

Have just come across this extract.

J M Ellenton.

23/4/74



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8th. April 1974.

Dear Mr. Hughes-Owens,

In case you are still interested in the effect of the Black Death in Oxfordshire, I give overleaf, extracts from "Deserted Villages of Oxfordshire", the names of the few villages in this county which are thought to have been depopulated as a result of that plague.

It is, of course, possible that you already know all this, but not having dealt with your original query about the Black Death with any real success, I risk sending this letter.

Yours sincerely,



J.M. Eltenton

Local History Librarian.

J.L. Hughes-Owens, Esq.,
Rosemary Cottage,
Bampton. OXON.

Extracts from "Deserted Villages of Oxfordshire", by K.L.Allison, M.W.Beresford,
J.G.Hurst. Published by Leicester University Department of English Local History:
Deserted Mediaeval Villages Research Group, 1965.

Bignell (in Chesterton). Depopulation perhaps began after the Black Death

Tilgarden (in Eynsham) Depopulation by Black Death

Tusmore (in Hardwick with Tusmore) Depopulated by Black Death

Wretchwick (in Ambrosden) Decline perhaps accelerated by Black Death

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is to register its impact in the various regions and to highlight its workings at a few points where fuller detail is available.

When the plague turned eastwards after reaching the Bristol Channel the first city to be threatened was Gloucester. The town-council, horrified at the tragedy which had overtaken their neighbours in Bristol, decided to seek refuge in isolation. An embargo was placed on all intercourse between the two cities and the gates closed to any refugees who might carry with them the seeds of the plague.² But even if it had been possible to keep out every infectious human, and there is no doubt that the plague had been present in Bristol in its most virulent and infectious form, the citizens of Gloucester could have done nothing to protect themselves from the plague-bearing rat, making its way along the ditches or travelling in the river boats that plied up and down the Severn.

Bishop Wulstan Bransford remained on his country estate, occupied in the endless search for new priests to take the places of the dead. Between March and September alone eighty vacancies had arisen, almost all caused, according to the County History, by the death of the previous incumbent.³ The Bishop himself died on 6 August, 1349. At Ham, a manor belonging to the Berkeleys not far from Cheltenham, so much land either escheated to the lord because of the tenants' death without an heir or was abandoned to look after itself that the bailiff had to hire the equivalent of 1,144 days' work to get the harvest in. The figure is impressive but so also is the fact that the extra labour was forthcoming, though no doubt at a considerable price.⁴

In so far as any pattern can be detected in the advance of the plague from West to East across England it seems to have struck from Bristol into Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire and from Southampton and the West across Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Surrey towards London. The first prong of the advance provided some of the most fearful devastation of the whole epidemic.

The worst months for Oxfordshire were March, April and May, though there must certainly have been many cases before and after this period of maximum destruction. The county was, at this time, an archdeaconry within the vast diocese of Bishop Gynewell of Lincoln. Professor Hamilton Thompson's enor-

mously valuable analysis of the Registers of the diocese shows that, so far as mortality among the clergy is concerned, the south of the county escaped lightly. In the deanery of Henley only a quarter of the beneficed clergy died and in Aston a mere 19%. But in the city of Oxford itself, 43% did not survive, in the deanery of Woodstock 42%, in Bicester 40% and in Chipping Norton 29%. In the whole archdeaconry just over 34% of the beneficed clergy perished, well below the 40.7% which was the average for Gynewell's diocese.⁵

Applying the suggested margin of error, one arrives at the highly speculative conclusion that total mortality in the archdeaconry should have been between 25% and 37%. The Cartulary of Eynsham Abbey provides evidence to show that, in that part of the county at least, the lower of these estimates was well below the mark.⁶ The Abbey itself, between Witney and Oxford, seems to have suffered badly enough. Abbot Nicholas had been deprived of his office by the Bishop because of some now forgotten offence. Bishop Gynewell nominated two administrators to look after the Abbey pending the nomination of a new Abbot but, on 13 May, two of the senior brethren arrived to report that the first of his nominees was dead and the life of the second despaired of. He named in their place the two monks who had brought the news and sent them on their way. His new appointments met with no greater success; both monks were dead before they reached the Abbey. In despair Abbot Nicholas was forgiven and reinstated.

