wrapped book and a bag into which I put wiped money. Ironically the book was necessary for my next e-book *Spanish Influenza 1918 Corona 2019: Similarities and Differences Questions and Answers*

<sup>260</sup> This is dealt with in the Chapter "The Third Pandemic."

disasters may have fled to rodent infested forests, towns or steppes and then moved on, being unknown carriers as they arrived on ways of transportation or settlements..

The more seemingly foolish cures and preventative methods are those that most people now know; using posies, burning herbs and wood and eating certain foods. Yet were they as foolish as they seem? Countering the stench of plague dead by using sweet smelling herbs and flowers showed the logic of fighting the enemy by using its opposite. Poultice paste made of vinegar wine and perhaps acid did not necessarily cure..<sup>261</sup> However these, astringent ingredients did kill germs and were therefore a logical attempt at killing off infection. Similarly, although he did not understand how it worked, in 1666 one of the few doctors to stay in London and survive ate staples of nutmeg and walnuts: fleas are averse to both.<sup>262</sup> Even more eccentric was a British consul in Alexandria. During a 1797 plague there he covered his entire body in olive oil: as a preventative: it worked because fleas could not reach his skin.<sup>263</sup>

While how vectors, germs and incubation functioned were not clearly understood factors, the need for avoidance was. People organised de-facto preventative measures. Butchers did not hand over carcasses literally, but put them on hooks.\* Payment for goods was by having bowls filled with vinegar for coins to kill any contagion. Buyers frequently dipped coins into acidic preparations before collection.<sup>264</sup> Often such bowls (which people

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<sup>261</sup> Dan Snow.

<sup>262</sup> Rideal, p. 52.

<sup>263</sup> Mertens, p. 116.

<sup>264</sup> Deaux, p. 125.

called plague stones) were large stone markers with a hollow for water or vinegar.<sup>265</sup> Vinegar, being astringent, readily available, cheap and effective, was at common dip. English people used plague stones from 1348 into the 1660s epidemic. Some still exist in rural areas, such as Eyam.<sup>266</sup> This preventative measure was not just in England. One Florentine poet wisely combined using vinegar as an astringent with ventilation, but some of his other advice, consuming bread, wine and cloves, shows how Medieval people could combine wisdom and obvious errors.<sup>267</sup>

Other methods were more drastic. One Leicestershire lord burned an infected nearby village, Nosely, but his manor Nosely Hall survived.<sup>268</sup> Touching or moving the dead or their possessions with ten-foot poles was a similar method. Hence the still used phrase “wouldn’t go near him with a ten-foot pole.” This phrase remains a folk memory within the English language. This indicates how basic preventative measures came from people, not their royal government.

Between 1346 and the middle of 1348 the Black Death had no discernible major material effect in England, although traders and those English people living overseas would have been deeply worried about both their physical and economic survival. There almost certainly would have been disruptions and subsequent scarcities with imported goods. The rapidly spreading contagion disrupted imports as European and the small Middle

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<sup>265</sup> Justbod, ‘The Plague Stones of York.’ Posted January 27<sup>th</sup> 2016. <https://justbod.blogspot.Com/2015>, accessed June 14<sup>th</sup> 2019.

<sup>266</sup> A photo of one such stone is amongst the illustrations at the end of Chapter Seven.

<sup>267</sup> Tommaso Del Garbo, ‘Consiglio Contro A Pistolenza’ (c.1350) Introduced, reproduced and retitled ‘How to Keep Safe.’ by Furtado, p. 64.

<sup>268</sup> Tuchman, p. 148.

Eastern seaborne trade became paralysed due to three factors; reduced productivity, the deaths of so many sailors and ports refusing disembarkation.

Ziegler lists several contemporary accounts for when the second pandemic reached England and he wisely points out the confusion their differences cause.<sup>269</sup> Not one account matches another on locale, exact date or introductory method. They all agree that it first reached England in the summer of 1348. However, those accounts stating that it first came in August are wrong as it was raging through the coast of south-western England and even far inland before that month. In 1348 a sceptical outlook reflected by checking information with other recorders before writing hearsay news seems a little-known practice. Chroniclers commonly accepted rumours and hearsay. They were apparently recording the truth as they believed it, albeit unknowingly using a flawed method.

Wherever the plague first arrived, it did not first hit anywhere where it could logically be expected: London, Dover and Yarmouth with their European proximity, regular shipping connections and trade and large populations were obvious the most likely starting points for contamination. Even Southampton, Newcastle, Hull, or Yarmouth were also likely to be first landings as they also had large and regular trade with nearby continental Europe, especially badly infected French sections of the Plantagenet empire. Instead, it was raging in the remote South-West before these South-East coast ports were infected. It raged first almost as far away as possible from infected Europe as anywhere in England.

Several accounts mention derelict ships with dead crews and port cities soon being devastated. Although English sources agree that ships carried the plague to southern English ports, they give different dates and locales

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<sup>269</sup> Ziegler, pp. 98-100.

for first contact, placing this as sometime between June and October 1348.<sup>270</sup> Of these recounted first infection locales the most likely has to be the port of Lyme Regis on England's South-West coast. The plague raged there months before it did so at Southampton or London.<sup>271</sup> Some primary source accounts claim a single Gascon sailor came ashore at Lyme Regis in June and the plague rapidly spread. Amanda Moore gives a more detailed and plausible account (quoting primary sources) in which a cargo boat from Bordeaux bound for Bristol put in at Lyme Regis to refurbish and to refit its sails after two weeks at sea.<sup>272</sup> Two sick sailors were taken ashore and locals recognised their buboes as plague symptoms. However, merchants, afraid of losing trade kept the news quiet so the disease soon spread throughout the port.<sup>273</sup> Unfortunately, Lyme Regis was not a sleepy, provincial port only concerned with local fishing. If it had been, the diseased crewmen and their vessels could have been dealt with sooner without a quick spread. Local officials could also have quickly noticed rare new arrivals and were more likely to know what locals were doing and so enforced quarantines. Instead, this port had wide contacts, having supplied twenty ships and 264 sailors for the recent Calais campaign.<sup>274</sup>

From Lyme Regis the infection spread to nearby Weymouth, then went through rural Dorset and Devon, heading north until it reached Bristol on

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., pp. 124-125.

<sup>271</sup> Moore,

<sup>272</sup> Ibid,

<sup>273</sup> Ibid,

<sup>274</sup> Gasquet, p. 83.

August 8<sup>th</sup> and then headed eastwards to London.<sup>275</sup> Francis Gasquet noted that the contagion spread quickly and traced its path in these western counties and notes a pattern; the western coasts were hit first, nearby inland areas were next and areas further inland were the last in the sequence to be infected.<sup>276</sup> Seaborne infections also went up the Bristol Channel soon after the initial spread.<sup>277</sup> They hit the southernmost fishing villages first, then infected the others, almost in a methodical sequence as the pestilence moved northeast up the channel, reaching Bristol in August.<sup>278</sup> By being infected by traders, travellers and refugees who used both inland roads from the south and shipping, Bristol was hit hard and repeatedly for a long time. The disease only died out there in July 1349, nearly a year after it arrived. How hard it hit remains a separate question; one of the few much quoted, supposedly primary sources must be wrong – if it really exists.

In 1823 Samuel Sayer supposedly quoted from a plague era city calendar roll which stated that ninety per cent of the city's inhabitants were killed and so few were left that the task of burying the dead could barely be done. The city was so devastated that grass grew in the High Street.<sup>279</sup> These facts still frequently appear in writings concerning England's worst Black Death epidemic. Writers sometimes use this document to indicate what happened across England. Dan Snow puts Bristol's death toll as being seven thousand

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<sup>275</sup> Boucher, p. 34.

<sup>276</sup> Gasquet, p. 83 pp. 102-104.

<sup>277</sup> Dan Snow.

<sup>278</sup> Gasquet, previous citation; Dan Snow previous citation.,

<sup>279</sup> Boucher, p. 34; also quoted by Ziegler.

out of around ten thousand residents.<sup>280</sup> As Bristol numbered around ten thousand residents with perhaps two or three thousand more, and probably had hundreds, even thousands of visiting crewmen from its busy trade and also took in refugees from the plague to the south, this claim of nine out of ten fatalities in Bristol means at least nine or ten thousand died in the city, perhaps as many as over twelve thousand. Apart from the supposed extraordinarily high, almost impossible proportion of deaths, another problem is that when Charles E. Boucher went to check the original calendar roll in the 1930s it was not in the city's collection where it was supposed to be. His thorough research for his 1938 talk 'The Black Death in Bristol' did reveal a few other primary source materials that tell a less dramatic, but more plausible story. In a patient roll of 15<sup>th</sup> November 1349 authorities give permission to extend half an acre of land contiguous to the church as the cemetery was full. Although Boucher does not explicitly develop this, the idea that gravediggers could bury about nine or ten thousand bodies or more in half an acre is impossible, even when considering that the dead might have been buried in layers, as became common practice across England during this catastrophe. Bristol did not become a ghost town; Boucher also shows that despite heavy casualties both the church and the council still functioned. Council records quoted by Boucher and reproduced by Ziegler show that of the fifty-two councillors, thirteen had their names scratched out for 1349, that is 35%.<sup>281</sup> In 1350 only three councillors had their names scratched off. These removed names may include those fleeing as well as fatalities. With the local clergy half died.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Snow, Previous citation.

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<sup>281</sup> Ziegler, reproduced document and caption, p. 110. Boucher's comments are referred to in the next source note.

<sup>282</sup> Boucher, p. 37.

How indicative are these figures for this city's entire population remains uncertain, but Boucher's estimate of 35% to 40% of Bristol's people being plague fatalities appears as more plausible than the 10% or less being left alive that a chronicler supposedly then gave. Their high percentage is also frequently and erroneously applied to other towns and even for the whole kingdom. What these documents do reveal is their contradictions, frequent vagueness and unreliability. Knighton wisely states that Bristol was hard hit without going into apocalyptic description.<sup>283</sup>

Another such example occurs from when the plague spread from Bristol to nearby Oxford. The 1348 university enrolments give a population of thirty thousand in one primary source (a former Chancellor) and double that in another.<sup>284</sup> This latter figure means Oxford's 1348 students seemingly numbered nearly as many as all of those then residents London when it was England's largest city. In that same year Oxford students were six times more common than students in Oxford in 1969. Ziegler estimates that in reality the Medieval enrolments were around fifteen hundred.<sup>285</sup> They may have been as high as double that, at the most.<sup>286</sup> Eleanor Chance, Deaux and Ziegler separately use primary sources to depict how the pestilence must have badly affected Oxford. Deaux estimates that a third to half of the city's denizens died.<sup>287</sup> One early account describes the

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<sup>283</sup> Deaux, p. 121.

<sup>284</sup> Ziegler, pp. 114-115; Deaux. p. 133.

<sup>271</sup> Eleanor Chance, 'Medieval Oxford,' pp. 3-73. *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 4, The City of Oxford*. 2017. Edited by Alan Crossley and C R Elrington. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol4/>, Accessed 2020.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., Both sources and Deaux, p. 34

<sup>287</sup> Deaux, p. 34.

university as locked up and so many fleeing that few remained alive to bury the dead.<sup>288</sup> The 1377 poll tax recorded just over twelve hundred paying residents, while around fifteen hundred people had been there in the early 1300s.<sup>289</sup>

Oxford provides a salient example of how the plague could be a major factor in changing a city. It was more than just a university town, being a major centre for the cloth and wool industries. As well as the educational religious and clothing industries it was also a major transport hub because it was located near the headwaters of the Thames and was also on the highways connecting Bristol and London and lesser roads leading to the southern coast. In 1334 it was rated eighth amongst the cities for taxable wealth within the Plantagenet kingdom and fourteenth in population. It was also an important political centre due to its connections with royalty; they not only stayed in Oxford, but frequently held councils there.<sup>290</sup> Richard the Lionheart was born in this city.<sup>291</sup> The plague started Oxford's decline: it probably killed around a third of the inhabitants, perhaps half. Starting in November 1348 it raged until June 1349: one local primary source, Anthony Wood, claimed the city endured "no less than sixteen burials a day."<sup>292</sup> This is certainly possible. Economic, demographic and social devastation soon followed. By 1378 a juror's report was considering what to do with destitute properties, especially thirteen acres within the

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<sup>288</sup> Ziegler reproduces this account, p. 115.

<sup>289</sup> Chance,

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>291</sup> John Gillingham, *Richard the Lionheart*. London, 1978. p. 24.

<sup>292</sup> Chance refers to this as being unlikely; Creighton quotes the passage without dispute.

city inhabited by criminals and prostitutes. The jurors also described how this derelict area was a dumping ground for filth and corpses. The plague disrupted religion, transport, education and industry, but the slump in the wool trade was another disaster for the city.<sup>293</sup>

Several further outbreaks between 1361 and 1499 also had their effect as the population continued dropping from even the 1377 figures, from twelve hundred in 1400 to about a thousand in 1438. It may have been the problems associated with a numerically declining workforce or the university-town council feuds, but was probably due to this high number of Black Death reoccurrences. Henley took over for transport on the Thames. Supplying the university soon became the town's main, almost its only industry. Even in the university halls numbers dropped, from 69 leases in 1444 to 31 in 1501. By 1523/1524 the city had slipped to 29<sup>th</sup> in taxable income from the eighth place in 1334. It took centuries to recover.

Winchester was also amongst the most devastated English locales, being a large thriving city. It was a major centre for treating wool, England's major export good. It also had a successful brewery, that despite some grain failures, still functioned. Its fair, the largest in Europe, attracted continentals who often brought exotic luxury goods to trade or sell.<sup>294</sup> Renovators were extensively working on the city cathedral when the second pandemic hit. This ancient English capital had 11,625 residents in 1300.<sup>295</sup> Winchester's traumas of 1316-1318 caused a population drop of

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<sup>293</sup> Spiffy Seven, *The Black Death in Winchester*. Posted 2008.  
<https://www.freewebs.com/blackdeathinwinchester/population.htm>, accessed July 27<sup>th</sup> 2019.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>295</sup> William Chester Jordan, p. 118.

10% to 15%.<sup>296</sup> Numbers in the next decade may have decreased slightly before 1349, but over eight thousand people at least still resided there when the pestilence hit in early 1349; it would still be causing casualties a year later. Reading different reliable records from Winchester suggests that dismissing the evidence from Medieval sources of extremely high English fatalities is not always wise. The 1349-1350 outbreak there alone brought the population down to at least 7,400.<sup>297</sup> Ziegler estimates Winchester's fatalities in 1349-1350 as conservatively around four thousand, around half of its residents. This estimate may include not only those who died, but also those becoming refugees, escaping the contagion by leaving for almost anywhere else. By the 1377 poll tax collection only 2,160 citizens paid.<sup>298</sup> Earlier famine and disease outbreaks, fleeing plague refugees, employment losses after 1350, tax exemptions for those under fourteen and tax evasion in 1377-1382, were all residential reducing factors. However, the first outbreak and then subsequent reoccurrences in the 1360s and 1370s must have been by far the major factors in causing an extraordinary proportional drop in residents: proportionally for every eleven people resided in this city in 1300, only two resided in 1377.

Such calculations strongly suggest that the plague devastated Winchester and its environs with unusual severity and affected the city in several different ways, apart from the death toll. The economic devastation was so severe that in 1363 Edward III remitted taxes from this once extremely prosperous and stable city.

How much of his concern was about money and how much about stopping the plague is indicated by his edict of December 1<sup>st</sup> 1349. Here he forbids

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>298</sup> Ziegler, p. 120.

English people to leave the kingdom – and then goes on to forbid them to take any currency.<sup>299</sup> Not a word refers to stopping the spread of the plague amongst foreigners or his French subjects. With this venal king this must have been due to there being little wealth left to deduct taxes from. Inhabitants left a high proportion of England's manors vacant for decades.<sup>300</sup> The clergy reduced work on the cathedral and what they did continue with, they made more economical.<sup>301</sup> Ziegler states that with the west font this was essentially a makeshift effort meant to last only a few years, even if it still remained that way in 1969.<sup>302</sup> This meant a large reduction in the workforce; the plague may have caused this. The loss of 48.8% of the priesthood would have greatly reduced organisational and economic capacities and also enthusiasm. The brewery must have been on reduced production due to both the crop failure caused by the rains and the lack of living harvesters caused by the plague or demands for higher wages. The great bi-annual fair would eventually continue, but with a drastic reduction in stalls, apparent attendance and an income reduced from sixty-six pounds before the plague to just over twenty in the following years.<sup>303</sup> A slump hit the devastated wool trade so badly that it lasted a hundred years and Winchester never regained its predominance in that

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<sup>299</sup> Creighton, p. 181. He reproduces a version of the document.

<sup>300</sup> Williman, p. 30.

<sup>301</sup> Seven; Charlotte Hodgman, 'Where the Black Death Happened.' An Interview with Mark Ormrod. *History Extra*. BBC. February 11<sup>th</sup> 2011. Immediate Media Company. Posted 2019. <https://www.historyextra.com> > Period > Medieval, accessed 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

<sup>302</sup> Ziegler, p. 121; Deaux, pp. 122-124.

<sup>303</sup> Seven, text and graph.

industry or in anything else. It would be 1841 before the population reached the 1300 level.<sup>304</sup> A once outstandingly prominent and economically important city in Plantagenet England never really regained that status. What did gain its status was the university and the scholars and celebrities educated there: it was and is considered one of the world's great centres for learning.

Another effect on Winchester was the effect on religious belief and respect. Winchester's people provide evidence linking England's 1348-1350 epidemic with hostility to the church. This started with a dispute over the church using valued inner-city ground as an extended cemetery for victims. The populace went against that and wanted the new cemetery outside city walls, where the land was not consecrated. After a mob attacked a priest while he conducted a burial service the opponents compromised; the new cemetery was consecrated.<sup>305</sup> The dispute reveals that Catholic authority was eroding, but also reveals that even under threats of pestilence and riot the church adamantly insisted on proper burial rites.

As with Bristol, Oxford and Winchester, London continued functioning, despite similar accounts to these other cities of devastation and nine out of ten dying. Not only supposedly high fatality rates and population proportions cause doubts. The great mortality had spread across southern England in an easterly direction, reaching London most likely during autumn, although dates are disputed, being as early as September 21<sup>st</sup> 1348 and as late as that November, with different chroniclers giving the starting point from being the first of that month to near its end.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>305</sup> Ziegler, pp.119-120. Winchester's bishop at the time is quoted.

<sup>306</sup> Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker. Hallam, p. 256. This chronicle gives the year 1349 as the date of infection, but evidence within the chronicle and other sources show that the true date was

On the way to London the pestilence devastated the southern counties. Although people and goods from Bristol were accredited with being the source, large numbers of ships with their cargoes and passengers from infected lands were almost certainly another cause of London's infection. Roads, which were conveyors for disease, spread to and from the city. Traders and travellers used the Thames for transport more than any road.<sup>307</sup> This was not just for London's short-term use. Ferries, fishing boats, merchant vessels, assorted barges for royal, aristocratic and common purposes, all used the river as a way to and from the home counties. To the west the Thames and other rivers flowing from the north ran far into the heart of South-West England, including up to the headwaters of the Thames near infected Oxford. To the east the Thames flowed almost to within sight of infected France, less than a daylight sail away. Regular trade and communications went in both directions, making the city both a recipient and conveyor of any contagion.

Apparently no forces regularly patrolled this river effectively or tried to clean it in the plague years. London was crowded with vermin and people, often crowded together amongst disease breeding filth. People frequently shared accommodation with chickens, pigs, (which were technically illegal in the city) sheep and cows.<sup>308</sup>

Despite the levels of filth, efforts by the city council and home owners which began in the earlier 1340s had some effects in cleaning the city streets, lanes and waterways, albeit as only a start.<sup>309</sup> Some places in

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1348. Baker gives September 29. Others as late as the end of November; Gasquet, p. 107. The precise dates are given here.

<sup>307</sup> Barker, p. 83.

<sup>308</sup> Ziegler, pp. 124-125.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-129 *passim*.

London even had sewerage, another of those changes upon which officials and builders made starts, just before the great pestilence which eventually accelerated the process. In the short term the 1340s plague, by killing London's cleaners, led to the filth situation being made worse; the king complained to the mayor in forceful terms, reminding him that filth led to contagious diseases.<sup>310</sup> The council's only possible reply was that they could do nothing, as their workers were dead.

The large population and being a great transport, hub combined with generally filthy conditions to mean that the plague lasted longer in the capitol than almost anywhere else. Starting in the autumn of 1348, it did not die out until well into 1350.<sup>311</sup> Fifty thousand were buried. in the London suburb of Smithfield, if one chronicler and an inscription can be believed. <sup>312</sup> Although such contemporary accounts and others saying that nine out of ten Londoners died are almost certainly extreme exaggerations, the city definitely was severely hit. How severely? Are the figures of fifty thousand creditable – or even possible? Ziegler quotes two copies of a now lost Medieval inscription in a London cemetery. The first copy states that fifty thousand were buried there in 1349; the second gives the figure as forty thousand.<sup>313</sup> Allowing for Ziegler's larger urban estimate of 75,000 and then adding thousands of likely refugees fleeing into London from the west and those unlikely to be in documents, Jews, crews, foreigners and the

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<sup>310</sup> Ziegler, p. 128 quoting the king's 1349 letter to London's mayor.

<sup>311</sup> Ziegler, p. 129.

<sup>312</sup> Boucher, p. 36; Gasquet, p. 108. Robert of Malmesbury is the contemporary source. The fifty thousand buried at Smithfield statement is examined in this chapter.

<sup>313</sup> Ziegler, pp. 180-181. Creighton also gives both figures and quotes and gives an English translation of the copy of this inscription. p.128.

homeless, even the larger fatality figure is possible, making for two out of three Londoner residents becoming fatalities. Creighton's and Ziegler's separate estimates of twenty to thirty thousand fatalities seems more likely. Ross gives a similar estimate of thirty thousand dead out of around seventy thousand inhabitants. Taking the estimate of Naphy and Spicer for London's total number of residents, the inscription cannot be so, unless almost everybody died. Their range of fatality estimates goes from 12,500 to twice that, ranging from one out of every four Londoners to one out of two.<sup>314</sup> Other evidence suggests that the figure of fifty thousand Londoners dying might be true, but not all just in 1348-1349. Prominent citizen Sir Walter Manny purchased thirteen acres outside the then city to bury the dead after London's cemeteries had been filled; bodies went into those acres in neat orderly tight rows, five deep.<sup>315</sup> That type of placing would have contained tens of thousands. Historians have often rightly used these accounts to indicate the high number of victims. Fragmentary evidence free of exaggeration strongly suggests horrific figures. While twenty-two wills were London's annual average just before 1348, two hundred and twenty-two were recorded in 1349 and in that same year two warden's committee documents contained the information that all their members were dead.<sup>316</sup> Both pieces of evidence here would only apply to the middle classes or higher, who suffered less than the lower orders; this would make these revelations even more horrific. Figures stating that at London's worst time, between 1<sup>st</sup> February and May 1<sup>st</sup> 1349 two thousand died a week cannot be discounted, even if the days and the exactly equal number are

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<sup>314</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 37.

<sup>315</sup> Ibej; Ziegler. pp. 129-131; Deaux, p. 123; Perry. His article includes a photograph of a row of Medieval London plague victim skeletons in a neat orderly row, each of them about half a metre apart, all of them on their backs with their limbs stretched out.

<sup>316</sup> Deaux, p. 124

suspiciously symmetrical.<sup>317</sup> If true this meant that just under 26,000 died when the plague was not even at its height. This height was reached between June and September 1349, when the average death toll reached an average of 290 a day according to a different chronicler.<sup>318</sup> This adds over 35,000 more to the peak total, giving 51,000. This matches different chroniclers' claims. As Manny's cemeteries were outside the city, amongst those buried there would be some Ziegler listed as being near the capitol, making for a population of 75,000 within London's wider area. To make this high estimation even worse is the fact that Manny's Smithfield cemetery was established months after the plague started raging and after London's cemeteries were full. When considering this information, well over fifty thousand dead and therefore two out of three London residents dying becomes plausible, but another alternative emerges. In 1891 Charles Creighton supplied both the full inscription and information which provides a key to this puzzle, even if he does not fully explain it. The translated inscription reads:

Anno Domini 1349, while the great pestilence was reigning, this cemetery was consecrated, wherein, and within the walls of the present monastery, were buried more than fifty thousand bodies of the dead, besides many more from that time to the present, on whose souls may God have mercy. Amen."

It was unlikely that anyone would deliberately lie or exaggerate on a sacred inscription, which was risking hellfire. Where they misled? When "the present" was remains dubious and "many more" may exclude fatalities excluding plague deaths because cemeteries existing before the plague were overflowing. Whatever the precise figures, what can be certain is that London was devastated and normal life vanished for years afterwards.

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<sup>317</sup> Marusek, p. 106.

<sup>318</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 37; Gasquet, p. 107. He gives a figure of two hundred burials a day.

Within the city, newcomers were frequently noted for disturbing the peace.<sup>319</sup> One effect that the plague had on the city was that it became a haven for criminals and never really lost that reputation.<sup>320</sup> This must be true as what forces for law and order which did survive within the city would have been preoccupied with burying the dead, caring for the sick, maintaining supplies into the city and keeping potential carriers out. Such crimes as squatting, burglary, thieving, vandalism, assaults and riots would surely have had low priority.

Normality had vanished with those Londoners who had the resources to flee the plague, often spreading it. Unlike Oxford and Winchester, London would recover fairly quickly from the pestilence's devastation. Being England's capital, major port, transport hub and major manufacturing centre helped recovery efforts. Once London was hit only the most determined, speedy, coordinated and knowledgeable effort may have saved the not yet affected Home Counties, the midlands and the north from contagion - and all of these qualities were lacking within England's leadership. The result was that no county escaped, even lightly.

Essex may possibly have lost half of its people. Conclusive proof for that does not appear to exist now and evidence is thin, as Reverend John L. Fisher noted when he presented evidence for this estimate in his 1943 article 'The Black Death in Essex.' He did have one detailed, informative and important piece of evidence for that conclusion. He reproduced a 1349 roll for the manor of Fyngryth as major evidence. This document shows that well over half of the manor's residents died. He pointed out that when the wills of deceased Fyngryth residents for 1348 came to being read out at the manor hearing, they totalled two as a certainty, with perhaps two more.

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<sup>319</sup> Boucher, p. 41. He quotes from a Patient roll of 1349.

<sup>320</sup> Ziegler, pp. 132-133.

In contrast by the next seasonal meeting on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1349, the assembly's clerk notes that twelve tenants there had died since the previous December and by June 1<sup>st</sup> fifteen more had died as revealed by will readings. The way the Lord of the Manor had taken over Fyngryth's farms gives a figure of fifty-five deaths amongst a group of listed tenants numbering about sixty or sixty-five.<sup>321</sup> By June 23<sup>rd</sup> the total had reached at least seventy and the plague had not even vanished yet having nearly a year more to ravage England. Even allowing for Reverend Fisher possibly underestimating the 1348 tenant numbers or working with incomplete information. Even if this is so, this still indicates an extraordinarily devastating attack on this community. Even amongst the immediate or near immediate replacements many deaths must have occurred for these figures to make sense if they are accurate and given that the recorder here is working with a small number of easily observed people and his lord would expect accuracy, so they probably are. For at least some farms to continue, replacements must have come in or those recently made widows and widowers continued as the documents shows that someone continued farming the manor's tenancies.

That viewpoint becomes even more alarming, when as the Reverend points out, these rolls only mention tenants, not their families, servants or employed workers. Indications that whole families had died or fled emerge because cottages and farms are bequeathed, often in wills and not to widows or children who would almost certainly be manor residents. They are bequeathed by the court to the nearest found or known relative. This mixture of first confiscating property and then apportioning ownership, also applies to livestock, as if nobody cared for them. The lord bequeaths other cottages and properties because they are unoccupied or uncontested,

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<sup>321</sup> Reverend John L. Fisher, 'The Black Death in Essex.' *Essex Review*. No. 25. Volume LII. (January 1943) Pages 13-20. Posted 11/01/2013.

<https://blackmorehistory.blogspot.com/2013/01/blackmore-fingrith-black-death-1349.html>, accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

as if like the livestock, the owner's relatives or the occupants had died or suddenly vanished.<sup>322</sup>

Although Reverend Fisher does not develop the idea, the rolls also show normal life continuing even in these circumstances. The lord (or his underlings) imposed fines for the usual misdemeanours. New tenants pledged the traditional fealty to the Lord of the Manor. The authorities also apportion tools, livestock and positions. The manor endures – and nobody mentions the great pestilence, even once. As usual, the manor rolls only refer to what they usually deal with. Tradition and habit help overcome the plague. Was Fyngryth typical or exceptional? For Essex? For rural England? Economic devastation, disruption and heavy fatalities were frequently chronicled in what manor rolls and chronicles survive. Unfortunately, comparatively few such rolls do survive, as rebels frequently and deliberately targeted many for destruction in the 1381 turmoil. Of those that remain a large proportion are from one estate, that of the Bishop of Winchester. His records are often used for generalised conclusions. Fyngryth serves as another example justifying the warnings of those historians who write of not developing patterns and conclusions concerning the plague on thin evidence.

While overall there was a pattern of the great pestilence's spread from Bristol north to Wales and eastwards, across the south to London and then northward to beyond the Scottish border, it was an erratic pattern. Naphy and Spicer give contrasts of cities with similar sizes, being no great distance apart and having very different death tolls. Ziegler writes of villages a mile or two apart strongly contrasting by being either lightly or heavily infected.<sup>323</sup> Puzzled, he refers to how the Black Death unexpectedly veered

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 'Fyngryth Court and View held there on Whiyt Monday in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of the reign of Edward III.' (sic) pp. 2-6.

<sup>323</sup> Ziegler, pp. 116-117.

away from cities in its path to strike illogically in places out of its way and then later would infect those places which it had temporarily spared.<sup>324</sup>

Ziegler gives no explanation, but if a major carrier was the windborne pneumatic plague, then this pattern becomes explicable. What can possibly be more erratic, unpredictable, far-reaching and beyond human control than the wind? The Plantagenet chroniclers who blamed the wind for the plague were onto something they only half understood. Other factors may include human blockades and barriers and their lack, tinkers, escapees and smugglers importing infected goods and the unnoticed ways of rats and vermin. The two different species of flea may also be a factor.

The plague certainly did not devastate with equality on its journey north. Norfolk, Lincolnshire and much of East Anglia suffered heavily. Much of the fens, Herefordshire, Salisbury and the midlands apparently suffered less. Yarmouth and its surrounds (known as Great Yarmouth) suffered a particularly savage attack. One primary source document writer claims just over seven thousand deaths there and another claims nine out of ten residents.<sup>325</sup> Sixteenth century Yarmouth petitioners to Henry VIII stated that 7052 residents there had died of pestilence during the reign of Edward III.<sup>326</sup> As their petition concerned their weak prosperity and inability to pay taxes, the port was apparently still suffering depopulating effects over a hundred and twenty years later. As the highest estimate for its population was somewhere over ten thousand, this means that nearly 70% of its people at least died, but this percentage should be lowered as a large number of sailors resided there and were almost certainly counted amongst the

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>325</sup> *Norfolk Heritage Explorer*.

<sup>326</sup> Deaux, pp. 135-136.

fatalities, but not amongst the permanent residents. Even allowing for this, the plague did hit extremely hard. Northtown, across the river from Yarmouth, barely existed after 1349.<sup>327</sup> Probably well over half of greater Yarmouth's permanent and temporary residents died. This could be in either the first plague or perhaps the high figure also included later fatalities, as their petition referred to these deaths being during the reign of Edward III, when plague outbreaks sometimes hit decades apart.

This estimate of well over half a city's population or even more dying in the first epidemic can also be applied to Norwich, until the 1349 arrival of the great pestilence one of England's largest cities. A chronicler's total of 7,104 dead would be over half the usual higher estimates of around thirteen thousand residents.<sup>328</sup> The 1377 poll tax compilers for this city would record 5,928 tax donors in one account and 3,592 in another.<sup>329</sup> Add this number to the seven thousand fatalities and use even the much-reduced natural increase to balance out further plague fatalities between 1361 and 1375 and the total is exactly thirteen thousand. It would be several decades after 1377 before Norwich began regaining such residential numbers. Like Oxford, Yarmouth, Beverley and Winchester, it never quite regained the prominent place in national economics and trade that it had in the first half of the fourteenth century, when some say that it was England's second largest city.

York, with its similar numbers and prominent placing, would suffer similarly. The population estimate of ten to thirteen thousand would be

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<sup>327</sup> *Norfolk Heritage Explorer*.

<sup>328</sup> Erewon, 'Sussex Kent and East Anglia.' Professor Russell is quoted. His estimate of 13,000 is close to other estimates.

<sup>329</sup> Erewon,. Russell quotes the poll tax; Creighton also quotes the poll tax and comes up with the lower figure.

reduced; nearly a third of its populace died. It would be 1601 before the population reached (or came close to reaching) what it had been in 1348.<sup>330</sup> Even that figure would be only reaching into the lowest estimates for the English population in 1300. Cruelly the plague would return in 1602 and then until the last third of the seventeenth century sporadic plagues would reduce York's numbers back to fourteenth century levels or lower.

Yarmouth's growth would also be a factor, competing with York for the north's export trade and rare workers. It would be 1700 before York's population rose above thirteen thousand. During 1349 the Great Mortality spread north. By late 1349 it was spread into Scotland by Scots. Their raiding army, hoping to take advantage of the disarray in northern England, and believing God was punishing the English with plague, jubilantly crossed the border and soon returned with more than booty.<sup>331</sup> Their lowlands were infected first, then the highlands. Norway also suffered from this plundering of the English. Near Bergen an English vessel with two cargoes, the intended one of goods and the other a dead crew, was washed ashore and plundered. The incubation period passed unnoticed until after the plunderers found they had the buboes. By then it was too late to stop the spread in Norway.<sup>332</sup> Deaux estimates that land's survivors as one in three with farmlands frequently reverting to forest.<sup>333</sup>

In Wales and Ireland English seafarers and traders embarking to go inland probably carried the pestilence into these lands. By autumn 1350 apparently no English county or town had escaped the epidemic. The result

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<sup>330</sup> Guy, p. 32, Table 1 shows the figure for England's population in 1601 as being 4.1 million. In discussing England's population in 1300 in this work various estimates are given with four million being one of the lowest estimates.

<sup>331</sup> Knighton, p. 146.

<sup>332</sup> Deaux, p. 115.

was that at least a fifth of England's people died between 1348 and 1350.<sup>334</sup> Ross's estimate goes higher: 30% to 40% died, which makes two million fatalities likely. Gasquet estimated that four to five million lived in England when the plague hit and half perished.<sup>335</sup> Doctor Simpson gives a similar figure, 2.5 million fatalities for England and Wales.<sup>336</sup> Ziegler gives a range from the lowest likely percentage toll as 23.6% with the highest at nearly double that, at 45%. This gives an approximate death toll of 1.4 million.<sup>337</sup>

Applying even this lowest percentage of deaths to the lowest population estimate means that at the very least, four hundred thousand people died. At the other extreme with some estimates giving fatalities as totalling over half the kingdom and the high estimates of over five and a half million residents, this means that as many as three million may have died. A more likely, somewhat conservative guesstimate between these two extremes is that around 30% of a population of over four million died, that is three times the lowest estimate, about one million two hundred thousand.

One frequently given death toll estimate by several modern historians is about a third of the total population, although they clearly disagree to some extent with what that total English population was.<sup>338</sup> Given incomplete

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<sup>334</sup> Ziegler, quoting and disagreeing with Professor Russel's 1940s estimate of twenty percent, which others also consider to be extremely low.

<sup>335</sup> Gaquet, p. 226 p. 237.

<sup>336</sup> Simpson, p. 8; Gasquet, p. 226.

<sup>337</sup> Ziegler, p. 197.

<sup>338</sup> Ziegler, p. 236 p. 238; Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*. Hammondsorth, 1990. p. 6 p. 32; Phillip Lindsay & Reg Groves, *The Peasant Revolt 1381*. London; n.d. p. 30; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. Third Edition. 1970. p. 131; R.B. Dobson, *The*

records, Medieval tendencies to exaggeration and vagueness and the way proportionately few skeletons from the epidemic are found so far, the real total is likely to be unknown. One indication is that the issuing of “a living” replacement positions and church benefices approved by the king were recorded in what were known as the patent rolls. These averaged ten a year before the plague, but by the second half of 1349 they had reached four hundred and forty and were at eighty-one after the plague was receding.<sup>339</sup> Even allowing for those fleeing or retiring, this still suggests an astounding death rate. However, this evidence should not be applied to the whole kingdom without clearer supporting evidence.

In England’s first Medieval outbreak at least a fifth to a third of the residents died in many cities and several death rates of 80% or 90% were claimed. Notable cities suffering extraordinarily high casualties include Winchester, Oxford, Greater Yarmouth, Lincoln and Southampton. Canterbury had a low rate, despite pilgrims still arriving. Some writers suggest that better hygiene, cleanliness and clean fresh water there were the saving causes.<sup>340</sup> Norwich between 1348 and 1350 becomes an interesting example of research problems and differences of opinion within this topic.

Jim Bolton states that when the plague hit Norwich in January 1349 this city was England’s second or third largest city, containing ten to twelve thousand residents.<sup>341</sup> Others put its population as a little higher, thirteen

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*Peasants’ Revolt of 1381*. Houndsmills, 1983. p. 59; Barbara Emerson, *The Black Prince*. London, 1976, p. 68; McNeill, p. 136.

<sup>339</sup> Gasquet, p. 87.

<sup>340</sup> Ziegler, p. 136.

<sup>341</sup> Bolton, p. 23.

thousand or perhaps two or three thousand above that.<sup>342</sup> G.G. Coulton gives a maximum of 17,000.<sup>343</sup> Creighton twenty to thirty thousand with the last figure as the highest possible estimate.<sup>344</sup> While disagreeing on numbers, everybody assessing the city's demographics agrees that it was one of the kingdom's largest, most populous and important cities before the great pestilence infected it. Of Norwich's denizens 40% to 50% would be dead by the spring of 1350.<sup>345</sup> One Medieval chronicler claimed that Norwich had nearly seventy thousand residents when the plague hit, killing over 57,000.<sup>346</sup> This is another fallacy. A nineteenth century writer reproduced that and then others followed his lead for several decades. While others expressed scepticism or caution. Then in 1969 another historian also quoted these enormous figures, so Ziegler did dispute these figures. Like Creighton, he concludes after examining the original document that the Medieval writer mixed up his Latin numbers; in Norwich: in reality, over seven thousand, over half the city's population died.<sup>347</sup> Creighton reproduces the key passage which caused the confusion:

“In yis yere was swiche a Dethe in Norwic that there[ died of ye Pestilence LVII Mil III C LXXIII besyd Relygius and Beggars.”

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<sup>342</sup> Ziegler puts the total at a thousand higher than Bolton's highest estimate p. 122 p. 176;

<sup>343</sup> Coulton, Volume II. p. 130.

<sup>344</sup> Creighton, p. 130.

<sup>345</sup> Ziegler, p. 122 p. 176; Coulton, Volume II p. 130. p. 132 He bases his agreement with others giving this estimate on the fatality rate amongst the Norwich clergy; it reached 48.8%.

<sup>346</sup> Ziegler, quoting Bloomfield, pp. 175-176.

<sup>347</sup> Ziegler, p. 176.

Creighton points out that if the first letter in each given Roman numeral should have been an x for ten, not an L for fifty, the figures drop from 57,000 to 17,000 with the first number. With the second number at 74,000, the drop goes to 24,000. Even these reconsidered figures are still very high. Delete the Ls altogether and the figures are the more likely: seven to fourteen thousand. Although Creighton, Bolton and Ziegler use primary sources and write in a scholarly way to disprove the high figure, the fallacy that fourteenth century Norwich contained seventy thousand people and fifty-seven thousand of them died in 1349 will almost certainly continue. Medieval exaggerations compounded by modern misinterpretations about numbers are only one problem. Although several historians write that we have a great deal of information about the plague, there seems to be a paucity of primary sources. Those sources we do have often do not tell us what we want to know, are much concerned with the nobility, royalty and the priesthood and are usually localised when it comes to detail. They are also generalised, vague and it becomes difficult to verify if they are referring to an unspecified locale, a county, all of England or even the whole Plantagenet kingdom. J.M.W. Bean refers to this problem and notes that the major primary source records are in the Cambridge and Oxford archives, while when it comes to estate records the Bishop of Winchester's estate records are unusually detailed.<sup>348</sup> Bean rightly warns against taking information from these documents (as applying to the whole of England, as marked regional variations appear elsewhere.

Another problem must be the nature of parish records. How reliable parish records can be when few would venture to the outlying areas of a parish to record events during the plague is a starting point. Many are incomplete due to the deaths of so many of their recorders. How many parishioners

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<sup>348</sup> Bean, p. 31.

fleeing or not wanting to be identified as infected with the pestilence is another.

Destroyed or lost records become a separate problem. The first widespread destruction of records occurred over much of England in 1381, particularly in the south-eastern half of England. Here the rebels' public burning of the Cambridge University archives left a significant gap. Other targets, included church, court and manor rolls, charters and administrative and legal documents.<sup>349</sup> In one attack rebels held a Surrey prior hostage, threatening him with death to get the remainder of his documents for destruction.<sup>350</sup> In Norfolk alone at least fifty-six manor rolls were burned and ninety-five rebellious incidents occurred.<sup>351</sup> Apart from those known, how many other documents did the rebels burn? How many church, council and personal documents went up in flames, some of them in burned buildings? Substantial numbers of other conflagrations happened and arsonists were indiscriminate with anything on paper, parchment or vellum. Hatred of the church and nobility was only one motivation. Rebels burned documents as authorities used written evidence to exploit villeins, usually for fees, fines, merchets, heriots, taxes and confiscations. Runaways would also have much to fear from these lists as they were recorded on such documents, as were promises of rewards for helping bringing them to justice and edicts against harbouring or aiding them. Henry VIII's plundering of the Catholic churches must also have destroyed a large proportion of Catholic records. The English Civil Wars and the subsequent Puritan revolution, the Great Fire of London and Hitler's blitz must all

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<sup>349</sup> Barker, p. X. p. 48 p. 51 p. 64 p. 95 pp. 100-101 pp. 192-193. pp. 197-199 p. 308 pp. 323-329 passim. Barker mentions several similar burnings in different locales.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, pp. 71-72. The source for this is the prior who wrote a complaint to the King.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

have had their effect. London's lost records due to the 1666 fire alone must have been catastrophic, even the chamberlain's offices and records went up in flames.

Even when records and accounts survive, other problems, possibilities and omissions exist. Faced with a catastrophe, their writers recount the catastrophe's dramatic effects: we get little detail of how survivors survived, what it was like for those fleeing to subsist in wild lands and forests – or perhaps like Boccaccio's Florentines, to flee to the isolated country estate where comfort and as much security as England provided existed. Nowhere was safe, for even in the country houses many died and many of these died untended, after spreading the disease in the countryside.<sup>352</sup> With those who did successfully survive in their country estates England had no Boccaccio to recount their survival stories. The nearest writers doing something like what he did, giving detailed eyewitness accounts from outside the restrictions and bias of the Catholic church, came centuries later. These were the poet Thomas Dekker with his eyewitness account *Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606) Doctor Thomas Lodge, James Banford, Henoeh Clapham and schoolmaster John Davies, the latter writing in poetic form. Of these five, all were located in London during the 1602-1603 plague years.<sup>353</sup> Defoe and Pepys, would describe the plague in London just over sixty years later and three hundred years away from the Medieval horrors, in a very different world.

Phillip Ziegler mentions this lack of primary sources and made a fine and vivid, but not sensationalist attempt to bring the English experience to life in his 1969 popular history *The Black Death*. This attempt becomes very necessary when one reads so many accounts describing the tragedy of this

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<sup>352</sup> Hecker, p. 17.

<sup>353</sup> Creighton quotes extensively from their writings and evaluates their efforts. p. 491.

time with cold, even chilling and dehumanising statistical figures. For those working in this field reminders of the human side remain very much needed and yes, this writer also needs that reminder.

As Ziegler points out, most English people were villagers and their concentration seemed higher in the south, so he sets his fictional village between London and Winchester. Given the paucity of individual experiences or even village experiences, until some Medieval manuscript emerges this must be the closest we can come to the Medieval English plague experience for commoners. His depiction rightly challenges another common if mistaken view, that proportionally the cities and towns suffered much more than the country and villages.

Cities and towns may have had numerically more cases, but examining recorded proportions and their recently transformed percentages gives a very different view. Barker, Gasquet and Bolton separately give statistics that can be used to support Ziegler's depiction and challenge the fallacy that villages and rural areas were safer from the pestilence than cities.

The town of Bury Saint Edmunds lost 50% fatalities, but in surrounding villages 60% died. In the north the great cathedral city of Durham lost 21%, but nearby much smaller Jarrow lost 80%. The rural estates of Durham Priory lost 78% of residents.<sup>354</sup> Hakeford Hall in Norfolk and Cottenham, a Cambridge manor, both lost half their inhabitants.<sup>355</sup> Nineteen per cent of the manorial tenants in Worcestershire died, yet the figure was at least 80% of Aston's tenants.<sup>356</sup> In Cornwall entire hamlets were depopulated.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Barker, p. 24.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>356</sup> Bolton, p. 23.

Across England, going by records that have survived, at least forty manors lost so many tenants, workers and owners that the manors just barely survived.<sup>358</sup> As Cardinal Gasquet clarifies by using many ecclesiastical and localised documents from the plague years, rural and city churches, monasteries, nunneries and abbeys were also badly hit, not only in casualties, but in their economy and ability to function, suffering “religious paralysis” being “wholly disorganised” and being “half ruined.”<sup>359</sup>

Some of these secular and ecclesiastical losses are probably people fleeing, another very small proportion of the casualties would have been recovering victims. Even so, the accounts of mass burials and the archaeological work on some of the plague pits support an extremely high town and city death toll, while the locales of rural burials are less well known.

