

The socio-economic impact of the 3rd outbreak

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London before the great plague

London, capital of the United Kingdom, its population (as no census was made of London until the late 1850's), historians worldwide estimate was surrounding the 300. 000 to 400. 000 people, by then one of the most populated cities in Europe, apart from being one of the most active in trade regionally and internationally speaking. Although being a city marked for technological advancements and urban expansion, London's hygiene was a terrible one, mainly due to a fast expansion starting from the early 1600 in which its growth was six folded. Even today the reasons of why exactly did London's population did such a dramatic increase is still a mystery amongst scholars, giving the blame mainly to the Industrial Revolution. By the 1600 the ever expanding city had already 97 Parishes, which will help this investigation go through thanks to the dead reports filed by these. As it was written by one of the civilians living inside London, London at the time of the Plague of 1665 was, perhaps, as much crowded with people as I suppose Marseilles to have been when the Plague begun in 1719; the Streets of London were in the Time of the Pestilence very Narrow, and, as I am Inform'd, unpaved for the most part; the Houses by continu'd Jetts one Story above another, made them almost meer at the garrets, so that the Air within the STREETS was pent up, and had not a due Freedom og Passage, to purifie itself as it ought.

British diet 17th century

Up to the 17th century, most consumables affordable by the lower class gave a series of illnesses which just contributed to worsening the already

poor level of health cities at the time had. A good example was the Ergot, which by 1853 was identified as a different plant, but before that it was identified by scientist of the time as a subspecies of Rye Kernel. Ergot is now identified as a main reason to much of the gangrenous infections found in London at the time and different mental illnesses, yet it was not proved until 1765 that it was poisonous. By the 17th century, English botanists and scholars, as they were convinced to be a species of the Rye, were letting the English population consume around 1. 3 million grains per year and as wheat prices increased, England had to sustain in the consumption of Rye, having terrible effects of the general health, and starting a epidemic of Ergotism and Gangrenous infections.

The common diet of the Lower class citizens, such as farmers consisted mainly vegetables farmed of the landing given to them, bread was also a primary element in their consumables. Made normally by bakers in the village, in the 17th century most bread was made with cheap grains, such as the before mentioned Rye Kernel. Those of higher standing had in their disposition a much larger market. By the 17th century, the French cuisine dominated the English table. They introduced much more refined versions of wine as well as anchovies and roux. By this time also, England was opening to worldwide commerce, diversifying their cuisine forever; The British Library mentions (2006) “ Thanks to the Europeans, the English realized that it was perfectly safe to eat raw fruit and vegetables, and began to enjoy salads with their meals”. This was a century of great advancements in this area without a doubt.

Weather conditions

By 1664, London was suffering one of the worst winters known in England history, which lasted from beginnings of December 1663 all until late April. The reports of the city reported a grain harvest in February of extremely wet and frozen Rye making possible the entrance of A special toxin which is favored by extreme weathers as well as the before mentioned Ergot. As April entered and Winter ended, summer came in immediately, and it was reported as the worse and hottest summers, Samuel Pypes, one of the civils living in London at the time reported june as “ the mighty heat of the weather” making it impossible the plantation of grains, expect for some places the plantation of rye, making London enter a food crisis as starvation came in. Also the heat worsen the health problems, this weather conditions made ideal for the entrance of the bubonic plague, since the hot and dry temperature helped the Flea carrying the Pest flourish.

The bubonic plague

The black death is known as a plague caused by the bacteria yersinia Pestis. This microscopic life form was normally found from sewers, streets, alleyways, and slums in the poorest parts of urban cities in which most probably rat nests would become vehicles for the disease to spread out. It is believed this bacteria would reproduce in the fur of these animals, in such a way a portion of the disease would actually infect the person while a reserve was left in the rat; today these strategy of housing from diseases is called “ plague reservoirs”.

The black Pest is known to have had three main strains. The Bubonic Pest is known by many medics, doctors, and in general by most of the scientific community as one of the strains to the Black plague, and although this was not the most lethal of all the strains, it was indeed the most notorious. It is believed that the bubonic Pest entered Europe around the 14th century for the first time. There are many different theories to how exactly did the plague spread, most scientists think the main only reason was due to the overpopulated rat community inside Europe, mainly due to the papal decree Vox in Rama, which caused the great cat massacre, and by effect a lowering in the main predator of the rat. Due to recent studies on patterns of the illness however, indicate that the original diagnosis of the spreading of the Bubonic Pest, which was treated as an airborne pathogen, can actually be possible also. Although, it was thought by most religious figures that the Plague was a form of divine retribution sent to punish them, specially due to the fact that it came from the eastern part of Europe, from different towns located in the north-west of the Asian continent (Modern territories of Ukraine and Poland), as well as the Arabian peninsula, considered by Christians to be pagan-filled places.

Today it is known that the reason of people thinking that this was a divine retribution was because sailors who went to any Eastern city and returned to Europe died almost immediately due to the Plague. As people struggled to explain the reason to this, they blamed the pagans; today we know it was due to the dock rats with fleas that entered the boat and infected the sailors.

Bubonic plague theory

The first sight of the third outbreak of the Bubonic plague was reported in Holland by 1663, which killed around 35. 000 civilians living in different small villages and towns. The scholar Nathaniel Hodges reported After most strict and serious Inquiry, by undoubted Testimonies, I find that this Pest was communicated to us by the Netherlands by way of Contagion; and if most probable Relations deceive me not, it came from Smyrna to Holland in a parcel of infected Goods.