But the manors of the Abbey suffered still worse. Common tradition in England ascribes to the Black Death the responsibility for the disappearance from the map of many villages, leaving the church, usually the only solidly constructed building, as a solitary monument to the past. Certainly the Black Death helped the process of depopulation and so weakened many communities that they were unable to survive the economic and social vicissitudes of the next two centuries. But very few villages can be shown to have been finally and completely deserted as a direct result of the Black Death.⁷ One of the exceptions was the Abbot of Eynsham's manor of Tilgarsley (or Tilgardesle) where the collectors of the lay subsidy reported in 1359 that it was not possible to gather the tax because nobody had lived in the village since 1350. There is no reason to think that Tilgarsley was either

rich or thickly populated before the Black Death but the fact that the tax was fixed at 9s 10d suggests that the community was reasonably prosperous or, at least, far removed from starvation.⁸

Another Eynsham manor, that of Woodeaton, went near to sharing the fate of Tilgarsley. 'In the time of the mortality of men or pestilence which befell in the year of our Lord 1349,' reads the Cartulary, 'scarce two tenants remained in the manor and they would have departed had not Brother Nicholas of Upton, then Abbot, . . . made an agreement with them and the other tenants who came in afterwards.' The bargain which the Abbot struck, giving the tenants a somewhat higher rent but less arduous feudal services, is an interesting example of the methods to which landlords were to have recourse in the years following the Black Death. He was only partially successful. By 1366 there were twenty-seven tenants in the village but six cottages still stood vacant.

At Cuxham, some seven miles south of Thame, only two reeves had been appointed to administer the manor in the whole period between 1288 and 1349. The old reeve died in March, 1349. His replacement died in April. His successor, a bailiff, died in June. His further successor died in July, and the fifth in line died or, at least, departed from the scene a year later in July, 1350. By 1360, the lord had given up any attempt to farm the manorial demesne and was seeking to put all his land out to rent.⁹

When the plague reached the city of Oxford, records Wood:¹⁰ 'Those that had places and houses in the country retired (though overtaken there also), and those that were left behind were almost totally swept away. The school doors were shut, colleges and halls relinquished and none scarce left to keep possession, or make up a competent number to bury the dead.' The problem of what happened to the University during the Black Death is particularly bedevilled by suspect statistics. Richard Fitzralph, who had been chancellor a little earlier, recorded that 'in his time' there had been thirty thousand students but that, by 1357, the total had shrunk to a mere six thousand. He blamed the fall, however, not so much on the plague as on the machinations of the friars who lured students away by ignoble means.¹¹ Thomas Gascoigne, writing in the middle of the fifteenth century,¹² confirmed Fitzralph's figure, saying that he had seen the figure of thirty thousand cited in the rolls of the early chancellors as the student strength

of the University. Wyclif raised the earlier total to sixty thousand and reduced the later to three thousand; not surprisingly attributing the mischief to the inflated worldly prosperity of the Church.¹³

Even in the bloated Oxford of the 1960's the total student body only numbers a little over ten thousand. No one to-day would accept as a reasonable estimate for 1348 a half or even a tenth of Fitzralph's figure, let alone of Wyclif's army of sixty thousand. Even at its peak of 1300 it is unlikely that the university held more than fifteen hundred students; three thousand would be the outside limit.¹⁴ Given the number of potential chroniclers whom the University must have contained, it is curious how little evidence survives to show what happened to this population during the plague. If the experience of the larger monastic houses is any guide, then those students who elected to see out the epidemic from within their colleges paid heavily for their rashness. It is highly unlikely that they fared better than the townsman and probable that they did a great deal worse.