Many of these urban sites remain undiscovered, or left alone, because many are under cities and suburbs. One such is under London’s Liverpool Street Station.<sup>360</sup> Another was at Charterhouse London where twenty-five skeletons had been found: they had been given a proper Catholic burial.<sup>361</sup> Even while this work was first being written tunnel diggers found another mass grave from the outbreak of 1348-1350. What those pit excavations do not support is the common image of piles of bodies being randomly and

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<sup>357</sup> Gasquet, p. 201.

<sup>358</sup> These manors are listed in ‘The Aftermath 1350-1664.’

<sup>359</sup> Gasquet, p xxii. ‘The Desolation of the Country.’ pp. 188-224 is his main focus, but his *The Black Death of 1348-1349* contains many other references and quotes concerning the devastation of England’s Catholic church.

<sup>360</sup> Hallam, p. 255.

<sup>361</sup> Dan Snow.

callously hurled into pits which soon overflow with corpses. This now stereotypical and misplaced image (at least in England) comes from two sources. The first (which is often quoted) is a description given by William of Dene, apparently a resident and perhaps eyewitness at the time in a Kentish town.<sup>362</sup>

George Deaux produces another account, from Cambridge, where diggers discovered a plague pit. The skeletons' positions revealed that they had been thrown in without any order.<sup>363</sup> This suggests either an absence of priests to instruct in the proper rites or that gravediggers ignored them. It may also be an effect of such extremely high casualties that few were left to bury the dead, as several chroniclers across the devastated lands state. Whatever the explanation, this find suggests a fundamental falling away of faith as the burial rites connected to where believers spent eternity, so Catholics had strict rules for burial rites. Bizarrely, the Pope applied Catholic rites in a conflict between ritual and expediency. When French Catholics threw bodies into the River Rhône the pope at Avignon consecrated the river as a burial site.<sup>364</sup> These two may be isolated examples. The previously mentioned excavations at Smithfield, Thornton Abbey and Charterhouse show that the gravediggers buried bodies systematically in ordered rows.<sup>365</sup> This was following standard Catholic custom. At Winchester churchmen and commoners battled over this right

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<sup>362</sup> Cowie, p. 49. This author quotes the description.

<sup>363</sup> Deaux, p. 135.

<sup>364</sup> Hecker, Chapter IV Mortality.

<sup>365</sup> Hecker refers to Smithfield, Chapter IV; The other sites are cited in previous source notes and textual references. A recent documentary included film of the forty-eight intact skeletons identically laid on their backs with hands in the same position.

to conduct standard funerals and burials. Venetian lazaret excavations show that their gravediggers conducted the first burials in 1485 in a similar orderly manner, but burials from later outbreaks revealed bodies tossed in holes.<sup>366</sup> The divergent burial practices were obviously sometimes callous or urgent, sometimes compassionate and ordered. This suggests that not expediency, laws or regulations, decided the manner of disposal of the dead. What is more likely is gravediggers decided burial methods: sometimes they were adhering to religious belief, sometimes ignoring it. The personality of whoever supervised their burial must also have been a likely factor. This could have been the same in England, a hundred and forty years before, with those opting for more compassionate and traditional forms being predominant. The jumbled state of skeletons found in excavated English plague pits from the 1660s epidemic, when Protestant beliefs ignored Catholic ritual, is often erroneously applied back on to England's Medieval Catholic burials. While many such burial pits remain unfound or unexcavated, available evidence so far suggests that medieval English people usually followed the strict rules of Catholicism concerning burials.

In Exeter and London, the plague lasted longest, but it had faded away by the autumn of 1350. After the disaster had clearly passed a stunned English people seemed to be dimly realising that life would never be the same. If anyone deserved blame, should they have blamed their King, for not taking preventative steps?



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<sup>366</sup> Valsecchi,

## Chapter 4

### *Could Edward III have prevented the plague reaching England?*

No serious writer disputes that the Black Death's first outbreak was the worst disaster to ever hit England. In the second half of the 1340s England needed a strict, fast, co-ordinated nationwide effort – and that did not happen. Even Edward III's generally admiring biographer Ian Mortimer in *The Perfect King: The Life of Edward III Father of the English Nation* (2007) states bluntly that by the northern hemisphere summer of 1347 Edward probably knew of the stories coming out of Asia and then Eastern Europe, but that he ignored what he heard. Another biographer Mark Ormrod, states that by the winter of 1347-1348 a trickle of stories about the Black Death were reaching England.<sup>367</sup> His priorities in 1347-1348 were celebrating his military successes, establishing the Order of the Garter, reducing crime and corruption and curbing his troublesome parliament.<sup>368</sup>

Amazingly, this remained the situation, although his daughter Joanna died of plague on 1st July 1348, while stopping over at obviously pestilence infected Bordeaux while travelling to Spain for her marriage.<sup>369</sup> Although he did take cautious steps concerning her escort, the question remains why did Edward not delay her travel through lands known to be plague infested? That question can only cause speculation. Being a devout man, did he believe God would protect royalty or that the plague was a

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<sup>367</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*. p.305.

<sup>368</sup> Mortimer, p. 257.

<sup>369</sup> Mortimer, p. 260; Ormrod, *Edward III*. pp.305-306.

punishment on the wicked and that his daughter, by being virtuous, was safe? Did he get accounts from those same chroniclers and thinking these were exaggerated, not believe the stories coming out of mainland Europe? He would soon lose his baby son, apparently to the epidemic and eventually lose two more daughters to the same disease in the 1361-1362 outbreak.<sup>370</sup>

Ian Mortimer writes that Edward was concerned with upholding order and that to change things to adapt to the plague would be to give in to it, to increase dread and therefore to seem an ineffectual ruler.<sup>371</sup> Until 1370 when strokes, developing senility and the influence of his mercenary mistress combined to change him, Edward III was not inept, ineffectual or foolish. However, in relation to the plague his few sensible steps were not enough. He obviously showed a lack of desperately needed foresight, focus and effectuality. These faults went beyond his lack of action and by doing so, contributing to the plague's spread. At times he also reacted with an astounding callousness. Several in Edward's court made this blatantly clear with their lavish, festivities performed ostentatious, expensive costumes to celebrate his recent victories. These events were organised and attended in with Edward was at festivities in the costume of a bird. This was June 1348.<sup>372</sup> That date places the festivities as happening when the great mortality was already ravaging his French domains and on the very verge of the epidemic reaching England.

He seemed to be more concerned with devising new taxes and establishing and structuring the Order of the Garter for favoured nobles, than with establishing barriers and quarantines. On August 6<sup>th</sup> 1348 he wrote

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<sup>370</sup> Mortimer, p.260; Ormrod, *Edward III* pp.472-473.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>372</sup> Mortimer, pp. 258-259.

concerning arrangements for the order of Garter.<sup>373</sup> This was when the south-west was obviously infected, the pestilence was obviously rapidly spreading there and Bristol, one of England's largest cities and most important transport hubs was obviously on the verge of infection. He celebrated Christmas and New Year revels and then on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1349 he held his inaugural feast for the Order of the Garter; Creighton, a writer careful with his many primary sources, describes how "the great feast for the Order of the Garter" was held at this time. Held in a starving, desolated land, this decision can only be seen as callous unless new primary source evidence for holding the feast emerges.

This feast happened at a time when just in England thousands were dying daily and the death toll must have obviously been in the hundreds of thousands by then. The fatalities and havoc were also in the rest of the Plantagenet Kingdom. In his French land it may have been worse than in England. The excuse that he was keeping up a pretence of normality fails when he fled London for the countryside. In late summer 1349 he even went on a hunting tour of his forests.<sup>374</sup> Did he come across plague refugees and if so, how did he treat them?

Despite his actions or lack thereof, he does not deserve sole blame. As Mortimer states, before the plague did hit, many Englishmen must have understood that unless they closed all ports, England would be the next area to be infected.<sup>375</sup> Mortimer speculates that because they would have been financially ruined if they closed the ports, parliament and the

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>374</sup> Mortimer, pp. 259-260.

merchants would have raised an outcry – and also have been unable to pay the taxes Edward needed for his luxuries and wars, let alone maintaining the Plantagenet Empire. A second unmentioned motivation for inactivity was that to use the English Channel as a barrier for the British would have been to cut his empire in half. His French possessions would have been isolated while in an uneasy truce with Valois France. This meant he would not have been able to collect revenue from his estates there and also taxes from his lords ruling that section of his empire. There was also the loss of royal power. Without his presence, his communications and his overall control of his lords based in France, those lords would have been defacto rulers. With prolonged separation from royal authority, they then would almost certainly have become used to that situation and their independent role within it. They would have resented any return to being Edward's lieges after the plague faded away. This may have led to intolerable defiance, even armed rebellion.

Was Edward also motivated by a soon to be well justified distrust of the French? To keep the Plantagenet Empire in one piece, was a priority. To do that meant being without the English Channel serving as a quarantine barrier. French actions would show he had reasons. The French, smarting over their defeats at Sluys, Calais and Crecy, would see the quarantining of Edward's French lands as an opportunity for reconquest. If the plague suddenly waned or vanished, they could easily and quickly break the truce that the epidemic had made necessary. This was a possibility between making the truce in 1347 and the late summer of 1349. This is more than speculation. Two years after making the truce, the French did attack in August 1349 and soon made a futile attempt to seize Calais, attacking in early 1350, before the waning plague finally died out.<sup>376</sup> Edward III, forewarned about the coming Calais attack, was canny in his battle plan

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., pp. 270-272.

and personally and courageously led his forces to victory. He repeated this success with a naval victory against a fleet of over forty Castilian pirates. He personally led his inferior ships at the battle of Winchelsea that August, capturing over half the enemy ships and sinking many others.<sup>377</sup> Such an astute, energetic, courageous and active monarch, must surely have perceived all these obvious possibilities and likelihoods - and found his choices to be invidious. Despite some steps, essentially he chose his main focus to be fighting a war to fighting a plague. The unprovoked French attack, the very limited funds he now had and the need to maintain his lords' loyalty left him no real choice. To let the French rampage and conquer and Spanish pirates to raid his coasts and mercantile shipping while he used his dwindling resources to fight the waning plague would have been political suicide.

Even so, he could have been done much years before these situations unfolded. Instead of establishing both external and internal quarantines before the plague arrived, once the plague was in England Edward III ordered prayers for the nation from the Archbishop of Canterbury - who died from the disease before he gave Edward's requested prayers.<sup>378</sup> Although the four separate coastal infections clearly made stopping the spreading disease difficult, securing all of England's ports was possible with the time Edward initially had between 1346 and summer 1348. As the plague spread slowly northwards, government forces probably could have stopped it by severe internal quarantine measures. Swiftly acting authorities in Milan succeeded in this, but in England no blockage occurred: it took until late 1349 for the pestilence to cover England and then to advance on Scotland and start to ravage that kingdom.

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid., pp. 274-276.

<sup>378</sup> Appendice, Document 14: The Metropolitan of Canterbury 'Prayers to Save the Realm.' 1349. in Nardo. p. 157.



*Edward II King of England between 1327 and 1377. This starkly realistic effigy comes from Westminster Abbey and shows the king at the time of his death, aged sixty-four. Courtesy: Wikipedia/Public Domain*

People using government edicts to counter the disaster failed in England: it died out because it killed so many carriers and the survivors were apparently most of those with genetic resistance. Was genetic resistance passed on from Justinian's plague? By fleeing, others managed to stay out of its path.

Not royal edicts but the efforts of county sheriffs, justices of the peace and manor lords lead to some victories. They instituted such rules as rudimentary quarantines, the burning of victims' possessions, using ten-foot poles to move bodies rather than carrying them, using plague stones, practising isolation and stopping movement from one area to another. Surely such actions had some preventative effects.

Now only speculation remains for what may have worked as a total blockage across England, but some evidence that the English probably would not have been able to stop the plague at the channel in 1348 comes from a comparative situation in the 1660s. At that time plague came from Asia again. Eventually it reached Amsterdam, where in 1663-1664 it killed in the tens of thousands.<sup>379</sup> Even as early as 1663 London's mayor, John Lawrence, had already established a quarantine unit at Canvey Island at the Thames Estuary for ships approaching London.<sup>380</sup> The government of Charles II also reacted fairly quickly and efficiently, giving orders to clean the city of filth and setting up checks and barriers. As England went to war with Holland in early March 1665, blocking continental contact seemed easy, but three things counted against this. The victorious English brought Dutch prisoners and captured Dutch ships to England and second, rats habituated shipping. The third factor was that records show that the first English cases in this last epidemic date to late 1664, three months before the

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<sup>379</sup> 'Great Plague of London.' *Wikipedia*; Rideal, p. 28.

<sup>380</sup> Rideal, p. 28.

king declared war.<sup>381</sup> With wartime regulations such a blockage was easy to set up and easy to enforce – yet by being too late, it failed. By the time this outbreak ended at least over two hundred thousand English people, perhaps nearly a million or even more, had died. This failure was because worthwhile internal measures came too late: it would be the late spring of 1665 before the London’s council proclaimed the first ordinances.<sup>382</sup> By then pestilence victims were becoming common and Londoners were fleeing to the countryside, some unknowingly taking their infection with them

Given 1340s-1350s chroniclers referring to a seemingly inexorable spread, the massive casualty rates, the futility of many preventative measures and a sense of powerlessness pervading contemporary accounts, the first response to the question of “could the 1348-1350 catastrophe have been prevented?” would be no. However, a closer examination reveals that stopping it may have succeeded for two reasons.

One reason is that other populations in fourteenth-century Europe experienced successes with preventative measures. Those parts of Europe which were either not affected or not to any great extent included Milan and its surrounding area, French and Spanish territories around the centre of the Pyrenees and a great swathe starting in north-east Germany and going through the southern half of Poland and much of what are now the Czech and Slovak republics. This area included the large cities of Warsaw and Magdeburg. By having border guards forbidding access and quarantine stations, Poland suffered lightly.<sup>383</sup> All of these areas were inland and therefore had time to prepare for what was spreading from the

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<sup>381</sup> Mitra, p. 3. Doctor Hodges, an eyewitness is quoted.

<sup>382</sup> Rideal, pp. 32-34.

<sup>383</sup> Tuchman, p. 108.

coastal cities. While coasts had an almost unlimited and rarely checkable access for spreading the virus by any type of vessel or embarking crew, the inland areas had mountains to block access. With mountains as barriers for travellers, obvious paths and fewer check points could be manned and therefore continually checked. While it remains not absolutely certain how effective these barriers were and therefore why these enclaves were spared, the evidence from Milan and surrounding areas survives. In Milan the autocratic duke acted promptly and dictatorially. The Milanese ignored the medical experts and believing miasmas did not cause the Great Mortality, but that it was personally contagious, they promptly took personal steps to block contagion.<sup>384</sup> They forbade the importation of goods and arrivals by travellers. All houses where a plague victim appeared were bricked up, the corpses, the carriers and the uninfected together. Two secondary sources assume that this was a brutal living death; a third mentions that locals lowered food into the houses in baskets.<sup>385</sup> People reacting differently in different locales, promptitude and ruthlessness seems to have been the cause for Milan's comparative success. Other northern Italian governments took sensible measures which did not stop the ravaging of their people. By the later 1340s the Milanese had reduced the ravaging to the extent that "only" fifteen thousand died.<sup>386</sup> This was in a population of well over a hundred thousand.

While this seems a horrific disaster to modern readers, compared to the contemporary death rates in other cities this was light. Venice and Florence had similar sized populations, but Venice lost 60% of its inhabitants, over

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>385</sup> Tuchman p. 108 and Ziegler, p. 54. Both write of those bricked up perishing. Naphy and Spicer mention the lowered baskets. p. 36.

<sup>386</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 35.

four times the proportional loss in Milan.<sup>387</sup> Florentines suffered more: perhaps two in three died. Even by deducting the lowest fatality estimate from the highest residential estimate gives nearly half Florence's population as fatalities; around forty-five thousand deaths amongst about ninety-five thousand locals.<sup>388</sup> The city of Pistoia kept detailed records of its unusually revealing civic ordinances to fight the plague and these still exist.<sup>389</sup> Like other Italian records, they show that many Italians, like English commoners and officials, rather than becoming refugees, passive victims or indulgers in useless superstitions, took sensible preventative steps.

Ziegler extracts several interesting points from the 1348 ordinances.<sup>390</sup> Pistorian authorities employed gatekeepers and had bodies buried at two and a half arms' length.<sup>391</sup> They forbade travel to infested areas and re-entry to returning travellers. They also banned linen, wool and corpses from entry and street stalls were closely supervised. Funerals were small and not commemorated by tolling bells to avoid demoralising townspeople. Grave digging was restricted to a few and the cavalry were relieved of duties because they believed exhaustion opened infections for plague. Modern scientists and medical workers have verified that belief. Other ordinances reveal concerns for the poor, showing that again images of the callous rich abandoning the poor to their fate did not always apply.

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>388</sup> Ziegler, p. 51.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>390</sup> Ziegler, pp. 54-55.

<sup>391</sup> Marks, p. 66.

Doctor Hecker gives an odd example of this without revealing the locale or locales. Merchants laid treasures at monasteries and churches, but the priests rejected these gifts, fearing contagion, so they locked the gates. The merchants responded: they threw their treasures over the gates.<sup>392</sup> To modern readers this sounds far-fetched, but the gospel story of Dives and Lazarus was well known and widely belied at this time. Dives was a rich man and Lazarus, who begged charity from him, was poor. Dives refused him and after they both died, Lazarus went to heaven and Dives to hell, where his earthly riches and his calls for mercy availed him nothing. The frenzied effort to divest themselves of wealth through unrequested charity makes sense if they knew of this story and believed they would soon suffer the fate of Dives in an eternal afterlife.

Another fallacy revealed by the creators of the Pistoia, Milan, Florence and Venice edicts was that although they were unable to explain the plague's origins or differentiate its three forms that broadly match modern basic scientific terms, they understood contagion at a basic level. They did not sit around baffled. By observation they soon knew the best ways to stop it within their limited means. There were lessons here for England – which the English would learn, albeit eventually.

Pistoia's council measures were exceptional: in contrast nearby Oviato's leaders, did nothing. If primary source reports are correct, 90% of its townspeople died. Modern research suggests this is another Medieval exaggeration; the real figure was about half of the residents, yet even that was around twelve thousand.<sup>393</sup> However, the contemporary figure could be true: most of the exaggerated Medieval figures give rounded numbers and come long after the described event. Such figures are usually meant to

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<sup>392</sup> Hecker, Chapter IV

<sup>393</sup> Marks, pp. 55-57.

convey either somebody's glory or villainy, not here. Visitors, refugees and those from outside the city who were under the city's council jurisdiction and therefore part of its records, must have contributed to these high casualty totals. Ziegler sees Oviato as typical of Italian town's responses.<sup>394</sup> Both responsible protective measures and apathy were not public secrets and how continental Europeans were reacting to the plague would have been common knowledge. If Edward III did not know this, the reality was easy to ascertain or verify. It is unlikely that he did not know of these measures and what would happen without their implementation. If he really did not know he should have enquired as his contemporary and enemy, the King of France did, when he summoned his kingdom's best medical experts to explain the unfolding catastrophe.

Edward would have had a very tough battle to save England from the plague. City government in Florence and Venice had taken several sensible steps, but both cities were amongst Europe's most plague devastated areas. Edward did have three advantages over the continentals; time, knowledge and the barriers of the English Channel and the North Sea. As the plague spread first from the east and then from the southern Mediterranean ports it took time, two years, which the English should have used to implement and even substantially build up preventative measures: several continental Europeans had shown effective tactics during that time span. If the English focus had been on what empirical evidence revealed about stopping the plague rather than futilely wondering what caused it, England might have been untouched by the worst horror in its history.

To keep the epidemic out of the British Isles Edward would have had to guard permanently all of a great long coastline for years, suppress the smuggling with continental Europe and set up quarantines and roadblocks. Internal and external trade, tax collections, and human and animal

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid, pp. 55-58.

movement would have had to be effectively controlled and possibly even totally banned. Such policies would have strained not only the economy, but the fabric of society - and even then may not have worked. Even so, considering the approaching catastrophe's obvious effects elsewhere, Edward should have tried these measures. He did have two powerful effective resources that had proved its worth several times before and could have won against the plague. He had one sheriff each in all thirty-nine English counties. They had the power of arrest, to issue the Kings' writs and to call immediately up levees of local citizens to meet threats. At a lower level, being under the sheriffs' command each county had at least six justices of the Peace to enforce their sheriff's orders and legal and court orders across the county. Edward could have used both the sheriffs and their justices. Similarly, while the sheriffs' powers and those of justices of the peace were localised and only for their county, a roving band existed which could appear anywhere in the kingdom on short notice. This was his now little known of sergeant-at-arms group. Unlike the sheriffs and the justices and judges they were not tied down to one location.

In his 2001 essay 'Edward III's Enforcers: The King's Sergeants-at-Arms in the Localities' Richard Partington focuses attention on what this group did. Their achievements were predominantly in the middle third of Edward III's reign, before the Black Death struck England. Formed in 1318, they initially numbered thirty men, but by 1347 they numbered ninety.<sup>395</sup> Partington outlines their origins, roles and tasks. Originally from classes below the nobility, they had often served as the king's bodyguards. They owed their privileged position to their loyalty and expertise. Chroniclers and officials noted their adeptness at their assorted tasks, often being

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<sup>395</sup> Richard Partington, 'Edward III's Enforcers: The King's Sergeants -at-Arms in the Localities.' In Bothwell, J.S. *The Age of Edward III*. Woolridge; 2001. pp. 89-106. Rather than clutter up the text with a source note for every sentence, the facts about this group are from Partington's work

assigned to work in locales they knew well. They do not fit into any single category. Proto-policemen, an internal affairs department, justices, recruiters, tax and fine gatherers, military and naval inspectors, assayers and customs officials were all amongst their roles at any given time. Their tasks could be carrying out orders that others had not done, collecting wool, investigating and replacing corrupt officials, conscripting for military service, requisitioning victuals, seizing forfeited lands and assaying ships for naval service. Escaped prisoners, outlaws, smugglers tax evaders and deserters were their usual quarry. They usually worked alone, but sometimes were in command of detachments and the king's clerks and local officials were frequently aides. They had the king's authority and that old cultural cliché "Obey in the name of the King!" might easily have been their battle cry. Their powers were such that on two occasions they arrested nobles. Their prestige (and so their power) came not only from royal connections, but from such successes as their campaign against resented local government corruption and preparing the fleet for the great success at Sluys, England's greatest naval victory until 1588.

Here was a can-do force virtually designed and ready to implement the steps needed to stop the plague reaching England, steps which were already effective in central Europe, parts of the Pyrenees and parts of northern Italy. Its only shortcoming was its small size, but it potentially served as a nucleus. England had no shortage of loyal and able lower-class warriors willing to serve for increased power, profit and prestige. Edward had the money to finance such an expansion. Even without expanding the Sergeants-at-Arms force, the ninety he had serving were a potential nucleus for a plague fighting force, backed by officials, justices, sheriffs and kings' clerks already accustomed to obeying and working with his sergeants. Facing the threat of the great pestilence, were this force capable of saving England from the menace? Quite possibly. At the least they would have saved parts of England and Wales. What happened was that the Black

Death reduced their operations.<sup>396</sup> The king and his underlings did not use them for the obviously approaching catastrophe. Such royal negligence combined with all the other obvious mistakes can only cause speculation about what the king was thinking.

More positively, when cardinals suggested a treaty with France in 1347 Edward III did agree. He also prorogued parliament to stop the epidemic spreading, but this may have really been because parliament was troublesome.<sup>397</sup> He uses the justices to enforce quarantines and blockages. He forbade travel abroad, even for war or pilgrimage.<sup>398</sup> He then issued measures to ban animal slaughtering in London, and that the disposal of blood and offal should be more hygienic and remote as he thought slaughtered animals' rotting flesh contributed to the plague.<sup>399</sup> Considering what rats eat he may have been right, without understanding why. This effect of the plague meant that he revived his father's rudimentary beginning of English health regulations concerning meat made nearly forty years earlier. Unfortunately, no sanitation workers remained alive to carry out his orders. He did stop collecting taxes in several hard-hit areas and even initiated the first remittance, which was for the Channel Islands. His undated remission and explanation, probably dated to early in 1349, was sent to the governor in the king's own words and shows considerable sympathy for the local fishers.<sup>400</sup> Before this Edward III was commended

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<sup>396</sup> Partington, p. 103.

<sup>397</sup> Deaux, pp. 123-124; Mortimer, p. 264; Horrox, pp. 123-124; Ziegler, p. 162. Royal instructions are quoted.

<sup>398</sup> Ormond, p. 360.

<sup>399</sup> Ziegler, p. 159 quoting royal instructions.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99. The contents are reproduced.

for his mercy and generosity and it may be that this was all that motivated him – or was he shrewd enough to know that trying to collect non-existent wealth would give him nothing but resentment leading to open defiance or even possible rebellion and the appearance of being powerless before the plague?

This communication to his governor reads as if this happened on his initiative, but soon those in lower levels of government would request him to remit their taxes or told him payment was impossible. Often this happened years later or even over a decade after the first great outbreak. It may well be that surviving messengers and tax collectors were unable or unwilling to travel during the worst of the epidemic. It also took some time for areas to work out finances amidst the chaos the epidemic and the attempts to stop it caused. Those in charge of economic decisions may also have delayed for other reasons. Some areas profited from the plague: high wages due to the scarcity of workers meant successfully charging high prices and taxing the new rich at high rates.

Whatever the cause, they were frequently ultimately unable to pay taxes. Facing this and telling an unpredictable king their distasteful, depressing realities may also have delayed payments. Those not paying taxes into the royal coffers would have usually led to the king's disfavour and also discouraged investors, being an admission of both royal failure and a loss of revenue. Even allowing for this the castle commanders of Carlisle, one of the king's own estates, was unable to pay him anything in 1352. Hull's and Cornwall's officials said the same a year later, followed a decade later by the revenue collectors at Huntington and Winchester in 1363.<sup>401</sup> Royalty wisely did not mete out punishments for these disastrous economic failures.

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<sup>401</sup> Erenow, 'The Midlands and the North of England. [Post Classical History II Posted 2019.](https://erenow.net/postclassical/the-black-death/11.php) ' <https://erenow.net/postclassical/the-black-death/11.php>, accessed July 2019.:

Edward did have other commendable policies after the pestilence did take hold in England, even if he failed to save the kingdom from contamination. He did not interfere with localised efforts to stop the plague; the justices were in the front lines and took systematic steps to maintain the status quo. His first preventative achievements concerned reactions to the pestilence rather than prevention. His policies concerning Jews led to the absence in England of the pogroms. In some parts of Europe people believed that Jews were supposedly spreading the plague, but few Jews lived in England at this time due to persecution and exile inflicted several decades before, but for Jewish residents in England in the 1340s no systematic persecution happened.<sup>402</sup> In central Europe, hundreds, sometimes thousands, were systematically killed, often by being burned alive, as one callous chronicler records, almost boasting.<sup>403</sup> One chronicler claimed that twelve thousand were killed in the city of Mainz. Deaux, who uses this as a source, rightly cautions against automatically believing such figures.<sup>404</sup>

Even so, primary source evidence shows that at this time continental pogroms were large and widespread. A vivid if distasteful example written in 1348 was sent by the writer the Castellan of Chillon as an answer to an enquiry about a recent case describes how Jews poisoned wells. He offers as proof the confessions of those Jews and Christians who were tortured “on the wheel” and the rack.<sup>405</sup> Then as now, confessions under torture had

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<sup>402</sup> Ziegler, p. 110.

<sup>403</sup> Heinrich Truchess Von Diessenhoven, Modern title: ‘Jews Poison Wells.’ Nardo, pp. 152-154.

<sup>404</sup> Deaux, p.173.

<sup>404</sup> Hecker, Appendice ‘Examination of the Jews accused of poisoning the Wells.’

little credibility, as the Castellan, apparently knew. To bolster his case for enquirers, he mentions confessions made without torture and poison found in wells.<sup>406</sup>

The great mortality was breaking down the power of the highest Medieval powers: royalty and the pope. Pope Clement VI issued two papal bulls in September 1348. Both warning against pogroms and their fallacious justifications. In these documents he went on to threaten loss of position and excommunication, for involvement in such acts, but even his appeals and threats had little effect with the people.<sup>407</sup> Two Christian Emperors, Charles IV of the Holy Roman Empire and Peter IV of Aragon, did try to protect the Jews, but against a widespread combination of survival instincts the plague engendered and avarice for the confiscated or plundered wealth of the Jews, they could do little.<sup>408</sup> In September 1348 Pope Clement reasonably pointed out that Jews could not have caused the pestilence; they also suffered from it and it existed where they did not live.<sup>409</sup> The timing of this document, coming a few months after the plague reached England, may have influenced England's lack of pogroms.

By being amongst the first infected areas European anti-Semites had much more time to establish themselves, to spread rumours, to organise to kill

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>407</sup> Pope Clement VI, Modern Title 'The Pope Defends the Jews.' 26<sup>th</sup> September 1348. in Nardo, pp. 152-154. This document is reproduced by Nardo and by "richardsh" (citation below) and as Appendix 1; Tuchman, pp. 109-116; Ziegler, pp. 98-111; Cohn, pp.139-140.

<sup>408</sup> Hecker, Chapter V Moral Effects; Richardsh (sic), '26th September 1348.Pope Clement VI Exonerates Jews from Causing The Black-Death.' *On This Day in Messianic Jewish History*. Posted Sept. 26<sup>th</sup> 2015. <https://jewinthepew.org/2015/09/26/26-september-1348-pope-clement-vi-exonerates-jews-from-causing-the-black-death-otdimjh/> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>409</sup> Tuchman, p. 115.

and ultimately to alienate in those lands where the pestilence arrived later - England, Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia. Probably due to the king, this strange movement did not stay in England long. Although in continental Europe some nuns, a few prominent aristocrats, some burgers and well-off women joined the movement, Catholic lay people from the lower classes formed it and were apparently numerically predominant, while each group's master had to be a layman.<sup>410</sup>

Flagellants initially attracted large numbers, enthusiasm and public support in much of Europe, where they wandered in processions. They believed that by whipping, prayer and calls to repentance, they atoned for the sins of all: therefore, God would show mercy to Christendom and lift the plague's curse.<sup>411</sup> The reality must be that just by wandering and then forming large groups consisting of participants and frequently an audience, flagellants spread the plague, as Pope Clement suspected.<sup>412</sup> A Medieval chronicler, Mathew of Nauenberg. gave a vivid, probably eyewitness account of their strange ways. They stripped to a shift reaching from thighs to ankles, lying face down, arms outstretched, with the body straight to form a crucifix, they were then flagellated. with whips with metal spikes that drew blood and frequently caused serious injury.<sup>413</sup> While they flagellated themselves or just after, they sang hymns. They finished with reading a letter from God passed on by an angel. God said he was displeased with the world's depravities, naming many sins: violating the

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<sup>410</sup> Hecker, Chapter V Moral Effects; Cohn, pp, 133.

<sup>411</sup> Hecker, 'The Ancient Song of the Flagellants' This document is reproduced as an Appendice; .Cohn. pp. 131-136. Two clerics are quoted about the worldly and alienating ways of the church.

<sup>412</sup> Ziegler, p. 67.

<sup>413</sup> Cohn, pp.133-134; Hesker mentions the points being of Iron. Chapter V 'Moral Effects.'

Sabbath, not fasting on Friday, blasphemy and adultery.<sup>414</sup> With interceding angels and the Virgin Mary's intercession for them with God, mercy could be given after thirty-three and a half days of flagellation if the flagellant's rules were followed. In Strasbourg a thousand people joined and Mathew of Nauenberg recounts that they gained so many recruits that they became uncountable.<sup>415</sup> Usually this would be dismissed as Medieval chronicler's hyperbole, but all evidence suggests that although they spoke wrote and acted with the usual ways of fringe cult, they were briefly a mass movement.

Another probable if unsuspected reality at the time is that by shedding their blood before assembled multitudes, they spread flecks of infected blood amongst the watchers. One contemporary chronicler noticed this splattering.<sup>416</sup> They splattered blood on walls and flagellants would lie on the ground, regardless of how clean or filthy it was.<sup>417</sup> They would have also spread blood on city square cobblestones, in an age when many went barefoot. Another practice likely to spread the contagion was that some treated rags stained with flagellant blood as holy relics, sometimes placing them on their eyes.<sup>418</sup>

Initially welcomed, the flagellants began to infringe on the church's power, frequently spouted heretical ideas and denounced many churchmen. The

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<sup>414</sup> Hallam, p. 258.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>416</sup> Deaux, p. 181. The Medieval source is quoted.

<sup>417</sup> Horrox, p. 161.

<sup>418</sup> Zeigler, p. 94; Cohn, p. 135.

criticizing church staffers had a point. In 'The Ancient Song of the Flagellants' The Virgin Mary acts as an intercessor for them with Christ – "Mary move thy son to sympathy."<sup>419</sup> This replaces Christ as the intercessor with God the father and virtually places Jesus as God the father, who does not appear in this muddled form of basic Christian belief. In this song they compared their blood splattering to the gore of Jesus on the cross, as if his sacrifice was not enough to save, theirs must be added to it. They also had other presumptuous ways of taking over church duties; invading churches, trying to cast out demons, and declaring things to be holy relics. They heard confessions, granted penances and absolutions and claimed visions and letters to be from God.

Deciding on the veracity of such things was and is the preserve of the church. They not only made clerical enemies, but their verbal and physical assaults on the rich made wealthy enemies. Like many of today's cults, they attracted criminals, fugitives and runaways wanting food, shelter and camouflage. Plausibly these hangers on were the cause for most of the flagellant involvement in assaults and robberies. If this was not disillusioning enough, at Strasburg one flagellant company insisted they could bring a dead child back to life and encircled the corpse and made their effort. Their failure added harm to their worsening reputation.<sup>420</sup> Even before Clement VI issued his bull against them in October 1349, the public mood had changed. Flagellants were frequently being persecuted by both religious and secular leaders.<sup>421</sup> They soon became a worry for royalty who began banning their processions and entry into their kingdoms. Apart from criminal activities and making enemies of the church, royalty had its own

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<sup>419</sup> Hecker, 'The Ancient Song of the Flagellants.'

<sup>420</sup> Hecker, Chapter V Morality.

<sup>421</sup> Two secondary accounts of the flagellants are by Cohn, pp. 131-141 and Zeigler, pp. 66-67 pp. 87-98.

reasons for this changed attitude. Doctor Hecker, writing in 1833, does not use the phrase 'hidden agendas' for how the authoritarian leadership of this cult were working, but that is what his words boil down to.<sup>422</sup> What their aim was might well have been some type of religious and/or political takeover, as Hecker implies. Messianic movements, cults and sects are always concerned with control, which while regimented in their organisations, does not stop with their members. Their leaders always want to control, at the least their society and the flagellant leaders fit this mould exactly with the usual justification that they will lead the world out of its travail into some form of paradise, once the bad people (such as royalty?) are overthrown. Did Edward III know of this or suspect it? Being devout, did the church influenced his attitude to this movement?

It was against this background that flagellants tried to set up in England in the autumn of 1349: authorities deported them back to Holland after they performed a few of their European rituals in London.<sup>423</sup> Given a contemporary description of their behaviour in England, this removal must be unsurprising. Over six hundred men wearing caps with decorated crosses and described as naked (meaning literally naked or wearing only brief undergarments?) marched while whipping each other's backs.<sup>424</sup> Edward III had saved England from a scourge – and a literal scourging if he devised this policy. At the least, he did not countermand this deportation. Flagellants were another stereotypical Black Death image inapplicable to England.

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<sup>422</sup>. Ibid.,

<sup>423</sup> Ziegler p. 96; Mortimer, p. 270.

<sup>424</sup> Robert of Avesbury, An excerpt from his work of about 1360. 'Contemporary Accounts of the Black Death.' Edited by John Simkin *Spartacus Educational*.. Sept. 1997. <https://spartacus-educational.com>> [MedievalBritain](#)> [the Normans](#), accessed 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018.



*Evidence of a pogrom in Strasbourg during the plague. Jews are being burned alive.*

*Note in the centre the upraised hand invoking God as he sets the fire alite..*

Wikipedia



*In contrast to the starkly realistic effigy in Westminster Abbey this idealised portrait of Edward III, garbs him with the trappings and symbols of royalty and cannot be true to life as the artist was aged about two when Edward died. Artist: William Bruges (1375–1450), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward\\_III\\_of\\_England\\_\(Order\\_of\\_the\\_Garter\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward_III_of_England_(Order_of_the_Garter).jpg)



*A 1349 depiction of A flagellant procession at Doornik. Public Domain Commons*

Even before the plague ended Edward acted as if it had ended by focusing on war preparations. On 12<sup>th</sup> February 1350 he ordered large numbers of arrows and on the 20<sup>th</sup> March issued levees for men at arms from several shires.<sup>425</sup> While explainable as due to news of truce violations by French attacks on Plantagenet lands, particularly Calais, it does show he preferred to focus on war, not plague.

A possibility exists that Edward was mentally not functioning as well as he should have been during the plague. He may have been going through the motions of festivities and normality in a stunned state because he could not

<sup>425</sup> Creighton, p.178.

cope with the deaths, devastation and scope of what was happening. He had to deal with the sudden deaths of two of his children within three months as well as his archbishop and many others he had known also dying in that time. Nothing in his past had prepared him for the greatest catastrophe that England or the world had ever known.

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## *Chapter 5*

### *The Aftermath 1350-1664*

Many of England's larger towns and ports, as well as its castles, armies and navies recovered quickly from the pestilential catastrophe, which had faded away before Christmas 1351. A few towns and many villages did die and some amongst the larger towns such as Beverley, Oxford, York, Norwich, Yarmouth and Winchester were no longer the prosperous and important places they had been, but they survived. No English city or cathedral town ever makes a list for those abandoned because of the Black Death. As both symbols of power and practical centres for royalist and religious order, cathedrals and abbeys survived. Across England manufacture, travel and trade all resumed by the second half of 1350, albeit in an often reduced, weakened or disordered condition. Where the Black Death had caused devastation that nobody could so easily heal was in agriculture and the wool and cloth trades. Agriculture was always crucially important for any kingdom, so England's survival as a functioning society was under an obvious threat as nine out of ten English people were involved in agriculture in some way.<sup>426</sup> This is not saying that nine out of ten English people were peasants glued to their tilled acres with no other income. The term 'cottage industries' applies very literally to England from Medieval times onward. Particularly in winter farmers could do other work. Household members could weave, mine and fish; men could go to sea and women wove, spun flax or wool.<sup>427</sup> Repairing and making tools, working with clothes, pottery, leather goods and shoes were other cottage

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<sup>426</sup> Coulton, Volume II. p. 115; Creighton, p. 24; Wooding, p.14.

<sup>427</sup> Wooding, pp..24-26

industries. A 1570 survey of households in Norwich found that in almost all cases women and children were employed in some way.<sup>428</sup> Was this typical of earlier times across England? Monasteries and nunneries usually had agricultural land worked on by members of their orders and lay people. Royal and noble estates had fields near their castles worked by serfs and villeins, whose numbers were sometimes increased by itinerants. Many tradespeople were part of the agricultural process at the productive base. particularly reeves, ostlers, toolmakers, tanners, millers, wagoners and account keepers. Others were involved in storing, inspecting, transporting and trading agricultural products. All of these groups, technically outside the peasantry, if totalled, could not numerically equal the numbers within the lower orders of the manor system, then the backbone of English economics, society and therefore order. This meant that negative effects on agriculture and therefore the kingdom could only be enormous and pervasive. A positive but ultimately unsettling effect on the feudal order was the way a small but growing group within the peasantry were becoming less subservient to their lords with purchased if limited independence. This group was the freedmen, often owning their own farms, but sometimes renting from the lord, usually with the right to keep their tenancy within the family.

Between 1350 and 1850 a tendency for existing farms to expand by taking over the smaller was common across much of England.<sup>429</sup> It is almost certain that both the lords of the manor and the freedman were part of this process which led to land commonly owned being privatised, communal

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<sup>428</sup> Wooding, p.26.

<sup>429</sup> Wooding, p.14 Wooding. gives the example of Havering in Essex, but says this example was far from typical Wooding quotes eyewitness Francis Trigge, who writing around 1603 described how this practice happened. and its effects. Wooding comments on what Trigge wrote and the general situation. pp.6-47.

rights being abolished and areas being depopulated.<sup>430</sup> As few freedmen would have abolished their ancient rights for an immediate advantage this suggests that the manorial owners were the overwhelming instigators of this process. Lands left vacant due to their owners dying of plague would have been easy and early targets for acquisition; albeit happening closer to 1350 than 1850.

Oversimplified narratives concerning the manor system often cause misunderstandings. The very title 'Lord of the Manor' leads to several stereotypes. A lord was indeed often the owner of the manor, but not always. Bishops and abbots, knights, unmarried women and widows could own manors.<sup>431</sup> While the lower levels of the aristocracy, such as a baron or a knight could be owners, the higher aristocratic levels usually owned several manors and farms and these were frequently not conterminous. With extremely slow and frequently unreliable communications, in such cases a seneschal, a wife, a knight or a relative was the acting manor lord.

The stereotypical image of a lord of the manor as an arrogant, dissolute, lazy bully with godlike powers living off the hard labour of grovelling peasants, should not be universally applied. Several factors usually limited their lordship's powers. They had both rights and duties.<sup>432</sup> The most obvious of these duties was fealty to the lord's many superiors and those manorial rulers were placed high on the social pyramid, but were still a long way from the top. Less obviously and more erratically, limitations came by economics, by custom and by the possibility of failure. The latter could at best be proof of ineptitude or being cursed by God or fate. At the worst superiors could remove them from positions or their peers and

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<sup>430</sup> Trigge, quoted by Wooding, pp.46-47

<sup>431</sup> Gies and Gies, p..45.

<sup>432</sup> Creighton, p. 136.

people with trading connections could ostracise them. This could happen because they gained reputations for being inept, foolish, treacherous, lazy, cowardly or being a disgrace. After the Black Death passed, its catastrophic effects frequently remained for years, not only adversely affecting the manor system, but the ruling class and the kingdom.

Fealty was a two-way street. A manor lord would preside at regular assizes and courts where they have new tenants, inheritors of estates and their staff pledge or renew fealty to them. However, he would have to do the same elsewhere, as manor lords owed obedience to their superiors, first to the aristocrats higher in the hierarchy, then the church, the shire sheriff and the ultimate fealty was to the king. In practical terms, this meant calling out able bodied manor men if a sheriff raised a hue and cry against robbers, escaped serfs, outlaws, mobs or insurgents. It meant putting together a small military force that would serve his superiors in either suppressing an insurrection or joining one. Military expenses for most manors were usually unavoidable, costly and frequently even ruinous. The manor lord customarily would have to have his own horse, armour and weapons, expensive in themselves, but a necessity for practical purposes and to maintain his prestige. To turn out for war in the same regalia as infantry and as an infantry officer, was a tremendous loss of prestige, almost a disgrace. Similarly, his squire would be mounted and well equipped, not to have a squire or any fighters to command was another sign of failure and disgrace. Even a small supporting force of eight infantrymen had to be equipped, fed and paid. Then as now, war was expensive and sometimes brought in little if any gain. Other costs included church tithes, high taxes to the king, frequent special levees and charity. For those made knights and of higher rank, other expenses were difficult to avoid. These, being embedded within chivalry, included largesse, gift-giving and hospitality.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Tuchman, pp. 62-63.

To be successful manor lords had to be diligent about their tenants and either knowledgeable about agriculture, trade, economics and animal husbandry or shrewd enough to pick trustworthy experts. They also had to be knowledgeable about the law and customs. Manor lords held court or assizes regularly and while they sometimes enrolled jurors, the manor lord usually decided matters concerning his domain. These would include permissions to leave or to marry, recording the state of tenancy takeovers and deaths, having swearing fealty ceremonies, issuing fines or levees, apportioning resources and resolving disputes. The latter were usually about ownership, borders or inheritances. The manor rolls reveal common concerns; trespassing cattle, shirking community work, neglecting land and buildings, defiling springs, digging pits in the highway and punishing nuisances and scolds.<sup>434</sup> It was also their task to find possible heirs and implement wills. If no heir could be found they could hold the possessions for tenants and eventually own them if no inheritor or relative could be found. These courts held at the manor were usually recorded and kept on the estate, those records becoming known as manor rolls. Where they do exist, which is too rarely, they are a valuable indication for the local effects of the Black Death.

Despite wide ranging despotic powers, it was nothing unusual for a manor lord to fail. Costs were the Achilles' heel of the manor system and as long as the crops were harvested, church and family feuds avoided and litigation and armed conflict did not devastate, the manor lord usually survived – before the Black Death. Unfortunately, all these devastating aspects were common. As all these threats were not to the system as a whole, but to individual manors, across the kingdom the system survived, but almost imperceptibly it began weakening when villeins, and staff began buying the land and held it as freemen. In the chapter 'England before the Plague.' the beginnings of this are mentioned. Even so, until the

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<sup>434</sup> Coulton, Volume I. pp. 84-95.

nationwide great famine and then the Black Death the manor system remained a fairly stable force - and a major force for such secular stability as feudal England had.

The plagues changed this. How much devastation the plagues caused to the manor system remains debated. It did not kill it as some claim: despite the high taxation that came in after 1345, we still have our aristocratic lords residing in castles and manors and frequently they have their farming tenants.

In the fifteenth-century some manors seem to have been part of the general recovery, their bosses finding new tenants and workers. Even so, George Deaux in his *The Black Death*, Francis Gasquet in *The Black Death of 1348 and 1349*, Charles Creighton in his *A History of Epidemics in Britain: From A.D. 664 to the Eradication of the Plague*, Reverend Fisher in his 1943 lecture “‘The Black Death in Essex.’ the Gies team in their *Life in a Medieval Village*, Jim Bolton in ‘The Word Upside Down’ and Dan Snow in his documentary *The Black Death*. all give examples which are listed below. They show the devastation in 1348-1350 and with some for years after. All eight writers separately show widespread and severe losses, even cases of annihilation. The manor rolls and other documents they quote from show massive devastation,, economic and social disruption also clearly show that replacing these losses could not be easy. Dan Snow states that five thousand villages were wiped out. While this figure appears extraordinary, if hamlets, manors, estates, monasteries and nunneries, small towns and locales where only a few survivors subsisted are considered in the vague term “villages” this figure may well be possible. The list below indicates this could be true :

*The King’s northern borderland estate and castle: Carlyle.* By 1354 the greater part remained uncultivated with no tenants, no working mills, no fishing or used pasture.