Other scholars, such as William Boghurst however debate the fact that the Plague was present for many years around, as a series of Parishes, such as St. Giles, St. Clements, etc. reported several deaths due to possible Bubonic Pest. Not only that but it is theorized that the plague had always been present, just that with all the factors mentioned before, such as poor health, Ergot, gangrene infections, and starvation, as well as unbearable heat made the Bubonic Pest a Plague, as it simply just got easier to spread. Reports actually fill up that from 1603 to 1665 only 4 years showed up with no Bubonic Pest death. As an example between the years 1603 and 1625 over 70. 000 deaths were reported by the Bills of Mortality. Even in London, some years before the Great Plague in 1665, a smaller outbreak happened in between 1640-47 in which more than 14. 000 civilians were reported dead by the same Pest.

First signs of the plague

September 1664: As Londoners heard the news that the Bubonic Plague returned to Holland people started to formulate different reasons on how the

Plague started to flourish again, as some said that came from Italy others stated that Netherland was having a small epidemic and their goods were being contaminated. Thought this was a rumor that spread fast through London people did not worried much, as some thought it was fake; due to the low quantity of merchants that corroborated this. By that time no official newspaper was printed, so the only way of knowing news was through boat merchants. As Londoners just talked of rumors, the royal government knew by fact that Holland was indeed infected, and debated ways in which they could stop the Plague from entering the country. As time passed on, the rumor died and things calmed, until by the late November, 1664, two Frenchmen were reported dead by the Plague in one of the outer zones of London. Daniel Defoe, famous writer and survivor of the London Plague narrates: And concerning themselves to inquire about it, in order to be certain of the truth, two physicians and a Surgeon were order'd to go to the House, and make Inspection. This they did; and finding evident Tokens of the Sickness upon both the bodies that were dead, they gave their opinions publicly, that they died of the Plague. As one of the strongest winters hitted by London, the Bills of Mortality published this report.

Quarantine

As August entered, and the last noble person was evacuated or in reclusion in his manor, London was set into heavy quarantine. Those healthy that were trapped inside London desperately wanted a way out. That same year there were countless reports on bribing and escapes. The policy of house arrest when the symptoms appeared inside a house was also in place, yet, some high middle class people bribed off officials to ignore some of the pest

symptoms they could have in their house, some preferred just to be homeless than to be inside their houses for a permanent house arrest until death with the Bubonic plague. Others would try to convince friends outside to poison the guard or drugged them so they could escape quarantine. Some people by the other hand had more wits with them and they decided to kill themselves by burning down their homes, or using this as a distraction to escape. As *The Great Plague of London* by the Charles River Editors say in page 33 “ In one incredible episode, a man attached a contraption made out of fireworks to his door and detonated the bomb, leaping out with his family through the window in the nick of time.”. As moral was found in an all-time low by part of the Lord Mayor of London, on August the 12th he ordered that all of those who were healthy had to be enclosed inside home by 9pm, as he would permit all those who were sick to step out to take fresh air. This however actually lowered the moral overall, as those who were sick went out in masses, a great number of the healthy population that were locked inside their houses noticed their relatives affected by the plague in between the sick, not only this but others ventured out to be with their loved ones, since they prepared to die with those who they love.

Evolution and mortality of plague

By late August it was reported by the Bills of Mortality a death rate of over 7.000 dead per week due to the Plague. As this was an official report of London's Bills of Mortality, pagan civilians, such as Jews Quakers, Muslims, did not applied to count into this list, making this number skyrocket up to more than 8.000 dead or even 9.000 per week. By this date, the plague houses established in London were insufficient to treat the ever rising

number of sick people inside London, meanwhile, those rich enough were escorted by Royal soldiers out of the city or stayed in quarantine within the Mayors manor. The inhumane conditions of this improvised houses of sick just worsened the situation as the little hygiene that was present made possible that infections came in as patients were being treated. There are present reports of these pest houses which can be shown, yet due to the high quantity of discrepancies found in them they are not reliable enough to be entered as a viable fact or source.

Although the pest houses did make living conditions of those infected with the Plague unbearable and lowered quite a lot the life expectancy of some of them, modern historians agree that these houses helped more as quarantine zones than what their real purpose was, helping reduce the number of victims London had all along. What worsened this was the fact that these pest houses were private locations, in which people had to pay to enter to get treated. These pest houses were also not controlled in any way by the government, which let the owners of these makeshift hospitals do whatever they wanted. This brings us to the main reason on why were this houses so low quality, understaffing. As most doctors were high class or in any way rich enough to leave the city, people were left with only nurses, and most of them very inexperienced nurses, since normal nurses started to ask for higher salaries for them to work inside a pest house. The high rate of mortality inside these houses made nurses gain a really bad reputation amongst Londoners, as some people would say nurses just suffocated their patients to death to rob them clean and then declare them dead. Others

accused them of trying to infect the healthy people with sick “ goo” they extracted so that they could get a stable money source.

As September came in, the Bills of Mortality published a new spike in the death rate, now between 8. 000 to 10. 000 non-pagan civilians were dying, it is estimated that the real numbers would round 12. 000.