Berkshire was in a poor state even before the arrival of the plague. An exceptionally hard winter followed by sheep disease had set back the county's economy a few years before and, though things had improved by 1349, recovery was not complete. The impact of the plague was devastating but, except in certain areas, transitory. At Woolstone, almost on the borders of Wiltshire, the landlord in 1352 was forced to engage dairy women to do the milking and extra labour for weeding and most of the mowing. Yet by 1361 customary tenants were again established and paid labour largely dispensed with.¹⁵ Of the Berkshire villages for which records exist, only in Windsor, a royal manor and as such likely to be given special treatment, were the changes introduced by the plague made permanent and all remaining villein services commuted for a money payment by 1369. Otherwise the pattern is one of losses made good, of a system strained but unbroken. Resilient and traditional, the manorial communities of England quickly put themselves back on an even keel and carried on, to the casual observer at least, as if the storm had never broken.

Buckinghamshire, where the Black Death was at its worst from May to September, does not produce a very different picture. In

- 128 26 op. cit. p230.
 129 27 'Register of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury.' *Somerset Record Society*. Vol X 1896, p596.
 130 28 M. Baehrel. 'Epidémie et Terreur: Histoire et sociologie.' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*. Vol XXIII 1951, pp117-46 and 'La haine de classe en temps d'épidémie.' *Annales E.S.C.* Vol VII No. 2 1952, pp 351-60.
 132 29 *Victoria County History* (henceforth referred to as V.C.H.), *Hampshire*. Vol II p33. See p147 below.
 133 30 *The Sky Suspended*. London 1960, p168.
 135 31 Knighton. op. cit. p61.
 32 C. E. Boucher. 'The Black Death in Bristol.' *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*. Vol IX 1938, p36.
 33 S. Seyer. *Memoirs of Bristol*. Bristol 1823, Vol II p143.
 34 A. Jenkins. *History of the City of Exeter*. Exeter, 1841, p62.
 35 G. Oliver. *History of the City of Exeter*. Exeter 1861, p74.
 136 36 W. G. Hoskins. *Devon*. London 1954, p169.
 37 Dr. J. Lunn. Ph.D. Thesis.
 38 L. F. Salzmann. *English Industries of the Middle Ages*. London 1913, p74. A. R. Bridbury. *Economic Growth*. London 1962, p25.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Relevant footnotes. 5-14

- 137 1 'Lives of the Berkeleys.' ed. J. Smyth. *Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*. Gloucester 1883, Vol I p322.
 138 2 *Galfridi le Baker*. op. cit. p99.
 3 *V.C.H. Gloucestershire*. Vol II p19.
 4 'Lives of the Berkeleys.' op. cit. Vol I p307.
 139 5 A. Hamilton Thompson. 'Register of John Gynewell, Bishop of Lincoln, for the Years 1347-50.' *Archaeological Journal*. Vol 68 1911, p323 and App. 3.
 6 'Eynsham Cartulary.' ed. H. E. Salter. *Oxford Historical Society*. 1907-8 Vol 2 p69.
 7 M. Beresford. *Lost Villages of England*. London 1954, p159.
 140 8 'Eynsham Cartulary.' Vol 2 p69. cf. K. J. Allison and other members of the Deserted Mediaeval Village Research Group. *The Deserted Villages of Oxfordshire*. Leicester 1965.
 9 P. D. A. Harvey. *A Mediaeval Oxfordshire Village: Cuxham*. Oxford 1965, p64.
 10 A. Wood. *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*. Oxford 1792, Vol 1 p449.