*Tintagel:* Cornwall. Owned by the Black Prince, he had to remit a quarter of all rents to keep the remaining workforce there. According to the Receiver of Revenues conditions actually worsened in 1351 and 1352. By 1353 much of the estate's lands were unoccupied and he could collect only a quarter of the rents that he once did. He was reduced to plundering the property of the dead there.

*Elton:* A Huntingdonshire village. All chevages (fee paying villeins to the manor lord) were dead. The village smithy (a blacksmith's workshop) the lord's ovens and the machines used for fuller's work fell into disrepair because nobody was left alive to work them.

*Hakeford Hall:* Norfolk This manor lost half their inhabitants

*Cottenham:* Cambridge This manor also lost half their inhabitants

*Sladen Manor:* This estate used to make twelve pounds a year and had an operative mill. After the plague, all tenants were dead and the land was useless.

*Ramsey:* Huntingdonshire Grain production fell by half and apparently even what was achieved was done by paying very high wages. After the king's Statute of 1351 high productivity levels were apparently maintained by threats of putting labourers in the stocks unless they worked.

*Storington Manor:* Bedfordshire. This estate had no value left at all. Uncultivated land was left alone, the woods were useless and no buyer could be found.

*Brandon:* North-West Suffolk. Farmers abandoned their nearby farmlands, which had been marginally successful in ordinary times. These reverted to wilderness.

*Winslow;* Buckinghamshire. 153 holdings here change hands due to deaths. Of the 153 deaths on this estate 42 were small farmers. Of the 43 jurymen there, 27 died in 1349.

*Hunstanton:* North Norfolk. In nine tenancies nobody was left alive. In thirty-one tenancies only women and children were left; 63 men and fifteen women died in the first savaging, while 172 tenants died in eight months. In redistributing thirty-one tenancies only women and children were left and in nine nobody was left alive. Seventy-four tenancies left no male heirs and twelve left no male relations.

*Escham:* Oxfordshire. Two tenants were left alive and they wanted to leave.

*Lessingham Manor:* Norfolk: On 13<sup>th</sup> January 1350 payments from tenants were reduced to thirty shillings as the greater part of the tenants there had died in the previous year.

*Hadeston Manor:* (Twelve miles from Norwich) Fifty-four men and fourteen women had died. Of these thirteen had left no heir.

*Croklam Manor* Cheshire. The Earl of Salisbury's wife owned this estate. She was wife to one of England's most powerful men. Previously returning thirteen pounds a year, the land was now considered worthless and all tenants and holders (of land? of position?) were dead.

*The Estate of William de Hastings:* All but ten tenants were dead and the land was declared to be valueless.

*Estates of the Bishop of Worcester:* Worcester. No harvest was brought in, workers left the mills and forges idle and no tenants could be found at any price.

*Hartlebury Manor:* Worcestershire. Previously returning 106 shillings, after the pestilence it returned nothing. All tenants had died.

*Herefordshire:* Some manors in this shire apparently had no tenants for thirty years after the first plague. Manor records show that the last listed tenants had died in 1349.

*Norwich Manor:* Norwich. Of the fifty tenant families twenty-one had died out. This does not necessarily mean that the surviving families were untouched by the contagion, only that some within the family survived.

*Bucklow:* Cheshire. By 1350 the estate was lying waste for want of tenants and a third of taxes were remitted.

*Burton on Trent:* Staffordshire. All tenants were dead.

*Meaux:* Yorkshire. Nearly all of the abbey's tenants were dead. This also describes the situation with the Abbey's monks.

*Ornard Pava:* Suffolk. The first nine deaths occurred on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1349 with fifteen more by the next manor roll gathering on May 1<sup>st</sup>. By the next quarterly gathering on November 3<sup>rd</sup> thirty-six more tenants are dead. As twenty tenants have left no heirs, a large number of residents who were not tenants must have died. The continuance of the plague over eight months here suggests either recurrent waves or an extremely tenacious grip, possibly kept active by subterranean mammals.

*Rayhnam Court:* Norfolk. Of the eighteen tenements now vacant, eight had reverted back to the lord of the manor and the rest were retained, apparently held in custody until the heirs arrived, if any could be found.

*Wilmacott:* The ruling family there and tenants had died out due to pestilence.

*An Oxfordshire Estate:* Eight out of eighteen claimants to the estate and three out of six tenants were dead. No one emerged to claim the untilled land.

*Whitechurch:* The estate of Margaret de le Beche. By October 1349 when she died, no fees were being paid and all tenancies were confiscated.

*Alcester:* Warwickshire. Rents were not in, due to the holders' deaths.

*Wappenry:* Warwickshire. By 1350 three houses, three cottages and twenty acres of land became vacant and valueless due to the plague.

*The Isle of Wight:* Many manors were taken over and taxes were remitted because so many had died.

*Fyngryth Manor:* Essex. Although fifty-five tenants resided there before the plague hit, seventy tenants would die of it. Clearly inheritors or replacements were dying. This manor continued to function.

*Lyddford:* Dartmoor. The mill was left vacant because most customers were dead.

*Estate of Sir Henry Husee:* Wiltshire. Three hundred acres of pasture were returned as being of no value as all tenants were dead.

*Stockton Manor:* Wiltshire. By June 1349 fourteen tenants were dead.

*Broughton Manor:* Shropshire. One tenant was left alive. All the others, the owners and "the natives" were dead.

*East Grnstead:* (Near Salisbury) The estate of Mary de Turnby. Three tenants were left.

*Rochester:* Kent. So many of the lower orders died or fled that the lord and lady were reduced to doing menial work.

*Gillingham:* Dorset. The Manor court rolls recorder states that by 13<sup>th</sup> December 1348 28 tenants were dead and by a second court in early 1349 22 more had died, with 45 more in May. Thirty tenants had left no heir.

*Chedzoy Manor:* Somerset. The manor court rolls for March 1349 reveal fifty to sixty fines on new tenants for taking possessions of the dead. The manor court appointed guardians for the numerous orphaned children.

*Aston Manor:* Warwickshire. This manor lost eight out of ten tenants.

*Cottenham:* Cambridge. This manor also lost half of the inhabitants.

*Cambridgeshire:* One writer stated that up to eight out of ten residents there died.<sup>435</sup> While extremely high, the way one burial pit there was filled with tumbled bodies suggests an extremely high death rate.

*Hampshire Manor:* Hastings. Rented meadows, arable farmland and woods all lost half their value.

*Hakeford Hall:* Norfolk. This manor lost half of its inhabitants

*Hame:* Gloustershire and *Colchester:* Essex. These estates lost half the value of their land.

*Worcestershire:* Nineteen per cent of the manorial tenants in that shire are known to have died.

*Hockham:* This estate of the Earl of Arundel could not find any tenants for thirty years after the plague hit.

*Durham:* In July 1349 the Bishop of Durham ordered Sir Thomas Gray to visit his extensive nearby estates and evaluate the situation. The land tenanted by those now deceased was reallocated. At least half and perhaps even 78% of the residents were dead. Surviving tenants did not wish to pay rents due to plague and when Gray threatened them with being compelled to pay rent and work the land, they threatened to run off to better land.

*Jersey and Guernsey:* Due to the great mortality levels the surviving fishermen were unable to pay the expected rents.

*Lincoln:* Fifteen nearby villages had few survivors left and in the decades to come those villages would be abandoned.

*Bedfordshire:* In a February 1353 petition to the King by the sheriff there stated that in 1351 and 1352 his bailiffs could get nothing from the farms except by extortion; that opinion was backed by an enquiring jury.

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<sup>435</sup> Cohn ,Samuel K. Jr, "Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague.?"

*Isle of Wight:* The devastation was so common that no taxes could be paid from here

*Camel River Area:* Cornwall. (Near Tintagel) the Black Prince's estates suffered great devastation. Plague wiped out twelve or fourteen manors. Following the rule that lords of the manor could take the possessions of the dead if they could not find heirs, the Black Prince made a total of thirty pounds by taking assorted goods. These included female clothing, golden buckles, copper dishes and ploughs. Royalty scavenging amongst dead underlings for the underlings' property to turn into money says more about England's economic devastation than any statistic.

*Castle Coombe:* Wiltshire Hills Amazingly, this was a success story. Tradesmen connected to cloth and skins (fullers, dyers, weavers, glovers and others) moved in with agricultural workers to start "a self-managed community" which was soon "thriving" and gaining "considerable wealth."<sup>436</sup> They maintained the traditional trading, markets and the old manorial basis to the extent that they did not tolerate nuisances and many were so habituated to the old ways that Creighton states that they could not throw off the ways of serfdom.<sup>437</sup> Possibly for that reason and because they were doing so financially well in an extreme economic depression, their lord tolerated the situation. In Shrewsbury when "strangers" possibly inspired by Castle Coombe, tried to work against the settled order, disputes quickly emerged and the intriguers were stopped.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Creighton, p.198.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.,

Except for Castle Coombe, were these manors, farms, estates and villages the worst examples and therefore not typical? Were they documented because of their devastation or created legal problems while nothing was written about others that could function? Even if they were not typical, they clearly demonstrate that over much of England, the plague was so ferocious and pervasive that it could destroy both isolated farming families, and whole manor systems and leave those surviving barely functioning.

This listing of devastated manors also shows that the power, prestige and riches of the highest levels of the church, the aristocracy and even royalty could not reverse the effects of the pestilence on aristocracy and agriculture. Manor lords could not get their properties immediately productive again, or frequently even functioning at a basic level, such was the power of the plague.

So, while this list shows that obviously the devastation was widespread, how typical are such cases of devastation? Many writers state that unlike continental Europe and the East, England was rich in resources about the Black Death – but in reality, this was only comparatively. This lack becomes obvious when investigating the primary source evidence for the manors, but while the precise extent of the plague's devastation remains uncertain, (excepting possibly Castle Coombe) no manors seem to have escaped untouched, if there were any, they seem to be unmentioned.

As the pandemic had gone north from the southern coasts it did not spread fatalities or its consequences evenly. It was not hitting a population evenly spread across England. About three quarters of the population lived south of the Humber River and east of the Severn River, where land was usually more arable.<sup>439</sup> Ven this true if simple statement misleads, for in the areas outside where that concentrated population lived were two of England's

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<sup>439</sup> Guy pp.34-35; Wooding, p.14.

largest towns, Bristol and York. Other larger towns also beyond these two divisive rivers include Chester, Hull, Oxford and Beverley. In the north and west here were of course sparsely inhabited areas; the moors, mountains, marshes and forests had few if any inhabitants, yet even here there seemed to be no escape, or at least surviving records of it.

In the countryside some villages were wiped out and what was once farmland would often revert to forest in following years and in subsequent plague outbreaks.<sup>440</sup> According to William of Dene, over a third of England's land became uncultivated.<sup>441</sup> What evidence exists tends to support this statement. Eventually numerous farmlands did revert to pasture.<sup>442</sup> Livestock was much less labour intensive than fishing, mining or working on fields of grain or orchards. Livestock would also be less vulnerable to climate change. While initially devastating, this change to pasturage would ultimately be an economic boon as wool became the kingdom's most important product.<sup>443</sup> What began as an unintended reversion to pasture became deliberate as investors in wool removed villages and farms to make way for pasturage for sheep as wool became lucrative.<sup>444</sup> These need for pasturage also applied to other animals, but

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<sup>440</sup> Several of the sources used to compile this list are used in other source notes. Others are Knighton, p. 148; Hallam mentions two such hamlets, Bolton and Hillcot and a village of twenty-three households; Casquet refers to entire hamlets being depopulated, p. 201 and p. 136. Here Gasquet quotes le Baker, a Medieval source. Dan Snow mentions Durham and uses primary source materials..

<sup>441</sup> Deaux, p. 128; Gasquet, p. 231. Dene quoted

<sup>442</sup> Pollard, pp. 178-179; Barker, p. 26.

<sup>443</sup> Ziegler, p. 121; Barker, p. 23.

<sup>444</sup> Ackroyd, pp. 357-358.

particularly to cows as in Medieval times leather and leather goods was England's second biggest export industry.<sup>445</sup> Saddles, shoes, sheaths, scabbards, bags, belts, book covers, quivers, hats and several types of clothing were made from cows and to a lesser extent, from other animals and excepting pigs and goats, all animal resources were dependent on pasturage.

While making cloth was an ancient and perennial cottage industry, it became much more important and therefore more organised and extensive after 1360.<sup>446</sup> Although there would be some severe fluctuations in the hundred years after 1360, wool exports would triple between 1470 and 1550.<sup>447</sup> The expansion of this industry was also due to increasing pasturage becoming available. Initially, it needed mostly shepherds, yet in its later stages it was labour intensive. Baling untreated wool in manor or farm barns was a comparatively simple process needing few workers, but cloth production and weaving wool were different, involving several intensive processes. Shearers, fullers, dyers, finishers and tailors were all part of the manufacturing process.<sup>448</sup> To get such a workforce functioning owners needed shears, wagons, carts, vats, weirs, waterwheels, spinning wheels, spindles, distaffs, looms, thrashing stones and fulling machines. Carpenters, weavers, wrights, stonemasons, tailors and their apprentices and laborers would have found employment in the cloth industry, most of it in cities and towns, for how many farmers or even franklins and even lords of the manor could afford to build clothing factories, purchase the

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<sup>445</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III* p.51.

<sup>446</sup> Barker, p. 28.

<sup>447</sup> Guy, p.50. p.109

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*,

necessary equipment and then pay to keep and house a large workforce? Large businesses did not directly produce all English cloth; small outputs could also be very literally a cottage industry, a farmer's or franklin's sideline, usually based on female relatives or dependents. Often one relative, one spinning wheel, a few sheep or goats, a loom, a spindle and a few other tools was all that was needed for small amounts of cloth. Some factors or reeves could do what is still done; parts of the creation process or small amounts of garments or blankets are literally farmed out as piece work. This was in the initially not very common places where manufacturing wool into clothing for a mass market was English, for many decades raw wool was exported to the Dutch and the Flemish for manufacture and then sold back to the English as goods.<sup>449</sup> It would be in the Tudor era before a large proportion amongst the wool merchants could afford their own factories. The development of establishing factories which took over making clothing from many of the cottage dwellers or foreigners was a slow process, but a noticeable one by the 1530s.<sup>450</sup>

Just for wool alone sheep were lucrative, but they became even more lucrative and even essential when their other uses were considered: mutton, sheepskin clothing, parchment made from treated sheepskins, string from tendons, glue from hooves and blood, bone, and manure for fertilising. With so many uses it is unsurprising that gaining pasturage for them became perennially urgent and not even royal edicts could permanently stop the takeovers of land for pasturage.

In the decades, even for several centuries after the first Black Death visitation, foreclosures on the commons became was a common occurrence. Foreclosure meant that private individuals either farmers, investors, lords

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<sup>449</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval People*. London; 1999. p.148.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.196-198.

of the manor or nobility, were taking over parts of the village commons and making them their own, fencing the land off, often for pasturage. This has led to a simplistic image of rich lords stealing from poor peasants. While probably a frequently accurate description, the takeovers were often by farmers on the make and one of the most resolute opponents of the takeovers was Cardinal Wolsey, one of England's richest and most powerful men. He even prosecuted hundreds of those foreclosing and ordered that their enclosing fences be destroyed.<sup>451</sup> Henry VII had a statuette against enclosure in 1489 and his son did the same in 1514-1515. In 1569 appointees of Elizabeth I reversed illegal foreclosures made by the northern rebels.<sup>452</sup> The commons takeovers were not always successful and it was a slow process: even by 1700 over half the commons survived.<sup>453</sup> If this meant that in some parts of England village life remained essentially unchanged, for the other half dramatic and permanent change had begun with enclosures which became common with the effects of the Black Death.

The large scale and lucrative developments coming from enclosures and rural takeovers however, was generally several decades into the future after 1348. Money was rarely around to take over land and few could be found to do the necessary work on these labour-intensive properties. Even when they were found their high wages meant low profits. Purchasers of products or produce were also rare, so prices dropped. Cloth fell in value by 10% and wool by 75% during and then immediately after the 1348-1350 epidemic. When trade overseas was halted by royal edict and then slow to restart, England's economy took another serious blow as wool, cloth and

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<sup>451</sup> Guy, pp. 91-94.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p.275

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p.92

leather were major revenue sources. Industry was troubled and unstable for decades after the first great mortality.

Markets for wool and cloth finally stabilised at a healthy level around 1450 and within twenty years supplied a demanding, lucrative and stable market.<sup>454</sup> Wool (and cloth made from it) became the most important English income earners. At this time wool became 80% of English exports and those exports reached as far away as Denmark, Prussia, Venice, the shores of the Black Sea and even Novgorod.<sup>455</sup> This situation would last for centuries, until the advent of mass cotton imports from the American south and some of Britain's colonies.<sup>456</sup> With economic power came political power as the most important wool merchants headed their trading associations, (known as the wool staple) they often deciding matters in those towns economically centred on the wool trade.<sup>457</sup>

Many of those towns prospered by cottage industries associated with the trades in wool cloth and goods derived from leather, timber and metals. Small seaside east coast ports also benefitted by shipping out wool.<sup>458</sup> By the reign of Henry VIII the wool staples were preferred for lending money to royalty rather than the banks. Wool increased in value and prestige from being important to being the basis of English prosperity. The blatantly obvious symbol that says it all and serves to remind even the most

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<sup>454</sup> Pollard, p. 180.

<sup>455</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The History of England. Volume I. Foundation*. London; 2011. p. 157.

<sup>456</sup> Power, p. 145

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

powerful is the permanently placed ungainly woolsack on the seat of the Lord Chancellor in the House of Lords: it stayed there until 2005.<sup>459</sup>

What would have happened if the pestilence had not led to the widespread replacement of grain fields, vines and orchards with pasturage? Climate change might have had the same effect, as sheep were obviously better at surviving cold, frosts and rains than fruit, vegetables, vines and grain. Perhaps climate change combined with the pestilence to have the effect that did happen. And if England had gone back to reseeding orchards, vines and fields? It would not have been so prosperous. Spanish wool traders, the English merchants most successful rivals in the wool trade, would almost certainly have expanded to meet the high demand. Spain only became a nation when the separate kingdoms were joined together in the second half of the fourteenth century. What would have been the balance of power if some of these little, poorer kingdoms were rich from wool? Would Spaniards have established their empire if it gained great wealth from wool, rather than gold? If it did not, would the Aztec and Inca empires survived to develop further? Would Latin America be Hispanic speaking and Catholic? Or as is most likely, would another European power have done what Spain did and added lands actually conquered by Spain to their empires? Ample gold in Europe coming from the Spanish empire depreciated golds' value, which had other economic effects. These potential economic and social snowballs did not happen, apparently due to English choices about devastated farmlands. From little acorns great trees grow, indeed.

Not all abandoned farmlands became pasturage. Farmers also abandoned other farmlands, such as the barren lands near Brandon, which had been marginally successful in ordinary times. These reverted to wilderness. Those surviving estates and farms not involved in wool did not have a remarkable economic future. Either in subsequent decades they suffered

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<sup>459</sup> Power pp. 145-146; Ackroyd. p. 357. He mentions the ending in 2005.

population annihilation or others did not take them over after the plague passed. They became virtual wastelands. Even in the more prosperous south, where land was usually more arable and bountiful, this still happened after the plague years. The villages of Tusmore and Tilgarsley in Oxfordshire and Hale in Northamptonshire were soon totally abandoned.<sup>460</sup> Near Lincoln the 1340s epidemic immediately destroyed fifteen villages or the survivors lingered on for another decade or two before abandoning what had been their homes.<sup>461</sup> Frequently survivors left to take over more fertile, abandoned lands.<sup>462</sup> Other shires were barely touched in the initial epidemic, yet astoundingly in the years between around 1350 and 1500 about thirteen hundred English villages were abandoned.<sup>463</sup> This presented fact creates an image of silent towns where those suddenly infected lay in fields and cottages because the few survivors had fled. This must have happened in some places. What seems more likely for the majority of villages and small towns is that the process was usually less dramatic and more prolonged, starting decades before the plague hit and continuing for decades, even centuries after. Pestilence, population loss and profit margins entwined to reshape the English landscape and economy.

The great mortality of 1348-1350 hit farms already weakened by decades of climate change and the great, cold and unusual rains of 1348.<sup>464</sup> The

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<sup>460</sup> Barker, p. 26.

<sup>461</sup> Erenow, 'The Midlands and the North of England.'

<sup>462</sup> Ziegler, p. 175.

<sup>463</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 41,

<sup>464</sup> Deaux, p. 118. Quoting Robert of Avebury, Registrar of the Court of Canterbury.

subsequent English outbreaks of 1361-1362, 1368-1369, 1371 and 1379-1382 and the many subsequent, more localised outbreaks would have increased the practical problems, further reducing the number of village survivors of the first great epidemic. Those later losses exacerbated or destroyed the villages already reduced basic ability to function. One description of how desperate the employment situation could be comes from an amazed and indignant chronicler, telling us of the lord and lady of the estate being so bereft of underlings that they had to do their own work! The horror! Near Rochester Priory surviving peasants refused work, while their lordship's family was reduced to poverty. Another chronicler describes women and children pushing ploughs to ensure a harvest. Traditionally an adult male's work, women and children pushing a plough shows a massive disruption of the social order and a sign of desperation. These three accounts and another very similar account were, if not typical, were perhaps not unusual and therefore part of a pattern.<sup>465</sup> For how long was it possible for villagers, manor residents or townspeople to continue to produce without ploughmen, hunters, ostlers, thatchers, coopers, crofters, bakers, fullers, shepherds, ark wrights, weavers, potters, fletchers, a miller, a clerk, a blacksmith, a priest and medical services? If any one of these tradespeople were no longer available village life would have been difficult, if most were gone normal life would have become impossible. People would have fled what little remained of their communities.

As those with larger farms and estates bought up or just took over the smaller, this would have also contributed to depopulation (as Trigge succinctly and vividly described) and the tendency to turn farms into pasturage, became almost irresistible as it was less labour intensive, but more lucrative. In areas where land was unsuitable for pasturage it would frequently be left to revert to wilderness, or barren sites, often for centuries.

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<sup>465</sup> Gasquet, p. 107.

The social breakdown the plague caused created a chance to flee serfdom. This was especially so as employers were offering what was then the coveted luxury of cash for work. This fleeing or migrating must have become also a major contributor to rural depopulation, contributing to under reported or unknown demographics in those areas where they did flee and where they did go. This must have been both high and widespread as in the years after the plague; marriages and birth rates dramatically increased as marriage and christening records indicate.<sup>466</sup> These were the obvious practical effects. The way wages were at unheard of heights only added to the combining allures of steady, paid work, buying what those high wages offered, establishing a family life and parenthood. Others worked for land, a villein's once impossible dream of being a self-employed farmer becoming a common reality for unknown numbers. With such devastation and such an opportunity, the workforce could not be replaced by relying on the old servile ways. Labor was now rare and therefore valuable and laborers knew it. Harvests rotted while dealers and harvesters made extortionist demands.<sup>467</sup> The pestilence's overall immediate economic effect was to halve land values, but double labour costs.<sup>468</sup> This combination could only lead to economic ruin for employers and advantage to employees. This tendency worsened in some areas because land became valueless; not only farm workers, but also buyers just did not exist. There was not even a strange stability in this pattern as English society existed in the immediate post plague years. In the countryside. in villages and small towns, some staples such as livestock, timber, tools, fruit and vegetables were available for the taking from

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<sup>466</sup> Hecker. Chapter V Morality.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>468</sup> Gasquet, p .228.

abandoned farms, shops warehouses and manors, at least for those willing to risk the deadly infection. In contrast newly manufactured goods became rare and expensive, if they could be found. Buyers were also rare.<sup>469</sup>

This led to a variation of the plunder economy, albeit an internal one without a war, it could be better entitled a predominantly scavenger economy. Dramatic extremes of both falling and rising prices in a market where goods, buyers and sellers were all rare, but needs were desperate. While food rotted in the fields a great rise in food prices hit England.<sup>470</sup> Knighton mentions prices went up, but while referring to some new prices, he did not compare them to the old, except for the cost of a horse. This dropped from forty shillings to six.<sup>471</sup> Was this because riders were rare or because travel was restricted, so horses were unneeded? Alternatively, were straying horses easily found now that their riders and ostlers were dead? Until travel and trade were restored, in cities and towns food must have become scarce and therefore costly.<sup>472</sup>

The new conditions could be heaven for a few amongst the previously oppressed, a chance for upward social mobility beyond their most fervid desire. Within the middle classes lawyers prospered “on a rich harvest of legal chaos.”<sup>473</sup> This legal harvest must have a basis on wills and their lack. For those suddenly appointed to priestly positions benefices awaited.

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid.. p.106 Gasquet quotes a medieval chronicle.

<sup>470</sup> Hecker. Chapter V Morality.

<sup>471</sup> . Gasquet Ibid.,

<sup>472</sup> Hecker, Chapter V Mortality.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.,

Opportunists picking up land for little payments of any kind or even without payments also benefitted. Those selling food or manufactured goods also did well where buyers existed. Yet even when considered together these assorted beneficiaries from the catastrophe could only have been a small proportion of the English people. It was hell for many, both for much of the peasantry and the merchants and for that large proportion of the ruined ruling class or those facing ruin. For all, it was to use Jim Bolton's apt phrase about the situation, "a world turned upside down" indeed. In his consideration of how much the new rich did benefit from pay rises Niall Ferguson states that the new rich were not that far ahead because prices rose dramatically.<sup>474</sup> There were the previously mentioned shortages of grain and fish in the early 1350s. Ferguson gives the extreme example of salt. This necessity for food preservation rose sevenfold between 1347 and 1352. He also mentions the bad harvests in 1370 pushing the prices of grain up 230%. Livestock prices rose when some pox was killing livestock at this time and manufacturing agricultural tools had become rare. In Ferguson's account it would be the later 1380s before prices dropped for those things that laborers and farmers needed.<sup>475</sup> The view that all or even most of the underclass who survived beyond 1350 prospered into abundance is indeed simplistic, even if some did. Beyond materialistic satisfaction was the question of mental happiness or the lack of it. For those who did prosper or at least improve in material terms or gain freedom, what were the mental effects of what they had endured?

Apart from accounts of religious doubts, the psychological effects remain almost intangible now, but must have been great. How many survivors would wish to stay in the same home where family members died? Many

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<sup>474</sup> Ferguson p. 123.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.,

must have endured this once out of necessity, but what proportion stood the strain of the reoccurring plague suddenly killing more family members every few years? It takes no great imagination to see Medieval people believing a locale was cursed after several epidemics hit there and then fleeing for anywhere else.

Apart from climate change and the reoccurring plague, uprisings against Richard II and Henry IV and the subsequent Wars of the Roses must have led to some villages being plundered and sacked out of existence, contributing to those thirteen hundred listed as abandoned, yet the direct and indirect effects of the plague must have caused many more abandonments. Some proportion of those who fled their villages often went to the towns rather than other rural locales. Escapees from serfdom and villeinage also flocked to the towns<sup>476</sup> This became a popular way to evade being villeins: it was a belief that those who could survive a year and a day without recapture would become free.<sup>477</sup> That large numbers did this is evident not only from the demographics showing rapid urbanisation, but by the king's 1360 edict concerning authorities rounding up absconders going to towns and punishing those authorities tolerating them. He was unlikely to have issued such an edict for only a few cases.

Others migrating to the cities include the freedmen, their children who could not inherit, those who had previously wandered the countryside for work or the destitute homeless. Combined, they must have numbered well into the tens of thousands, for England's urban population was around 20% by the time of the April 1377 poll tax.<sup>478</sup> This means that in the twenty-nine

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<sup>476</sup> Creighton, p. 141.

<sup>477</sup> Barker, p. 74.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

years since the 1340s epidemic urban dwellers had more than doubled as a proportion of the kingdom's population. This demographic revolution, would continue unabated, eventually changing England from a predominantly rural kingdom to a predominantly urban nation.

A factor that makes assessing the effects of the first great outbreak difficult is the way that over most of England the plague from 1361 onwards until 1665 frequently reoccurred after about a decade, sometimes less. The first great outbreak had made the symptoms and effects so apparent that there seems to have been little need to chronicle details of subsequent, less startling, less devastating inflictions. This tendency may also combine with the destruction of records. This paucity with primary sources leads to a fallacy that the pestilence in England ended in 1350, only to reoccur in 1665 before vanishing forever. Slightly more accurate chroniclers and modern writers mention outbreaks in 1361-1362, 1368-1369, 1371, 1379-1382 and then sporadic, usually localised outbreaks in the subsequent decades until 1563-1564. 1593 1602-1609 and 1665-1666.

Noticing the number of reoccurrences, this writer started on a chronology of recurrent English plague years, but this became pointless as finding twenty years in a row where somewhere notable in England was *not* hit by the plague in the timespan of 1361-1666 did not happen.<sup>479</sup> Even five plague free years in a row were rare after 1361. It was the years *without* infection somewhere in England which were uncommon.

Apart from the Great Mortality of 1348-1350 such continual reoccurrences meant that it would be at least a hundred years before England's overall population even began to recover, even by the most favourable estimates.

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<sup>479</sup> Brian Williams, 'The Cycle of Plague.' A BA Honours Degree. Excerpt. University of Hull. [www.urbanrim.org/plaguelist](http://www.urbanrim.org/plaguelist), accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Other sources giving various outbreak dates include Ziegler, Naphy and Spicer, Williman, Lambert, Williams, Shuttleworth, Bolton, Hallam, Partington, Pollard, Ibeji, Marsek, Dyer, Ormrod, Ashworth, Hesker and Seven.

Barker sees this stagnation lasting until the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>480</sup> Similarly Coulton sees the population as being at the most 4½ to 5 million during the reign of Henry VII (1485-1509).<sup>481</sup>

Wooding and Pollard give very similar assessments to each other but differ from the more pessimistic guestimates of Barker and Carleton. Wooding sees this recovery beginning around 1450, but growth was sluggish until around the middle of the next century, while England's population was less in 1600 that it was in 1300 and in some areas was even lower than what it had been during Roman rule..<sup>482</sup> Pollard, see the numbers stabilising around 1450 without a real increase for many years.<sup>483</sup> Similarly, but separately John Guy also notes this sluggish growth starting around 1450, with population growth only really picking up around 1520. and soon leading to population pressures as it become rapid after 1525.<sup>484</sup> Even so, Pollard notes that as late as 1525 England contained less people than it had in 1377.<sup>485</sup> Nial Ferguson comes to a similar conclusion, giving the 1450 population as two million.<sup>486</sup> His figure is also less than any estimate for

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<sup>480</sup> Barker, p. 25.

<sup>481</sup> Coulton, Volume I. p. 146.

<sup>482</sup> Wooding, p. 63.

<sup>483</sup> Pollard, p. 177; Wooding, p. 154.

<sup>483</sup> Ferguson, p.131.

<sup>484</sup> Guy, pp.32-33. p.94 Text and Table 1 page 32

<sup>485</sup> Pollard, p. 177; Wooding, p. 154

<sup>486</sup> Ferguson, p.131.

what the population had been in 1300. Other killer epidemics also played their part in stopping population increases. Recurrent influenza was one, from the end of the fifteenth century syphilis became another and water bone diseases was always a problem. There was also the strange, reoccurring sweating sickness, which arrived in England in 1485 and sporadically reappeared until permanently vanishing in 1551. This usually killed within a day and was not a variant on the plague.<sup>487</sup> Some variant of influenza became an epidemic spreading across much of the midlands and south- eastern England between 1555 and 1559. Directly or indirectly, it killed around 200,00, which was about 6% of England's population.<sup>488</sup> Amongst those dead during the height of this epidemic was Queen Mary, skilled by a fever of some kind.<sup>489</sup>

Despite their differences on details based on estimates and guesstimates all of these historians are in agreement on the overall demographic picture: England lost so many fatalities to the 1348-1350 great mortality that for a hundred years after, its population suffered a drastic decline and only sluggishly recovered after around 1450.<sup>490</sup> The high plague death rates amongst children in 1361-1362 and then from multiple causes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would be a factor in this sluggish growth as about one in five English children would die before reaching adulthood.<sup>491</sup> Demographers agree that in the middle of the sixteenth

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<sup>487</sup> Furtado, pp.75-85, Furtado reproduces primary source writings on the topic.

<sup>488</sup> Guy, p..30 pp.30-32.

<sup>489</sup> Wooding, pp.391-392.

<sup>490</sup> Guy, p.31..

<sup>491</sup> Wooding, p.100.

century England's population was rising dramatically despite all the drawbacks. How dramatically? Wooding cautiously deals with one estimate that gives the kingdom's population as growing over a decade by a quarter of a million to reach three million in 1551.<sup>492</sup> Guy also uses the same source for the same decade in a table, showing almost the same growth proportions for England as Wooding uses.<sup>493</sup> Both writers show an increase in population growth of almost a quarter of a million. This means that one in twelve people alive in England in 1551 were born in the previous decade. If half of the population were female this means that an average of one in six females gave birth between 1541 and 1551. Excluding those females not of child bearing age would lower the proportions even more, by how much can only be uncertain. With one in five Tudor era children not reaching adulthood this increase seems dubious when other factors for lowering the proportion of births to mothers in this decade are considered. Plague ravaged provinces between 1544 and 1546 and then hit London again in 1548 with the provinces being infected again between 1549 and 1551.<sup>494</sup> Syphilis, the sweating sickness epidemic, miscarriages and deaths during or after births, fatalities during the wars and uprisings of 1547 and 1549-1551, famine and malnutrition were all lowering life expectancy. These factors must mean that the less than one in twelve births ratio for this decade must be dropped further. One in three women of child bearing age having a surviving baby in this decade or even one out of two is possible, especially when considering the large size of families then. While the indicators show England's population increasing at this time, this supposed increase of quarter of a million live births in a population of

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid., p.280.

<sup>493</sup> Guy, p.32

<sup>494</sup> Wooding, p.280.

considerably under three million in a decade strains credibility; even if such factors as improved diet from the Columbian exchange and the Eastern trade, increased crops, general longevity and improved medical care are considered.<sup>495</sup> If so it would mean a predominance of the young, which usually means a reinvigoration or an upheaval of society, and in England this was happening in the last two thirds of the sixteenth century. Lucy Wooding uses several sources to create an image of unruly youth being common then.<sup>496</sup> Other effects were more positive as youth brought their freshness, optimism and energy to several fields. England's Protestant reformation began in the 1520s with secret clubs at Cambridge University and several of the attendants there would rise to prominence in the religious world.<sup>497</sup>

In culture the Elizabethan era would see an outpouring that still amazes, while young English explorers, traders and colonizers would cover much of the world and linguists, scientists and educators would rapidly expand the English language. The great pestilence was of course not a direct cause of all these changes. However, it was a crucial factor in changing the demographics that were an indirect part of changing England from a Medieval kingdom into the powerful expansionist Tudor nation from which the British Empire would soon develop.

A Black Death effect on continental Europe which never reached England was that while much of Europe would produce morbid, often hideously repulsive art inspired by the Black Death, little of it was produced in England. Examining English literature reveals only a few in passing morbid

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<sup>495</sup> Guy, Text and Table 1 both p..32.

<sup>496</sup> Wooding, pp.123-124. See her source notes for Chapter 4 numbers 19-21

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., p.242 p.252 p.255

plague references.<sup>498</sup> In the emergent popular ballad form not even that many references appeared. In this writer's researches for his *The Medieval British Ballads: Their Age Origins and Authenticity* (2015) hundreds of ballads starting from the thirteenth century and going beyond the last great outbreak into the nineteenth century were examined: not one even refers to the plagues. In tombs, churches and manuscripts across much of Europe, graphic, even nightmarish images of prancing skeletons, decayed corpses and terrified people emerged as decorative art, but whatever the reason England provided few examples. While Edward III apparently had a role in protecting Jews and quickly ridding England of flagellants, this cultural development shows the restraint and good taste of the English people, rather than just that of their ruler. As with the 1918-1921 influenza pandemic, which suddenly left over two million Europeans dead, but few 1920s cultural depictions, very few cultural aspects of the Black Death emerged in England's epidemic's aftermath.

One indirect cultural effect seems initially remote from the influence of the plague: the Robin Hood stories. Like the rebellions of Wat Tyler and then the extremely similar 1450 rebellion of Jack Cade in Kent, they reveal hostility to royal, noble and religious authority. The villains are King John, The Sherriff of Nottingham, the noble lord Guy of Gisborne and also worldly priests and prelates. It would be extremely unlikely that the common people could have made such highly ranked figures the villains in popular culture in the earlier feudal era, when their superiors pervasively indoctrinated respect for themselves and enforced it with harsh punishments when indoctrination and threats failed. Subservience was widely obeyed and accepted as part of the natural order – until with the reoccurring Black Death the natural order broke down: attempts to restore

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<sup>498</sup> Siegfried Wezel, 'Pestilence and Middle English Literature: Friar John Grimstone's 'Poems on Death.' In Williman, p. 131.

it were at best only partially successful. The Parliamentary Act of 1360 which fined mayors or bailiffs ten pounds to the king and five to their lord if they refused to deliver up laborers, servants or artificers who “absent himself from his master’s service” reveals much in a few words.<sup>499</sup> They show that many must have fled, that that they had popular support and that a mentality that would be attracted to Robin Hood’s fictional persona was existent by the time the first known cultural expression emerged around 1377. When in a much-quoted passage from that year *Piers Plowman* refers to knowing rhymes about Robin Hood.<sup>500</sup> In those changed circumstances resentments and hostility could be expressed and authority’s opponents become heroes.

At the time the various claimants to being Robin Hood had four things in common, the name or a variation of it, existing in England’s central forest areas and being in trouble with authority. They were also dead for about a century before they appeared in popular culture.<sup>501</sup> Unless their rebellious ways appealed deeply to people, why would the common people, balladeers and writers make several obscure, localised figures named something like Robin Hood into a composite figure, one who emerged as England’s national hero by the early seventeenth century?

The plague’s influence here may have been a flow on effect. It seems to have entwined with other causes onto a turbulent, violent society. England was intermittently engaged in dynastic and foreign wars and rebellions,

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<sup>499</sup> Creighton, p. 197. He quotes the document.

<sup>500</sup> J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood*. London 1983. p.16. Holt reproduces the original couplet in both Medieval and modern English.

<sup>501</sup> Garry Victor Hill, ‘Did Robin Hood Exist?’ Armidale; 2018. Website: Garry Victor Hill. [garryvictorhill.au/pdfDidRobinHoodExistPDF](http://garryvictorhill.au/pdfDidRobinHoodExistPDF).

from French raids on some English coasts in 1377 until the 1490s.<sup>502</sup> A combination of politics and war, already straining social cohesion, worsened because the various plague epidemics returned intermittently.

The escape to the pure, happy forest where people (and therefore contagion) are rare might also reflect the plague - or a vicarious escape from it. People did try to escape the plague and authorities by hiding in forests.<sup>503</sup> However starvation and exposure were more likely than dining on ample venison while singing ballads in the merry greenwood. Some fragments of these cultural manifestations concerning Robin Hood seem to have emerged just before the Black Death, such as the much-quoted reference in the 1337 *Piers Ploughman* poem, but all available evidence shows that the widespread and immense popularity of the Robin Hood ballads really began during the troubled times during the early fifteenth century. Other later developments and embellishments such as Friar Tuck (a fourteenth century pirate in reality) and Maid Marion would only add to that late Medieval framework.

Another cultural possibility developed from the arrival of the Black Death is a popular children's nursery rhyme:

Ring a Ring a Rosie  
 A Pocket Full of Posies  
 Achoo! Achoo!  
 All fall Down!

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<sup>502</sup> 'Battle Of Stoke Field. *Wikipedia*. The idea that The Wars of the Roses ended in 1485 at Bosworth field is another fallacy. Yorkist pretenders were defeated and about four thousand were killed at the battle of Stokes in June 1487. Other smaller battles occurred after Stokes

<sup>503</sup> Deaux, p. 197. Knighton is used as a source.



*Perhaps the most horrifying and bizarre picture ever painted. This is usually entitled 'The Triumph of Death.' Pieter Bruegel the Elder, (c.1525-1569) Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

In interpretations since 1951 the rose ring is the bubonic plague appearing on the skin, the pocketful of posies is the scent used to ward off the stench, the sneeze is the plague's spread by sneezing and the rhyme ends with everyone falling down in imitation of falling dead from the plague.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Williamson.

While such interpretations fit the basic facts, other writers point out that no known English language version in full existed before 1881, that even earlier references to it and German versions are from the eighteenth century and none of these actually emphatically mention the plague.<sup>505</sup>

Two other cultural effects concerned the prestige of royalty, the nobility and Catholicism. Ideally these three forces entwined into upholding the feudal order, but were not the same although they all wanted their power, privileges and wealth preserved or expanded within the settled order. As with so many of the plague's effects, other factors entwined. With Edward III his reputation had a long way to fall from its zenith, reached just before the plague reached England. His rule until 1348 clearly had shown him to be one of England's great kings – then plague came and his failure to stop it reaching England, then contain it and its effects there, dramatically changed everything.

His attempts to reverse the plague's economic affects through legislation failed. These steps worsened both economic problems and his waning royal status. Within four years of his death, his policies to fix the economy and finance the war with France through fines and repeated poll taxes led to commoners' jacqueries such as England had never seen. There had been rebellions before, but they were organised and led by those nobles intent on replacing a king with themselves. In her *1381: the Year of the Peasants' Revolt* Juliet Barker draws on trial transcripts, confessions and other primary sources to show that this event was not totally the rebellion of peasants led by peasants, as it is often described. Her lists of rebels included established tradesmen, farmers and franklins, manor lords, clerks, lower-level clergy, bailiffs and burgesses and even several figures who while not nobility, were rich and connected to diverse English bureaucracies. This rebellion was initially against privilege, nobility and particularly onerous, overly

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<sup>505</sup> 'Ring a Ring A Rosie.' *Wikipedia*.

frequent and wasteful poll taxes. The ugly methods used to collect those taxes and overdue fines, to trace escaped villeins and to punish the reluctant and the evasive, were the revolt's immediate cause. Behind such obvious motives was an increasing self-confidence that came from the labour shortages caused by the plague.

Apart from germs and death what the Black Death also had spread was a new attitude to authority; in 1381 only the king escaped this contempt which often became literally murderous when rebels found authority figures, both secular and religious. In less than forty years the attitude to royalty had gone from its zenith to its nadir. At the rebellion's peak some leading figures issued a call to the king to end all villeinage and turn villeins into freedmen. This would have virtually ended the agricultural cornerstones of feudalism and nobility by confiscating much of their estates. The rebels could have only proposed this when villeinage and feudal controls and respect for superiors were obviously weakening. Other mass movements emerged with essentially similar motivations and attitudes. These included the two rebellions against tin mining taxes in Cornwall in 1497, the Lollard rebellion of 1414, and Jack Cade's 1450 virtual duplicate of 1381. Here Kentish peasants marched on London again, only to be defeated there, again. All these rebellions emphasised the changed relationships between classes which had been slowly developing since the middle of the thirteenth century and accelerating in pace after the second half of the 1340s.

Apparently one effect that did not happen from these changing attitudes and revolts was a rebellion against the concept of royal rule itself. Court transcripts show that many rebels admired Richard II, believing evil counsellors were the problem – or is this just that we do not have accounts of those rebels who said or thought otherwise? Being scared of royal retribution would have kept many rebels in line when interrogated or testifying. Such caution causing fears could have kept even compliant chroniclers silent about expressed hostility to royalty.

Another factor was that commonplace respect for royalty, a pattern of centuries and a key feudal belief, meant that the feudal system would not have been overthrown in a season. Despite the failure of royalty to stop plague outbreaks and their subsequent unpopular ordinances, statutes of labour and poll taxes over thirty years later, widespread royal respect was still evident. This respect was not just from those rebel leaders on trial in 1381. It was evident even then amongst the mass of rebels, as their acceptance of Richard II's unfulfilled promises to them show.

How in relation to the reoccurring plagues' effects did this change develop? Leonard W. Cowie does state that England experienced a breakdown of law and order during and after the 1348-1350 catastrophes. However the primary source document he reproduces does not mention abundant details and it reads so imprecisely that it might refer to such minor matters as name calling or a refusal to show the usual deference to supposed betters, as much as a physical rebellion.<sup>506</sup> He also refers to a plundered manor in Wales.<sup>507</sup> Riots in Durham occurred in 1349, motivated by a feared Scottish invasion that never eventuated combined with a feared spread of the plague, which did.<sup>508</sup> In the 1350s a rent strike in Chester was savagely repressed. William of Dene's comments and Winchester's riot against priests have been mentioned. Another riot was against a local church over an inadequate burial ground and in the 1361-1362 epidemic authorities sent out extra clerks, justices and sergeants at arms, suggesting some type of social crisis.<sup>509</sup> In 1377 a gathering to resist the lords by force

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<sup>506</sup> Cowie, p. 60.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>508</sup> Ibej,

<sup>509</sup> Partington, p. 104.

occurred, but did not then develop further.<sup>510</sup> The Rochester chronicler and cranky Knighton both note that laborers were arrogant and hostile, with a presumptuous new independence.<sup>511</sup> Prosecutions for looting dead plague victims of their clothes happened in Norfolk, but what proportion of such looting happened before the eyes of authorities?<sup>512</sup> Defiance took the form of refusing fines and frivolousness in dress in a society where class regimentation concerning clothing styles was strictly enforced.<sup>513</sup> Knighton also noted that during and after the great epidemic a widespread disrespect for clergy emerged, religious fervour slackened and “wickedness” became common. There were also refusals to work. Running off and demands for higher pay. This was in a society where the lower orders demanding anything from their superiors was unheard of.

However, social conflict is one thing and widespread social breakdown across the kingdom is another. These localised examples and a general pattern towards defiance and disbelief are not strong evidence of widespread and extreme social conflict before 1381, even although that remains very possible.

