

A Plague Upon All Your Houses
epidemic disease and our ancestors
Janet Few



www.thehistoryinterpreter.com



@JanetFew.bsky.social

Janet runs a 5 week online course *In Sickness and in Death: researching the ill-health and death of your ancestors* for Pharos Teaching and Tutoring. The next presentation begins 12 October 2026
www.pharostutors.com.

Epidemics Timelines

www.mongenes.org.uk/epidemics_in_bri.html

www.hyattfamily.co.uk/docs/General%20genealogy%20help/british%20epidemic%20timeline.txt

Some Epidemics

1485 Sweating sickness England
 1487 Plague
 1500-1501 Plague across Britain 20,000 died in London (c.30% of the population)
 1506 Syphilis
 1506-8 Sweating sickness began London, especially effecting Oxford and Cambridge universities
 1509 Syphilis
 1510 Influenza Europe
 1514 Smallpox – earliest known English outbreak
 1517-1522 Sweating sickness England
 1518 Earliest record of measles
 1522 Typhus in Oxford and Cambridge
 1528-1529 Sweating sickness England and northern Europe
 1540 Dysentery, typhus and influenza
 1549 Syphilis
 1551 Sweating sickness England
 1555-1558 Dysentery, typhus and influenza
 1557 Influenza Europe
 1563 Plague in London
 1580-1582 Influenza Europe
 1586 Typhus in Exeter
 1592-1594 Plague in London
 1597 Plague in north of England
 1602-1631 Smallpox across the country
 1612-1651 The ‘new disease’ - possibly typhus
 1625 Influenza
 1638 Plague in Monmouthshire, particularly Bedwellty
 1638 ‘Spotted fever’ particularly in Hampshire
 1640-1643 Typhus in Oxford, Reading and Tiverton
 1641 Smallpox and plague
 1646 Plague in Devon

1651-1652 Influenza
 1659-1661 Measles and smallpox in London
 1661-1665 Typhus in London
 1665 Plague particularly in London
 1666 Plague in Winchester
 1667 Plague in Nottingham, the last recorded instance
 1670 Measles London
 1674 Measles
 1675 Influenza
 1681 Smallpox in London
 1685-1686 Typhus in London
 1697 Dysentery
 1705-6 Measles
 1710 Smallpox in London
 1717 Smallpox Manchester
 1718-9 Measles, smallpox and influenza
 1721-2 Smallpox Yorkshire
 1728 Scarletina and diphtheria York and Plymouth
 1734-1736 Scarletina and diphtheria Devon and Cornwall
 1739-40 Particularly cold winters
 1741-2 Typhus London
 1748-51 Scarletina particularly in London, Cornwall, Kidderminster, St. Albans and Plymouth
 1751-1753 Smallpox across the country, the most serious outbreak up until this time
 1757 Smallpox Manchester
 1773 Typhus Chester Smallpox Manchester
 1778 Scarlet Fever
 1780-82 La Russe [Russian Flu]
 1781-4 'Plague Ague' Severn Valley
 1788 Typhus particularly in London
 1790 Typhus Liverpool
 1793 Scarletina and diphtheria Buckinghamshire
 1799-1800 Typhus
 1804-5 Scarletina Manchester
 1808 Measles London
 1816-1819 Smallpox and Typhus 'The Irish Disease' London 1 in 14 died, Carlisle 1 in 10, severe in Yorkshire
 1824 Measles southern England particularly Exeter
 1825-1826 Smallpox
 1826-1828 Typhus
 1830-1831 Influenza
 1831-1832 Cholera
 1833 Influenza
 1837-1840 Smallpox
 1844 Scarletina
 1846 Very hot typhus and fevers
 1847 Influenza, smallpox with typhus or relapsing fever, particularly in the north of England and Scotland
 1848 Influenza, smallpox with typhus or relapsing fever, scarletina
 1848 Cholera
 1849 Cholera Plymouth
 1849 Smallpox with typhus or relapsing fever, cholera