- 11 E. Brown. *Fasciculus rerum expetendarum et fugiendarum*. London 1690, Vol 2 p473.
 12 *Loci e libro veritatum*. ed. J. E. T. Rogers. Oxford 1881, p202.
 141 13 *De Ecclesia*. ed. J. Loserth. London 1886, p374.
 14 H. E. Salter. *Mediaeval Oxford*. Oxford 1936, p108. cf. Hastings Rashdall. *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (ed. Powicke and Emden). Oxford 1936, Vol 3 p317.
 141 15 *V.C.H. Berkshire*. Vol II p185-87.
 142 16 Hamilton Thompson. op. cit. p322.
 17 L. J. Ashford. *History of the Borough of High Wycombe*. London 1960, p49.
 143 18 *V.C.H. Wiltshire*. Vol IV p39.
 144 19 Gasquet. op. cit. p130.
 20 *Reg. Edendon* ii fol. 17. 'Mandatum ad orandum pro Pestilentia.' cit. Gasquet. op. cit. p124.
 145 21 *V.C.H. Hampshire*. Vol II pp32-33.
 22 Dr. J. Lunn. cit. Coulton. p496.
 23 N. S. and E. C. Gras. *The Economic and Social History of an English Village*. Harvard 1930, p153.
 146 24 *Ibid*. p76.
 25 Gasquet, op. cit. pp216-18.
 26 *Originalia Roll*. 29, Ed. III m. 8. cit. Gasquet. p217.
 27 *British Mediaeval Population*. op. cit. p285.
 147 28 W. L. Woodland. *The Story of Winchester*. London 1952, p114. *V.C.H. Hampshire*. Vol 11 p32.
 148 29 H. C. M. Lambert. *History of Banstead in Surrey*. Oxford 1931, p15.
 30 E. Robo. 'The Black Death in the Hundred of Farnham.' *Eng. Hist. Rev.* Vol XLIV 1929, p560.
 31 See p226 below.

CHAPTER NINE

- 151 1 J. C. Russell. *British Mediaeval Population*. op. cit. pp286-87.
 153 2 I have made much use of E. L. Sabine's three essays in *Speculum*: 'Butchering in Mediaeval London,' Vol VIII 1933, p335; 'Latrines and Cess-pools of Mediaeval London,' Vol IX 1934, p303 and 'City cleaning in Mediaeval London,' Vol XII 1937, p19, in preparing this chapter.
 154 3 B. Lambert. *History and Survey of London*. London, 1806 Vol 1 p241.
 155 4 H. J. Riley. *Memorials of London and London Life*. London 1868, p295.

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Tel: Wheatley 234

19.6.73

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There is a very good article on **The Black Death** at Witney, in the Oxfordshire Archaeological Society's Report for 1909.

J.M. Elton

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Local History Librarian.

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Director of Education: E. J. Dorrell, M.A.

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14th. June 1973.

Dear Mr. Hughes-Owens,

Black Death in Oxfordshire

So far as I know, there is no book which deals specifically with the effect of the Black Death in this county.

I enclose an extract from the article on "Social and Economic History" in the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire, volume 2.

No doubt there would be found references to the plague in the histories of the various villages &c., in the volumes of the V.C.H., which deal with the various Hundreds. If you would like me to do so, I will most willingly go through these volumes, and send you whatever information I find on the subject.

Yours sincerely,

J.M. Eltenton

J.M. Eltenton (Miss)

Local History Librarian.

J.L. Hughes-Owens, Esq.,
Bampton.

A HISTORY OF OXFORDSHIRE

But this peaceful development was checked by a catastrophe, the great pestilence which in 1349 swept over England. That Oxfordshire suffered is certain,¹ but the precise effects of the plague on the economic condition of the county are not easy to estimate from the scanty evidence which survives. It is perhaps not without significance that there is a gap of seven years in the Bicester Priory accounts, between 1348 and 1355, while the court rolls of the priory manors are carried forward from 1344 to 1358, with a break for the intervening fourteen years. The last entry, too, for 1344, treats of bondage and *opera servilia*; the first entry for 1358, written on the same membrane, mentions a stranger (*extraneus*) in the manor for whom the reaper (*messor*) acts as pledge.²

There is also one important piece of direct evidence. The Eynsham Chartulary relates how 'in the time of the mortality of men or pestilence which befell in the year of our Lord 1349 scarce two tenants remained in the manor [of Woodeaton], and they would have departed had not brother Nicholas of Upton, then Abbot made an agreement with them and the other tenants who came in afterwards.'³