What was true was that the second half of the fourteenth century became a time when the English peoples’ respect for law and order, royalty, nobility, the church and the hierarchical nature of society began to crumble as the lower orders became much more concerned with self-interest. Obedience was no longer habitual or guaranteed. In the century to come isolated

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<sup>510</sup> Deaux, p. 197.

<sup>511</sup> Deaux, p. 146. Quoting Knighton.

<sup>512</sup> Creighton, p.140.

<sup>513</sup> Deaux, p. 140. p. 146. Quoting Knighton; Pollard, p. 186; Mark Ormond, *Edward III.* p.475.

incidents occurred which were unlike anything before the first epidemic. The fifteenth century would be a time of rent strikes.<sup>514</sup> Other defiance emerged. Twelve serfs in Hampshire murdered their lord in 1426.<sup>515</sup> The Cornish rebellions over tin mining taxes and prohibitions in 1497 had led to another unsuccessful march on London which had to be suppressed with a pitched battle against ten thousand rebels at Deptford Bridge.<sup>516</sup> In 1498 a rebellion of about a hundred people resulted in a court case where the rebel's leader, Roger Marshall, gave the defence in court that he was indulging in Robin Hood style practices.<sup>517</sup> This is a long way from the grovelling expected from the lower orders before their supposed betters in courts: this initial incident and the testimony reveal a fundamental contempt. This mixture of discontent and contempt, like the plague, would become dormant, and fuel the several large rebellious outbreaks after 1381 which have been mentioned.

This tendency towards a social breakdown is also evident not just from outright mass rebellions, but from a pattern of incidents recorded in a collection of family documents now known as the Paston Letters, written between the years 1440 and 1479. This collection focuses on important events to the Paston family. Based in Norfolk, their letters are mostly localised, although several refer to events in London and the Home Counties. They record the summary execution of the king's advisor, the

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<sup>514</sup> Christopher Dyer, 'A Redistribution of Incomes in Seventeenth Century England.' in Hilton, pp. 207-213.

<sup>515</sup> Pollard, p. 185.

<sup>516</sup> 'Cornish Rebellion of 1497.' *Wikipedia*.

<sup>517</sup> Hill, 'Did Robin Hood Exist?' p. 40.

Duke of Suffolk, by rebels and the murder of the Bishop of Suffolk.<sup>518</sup> Writers in the Paxton collection mention several instances of mob violence and crime, and also defiance of royal authority and the resentful actions and attitudes of the common people. What they do not mention except for brief and vague avoidance advice is the Black Death. This becomes understandable as continued outbreaks and royal policies concerning its effects were not the only causes for this new situation. The monarchy was clearly continually losing prestige and obedience for several reasons, but Edward III's reactions to the plague - or a lack of them, were a strong starting factor and one that his successors would inherit. Royal rule continued, but royal prestige and therefore authority, started waning in 1348 and with only a few brief exceptions, would continue to do so during the Medieval era. In his last years Edward III's strokes left him obviously mentally impaired and nearly helpless while his young mistress frequently controlled him. This earned him more contempt. Nobles and chroniclers correctly saw his successor, Richard II as weak, ineffectual, erratic, and given to making mistakes. In 1399 he was easily overthrown and imprisoned. His successor, Henry IV, was a usurping military strongman who ruled over a troubled, discontented and divided kingdom - just. The short and widely praised reign of Henry V was only an intermission in this divisive, wasting process which continued even after Henry VII's takeover in 1485 and would last until his granddaughter, Elizabeth I ruled.

Many accounts focus on England's first and greatest outbreak as being the sole cause of plague's long-term effects, but this was only the start: other outbreaks reinforced and perpetuated those initial effects. One of the most obvious was how reoccurring plague outbreaks kept lowering England's population. Amongst the most frequently used publication on this topic is William H. McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples* (1976). He states that England's

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<sup>518</sup> Barber pp. 29-30 p. 47. Letters describing the then recent events are reproduced.

population fell from 3.7 million in 1348 to perhaps 2.2 million in 1377. He focuses on this happening not only because of the first devastation, but because of recurrent plague outbreaks.<sup>519</sup> After that of 1348-1350 the next was the so-called children's plague, which started in the summer of 1361 and continued into the next spring. As previously mentioned, it was followed by other nationwide outbreaks, with many others following in the next three centuries.

Not all of these later outbreaks were nationwide or even widespread and unlike the 1348-1350 outbreak, no consistent contagion spread emerges. Oxford and Cambridge death rates recorded during the first three fourteenth century outbreaks indicate how severe Medieval outbreaks there were compared to the first:

1348 The death rate was ten times the normal levels.

1361 The death rate was seven times the normal levels.

1369 The death rate was three times the normal levels.

1375 The death rate was three times the normal levels.<sup>520</sup>

The Pope's personal physician Raymundus Chalmeli de Vinario, made similar calculations in 1383 for the outbreaks between 1348 and 1382: but going as far as to write that in 1282 only one in twenty were infected and almost all survived.<sup>521</sup> This should be treated sceptically as later European plague epidemics would show the virulence of the plague was still horrendous.

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<sup>519</sup> McNeill, p. 136 p. 158.

<sup>520</sup> Bean, p. 31 using Medieval figures.

<sup>521</sup> Cohn, Samuel K. Jr, "Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague."

While two groups of statistics applying to regional academic centres are not England and so cannot be applied with certainty to the whole kingdom, they do show a plausible pattern. These proportional figures indicate that combined with building up an immunity, people learnt how to prevent the contagion spreading. They also show that while in 1361-1362 the plague was less deadly, even if it was only slightly less so. Further evidence for this is from the inquisition post-mortems, which were reserved for the upper classes, but what figures are available indicate that in 1349 437 post mortems for plague were carried out and in 1361 338 were.<sup>522</sup> Naphy and Spicer estimate that this 1361-1362 epidemic killed around 20% of the remaining populace, while the next bout in 1369-1371 took 10% to 15% of even that new remainder.<sup>523</sup>

The 1361-1362 outbreak hit eleven years after the first great outbreak passed, just as the English must have been advancing with economic, social, demographic and psychological recovery. The 1361-1362 pestilence did not have the same surprise, massive death toll and sudden and therefore traumatic psychological effects as the first epidemic. Even so, it would have rekindled the fears, disruptions and misery of the first, dooming hopes that the nightmare had passed. With subsequent outbreaks psychological effects would surely have led to a dulled fear, dread and pessimism.

One odd effect was that in 1361-1362 children and adolescents, particularly boys, were so severely hit by the pestilence that contemporary chroniclers identified it as 'The plague on children'.<sup>524</sup> It would hit Edward III and his

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<sup>522</sup> Bean, p. 29. 'Deaths Recorded in Inquisition Post Mortems 1344-1375.' pp. 34-36.

<sup>523</sup> Naphy and Spicer, pp. 40-41.

<sup>524</sup> Boucher, p. 38.

queen harder than most as having lost two children in the 1349 plague havoc, they would lose two more both daughters to the childrens' plague.<sup>525</sup> Doctor Mike Ibeji has compiled seven primary sources; these all describe this pattern for English plague outbreaks in 1361-1362, the outbreaks covering apparently all the kingdom in 1368-1369 and 1371-1373 and then the 1378 outbreak in York and again in 1390-1391. They all disproportionately affected children and youth again.<sup>526</sup> A 1391 York chronicler's entry records a death toll of eleven thousand.<sup>527</sup> If accurate that figure would mean almost the entire city of York – or is the Diocese of York meant? Or does possibly 'York' mean Yorkshire? In 1382 London was hit by the pestilence, which chiefly hit boys and girls.<sup>528</sup> 1401 would see another outbreak affecting children, the last to fit this pattern.

While both Medieval and modern writers are puzzled by this pattern of child and adolescent deaths, possibilities emerge. These young casualties were those who had not survived earlier visitations and so had not built-up immunity. Or had a parent not passed on their immunity because somehow they survived without it? Why were males, particularly boys, the most likely target? Boys were given to being more in physical group activities which involved frequently touching each other, particularly in football and wrestling. Other contact forms include assorted sports, warfare, harvesting, shearing, hunting and doing apprentices' tasks. As a generalisation, boys are also frequently famed for their lack of hygiene.

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<sup>525</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*. pp.472-473.

<sup>526</sup> Ibeji,

<sup>527</sup> Marusek mentions York's figures.

<sup>528</sup> Creighton, p. 219.

Whatever the reasons, this targeting of the young would reduce procreation and add to the ways England's population declined or remained stagnant for several decades after 1401. Accepting these figures for the outbreaks which hit England between 1348 and 1401, gives a higher death toll of perhaps two million or more for these repeated outbreaks in this period, if making some allowance for natural increase over forty years is included. The economic and religious responses did not greatly differ in these later outbreaks as the pestilence still hit hard. In 1369 and 1375 the king's rents remained much reduced due to plague.<sup>529</sup> In the latter year an English cardinal persuaded the pope to give remission of sins. This was the same emergency pattern which the pope had authorised in the first Black Death epidemic and not one to be used lightly. In an act resembling that of 1258 London's mayor in 1390 bought up supplies of corn for starving people during that severe outbreak.<sup>530</sup>

Despite such charitable actions by some of the powerful resentments remained and with reason. The plague hit them much worse than it hit the rich, who could afford to flee and not necessarily to the forest; the rich often had other more remote, comfortable abodes.<sup>531</sup> The rich also had other advantages not fully appreciated at the time. The Charterhouse skeletons and assorted other sites with skeletons reveal chronic malnutrition and spinal injuries, suggesting that the poor would have had a lower resistance to diseases.<sup>532</sup> Other advantages for the rich were in their habitations. The 1377 poll tax had revealed that with the new post pestilence wealth they

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<sup>529</sup> Creighton, p. 217 p. 218.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>531</sup> Mortimer, p. 264; Emerson, p. 68; Lindsay & Groves, p. 31; Gasquet, p. 227.

<sup>532</sup> Morgan.

were living more spaciouly, with glazing, stored water, thick stone walls and sewerage all becoming more common.<sup>533</sup> The roof and ceilings of the better off were sometimes of stone, tile, prepared timber or slate, which preclude rat habitations, while the poor usually had thatch, straw or bracken roofing on wattle and mud walls.<sup>534</sup> Rats, vermin and birds love thatch and straw and this was the common method of roofing from prehistoric times onwards.<sup>535</sup> Even today it still exists. At the time of the 1348 plague the wealthier had more space in their abodes and their own beds, lessening physical contact. The warmth from fireplaces would also have reduced the need for shared body warmth.

By 1377 overcrowded, filthy London had definitely become another over generalisation, perhaps even a stereotypical fallacy. Wall of stone were supposed to be three feet thick and in some areas were sixteen feet high. Gardens in London attached to residential buildings and shops were common. Juliet Barker challenges the stereotype of late Medieval English people being habitually unwashed, pointing to frequent depictions of bathtubs, the way courtesy books emphasised washing the hands before every meal, existent bathrooms in the houses of the rich and public bathhouses.<sup>536</sup> Samuel K. Cohn also attacks the fallacy of late Medieval domestic filth and also mentions these improvements and others.<sup>537</sup> With sewerage and rubbish, the image of streets running with such things

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<sup>533</sup> Barker, pp. 85-90.

<sup>534</sup> Lindsay & Groves, p. 14; McNeill, p. 162.

<sup>535</sup> Gries and Gries, p, 34.

<sup>536</sup> Barker, pp. 89-90.

<sup>537</sup> Samuel K. Cohn , 'Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague.'

because residents regularly tossed buckets of rubbish and excreta into the streets also seems overdone. Official complaints are the basis for these stereotypes, but not for accepted standard practice. This was a crime in some circumstances, such as placing heaps of dung in a high street.<sup>538</sup> The city council established public toilets in London and in 1372 increased penalties for tossing rubbish into the streets.<sup>539</sup> Dung boats carted horse manure to farms. Even so, this new image needs several caveats. These are late Medieval images and examples, most coming from after the first great pestilence, when reforms were desperately needed and were worked on. They also apply to Canterbury, so what was happening elsewhere? If complaints in London about filth and rubbish are myriad and continuous, how typical are they of actual life? Were the apparently new attempts at hygiene and cleanliness little more than just that? Were these aims only sometimes achieved? What proportion of people lived hygienically?

The probability is that only the nobility, senior clerics, the rich and the rising middle class of merchants, tradespeople and those in lower orders working for all the previously mentioned groups, lived this way. This would explain to some extent why the rich were less likely to be infected by plague, for across the centuries health workers and observers, in different locales across the globe, reported that poverty, overcrowding, filth and plague were connected in cause and effect with epidemics.

In Medieval England the poorer classes, had their beds of seldom changed straw. Here they huddled together for body warmth while fully clothed to sleep, often with animals in the same room. In such conditions they must have unintentionally become plague vectors, as due to their proximity to biting fleas and rats and also touching and coughing householders they

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<sup>538</sup> Gries and Gries, p. 180.

<sup>539</sup> Barker,, p. 88.

could easily become contagion vectors. Common animals could be carriers Knighton narrates how thousands of sheep became plague fatalities and that even scavenging birds would not touch their carcasses.<sup>540</sup>

Unfortunately, he does not state if this happened in one locale or across the kingdom. Which species infected which?. Sheep and humans were habitually in close proximity and at shearing time this became intense, with the greatest possible physical contact. This contact involved shearers holding sheep closely while shears clipped and usually caused nicks and cuts to sheep and sometimes shearers. This exchange of blood could easily have led infected shearers to infecting sheep. Excreta, offal and rubbish could also spread plague and the poorer areas apparently did not benefit much from attempts to clean London. The plague hit particularly badly in overcrowded, unsanitary sections of English cities.<sup>541</sup> Centuries later different commentators noticed this same pattern in the third pandemic.

Evidence for the epidemic's effects on England's economy reveal contradictory experiences, suggesting very localised responses to differing pressures, mostly based on what their local products were. While meat from straying animals must have been common in the countryside, prices soared in the towns.<sup>542</sup> During this crisis even at Lent when fish was a religiously required food source, even the rich could not purchase fish at any price.<sup>543</sup> This must reflect the ban on shipping and travel and perhaps fishing out rural streams and rivers in the preceding years as trade in meat

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<sup>540</sup> Deaux, p. 137. This is part of Knighton's much quoted and much reproduced description of what the Black Death did to England.

<sup>541</sup> Deaux, pp. 122-123.

<sup>542</sup> Hesker, Chapter IV Mortality.

<sup>543</sup> Deaux, p. 196. Medieval source quoted.

was stopped when travel was banned. Plague refugees and quarantined locals would have done this. Iron, salt, and clothing prices doubled.<sup>544</sup> Some apparent eyewitnesses and subsequent historians write of prices dropping due to a lack of purchasers. Others write of high prices for manufactured goods caused by scarcity. This happened because tradesmen died, hid or moved off for higher wages. An account from near Rochester which might plausibly be applied to other locales mentions that once the lower class after being enriched, refused to work, impoverishing their lord. They then committed unspecified “outrages.”<sup>545</sup>

The economic situation seems another outrage to the anonymous chronicler, as even when commoners wages tripled “churchmen, knights and other worthies” could barely persuade surviving commoners to work for them. The higher classes were forced to thresh their corn, plough and “perform every other unskilled task.”<sup>546</sup> To make the situation even worse to the chronicler “the poor and servile have been enriched and the rich impoverished.”

Others were also impoverished as the catastrophes severely disrupted trade, where it still existed. Tardily the King had banned all foreign travelling long after the plague arrived in England. That law made for scarcities amongst consumers and either stockpiles amongst producers or empty shelves. What was likely was that at best seafaring trade was irregular and therefore minimal. This meant that most of England’s lucrative external wool market collapsed during the plague years. Trade by

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>545</sup> Anonymous Chronicler of Rochester Priory, Excerpt from ‘Chronicle of the Black Death.’ (1348). Introduced, reproduced and titled ‘Triple Wages.’ By Furtado, p. 64.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.,

road was also greatly reduced. Little of that was with Scotland or even internal: even where the king's laws were not working to quarantine, locals discouraged travellers from entering manors, villages and towns. Even this scenario assumes two things: that traders and suppliers could find enough working travellers willing to risk contamination by coming into contact with others and that surviving wool traders had enough shorn wool stored to trade. As the listing of affected manors in this work and other passages show, accounts from the time make it clear that some manors and farms still functioned, albeit only to some extent, but very many others did not. Those that did were likely to put their produce into storage due to blocked roads and ports. Other manors and farms were abandoned or occupied by the dead - or if by the living, by bewildered, traumatised survivors. Chroniclers describe abandoned farms and straying animals. The price of most farm animals did seem to drop dramatically. This sounds probable. In rural areas why pay for animals when large numbers were now no longer owned, straying and frequently could be easily taken without penalty or cost? Opportunists or the desperate could purchase even land, farms or materials extremely cheaply or trade them for rare goods or promises of labour. Some could just take them, with or without promissory notes.

The reasons why this could happen are obvious: so many estate workers died or fled the plague that crops often went unharvested and fruit unpicked. With few shepherds, shearers and drovers remaining, they could rarely track straying farm animals and gain work at the same time. Surviving tax or debt collectors and law enforcers would also have been loath to travel. Even if they did follow standard procedure, would they have strived to come into contact with the dead, dying or the possibly infected? If workers could not produce much, if anything at all, where production survived it was on much lower levels and so both profits and taxes had to be reduced.<sup>547</sup> Surviving workers who stayed frequently

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<sup>547</sup> Knighton, p. 148.

demanded and got much higher wages.<sup>548</sup> Many purchased their freedom or left.<sup>549</sup>

In an attempt to curb these tendencies and to restore traditional feudalism Edward III issued the first Statute of Labourers in 1349, which became a preamble to the second in 1351.<sup>550</sup> A third would follow in 1368. The first words of the first statute clearly show that the King was not the protector of all English people, but was blatantly trying to enforce going back to the past world of poverty and subservience for most of his subjects. An early step in this prolonged process was to have the employer pose as a victim of malice and outrageous pay demands and therefore he could jail his supposed malicious bullies. Alternatively, the compliant would be on wages restored to what they had been in 1346.<sup>551</sup> The writer of the statute makes this blatantly clear:

That every person, able in body and under the age of 60 years, not having enough to live upon, being required, shall be bound to serve him that doth require him, or else be committed to gaol until he shall find surety to serve, and that the old wages shall be given and no more; whereas lately it was ordained by our lord king and by the assent of the prelates, earls, barons and others of his council, against the malice of servants who were idle and not willing to serve after the pestilence without excessive wages, that such manner of servants, men as well as women, should be bound

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>549</sup> Phillip Lindsay & Reg Groves, p. 30.

<sup>550</sup> R.B. Dobson, pp. 63-64.

<sup>551</sup> Dobson, reproducing the 1351 Statute of Labourers. p. 64

to serve, receiving the customary salary and wages in the places where they are bound to serve in the twentieth year of the reign of the king that now is, or five or six years before, and that the same servants refusing to serve in such a manner should be punished by imprisonment of their bodies, as is more plainly contained in the said statute. Whereupon commissions were made to diverse people in every county to enquire and punish all those who offend against the same. And now for as much as it is given to the king to understand in the present parliament by the petition of the commons that the servants having no regard to the ordinance but to their ease and singular covetousness, do withdraw themselves from serving great men and others, unless they have livery and wages double or treble of what they were wont to take in the twentieth year and earlier, to the great damage of the great men and impoverishment of all the commonality; whereof the commonality prays remedy. Wherefore in the parliament by the assent of the prelates, earls, barons, and those of the commonality assembled there, in order to refrain the malice of the servants, there are ordained and established the underwritten articles.

The twelfth year here is a mistake, referring to 1347, the year before the plague reached England. Edward's reign actually began in 1327, but his mother was briefly his regent.

In that same document the king then goes on to specify pay rates and punishments for refusing to accept these low pay rates, or for those trying to leave their designated areas, answering back to his magistrates who were enforcing these laws and speaking against the laws.\* These punishments included putting offenders in stocks and enforcing jail terms. Beggars strong enough to work, but who did not, were to be imprisoned.<sup>552</sup>

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\* This document is included as an appendix.

As specified in his statutes he even gave heavy fines to some of those paying out high wages, including abbots and priors, greater and smaller landowners and even lesser and higher lords.<sup>553</sup> We can only wonder what is the difference between a king and a modern mafia patriarch. Ancestry perhaps? A pattern of sanctimonious religiosity? However, like so many attempts by some form of government to override the iron law of supply and demand, this policy was essentially a failure. It had an inbuilt problem with compliance: very high rising prices, particularly in the towns and cities meant 1348 levelled wages could buy little. Who could or would work for wages that still left them starving?

In 1351 the king's solution of jailing rebellious labour only exacerbated the situation as it made the potential supply of labour scarcer: suspects flee and jailbirds and those in pillories cannot work. Even Knighton, aligned with the royal family, could see this. He described how when authorities jailed some recalcitrant laborers, others fled to the forests and the woods. Whatever their motives even the kings jailers essentially disobeyed the king. Probable factors such as pity, insufficient supplies for prisoners, overcrowded space in jails or bribes, affected several jailers. They soon released those held for violating the new statutes on a promise to seek employment.<sup>554</sup> Much more appears to be going on in this conflict than Knighton describes. He does not tell us if those fleeing and jailed were in large or small numbers, or if this was a widespread pattern or localised. What did happen to those jailed and then released to find work? He does not tell us if what proportion did find work, and if it was found fast. How

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<sup>552</sup> Coulton, Volume I pp. 98-99.

<sup>553</sup> Gasquet, p. 230. Knighton commented on this.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.,

many did flee to the forests? Scores? Hundreds? Thousands? More? This pattern of escaping laws by hiding in the forests was an ancient one, but it became common and amongst the law-abiding from when the pestilence started in 1348 onwards, but for how long did it continue? The fact that in 1360 a statute was made concerning those who were runaways fleeing their employer for towns or the country could be seized, taken before the courts and branded on the head shows that large numbers were runaways.<sup>555</sup> The royal punishments listed in 1360 for those refusing to hand over runaways also supports this and provides evidence of sympathy for runaways among officials and possibly a need for their labour and spending power. The king would not have concerned himself with small numbers or little problems. Were they released on their promise because of the jailers' gullibility or pity, the King's sense of mercy or because somebody high up realised what Knighton knew, that those jailed or escaped do not work? The obvious and unanswered questions here reveal the problems in primary sources. The questions cannot be answered because the precise, more detailed needed information is not there – and Knighton's account, despite its omissions, remains one of the most detailed about the 1348-1350 English plague and its immediate aftermath.

We can easily imagine Edward III as a fascistic tyrant enforcing unpopular laws. In his defence, the idea of a democracy (which politically was where England was very slowly heading, albeit in an inchoate manner) would have been unimaginable to him. He would have seen the rebellious lower orders as little better than bandits or servants of Satan and en-masse as a mob bent on increasing chaos and destruction. It was his sworn duty and the purpose of his life to keep the kingdom in good order. This meant upholding traditions, laws, the church and the hierarchical society that had existed for centuries. He was not the worst force for repression. Amazingly

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<sup>555</sup> Coulton, Volume II. p. 99.

this was The House of Commons, frequently depicted as a force for furthering democratic rights and opposing exploitation, certainly – just as long as it suited their self-interest. The Commons sometimes went even further than Edward III did in trying to maintain the repression that was also in their self-interest, to keep the lower orders below them servile, quiet and at their tasks. In 1352 they made it legally easier to repossess runaway serfs and return them to their customary manors.<sup>556</sup> The 1351 and 1360 ordinances have been mentioned, but there were others. The Commons tried petitioning to ban villein's sons from school, but this was rejected, then in 1376 the Commons wanted beggars imprisoned and giving alms to them forbidden. In 1388, eleven years after Edward III died, and seven after Richard II promised more freedoms to the lower orders, a royal statute proclaimed that those who had laboured till the age of twelve at the plough, the cart or at husbandry would labour at their profession all their lives.<sup>557</sup> In that same year tradesmen with little work at harvest time were legally compelled to work at the harvest, while able bodied beggars were forbidden to collect alms and would be sent to the stocks for not working. All Edward III's power and waning popularity and support for economic repression and occupational restrictions from the House of Commons could not change the essential basis of economics, the power of supply and demand. Even his son, the Black Prince, had to make concessions to his tenants and workers so that his estate would survive. A 1377 rewrite of these laws was rigidly enforced in Kent, where alone in England, villeinage had never been made legal and so subservience did not permeate society as much as it did in the rest of England. That attitude led to defiance when poll taxes were introduced there. It cannot be a coincidence that Kent became a stronghold and leading recruiting ground for the people's march

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<sup>556</sup> Wooding p.362

<sup>557</sup> Coulton,, Volume II p. 98.

on London four years later and then again for two peasant rebellions in 1414 and 1450.<sup>558</sup> Despite their unpopularity and the general ineffectuality of their enforcers, these laws remained, perpetuating resentment and so becoming a long-term cause of uprisings.<sup>559</sup> After the risings these statuette of labour laws became dead letter laws, but remaining until their 1863 repeal. The fate of the sergent-at arms group shows this growing if inchoate contempt for authority connected to royalty. They were held in contempt even before the rebellion, targeted during it and faded away after it. Some belief in kingship remained, as it led to Richard II's finest moment. When rebels massed at London, alone and on his own initiative, he courageously rode out to calm the murderous rebels, who believed his promises. He rode away unharmed, to tell them after the rebellion's leaders were executed and the rebels' support dissipated that villeins they were and villeins they would remain. Once again he got something wrong.

The labour scarcity continued for centuries as further plague outbreaks and other diseases hit much of England. These further outbreaks combined with assorted war fatalities and the beginnings of migration into a developing empire starting in the thirteenth century with Wales, Scotland and Medieval North-East Ireland to effect population levels and employment. These factors meant that the population did not increase to any great extent until the late seventeenth century, when it was once again over five million.<sup>560</sup> That figure was roughly what England's population has been estimated as being in 1300. For over a century after 1348-1350 the demand for labour was very strong and initially urgent due to dislocation and scarcity, much of it caused by the plague. Labour therefore demanded

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<sup>558</sup> Bolton, p. 46.

<sup>559</sup> Keen, p. 43; Tuchman, p. 121; R.B. Dobson, p. 51.

<sup>560</sup> McNeill, p. 136 Table. He states that the population nearly doubled between 1430 and 1690; 'Demography of England.' *Wikipedia*.

higher wages and better conditions. From a twenty-first century perspective working conditions in Tudor and Stuart Great Britain before the rise of trade unionism still seem extremely exploitative, true enough, yet consider how far they had come from the vanished world of merchets, heriots, brandings, pillories, enforced marriages, banned migration and serfdom.

Clearly in the plague's aftermath even many of the rich and the aristocrats were in a financial nightmare – at least in the short term. The long term was different for landowners. History, like law, cannot function on plausibility or probabilities being elevated to certainties. What evidence we have suggests attempts at proper bequeathing, and much legal confusion, suggesting opportunistic confiscations or forced sales frequently happened.

While most of the rich may have lost economically in the short term, as trade was almost eradicated, and prices and wages rose, but even during plague outbreaks they gained long-term assets. Hecker's cynical comment about lawyers enriching themselves from a rich harvest of chaos should be borne in mind. Some may have gained buboes from touching some of these assets picked up from the infected dead, but livestock, farmhouses, wagons, carts, mines, fisheries, ferries, boats, boats and toll bridges were all safer takes. Frequently landowners legally gained more land, especially if it bordered their estates, which due to deaths could not be given to deeded heirs. While in the short term this was often valueless land, assets are never stationary in their value. Turning such land to pasture, trading it for labour or getting new tenants means that they or their replacements eventually prospered.

One other very different effect of the plague that ultimately would strongly benefit conservative politics in England (and still does) was the rise of the yeomanry in the years after the first plague outbreak faded from England in 1350. Yeomanry were self-employed farmers who owned their own land. Such farms were usually worked by family members and perhaps a few servants or seasonal labourers. The yeomanry where a small minority in

the decades before the first plague hit. However, they were a continually growing proportion of the population in the subsequent decades. As villeinage slowly died out in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century yeomanry's freeholding farming numbers increased. They were around forty thousand, about 2½% of England's total number as this process developed just after the plague.<sup>561</sup> During the reign of Henry VII between a quarter and a third of English land was owned by the gentry.<sup>562</sup> This percentage would increase in both numbers and proportions and even more so during the later Tudor and Stuart eras. By 1600 the yeomanry numbered between sixty and eighty thousand and by 1640 nearly half the landowners were yeomanry or husbandmen.<sup>563</sup> They often branched out, investing in or owning other business such as taverns, fishing boats, barges, ferries, mines, potteries, smiths or tanneries. They would often have relatives owning or working in these industries, giving them a link that made them stronger. Their strong position in the House of Commons, their economic power in the rural areas which still dominated England until the second third of the nineteenth century and the way they were a force for stability, all gave them much more influence and power than their initial proportion of the overall population suggests. From an almost negligible factor in English politics before the fourteenth century, these farmers would become a powerful political force in the Tudor and Stuart years - and they still are. By 1374 with merchants and others who were part of the emerging middle class they had formed a block in parliament. That block was numerically and psychologically strong enough to challenge what was aptly known as the court faction, which as the name suggests were those

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<sup>561</sup> Bolton, p. 53.

<sup>562</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*. p.49.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*,

who sided with the king.. Their new self-confidence and obvious power were strong enough to gain the support of the slowly dying Prince of Wales, desperate to have their support for his son Richard's primogeniture.<sup>564</sup> The yeomanry's change in demographics and social position is not hard to fathom. Cash payments meant villeins and labourers gained savings to buy land to farm. Death taking so many tenants, farmers and workers meant an abundance of untenanted, untilled, unproductive land, so land became cheap, frequently desperately cheap and therefore affordable. This assumes that all newly occupied land was paid for which must be erroneous, so how much land was just confiscated or just taken? In contrast as mentioned the traditional estate owners, the manor lords and nobles, had land, but also had taxes, tithes, upkeep, military expenses and wages to pay, with little means of generating income due to labour shortages, trade bans and land having reverted to wilderness. They would have been glad for any cash and peasants could now pay for what the owners could rarely use.<sup>565</sup> Others traded their labour for land; the former being scarce and the latter now being abundant. This trade alone shows that the Black Death was making what had once been inconceivable a tangible and commonplace reality.

As mentioned, it is also very likely that frequently runaway serfs or villagers found abandoned farms or fields, took them over, herded up straying animals, harvested untended fields and picked untended orchards and by doing so, did well for themselves – if they did not catch the plague while plundering or scavenging. This upward social mobility was more likely to happen successfully in the 1350s and after than in the years 1348-1350. If local authorities still functioned or even existed, where they likely

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<sup>564</sup> Emerson, pp. 252-255.

<sup>565</sup> Deaux, p. 195.

to remove someone who paid taxes and tithes, and who provided food and trade products in a devastated land? Did such desperate, probably already criminal people threaten the lives of officials who threatened them with exposure or arrest? Would officials in that situation then proceed to enforce the law? Could they? For survival it would be wiser to back away. To gain ease, prosperity, stability, paid taxes, donations, popularity and compassion it would also be wiser to back away. The first thieves or scavengers to take possession would perhaps soon join in expected communal efforts to defend the land from later thieves and brigands. Medieval records of such people would surely have been rarer than their being found out. While plausible, there is some evidence that this pattern was so. As mentioned, the 1360 edict threatening bailiffs and mayors for refusing to hand over escapees suggests that this refusal or ignoring was a common pattern as the king would surely not have concerned himself with a case or two.. What can only be extremely unlikely must be that downtrodden, poverty-stricken estate workers would have let such an opportunity to gain freedom and wealth pass by. Why stay on the same estates where their "betters" had exploited them? Why passively wait for the next overlord to arrive and enslave them, if the plague did not kill them first? Would new authorities replacing their dead predecessors know who was a freed man or a runaway? Would they have cared or made trouble for themselves by launching such investigations? For historians the great number of destroyed documents in the deliberate burning of any type of records in 1381 makes definitely answering this impossible. It is unlikely that many such records were made during the chaos of 1348-1350, when more urgent matters preoccupied the survivors.

This would have been different for their imitators a few years later, eager to be servile and efficient for their employers, so as to keep themselves in some comfort. While rebels usually burned the records to stop tax collecting and possession disputes, these burnings supplied a rare and welcome opportunity for runaway serfs and escaped villeins to conceal their past, their lack of records or their names on lists of runaways. In the

1360s and 1370s, long after authority was re-established, lawmen still pursued some of these runaways and their later imitators, with varying levels of success.<sup>566</sup> With those not caught, were successful adaptations and upward social mobility rare or common? Their descendants would be law-abiding rural dwellers, their farms an inheritance for someone in each generation to come. Others would have migrated to cities and towns where detection was even more difficult. While definite answers about how this process worked across all of England are unavailable, indications within scanty remaining evidence and what we know of human nature and survival instincts make these scenarios plausible. It would take the Industrial Revolution, starting about three hundred years after the fourteenth and fifteenth century plagues ended, before another event would have such a massive effect on England's demographics and eventually create a larger class than the yeomanry, the urban proletariat.

Usually most of the yeomanry and their middle-class allies (who were sometimes relations or neighbours) were radicals against the manor lord's bailiff's and those authority figures who threatened their newly found upward social mobility. However, these same people were usually fiercely conservative towards anything perceived as a threat from those below them or outside their peer group. This attitude was evident in the laws coming out of The House of Commons which were aimed at the classes below theirs. For the yeomanry their farms and their class were the real England. The word yeomanry became synonymous with staid, dependably conservative patriotism – and for good reasons. The rebellions of 1381, 1414, 1450, 1497 and the English Civil Wars of the seventeenth century became forgotten exceptions. Fearing a loss of the liberties they had and sensing chances to gain more, they frequently rebelled against royalty. Oliver Cromwell's rise and the failure of his Commonwealth to outlive him for long shows both the power of his yeomanry class and their need for

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<sup>566</sup> Barker, pp. 73-76.

allies. After the 1688 revolution royalty and yeomanry would be in a permanently symbiotic relationship - and still are.

Before the plague other factors had also weakened England's feudal bonds. Knighthood, the basis of nobility and a cornerstone of the feudal order, was also coming under pressure from technological changes. What would English archers at Crecy in 1346 and again at Agincourt in 1415, have thought of the superiority of French aristocrats, as filled with arrows, they piled up in the mud without even coming close? Longbows, cannons and crossbows (three sources for the sure destruction for armoured cavalry the world of knighthood relied on) were first used in England decades before the Black Death hit.<sup>567</sup> What would those seeing bombardiers successfully battering castles, the embodiment and outstanding example of noble power, think of that power upon seeing its material evidence demolished? Would the English commoners have applied their contempt only to foreign aristocrats they had defeated on the battlefield - or would they also apply these feelings to their own aristocratic knightly commanders, their supposed betters?

By 1381 rebels were also openly contemptuous of all hierarches as their chants and slogans demonstrate.<sup>568</sup> The most memorable example of this mentality came from a sermon by John Bull. In the plethora of dull English Anglican sermons that have accumulated over the centuries and had no social effect, Bull's was a standout. Their chant succinctly mixed defiance, contempt and a rejection of the feudal order:

When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the  
gentleman?

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<sup>567</sup> Tuchman, pp. 70-71.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., pp. 374-375.

Their plundering of parts of London and murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury also shows their level of hostility.<sup>569</sup> While immediate causes for that rebellion were obvious, these attitudes so obvious in their questioning chant also suggest a changing attitude to nobility and a developing self-confidence amongst the lower orders. The way they demanded and got higher wages contributed to that self-confidence. Knighthood and nobility survived, albeit transformed and with less absolutist power; but their best days were before the Black Death.

The same idea applies to that other mainstay of the feudal system, the Catholic Church. Two obvious reasons emerge for this. Believers frequently attributed the plague's cause as being the will of God, his punishments for sinfulness.<sup>570</sup> In his warnings against the plague and in his descriptions of what it was doing to continental Europe Bishop Zouche blamed the continentals for forgetting God in the previous days of prosperity.<sup>571</sup> At that same time the Prior of Canterbury succinctly expressed a similar concept, focusing more on a learning process than punishment, even if the punishment is harsh:

He often allows plagues, miserable famines, conflicts, wars and other forms of suffering to arise, and uses them to terrify and torment and so drive out their sins.

‘Prayers to Save the Realm’

Words like this would have been little if any comfort to the survivors living

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid., pp. 376.

<sup>570</sup> Marriot, p. 11; The Metropolitan of Canterbury, p. 157; de Mussis, pp. 128-129; Ziegler p. 268.

<sup>571</sup> Erenow, The Bishop's sermon of 28<sup>th</sup> July 1348 is quoted.

in fear: people quite reasonably asked why the plague attacked good and bad alike.<sup>572</sup> The way requested repentant prayers had no effect on stopping the plague would surely have also lowered the church's credibility. This alienation also happened at the local level as many priests fled to save themselves, while their superiors had to pay others massive amounts to have underlings stay or be replacements.<sup>573</sup> While it remains unclear how many fled, or in what proportion of the whole, some indications emerge from the churchmen's resignation statements. In Lichfield diocese before the plague hit those leaving averaged six a year, during the plague the number reached forty-two and in the epidemic's aftermath it came to thirty-five, while other dioceses also showed great resignation increases during this time.<sup>574</sup> However, this cannot be the full numbers; how many would delay fleeing to pen out a resignation where they needed speed to avoid the deadly infection? How many were literate so they could submit a resignation? How many others hated being in orders and saw a chance to escape, as by being assumed dead they could move and begin a new life?

A very large proportion of England's priests did die during the epidemic. Amongst lesser clergy perhaps four in ten died, while 18% of Bishops were fatalities.<sup>575</sup> Gasquet states 25,000 clergy died, half of his total, but his were

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<sup>572</sup> De Mussis, pp. 128-129.

<sup>573</sup> Ralph of Shrewsbury, a Letter of January 1349. Reproduced by Ziegler, p. 128; Coulton, Volume II. Coulton also mentions Bishop Ralph's comments and quotes from several other Medieval sources referring to deserting priests. pp. 133-135. These comments are mostly from bishops and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

<sup>574</sup> Coulton Volume II. p. 134.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

account shows that he based his conclusions on assumptions for both the total and the death rate.<sup>576</sup> Such a high number is in the range of 48% of the clergy dying which is possible, but lacking in evidence. Whatever the numbers, from the brief records it remains unclear what proportion were self-sacrificing martyrs, how many were fallible humans and what proportion were mercenaries.

The high toll would have been amongst their most sincere and self-sacrificing priests, who tended to those dying and sick, making the survivors who probably evaded or abandoned their duties look even worse. One account from Paris describes how the holy sisters of the Hotel-Dieu continued to work amongst the plague patients there “with the most perfect gentleness and humility,” knowing what was the risk they were running.<sup>577</sup> About Five hundred of them died there and the contagion wiped out the order - which volunteers replaced, but it was wiped out yet again, there was no shortage of replacing volunteers.<sup>578</sup> A Carmelite friar wrote this incredible account as an excerpt of a general history of France during the Hundred Years War. Would he have lied in a little-known general history to do his little bit to restore the reputation of the church? Even if accepted as genuine, how extraordinary was that martyrdom? Should examples of Catholic behaviour from outside England be considered and then compared to behaviour within England’s orders?

If groups of English nuns and clergy did sacrifice themselves like this, records of such sacrifice do not seem to exist. Could this be because the

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<sup>576</sup> Gasquet, p. 237

<sup>577</sup> Jean De Venette, ‘The Chronicles of Jean De Venette., (c.1348-1349) is introduced, reproduced and retitled ‘Devotion of the Holy Sisters.’ by Furtado, pp. 58-59.

<sup>578</sup> De Venette; Hecker mentions the fatality numbers and the way there was no shortage of volunteers. Chapter IV Mortality,

witnesses also died? In a society where few were literate no one was left to record such courageous behaviour? Another less obvious factor was that martyrdom was a normal expectation for clergy and the public would have taken martyrdom for granted. In contrast, abandoning their parish in a crisis, and perhaps their faith, would have been unexpected, astounding and caused anger and a sense of betrayal. These reactions would have frequently led to recording this unusual and unexpected development. Most historians go along with the Medieval eyewitnesses and writers in holding those who fled in contempt –but should we?

For those large numbers who did flee, in their defence it can be said that if their duty included serving the dying so that they would soon be dying by the plague themselves, that this was a very big ask. People expected them to tend in the most degrading circumstances those who only rarely survived. Their tending did very little good and in some situations must have only spread the disease, either by recklessly ignoring it or by heroically risking becoming contagious out of compassion for the sick.<sup>579</sup> By not fleeing they faced a horrible death. As descriptions in this work show, a more cruel, degrading and agonising way to die would be difficult to imagine. Of course, by fleeing an unknowable proportion of more escaping clergy would have spread the contagion. Even Martin Luther, one of the harshest critics of selfishness and personal failings within the church, when addressing the question in advice to another reverend, did not blame those fleeing pestilence and did go beyond implying that priests should stay and those fleeing should be careful not to spread the disease.<sup>580</sup> Following his own advice, he stayed to administer to the sick and the dying in the city of Wittenberg.

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<sup>579</sup> Hecker, Chapter II. The Disease.

<sup>580</sup> Martin Luther, A Letter to the Reverend Doctor Johann Hess, pastor of Breslau. 1527. is introduced, reproduced and retitled ‘A Christian Response to the Plague.’ by Furtado, pp.72-74.

Even allowing for this defence of those abandoning their duties, their effect on belief in Catholicism could only have been extremely negative and reinforced the waning of belief caused by the plague's effects. To add to this waning was a simultaneous waning in the considerable economic power of the Catholic Church. In *The Black Death of 1348-1349* Cardinal Gasquet quotes extensively from church records of the time, showing abbeys, monasteries and churches just barely surviving by begging off payments, pleading for remittances and even sometimes denying charity. The authorities gave facing financial ruin as the cause. This would have caused resentment. It also raised the dilemma of if the great pestilence was God's punishment for wickedness as the church preached, why were so many churchmen dying? Were they then wicked? If not, were they wrong as to the cause and therefore not speaking with the voice of the God that they were supposedly representing? These questions could only pose an obvious and invidious choice for the priesthood, and in a situation where doubts about them and resentments could emerge. As the church no longer was involved in massive building programs it employed fewer laymen - and how much of their professed belief was because of what their employers professed and their need to keep their employers' goodwill?

Other major factors already at work to weaken the church's appeal were the papal schism of 1305, when two competitors competed to be pope and the failure of the crusades to hold the defended Christian sectors of the Holy Land. Acre which was the last Christian bastion in what had been the crusader kingdom of Outremer; fell to the Moslems in 1291.<sup>581</sup> During the fourteenth century attempts to revive the crusading spirit and reconquer the Holy Lands only ended in squabbles, futility and disasters. For any thinking Catholic these continual Crusaders' failures and disasters raised questions: did God want these lands reconquered? If not, why not? Was

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<sup>581</sup> Anthony Bridge, *The Crusades*. London; 1980. pp. 277-296.

his church really his instrument to achieve victory? Were they failing to achieve that victory because they were far from God?

Demoralising as these questions were, worse came with the Papal schism of 1378, when the feuding papal competitors totalled three. Some commoners may not have even known of this and those that did may have been more puzzled than doubting in their faith, but other causes for doubt and contempt were before their eyes. These included the lucrative market in superstitions, relics and pilgrimages, and the increasing veniality of the church. The latter was also obvious in their endless demands for free labour, tithes, taxes, fees and financial penances. These factors directly affected the English commoners and predate the plague. In 1276 at Hammondsworth rioting tenants refused to render due services to the priory there, saying that they would rather die. They threatened to burn the priory; royal forces had to restore order.<sup>582</sup> In 1327 Saint Albans would experience a virtual uprising against the church which involved hundreds taking monks hostage and church estates being plundered and burned.<sup>583</sup> This type of thing occurred on a widespread scale during the 1381 rebellion, when even a few clergy joined the rebels, who murdered high-ranking churchmen. Not only labour scarcities led to the survivors demanding higher wages; a scarcity of priests had the same effect. Knighton, himself a priest, noted how surviving priests made similar big money claims to serve.<sup>584</sup> Near illiterate recruits were brought (pun intended) into both holy orders and minor roles.<sup>585</sup> Archbishop Islop revealed little choice existed as Church numbers declined to such a low

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<sup>582</sup> Barker, p. 71.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>584</sup> Gasquet, pp. 238-239. Knighton quoted.

<sup>585</sup> Deaux, pp. 188-189; Casquet, p. 251. Wadding quoted.

level that it was heading for no priests.<sup>586</sup> As even Wadding, a Franciscan annalist and the priestly chronicler Knighton separately commented, almost inevitably this shortage and lowering of entry standards led to a loss of literacy, fervour, knowledge and priestly discipline.<sup>587</sup>

Another emergent problem was that the church had always gained awe from the common people and not just because of its displays of wealth and munificence. Its massive cathedrals and churches with their bright colours, decorative precious stones, statues, carvings, costumes and lead lights offered a vision of a colourful afterlife to come. The churches and cathedrals offered a welcome contrast to their dreary peasant existence in hovels and at best, cottages. The priesthood were the caretakers of this uplifting world, with what was tangible, what was spoken and promised as the word of God was in their custody through their literacy and possession of the texts. They were usually remote to some extent from the common people and by being consecrated, were deliberately made so. This changed when to bolster the priestly ranks, those who were familiar commoners were suddenly made priests. How could illiterates and near illiterates interpret and even recite the word of God? What would these new priests think of their new role of custodianship? The grandiose art and architecture, so inspiring, was in disillusioning contrast to its administrators. The proverb familiarity breeds contempt has a double edge here. These new priests would have developed contempt for the worldly ways that they had inherited and the commoners would have contempt for their suddenly promoted neighbours and relatives.

Which of these factors were the most important, how they interacted and who they affected still causes speculation rather than certainty. To what

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<sup>586</sup> Deaux, p. 188.

<sup>587</sup> Gasquet, p. 239 quoting Knighton, p. 25. Wadding quoted.

extent disillusionment from the church's reaction to the plague influenced England's later fourteenth century religious rebels and critics, the Lollards and John Wycliff and his followers, remains unknown. Despite the three mass rebellions during the long existence of Lollardry from the 1380s until at least 1457 and the murders of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1381 by rebels and the Bishop of Suffolk in the 1440s, no major religious rebellion against Catholicism occurred. The Lollards were initially popular in 1382, but Richard II, his successors and civic authorities worked closely and vigorously with the church to suppress the movement.<sup>588</sup> The Lollards became a persecuted, secretive fringe movement that even Wycliffe believed was too extreme.<sup>589</sup> A long gap emerged between the 1340s disillusionment and Henry VIII's start on establishing the Anglican Church in 1536.

