CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Original Records Respecting the Plague in This Country

Author(s): George Harris

Source: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 8 (1880), pp. 278-280

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Royal Historical Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3677833>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 20:31 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Royal Historical Society, Cambridge University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

ORIGINAL RECORDS RESPECTING THE PLAGUE IN THIS COUNTRY.

BY GEORGE HARRIS, Esq., LL.D., F.S.A.,
Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

WE have accounts of the reappearance of the plague on the continent of Europe, which, if they do not create actual alarm, are at any rate calculated to excite a strong interest about it, more especially as regards the precautionary and other measures which were adopted in this country on the occasion of its former visitations. To some of the official documents recording these proceedings I have been allowed to have access, and I propose now to lay before you a few extracts from them.

The following record is contained in the "Book of Pleas" kept in the Guildhall at Norwich :—

"In the year of our Lord 1349 God Almighty visited mankind with a deadly plague, which began in the south parts of the world, and went through even the northern parts thereof, attacking all nations of the world. This plague equally destroyed Christians, Jews, Saracens, killed the confessor and the confessed. In many places this plague did not leave the fifth part of the people. It struck the world with great fear ; so great was the pestilence that the like was never seen, heard, nor read of before, for it was believed that there was not a greater number of souls destroyed by the flood in the days of Noah than died by this plague."

From the "Institution Book" at Norwich of this time it appears that the clergy died so fast that they were obliged to admit numbers of youths that had only devoted themselves for clerks by being shaven to be rectors of parishes ; and

accordingly a bull of Pope Clement to the Bishop of Norwich dispensed with sixty clerks, though they were only "shave-lings," and but twenty-one years of age, to hold livings, no less than 1,000 parish churches being void of incumbents in that diocese.

The following ordinance was made by the Corporation of Winchester in the year 1583 :—

"That if any house within this cytie shall happen to be infected with the plague, that thene everye person to keepe within his or her house every his or her dogge, and not to suffer them to goe at large. And if any dogge shall be then found abroad at large, it shall be lawful for the Beadle or any other persone to kill the same dogge. And that any owner of such dogge going at large shall lose 6s., to be levied and divided as aforesaid."

The following entry is contained in the Register of the parish of Dunchurch in Warwickshire, a village which stood on the great road from London to Birmingham, and was therefore exposed to having people pass through it who had lately quitted London while it was visited by the plague :—

"In the year 1625 there was a great plague in London, which swept away above 34,000 persons. Some people flying from the pestilential air of London died in Dunchurch, and were buried by the vicar's side land in Long-field."

There is a tradition that Leamington Hastings, which is a village near Dunchurch, and which lies out of the high road, was also visited by the plague ; and the spot is still pointed out where the remains of those who died of it were buried.

The following is extracted from the Vestry Minutes of St. Martin's in the Fields for the year 1625 :—

"Thomasin Morris, widow, Elizabeth Collins, widow, and Catharine Rile, wife of Richard Rile, appointed searchers to view the bodies of all persons deceased in the parish, and truly to certify of what disease every one hath died, as well as they can, especially to report truly all that happen to die of the plague. And touching their habitation, it is ordered that Goodwife Ellis shall leave the apartment wherein she is now joined in with Goodwife Shepherd, and go down to Goodwife Collins into the lower room, there to dwell together

with her, and they are sent to Sir Thomas Wilson to be sworn. And it is thought fit that a competent piece of ground, parcel of the ground adjoining to the military yard about the middle top, be enclosed for the dwelling and abiding of such persons as shall be appointed bearers and buriers of such as shall die of the plague in this parish.

“Item. Whereas there are examiners to be appointed for the better observing of order during this time of the contagious infection, who are to be persons of discreet and sober government; it is thought fit that Henry Tryold, Thomas Potter, and Francis Read be examiners to inquire of such houses as it shall please Almighty God to visit with the plague in this parish, and otherwise to do what employment as by the orders made within the City of London, and otherwise by statute appointed in that behalf, they shall be directed, and were sent to Sir Thomas Wilson, Knight, to be sworn.”

As far as I can trace it, the last time that the plague was known to be in this country was in the year 1667, two years after the great plague of London; and the last place in which it appeared was *Nottingham*. And it is a singular circumstance that though, as we are told, at Derby no tanner's house was visited by the plague, yet at Nottingham the plague prevailed chiefly in the neighbourhood of the tanyards, which were in the lower street of the town. There huts were ordered to be prepared for the infected, especially below the castle; swine were ordered to be kept up; all the dogs and cats were ordered to be killed, for fear they should carry the infection about, and the goose fair was ordered to be held in a different part of the town from that in which it had usually taken place, for fear of bringing in infection.*

* From the “Corporation Records of Nottingham.”