By comparing the terms of this agreement with the earlier conditions of labour on the manor, it is possible to trace the gradual emancipation of the Woodeaton villeins from their compulsory labour-services, and the reaction which followed when the pestilence had made labour scarce and dear. The obligations of the typical villein or virgater are given for three different periods: before the plague, when he held '*ad firmam*' or by rent, and when he held '*ad operacionem*' or by labour; and after the plague, when the new compact was entered into with Abbot Nicholas. The holding included a messuage, eighteen acres of arable land, and two acres of meadow.

SERVICES OF WALTER DOLLE, *virgatarius*

(a) *Ad operacionem*

Work from Michaelmas to Martinmas for five days a week: from Martinmas to St. John Baptist's Day, four days a week.

Carrying on Sundays to Eynsham, if necessary. Pannage: aid: toll for brewing at the tavern: ox and colt not to be sold, daughter not to be married without the lord's leave.

Work included thrashing a *deywina* of corn (defined as a measure of which four went to seven bushels), two measures of barley, three of oats, and one of beans or pease, hedging and ditching.

Whether '*ad operacionem*' or '*ad firmam*,' nutting in the lord's wood one day and carrying two loads of wood to the lord's court (hall) for Christmas, or four bundles of wood.

(b) *Ad firmam*

Rent 5s.

One ploughing with food: a hen to the lord and eggs at Easter: pannage: harrowing one day, if *ad deywina* three roods: mowing (*sarculare*) one day with one man: carrying hay one day: three *bederipes* in autumn with three men without food: a fourth with food.

(c) *By new agreement*

Fine for entry on tenement. Suit to all courts.

Heriot of best beast. Ox and colt not to be sold, daughter not to be married without the lord's leave.

Three *precariae* or ploughings at the two sowings with 'as many (beasts) as he has in his plough,' with food: three *bederipes* with two men without food: a fourth with food: mowing (*falcare*) twelve days the lord's meadows or corn-fields, without food.

Rent 13s. 4d. while it pleases the lord, and the scribe thinks that it will please him, for he notes that 'the aforesaid services were not worth so much.'

¹ Cf. Thorold Rogers, *Oxf. City Doc.* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xviii), 4.

² Mins. Accts. P.R.O. bdle. 956, No. 6, 20-21 Edw. III; bdle. 956, No. 7, 28-29 Edw. III [Bicester]; Ct. R. P.R.O. 197, No. 7, m. 3 v^o.

³ Eynsham Chartul. Ch. Ch. Oxf. Chapter House II, fol. 11 r^o.

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

GERALD GALE BURKITT, LL.B. D.L.
CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

TELEPHONE : 49861 (Ask for
xxx Miss Barnes)
Mr.

Ref. HMW/SJB/MIG/206



COUNTY HALL
OXFORD
OX1 1ND

Your Ref.

12th June, 1973

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 11th June about Jackson's Oxford Journal and other County Newspapers. The County Record Office holds sets, though with some gaps of the following newspapers:-

Oxford Times 1862 - to date
Oxford Chronicle 1859 - 1929
Oxford Journal 1753 - 1802
Jackson's Oxford Journal 1775 - 1909
Oxford Journal Illustrated 1909-1928
Witney Gazette 1883 - 1941
Chipping Norton Advertiser 1930 - 1968
Banbury Advertiser 1859 - 1970.

These are housed at a store but this store does not have facilities for Researchers and any volumes you wish to consult will need to be brought into the County Record Office for you. A member of the staff will be going to the store to bring back records at about 9.30 a.m. on the 13th June and the next visit will not be until the 21st June. Due to staff problems the County Record Office will virtually be closed from the 21st to 28th June and it would be helpful if you could avoid visiting the office during this period. Research space in any case, is rather limited and it is helpful if you could make an appointment. The telephone number is Oxford 49861 Extension 202.

Yours faithfully,

Clerk of the Council

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