What is frequently evident in this period is a waning of widespread fervour for the church during and after the first great plague. As previously mentioned, even violent incidents against the church leadership, records and buildings happened, but not against some social events, organised charity and causes of employment. Commoners enjoyed their miracle plays, their holy days and festivals based in Biblical themes. Lucy Wooding lists several massive building projects, the spread of printed bibles and charitable organizing during the first third of the Tudor era.<sup>590</sup> This suggests the widespread popularity for the church - and yet people also

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<sup>588</sup> Coulton, Volume II pp. 125-127 pp. 136-137. Knighton quoted.

<sup>589</sup> M. E. Aston, 'Lollardry and Sedition, 1381-1431.' *Past & Present*, Volume 17, Issue 1, April 1960, Pages 1-44, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/17.1.1>, accessed 2018.

<sup>590</sup> Wooding, pp. 104-118.

must have attended services so as not to lead to fines, ostracism and possibly taking the first step to imprisonment or even execution. The church's charity benefitted many and its building programs gave employment, but did this demonstrate genuine loyalty or sanctimonious self-interest?

If the Catholic faith was genuine amongst the majority of people, where were dedicated masses defending their churches and monasteries when Henry VIII launched his takeover? He could not get away with his religious revolution unless the church was already troubled, feuding and treated with widespread apathy and cynicism, even if those attitudes were circumspectly expressed, if at all. There were some mass defences of the Catholic system. The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. was one of the larger active English defences of Catholicism, having thirty thousand men on its march to London. However, it was only strong in the north, marginal and unsuccessful. Marginalised, localised and unsuccessful also apply to the Catholic rebellions in Cornwall in 1547 and the rebellion centred on the locales of Northwayr, Tyttehanger and Saint Albans in 1548-1549.<sup>591</sup>

If the majority of English people still retained some of the traditional aspects of worship and belief when Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558, by 1580 apparently the majority were Protestant.<sup>592</sup> The last Catholic rebellion on English soil was in the north in 1569, led by the earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland; it had some initial success as Durham Cathedral was captured and purged of Protestant elements, but this force of at most six thousand (or 5,700) was defeated by a force loyal to the queen of fourteen thousand; seven hundred Catholic prisoners were ordered to

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid. p.489.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., p.492 p.494.

summarily hanged, but of these a smaller number were.<sup>593</sup> Elizabeth's forces invaded southern Scotland and three hundred villages and fifty castles were destroyed.<sup>594</sup> Elizabeth then instituted a severe persecution of assertive English Catholics, particularly clergy or propaganda distributors. She had such actions legally registered as treason.<sup>595</sup> This was a death penalty offence and torture, imprisonment and executions happened. Other repressions included removing depictions of saints from churches, banning confessions, pilgrimages and prayers for the dead, abolishing references to purgatory, communicating with Catholic priests or aiding them and ending Saint's days celebrations. There were a few compensating replacements. Once Catholic lands were allocated or sold to Anglicans. Guy Fawkes Day celebrated the failure of the Gunpowder Plot. November 17<sup>th</sup> had been Saint Hugh of Lincoln's holy day: Elizabeth made it a celebration of her ascension to monarchy, replete with a cavalcade and a tournament.<sup>596</sup>

In response to the repressions the Pope's excommunicated Elizabeth from Catholicism on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1570 and called on her subjects to disobey her.<sup>597</sup> Apparently because at the time of her birth in 1533 the breach with Rome was incomplete, so technically she was born a Catholic although from childhood onwards, perhaps even before, she never had anything to do with their ceremonies. After the 1569 rebellion her espionage system was catching around six out of ten Catholic clergy, either amongst those till

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<sup>593</sup> Wooding., pp 457-458; Guy, p. 275

<sup>594</sup> Guy, p.275.

<sup>595</sup> Guy, p.277; Neil Nanson, *The Confident Hope of a Miracle: The True Story of the Spanish Armada*, London, 2004. p.145.

<sup>596</sup> Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World*. Saint Ives; 2016. Brotton quotes several passages from the excommunication document.

resident in England (suspected to number about three hundred who were usually hidden in safe houses) or those furtively trying to enter the kingdom.<sup>598</sup> She insisted that all office bearers sign the Oath of Supremacy, which meant obedience and loyalty to her at a time when she was excommunicate.<sup>599</sup> Penalties for not attending Anglican service were severe, starting with heavy fines and the seizure of goods and land if offenders could not pay. These two policies gave Catholics dilemmas, for to associate with or serve an excommunicate and to attend such services were mortal sins: not to obey and not to attend her services was to end up dispossessed. These and other various forms of persecution continued for years after the 1569 rebellion.<sup>600</sup> Obviously such suppressive methods worked and many English Catholics went into exile, while others abandoned their faith or practised it furtively.

The suppressive methods were a major factor in rapidly changing England. In 1558 Protestants were only a majority of the population in London and Kent: by 1588 they were a majority in every English county. Neil Nanson makes the point that by the 1580s without the established clergy and order the old Catholic ways were dying out with the ageing, fading away generations that had grown up living in the once established church.<sup>601</sup> Without priests and remembrance English Catholicism faded, except for the literate and those rich enough to travel or brave enough to shelter priests

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<sup>598</sup> Brotton, pp. 64-65. Brotton quotes several passages from the excommunication document.

<sup>598</sup> Guy p.277.

<sup>599</sup> Wooding., pp. 495-497

<sup>600</sup> Nanson, p..246

In both the days of the Black Death and then again in the years between Henry's split from the church in the 1530s the same broad pattern was repeated. Both the crises of the 1530s involved the loss of its leaders from the top down to the parish priest, the devastation of its financial power and largesse and disillusion with widespread corruption and obvious feuding and superstition. All of these factors as well as spreading plague had their demoralising and alienating effects. When in 1588 Phillip II of Spain launched his Armada to invade England, this was, like the reign of his wife Mary I, a golden opportunity to make Catholicism the powerful and dominant religion in England again. Both Mary and Phillip failed dismally. Mary's continual, determined efforts to bring England back to Catholicism and reduce Protestantism during her five-year reign led to no great enthusiasm or much effect on society. Exactly the same could be said for Phillip's intended invasion: no English Catholics rose in rebellion to support him.

The Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which a small group of English Catholics intended to restore Catholicism as England's dominant religion by blowing up the king and parliament, gained only apathy or hostility, even from fellow Catholics. After this, despite some prominent nobility and gentry staying Catholic, where it did survive in England Catholicism dwindled away into a minority fringe religion. The Anglicans replaced Catholic repression and hypocrisy with their own. While Catholic priests were in disguise and being hidden: the Ottoman envoy, a Moslem, attended royal spectacles in London while in Moslem clothing and Moslems could openly practice their religion.<sup>602</sup> While torturing and executing fellow Christians Elizabeth was shipping weapons to Moslems actively fighting Portuguese Christians in Morocco, but then trade with Morocco was lucrative, especially concerning their imported sugar, which the queen had a great

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<sup>602</sup> Brutton, pp.1-2 p.11-12.

fondness for.<sup>603</sup> This same pattern of arming Moslems against Catholic rivals in trade and conquest would soon follow with the Spaniards, ruled by her fellow Christian and brother in law Phillip II.<sup>604</sup>

To say one effect of the Black death on England was to cause the replacement of Catholicism with Protestantism would be a stretch too far, even ridiculous. Even so, before the Black Death Catholicism in England had been *the* religion, apart from small groups of Jews in some cities, and perhaps forest bandits and pirates. By the time of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 English Catholicism had been reduced to where the small groups of Lollards once were, two hundred years before.

The plague by itself did not lead suddenly or directly to England's reformation, but it did contribute to a widespread loss of Catholic certainty, fervour and finances, all of which were contributing factors to weakening Catholicism to the extent that they made British Protestantism possible.

Language in England was also affected by plagues. By killing off many scholars who wrote and spoke in Latin, it hastened the development of common English as England's national language.<sup>605</sup> English began taking over from French soon after the first plague waned.<sup>606</sup> A high death rate in the established priesthood led to their sudden replacement by English speaking laymen. who almost certainly did not speak or write in Latin or French, English began to dominate chronicles, official records and those sections of church services not regularly performed in Latin. By 1362 a

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p.2 pp.62-63.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., p.98 p.112.

<sup>605</sup> Ziegler, pp. 260-261.

<sup>606</sup> Cowie, p. 62. Quoting the Medieval educationist John Cornwall.

Parliamentary act made English the law courts' language. Henry V, who ruled from 1413 to 1422 enthused for English and used his royal powers to develop these trends.<sup>607</sup> His role apparently had no obvious link with the earlier developments before he ruled.

In architecture, some claim that killing off so many artisans led to a new style, the simpler to develop perpendicular, which needed less skill from artisans. Others state that examples prove that this was developing a decade before the great pestilence started.<sup>608</sup> By the 1340s it was becoming common and by 1370 had become the widespread and usual English style.<sup>609</sup> It also became common not just in new buildings, but in church renovations and additions and in secular architecture. Even so, the plague may have accelerated the process, making an emerging tendency the dominant fashion. Cost must have also been a factor, while some made donations out of thankfulness for the plague's passing, tithes frequently remained uncollected as the usual donors were dead, fled, or reduced to poverty. The devastation and disorganisation of the clergy would have also affected collecting finances, at least for some years after 1350. Another factor may well have been that across Europe (excepting Spain) the building of the great cathedrals and abbeys was already past its zenith when the Black Death hit.<sup>610</sup> In England the reasons for this are fairly

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<sup>607</sup> Malcom Vale, 'Henry V & the King's English.' *Yale Books*. Yale University Press. Official London Blog. Posted 8<sup>th</sup> August 2016. <https://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2016/08/08/henry-v-the-kings-english-by-malcolm-vale/>, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2019. Vale reproduces an illustration of the first letter written in English, being from King Henry V to his officials

<sup>608</sup> Wim Swann, *Art & Architecture of the Late Middle Ages: 1350 to the Advent of the Renaissance*. Ware; 1982. p. 23. Swann gives two photographic examples of architecture from the 1330s; Ziegler, pp. 265-266.

<sup>609</sup> Swann, p. 23.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

obvious. The church certainly gained psychological dominance and therefore power over towns and cities where they built such things. However, their continual repairs, renovations, expansions and cleaning were a hefty expense, needing continual large donations unless they were a lucrative pilgrimage site. With a finite supply of pilgrims, tithes and donors the questions became obvious: how many great cathedrals could one kingdom afford? - or need? They appear as ample for the existing congregations and to continue to build them for every little town of a few thousand people was expensive, unnecessary and incongruous.

Changes were also strongly affecting secular architecture in the last third of the fourteenth century. Building new castles still happened, but new starts on such prolonged efforts were becoming rarer, perhaps due to labour shortages or perhaps due to costs in uncertain economic times: both were caused by the pestilence, but the increasing use of cannon was not. Artillery was making castles obsolescent. Towards the end of the Medieval period houses were increasingly being built in stone and brick, clay, daub or timber were becoming obsolescent. Except for parts of northern England where the climate was harsh, the tradition of using longhouses for farming was waning; new buildings in that style were rare by 1350.<sup>611</sup> In the long houses people and animals were under one roof and were crowded. The new architectural pattern had barns for animals and a separate main residence of varying quality. Workshops and storage sheds were now often close nearby, with all the buildings frequently surrounding a courtyard.<sup>612</sup>

Initially did the Black Death make this design popular? Indirectly perhaps. People may have realised that close proximity to each other, to such goods as cloth and wool and to animals somehow spread diseases. It may be with

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<sup>611</sup> Barker, pp. 26-27.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.,

more money they could afford more spacious housing and so could separate themselves from the stench and noise of their animals.

The 1377 poll tax revealed a widespread pattern of more spacious living in both town and country.<sup>613</sup> This was almost certainly a combined effect, first, of the population dropping due to the Black Death and therefore there were vacant rooms and buildings. Secondly, the higher wages the survivors could get for decades after 1348 provided extra income for building and renovating expenses. This effect of this development was widespread and long lasting; it remained the essential design for English farms until the advent of coaches made coach houses and stables for changing teams more than luxury items. Even this development retained essential aspects of the late Medieval pattern, lasting until the advent of motorised vehicles. This meant that people needed garages, petrol stations and macadamised roads.

For most of the population diet had also changed. For the rich there was no great change, but between 1348 and 1350 the ratio of people to livestock, farm animals and wild creatures changed dramatically, with the number of consuming humans much reduced. With law and order broken down or at best disrupted, an abundance of straying edible animals existed. Survivors were now getting them for the taking, many of these survivors were refugees resided in the countryside without regular subsistence. Others who would see straying livestock as a gift from God to be taken were "the men on the land." The forests and streams where hunting and fishing had been traditionally banned would have frequently been open for exploitation in these chaotic times. Although initially probably being hunted and fished out by refugees, fish and forest creatures with their high breeding rates and an eventual reduction or absence of human predators would make a quick comeback. Did this happen across England? Did it sporadically occur in some locales? Did the acquisitions only go as far as

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

straying livestock - or were abandoned farms or those containing only the dead frequently looted? Was their land acquired by virtually anyone, refugees, escapees, the wandering poor, neighbours, at one extreme - or neighbouring lords at the other? With the Prince of Wales scavenging amongst the dead, did lesser beings also do the same?

While in the desperate plague years some even in these groupings would have devoured confiscated animals, for most they were an asset and a possession to accelerate the need for more pasturage. The tendency for grain fields and orchards to revert to pasturage was therefore lucrative: doubtless mother nature did not always revert grain fields to pasture without assistance. Evidence for this development concerns greatly increased meat consumption. This tendency is obvious in the "myriads of complaints" made about London butchers. notably from the 1340s on.<sup>614</sup> Town and city butchers frequently appear in accounts and documents in the middle of the fourteenth-century. The way English kings concerned themselves with complaints concerning butchers' work habits and aldermen legislated their work practices showed that meatworkers were not a small or unimportant group. This suggests that a high proportion of city dwellers were eating meat regularly from just before the plague years onwards.

In those years the habitual, traditional English reliance on grain was hit doubly hard, first, by a lack of harvesters and then by what happened to harvests. In 1350 so much English grain was exported to Barbary (now Morocco and Western Algeria) that there was a dearth in England and a famine in 1353.<sup>615</sup> This export of grain initially looks like another callous and mercenary act, but was it? With at least thirty per cent of the

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>615</sup> Marusek, pp. 106-107.

kingdom's consumers dead in 1350, and perhaps even half, the kingdom must have initially had an abundance of grain, even allowing for that which was rotting unharvested in the fields. That sight in itself (or knowledge gained from officials) may have caused Edward III to export what he could manage to harvest, for even with the captured French king's ransom, in 1354 cash was sorely needed. Trade had been severely disrupted and for a time was virtually non-existent. Many estates returned absolutely nothing and he had already given many remittances and needed to give more, both partial and total.<sup>616</sup> His curious forbidding of Portland and the surrounding area to sell its crops in 1353 because the area was so depopulated that the people could not defend themselves initially sounds inexplicable.<sup>617</sup> In Portland defence and crops are unconnected. The need for crops for the Barbary Coast sales and therefore much needed income provides an explanation which once again suggests that Edward III might not have had the humanitarian motivations which initially appear in several of his statements. The king definitely needed money from somewhere

Not only individual small holdings or manors, but large or heavily populated areas requested and got remittances. Supplicants for the Isle of Wight, and for Stoke, Southampton, and Portsmouth were amongst the successful supplicants.<sup>618</sup> In a February 1353 petition to the King by the sheriff of Bedfordshire stated that in 1351 and 1352 his bailiffs could get nothing from the farms except by extortion; that opinion was backed by an

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<sup>616</sup> Many writers on the topic mentions his remittances. Gasquet goes into detail with several examples in 'The Devastation of the Country.'

<sup>617</sup> Gasquet, p. 83. Edward III quoted.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., pp. 216-217.

enquiring jury.<sup>619</sup> With even his own estate at Carlyle and that of his son's at Tintagel barely functioning and getting remittances, obviously England's manors and freehold farms could no longer be a reliable economic cornerstone in the foreseeable future. Edward III had few options: no king could retrench on expenses very far or for very long without losing influence and allies. Munificence was an expected kingly virtue. Without taxes, remittances, rents, sales and plunder, his income dwindled to almost nothing by 1350. His underlings and allies would sense penury, and therefore both weakness and no material advantage to themselves in backing him. For these reasons penury meant contempt. Obviously, that would lead to a loss of authority. In 1350, when the exports restarted, did he know or suspect that within three years this would cause famine? Did the loss of many remittances, taxes and the other financial setbacks give him any choice?

This grain shortage would have meant a reliance on eating animals and dairy products and as more grain fields became pasturage, the population would eventually have become habituated to eating a higher proportion of meat, eggs and cheese, with milk being a more common drink. These high protein, previously expensive foods were now affordable for many due to the wage rises. Such foods would have decreased scurvy, rickets, malnutrition and stillbirths, while increasing physical strength and resistance to both disease and exhaustion. Such factors obviously increased longevity as well as health and natural increase. Lucy Wooding has described how diet had improved during the earlier Tudor period to the extent that diseases caused by malnutrition were becoming rare.<sup>620</sup> To what extent this improvement would happen on an individual Medieval human body obviously remains uncertain. Equally uncertain must be the precise

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>620</sup> Wooding, p.33

proportion of English people affected by this changed diet. Given the differences in locales and then dietary differences between classes and between rural rich and urban poor, it would be difficult to try to recreate the average effects of diet changes on longevity and health as applying to the whole population. In the decades after 1350 some overall improvement in health and longevity, especially for the peasantry, appears likely, but without any dramatic improvement. Dramatic benefits in health and longevity (referred to in detail in earlier chapters) were centuries away, developing after the effects of what Alfred W. Crosby called the Columbian



*A rich couple lie sick while a doctor spreads herbs. This 1411 Swiss illustration is frequently described as depicting Black Death victims, their eruptions look more like smallpox, but the doctor's treatment looks like what was done for the plague.*  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smallpox01.jpg>

exchange and other subsequent colonial trade percolated through all levels of the population.

Did this dietary change or the plague change genetics? Recent work on skeletons suggests that the plague greatly reduced or even purged England of those with a simple genetic code that made for a low resistance to disease. This left those with a more diverse code and therefore a stronger resistance to survive. This group then developed more resistance to other diseases. This theory needs more favourable evidence because some obvious evidence goes against it. The prevalence of several diseases within England continuing centuries after the Black Death faded. goes against this. These diseases include smallpox, cholera, typhus, typhoid, tuberculosis, measles, mumps, the great influenza pandemics of 1918-1921, and then those of 1957-1958 and 1968, AIDS, SARS, and mad cow disease. s Such obvious evidence, goes against this idea.

Despite expenses during this economic turmoil, the 1348-1350 epidemic had effects on hygiene, although improving steps were taken years, even decades before. Edward II took a first step by issuing a 1309 ordinance to cleanse London of filth and excrement; it was the late 1340s before this became a reality. During the plague years his son reinforced this and included butchery products.<sup>621</sup> Basic ideas about food and quarantine regulations developed after the plague started. Like so many things that seem an effect of the plague, this had a prototype years before, was developed further during the plague years, and become part of life in subsequent decades. In 1388 Parliament passed a sanitation act concerning water pollution. They banned people dumping dung, entrails, and garbage into rivers.<sup>622</sup> During 1392/1393 they went further, giving specific

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<sup>621</sup> Cowie, pp. 45-46. Quoting from the 1309 ordinance. See also Source Note 47.

<sup>622</sup> Deaux, p. 123. The ordinance is quoted.

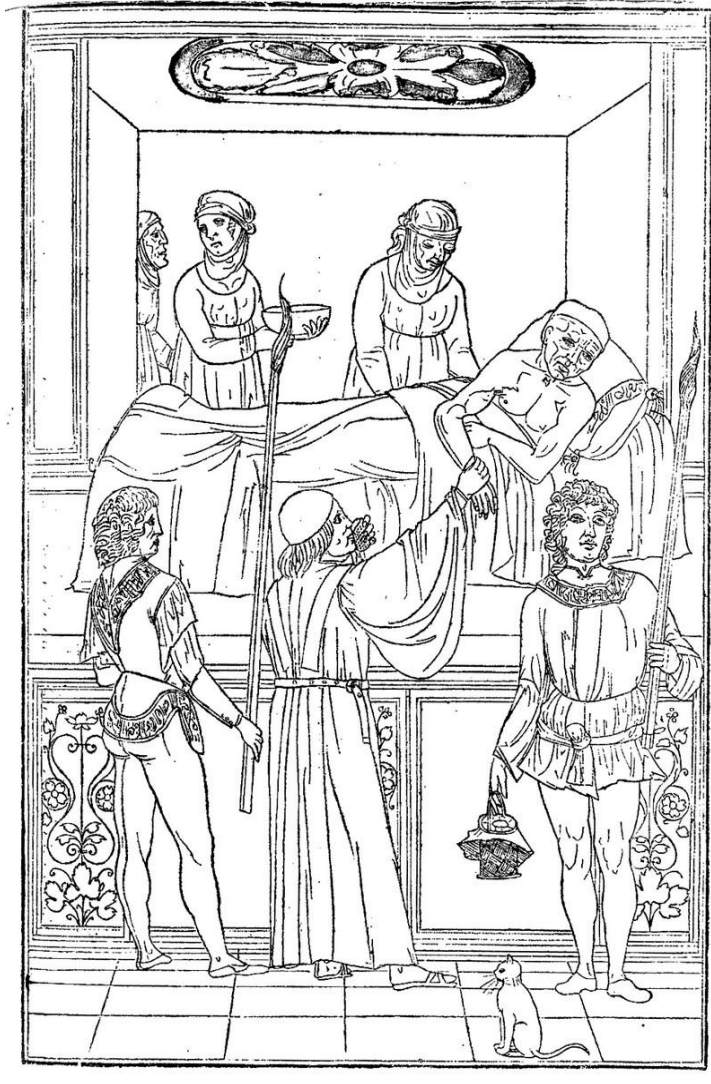
instructions in response to neighbours' complaints about the stench.<sup>623</sup> At ebb tide butchers were to cut up offal at a special pier and dump it in the middle of the Thames so that the ebb tide would take the offal out to sea and not pollute the river banks.<sup>624</sup> Given the Thames being grossly polluted long after this, this law was either not strongly enforced, or not enforced for very long. Wherever people are crowded together without hygienic practices, filth, bacteria, viruses and stench soon exist, but the idea that such things were repulsive, deleterious and therefore unacceptable was clearly spreading in fourteenth-century England even before the Black Death years. The plague made that idea more urgent.



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<sup>623</sup> Barker, p. 87.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.,



*Treating a rich man for the plague in 1493. The physician takes his pulse, the taper is to fumigate and the bowl is held for urine. Credit: [Wellcome Collection](#). CC BY*

## *Chapter 6*

### *The Later English Plagues*

Concerning the Black Death in England, writers in book after book, essay after essay, most textbooks, documentaries and endless articles and blogs focus on either the 1348-1350 horror or the 1665-1666 epidemic. This gives an overwhelming impression that these two epidemics are the full story: they are not. These two epidemics were the largest and the most dramatic in their effects and so left behind the most dramatic, vivid and detailed accounts. Their sudden arrival also made an impression as people tried to describe and puzzle out what had hit their society and why. With the later, less pervasive, less massive outbreaks between 1350 and 1665 there was no need for that: everyone knew what the plague was. If those other outbreaks are mentioned in popular histories or textbooks, it is usually in relation to how they affected a particular locale, performances of Shakespeare's plays or sieges in the 1640s Civil War. This is despite widespread deaths, deprivation and destitution, and social and economic dislocation, all caused by these frequent other epidemics.

A few writers mention the 1361-1362, 1368-1369 and 1371-1373, 1375 and 1379-1382 outbreaks. These were widespread across England, but may not have hit the entire land. Even with these outbreaks information often appears vague, brief and frequently contradictory. Some date the 1361 outbreaks to just that year, others to 1361-1364. Some have the next outbreak beginning in 1368 and from that point have it lasting to 1371 or 1372 or 1373. The 1375 outbreak is usually, but not always treated as a separate epidemic. Some commentators ascribe an outbreak in 1377 to the Black Death, but not conclusively. Another very widespread, if sporadic,

apparently nationwide epidemic which gains little notice started in 1379 and continued to 1382. Writers describing great pestilences during 1603-1604 sometimes date them to starting in 1602 and lasting to 1606. Similarly, one outbreak, described as that of 1609-1610 sometimes starts in 1608 and sometimes continues into 1611. The series of outbreaks in the 1630s are treated separately, but in Kevin Sharpe's *The Personal Rule of Charles I*. (1992) he treats this as one nationwide plague. He could be right. Although with this outbreak there was no dramatic blanket spread covering of all of England in a brief timespan, as happened in 1348-1350. outbreaks sporadically occurred across much of England between 1636 and 1639.<sup>625</sup> Few writers mention this as one epidemic and their accounts differ, even on basic information. These recurrent seventeenth century outbreaks worked more slowly and sporadically, leaving much of England untouched - and so, then and now, it goes unrecognised as a nationwide epidemic.

Perhaps the worst single example of conflicting information concerns York, which was untouched by a seventeenth-century epidemic in one account and yet in another, thousands were buried outside the city walls. Why does this confusion exist? The problem of destroyed evidence, particularly in 1381, has already been mentioned for the catastrophic years of 1348-1350 and later outbreaks until the rebellion of 1381, but it may also apply to later events. A paucity of sources certainly does. Another problem is that sources contain usually only vague or fragmentary information, if that. Brian Williams's compilation of English plague outbreaks and the years in which they started reveals a kingdom continually hit by the pestilence. He lists seven outbreaks between 1348 and 1400 and twelve in the next century, nine in the sixteenth and seven in the seventeenth before the plague finally abated in England in 1666.<sup>626</sup> Similarly, Ormond and

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<sup>625</sup> Kevin Sharpe, pp. 620-624.

<sup>626</sup> Williams,

Lindsey include the Newcastle outbreak in 1432 and total thirteen for the fifteenth century.<sup>627</sup> In the first half of seventeenth-century London endured major outbreaks in 1602 through to 1610, then in 1625, 1631, 1636 and 1646. While a few epidemics such as those in 1379-1382, 1411-1414, 1563-1564, 1593 and 1635-1639 are clearly spreading across the whole kingdom or are close to that, others are described as being in diverse places. In terms of clear evidence, it remains unclear why some regions or remote places were untouched. A possible explanation this writer gave for erratic and inexplicable English plague spreading patterns in 1348-1350, that the wind carried it, could easily apply again. The spread of later Medieval and Renaissance epidemics rarely reveals a pattern. Other possible explanations apart from winds include officials successfully avoiding contagions because such preventative measures were effectively enforced in some places and not others - or enforced in some years and not others. Some health workers or officials may have been conscientious and astute, others may have been time servers, incompetent, corrupt, lazy or ignorant. They may have been all of these negative characteristics or shared their vices in a working team.

One emergent pattern is that while outbreaks frequently lasted three years, they rarely lasted longer. Why? Hull between 1472 to 1478, London starting in 1602 and going through to 1610 and near Ipswich between 1906 and 1911 were exceptions.<sup>628</sup> Or are they? Are these exceptions really one prolonged outbreak, or are foreign ships continually reinfected these busy ports? Do these have something to do with the lifespan of rats or fleas or the period needed for developing immunity? Were some rats carriers of the more deadly Asian flea species, while others carried the less deadly European

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<sup>627</sup> Ormrod and Lyndley, pp. 30-32.

<sup>628</sup> Creighton, Hull p. 286, London pp.493-496.

variety? Does human movement or differing levels of humidity, rainfall, wind or temperatures have effects?

Trade with Europe was frequently a cause. The trading hub cities of London, Newcastle, Bristol, Yarmouth, Hull, Grimsby and York thrived on foreign trade. Infected goods, crews or rats coming ashore were the probable causes for their outbreaks. London rarely escaped a plague outbreak, while Newcastle suffered them in 1432, 1589, 1597 and 1635/1636, the latter causing six thousand deaths. York suffered regularly in the nationwide outbreaks of 1602-1604 and 1631 and the more isolated attacks in 1550-1551 and 1645.<sup>629</sup> Hull was hit in 1537, 1575-1576 and again in 1637.<sup>630</sup> Grimsby suffered a severe outbreak between 1590 and 1591.<sup>631</sup> Bristol was hit in 1550, 1603, 1640 and 1644-1645.<sup>632</sup> Another emergent pattern in these attacks is that northern seaports frequently had isolated outbreaks that left no record of spreading far. This suggests effective preventative quarantines or something preventing fleas and their carriers from usually travelling inland.

Oddly, being far from ports or even far from the sea did not always prevent outbreaks. Remote Oswesley, so far inland as to be about as far as possible from the sea in England, suffered pestilence severely in 1559, when the disease seemed to exist nowhere else.<sup>633</sup> The way that other inland cities

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<sup>629</sup> Lambert, *A Short History of York*.

<sup>630</sup> Lambert, *A Brief History of Kingston Upon Hull*.

<sup>631</sup> Tim Lambert, *A Brief History of Grimsby*. Revised 2019. [www.localhistories.org/hull.html](http://www.localhistories.org/hull.html), accessed 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

<sup>632</sup> Scott, Duncan and Duncan, p.14; For Bristol, Wedgwood, is the used source, p. 357.

<sup>633</sup> Dyer, p. 318.

also had similar experiences creates a conundrum: without being part of outbreaks across England and apparently without recent direct contact to ports, or goods or people from ports, they suffered local epidemics.<sup>634</sup>

These cities and areas include:

Penrith in 1380, 1554 and 1597.

Bury Saint Edmonds in 1499-1500 and again in 1509.

Exeter in 1357, 1537 1546 and 1606.

Stratford on Avon in 1563-1564.

Norwich in 1578/79 (when around five thousand died) and again in 1583  
This city of around eighteen thousand experienced a serious pestilence outbreak at approximately five-year intervals.<sup>635</sup>

The Eden Valley 1597/1598.

Westmoreland and Cumbria between 1597 and 1599.

Salisbury in 1627.

Staffordshire in 1593.<sup>636</sup>

Devon in 1546-1547 and again in 1589-1593. This second infection predates the widespread and virulent epidemic of 1593 <sup>637</sup> Was this a repeat of the

<sup>634</sup> Bolton, pp. 28-32; Scott, Duncan and Duncan, mention Exeter, p. 14. Guy mentions Staffordshire, p.30 others mentioned have been sourced in other footnotes

<sup>635</sup> Wooding gives slightly different figures in a slightly different timespan. She states that 6,000 died in this city between 1579 and 1580. *Tudor England*; Guy, gives the population p.34.

<sup>636</sup> Guy, p.80,

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.,

1348 spread of the plague starting in the west and spreading north and east and infecting London, rather than London being the spreading point?

Chester in 1602-1606.

Carlisle, Lichfield and Leeds in 1644-1645.

Eyam in 1665.

Like Bristol and London, outbreaks in Carlisle, Lichfield and Leeds in the 1640s involved overcrowding from wartime refugees. Food deprivation in sieges not only lowered resistance to contagious diseases, but almost certainly caused contact with hungry rats roving in their search for food. This then led to plague. In the remote Derbyshire village of Eyam in 1665 nearly three hundred died because a tailor imported a bolt of infected cloth. In Penrith 1597 the cause was a visiting stranger. Such causes may also have started off the outbreaks. Several other examples give no details concerning causes. Several experts now argue against the idea of the disease lying dormant in mammal burrows for years, yet these outbreaks may well have been caused by such a factor: researchers have proved plague germs to be durable, rodents are pernicious and scientists have proved several species of English mammals to be carriers.

The most important of these inland outbreaks which cannot be attributed to external trade or visiting strangers occurred in the North-West between the autumn of 1597 and the beginning of 1599. With this outbreak two possible ways for the contagion to spread appear. In Newcastle church records state that the famine across much of the kingdom was so severe in the north that people travelled from as far away as Carlisle and Durham to buy food at this port.<sup>638</sup> As the plague was in Newcastle, they apparently took it home with them. Scott, Duncan and Duncan have reproduced a map

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<sup>638</sup> Scott, Duncan and Duncan, p. 11. A 1597 bishop's document is quoted.

showing the affected territories and a diagram showing how the plague spread from Newcastle across Northumberland, Cumbria and Westmoreland to its final destination of Dumfries in the Scottish southern highlands.<sup>639</sup> It never reached the coasts. These authors also note that the plague's trail through the Eden Valley matched that of Scottish cattle herders taking their herds south.<sup>640</sup> Edinburgh had the plague in 1585.

.This epidemic provides information indicating spreading patterns and the unreliability of plague records. A church plaque bears a record of town deaths from this 1597 outbreak. In Penrith 2,260 supposedly died, while the figures from Kendall are 2,500, in Richmond 2,200 and Carlisle lost 1,196 residents.<sup>641</sup> However, the same writers use parish records to show that these figures are too high because they would have to include almost all the town residents. Carlisle contained around 1,300 denizens when 1,196 supposedly died, but although such a high figure is clearly unlikely, the death toll there must have been extremely high as of 316 listed households, clerks recorded 242 as being plague infected.<sup>642</sup> By the time normal conditions returned Penrith had lost 858 people, not 2260.<sup>643</sup> These authors do consider that the plaque's higher number included those from parishes outside the towns, but conclude that by using church records an approximate proportion of 40% of the inhabitants hit by this epidemic died. This is less than half of what the plaque has on inscriptions.

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid., The map, Figure 5 p. 12. The diagram, Figure 6 p. 14.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.,

This is problematic. To put up a lie or exaggeration in a church is sinful and no motive for fraud appears; they must have believed it. Why? Do these figures include religious dissenters and Catholics, who would not be in usual parish records, but who would be in burial records? Did their figures include not only those from outer parishes and remote farming households, but also plague refugees, beggars, vagrants, itinerants and travellers not buried in churchyards or recorded in town registrars?

The fatalities amongst such groups would have been very high. Even after making all allowances, the plague records seem another example of exaggerated fatalities, but one that investigators can judge and reassess by comparing with other primary source material. Another interesting record from this outbreak shows that suspicions about marriage rates dropping during Black Death outbreaks are probably true, dropping from nineteen before the plague to ten during it.<sup>644</sup> While it would be foolish to make much of one later parish register, to apply it across England over centuries, it tentatively remains indicative for the kingdom, so does Doctor Hodges' comment about couples "having the courage to marry again" when the 1666 plague waned in London.<sup>645</sup> An odd contagion outside any discernible pattern or cause was the pestilence of 1544-1546 which was oddly in the North-East and the South Coast, initially geographically separated, it then spread westwards. The 1509-1510 epidemic was also considered "a great plague" but in "various parts" rather than infecting the whole kingdom.<sup>646</sup> One of the worst outbreaks, the 1563-1564 contagion, involved troops returning from the siege of Havre. They probably brought the contagion

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>645</sup> Mitra, p. 7

<sup>646</sup> Brian Williams.

into London, as one chronicler in the capital claimed. It eventually went through several southern inland cities and the midlands, being considered as amongst England's worst epidemics.<sup>647</sup> For the first time, clerks kept reliable daily records of casualties in London and adjoining parishes. Some Protestant contemporaries blamed this outbreak on a stubborn residue of Catholicism amongst London's Catholics.<sup>648</sup> Around eighty thousand English people died, a quarter of those were in London and the eleven surrounding home county parishes.<sup>649</sup> The dead totalled between a third and a quarter of the city's inhabitants.<sup>650</sup>

Terrible as this was, the plague was no longer devastating a generally passive metropolis. Queen Elizabeth took steps to protect both herself and Londoners. Like her predecessor Edward III and later Charles II, she evacuated the court and took drastic steps to contain the plague by banning importing foreign goods and ordering hanging for people trying to enter the city.<sup>651</sup> Public gatherings were banned and several specific forms involving large numbers of participants were listed including play and puppet performances, football, other ball games, fencing, dancing schools, bowling, bear baiting and cockfighting.<sup>652</sup> Now it is difficult to tell if

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<sup>647</sup> Brian Williams, quoting Shrewsbury; Dyer, p. 310; Creighton, pp.306-307; Linda Alchin, 'The Black Death Bubonic Plague in The Elizabethan Era.' Posted February 14<sup>th</sup> 2018. *Siteseen*. [www.william.shakespeare.info](http://www.william.shakespeare.info), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

<sup>648</sup> Dyer, p. 322.

<sup>649</sup> Creighton. He reproduces the records from that time, p.306.

<sup>650</sup> Alchin.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>652</sup> Wooding, p.550.

officials implemented her orders or if so, how successful a deterrent this was.

The Thames was a problem, as in Medieval days and long after, it was almost a sewer for the city, simultaneously serving as a major waterway for trading and transport, both to England's interior and to foreign ports.<sup>653</sup> It was also without effective water police. Despite these sixteenth century reoccurrences and their failures to stop them, the English were learning, in some ways. From the fourteenth century onwards, the Italians had partial successes with a range of methods, both in preventative ways and for controlling or even eradicating plague. The English eventually adopted several of their methods.. Despite the way the Milanese, Florentines, Venetians and Pistoians took several similar and comprehensive steps to stop the plague, several other Italian city state governments, duchies and principalities did not develop a widespread, comprehensive and totally successful control system. Having assorted different forms of government and localised rulers meant that Italian developments differed, were piecemeal and spread over centuries, developing in response to obvious aspects of their latest outbreak. With the more systematic and successful Italian tactics the English consciously followed suit to fight diseases. Being one kingdom rather than a collection of feuding city-states, little kingdoms and duchies like the Italians, the English developed a rudimentary nationwide policy sooner and with more uniformity – at least on paper.

Early nationwide steps were taken in 1518 when the King's then most prominent and powerful adviser, Cardinal Wolsey, devised steps for quarantines and identifying suspected carriers; within months his system was working in Oxford.<sup>654</sup> In that same year the Royal College of

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<sup>653</sup> Alchin.

<sup>654</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 98.

Physicians was founded in London and its members became much concerned with preventative measures against contagions.<sup>655</sup> These steps marked the beginnings of England's nationwide health system. The plague had made that a necessity and it would be amongst its most wide-ranging long-term effects of the bubonic plague being in England.

In some of these practices and plans the English were ahead of the Italians. It would be the late seventeenth century before the Italians organised the following steps beyond being piecemeal and occasional measures into one system:

Establishing lazarettos

Quarantining carriers and suspects

Confiscating and storing trade goods from plague suspects or arrivals

Issuing public notifications of preventative measures

Using church services to announce measures and developments

Marking plague houses with symbols

Burning both plague houses and goods of the infected

Severe punishments for violations.

Identifying plague carriers with specially coloured walking sticks.

Several years later London's council began a systematic, localised and immediate recording of deaths by cause per week in parishes. These records were named "The Bills of Mortality." While not perfectly accurate, they did mark a contrast to the wildly inaccurate, frequently vague hype of earlier times being accepted as fact..

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., pp. 99-101 passsim.

While to modern readers these measures seem an extremely slow development, the Italians and the English were generally ahead of their time compared to most of the world. Rigid effective quarantines, fumigation, Pure Food Acts, detailed comprehensive council regulations against contagion and vermin and inspectors to regularly enforce these regulations became only commonplace across even much of the western world in the early twentieth century. In several ways London was an exception to this slow and piecemeal development. Frequent enormous losses there meant preventative steps and then containment measures had to be regularly in place. Being a large, thriving, crowded port city with international trade connections and expatriates meant that vectors were common and conditions were perfect for spreading diseases: very large outbreaks occurred there in 1563 and 1590 and then starting in the summer of 1592, one of these large outbreaks continued until early in 1594.<sup>656</sup> Just in 1593, this outbreak killed fifteen thousand in London alone, over 10% of the city's populace.<sup>657</sup> The high number of casualties reflected an increasing population over the previous fourteen decades, especially in the last five, but the grain famine must have been a contributing factor. In the 1590s for three consecutive harvests, the crops had failed<sup>658</sup>. Where there many famine deaths and if so, were they added to the plague deaths? Clearly starvation weakens resistance to diseases and malnutrition was a common killer at this time, but did famine conditions prove contusive to plague, or just to other diseases? Whatever the cause, in the 1590s English death rates increased by 50%.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography*. London; 2005. pp. 174-175 pp. 188-190 pp. 205-207.

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188.

<sup>658</sup> Wooding, p.146, pp. 474-475.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, p.147.

Culturally this may have had a great effect, for with the theatres being closed to avoid contagion Shakespeare's company took to touring England and one "Will" is listed amongst them; he was still both player and playwright at this time.<sup>660</sup> Would he have been able to write much while rehearsing, performing and travelling? It would have been difficult. Would he have written more plays if he had stayed in London and the theatres had stayed open? Would he have died of plague if he had stayed and obviously not left those great and influential works written after 1593? This was Shakespeare's second fortuitously spared contamination as the 1563-1564 visitation's almost disastrous cultural effect involved hitting Stratford Upon Avon. Three months after Shakespeare was born there, in April 1564, he was lucky to survive. Over a tenth of Stratford's locals did not, including a family in his parent's street, listed as plague fatalities on the same page which records his birth.<sup>661</sup> Shakespeare does refer to the plague in some of his works. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the dying Mercutio tells the feuding Capulets and Montagues that he wishes a plague on both their houses. This seemingly means a plague on the prominent families, the houses of Capulet and Montague, not their literal houses, but Shakespeare's language frequently shows how he loved puns, ambiguity and hidden meanings. His contemporary audience would have gained an image from their experiences with plague. With the feuding families locked up in their houses under guard both families' members would have each killed each other off with the disease, out of sight and contact from the general populace. While that hypothetically happens, other people like Mercutio would have been free to go about their lives without being infected and dying due to the feud, which Mercutio ultimately implies as being like the

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<sup>660</sup> Akcroyd., pp. 188-190.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.,



*This illustration and similar others are often used to show the foolishness of methods used to fight the Medieval Black Death. It is from a series of illustrations used to stop an epidemic in Rome in 1656. Other measures included marking infected houses, burning the clothes and possessions of the infected, strict quarrantines and the death penalty for those violating the rules. This doctor might look ridiculous, but the attire and wand are designed to reduce contact. The beaky mask contained posies to reduce the terrible stench and would have also stopped facial contact. It eventually inspired Venetian carnival masks.*

*Below are some of the other Roman methods used to fight the plague in 1656. Both images Courtesy Wikipedia*



plague. Another Shakespearean mystery may involve the plague. In 1603 a publisher's catalogue listed his play, *Love's Labor Won*, but this was the same year that plague raged again in London; plague victims' property was burned. Is this what happened to one of Shakespeare's missing plays?

Apart from its effect on Shakespeare, this epidemic gets little attention, despite being one of England's worst plagues, despite having better eyewitness documentation and government records than earlier outbreaks. Apart from London's Bills of Mortality and detailed parish records free of

medieval hype, five men in London all wrote their observations in different ways. We have a sermon, a poem, medical observations and explanations and the detailed and vivid eyewitness account of the poet and playwright Thomas Dekker. At its peak this plague lasted from late 1602 to October 1603, although parts of England were being hit as late as 1606 and it would be 1610 before the waning outbreak finally died out in London. It probably hit York in the summer of 1602, but accounts giving dates for that city are muddled. Chester, which ironically would be amongst the last cities to endure this epidemic, would be amongst the first afflicted, recorded cases from September 1602 onwards with a total of just under a thousand fatalities.<sup>662</sup> In the next April Middlesex and Surrey sent notifications of outbreaks there and appeals for help, although by then few English cities were in a condition to help anyone. The first few deaths in London in this epidemic started showing up in records for the week ending December 17<sup>th</sup> 1602 and peaking in the next year, with annual fatalities from 1605 to 1610 ranging from over eighteen hundred to over 4,200.<sup>663</sup> Out of a population for greater London of around 227,000, the death toll in 1602-1603 came to 30,519.<sup>664</sup> Unlike the Medieval and early Tudor claims, this is more accurate – with some caveats which Doctor Creighton mentions. Clerks recorded no precise number of deaths before March 10<sup>th</sup> although there are references to them. None were recorded from the outer parishes before July 10<sup>th</sup> and none at all for some outer towns and parishes. Creighton does mention that records for the total plague burials in London and its neighbouring parishes came to over 33,000. These different sources provide strong evidence for accuracy. Even the sceptical investigating demographer John

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<sup>662</sup> Creighton, p.497.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, p.494. This writer uses the Bills of Mortality to draw up a table.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, Creighton calculates this population from contemporary records as being that number in 1605. p. 491. The deaths come from the work of Graunt, parish records and Bills of Mortality.

Graunt (1620-1674) who investigated the earlier London fatalities of 1602-1603, came to a conclusion that 30,561 Londoners died. This was only forty-two more than the Bills of Mortality total.

Creighton investigated parish records and noted how in many then rural or semi-rural parishes the fatality figures for this epidemic were higher than in 1665.<sup>665</sup> He then gives nine as examples: Islington, Hackney, Enfield, Barking, Stratford, Romford, Lewisham and Croydon.

While London would not be as badly hit as in 1665, Dekker gives a similar account to that of Defoe's later faction for the 1665 epidemic in London. Doctor Lodge and Minister Bamford separately wrote about fleeing physicians. As most physicians had fled, usually only desperately mercenary quacks did the rounds, peddling otiose antidotes and amulets. During Doctor Lodge's observational walk in Cheapside, he saw "men, women, and children dropped down before him, houses were rifled, streets ransacked, rich men's coffers broken open and shared amongst prodigal heirs and unworthy servants."<sup>666</sup>

Like Defoe, Dekker described those fleeing as spreading plague; records do show it sporadically flaring up after it waned in London. By October 1603 this epidemic had spread west to Wiltshire and on to Bristol, where the toll reached 3,000.<sup>667</sup> London's toll was ten times Bristol's.<sup>668</sup> York was badly hit

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., p.493.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., p. 484. Creighton quotes Dekker's 1606 writings.

