

# Black plague of london 1665

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The Great Plague in London of 1665 Although people proposed a variety of causes for the great plague in London of 1665, the effects of the plague were certainly catastrophic. Europe experienced many outbreaks of plague prior to the year of 1665. Unfortunately, no one was quite sure what exactly caused the plague, which devastated each person who was affected. The effects of the plague on society wreaked havoc on victims both socially and physically. Consequently, Londoners were forced to try many drastic measures to prevent the spread of disease.

Nevertheless, the great plague left the city of London greatly damaged. Even though different causes for the plague were mentioned, the most relevant and logical cause of plague was derived from London's filthiness. Charles J. Shields writes: Although 17th-century Londoners were familiar with the plague's symptoms, they had no idea what caused it. One pattern they noted, however, was that it went hand in hand with filthiness. London was an ancient human habitation, dating from the days when the Roman army had built its outside walls.

Without means to provide sanitation for all its inhabitants, the city evolved into a breeding ground for epidemics. (13) Dirtiness often accompanies congested areas, and London was undoubtedly no exception. According to Britannica, "the greatest devastation remained in the city's outskirts, at Stepney, Shoreditch, Clerkenwell, Cripplegate, and Westminster, quarters where the poor were densely crowded" (Britannica 447). In seventeenth-century London, people who lived in poverty were believed to be at a high risk for contagion (Hays 124).

Residents of London deposited their rubble outside of their homes so that the rain could wash the trash away (Shields 13-14). Consequently, the filth throughout London's neighborhoods attracted many rats, which carried plague-ridden fleas (Trueman). Because rats lived near garbage, the rodents also resided closely to humans, particularly the poor. Nonetheless, when the rats died, the fleas found new human hosts. When fleas that were infected with the disease broke human skin, the microorganism, *Yersinia pestis*, attacked the lymphatic system, causing enlargement of lymph glands.

Therefore, the protuberances were symptomatic of plague (Appleby 162-163). Meanwhile, many Londoners still believed that there could be another cause for the plague's recurrence. Some people believed that plague was caused by natural factors, but others believed that plague was obtained through an occult element. The English were led to believe that plague was a "manifestation of divine providence and power, as a product of an environmental miasma, and as an infectious contagion that moved from one person to another" (Hays 124).

Residents of London expected a penalty for their corrupt actions as a result of religious persecution, killing of a king, and the absurdness of government. In 1657, just eight years before the last plague, Clergyman Thomas Reeves handed out flyers warning that plague would be the Londoners' consequence for immoral conduct (Shields 24-25). In fact, those who believed in supernatural causes of the disease sought counsel from a deity through prayer, omens, and charms (Hays 124). As a result of the plague, the community of London suffered both physically and socially.

Immediately upon contracting the infection, one would have an array of flu-like symptoms, such as chills, queasiness, and regurgitation. In addition, sufferers developed signs of apprehensiveness and occasionally derangement (Shields 12). Another symptom of plague was the pungent stench of the victim's breath. Some people carried flowers with them to act as a perfume to hide the bitter smell (Trueman). Andrew B. Appleby stated that the plague could be in bubonic or pneumonic form. The pneumonic form was transferred through sneezing and coughing around others.

The pneumonic plague originated from the bubonic plague because victims sometimes acquired pneumonia along with the bubonic form. The pneumonic plague was occasional in England. The symptoms included the coughing of blood (163). Furthermore, the affliction took a tremendous toll on the overall health of each victim by causing dark round marks around the groin, armpits, and neck. Also, the petechiae, or black spots, arose in other areas of the body (Hays 124-125). Unfortunately, these blemishes often turned into infected pus-filled welts.

The last stage of sufferer's disease occurred as the boils appeared. Of course death was inevitable, but the longevity of the plague's victims was a mystery because each person's reaction to the disease was different. For instance, after developing the ailment, some people would die within hours, and others would live as long as a few days. Entire families were destroyed by this annihilating illness (Shields 12). Equally important, the societal effects of plague were immense. In 1665, 68, 596 casualties were recorded (Britannica 447).

Consequently, the cadavers were covered with shrouds and placed in a mass grave because the sudden rise in deaths caused there to be a greater demand for coffins, yet a shorter supply. Not only did people lose loved ones, but they also had difficulty carrying out traditional funerals because the exposed corpses raised the risk of contagion. Although limiting guests at funerals went against society's customs, Londoners needed to stay clear of the disease as much as possible (Hays 127). Gathering the dead was a difficult task to complete for the bearers.

Bearers had to fetch bodies infested with the deadly plague, along with the bearers of the carts. The dead carts were used mainly for large parishes. The carts would grind while being pushed down the street, and the bearers would ring a bell while continually yelling for residents to release the corpses to the cart. Sadly, family of the dead had to witness their loved ones being towed away with the loss of dignity and respect for the deceased (Shields 48). London hired "nurses", who lacked proper training and experience, to check on diseased victims. If sufferers could afford sustenance, these "nurses" would bring them food, too (Trueman).

Society suffered through many hard times during the plague's reign. Because of the plague's atrocious impact on London, residents decided to take matters into their own hands. Since the plague escalated rapidly, the rich people of London left the city for the safe countryside. The poor had no resources to escape the plague's wrath. In fact, soldiers were hired by London's council to supervise the outskirts of the parish where the poor resided. No one was allowed outside the boundaries unless he had a document from his parish leader stating that he could leave (Trueman).

On account of all the wealthy that left London to escape disease, the impact made by plague was mainly on the destitute (Hays 128). Because the disease was taking hold of the population so quickly, the Lord Chamberlain chose to close down the theatres in London. The roads outside of the city were congested with the traffic of people seeking refuge. The city of London was in complete chaos (Shields 31-32). Realizing that the plague was taking over London, the English government mobilized a new system of methods to battle the disease. When the plague hit, London was still following outdated rules from the plague of 1578.

To begin the new set of rules for cleaning London, the government demanded that the garbage on the streets and the obstacles in the ditches were to be removed promptly. On the contrary, authorities believed that smoking tobacco and lighting fires to release smoke was profitable for the environment of the plague. Also, the Privy Council requested the slaying of stray animals, such as dogs and pigs. These animals were thought to carry the plague (Hays 122-123, 127). In addition to the exile of the wealthy and the rise of cleaning standards, London also attempted to prevent the spread of plague by isolation.

Accordingly, any family that had at least one member tainted by the disease was confined to their own home for over a month. As a caution to others, a red cross was painted on the door to display the infection of the family inside the house; however, only "nurses" were permitted to enter the plagued home (Trueman). Because of the forced seclusion from the outside world, many trapped plague victims rebelled against the authorities. For instance,

neighbors helped to release the captive by removing the cross from the door of the victim's house.

The government endorsed severe penalties toward those who disobeyed the rules laid out for them to follow. Inevitably, the policy of solitude for the afflicted came to an end when the amount of homes that needed to be secluded became too great and the people who regulated the guidelines were at a shortage; however, parishes did try to aid the imprisoned victims by raising taxes to provide food (Hays 125-127). Although isolation seemed like a feasible plan to the English government at the time of the plague's existence, people naturally rebelled against being held hostage in their own home, even if food was provided for them.

In conclusion, the great plague caused a tremendous uproar in the lives of the ones who lived in London in 1665. Even though numerous causes were offered to explain the root of the plague's frequency, the most reasonable explanation of the disease's occurrence was through the spread of contagion by fleas. As a result of the affliction of plague, society suffered great damage in a physical and civil aspect. Although no one was sure what caused the plague in London, many measures were taken to help prevent the expansion of the pestilence. After all, the plague of 1665 was the last of the plagues to claim London.