1853-1854 Cholera
 1856 Diphtheria
 1857 Diphtheria
 1858 Diphtheria, scarletina
 1859 Diphtheria, scarletina
 1861 Typhus
 1862 Typhus particularly in London
 1863 Typhus, diphtheria, scarletina
 1864 Typhus, diphtheria, scarletina
 1865 Typhus, cholera
 1866 Typhus, cholera, whooping cough
 1867 Typhus
 1868 Diphtheria, scarletina, smallpox
 1869 Diphtheria, scarletina, smallpox
 1870 Diphtheria, scarletina, smallpox
 1870 Measles particularly in Blaenavon
 1871 Smallpox
 1872 Smallpox
 1874 Diphtheria, scarletina
 1878 Whooping cough
 Late C19th Chlorosis England, France and USA
 1883 Measles
 1888 Smallpox in Sheffield
 1889-1890 Influenza Russian flu worldwide
 1894 Measles
 1918-1919 'Spanish' Flu worldwide particularly noted for killing young adults aged 20-40 - often from secondary pneumonia 500 million infected, c. 21m died
 2020 COVID19

Further Reading

- Creighton, Charles *A History of Epidemics in Britain: Volume 1 From AD 664 to the extinction of the plague* (1894 reprinted Cambridge University Press 2013)
- Creighton, Charles *A History of Epidemics in Britain: Volume 2 From the extinction of the plague to the present time* (1894 reprinted Cambridge University Press 2013)
- Hatcher, J *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530* (Palgrave 1977)
- Kiple, Kenneth F ed. *Plague Pox and Pestilence: disease in history* (Phoenix Illustrated 1997)
- Smallman Raynor, Matthew & Cliff, Andrew *Atlas of Epidemic Britain: a twentieth century picture* (Oxford University Press 2012)
- Wills, Simon *How our Ancestors Died: a guide for family historians* (Pen and Sword 2013)

Plague in the diaries of Samuel Pepys www.pepysdiary.com/encyclopedia/301/
 Black Death
www.historytoday.com/ole-j-benedictow/black-death-greatest-catastrophe-ever
 Plague www.historytoday.com/lara-thorpe/great-plague-1665-case-closed

The Great Plague 1665

www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/The-Great-Plague/

Bills of Mortality

<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/londons-dreadful-visitation-bills-of-mortality>

History of Vaccination www.historyofvaccines.org

Smallpox Vaccination Records

www.genguide.co.uk/source/vaccination-registers-amp-certificates/51

Typhoid Mary www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3959940/

Medical Officer of Health Reports <https://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/>

Over 68,000 Medical Officer of Health Reports the Internet Archive

<https://archive.org/details/medicalofficerofhealthreports>

Medical Officer of Health Reports on Scotland Places

<https://scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/official-reports/medical-officer-health-reports>

An 1831 account of the treatment of cholera

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5765083/

Cholera www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/p-health/cholera3.htm

Cholera in London www.choleraandthethames.co.uk

Cholera www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/public-health

Cholera in Alnwick <https://bailiffgatecollections.co.uk/family-history/1849-cholera-outbreak/>

Cholera www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/longview/longview_20030415.shtml

On the mode of Communication of Cholera Dr John Snow 1855 (mentions several regional outbreaks and other water borne diseases) www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/snowbook_a4.html

Cholera in Nineteenth Century England www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=pamela-k-gilbert-on-cholera-in-nineteenth-century-england

Syphilis video www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_OWNAm0qJI

Cures for Spanish Flu

www.cowhampshireblog.com/2017/08/25/100-years-ago-cures-for-the-spanish-flu

Spanish Flu

<https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2021/01/14/spanish-flu-pandemic-newspapers/>

Responses to Contagion <https://intheirownwriteblog.com/2020/04/28/contagion-and-compassion-the-view-from-history/>