<sup>667</sup> Julie Shuttleworth, 'The Plague Epidemic 1603/1604.' (1995) *Hungerford Virtual Museum*. Updated Posting 16<sup>th</sup> April 2016. [www.hungerfordvirtualmuseumco.uk/index.../491-the-plague-epidemic-1603-1604](http://www.hungerfordvirtualmuseumco.uk/index.../491-the-plague-epidemic-1603-1604), accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>668</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The History of England*. Volume III; *Civil War*. London; 2014. p. 4; 'The Great Plague of London.' *Wikipedia*. accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

in 1604, despite their preventative measures including exiling victims to isolated pest huts on the sparsely inhabited moors.<sup>669</sup> Demographically York had not quite recovered from the fourteenth century epidemics, with estimates of 10,000 to possibly 30,000 residents when the 1349 outbreak hit. Of York's populace of around 10,000 at the beginning of the seventeenth century, 3,512 residents are known to have died, that is 35%.<sup>670</sup> It also raged in Chester for over three years, from September 1602 until January 1606. Similarly Exeter would be amongst the first afflicted, recorded cases from September 1602 onwards.

James I had only just succeeded to the English throne weeks after plague reached southern England, and most consider him a failure as a king, while Edward III is usually hailed as a success, but such reputations have nothing to do with their efforts concerning the pestilence in England. Their efforts on that issue reveal the reverse of their popular images.

Despite an unattractive personality, beliefs so autocratic that they challenged even the values of his time and his cruel persecution of witches, James showed more concern for his people and fought the plague immediately, to the best of his ability and with some success, despite high casualties. In contrast to Edward III's callous festivities while hundreds of thousands died, because the plague raged James forbore to have the usual celebratory grand entry procession at his coronation and the event itself was without the usual grandiose effects.<sup>671</sup> Working with his privy council, he quickly issued 'A Book of Orders' which specified that houses where

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<sup>669</sup> Justbod,

<sup>670</sup> Ashworth, He supplied the figures; Justbod gives the same figures. This writer put them into rough percentages.

<sup>671</sup> Ackroyd, *The History of England*. p. 4.

people were infected were to be shut for six weeks and marked with both a large red cross and posted up prayers.<sup>672</sup> He ordered the placing of guards outside such houses while those inside were encouraged to avoid others and stay home, but if going out were to wear special identifying clothes.<sup>673</sup> As was usual by this time, plague fighters were to burn the clothing, bedding and “other stuff” of the infected, but unusually, charitable collections were authorised to help those dispossessed by the burnings. Magistrates were instructed to assess casualties, urge the infected to avoid the uninfected and raise money for the poor, those already infected or those who were about to become so.<sup>674</sup> Another sensible move was to institute factual compilations. This collected information about numbers, locations and causes of death came from the base up, not from unfamiliar officials appointed by royalty, bishops and aristocrats. Professional searchers were paid for each body found and their localised reports, along with similar parish records, were put together into the ‘Bill of Mortality’ which by the seventeenth century was issued every week, publicly listing deaths by cause. This enabled placing resources in afflicted areas and served as a warning about areas to avoid. The officials issued figures for total fatalities during a plague outbreak by adding up the Bills of Mortality.<sup>675</sup> These ordinances established that people, goods and ships, coming from areas even suspected of being plague affected, were refused entry to England.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>672</sup> Kelsey.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>674</sup> Wooding, p. 561.

<sup>675</sup> ‘Great Plague of London.’ *Wikipedia*. [https://encyclopedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Plague\\_of\\_London](https://encyclopedia.org/wiki/Great_Plague_of_London), accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2019.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.,

Ships' crews were refused permission to disembark or unload goods, they were to stay a distance offshore.

In the 1660s epidemic later writers have found much that was wrong with this system, but worthwhile ideas emerged and showed their designers had concerns for the common people. This was also evident in the way the booklets were sold at "no great charge" so the poor could afford them.<sup>677</sup> The existence of this booklet and the manner of its distribution strongly suggests James and his advisors had a level of compassion, concern, focus and understanding rare in dealing with the Black Death at that time..

Apart from compassion, the more humane ideas would have made the measures more effective. The rat-infested, overcrowded slums with their open sewers made the poor both the main targets and main human carriers of the plague. Replacing destroyed goods made reporting by the infected more likely. Officials and commoners did not always practice the King's more humane instructions. As wanderers and vagrants were believed to be plague carriers they were frequently arrested or forcibly driven away.<sup>678</sup> Also enforced were the burials in plague pits. Poorer Londoners resented this practice; women and children from amongst the poor gathered at pit burials to show that they had no fear of the plague.<sup>679</sup> Clearly these enforcing measures were also opposed and difficult to enforce. Sensible as 'A Book of Orders' was, it was reactive rather than preventative. With conditions unchanged and the cause unknown, plague continued, even returning several times. The plague of 1608-1611, while not as virulent or as widespread as the nationwide epidemics of 1563-1564, 1590-1593 and 1602-

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<sup>677</sup> Kelsey.

<sup>678</sup> Shuttleworth

<sup>679</sup> Naphy & Spicer, p. 93. They quote a London observer.

1606, was sporadic. It also lingered, being one of the few to last three years. One of the worst returns was in the summer of 1625, weeks after King James died. This left 41, 313 known English dead by one account and 33,000 by another.<sup>680</sup> Around one in five Londoners died.<sup>681</sup>

Almost as deadly was the outbreak of 1636, which lingered into 1639 in some locales. In Newcastle alone around six thousand died in that epidemic.<sup>682</sup> Charles I resembled his father in his sensible attempts to fight plague outbreaks in his reign, but like his father's efforts, his attempts were preventative and piecemeal. He sensibly asked for proposals and inventive attitudes to fight disease from his doctor, who by telling him that rats caused plague and that nationwide health rules were needed, gave the king the key to unlocking successful health measures for controlling the pestilence.<sup>683</sup> Unfortunately, by ruling without parliament Charles I had given himself a massive workload, and at a period when political and religious tensions absorbed his time and energy, so this chance to resolve the contagion problem passed and during his reign several outbreaks devastated much of England. Even so, he did improve health controls. During the 1630s these ordinances, started by Cardinal Wolsey for Oxford in 1518 and developed further by James I and his privy council, were finally enforced with some embellishments and new additions by Charles I.<sup>684</sup> In 1636-1637 causes of possible person to person contagion, including

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<sup>680</sup> 'The Great Plague of London.' *Wikipedia*; Shuttleworth.

<sup>681</sup> Rideal, p. 26.

<sup>682</sup> Dyer, p. 311.

<sup>683</sup> Kevin Sharpe, p. 622.

<sup>684</sup> Naphy and Spicer, pp. 101-102.

festivals, fairs, influxes of visitors, and the presence of ragmen (and their manufacture of their scavenged rags into paper) were all banned.<sup>685</sup> As scavenged rags could have come from the infected dead or the dying this was sensible. A blanket prohibition on goods from infected places was also on the books. Despite such measures, the mortality during this virtually nationwide epidemic was 35% higher than normal, with the epidemic not only in the cities, but hitting the countryside.<sup>686</sup> Some rural dwellers suffered more than those in the cities. In 1638 different parts of Essex had death rates that were three, four or five times higher than the normal. In assessing the fatalities of these provincial sixteenth and seventeenth century epidemics before England's civil wars, Alan D. Dyer concludes that the average death toll in the towns averaged around 10%, but sometimes would hit 40% to 50%.<sup>687</sup> Averaging statistics out can be misleading in any situation of course, but with contagions and a nation with hundreds of preventative measures, wide differences become a strong possibility. Some places may not have had a single case: others...

Other effects involved resentment and violence. As the rich fled, those who stayed were usually the poor. They not only suffered plague and the fear of it, but the direct effects of their being few rich people left. These effects included often leaving them unemployed as no revenue came from their fleeing employers. Revenue losses also affected government - and so government itself was left in disarray and so services were not provided.<sup>688</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Ibid., pp. 620-624.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., p. 623.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>688</sup> Ibid., pp. 319-320.

Charities would also have been affected as donors fled. Resentments led to hostility towards the rich and to authorities because where they did operate, they enforced residence in pest houses and instituted other repressive measures.<sup>689</sup> Some brave attempts to calm the people happened. In 1627 in plague infested Salisbury ministers who stayed were cheered and Mayor Ivie walked the streets in his full mayoral regalia to show that local government was resilient and not abandoning them.<sup>690</sup>

Another source of resentment concerned the rustics: city people fled to the country, bringing the plague with them - or fear of it. The latter caused assaults and at least one deliberate drowning as a deterrent against proximity. Odd cases of fleeing thieves finding that no amount of plunder could buy accommodation emerged. One such thief died of exposure with fourteen hundred pounds found on his person. Normally that amount could have bought the whole village, let alone a night's accommodation.<sup>691</sup> Rural residents often manned barriers and roadblocks while sentries watched over villages.

Dyer remarks on several other effects of the plague in this era. Unlike the plagues which hit in 1361 and after during the fourteenth century, children were no longer a high proportion of plague casualties, but young men were: marriage rates were disrupted.<sup>692</sup> The plague and preventative effects devastated local economies – briefly. Deaths, illnesses and being locked in meant few if any customers. Even if necessity meant basic purchases

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<sup>689</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>690</sup> *Local Legends: UK History Local to You Wiltshire.*

<sup>691</sup> Creighton, p..519. He quotes Doctor Donne, Dean of Saint Paul's.

<sup>692</sup> Dyer, p. 313.

continued, casualties and quarantines would hamper production through a lack of labour to produce.<sup>693</sup> Similarly, the manned road blockages stopped buyers, raw materials, and the planning of trade routes, while officials banned fairs and markets.<sup>694</sup> These bans prevented selling remnants. How badly hit were the provinces? Exeter's 1625 epidemic ended almost all trading, while in York trade slowed in the 1631 outbreak.<sup>695</sup> In 1636-1639 Norwich's cloth trade was so badly hit that tradesmen frequently migrated to America, while in Preston 756 out of 887 residents went on poor relief.<sup>696</sup> Were these locals revealing typical or exceptionable examples?

One odd example which reversed the usual repressive, resented effects occurred in Salisbury. The city had protected itself in the 1625 outbreak with guards on the roads to keep out strangers and London trade goods.<sup>697</sup> However, in March 1627 an outbreak there led the Puritan Mayor John Ivie to denounce lewd locals, drunkards and whore-masters for causing the outbreak.<sup>698</sup> Blaming an outbreak on morality was not new, but his response was. Although the town council had been reforming the welfare laws since 1623, Ivie pressured the rich to donate so that the poor had the

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid, p. 317.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>695</sup> Dyer, p. 317; Kevin Sharpe, p. 621 p. 753.

<sup>696</sup> Kevin Sharpe, p. 621.

<sup>697</sup> Elizabeth Crittall, *Salisbury City Government: 1612-1635*. London; 1962. Digitalised. BRITISH HISTORY ONLINE <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol6/pp105-113>, accessed 11 July 2019.

<sup>698</sup> Uncredited, *Local Legends: UK History Local to You Wiltshire*. Ivie quoted. [www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/myths\\_legends/england/wiltshire/article\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/myths_legends/england/wiltshire/article_1.shtml), accessed 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

financial capability to be taught trades, while an expanded workhouse and a new brewery would be built. Ivie used brewery profits and donations to finance a tokens system of wages instead of money so that alcohol could not be purchased, only food and fuel. The system worked for twenty years before old ways returned. Unfortunately, this was not only new, it would apparently stay unique. Exeter's example of payouts seemed typical as the plague continued to strike.

Trade with the East fuelled the fire: the way contagion continually hit Venice, Europe's major trading entrepôt with the East, strongly suggests this. Another indication for this is that a thorough investigation conclusively linked sixteen out of twenty-four European outbreaks to seafaring trade.<sup>699</sup> This infection pattern repeatedly devastated Venice and northern Italy, despite strong preventative measures. One of the worst outbreaks hit in 1630, leaving tens of thousands of dead in Venice alone. It would eventually hit London badly in the next year. Pestilence became obvious in Newcastle in 1635, then England suddenly began to suffer another widespread outbreak in 1636, when around ten thousand English people soon died.<sup>700</sup> Hull, being another port always trading with Europe, lost 10% of its people to plague in the next year.<sup>701</sup>

Plague did not need fresh seaborne supplies to keep its hold on Medieval and Renaissance Europe; armies were great contagion carriers. Typhus, typhoid, dysentery and plague often devastated armies much more than war: campaigning forces gave these diseases to civilian residents wherever

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<sup>699</sup> Schmid.

<sup>700</sup> Cara Murphy, 'The Bubonic Plague and the Impact on Venice.' ICE Case Number 147. August 2005. Posted May 4<sup>th</sup> 2007. <https://flutrackers.com/...to.../21952the-bubonic-plague-and-the-impact-on-venice>, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

<sup>701</sup> Lambert, 'A Brief History of Kingston Upon Hull. England.'

they passed.<sup>702</sup> A well-known example of war spreading disease became apparent in the 1490s, after French armies invaded Italy and spread syphilis there. Another was in 1558 when Ivan the Terrible conquered khanate lands near Astrakhan. His army left a trail of famine and plague.<sup>703</sup>

Sieges were one of the most common ways for plague to spread in war. Sieges pushed both the besieged and besiegers. rats, other vermin and fleas together in cramped spaces with wounds, stress, fatigue and starvation decreasing resistance. For opposing armies and their civilians proximity was a great danger for spreading contagions, but eating vermin was surely even worse. Not only people, but rats died of starvation and their fleas must have found a new home in humans, When the Italian city of Mantua was besieged plague began in October 1629 and continued after the city's capture in July, when the last six or seven thousand survivors in what had been a city of thirty thousand surrendered to an army of what was now twelve thousand from what had initially been thirty thousand.<sup>704</sup> Few casualties on either side were battle deaths. A similar English example on a smaller demographic scale emerged in the 1380 Penrith siege by Scottish raiders. When the Scots plundered the town and its surroundings they took the plague back, leading to claims that it killed a third of Scotland's people.<sup>705</sup> Was this spread by contact with the besieged or by the four thousand cattle the Scots stole?<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>702</sup> Martines, p. 144.

<sup>703</sup> Brotton, p.47.

<sup>704</sup> Martines, pp. 190-193

<sup>705</sup> Scott, Duncan and Duncan, p. 1.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid., p. 17 p. 19.

Edinburgh and its port of Leith may at times have been the first transmission point into the British Isles for continental infections. Another possibility is that English wars or Scottish cattle drovers once again spread the plague into southern Scotland. Whatever the cause, Edinburgh and Leith were both so badly infected between 1645 and 1647 that both cities lost about half their populations: 35,000 in Edinburgh, a tenth of that number in much smaller Leith. The crowded, unsanitary, vermin infested slums there made for perfect plague breeding conditions. It was amongst Scotland's most devastating Black Death visitations and except for a few hundred cases nearly three centuries later, its last.<sup>707</sup>

Like Mantua, in the period of Britain's Civil Wars and their interregnum when armies still roamed, disease devastated several English cities. Sieges were the most common source. Bristol was badly hit in 1644 until after its surrender in the next year, when sieges in Carlyle, Leeds and Lilyfield also led to plague outbreaks. The brief peace that came in the spring of 1646 did not lead to the plague's cessation. Another outbreak spread across much of England in that year, with some places still being affected into 1648. Wartime conditions may have caused this epidemic, for it emerged between the two English Civil Wars, when the parliamentary army and roaming looter bands still existed and the land and people remained devastated and disordered. Government departments were disrupted and hardly in a condition to enforce sanitary and quarantine ordinances. Parliamentary armies and those of their enemies carried plague by passing through infected areas. One of the worst hit towns must have been Chester, which (as in 1603-1606) again endured one of England's longest epidemics in this situation. The prolonged outbreak there between 1646 and 1648 was proportionally amongst the worst as Chester lost two thousand residents; a

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<sup>707</sup> David Maclean, 'Lost Edinburgh: The Great Plague of 1645.' *The Scotsman*. 26<sup>th</sup> March 2004. <https://www.scotsman.com/news-2-15012/lost-edinburgh-the-great-plague-of-1645-1-3351337>, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

high and horrendous loss for a seventeenth century provincial town.<sup>708</sup> London had quartered troops and so endured the worst outbreak since 1631. It would be late 1648 before most of England was free of the last remnants of these pestilential blows.

These seventeenth century bubonic outbreaks would have two extremely important potential effects. In 1603, both the allies Elizabeth I of England and Sultan Ahmed al Mansur of Morocco died. The latter died of plague six months after James VI succeeded Elizabeth. Unlike her, James was not aligned with the Moroccans, who within months were engaged in a bloody civil war amongst Mansur's sons over the succession.<sup>709</sup> That conflict ended all commercial and diplomatic ties between Morocco and England and within months James signed a peace treaty with their common enemy Spain.

He now looked westwards to the New World for trade and colonization. Settlements began in Virginia at Jamestown in 1607, In Bermuda two years later and in the Massachusetts Bay area in 1620. New World sugar production started in Barbados in the 1630s and soon spread. This replaced the large and lucrative sugar trade with Morocco. While tobacco was initially a failure in Virginia, it soon became lucrative and in 1619 enslaved African were first imported to labour on tobacco, and soon on sugar and cotton. These settlements and their crops developments marked the beginnings of modern America. Would the USA have developed as a multi-racial, English-speaking Protestant nation with its puritan ways and its work ethic if Sultan Ahmed al Mansur had not died of plague and therefore James would stayed in a military, diplomatic and military alliance against Spain and been content to not have looked westwards for trade? It

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<sup>708</sup> Dyer, p. 310.

<sup>709</sup> Brotton, p.296.

is very possible and the effects of that is now modern America being colonized by his French, Dutch and Spanish rivals opens up possible effects for the whole globe beyond imagining.

A second possibility is also immense in its potential. In November 1651, Henry Ireton, a parliamentary leader Cromwell called his son (he was his son in law), died of plague while on active military duty in Ireland.<sup>710</sup> While not officially his deputy, he emerges Antonia Fraser's *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men* as Cromwell's right-hand man when Cromwell was becoming England's dictator. A young man, if he rules over England after Cromwell died in September 1658. Due to holding that position and due his virtues and also to being young, he was then likely to have ruled for many years. Ireton had proven himself a man of great ability in the fields of religion, politics, diplomacy and war. He had resolution, incisiveness, sedulousness, courage, and astuteness. He was a natural born leader. None of his qualities were evident in Richard Cromwell, who did succeed his father, briefly. His rule led to conflicts between the army and parliament. After his resignation parliament soon restored England's monarchy.

What would have happened if plague had not killed Ireton? The divisive strife which came immediately after Cromwell would have been settled quickly and decisively, if it arose.. With Ireton gaining more time to perpetuate Puritanical Republican ways, would both England's rule by monarchy and Anglicanism have faded away? Would the people have then become habituated to Cromwellian Puritanism and republicanism? If that had happened surely America's Puritan settlements would have been closer to their English government. Given the unpopularity of royalty as a motivation in the events leading to the American Revolution, would their War of Independence have even happened if England was a Puritan republic? Puritan America staying in a Puritan dominated British empire itself raises extraordinary possibilities. What would the world have been

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<sup>710</sup> Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men*. 1973. Saint Albans; 1975. p. 397.

like if instead of several hundred million Anglicans, that church had faded away or been reduced to a small sect and their global numbers were replaced by Puritans? What can be certain concerning Ireton is that his death by plague stopped these possibilities from developing.



## *Chapter 7*

### *The Last Great English Plague*

By the early 1660s England's people apparently had solid reasons to look to a future free of plague. The last major outbreak had dwindled away well over a decade before. Never before had England enjoyed that amount of time without an outbreak occurring somewhere in the kingdom. It must have seemed to them that their combination of preventative methods at the first signs of plague, (including quarantining, burning suspect goods, isolating suspects, guarded road barriers, banning public gatherings, foreign trade and travel) had worked. Other reasons for optimism were the way the provincial areas had quickly recovered from their economic collapses caused by the plague.<sup>711</sup>

The last and worst of the seventeenth century English plagues started with a few cases amongst foreigners who were resident in London in late 1664.<sup>712</sup> Although a delay of months passed before the realisation that infected people were in the city hit, once it did this time there was no bewildered, unprepared, supine response in higher levels of government. Once again, the pattern of contagion started in the far East, reached continental Europe and was carried to England by foreigners. Plague had returned to the Ottoman Empire in 1661 and followed its usual westward path across western Europe. Several Italian cities were badly hit, but the Dutch

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<sup>711</sup> Dyer, pp. 311-312.

<sup>712</sup> Defoe, p. 23.

suffered more than most. Amsterdam in 1663-1664 was devastated; somewhere between 24,000 and 35,000 people there died.<sup>713</sup>

That English delay of months before ensuring comprehensive quarantine and banning measures in the period between late 1664 and early 1665 was enough to give the tenacious pestilence another chance to spread. Once again, blame game players brought in God's will as a punishment for pleasure. The Puritans blamed the court's profligate behaviour. Charles II was indeed a man devoted to the pleasures of the flesh and the eye, but eyewitness and favoured royalist John Evelyn believed God was angry with Puritan heresies.<sup>714</sup> Unlike the 1348 English outbreak, apportioning blame during the spread of the outbreak cannot be easy. Charles I, his son eighteen years later and their advisors may bear no more blame for anything, excepting perhaps tardiness in enforcing their worthwhile ideas.

In the 1660s outbreak others developed the ordinances of 1603 and the 1630s further. Enforcing these ordinances, officials insisted that houses containing plague victims were sealed with a red cross on the door and inscribed with the slogan 'Lord have mercy on us.' Two guards were placed before such houses, one for the day shift, one for night.<sup>715</sup> Health care workers were to carry a painted white stick four-foot long so that people saw their approach and presumably either avoided them or begged for their assistance.<sup>716</sup> A year before the plague broke out the estuarine quarantine station near London was operative. After the pestilence had

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<sup>713</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 114; Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Hammondsworth; 1966. p. 23; Rideal estimates 24,000, p. 28.

<sup>714</sup> Rideal, quoting Evelyn, p. 223; Aubrey Menen, *London*. Amsterdam; 1976. p. 37.

<sup>715</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 114; Mary Dobson, p. 15.

<sup>716</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 114.

broken out in some London suburbs the city had an internal quarantine. What were then called pest houses (and what we would now call hospices) were established. Even before England was at war with the Dutch and the French, the government forbade trade and contact with the Dutch. Charles II followed the example of his grandfather James I and father Charles I in taking wise steps to fight the plague, even adding others. Under his 'Order for the Prevention of Plague' mayors, bailiffs, justices of the peace and other officers were to enforce these additional rules:

Strangers were forbidden to travel without a special bill of health.

No furniture was to be removed from an infected house.

Public gatherings such as funerals were discouraged.

Ale houses were to be kept clean and limits were placed on their crowds and opening hours.

No unwholesome meat, stinking fish or musty corn was to be tolerated.

Swine, dogs, cats and tame pigeons were not permitted to move in the streets.

Pest houses were to be set up with examiners looking for plague symptoms.

The first to be infected in a family was to go to a pest house.

Red crosses were to be painted on infected houses with warnings in large letters.

A forty-day quarantine period applied to infected houses once plague was known to be there. Infected houses were to be well fumed, washed and whitened with lime. No clothes were to be removed for three months.

No burials were to be within church yards unless they were of a large number. The bodies were to be covered with lime and the graves not opened for a year.

Special provisions, prayers and collections were to be made for the poor.

The utmost severity would be applied to officers failing in their duty.<sup>717</sup>

In July London's mayor issued another proclamation extending steps to be taken. He forbade beggars, vagrants and dangerous people from entering the city and forbade visitors and strangers entering residences. Closing taverns and dispersing gatherings happened. Lawbreakers were to be immediately arrested. Hawkers and balladeers were banned from their street trade and killed dogs, cats and other vermin were not to be left in the streets.<sup>718</sup> This proclamation was wisely not only for aldermen, but was to be read in churches. One point, banning boaters on the Thames, now reads eccentrically, but the river was still a virtual highway for travel, and therefore for filth and infection.

Despite all these preventative steps the land was savaged again. The high fatality figures make the King's attempts initially seem a dismal failure, yet compare these proportionally with both the whole kingdom in 1348-1350 and then London numbers in both the 1348-1350 and 1666 epidemics and a different answer emerges. In Medieval London and some other major cities death rate estimates went as high as 90%, with even half of that percentage being a conservative estimate: two out of three Londoners dead was likely. In Restoration London roughly 15% to 20% of the inhabitants died.<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> Charles II, 'Order for the Prevention of Plague.' *The National Archives*. 'Great Plague of 1665-1666.' [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/greatplague](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/greatplague), accessed June 2019. The textual listing above paraphrases the original and I also use modern English and moved regulations to be near similar ones.

<sup>718</sup> 'A Proclamation to the Aldermen by the Mayor of London.' Issued July 4<sup>th</sup> 1665. Reproduced by Naphy and Spicer, p. 106. This is an appendice in this work.

<sup>719</sup> The National Archives. 'Great Plague of 1665-1666.' The lower figure comes from the uncredited modern introduction to primary source documents; Naphy and Spicer give the higher estimate, p. 119.

Despite a high toll in 1664-1666 estimates for those years are still hundreds of thousands lower than higher estimates for the Plantagenet years.

How many did die in the 1664-1666 outbreak? Probable childhood eyewitness and adult researcher Defoe put the death toll just in London as at the very least as over a hundred thousand.<sup>720</sup> Even this was a conservative estimate, as he stated and as modern historians agree. Defoe has much to reveal about both the many fatalities from related causes and the inefficient, erroneous, incomplete and sometimes deliberately false records. In the middle of 1666, when the last remnants of this nearly nationwide pestilence faded away, at the very least, using incomplete and paltry records, around two hundred thousand Londoners had died.<sup>721</sup> With estimates of 400,000 unreported British deaths, the real nationwide toll was likely to have been around a million, perhaps as high as 1.4 million.<sup>722</sup> As the 1650 population was around five million, this gives a proportional death toll range of around two in ten, perhaps to seven in twenty-five. This compares to a low in 1348 of two in ten up to a high estimate of five in ten or more. Clearly proportionally, the 1660s epidemic was less devastating.

The later English outbreak also lasted only half as long as its first great epidemic, at least in part due to the later security measures. If these were not a great success, they were not a dismal failure either. They reveal a break with the fatalistic "The end has come." "Let God's will happen" and "This must be God's just punishment" lines of thought that are a certain barrier to any possible level of preventative success. Instead, the ordinance

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<sup>719</sup> Defoe, p. 116.

<sup>720</sup> Naphy and Spicer; p. 113.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.,

and subsequent document shows a determined, calm, clear will to prevent the catastrophe spreading and to fight it where it existed. It also shows that although they did not have the scientific knowledge needed to fully understand the causes, the majority of pestilence fighters were now on the right track, understanding that filth, vermin and contact with people and objects touched by the infected spread plague. They also understood the power of bacterial and virus killers such as fire and lime powder. While coming too late to block the pestilence's spread, the practical workers and rule enforcers do appear to be functioning at their task with regularity.

Three major problems entwined to ensure that the king's and Mayor Lawrence's edicts did not entirely succeed. The first and perhaps most important was the way that the first few cases starting in late 1664 and going into the next early spring received little attention: the plague's tenacious grip predated the ordinances and proclamation by months, even if comparatively few cases emerged before the king acted. A second problem concerned the common people. Many more lives would have been saved if the people had adhered to the ordinances, but they frequently did not adhere. In Daniel Defoe's fiction *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) he states this. He mentions how instead of preaching practical methods quacks, preachers, soothsayers and sellers of charms and amulets did a great if otiose trade. Both Pepys and Defoe mention the most outstanding example, a Quaker and former composer Solomon Eagle, who strode the streets preaching nearly naked with a burning brazier attached to his head.<sup>723</sup> Like the sellers, he shows that common attitudes had not greatly changed since the Middle Ages. Defoe describes how house quarantines frequently failed as people used upper storey windows and attics to escape their homes by clambering over rooves. The poor in particular ignored

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<sup>723</sup> 'Solomon Eccles.' *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon\\_Eccles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Eccles) accessed 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

prohibitions, Being financially desperate, they often kept working as if the disastrous disease was of no consequence.<sup>724</sup> Another eyewitness presents corroborating evidence for Defoe's last point. Thomas Povey writes of how the poor, being used to death, focused on what they considered oppressive: to them: the city council, royal edicts and government proclamations seemed tyrannical.<sup>725</sup> In a court case held at Whitehall in the presence of the king on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1665, Charles II heard how a riot happened. This started when a cross was removed from the door of an infected house, people fled and authorities ordered a chase.<sup>726</sup> The common people's resistance to proclamations, edicts and mass burials must have become a common cause for bacteria and viruses to spread.

Considering the treatment of the dead, such hostility becomes understandable. The commonly known imagery of death cart drivers on their regular rounds calling out "Bring out your dead!" dates from this time.<sup>727</sup> Believing that this happened in fourteenth century epidemics is apparently another fallacy: where is the evidence from that earlier time for such a thing happening? In 1666 London corpses were loaded onto the backs of carts or wagons and then indiscriminately tipped into pits, usually with little physical contact. This became possible by tipping up the carts so that the dead slipped any which way into prepared trenches or pits. Excavated plague pits from this time reveal jumbled skeletons. Images from such sites as well as illustrations have led to the common misconception that the Medieval and early Renaissance burials also usually

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<sup>724</sup> Defoe, p. 220.

<sup>725</sup> The National Archives, 'Great Plague of 1665-1666.'

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>727</sup> Rideal, p. 48.

happened this way: despite the evidence from a Cambridge pit and William of Dene's account, archaeological evidence shows otherwise.

Another difference between the earlier outbreaks and that of the 1660s was that the later burial sites grave diggers usually covered bodies with lime and by ordinance corpses were buried at a depth of six feet, hence the almost worldwide, still current effect of burying the dead at that depth.<sup>728</sup> There had been of course burials at that depth before it became a legal requirement, but before then from at least the Medieval era a depth of three feet was customary.

In considering how even the lower fatality figures are certainly understated, a third cause for the failure to stop the disease emerges for plausible reasons. These are given by one 1660s London eyewitness, John Graunt. An early demographer, he investigated the investigators and their way of recording deaths, finding much wrong. Clear instructions that those employed in this task should be of good character, respectable and reliable, date from the Bills of Mortality established in 1603 and reinforced in the 1660s - on paper.<sup>729</sup> Graunt found that searchers were frequently corrupt, illiterate and incompetent, so how did illiterates (assuming that they were honest) identify and record causes of death from medical certificates? Parish clerks were also probably bribed into keeping the real causes hidden.<sup>730</sup> Ostracism and loss of business were two obvious causes for keeping infection secret. Quarantining, which under the new

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<sup>728</sup> Anthony Burgess and Christopher Bristow, (editors) *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Hammondsorth; 1966. Anthony Burgess, A modern footnote to Defoe's account, p. 62.n

<sup>729</sup> John Lawrence, Mayor. 'Orders Conceived and Published by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London Concerning the Infection of the Plague.' 1665. This document refers to needed qualities several times. Reproduced by Defoe, pp. 57-66.

<sup>730</sup> 'Great Plague of London.' *Wikipedia*.

restrictions kept people at home for forty days, was another implemented unpopular limitation which got inimical responses. Graunt noted that the deaths listed from other causes were very much higher than usual; probably a sign of a cover up. Defoe also states this and offers factual evidence. He reproduces Bills of Mortality with which he has his narrator explain that the other causes of death sections had extremely high, virtually impossible increases during this time; these numbers suddenly dropped with the onset of cold and reductions in plague.<sup>731</sup> Like Graunt, he mentions corruption amongst administrators and their desire to not be connected to the contagion raging amongst the common people. Other problems which Graunt mentions as likely to lower the real toll were that burial parties often did not record the poor dumped in plague pits and those who were not Anglicans were frequently uncounted and unmentioned in Anglican parish registers which usually only recorded Anglicans. Other figures for other denominations and foreigners are at best incomplete. Another cause for inaccurate understated figures was that people did not want to be known as contagious victims and officers were open to bribery, causing "great abuse in reporting the disease."<sup>732</sup> London's Bills of Mortality for 1665 gave a Black Death toll of 68,595.<sup>733</sup> Apart from the reasons Pepys, Bell, Graunt and Defoe give this cannot be the full total as this pestilence started in 1664 and in London continued into early 1666. The Chancellor, Lord Clarendon estimated that London's death toll was twice what the Bill of Mortality stated. As the English population

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<sup>731</sup> Defoe, pp. 215-218.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., p. 59 pp. 215-216.

<sup>733</sup> Company Parish Clerks of London, 'London's Annual Report on Deaths for 1665.' *Wikipedia*.

in 1650 was an estimated five to 5¼ million, dropping to 4.9 million three decades later, even Grumble's estimate of plague deaths (the highest of these estimates) must be much lower than the likely reality. With thirty years of natural increase, improved diet from trade with the colonies and no other mass epidemics, natural disasters or major wars, that late seventeenth century estimate should have been much higher.<sup>734</sup> Increasing migration to the colonies, especially after the plague, was also a factor in lowering population, albeit a proportionally low one.

Once again, an outbreak led to popular fallacies, both connected to books.. Fifty-six years after the epidemic ended Defoe had published a fiction now commonly known as *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Its original title page was *A Journal of the Plague Year: being observations or memorials of the most redoubtable occurrences public as private which happened in London during the last great visitation in 1665*.<sup>735</sup> Defoe's name does not appear on the title page. Instead, the book is supposedly "Written by a citizen who continued all the while in London." Along with Pepys writings, *A Journal of the Plague Year* makes the 1665 great mortality appear as mainly another London outbreak, not the national disaster it was. The narrator is fictional, but most of the book is not.

This novel seems creditable as an eyewitness account for several good reasons. He has successfully created the persona and style of a sober, observant, male merchant. This work reads as a journal, lacking the didactic morality, self-censorship, contrived situations or melodramatic effects of so many eighteenth-century narratives. It is so easy to take it as a valid primary source written in 1665-1666 and many mistakenly do. In some ways that are not so obvious it is indeed a valid source. Defoe was

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<sup>734</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>735</sup> Anthony Burgess and Christopher Bristow, (eds.) The editors reproduce the original title page. p. 21. The antiquated spelling has been updated by this writer.

probably a child eyewitness, living in London and being at most seven and perhaps as young as five when the scourge ended. He used family memories, interviewed survivors and inspected what documents he found.<sup>736</sup> Unfortunately, he did not give footnotes, although he reproduces Bills of Mortality as evidence of faked figures. He uses many sources and identifies them in this text; everything from parish and assorted official records and anecdotes to spells and incantations. He reversed historical writers' usual processes where past events give colour and dramatic situations to develop their characters. Here Defoe's main character is a narrator in the background and the situation is the focus. All characters exist to show how the epidemic devastated London or nearby areas. He fills this fiction with historic detail.<sup>737</sup>

In contrast, Pepys did not write his account as fiction or provide much analysis. He was an eyewitness in London and his account remains a valuable primary source, describing what he sees and what others then recounted, but his writing lacks the detail, length and scope all so evident in *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Too many commentators treat the writings of Pepys and Defoe as either history or fiction, while the reality is that they do not fit easily or purely into either category.

Unintentionally Pepys and Defoe, by focusing on London, lead to a second fallacy about this outbreak, that London was the only place hit by the new pestilence in 1665. Defoe does briefly mention the spread to other cities and has some episodes set in nearby forests and the countryside, but London remains his focus. The high number of fatalities in London and writings which focus solely on the capital reinforce this impression. Modern works sometimes describe this outbreak as the great plague of London, or London's last great plague.

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid.,

In reality much of England was heavily infected. Once again refugees fleeing this city often took the disease with them, resulting in rustics forcibly banning travellers from entering their locales, again. For refugees the result was that many subsisted in forests or by the roadside. In such locales they died of hunger and what Defoe describes as distress. What that word means apparently combines mental and physical stresses. Continual cold systematically lowers body temperature. This is now described as exposure. This combines with repeated nights of hunger and endured cold and forest noises and so leads to a loss of the regular undisturbed sleep

necessary for physical and mental health. Few have lived beyond around eight or nine consecutive days without sleep.

When these effects do not kill by themselves, they leave exposure victims weaker to bronchitis and pneumonia and to contagions such as typhus, typhoid, fevers and plague. Whether it was spread by vermin, people or infected goods, the pestilence did spread first through London's neighbouring areas, then over much of England. Lower fatality rates or none show that barring both travellers and trade goods, establishing boundaries and quarantines and putting victims in pest houses had some effect in the western and northern areas. The decision by the Council of Scotland to close their border to stop the contagion, to ban foreigners without a bill of health and to put ships and their crews through quarantine procedures worked; Scotland was spared.<sup>738</sup>

Some outlying cities, such as Salisbury, were in comparison to London only lightly hit with a fatality rate of 7%, while in Colchester the fatality rate

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<sup>738</sup> The National Archives. 'Great Plague of 1665-1666.' Modern introduction to primary source documents; Naphy and Spicer, p. 122; Rideal. p. 67.

reached 49% and Southampton also lost about half its inhabitants.<sup>739</sup> Shipping from continental Europe, where the plague raged, was almost certainly connected to this high rate. It hit strongly in those other towns, which like Colchester, were connected to that trade route. These included Yarmouth, Ipswich, Newcastle and Sunderland, the latter two ports being particularly hard hit.<sup>740</sup>

Attributing the spread of the deadly disease cannot always be blamed on overcrowding caused by large refugee numbers. As Colchester and Southampton's losses show, frequently many areas with fewer slums and much lower numbers than London suffered with proportionally higher casualty rates.

Eyam, a Derbyshire village provided both an example of altruism and of the contagion taking hold without the usual problems from rats, pollution, filth and overcrowding.<sup>741</sup> When a tailor there received a bolt of cloth from London and shook it so that infected fleas fell out he was dead within two days and his household were infected. Reverend William Mompression persuaded Eyam's villagers to quarantine themselves to stop the plague's spread. Boundary stones were placed around the village and plague stones were used, so that villagers from nearby Stoney Middleton brought food, left it near the boundary stone and took payment. A generous aristocrat

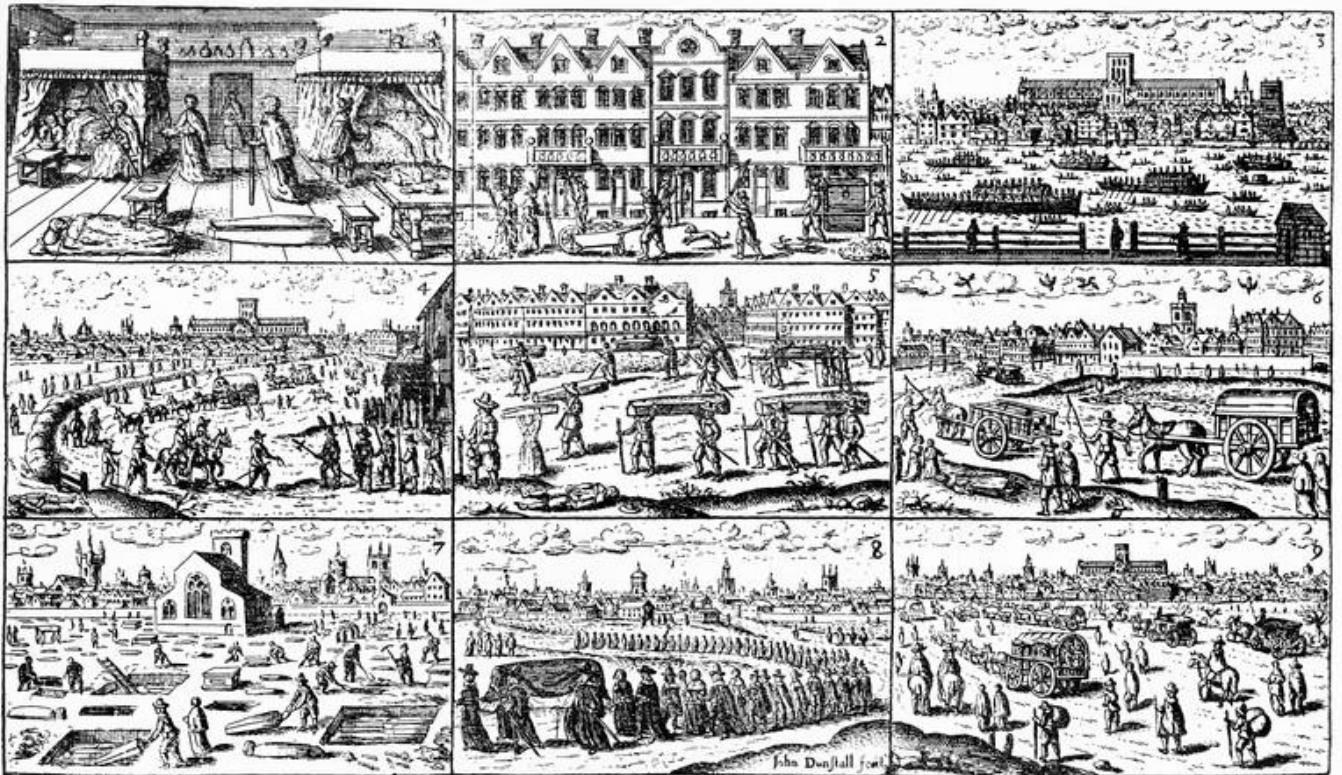
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<sup>739</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 120 p. 122.

<sup>740</sup> Defoe, p. 230.

<sup>741</sup> The story of Elam has been retold in many secondary sources. The major source for the version given here relies on an excerpt from *Companion into Derbyshire*, by Ethel Carlton Williams. Published in 1948, this excerpt is reproduced on the website *Stoney Middleton Heritage*. Posted 2019. [smhscq.org/village\\_history\\_the\\_great\\_plague\\_of\\_1665](http://smhscq.org/village_history_the_great_plague_of_1665), accessed June 14<sup>th</sup> 2019. Other sources are Naphy and Spicer, Justbod, Rideal, 'Eyam' in *Wikipedia* and a segment in *Joanna Lumley's Home Sweet Home: Travels in My Own Land*. Episode 1 Shown 7:40 p.m. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021. ABC Television.

living nearby also sent supplies. The unviolated quarantine lasted fourteen months, well into 1666.\* Differing secondary accounts give different figures for how many were involved and how many died or survived. The figures for the total numbers involved go from 350 to over 800, with survivors numbering either 83 from the lower figure or 430 from the higher.<sup>742</sup>



FASEMILE REPRODUCTION FROM A PICTORIAL BROADSIDE OF 1666 (4) IN POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR

*Nine images of the plague in London, 17th century. Credit: [Wellcome Collection](#). CC BY*

<sup>742</sup> 'Eyam.' *Wikipedia*.

\* It would be March 2020 before the church went into a quarantine again.



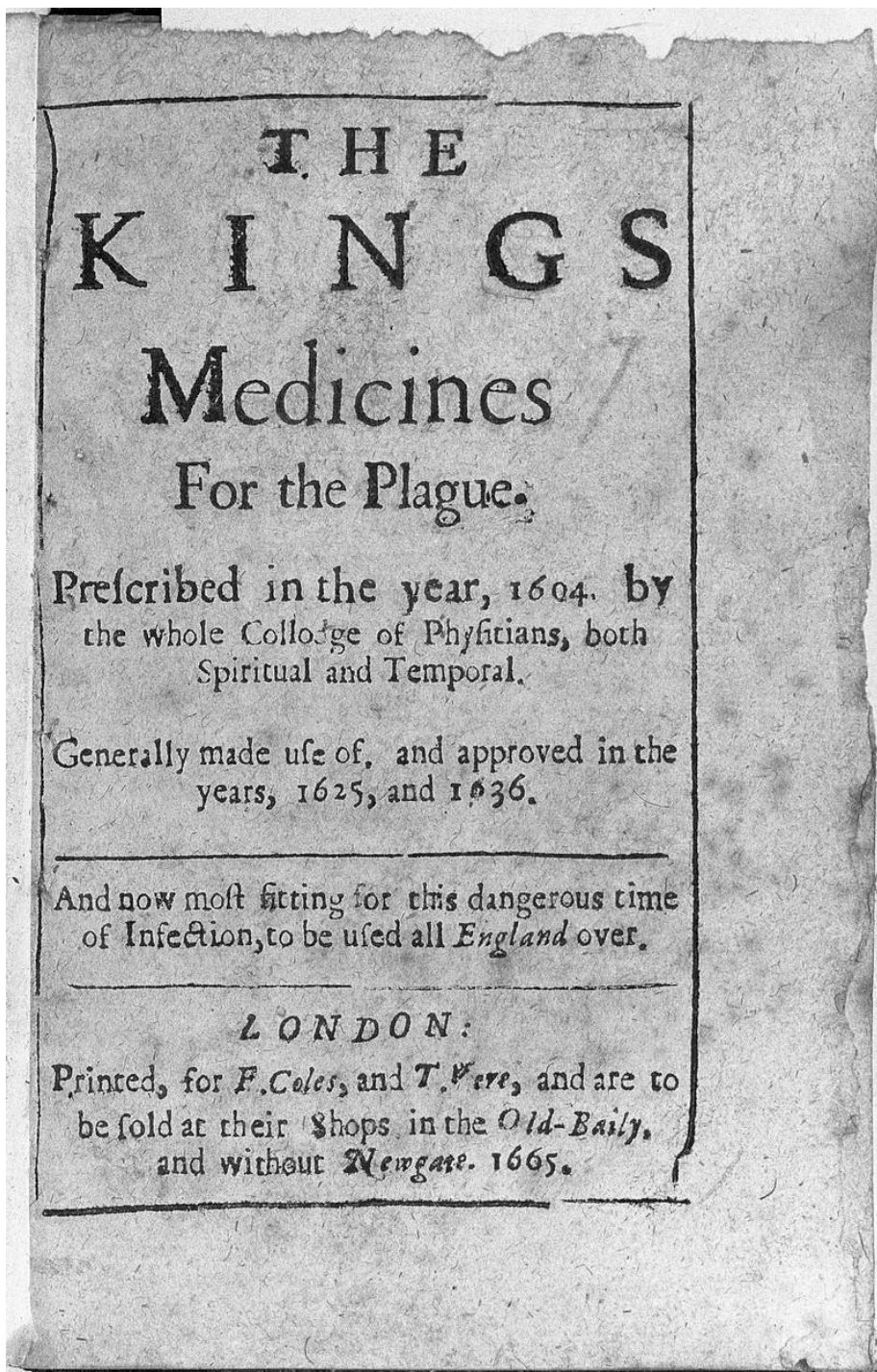
*Solomon Eagle (also known as Solomon Eccles) depicted here as striding through plague ridden London with burning coals on his head, trying to fumigate the air and call people to repentance. The figure in the background shows the likely public response. Chalk drawing by E.M. Ward, 1848.*

Credit: [Wellcome Collection](#) CCBY



*Collecting the dead in 1665. Courtesy Wikipedia.*

The frontpiece of the king's instructions to assist fighting the plague. Originating in 1604, it was updated for England's last outbreak



Credit: Commons/ Wikipedia



# RULES and ORDERS

To be observed by all Justices of Peace, Mayors, Bayliffs, and other Officers, for prevention of the spreading of the PLAGUE.

Published by His Majesties special Command.

6. That Fires in moveable Hang, or otherwise, be made in all necessary publique Meetings in Churches, &c. and convenient Furnes to correct the Air be burnt thereon.

7. That care be taken that no unwholsome Meats, Stinking Fish, Flesh, musty Cozn, or any other unwholsome Food be exposed to sale in any Shops or Markets.

8. That no Swaine, Dogs, Cats, or tame Pigeons be permitted to pass up and down in Streets, or from house to house, in places Infected.

9. That the Lawes against Inn-Houses be forthwith put in strict execution, and that no more Alehouses be Licensed then are absolutely necessary in each City or place, especially during the continuance of this present Contagion.

10. That each City and Town forthwith provide some convenient place remote from the same, to where a Pest-house, Huts, or Sheds may be Erected, to be in readyness in case any Infection should break out; to which if it shall happen to do, That able and faithful Searchers and Examiners be forthwith provided and Sworn to search all suspected bodie, for the usual signs of the Plague, viz. Swellings or Risings under the Ears or Arm-pits, or upon the Groynes; Blains, Carbuncles, or little Spots, either on the Breast or back, commonly called Tokens.

11. That if any House be Infected, the sick person or persons be forthwith removed to the said Pest-house, Sheds, or Huts, for the preservation of the rest of the Family: And that such house (though none be dead therein) be shut up for Forty days, and have a Red Cross, and Lord have mercy upon us, in Capital Letters affixed on the dooz, and Warders appointed, as well to find them necessaries, as to keep them from conberling with the sound.

12. That at the opening of each Infected house (after the expiration of the said Forty days) a White Cross be affixed on the said dooz, there to remain Twenty days more; during which time, or at least before any stranger be suffered to lodge therein, That the said house be well fumed, Washed and Whited all ober within with Lime; And that no Clothes, or Householdstuff be removed out of the said house into any other house, for at least Three moneths after, unless the persons so Infected have occasion to change their habitation.

13. That none dying of the Plague be buried in Churches, or Church-yards (unless they be large, and then to have a place assigned for that use (to where other bodie are not usually buried) Boarded or Paled in Ten foot high) but in some other convenient places, and that a good quantity of unslark Lime be put into the Graves with such bodie, and that such Graves be not after opened within the space of a year or more, lest they infect others.

14. That in case any City, Burrough, Town or Village be so Visited and Infected, that it is not able to maintain its own pooz, That then a Rate be forthwith made by the adjoining Justices of the Peace, and confirmed at the very next Quarter-Sessions, for that use, upon the neighbouring Parishes, according to the Statute 1<sup>o</sup> Jacobi, so that such Visited pooz may have sufficient Relief; want and nastiness being great occasions of the Infection.

15. That you your selves use your utmost endeavours, not only to see these Directions punctually obserbed, and be in a readyness to render an Account as often as you shall be required, but that you strictly enjoyn all High Constables, Petty Constables, Headdurroughs and other Officers, to execute their respective Duties according to their places, and if any shall fail herein, to use the utmost severity against them according to Law.

What relates to Physitians, Chyrurgeons, and such other persons as are necessary for the preservation and help of such who shall be Infected, the same is left to your particular care and discretion.

Lastly, That you take special care, that not onely the Monethly Fasts, but that the publique Prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays also, be strictly and constantly obserbed according to His Majesties Proclamation; And that such Collections as shall be then made, be strictly applied to the relief and necessities of the pooz in Infected places, by which means God may be inclined to remove his severe hand both from amongst you and us.

Deaths go from 259 to the 273 mentioned in church records.<sup>743</sup> This self-sacrificing, courageous act stopped the plague spreading elsewhere. Even so, Ethel Carlton Williams in her *Companion to Derbyshire* raised the likelihood that in that contained space the plague spread amongst the villagers with more effect than if they had fled.

The disease was fading away in London by early January 1666; the city's official weekly death toll dropped to ninety and the court and government departments were preparing to return to the capital and did so early the next month, when the weekly death toll had dropped further, to fifty-six.<sup>744</sup>

This waning away in London did not end the plague in England, which is another fallacy. In Spring 1666 some remnants still existed; it still ravaged many regional centres and towns.<sup>745</sup> Eyam, Ipswich, Colchester, Yarmouth, Norwich and Gravesend were particularly badly hit and even the fleet was affected in April and May.<sup>746</sup> Graves of plague victims dated as late as August 1666 appear near Eyam.<sup>747</sup>

And the effects? The tremendous economic and demographic resilience Dyer and others described as happening in the provinces in the earlier seventeenth century epidemics also occurred after 1665. Surplus residents from the rural areas came to the cities and filled vacancies. Within decades in the Restoration era Black Death was a memory, not a way of change or a long-lasting economic disaster.

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<sup>743</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>744</sup> Rideal, p. 92. p. 103-105.

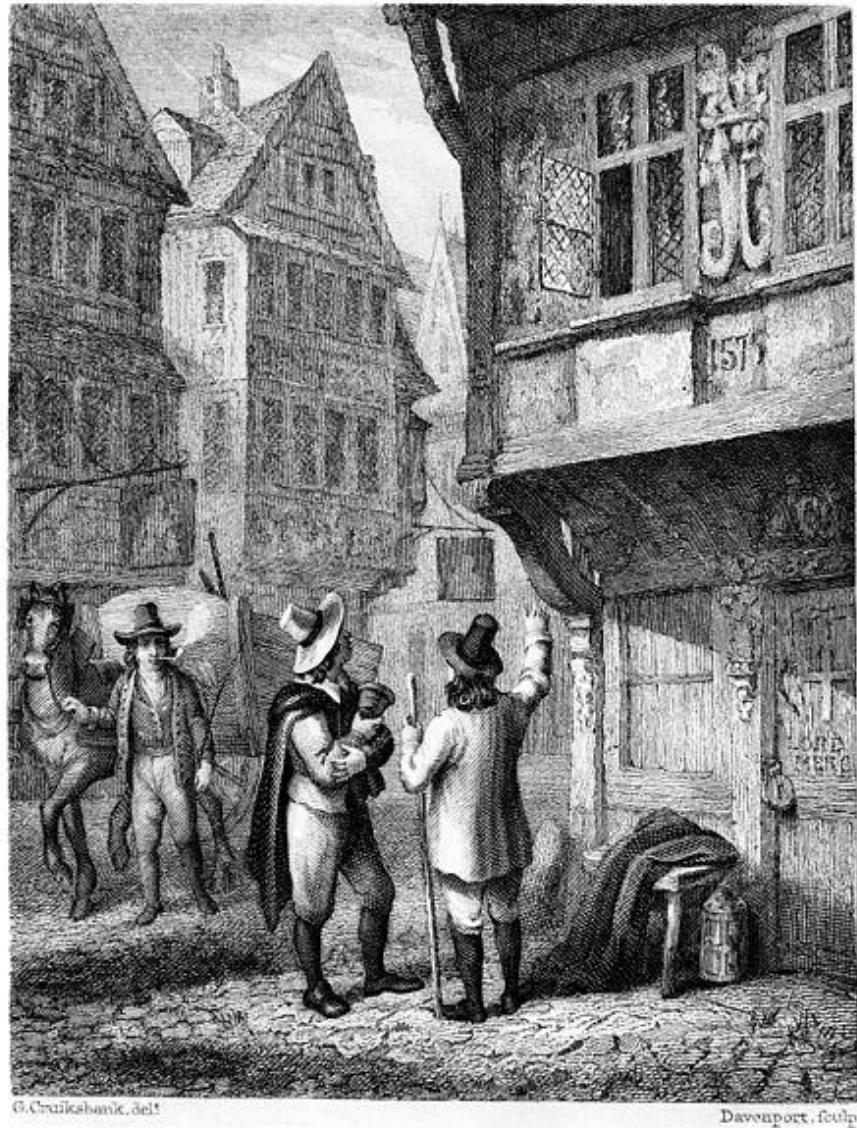
<sup>745</sup> Mitra, p. 7.

<sup>746</sup> Rideal, pp. 115-116. p. 160.

<sup>747</sup> Lumley,



*Eyam's church and Eyam's boundary stone. Both images are from Wikipedia*



*'The Dead Cart' by George Cruikshank. The two pedestrians (one with a warning bell in hand) are calling on London householders to give up their dead.*  
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fe/Plague\\_in\\_London%2C\\_1665.\\_Wellcome\\_M0005746.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fe/Plague_in_London%2C_1665._Wellcome_M0005746.jpg)

## *Chapter 8*

### *1666: The Aftermath*

1666 marked the end of London's last great outbreak of the Black Death.<sup>748</sup> After this, despite dreaded expectations, only occasional cases would occur. This has puzzled many writers, but Defoe unintentionally reveals a major reason when he describes how in 1665 multitudes of dogs, cats and mice and a "prodigious multitude" of rats were destroyed by baits.<sup>749</sup> Rats are prodigious breeders and the black rat should have made a comeback from this attack, but differing events combined to prevent this. The Great 1666 Fire of London destroyed most of the city.<sup>750</sup> Those rats which survived both the pestilence and the sanitation exterminations, would have had little chance to survive the fire due to the way that it spread and consumed. Their habitual home of thatched rooves provided no escape as flames spread upward. Port warehouses, by being near water and shipping were amongst their favoured residences. Most of these being on the banks of the Thames burned with extraordinary suddenness and speed on the fire's first night, so that those vermin not burned to death immediately tried a presumed failed escape attempt of diving into the Thames. Others may have already existed in another favoured habitation, cellars - or possibly escaped there to get away from the flames. Cellars were a death trap in a house fire, rarely providing an escape from flames above. Rideal writes of how cellars were amongst the last and longest to burn as they frequently

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<sup>748</sup> Defoe, pp. 136-137.

<sup>749</sup> Menen pp. 5-41.

<sup>750</sup> Menen. pp. 5-41; Rideal, pp. 167-225. Passim. Rideal describes the process and the rebuilding, using many primary source eyewitnesses, reports and illustrations.

contained flammable goods. As in earlier Black Death outbreaks, a greater drama overshadowed the rats' role.

Enforcing the king's 1667 Rebuilding Act also unintentionally ensured the black rat made no great comeback. Charles II insisted on open spaces, and also on rebuilding in stone and brick, both of which was inhospitable to them.<sup>751</sup> From the late sixteenth century onwards building in stone or brick was replacing building with timber and the Great Fire accelerated this.<sup>752</sup> This meant that thatched and timber rooves and walls, all three so attractive to rats, were usually replaced with uninhabitable tiles of clay, slate pieces, hardwoods, bricks, mortar, stone and sometimes tin or other metals. These materials would retain the extremes of heat and cold, making it difficult for rats with their delicate paws to creep across such surfaces or live below them. In contrast, thatch, by not retaining temperature extremes, was more habitable by vermin. So were the little noticed reed and woven straw floor coverings. Erasmus gives a horrified eyewitness description of how reeds and straw harboured all types of filth and vermin.<sup>753</sup> From the crusades onwards such coverings were slowly giving way to carpets, so much easier to keep clean. Their denser weave and dyes also made them less habitable to vermin. Having one flat surface rather than multitudinous woven grooves also made cleaning easier and containment of food scraps, filth and small vermin more difficult.

In the late 1960s woven straw floor coverings made a comeback, but within a decade that fashion waned as people found they absorbed spilt liquids, food scraps and crumbs. Apart from the inherent attraction of straw

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<sup>751</sup> Rideal, p. 216.

<sup>752</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*. p.51

<sup>753</sup> Deaux, p. 123.

scrappy food sources stored there attracted vermin of all kinds and as so frequently happened, vermin as well as food attracted rats and fleas. Another important reason for the decline of black rats within the city was part of the bigger picture; builders ensured that new houses replaced London's crowded hovels, major breeding grounds for plague.<sup>754</sup>

The rapid 1666 fire would have also eradicated much of the city's vermin and the refuse they fed on. The very act of rebuilding most of London also meant that for years the city experienced nearly perennial noise. The movements of builders with their thudding feet and their creaky barrows, carts and wagons, and their plodding horses' hooves resulted in ground reverberating or being irregularly shaken in ways barely noticeable to humans, but frightening for vermin. Hammering and sawing would have added to this. All these forms of disturbance would have discouraged vermin, reducing their presence in many areas. These factors must have contributed to the way that London avoided major plague epidemics again. When rats did eventually return in large numbers it was the grey species, much less liable to carry Asia's deadly plague bearing fleas.

Western Europe would endure major outbreaks for another eighty years after England's last large pestilence visitation. Massive outbreaks continually hit Venice during the seventeenth century because the city stayed an entrepôt for the Silk Road trade and continued its regular seafaring ties to several eastern ports.<sup>755</sup> Two of the worst and last western European outbreaks were in another great port, Marseilles, first in 1720-1722 and again in 1734. The 1720-1722 Marseilles devastation killed around forty to sixty thousand in a population of ninety thousand.<sup>756</sup> This

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<sup>754</sup> Menen, pp. 40-45.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>756</sup> Mitra, p. 2; Simpson p. 11 He gives the higher figure.

catastrophe is sometimes described as Europe's last great bubonic plague outbreak, but this is not so, a small, localised outbreak occurred in Italy in 1815. Larger epidemics were in the Ukraine in 1738-1739 and western Russia and Poland suffered major epidemics in 1769-1771.<sup>757</sup> Moscow would lose seventy thousand by official figures in 1771 and probably eighty thousand, with surrounding villages and towns losing around twenty thousand more.<sup>758</sup> When the city's daily death toll went over twelve hundred a day a mad riot ensued in which people attacked surgeons and forcibly broke into plague houses. Looters took plunder and owners retook possessions intended for burning while rioters hugged corpses to show defiance and fatalistic attitudes.<sup>759</sup> Authorities used soldiers to suppress the rioters. Eyewitness Doctor Charles de Mertens was then able to institute sensible preventative measures similar to those used in seventeenth century London. Moscow and London had more than that in common.

Like Defoe and Graunt, Mertens found the fatalistic, inimical resistance of the common people made it difficult to stop the epidemic. Once again plague was preferred to regulations and it was a punishment from God. Like early Restoration London, Moscow was a large capital with a thriving water borne foreign and national trade. Another similarity was that Moscow was then also built primarily of timber and thatch. Like London, after a great fire destroyed most of the city, Moscow would also be rebuilt in materials the same or similar to London and therefore also never had another great outbreak after its rebuilding. Czar Alexander I started building this essentially new city in 1813, after Napoleon's great fire. Other

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<sup>757</sup> Mertens, p. viii p. 3. p. 85.

<sup>758</sup> Mertens, p. 26 p. 32.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-23

reasons also account for the end of reoccurrences. Doctor Mertens wrote an account of Moscow in 1771 in which he gave clear reasons for his success in dealing with the plague, which he clearly meant to be emulated. These included the fastest possible response at the first symptoms being known, isolation which while effective, was not imprisoning, burning absolutely any infected possessions, fumigating buildings and burying the dead deep with a strong covering. He advised banning cloth, wool, furs and feathers, without quite understanding that they were dangerous, not only because of human touch, but because they could be carrying fleas.<sup>760</sup> He also advocated banning contact with nations where plague was prevalent. Although his writings may not have always been the original source, these ideas would also be found to be effective by others and would eventually go global, being taken up across the British Empire, especially after a third pandemic began in China in the 1870s.

After 1666 England seemed free of the pestilence. Referring to a 1900 Glasgow case Doctor Colvin stated this to be the first in Great Britain for 235 years.<sup>761</sup> This may have been incorrect. In 1888 the town of Middlesbrough suffered an unusual outbreak of what seemed then to be some strange form of pneumonia, causing 369 infections, while in contrast the local total for the period 1880-1887 came to 334 - and the symptoms were also unusual; all of which in one case at least matched pneumatic plague.<sup>762</sup> In 1890 a similar outbreak hit a Lincolnshire village, killing eighteen - and it had the same odd test results.<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>761</sup> Colvin, p. 1782.

<sup>762</sup> Stout, pp. 664-668.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.,



*In September 1771 Moscow's Black Death epidemic led to riots and panic, vividly portrayed here, perhaps over vividly. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36915842>*

While most of western Europe saw the last of the Black Death by 1775 and the last was in the Italian town of Roja in 1815, nineteenth century outbreaks continued in the Balkans, Egypt, India and the Levant.<sup>764</sup> One of western Europe's last outbreaks was in a most unlikely locale. This last

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<sup>764</sup> Mitra, pp. 1-14; Cohn ,Samuel K. Jr, "Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague."

English outbreak was in Suffolk. A small outbreak here amongst a few families began as late as 1906 and then again in 1909/1910 and another three cases after that, before ending in June 1918. Of the twenty-two infected people, eight had the bubonic strain, the remainder had the pneumatic strain and only six of these twenty-two recovered.<sup>765</sup> The outbreak was rural, in an area five miles south of Ipswich and within an easy walk of a river where foreign ships sailed. This meant that rats could have easily jumped ship and not travelled far to infect other species, particularly humans. Alternatively, even a light breeze could have carried the pneumatic strain from sailors to shore. The existence of both strains and infected rats within a small area suggests both contagious methods or some similar methods were simultaneously infecting those residents nearby. Amongst these ships their last embarkation ports included Valparaiso, Rosario, Alexandra and San Francisco – all of which experienced pestilence between 1907 and 1911.<sup>766</sup> This Edwardian outbreak became important as it was the only one in England which had a modern scientific investigation where rats and their fleas were known as carriers - and were scientifically assessed for their role. Given the widespread area covered, the number of dissections, autopsies, enforced quarantines and hospitalisations, this was clearly a large and thorough investigation. Apparently it involved more staff than victims.

This effort confirmed what investigators in Manchuria were also discovering in 1910/1911 and what Americans near San Francisco found out two years before: that rats were not the only carriers. In Suffolk in 1910 ferrets, hares and cats carried the virus and researchers found that even two out of forty tested rabbits were revealed to be infected, carrying a flea

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<sup>765</sup> Van Zivanenberg, p. 67.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.,

species that bit humans.<sup>767</sup> This did not absolve rats. After one was captured in an infected house, it was observed until it died soon after. Investigating 15,332 rat dissections revealed only thirty-five plague carriers – but these were spread over twenty-seven areas.<sup>768</sup> This suggests that this little outbreak originated with rats, then spread quickly over areas, but not amongst burrowing mammal groups. It also suggested that humans spread the disease amongst themselves. The time between the first case in 1906 and the last in 1918 with three recurrences in that timespan also suggested the disease's tenacity or an ability to be undetected, perhaps in vermin burrows.

England's third last bubonic plague case emerged in 1911, when a sailor who had not been to sea for some time was stricken. His recovery took months and he was left with severe eyesight problems.<sup>769</sup> With both the recovery time and lasting effects this was an unusual, inexplicable case.

In June 1918 two women in this area became England's last plague deaths. One was infected because she visited the other.<sup>770</sup> As with the 1890s epidemics and then the Manchurian cases, this case also disproved the idea that humans could not infect other humans. While this 1918 outbreak answered several questions, it raised the question of whether the disease had been harboured in borrows for years or if it was ship borne, perhaps the area was being reinfected by one particular vessel coming to the nearby port every few years. These last cases were virtually unknown at the time

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<sup>767</sup> 'Table of Human Cases of Plague in Suffolk.' Reproduced by Van Zivanenberg, p. 67.

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>769</sup> Van Zivanenberg,

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*,

and not just because the war effort devoured medical resources. With startling irony in the Spring of 1918, the Spanish influenza pandemic infected its first English soldiers, who carried the disease from the front into England in the same month that these last two victims died.<sup>771</sup> In its brief but catastrophic devastation, Spanish influenza killed at least 228,917 in the United Kingdom between 1918 and the early 1920s.<sup>772</sup>

Even this figure comes from inadequate records: the real toll must be much higher. Globally this pandemic spread where the Black Death never reached as few areas escaped as the breath born influenza germs combined with modern transport, laxity, wartime priorities and cramped conditions. About half the world's population suffered, death toll estimates range from nearly twenty-two million in a much-used 1920s study up to one hundred million in more recent research.<sup>773</sup> The 1918-1922 Influenza Pandemic is just slipping out of living memory and into folklore. It killed millions more than any Black Death outbreak and in a world where media could play a much larger role in disseminating knowledge about it than anyone could communicate about bubonic plague outbreaks: yet it remains little known while the Black Death endures in the popular imagination.




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<sup>771</sup> John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*. New York; 2005. p. 170. Barry quotes a British Medical officer at the front.

<sup>772</sup> Richard Collier, *The Plague of the Spanish Lady: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919*. London; 1974. p. 305.

<sup>773</sup> Collier, p. 305. As he states, these figures are only approximations and based on the 1920s work of Edwin Jordan. In the 1980s. Alfred W. Crosby used computers to cover these same recorded areas and found new information, putting the global death toll at 27 million; Barry, p. 4. Others put the death toll as high as a hundred million.

*Chapter 9*  
*The Third Pandemic*

The long running third bubonic plague pandemic lasted from the early 1870s well into the 1920s. In India and China, it would kill on roughly the same scale as the European epidemics from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. This time Great Britain and Europe experienced mercifully different outcomes compared to earlier bubonic plague epidemics. It would barely touch England; less than a thousand people were infected there. In Britain's empire it would be another matter; the effects of this new pandemic would affect England and English expatriates. colonial administrators, the merchant navy crews and imperial garrisons. It would also affect English epidemiologist's research and that nation's public health and hygiene.

In the second half of the 1890s, bubonic disease was finally correctly analysed and controls began. The discovered secrets and their remedies did not come from where experts and the knowledgeable segments of the public would expect it - the world's most prestigious laboratories, located in Europe, the USA or Japan. Even their well-established scientists and research teams in colonial locales were not the discoverers. Instead, it came from three little known individual European expatriates working in Asia virtually simultaneously if separately, a Swiss scientist in Hong Kong, a Ukrainian bacteriologist in Bombay (now Mumbai) and a French doctor in Karachi. They placed themselves on the front lines of what became this third pandemic.

Like the fourteenth century horror, this third outbreak also came out of western China. Starting in Yunnan, perhaps as early as the beginning of the 1870s, it was certainly detectable in Amoy (now Xiamen), by 1878 and officially reported in 1884 by C.A. Gordon, a British officer in China's Imperial Customs Service in Yunnan.<sup>774</sup> He based much of his speculation on a report of 31<sup>st</sup> March 1878 by another European in the Chinese Customs Service, Mr. Rocher, who noted that instead of disappearing, as some had written, the plague had spread from its first appearance through much of the Chinese empire.<sup>775</sup> In his account it is not always clear when Gordon quotes Rocher or uses his own observation or some other source. He does state that the plague seems to have originated in Burma and that the Chinese empire's war against its rebellious Moslem subjects had spread it, becoming a scourge within the empire's forces fighting that rebellion. A British consulate, Mr Barber, (who also used Rocher as a source to some extent) his French equivalents and a French missionary also were in this area at this time. All three Europeans separately noted the Chinese beliefs on the pestilence, the way the rats died first and how buboes formed on the humans.<sup>776</sup> By June 1882 another English expatriate, Doctor Lowry being stationed at Pakhoi, a city of twenty-five thousand located in the Gulf of Tonkin, described an outbreak of plague there, where four or five hundred died.<sup>777</sup> Once again there was widespread filth, unventilated houses in hot weather and rats dying just before people did. Charles Creighton, (who

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<sup>774</sup> C. A. Gordon, His report originally entitled 'Reports of the Medical Officers Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service.' (1884) is introduced, reproduced and retitled 'The Plague in China' by Furtado, pp.183-184.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>776</sup> Creighton, p. 168. He reproduces Barber's report, which refers to the opinions of the French consulate, Mr. Rocher and the missionary.

<sup>777</sup> This report, initially reproduced by Creighton, is Appendice 3.

was a doctor as well as a historian) wrote a massive, detailed and usually accurate history of epidemics, even reproducing these accounts, referring to dying rats as a predecessor to the plague.



*Bombay plague epidemic, c. 1896-1897. Above: an exterior with stretcher carriers and staff standing outside the buildings. The men standing straight and stiff and facing the camera shows that it is posed Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) terms and conditions.*

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



*The interior of a Bombay plague hospital. As in the top photo this is posed and shows a very orderly very untypical treatment for plague: Photo: Credit [Wellcome Collection](#). [CC BY](#) Both Photographs by Clifton & Co.*



*Gulamsha segregation camp being disinfected, Karachi, India. Photograph, 1897. [CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)] While the two previous photographs were used to show that the British Raj cared for plague victims, those hospitals shown were for only a tiny proportion of treated Indians. Most would have been treated as were those in the photographs on this page and the next.*



*Disinfecting sufferers of the plague in wooden tubs, Karachi, India. Photograph, 1897. Credit: [Wellcome Collection](#). CC BY [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Man\\_being\\_injected\\_by\\_doctor%2C\\_during\\_the\\_outbreak\\_of\\_bubonic\\_Wellcome\\_V0029287.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Man_being_injected_by_doctor%2C_during_the_outbreak_of_bubonic_Wellcome_V0029287.jpg)*



*Doctor Simond, the discoverer of how plague spread in Karachi in 1895-1897. Here he injects a patient there. Courtesy Wikipedia/ Wellcome Collection.*

Apparently neither Lowry nor Creighton investigated the connection between rats, plague and people in detail, limiting themselves to observations, although Lowry did share the Chinese belief that rats caught the plague because they were close to the ground.<sup>778</sup>

Wherever this new plague originated and wherever it had spread in the beginning, it had certainly taken a strong hold of inland South-west China by 1893.<sup>779</sup> It then spread eastwards to Canton (now Guangzhou) and then

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<sup>778</sup> Some of the work of Lowry and Creighton is reproduced in the appendices.

<sup>779</sup> Randall, p. 4.

to Hong Kong and China's southern coast by 1894.<sup>780</sup> By 1896 it was spreading in colonial India (which at that time included Pakistan and Bangladesh, but excluded the later enforced additions of Goa and Sikkim) where its grip would be extremely tenacious, widespread and prolonged. By the turn of the century it had killed around ten million Chinese and between then and 1910 another five million would die across the globe.<sup>781</sup> 1910 would not see the third pandemic end, but globally it was waning and sporadic then, except in India, the worst hit area across the globe.<sup>782</sup> This Indian epidemic arrived just before the plague's real causes as originating in rat bites and the blood of infected fleas who lived on rats was revealed as the cause by scientific proof.<sup>783</sup> India's colonial authorities frequently documented this epidemic in detail, confirming what had previously been suspected or limited to anecdotal or unconfirmed accounts.

Yersin's still widely unaccepted efforts initially got little publicity. but he should have. He used science to prove that person to person infection occurred, infection could be passed on through contact with goods and that rats were carriers of the killer flea that would eventually bear his surname.<sup>784</sup> Perhaps the lack of credit had something to do with his lack of connections in the academic and scientific worlds, or it may have been because he was proving in scientific circles what others who were little known had said over the centuries.

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<sup>780</sup> Mitra, p. 2.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>783</sup> Naphy and Spicer, pp. 167-168; Ziegler, pp. 25-26.

<sup>784</sup> Schmid,

India in 1897 would also see the world's first successful scientific mass vaccination against plague. On January 23<sup>rd</sup> plague broke out in a Bombay jail which contained 345 inmates with nine cases being known of by authorities in the next six days.<sup>785</sup> On the next day Ukrainian born bacteriologist Waldemar Haffkine, called for volunteers for his new vaccine based in sediment and fluid. By early May that year, 11,362 individuals had been inoculated and only twelve had died. Even amongst these twelve fatalities three were probably infected before having their vaccination. Of those vaccinated who showed infection signs thirty-three recovered, an extremely successful rate in a disease which usually roughly reversed this ratio. Haffkine estimated that his medicine made Indians about twenty times safer.<sup>786</sup>

Sadly, even inexplicably, this vaccine was not mass produced and quickly distributed: the plague in India would be prolonged and kill in the millions. Doctor W.G. Liston had another medical success by building on what Yersin, Simond and Kitasato achieved. In 1903 this British army doctor, stationed in Bombay, noted how twice he saw dead rats in rooms where humans were infected. He then used guinea pigs in experiments to show what he suspected, that rat fleas leave dead rats to find a new host, usually nearby humans.<sup>787</sup> Despite these medical successes this pandemic gave indications by its several widespread locales around the world that it was potentially devastating. With the world's population approaching two billion early in the twentieth century, the third plague pandemic could

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<sup>785</sup> Waldemar Haffkine, 'Remarks on the Plague Prophylactic Fluid.' (1897). Introduced, reproduced and titled "Plague in Prison." By Peter Furtado, p.187.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>787</sup> W.G. Liston, 'Reports on Plague Investigations in India.' (1911). Introduced, reproduced and titled 'Identifying Fleas as the Vector.' By Furtado, p.188-189.

have killed a total larger than those epidemics of Justinian and all the Medieval and Renaissance epidemics combined. Fortunately, dedicated human agencies within the British Empire were doing simultaneous research and using similar quarantine methods in Karachi and Hong Kong, both with some success. Staffers established quarantine centres around the world, then rapidly took up these methods, slowing and then eventually stopping the new plague spread.<sup>788</sup> Salvation was not only based in the discovery of bubonic plague's cause; this was only the start.

Epidemiologists would combine this knowledge with developments in dealing with contagion and starting in the later 1890s and the Edwardian era, this combination would rapidly lead to successful preventions and eradications. It would be 1905 before public opinion and Yersin's last recalcitrant opponents adjusted to the explanation given by the Bombay Plague Research Commission, who declared that rats and their fleas caused the plague.<sup>789</sup> In that same year Simond's ideas were taken up by Argentina's "hygenistas" who were already fighting pathogens by fumigation.<sup>790</sup> Between 1894 and 1911 several comparatively minor and contained outbreaks within the British Empire and its trading partners would continue. The first outbreaks were in ports obviously linked to trading with Hong Kong. These included London, Canton, Macao, Manila, Amoy, Yokohama, Osaka, Oporto, Formosa (now Taiwan) and Bombay.<sup>791</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> McNeill, p. 147; Yu Shan Tin, and Wang Tsun Shang. 'A Letter of Thanks.' 18<sup>th</sup> July 1903. Reproduced by Blake, p. 39. This refers to the success in Hong Kong.

<sup>789</sup> Deaux, p. 64; Gasquet, p. viii.

<sup>789</sup> Lucas Engelmann, 'Fumigating the Hygienic Model City: Bubonic Plague and the Sulfurozador in Early-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires.' *Cambridge Journals Medical History*. July 2018; 62(3): pp. 360–382. PMID: 29886876 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6113751/> accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>791</sup> Marriot, p. 80 p. 121; Naphy and Spicer, p. 54 p. 167; Simpson, p. 12.

By the turn of the century Honolulu, Mauritius, Asuncion, Buenos Aires, Rosario, most Australian, New Zealand and South African port cities and the Chinese enclave in San Francisco were hit. Other later stricken areas include Saint Petersburg, Mozambique, Lisbon, Trieste, Asunción, Corrientes, Saint Petersburg, Mauritius, Brazil, Madagascar and Naples. Despite this casualty list in ports preventative measures in several ports began early in this third pandemic. Some American and Argentinean ports had begun fumigation of incoming shipping as early as the end of the 1880s for assorted pathogens.<sup>792</sup> This was not yet commonplace twenty years later, especially in colonial and oriental ports. Even inland locales suffered; Vienna, Bolivia, Astrakhan, Mandalay, Turkestan and Rockhampton Australia in 1906, had cases.<sup>793</sup> Liverpool, Cardiff and Glasgow all suffered some deaths. Sixteen in Glasgow died in the first 1900 outbreak with smaller numbers in the subsequent attacks in 1901 and 1907.<sup>794</sup> The last English outbreaks in Suffolk has been assessed.<sup>795</sup> Other infected locales were also in unlikely places; boats from San Francisco infected ports in Mexico and Chile. Egypt, Arabia, Algeria, Russia and Turkey.<sup>796</sup>

Senegal probably suffered worst outside colonial India and imperialist China. In 1914 plague broke out along the coast on Cape Verde where at least 3,700 died in Dakar, the largest city. Rail carried plague carriers some

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<sup>792</sup> Engelman,

<sup>793</sup> Marriot, p. 15 p. 121; Boyle and Hope reproduce a report mentioning Naples.

<sup>794</sup> Mary Dobson, p. 8; Gillian Sharpe; Colvin, pp. 1782-1783

<sup>795</sup> Dave Fowler, 'Black Death Facts.' *History of the Plague*. <https://blackdeathinfo/facts>, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>796</sup> Marriott, p. 121.

distance inland, although areas beyond that were spared.<sup>797</sup> The plague reappeared there in 1918 and again in 1919; the fatalities were almost as high in each year.<sup>798</sup> This total of almost ten thousand was probably understated for three reasons. The primary focus for French colonial administrations was on the war and several of its methods such as enforced vaccinations, travel certificates and expectations of rat catching would have increased native hostility, distrust and probably avoidance. It was also ineffectual: it would be 1945 before the plague was eradicated in Senegal. In July 1914 New Orleans had forty casualties originating with one sick foreign sailor and Los Angeles also had a similar sized outbreak in October 1924.<sup>799</sup> In both cities the new measures made for a quick containment followed by suppression. Other locales where residents suffered recurrent outbreaks were Manchuria in 1910-1911 and again between 1921 and 1924 and Argentina in 1921 and 1928.<sup>800</sup> California also endured outbreaks between 1899 and 1907. The deadly infection spread westward from the Californian coast, reaching Texas, Louisiana and Florida by 1910.<sup>801</sup> The Sierra Nevada Mountains became infected in 1929 and the virus continued eastwards, but was eradicated east of the Mississippi using successful preventative measures. Another factor stopping the virus was that the carriers were predominantly desert and mountain creatures: quarantines

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<sup>797</sup> Myron Echenberg, 'The Dog That Did Not Bark: Memory and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Senegal.' In *The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919: New Perspectives*. Edited by Howard Phillips and David Killingray. London and New York; 2011. p. 237.

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>799</sup> Rideal, pp. 225-227 pp. 234-240.

<sup>800</sup> *New York Times*. Report of March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1921.

<sup>801</sup> Marriot, p. 230.

applied to humans may have reduced contact. Did this factor reverse usual patterns, where animals infected humans? If it did not, were rats, who do not travel great distances on their feet, unintentionally transported by humans by rail, boats and trucks from the ports of San Francisco and Los Angeles to as far as the Mississippi? Alternatively, squirrels were in the eastern San Francisco Bay area and large adjoining rural areas.

conterminous to wilderness. Rupert Blue's teams found that squirrels in these areas were infected by 1907. Prodigious breeders, did these forest creatures and similar forest mammals and spread the virus westwards?

In almost all third pandemic outbreaks outside China and India the death toll was comparatively light compared to locales hit in prior pandemics. Sydney lost 103 dead. Oporto and San Francisco 113 each with a total of 363 in South Africa. Similarly, Asunción which was infected in April 1899, had 114 dead and Rosario, an industrial port in Argentina had 700 cases, of these 248 died.<sup>802</sup> Even the inland city of Vienna, noted for its cleanliness and medical facilities, lost three fatalities.<sup>803</sup>

Mauritius suffered over twelve hundred known cases between 1899 and June 1902.<sup>804</sup> Fortunately, the medical officer in charge, Doctor Barbeau, was a health worker of the same calibre as Blue, Yersin, Haffkine and Simond. His reports revealed diligence, energy and exactitude as he recorded the timing, locales and case origins. He noted contagion patterns, established cleansings, hygienic practices, bannings and rat hunts. Barbeau

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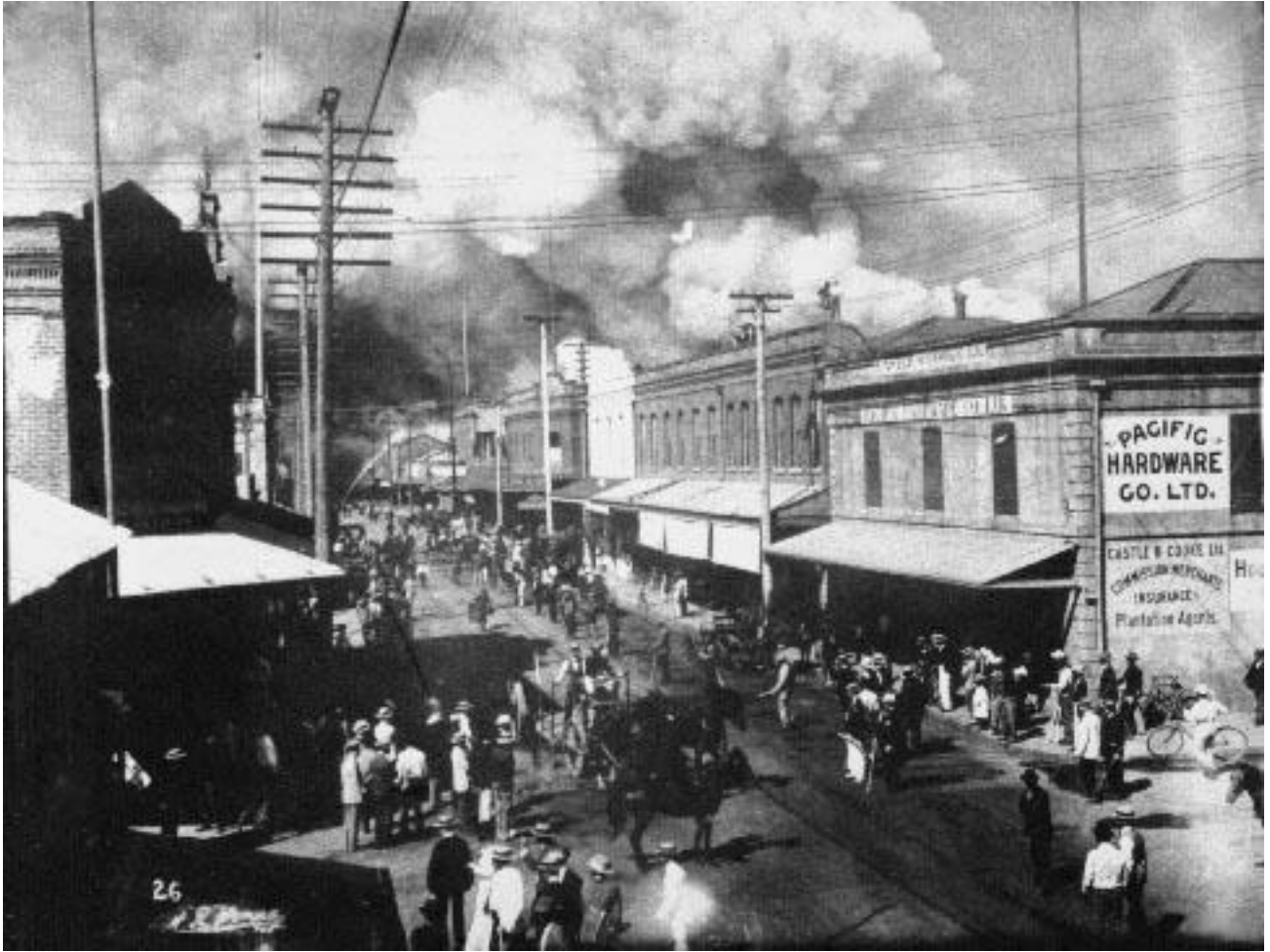
<sup>802</sup> Engelmann.

<sup>803</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 167; Marriott, p. 121.

<sup>804</sup> Doctor L.G. Barbeau, (acting Plague authority) 'Further Dispatches Respecting the Bubonic Plague' Government House. 14<sup>th</sup> June 1901-13<sup>th</sup> June 1902.' The total comes from his tables which are included in his report of 13<sup>th</sup> December 1901. Although his tables total nearly seventeen hundred cases, some of these were hospitalisations carried over from previous months.



*British soldiers fight the plague in Hong Kong by publicly burning goods suspected of carrying the plague. c. 1894. The body language of the supervising officers reveals some of their arrogance. Courtesy Wellcome Collection Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.*



*The Chinese ghetto in Honolulu burns in 1900. Courtesy Wikipedia - Hawaii State Archives [http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/hpd/centennial/cf\\_lp10.htm](http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/hpd/centennial/cf_lp10.htm), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9988283>*



*Fumigation by shower in Hawaii 1900. By crowding people together this must have spread the virus, not reduced its spread. Creative Commons/Public Domain.*

and his team kept precise records of the numbers of killed rats, their locales and their state of infection. He initiated Yersin's vaccine and by doing this, was able to lower the human death rate. This initially ranged from 100% to 81% and then to between 71% and 59.3% later in this epidemic. These low fatality figures were not due to the 1870-1930 pandemic being less deadly than earlier versions. Hong Kong had a fatality rate of 93% in 1894 and 89% in 1896. Bombay's fatality rate was 84% while Karachi lost 89% of the infected.<sup>805</sup> Those 113 fatalities in San Francisco were part of a group of 121 infected people and in a second outbreak there a few years later 78 out of

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<sup>805</sup> Mitra, p. 24.

160 infected died.<sup>806</sup> In the 1901 British outbreak Liverpool lost six out of eight infected people while Glasgow lost sixteen out of thirty-six.<sup>807</sup> Low fatality rates across this widespread range of locales were primarily due to the new knowledge concerning rats and fleas and the need for hygiene.

Knowing how without speed and efficiency the contagion could spread, were also major factors. In 1900 Glasgow authorities promptly and successfully focused efforts on rats to prevent the contagion spreading.<sup>808</sup> In Honolulu in late 1899 officials gave medical authorities dictatorial powers which they used dictatorially indeed; they forcibly burned possessions, armed guards enforced compulsory showers and washed houses with carbolic acid. Authorities began burning infected peoples' houses. In what several claimed to be an accident one burning house started a conflagration lasting days, destroying the city's Chinatown ghetto.<sup>809</sup> Ten thousand were left homeless and of these four thousand were in custody. Some local whites publicly sanctimoniously said that they saw this fire as purifying the city and providing an advantage to buy up valuable real estate.<sup>810</sup>

In 1894 Hong Kong's British authorities began fighting plague using modern methods. Focusing on rats became a tactic, but the new knowledge

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<sup>806</sup> Mary Dobson, p. 18.

<sup>807</sup> Colvin, pp. 1782-1783.

<sup>808</sup> Gillian Sharpe.

<sup>809</sup> Rebecca Onion, 'The Disastrous *Cordon Sanitaire* Used in Honolulu's Chinatown in 1900.' *Slate*. August 15<sup>th</sup> 2014. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/08/history-of-the-cordon-sanitaire-honolulu-hawaii-bubonic-plague-in-1899.html>, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2019; Randall, pp. 23-25.

<sup>810</sup> Onion, quoting from 1900 sources.

about the rat's importance was not enough. Nine years later, in an extraordinarily prolonged outbreak Hong Kong was still in an epidemic. Strong measures such as British soldiers barging into homes to forcibly fumigate or to confiscate clothing and possessions (infected or suspected of carrying infection) and then burning them in the street led the Chinese to concealing plague cases. Sometimes infected bodies were furtively dumped to avoid domestic detection.<sup>811</sup>

Governor Henry Blake believed the Chinese could be reasonable and that colonial authorities could allay hostility by several actions. These involved Chinese in a committee and reimbursing their costs for lost work. He also brought in generous and liberal policies:

Invited discussions with prominent Chinese people

employing rat catchers

issuing rat traps for home use

issuing cash payments for dead rats

establishing a free Chinese bathhouse and hospital.

giving those infected their choice of European or Chinese doctors.<sup>812</sup>

His measures worked. Within five months, by the middle of 1903, the epidemic was over and he was being thanked by prominent Chinese residents.<sup>813</sup> The contrast between the earlier strategies example showed the importance of conciliating and then using locales in fighting epidemics.

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<sup>811</sup> Blake, pp. 5-6.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-10.

<sup>813</sup> Yu Shan Tin and Wang Tsun Shang.

In Sydney in 1900-1901 state and council governments used strong measures. They destroyed slums and set up quarantines for twenty people.<sup>814</sup> Not all measures were repressive, the teams cleaned gutters and cemented cracks to stop rats entering. The government employed three thousand rat catchers and paid children sixpence for every dead rat caught, part of a rat eradication program estimated to have killed around a hundred thousand of the vermin. Amazingly 303 infected individuals recovered, which is one out of four cases.<sup>815</sup> Despite these measures, ships brought in plague in twelve minor outbreaks, which in Adelaide continued until 1925, leaving a total of 1371 cases and 535 deaths. Similar to New Orleans in 1914 Adelaide's outbreak showed the same speed and spread when one infected sailor coming ashore there soon led to 608 registered cases.<sup>816</sup>

Methods used in Hong Kong, Honolulu, Sydney and Los Angeles, show that ruthlessness was not limited to Medieval lords. Racist blame games also continued; instead of Jews, the scapegoats were now Chinese. Marriot and Randall separately document several examples across the globe.

While global success stories also emerged across the globe, late outbreaks in Colonial India and China were less successfully controlled. Hong Kong had a population of 210,995 in 1894, but lost at least 6, 272 known fatalities to recurrent outbreaks between May 1894 and July 1903.<sup>817</sup> In 1894 Canton

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<sup>814</sup> Julie Power, 'Ground Zero: How the Plague Devastated Sydney.' *Sydney Morning Herald*. 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019. p. 10.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>817</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 167; Ayres, p. 8-22 passim; Blake, pp. 1-11 passim

had lost about sixty thousand residents.<sup>818</sup> By the epidemic's waning that figure would be a hundred thousand.<sup>819</sup>

Colonial India lost even more people mostly among the poor and peasantry. The crowded cities of Bombay and Calcutta in particular lost heavily, with Bombay losing 150,000 in the immediate term and 1.2 million dead in the decade 1896-1906, but over-all India lost over ten times even that horrifying figure in the four decades between 1898 and independence in 1947.<sup>820</sup> Some of these Indian figures can only cause reconsideration of apparently exaggerated Medieval figures, particularly concerning the East. However listed fatalities from British colonial officials stated that the India wide death toll had been 600,000 in the first eight months of 1903 and information from Simla claimed even 75,000 in one week in April 1907.<sup>821</sup> Cardinal Gasquet also stated that the plague came from Hong Kong to Bombay, arrived in the Punjab in October 1897 and was particularly deadly and widespread there.<sup>822</sup> Much evidence suggests that Gasquet apparently has transit method and contagion entry point right but the date for the beginning of the Indian epidemic wrong by over a year. Most sources date this outbreak as being caused by ships from Hong Kong arriving in 1896. Doctor Simpson estimated the death toll at over five million between the disease's outbreak at the beginning of 1896, when ships from Hong Kong

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<sup>818</sup> Mitra, p. 2

<sup>819</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 167.

<sup>820</sup> Naphy and Spicer, p. 167; Gasquet, p. vii.

<sup>821</sup> Gasquet, p. vi p. vii.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*, Gasquet does give figures and their distribution, but while his other information seems accurate, some of his details are unlikely.

brought the plague, until June 1907. Four million of these casualties occurred between 1902 and 1907.<sup>823</sup>

Death toll figures and the effectiveness of British health care centres are both difficult to estimate. Three reasons emerge for this difficulty. The small staff had to deal with the extremely large numbers being infected. Even in the best times disease deaths in India were high. Finally, India was hit by a killer famine in 1896, around the same time that the plague arrived. How these disasters affected each other remains unclear.

In contrast to India and China elsewhere in the world preventative measures kept these outbreaks down to comparatively small numbers. One of the last involvements of British officials in fighting plague was not in England, but in their mandated territory of Palestine. In 1922 an outbreak occurred in and around Jerusalem.<sup>824</sup> This must have been successfully and quickly suppressed as it gained little notice.

Globally it would be 1931 before the first successful mass vaccination.<sup>825</sup> Plague was still prevalent in Africa and the East in the 1940s. In that decade successful vaccinations and the use of antibiotics which reduced plague's effects were becoming commonplace.<sup>826</sup>

Late in 1943 a catastrophe was averted by the slightest chance. In New York Harbour American health workers fumigated a merchant ship from North

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<sup>823</sup> Simpson, p, vii p. 14.

<sup>824</sup> Yosef Haftman, 'A terrible new weapon of war': The Spanish flu had its Own Share of Conspiracy Theories." *Haaretz*. 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com) › [israel-news](#). accessed August 30<sup>th</sup> 2020.

<sup>825</sup> Marriott, p. 203 pp. 220-222 pp. 227-236.

<sup>826</sup> McNeill, p. 146.

Africa. Officials declared it plague free and medically examiners closely checked her crew for plague and passed them. Quarantine was over, and longshoremen were unloading the cargo when one of them noticed dead rats in the hold. Tests revealed that they were plague carriers. City officials immediately initiated a rat eradication program for nearby areas.<sup>827</sup> What would have happened if that single longshoreman had been looking the other way? Overcrowded New York with its millions of people was a major transport hub and financial centre, both of global importance; it was also notoriously rat infested. Even now NYC officials amongst the rat exterminators believe they that cannot really exterminate the city's rats.<sup>828</sup>

If plague bearing rats had infected New York, unless the new vaccines were rapidly produced, millions would have died. Given the large variety and numbers of assorted transport vehicles there, the plague had the capacity to incubate and then spread to major American cities within days and then spread across the rest of the country – and then across the world by aircraft and shipping. If all this sounds exaggerated, consider how during a world war a generation before a few birds infected South-west Kansas with what was soon known as Spanish Influenza.<sup>829</sup> This may have remained a localised outbreak, but evidence strongly suggests that a few enlisted former farm boys returned home on leave, became infected and then during their incubation period returned to their nearby military base, where over fifty thousand others resided in cramped conditions. The war situation meant that those recruits became soldiers travelling across America and then to the European front by sea in even more cramped

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<sup>827</sup> Ibid., pp. 252-253.

<sup>828</sup> Marriott, pp. 244-250. New York officials and catchers are quoted.

<sup>829</sup> Barry pp. 92-95.

conditions than the tents at Fort Leavenworth, where at least tent flaps allowed for ventilation and there was space to walk in fresh air. Ships had enclosed walls, small crowded spaces and small portholes and thin hammocks, not wider beds. By putting thousands in these transports, they spread the killer virus over Europe first. Soon most of the world was infected.<sup>830</sup> As the worst months for this pandemic were between September 1918 and January 1919 this pandemic would have little effect on the First World War's outcome. World War Two in late 1943 had more capacity for havoc caused by this similarly contagious disease.

An America either paralysed by the plague or suddenly shifting its focus from fighting the war in 1943 to fighting this disease would almost certainly have meant a longer Second World War. Depending on how the infection spread outcomes become variable. An uncontaminated U.S.S.R. had the potential to conquer all of Nazified Europe. Russians may have been staring across the English Channel, wondering if they should try where Phillip II, Napoleon and Hitler had failed. A soviet occupied Rome would have, at the least, greatly weakened the Catholic Church, shaping its policy. Given Stalin's Russian track record, he may have even purged Christianity across Europe, leaving developing world countries to reshape Catholicism's remnants - in their image. Alternatively, devastated Allied powers being unable to fight on effectively, may have made a peace with the Nazis, so that their descendants still rule - and fascism remained an active, even creditable political force. Considering these possible immediate effects and then their snowballing effects, the capacity for global havoc caused by a 1943 fourth pandemic becomes virtually unlimited.

With tragic irony at this time, when centuries of effort to eradicate mass plague outbreaks from natural causes finally succeeded, other humans calculatingly spread the disease. In the 1940s a Japanese germ warfare unit

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-98 pp. 169-170..

conducted experiments with plague on human guinea pigs and then went on to deliberately spread it: around twenty thousand Chinese civilians died.<sup>831</sup> As late as 1994 a major outbreak affecting thousands occurred in the Indian city of Surat, but modern methods contained it.<sup>832</sup> A 1990s outbreak in Madagascar was also contained, albeit with less media attention. Even in the twenty-first century with antibiotics, quarantines, hygiene as common knowledge and pest control, over two thousand people a year in the developing world become plague fatalities and thousands more survive, through the use of antibiotics. In late 2019, another bubonic plague epidemic seemed in the offing as three cases were confirmed in China's north-west. The almost simultaneous first fatalities from the Corona virus in Hubei province gained the media's attention and overshadowed both China's bubonic cases and Africa's Ebola cases. Since the 1980s scientists have warned that as the earth's temperature heat up viruses will spread much more frequently and with more ferocity: in the twenty-first century this seems to be happening.

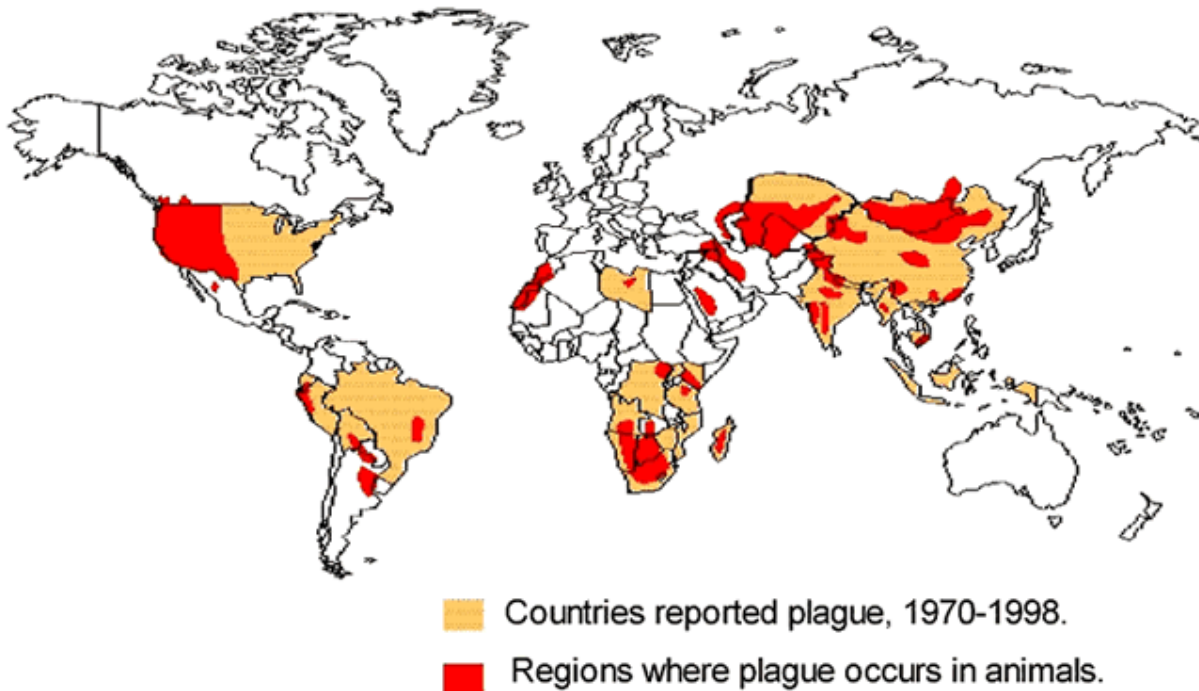
The Corona/ COVID-19 pandemic which started ten months after the first version of this book went on the web, has not yet been conclusively linked to climate change. It has been caused by the same problem that caused the fourteenth century bubonic plague and the 1918-1921 Spanish Influenza Pandemic. The first similarity is that different species come into too close proximity and then people came into contact with those infected creatures. Once again contact with an infected species means that as the virus spreads among species for the first time, it becomes virulent, hitting with a high mortality rate. Even so Corona/COVID-19 is not the Black Death in an

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<sup>831</sup> Doctor Robert K.D. Paterson, 'Japan's Role in Developing Biological Weapons in World War II and its Effect on Contemporary Relations Between Asian Countries.'  
[www.montana.edu/history/ugyersinaessays/sham.htm](http://www.montana.edu/history/ugyersinaessays/sham.htm), accessed 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

<sup>832</sup> John Williamson (Producer and Co-Writer) '*Introducing the Pathogens.*' (video) 1995.

## World Distribution of Plague, 1998



*The modern global bubonic spread Courtesy Wikipedia*

updated guise. Spreading contact methods are less extreme and so is the death rate, being around 1% to 5% for Corona and well over 80% even by conservative estimates for Bubonic Plague. People no longer fatalistically accept that they will die or believe that the apocalypse has come and that such a fate for themselves and the world is God's will.

Scientifically informed planning has now replaced ignorance, that being a great cause for both the panic and apathy associated with the plague. Experts now know that no matter how horrendous, a pandemic is no apocalypse destined to wipe out all life on earth, instead there will be some kind of aftermath.

The Medieval disease's short-term effects on England were to affect life to the extent that chaos, havoc and despair were the new normal. Few if any escaped that. Such effects were both practical and psychological. Some gained immediate and impressive financial and social gains, but in the midst of such an upheaval that even they could not be secure. The disease's continual reoccurrences reinforced that insecurity.

The plague's long-term effects on England's economy, architecture, language, agriculture, religion, demographics, hierarchy, monarchy, nobility, manor system, labour, culture and social cohesion are sources for controversy and conjecture. So many different fields being studied for the plague's effects shows that deep as its effects went, it was also pervasive.

Many claim that in the long term the Black Death's effects were beneficial, contributing to the development of modern health systems, the end of the tyranny of Medieval Catholicism and to the waning of repressive feudalism. Therefore, the Great Mortality eventually led to a better world. These conclusions come after following a long and dubious trail. What can only be more certain is that for over three hundred years the effects of plague were a traumatic nightmare for all of England.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### The Second Papal Bull 1348 by Clement VI

For all our brothers, the archbishops and bishops and our son beloved chosen, abbots, priors, deacons, senior, archdeacons, vicars, secular clergy, officials, presidents and other prelates of churches and monasteries and their deputies, and ecclesiastical persons, secular and regular, and even chapters and convents, churches and aforementioned monasteries, all exempt and non-exempt, the Cistercians, Cluny and Premonstratensian orders, all other orders of St. Benedict and St. Augustine, Greetings etc. While we can, rightly hate the treachery of the Jews (who, persevering in their stubbornness, do not care to understand the words of the prophets and the secrets of their writings and join the new Christian faith) but – being aware that our Saviour worthy to choose the Jewish tradition in which, for the salvation of the human race, he took a mortal flesh – for this reason it is normal that we cherish these same Jews because of the humanity. As they seek help our protection and mercy of Christian piety, we, following in the footsteps of Calixte, Eugene, Alexander, Clement, Celestin, Innocent, Grégoire, Nicolas, Nicolas Honorius and III, and our Roman Pontiffs predecessors of happy memory, we give them the shield of

our protection, ordering, among other things, that no Christian can in no way cause injury or death of these Jews without receiving the judgment of the lord or official of land or region in which they live, they should not take their money from them or require compulsory service, except for the things that, in ancient times, they were used to doing; and that if someone, although knowing the content of such a decree attempts to act against him, he endangers his title and office, or he must be struck by a final sentence of excommunication, unless he takes care to correct his presumption by a worthy satisfaction, as contained in these letters. However recently a public outcry (or more accurately, *a nasty rumour*) came to our attention that some Christians mistakenly blame the plague (which God afflicts the Christian people, caused by the sins of the people) come from poisons Jews deceived by the devil – who in their own impious temerity killed some of these Jews, regardless of age or gender, and that although these Jews were ready to submit to the judgment of a court competent to *judge*.(?) About the fallacy of such a crime, even if the attack of these Christians has not been calmed by it, but because of this, their anger was filled even more, since their error appeared to be approved, as that there was no opposition. And although we might wish that these same Jews are guilty by participating in such great indignation (whose adequate punishment, dignified and severe, could hardly be thought) and had to be struck down by a sentence; despite everything, because in many and various parts of the world who are not familiar cohabitation with these Jews, the plague everywhere afflicted and afflicts the community because of the secret judgment of God, thus proving that the aforementioned Jews are responsible only not stand as an

explanation or cause of great indignation telle (tells us). We order you therefore by all these apostolic writings that each of you has been asked about this was to – in your churches for the solemnities of the Mass, while people are gathered for divine services – warn those who are subject to you, clergy and laity, on pain of excommunication (which you will receive from there, if you do not) and you must expressly instruct them not to presume on their own authority (or more accurately, their own recklessness) enter, hit, injure or kill these Jews, or to force them to compulsory service for them; but if they were to be in a lawsuit against them, either on these or any other case, they had to continue with the rule of law in the presence of judges competent, who – so they can take action against these or other excesses of these same Jews, as is just – we take away their powerless by these present letters. These present letters are no longer in force after one year.

Given at Avignon, the sixth calends of October, in the seventh year of our pontificate.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Clement\\_VI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Clement_VI)

Comments n italics are interpretations by the author. Some colourings and underlings have been removed. In Appendix 2 the spacing italics and colons have been used by the author for clarity.

## Appendix 2

### The Statuette of Labourers. Issued 1349 and expanded 1351.

#### King Edward III

That every person, able in body and under the age of 60 years, not having enough to live upon, being required, shall be bound to serve him that doth require him, or else be committed to gaol until he shall find surety to serve, and that the old wages shall be given and no more; whereas lately it was ordained by our lord king and by the assent of the relates, earls, barons and others of his council, against the malice of servants who were idle and not willing to serve after the pestilence without excessive wages, that such manner of servants, men as well as women, should be bound to serve, receiving the customary salary and wages in the places where they are bound to serve in the twentieth year of the reign [1347] of the king that now is, or five or six years before, and that the same servants refusing to serve in such a manner should be punished by imprisonment of their bodies, as is more plainly contained in the said statute. Whereupon commissions were made to diverse people in every county to enquire and punish all those who offend against the same. And now for as much as it is given to the king to understand in the present parliament by the petition of the commons that the servants having no regard to the ordinance but to their ease and singular covetousness, do withdraw themselves from serving great men and others, unless they have livery and wages double or treble of what they were wont to take in the twentieth year and earlier, to the great damage of the great men and impoverishment of all the commonality; whereof the commonality prays remedy. Wherefore in the parliament by the assent of the prelates, earls, barons, and those of the commonality assembled there, in order to refrain the malice of the servants, there are ordained and established the underwritten articles.

*Item:* that carters, ploughmen, drivers of ploughs, shepherds, swineherds, day men, and all other servants shall take the liveries and wages accustomed in the twentieth year or four years before so that in the countryside where the wheat was wont to be given they shall take for the bushel 10 d, or wheat at the will of the giver until it be otherwise ordained. And that they be hired to serve by a whole year, or by other usual terms, and not by the day; and that none pay at haymaking time more than a penny a day; and a mower of meadows for the acre 5 d, or 5 d by the day; and reapers of corn in the first week of August 2 d, and the second 3 d and so on until the end of August and less in the country where less was wont to be given, without meat or drink, or other courtesy to be demanded, given, or taken; and that all workmen bring their tools openly in their hands to the merchant towns, and they shall be hired there in a common place and not privately.

*Item:* that none take for the threshing of a quarter of wheat or rye over 2½ d and the quarter of barley, beans, peas and oats 1½ d, if so much were wont to be given. And in the country where it is usual to reap by certain sheaves and to thresh by certain bushels they shall take no more nor in other manner than was wont the said twenty year and before, and that the same servants be sworn two times a year before lords, stewards, bailiffs and constables of every town to observe and perform these ordinances; and that none of them go out of the town where he lives in the winter to serve the summer if he may serve in the same town, taking as before is said. Saving that the people of the counties of Stafford, Lancaster, and Derby, and people of Craven and of the marches of Wales and Scotland, and other places may come in time of August and labour in other counties, and safely return as they were wont to do before this time; and that those who refuse to make such oath, or to not perform as they were sworn to do or have taken upon them shall be put in the stocks by the said lords, stewards, bailiffs and constables of the towns for three days or more or sent to the next gaol, there to remain until they satisfy themselves. And that stocks be made in every town for such occasion, between now and the feast of Pentecost.

*Item:* that carpenters masons and tilers and other workmen of houses shall not take by the day further work except in the manner as they were wont to do, that is to say, a master carpenter 3 d and other carpenters 2 d; a master mason 4 d and other masons 3 d and their servants 1½ d; tilers 3 d and their boys 1½ d; and other coverers of fern and straw 3 d and their boys 1½ d; plasterers and other worker of mud walls and their boys, in the same manner without meat and drink that is from Easter to Michaelmas and from that time less according to the rate and discretion of the justices who shall be assigned thereunto. And those who carry by land or by water shall take no more for such carriage to be made than they were wont to do in the said twentieth year and four years before.

*Item:* that cordwainers and shoemakers shall not sell boots or shoes nor any other thing touching their craft, in any other manner than they were wont to do in the said twentieth year.

*Item:* that goldsmiths, saddlers, horseshmiths, spurriers, tanners, carriers, tawers of leather, tailors and other workmen, artificers and labourers, and all other servants not here specified, shall be sworn before the justices, and do use their crafts and offices in this manner as they were wont to do the said twentieth year, and in the time before, without refusing the same because of this ordinance, and if any of the said servants, labourers, workmen or artificers, after such oath made, come against this ordinance, he shall be punished by fine and ransom and imprisonment after the discretion of the justices.

*Item:* that the stewards, bailiffs and constables of the said towns be sworn before the same justices to enquire diligently by all the good ways they may, of all them that come against this ordinance and to certify the same justices of their names at all times, when they shall come into the country to make their sessions, so that the same justices upon the certificate of the said stewards, bailiffs, and constables, of the names of the rebels shall cause their bodies to be attached before the justices, to answer of such contempts so that they make fine and ransom to the king in case they be attainted, and moreover to be commanded to prison there to remain until they have

found surety to serve and take and do their work and to sell things vendible in the manner aforesaid. And in case that any of them come against his oath and be thereof attainted, he shall have imprisonment of forty days, and if he is convicted another time, he shall be imprisoned for a quarter of a year so that every time he offends and is convicted, he shall have double pain. And that the same justices at every time they come into the country shall enquire of the said stewards, bailiffs and constables if they have made a good and lawful certificate or any concealment for gift, procurement or affinity, and punish them by fine and ransom of they are found guilty. And that the same justices have power to enquire and make due punishment of the said ministers, labourers, workmen and other servants, and also of hostlers, harbergers and all those that sell victuals by retail or other things here not specified, as well as the suit of the party as by presentment, and to hear and determine and put the things in execution by the exigend after the first capias if need be and to depute others under them, as many and such as they shall see best for the keeping of the same ordinances, and that they that will sue against such servants, workmen, labourers and artificers for excess taken of them, and they are attained thereof at their suit, they shall have again such excess. And in case none will sue to have again such excess then it shall be levied of the said servants, labourers, workmen and artificers and delivered to the collectors of the fifteenth in alleviation of the town where such excesses were taken.

*Item:* that no sheriffs constables, bailiffs, and gaolers, the clerks of the justices or of the sheriffs nor other ministers whatsoever they be take any thing for the cause of their office of the same servants for fees, suit of prison or other manner and if they have any thing taken in such manner they shall deliver the same to the collectors of tenths and fifteenths in aid of the commons for the time that the tenth and fifteenth runs, as well for the time past as the time to come, and that the said justices enquire in their sessions if the said ministers have any thing received of the same servants, and that they shall find by such inquests that the said ministers have received, the same justices shall levy of every of the said ministers and deliver to the said collectors, together with the excess and fines and ransom made, and also the amercements of all them that shall be amerced before the said justices, in alleviation of the said towns as before is said. And in case the excess

found in one town exceeds the quantity of the fifteenth of the same town the remnant of such excess shall be levied and paid by the said collectors to the next poor town, in aid of their fifteenth, by advice of the said justices, and that the fines and ransoms, excesses and ameracements of the said servants, labourers and artificers for the time to come, running of the said fifteenth be delivered to the said collectors in the form aforesaid by indentures to be made between them and the said justices so that the same collectors may be charged upon the account by the same indentures in case that the said fines ransoms, ameracements and excesses be not paid in aid of the said fifteenth. And when the fifteenth ceases, it shall be levied to the king's use and answered to him by the sheriffs of the counties.

*Item:* that the justices make their sessions in all English counties at least four times each year, that is to say at the feasts of the Annunciation of Our Lady, St Margaret, St Michael and St Nicholas, and also at all times that shall be necessary, according to the discretion of the justices, and those who speak in the presence of the justices or do other things in their absence or presence in encouragement or maintenance of the servants, labourers or craftsmen against this ordinance, shall be grievously punished by the discretion of the justices. And if any of the servants, labourers or artificers flee from one county to another, because of this ordinance, then the sheriffs of the counties where such fugitives shall be found shall cause them to be taken at the commandment of the said justices of the counties from where they flee, and bring them to the chief gaol of the shire there to abide until the next sessions of the justices. And that the sheriffs return the same commandments before the same justices at their next sessions. And that this ordinance be held and kept as well in the city of London as in other cities and boroughs, and other places throughout the land, within franchises as well as without.

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### Appendix 3

#### Orders Conceived And Published By The Lord Mayor And Aldermen Of The City Of London, Concerning The Infection Of The Plague; 1665.

Whereas in the reign of our late sovereign King James, of happy memory, an act was made for the charitable relief and ordering of persons infected with the plague; whereby authority was given to justices of the peace, mayors, bailiffs, and other head officers, to appoint within their several limits examiners, searchers, watchmen, keepers, and buriers, for the persons and places infected, and to minister unto them oaths for the performance of their offices; and the same statute did also authorize the giving of their directions as unto them for other present necessity should seem good in their discretions: it is now, upon special consideration, thought very expedient, for preventing and avoiding of infection of sickness (if it shall please Almighty God), that these officers following be appointed, and these orders hereafter duly observed.

#### *Examiners to be appointed to every Parish.*

First, it is thought requisite, and so ordered, that in every parish there be one, two, or more persons of good sort and credit chosen by the alderman, his deputy, and common council of every ward, by the name of examiners, to continue in that office for the space of two months at least: and if any fit person so appointed shall refuse to undertake the same, the said parties so refusing to be committed to prison until they shall conform themselves accordingly.

That these examiners be sworn by the aldermen to inquire and learn from time to time what houses in every parish be visited, and what persons be sick, and of what diseases, as near as they can inform themselves, and, upon doubt in that case, to command restraint of access until it appear what the disease shall prove; and if they find any person sick of the

infection, to give order to the constable that the house be shut up; and, if the constable shall be found remiss and negligent, to give notice thereof to the alderman of the ward.

*Watchmen.*

That to every infected house there be appointed two watchmen – one for every day, and the other for the night; and that these watchmen have a special care that no person go in or out of such infected houses whereof they have the charge, upon pain of severe punishment. And the said watchmen to do such further offices as the sick house shall need and require; and if the watchman be sent upon any business, to lock up the house and take the key with him; and the watchman by day to attend until ten o'clock at night, and the watchman by night until six in the morning.

*Searchers.*

That there be a special care to appoint women searchers in every parish, such as are of honest reputation and of the best sort as can be got in this kind; and these to be sworn to make due search and true report, to the utmost of their knowledge, whether the persons whose bodies they are appointed to search do die of the infection, or of what other diseases, as near as they can. And that the physicians who shall be appointed for the cure and prevention of the infection do call before them the said searchers, who are or shall be appointed for the several parishes under their respective cares, to the end they may consider whether they be fitly qualified for that employment, and charge them from time to time, as they shall see cause, if they appear defective in their duties.

That no searcher during this time of visitation be permitted to use any public work or employment, or keep a shop or stall, or be employed as a laundress, or in any other common employment whatsoever.

*Chirurgeons.*

For better assistance of the searchers, forasmuch as there has been heretofore great abuse in misreporting the disease, to the further spreading of the infection, it is therefore ordered that there be chosen and appointed able and discreet chirurgeons besides those that do already belong to the pest house, amongst whom the city and liberties to be quartered as they lie

most apt and convenient; and every of these to have one quarter for his limit. And the said chirurgeons in every of their limits to join with the searchers for the view of the body, to the end there may be a true report made of the disease.

And further: that the said chirurgeons shall visit and search such like persons as shall either send for them, or be named and directed unto them by the examiners of every parish, and inform themselves of the disease of the said parties.

And forasmuch as the said chirurgeons are to be sequestered from all other cures,<sup>79</sup> and kept only to this disease of the infection, it is ordered that every of the said chirurgeons shall have twelvecence a body searched by them, to be paid out of the goods of the party searched, if he be able, or otherwise by the parish.

*Nurse Keepers.*

If any nurse keeper shall remove herself out of any infected house before twenty-eight days after the decease of any person dying of the infection, the house to which the said nurse keeper doth so remove herself shall be shut up until the said twenty-eight days shall be expired.

ORDERS CONCERNING INFECTED HOUSES, AND PERSONS SICK OF  
THE PLAGUE.

*Notice to be given of the Sickness.*

The master of every house, as soon as any one in his house complaineth either of botch, or purple, or swelling in any part of his body, or falleth otherwise dangerously sick without apparent cause of some other disease, shall give notice thereof to the examiner of health, within two hours after the said sign shall appear.

*Sequestration of the Sick.*

As soon as any man shall be found by this examiner, chirurgeon, or searcher, to be sick of the plague, he shall the same night be sequestered in the same house; and in case he be so sequestered, then, though he die not,

the house wherein he sickened shall be shut up for a month after the use of the due preservatives taken by the rest.

*Airing the Stuff.*

For sequestration of the goods and stuff of the infection, their bedding and apparel, and hangings of chambers, must be well aired with fire, and such perfumes as are requisite, within the infected house, before they be taken again to use. This to be done by the appointment of the examiner.

*Shutting up of the House.*

If any person shall visit any man known to be infected of the plague, or entereth willingly into any known infected house, being not allowed, the house wherein he inhabiteth shall be shut up for certain days by the examiner's direction.

*None to be removed out of Infected Houses, but, etc.*

*Item:* That none be removed out of the house where he falleth sick of the infection into any other house in the city (except it be to the pesthouse or a tent, or unto some such house which the owner of the said house holdeth in his own hands, and occupieth by his own servants), and so as security be given to the said parish whither such remove is made, that the attendance and charge about the said visited persons shall be observed and charged in all the particularities before expressed, without any cost of that parish to which any such remove shall happen to be made, and this remove to be done by night. And it shall be lawful to any person that hath two houses to remove either his sound or his infected people to his spare house at his choice, so as, if he send away first his sound, he do not after send thither the sick; nor again unto the sick, the sound; and that the same which he sendeth be for one week at the least shut up, and secluded from company, for the fear of some infection at first not appearing.

*Burial of the Dead.*

That the burial of the dead by this visitation be at most convenient hours, always before sunrising, or after sunsetting, with the privity<sup>80</sup> of the churchwardens, or constable, and not otherwise; and that no neighbors nor friends be suffered to accompany the corpse to church, or to enter the house visited, upon pain of having his house shut up, or be imprisoned.

And that no corpse dying of the infection shall be buried, or remain in any church, in time of common prayer, sermon, or lecture. And that no children be suffered, at time of burial of any corpse, in any church, churchyard, or burying place, to come near the corpse, coffin, or grave; and that all graves shall be at least six feet deep.

And further, all public assemblies at other burials are to be forborne during the continuance of this visitation.

*No Infected Stuff to be uttered.*<sup>81</sup>

That no clothes, stuff, bedding, or garments, be suffered to be carried or conveyed out of any infected houses, and that the criers and carriers abroad of bedding or old apparel to be sold or pawned be utterly prohibited and restrained, and no brokers of bedding or old apparel be permitted to make any public show, or hang forth on their stalls, shop boards, or windows towards any street, lane, common way, or passage, any old bedding or apparel to be sold, upon pain of imprisonment. And if any broker or other person shall buy any bedding, apparel, or other stuff out of any infected house, within two months after the infection hath been there, his house shall be shut up as infected, and so shall continue shut up twenty days at the least.

*No Person to be conveyed out of any Infected House.*

If any person visited<sup>82</sup> do fortune,<sup>83</sup> by negligent looking unto, or by any other means, to come or be conveyed from a place infected to any other place, the parish from whence such party hath come, or been conveyed, upon notice thereof given, shall, at their charge, <sup>56</sup>cause the said party so visited and escaped to be carried and brought back again by night; and the parties in this case offending to be punished at the direction of the alderman of the ward, and the house of the receiver of such visited person to be shut up for twenty days.

*Every Visited House to be marked.*

That every house visited be marked with a red cross of a foot long, in the middle of the door, evident to be seen, and with these usual printed words, that is to say, "Lord have mercy upon us," to be set close over the same cross, there to continue until lawful opening of the same house.

*Every Visited House to be watched.*

That the constables see every house shut up, and to be attended with watchmen, which may keep in, and minister necessaries to them at their own charges, if they be able, or at the common charge if they be unable. The shutting up to be for the space of four weeks after all be whole.

That precise order be taken that the searchers, chirurgeons, keepers, and buriers, are not to pass the streets without holding a red rod or wand of three foot in length in their hands, open and evident to be seen; and are not to go into any other house than into their own, or into that whereunto they are directed or sent for, but to forbear and abstain from company, especially when they have been lately used<sup>84</sup> in any such business or attendance.

*Inmates.*

That where several inmates are in one and the same house, and any person in that house happens to be infected, no other person or family of such house shall be suffered to remove him or themselves without a certificate from the examiners of the health of that parish; or, in default thereof, the house whither she or they remove shall be shut up as is in case of visitation.

*Hackney Coaches.*

That care be taken of hackney coachmen, that they may not, as some of them have been observed to do after carrying of infected persons to the pest house and other places, be admitted to common<sup>57</sup> use till their coaches be well aired, and have stood unemployed by the space of five or six days after such service.

ORDERS FOR CLEANSING AND KEEPING OF THE STREETS SWEPT.

*The Streets to be kept Clean.*

First, it is thought necessary, and so ordered, that every householder do cause the street to be daily prepared before his door, and so to keep it clean swept all the week long.

*That Rakers take it from out the Houses.*

That the sweeping and filth of houses be daily carried away by the rakers, and that the raker shall give notice of his coming by the blowing of a horn, as hitherto hath been done.

*Laystalls to be made far off from the City.*

That the laystalls be removed as far as may be out of the city and common passages, and that no nightman or other be suffered to empty a vault into any vault or garden near about the city.

*Care to be had of Unwholesome Fish or Flesh, and of Musty Corn.*

That special care be taken that no stinking fish, or unwholesome flesh, or musty corn, or other corrupt fruits, of what sort soever, be suffered to be sold about the city or any part of the same.

That the brewers and tippling-houses be looked unto for musty and unwholesome casks.

That no hogs, dogs, or cats, or tame pigeons, or conies, be suffered to be kept within any part of the city, or any swine to be or stray in the streets or lanes, but that such swine be impounded by the beadle or any other officer, and the owner punished according to the act of common council; and that the dogs be killed by the dog killers appointed for that purpose.

ORDERS CONCERNING LOOSE PERSONS AND IDLE ASSEMBLIES.

*Beggars.*

Forasmuch as nothing is more complained of than the multitude of rogues and wandering beggars that swarm about in every place about the city, being a great cause of the spreading of the infection, and will not be avoided notwithstanding any orders that have been given to the contrary: it is therefore now ordered that such constables, and others whom this matter may any way concern, take special care that no wandering beggars be suffered in the streets of this city, in any fashion or manner whatsoever, upon the penalty provided by law to be duly and severely executed upon them.

*Plays.*

That all plays, bear-baitings, games, singing of ballads, buckler play, or such like causes of assemblies of people, be utterly prohibited, and the parties offending severely punished by every alderman in his ward.

*Feasting prohibited.*

That all public feasting, and particularly by the companies of this city, and dinners in taverns, alehouses, and other places of public entertainment, be forborne till further order and allowance, and that the money thereby spared be preserved, and employed for the benefit and relief of the poor visited with the infection.

*Tippling-Houses.*

That disorderly tippling in taverns, alehouses, coffeehouses, and cellars, be severely looked unto as the common sin of the time, and greatest occasion of dispersing the plague. And that no company or person be suffered to remain or come into any tavern, alehouse, or coffeehouse, to drink, after nine of the clock in the evening, according to the ancient law and custom of this city, upon the penalties ordained by law.

And for the better execution of these orders, and such other rules and directions as upon further consideration shall be found needful, it is ordered and enjoined that the aldermen, deputies, and common councilmen shall meet together weekly, once, twice, thrice, or oftener, as cause shall require, at some one general place accustomed in their respective wards, being clear from infection of the plague, to consult how the said orders may be put in execution, not intending that any dwelling in or near places infected shall come to the said meeting while their coming may be doubtful. And the said aldermen, deputies, and common councilmen, in their several wards, may put in execution any other orders that by them, at their said meetings, shall be conceived and devised for the preservation of his Majesty's subjects from the infection.

Sir John Lawrence, Lord Mayor

Sir George Waterman, and Sir Charles Doe, Sheriffs

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Hyphenation, commas and spacings have been corrected, but not archaic spellings.



## Appendix 4

### A Description by Doctor Lowry of a plague outbreak in the city of Pakhoi in the Gulf of Tonkin June 1882.

It occurred in the hot weather of June (85° Fahr. day, 76° Fahr. night); for fear of thieves the houses are carefully shut up even on the hottest night. The epidemic caused about 400 to 500 deaths in a population of 25,000. The disease does not spread. In nearly every house where the disease broke out, the rats had been coming out of their holes and dying on the floors: Dr Lowry dissected several of them, and found the lungs congested. In the human subject, except for the buboes, the disease resembled typhus: "anyone going to the bedside of a patient would certainly at first think it was that disease he had to deal with." The same disease occurred at Lienchow, a city twelve miles off. Another English physician in the service of the China Maritime Customs heard of a malady with the symptoms of plague in certain districts of Southern Kiangsi in the autumn of 1886; but no particulars were to be had. Typhus was prevalent, and very fatal, every year in the towns, villages and hamlets of Northern Kiangsi.

One curious piece of evidence as to the death of rats, not associated with plague in men, comes from a more northern province of China. In the autumn of 1881, on the opposite side of the Yang-tsi from Nanking and in the western suburbs of the ancient capital, the rats emerged from holes in dwellings, jumped up, turned round, and fell dead. Baskets and boxes filled with their bodies were cast into the canal. "Here," says Dr Macgowan, "was evidently a subsoil poison which affected the animals precisely in the same way as the malaria of the Yun-nan pest. Happily, the subterranean miasm at Nanking did not affect animals that live above ground

Doctor J. H. Lowry, *Medical Report. Chinese Maritime Customs*, No. 24, 1882, p. 27.

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## Appendix 5

### Did Lice cause the Black Death?

In 2018 a team from the University of Oslo, used computer modelling to try three different modes of transmission for bubonic plague, rats, air transmissions and humans' body lice and found that the lice were the most likely carriers.<sup>833</sup> While they presented this as a theory, two years later in a popular documentary series about the 1665 English epidemic *The Great Plague* applied this idea to Bubonic Plague. Xand van Tulleken (the main presenter) states this as an established fact several times. Although this idea is definitely applied to England in 1665, other outbreaks are not definitely connected to lice, but this is the impression: the rats and their fleas are blameless. Supposedly for a hundred years people have been misled over the cause of plague and now the presenters reveal the truth.<sup>834</sup> Dan Snow in his 2020 documentary *The Black Death* also credited lice as being amongst the carriers of the plague.

The discoveries of Doctor Yersin in the 1890s, when he detected the plague within rat's fleas, is briefly mentioned, but van Tulleken states that this find has been back dated as a cause for other outbreaks and then goes on to present evidence that lice caused plague, not rats and their fleas. The film makers way of dealing with the plague omits much. No mention is made of the way rats frequently died of the plague before humans did. This not only happened in the outbreak Doctor Yersin witnessed and recorded, but was so common in different populations

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<sup>833</sup> Yirka; Gill.

<sup>834</sup> Jamie Simpson, (Series Producer and Director) *The Great Plague*. Chanel 5. Three episodes of forty-five minutes each. Presenters: Doctor Xand van Tulleken, Rakasha Dave and John Sergeant. A Chanel 5 Production. First showing February 2020.  
<https://www.channel5.com/show/the-great-plague> Accessed 28<sup>TH</sup> January 2022.

that adages about when rats stagger around and die plague has come. These incidents were common before and after Yersin's discovery. It was mentioned by eyewitnesses during the 1665 English outbreak, but is not mentioned in the show. Since then, researchers and doctors confirmed that rats were plague carriers, many times and in many locales, sometimes by on site observation or anecdote, but usually using scientific methods.

The film makers did show three experiments which presented evidence for their view. The first showed that body lice are aggressive and successful in their attack on human skin to get blood. This is already well known. The second was an attempt to prove that the Yorkshire town of Eyam, which was known to be infected with plague, was infected by lice. Plague was unintentionally sent there in a package of clothes, which were supposedly infected by lice within the clothing. To simulate the journey of the lice from London to Eyam so as to see if they could survive the five-day journey, the lice were under watch in laboratory conditions. Within three days most were dead and only one louse lived to the fifth day, the time needed for the journey. This proved that a louse could have infected the village.

However, to this writer, the study was flawed. An antiseptic twenty-first lab with an antiseptic glass container holding the lice is not a sixteenth century package of clothing. The number of lice used was unmentioned: did one louse survive out of fifty, a hundred, a thousand? The researcher giving the verbal reporting talked of lice deaths in percentages, suggesting a large number. The laboratory worker stated that the used lice were head lice, not the harder to find body lice, which have a longer life expectancy and so could have survived the journey to Eyam, surviving in large numbers. The conductor of the experiment also quite plausibly suggested that the tailor who opened the package may have breathed in lice parts or their shit, possibly. Even so, the film makers have only raised a remote possibility that lice infected Eyam with the plague.

Other problems emerge with their presentation of this theory. They state that two French weavers were the first to bring the plague to England, when they resided in Saint Giles in December 1664. Minutes later in the same episode they then argue that as disembarking rats usually infected the port areas first. The plague should have infected Saint Giles last, not first as it was far from the ports. Therefore, rats

and their fleas did not infect England. Their own narrative shows the two Frenchmen infected Saint Giles first. What infected them, lice, rat fleas or humans, remains an open question. Infection from Saint Giles was likely to have been human to human, with assorted vermin and creatures being infected by contact with Infected humans.

The widespread burning of clothes and linen during this plague, both by official orders and common initiative, does indeed suggest that lice were plague carriers, and that people sensed this, but fleas also inhabit clothing: a fact not made much of. Final proof for lice alone as plague carriers was not given,

In a third experiment conducted at the University of Marseille experts use a rabbit to show that a plague infected louse could infect this creature. This is strong evidence. Going against the lice caused the plague theory are the following facts which the filmmakers do not mention.

Although they quote from Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. they do not refer to his mention of the multitude of dead rats in London.

In most accounts of the spreading plagues, ships, then ports start the infection, suggesting rats, not lice, are the cause. As the film makers say, lice cannot survive long distances without hosts. If they cannot live more than ten days without a host, how could they survive months long voyages from eastern Asia to western Europe?

Lice can indeed be deadly; they carry typhus, which kills on an epidemic scale. Yet where are accounts of typhus spreading in accounts of the plague? Surely, lice would simultaneously spread both diseases?

The evidence of the 1910 outbreaks in Sussex and Manchuria and the continuing American experience with assorted mammals shows that other animals and vermin besides rats can infect humans with plague and not only in isolated, even rare cases. Lice could also be carriers, but this is very different to being the cause of pandemics. How many of these other mammals carry lice?

The number of scientific tests linking the Asian flea species to *Yersinia* is large, but where are the scientific tests linking lice to *Yersinia*?

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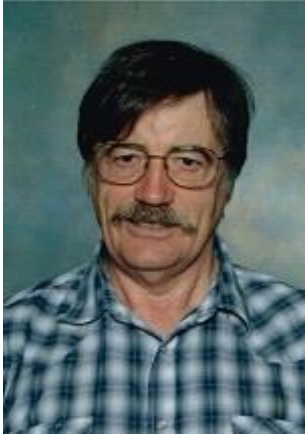
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### About the Author

After careers in heavy industry and politics he abandoned these disastrous choices and gained a double honours degree (English & Drama) with Modern History as a third, specialising in the rebellion against western imperialists in nineteenth century India and China. Other subsequent history studies at university included: The Conquest of Mexico, Nazi Germany, Migration, the Crusades, Witch-hunts from 1400-1700 and the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Crete, Troy, Greece, Rome, and Medieval Europe. In culture honours studies included W.B. Yeats and William Morris, Swinburne, Shakespeare, New Literatures in English and American Literature. In 1995 by a fluke, he became a tutor and defacto university lecturer/tutor, being a sudden replacement and the only person in the city qualified with the required highly specialized degree. He then worked in mainstream English for a term and then in university preparatory courses for indigenous students in English, Sociology, Education, Critical Literacy and Psychology. After government retrenchments to university in 1998, he returned to High School teaching. Since 2008 he organises and plays community radio programs in the Folk and Celtic genres. Garry recently finished a second university degree, this time solely in History.

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### **Twentieth Century Film Reviews**

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- [Krim's Crossed Swords\(1954\)](#)
- [Corman's The Secret Invasion\(1964\)](#)
- [Jewison's The Russians are Coming \(1966\)](#)
- [Thorpe's Malaya \(1949\)](#)
- [Kurosawa's Rashomon \(1950\)](#)
- [Warren's Little Big Horn \(1951\)](#)
- [Hitchcock's Vertigo \(1958\)](#)

- [Wood's A Night at the Opera \(1935\)](#)
- [Fleming's The Last Grenade \(1970\)](#)
- [Bergman's Cries and Whispers \(1972\)](#)
- [Branagh's Hamlet \(1996\)](#)
- [Rosi's Christ Stopped at Eboli \(1978\)](#)
- [Peckinpah's Major Dundee \(1965\)](#)
- [The Day of the Triffids \(1962\)](#)
- [Castle's The Old Dark House \(1963\)](#)
- [Milestone's Kangaroo The Australian Story \(1952\)](#)
- [Hitchcock's The Paradine Case \(1947\)](#)
- [Lauder's Geordie \(1955\)](#)
- [McLeod's The Paleface \(1948\)](#)
- [Rossen's Island in the Sun \(1957\)](#)
- [Steamboat Bill Jr. \(1928\)](#)
- [Hathaway's Niagara \(1953\)](#)
- [Jewison's The Thomas Crown Affair \(1968\)](#)
- [Goulding's Grand Hotel \(1932\)](#)
- [Ford's The Iron Horse \(1924\)](#)
- [De Mille's The Ten Commandments. \(1956\)](#)
- [Whale's The Invisible Man \(1933\)](#)
- [Capra's It Happened One Night \(1934\)](#)
- [Kinugasa's Gates of Hell \(1953\)](#)
- [Widerberg's Elvira Madigan. \(1967\)](#)
- [Hill's Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid \(1969\)](#)
- [Ashby's Harold and Maude \(1971\)](#)
- [Critchon's The Lavender Hill Mob \(1951\)](#)
- [Home Alone \(1991\)](#)
- [The Road To Zanzibar \(1941\)](#)
- [Fairbanks The Black Pirate \(1926\)](#)

### **Twenty First Century Film Reviews**

- [Delicious \(2021\)](#)
- [To Kill a King](#)
- [Lion \(2016\)](#)
- [Salmon Fishing in the Yemen](#)
- [The Water Diviner](#)
- [Noah](#)
- [A Million Ways to Die in the West](#)
- [A Walk in the Woods](#)
- [Star Wars: A New Hope](#)

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- The Myth of the Prophet: Trotsky and his Followers
- Trotsky and the Kronstadt Rebellion
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- The Indian Mutiny of 1857. Motivations and Ideology
- Rhetoric Romance and Reality: Maude Gonne and W.B Yeats
- Looking Back to Save the Future: W.B Yeats and William Morris
- J. W. Waterhouse 1849-1917: His Life and Art
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